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RESEARCH AREAS

Development Economics, Firm Productivity, Trade, Migration

ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

2021 – 2026 Ph.D. in Agricultural & Resource Economics, University of California, Davis

2018 – 2019 M.Sc. in Economics, Trinity College Dublin

2014 – 2017 B.Sc. in Physics, Royal Holloway, University of London

WORKING PAPERS

Chawla, P. 2026. “Local Human Capital Development and Firm Resilience: Evidence from the 1997 Indonesian Crisis.” Working paper. Available at SSRN. (Job Market Paper)

Summary: Do returns to human capital rise during crises? This paper examines whether human capital accumulation created by Indonesia’s INPRES school construction program in the 1970s improved firm resilience in the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis. I find that each additional school per 1,000 children increased real labor productivity and output during the crisis period by 2.7 and 3.3 percent, respectively. INPRES induced changes in the local pre-crisis workforce composition that shifted workers toward more skill-intensive production work. I argue that these skills became particularly valuable during the crisis, when firms faced disruptions. Consistent with this mechanism, INPRES had larger effects in sectors with higher import intensity, where adjustment demands were greater. I show that the local abundance of skilled workers in high-INPRES districts kept wages relatively lower, enabling plants to retain more of them when they were most valuable.

PUBLICATIONS

Barriga-Cabanillas, O., **Chawla, P.**, Redaelli, S. and Yoshida, N. 2025. “Estimating Poverty in Afghanistan Without Consumption Data: An Imputation-Based Approach.” *The Journal of Development Studies*, 1–22.

Summary: This paper uses a machine learning-based survey-to-survey imputation method to estimate poverty in Afghanistan following the Taliban’s return to power in August 2021. A model trained on the 2019/20 Expenditure and Labor Force Survey is used to predict household consumption in the 2023 Afghanistan Welfare Monitoring Survey, a phone survey drawn from the same sampling frame. The results show that 48.3 percent of the population was poor as of April-June 2023, a 4 percentage point decline since the same months in 2020. This decline was driven by falling rural poverty, while urban poverty remained unchanged.

RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

“Predicting Mexico-to-US Migration with Machine Learning for Counterfactual Analysis,” with J. Edward Taylor

Summary: Reliable tools to predict migration are increasingly important amid rising climate and economic risks, and demographic shifts. Tree-based machine learning models can uncover complex, nonlinear relationships that conventional models often miss and can be used to simulate responses to shocks. Migration data are costly to collect, so models must perform well with readily available data. We first train a LightGBM model on an ideal dataset, a panel

tracking the employment locations of 10,739 individuals from 1980 to 2007, and achieve high predictive accuracy. Using this as a benchmark, we then train a model on just four years of data without migration histories. By adding public weather data, this restricted model approaches benchmark performance (within 0.1 F1 score). Counterfactual shocks show that a 10% rise in temperature reduces migration by 13% the following year, a 10% increase in age lowers it by 17%, and a 10% drop in income by 18%.

“Firm Networks, Risk Sharing and Resilience to Shocks Among Small Firms in Tanzania,” with Daniel Putman and Jess Rudder

Summary: We examine the role of formal and informal networks among small firms in helping them cope with shocks. Using novel survey data that we collected in rural Tanzania, we estimate complete firm networks and analyze how network characteristics, such as centrality and clustering, shape firms’ exposure to shocks and their responses, including access to credit, performance, productivity, and entry and exit.

“Is Technology Inappropriate for Developing East Asia?,” with Francesca de Nicola, Aaditya Mattoo and Jonathan Timmis (World Bank East Asia Pacific)

Summary: We test the “inappropriate technology” hypothesis in Vietnam by examining whether the productivity premium from imported technologies adopted by manufacturing firms is lower when those technologies are not well suited to local conditions, exploiting tariff variation as an instrument for technology adoption.

“Financial Literacy and Small Firm Performance in Uganda,” with Ester Agasha, Andrew Hobbs, Travis Lybbert, Nathalie Nyanga, and Bruce Wydick

“Local Economic Impacts of Cash Transfers to Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Mexico, Mauritania, and Moldova,” with Justin Kagin and J. Edward Taylor

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

2023 – Present Consultant, The World Bank, Washington, D.C.

