

Research Statement

Sayak Khatua

I am an international development professional highly interested in policy analysis. With more than five years of professional and academic research experience, I have contributed towards projects across several countries. I currently work as a Senior Research Associate at The International Initiative for Impact Evaluation(3ie) where I lead the institution's Research Transparency initiative and specialize in data curation, management, and computational reproducibility.

I am an open science and open policy¹ enthusiast with extensive experience in data reusability, reproducibility and employing best practices to make research more credible.

During my time at the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie), I have had the opportunity to work on thematic areas that specifically aim at influencing policy at country level. I have worked on quality assuring projects that have taken place in Uganda and the Philippines, and have experienced first hand how interventions can influence policy at the national level. One of my recent engagements was supporting a multi-state impact evaluation to understand latrine use in rural India. The project provided a number of insights into the latrine use puzzle and also pointed to gaps in the work of the government. Along with these aforementioned projects, I have worked on quality assuring various others in Immunization, HIV prevention, agriculture insurance, and so on. These projects have been instrumental in shaping my interest in development and health economics with a focus on using big data to measure and evaluate outcomes. One of the projects that I worked on under the Immunization umbrella, used electronic bands to track the immunization rates of children between 0-6 months in real time. The intervention improved immunization rates and have also been taken up by the local government.

I have always been interested in migration and have worked on modeling migration using the gravity model of trade. An area that I want to look into in the future is migration of health workers, especially in the times of pandemics and epidemics. The altruistic nature of health workers migrating towards difficult contexts to help people in need has been an exciting area of research for me. The motivation to move is well beyond the rational push and pull factors discussed in general migration literature. I believe there are other diverse factors in play that influence the decision making for health workers.

¹ Open Policy Analysis. Berkeley Institute for Transparency in Social Science (BITSS).
<https://www.bitss.org/opa/>

In addition to studying this, reviewing literature in the intersection of health and migration led me to understand that there is a gap in understanding the psychological cost of migration, especially among health workers. These costs are often ignored or remain unrealised in the short run, but show up in the medium and long run. Foreign health workers often face discrimination, burn out, job dissatisfaction, and so on, which affect the physical and mental health of health workers. I want to investigate this gap further.

Within the context of migration and health, the issue of measurement and evaluation of programs implemented to improve SDGs in countries affected by conflicts, natural disasters, and other difficulties² presents a diverse set of methodological, operational and logistical challenges. With this in mind, there is a need to focus on alternative sources of data, such as satellite data, data from sensors and drones, mobile phone data, and so on to address the issues surrounding research in difficult contexts. I plan on combining existing data sources such as administrative national and state level data with alternative data sources to measure and monitor SDGs better, and to evaluate policies/programs in difficult contexts.

My current research interests include topics such as migration, WASH, big data, meta-research, evidence synthesis. I envision my future endeavors at the nexus of evidence based policy making, migration and better health systems. Apart from those mentioned above, I would also like to study the long term impacts of policies aimed at reducing poverty, forced labour, various evidence synthesis ideas such as social network analysis of co-authorship in impact evaluation, and best practices in impact evaluation research. I would be thrilled to discuss more about my interests, skills and learning objectives if given the opportunity.

² For example, difficulty to access, poor infrastructure, dictatorial governments, etc.