

PAUL SIRMA

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EDUCATION

University of North Carolina (UNC) at Chapel Hill

Chapel Hill, NC

Ph.D. in Public Policy

August 2016-May 2023 (expected)

Dissertation title: Three essays on human capital accumulation, farm households' productivity, and poverty: evidence from cash transfers in Malawi.

Dissertation committee: Sudhanshu Handa (chair), Brigitte Seim, Gustavo Angeles, Amber Peterman, Steven W. Hemelt

Colgate University

Hamilton, NY

B.A. in Quantitative Economics and Econometrics

August 2011-May 2015

RESEARCH INTEREST

International Development, Social Protection, Education, Poverty Reduction, Social Policy

PEER-REVIEWED JOURNAL ARTICLES

Handa, Sudhanshu, Otchere, Frank, & **Sirma, Paul.**; on behalf of the Evaluation Study Team (2022). More evidence on the impact of government social protection in sub-Saharan Africa: Ghana, Malawi, and Zimbabwe. *Development Policy Review*, 40, e12576. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dpr.12576>

WORKING PAPERS

Long-term impacts of unconditional cash transfers on schooling: evidence from Malawi (*Job Market Paper*)

Abstract: Unconditional Cash Transfers (UCTs) are effective policy instruments to increase schooling outcomes, but are UCTs effective in the long term? This paper studies this question and presents evidence of how a flagship UCT program in Malawi affected school enrollment and grade completion eight years after the program began. I use three-year panel data from the experimental rollout of the program—after which the control group received the transfers—and a follow-up survey conducted five years later to study the long-term differential impacts of the UCTs on schooling. In the short-term, school enrollment and highest-grade completion are significantly higher for children in the early treatment group. In the long-term, five years after the late treatment group started receiving transfers, the impacts on highest grade completion persist only for older out-of-school girls. For this subgroup, the long-term school enrollment is significantly higher for children living closer to a secondary school than those living farther away. These larger impacts for children with easy access to a secondary school suggest that school supply constraints contribute to low human capital accumulation in Malawi and that demand-side interventions like UCTs cannot overcome these constraints.

The effect of unconditional cash transfers on labor allocation and farm productivity *(with Sudhanshu Handa)*

Abstract: This paper shows liquidity is an important constraint that prevent households from allocating their labor efficiently. We estimate the impacts of unconditional cash transfer program in Malawi, 30 months since baseline, and find large positive impacts on agricultural production and on-farm labor. We also find negative impacts on casual or *ganyu* labor. To explain these results, we test and reject the separation assumption of the agricultural household models. We show that demographic variables are associated with on-farm labor demand. We also show that cash transfer enables treated households to invest in agricultural inputs which increases their on-farm productivity

WORK IN PROGRESS

Dosage effects of unconditional cash transfers: evidence from the Malawi Social Cash Transfer Program *(with Sudhanshu Handa)*

This paper studies a causal relationship between duration in a cash transfer program and poverty in the context of an unconditional cash transfer (UCT) program in Malawi

Authorship in economic development journals *(with Amber Peterman and Dharini Bhatia)*

This paper provides a rich description of the state of authorship representation—as it relates to authors’ country of origin/affiliation and gender—in the economic development journals

An empirically driven theory of poverty reduction *(with Sudhanshu Handa, Zhiyuan Liu, Gelson Tembo, Clement Adamba, and Peter Mvula)*

This paper uses secondary data from national unconditional cash transfer (UCT) programs in Ghana, Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe to estimate the conditional average treatment effect (CATE) to understand how households use the UCT to improve their living standards.

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Graduate Research Assistant	Carolina Population Center, UNC at Chapel Hill
The Transfer Project	2019-present
Assisting in the impact evaluation of Ghana Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) with Integrated Social Services (ISS) program and Malawi Social Cash Transfer Program (SCTP) Longitudinal Impact Evaluation. Responsibilities include reviewing survey instruments, assisting in the training of enumerators, supervising field work, cleaning data, conducting descriptive analysis, writing Stata programs (ado files), producing result tables and graphs, and writing sections of the report.	

Modelling cash transfer response to Covid-19 shock using national household survey for UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office. Responsibilities include cleaning data, writing microsimulation scripts in Stata, producing final output in Microsoft Excel format.

Quantitative Research Assistant

American Institutes for Research (AIR)

Washington, DC

July 2015-June 2018

Collaborated with senior researchers in the International Research and Evaluation Division at AIR in evaluating impacts of programs covering broad topics, including agriculture, education, reading and literacy, and social protection

FELLOWSHIPS

UNC Graduate School Dissertation Completion Fellowship	August 2022-May 2023
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PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

Presentations

Center for the Study of African Economies (CSAE), Virtual	March 2022
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Field Work

Nkhata Bay and Zomba, Malawi	May 2022
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Rufiji, Tanzania	July 2013
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Technical Training Workshop

Organized by African Economic Research Consortium & UNICEF	Nairobi, Kenya
Instructor	May 2019

SKILLS

Programing & Software	Stata, R, Python, QGIS
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Languages	Swahili (native), English (fluent)
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REFERENCES

Sudhanshu Handa , Kenan Eminent Professor of Public Policy shanda@unc.edu	UNC at Chapel Hill Department of Public Policy
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Gustavo Angeles , Associate Professor gustavo_angeles@unc.edu	UNC at Chapel Hill Department of Maternal and Child Health
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Joaquin Alfredo-Angel Rubalcaba , Assistant Professor jrubalca@email.unc.edu	UNC at Chapel Hill Department of Public Policy
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