- Produced research publications and a flagship policy report with the East Asia and Pacific Chief Economist’s Office, and previously with the Poverty and Equity Global Practice.
- Recent projects: Ongoing coauthored research on the appropriateness of imported technologies for developing East Asia; the “Firm Foundations of Growth” report, analyzed the impact of digitalization, skills, non-tariff measures (NTMs), and pandemic resilience on total factor productivity (TFP) and other firm outcomes in the EAP region.
- These analyses use financial statement and survey data from hundreds of thousands of firms across 7 Asian countries, labor force surveys, input-output tables, trade and tariff data, and firm-level production function estimation.
- Past projects: Poverty projections in Afghanistan using machine learning models (paper above); Economic activity analysis in Afghanistan using nightlights data.

2023 – 2024 Graduate Student Researcher for Prof. J. Edward Taylor, UC Davis

- Led analysis estimating the local economic impacts of refugee cash transfer programs in Mexico, Mauritania, and Moldova, in collaboration with UNHCR and the American Institutes for Research.
- Developed a dashboard for local governments to monitor the local economic impacts of spending in 4 protected areas across Sub-Saharan Africa.

2022 Research Intern, United Nations Development Programme, New York, NY

- Contributed to the 2021/22 UNDP Human Development Report by conducting data analysis and creating data visualizations for 2 sections of the report.

- 2022 RA to Prof. Yusuf Neggers, Ford School of Public Policy, Univ. of Michigan
- Conducted data analysis for a research paper, including scraping millions of rows of publicly available administrative data using Python, automating workflows with AWS, and managing storage in MySQL.
- 2019 – 2021 Research Associate, Evidence for Policy Design, Harvard Kennedy School
- Executed 2 large-scale randomized control trials (RCTs) across 3 Indian states in collaboration with US-based economists, managing a field team of 15 members.
 - Collaborated with government officials to align project objectives and designed survey questionnaires for over 1,000 officials.
 - Built Python data pipelines to scrape and process over 50 million rows of public data from government websites and APIs.
 - Conducted econometric analyses, produced data visualizations, and prepared reports.

TECHNICAL SKILLS

Programming: Python (pandas, scikit-learn), R, Stata, SQL/MySQL

Tools and Platforms: Git, Unix, Markdown, R Shiny, AWS (EC2, RDS), SurveyCTO

Statistical Methods: Machine Learning (Linear/Logistic Regression, Random Forests, Gradient Boosting, LightGBM), Causal Inference (DiD, RDD, IV, PSM, SC), Panel Data Econometrics

GRANTS, FELLOWSHIPS AND AWARDS

- 2026 UC Davis GSA Travel Award
- 2025 UC Davis ARE Grad Travel Award
- 2024 Giannini Dissertation Fellowship (\$21,500 stipend)
- 2024 Giannini Foundation Mini-Grant, \$20,000 (with J. Edward Taylor)
- 2024 Henry A. Jastro Graduate Research Award, \$3,000
- 2024 UC Davis ARE Summer Research Fellowship
- 2021 – 2024 UC Davis Nonresident Supplemental Tuition Fellowship
- 2021 – 2022 UC Davis Provost's Fellowship (\$25,000 stipend)
- 2014 Royal Holloway International Excellence Scholarship (tuition waiver)

PRESENTATIONS

AAEA & WAEA Joint Annual Meeting 2025 (Best Poster Award Recipient), Japan Economic Policy Association 2025, World Bank-LSMS Conference “Better Data for Better Jobs and Lives” (2025), UC Davis Development Workshop, Giannini Student Research Conference

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Main Instructor: Economic Development (UC Davis, 2024)

TA: Operations Research & Management Science, Economic Development, Econometric Methods, Agricultural Labor, Intermediate Microeconomics, Math & Statistics for Economics

Teaching Fellow: Math Foundations Course (Ashoka University, 2018)

BLOG ARTICLES

“Government Intervention in India and Taiwan Affects Global Rice Markets” (with Tzu-Hui Chen),
Ag Data News (2022)

LANGUAGES

English (Native/Bilingual), Hindi (Native/Bilingual), Korean (Beginner)