

VAISHNAVI SURENDRA

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Current Position Postdoctoral Scholar, University of California, Berkeley

Doctoral Studies University of California, Berkeley
PhD, Agricultural and Resource Economics, 2020
DISSERTATION: “Essays on Credit Markets in Rural India”

PRIMARY FIELDS: Development Economics, Economics of Institutions
SECONDARY FIELDS: Household Finance, Labor Economics, Economics of Gender

References	<u>Prof. Aprajit Mahajan</u>	<u>Prof. Ethan Ligon</u>	<u>Dr. Vijayendra Rao</u>
	aprajit@berkeley.edu	ligon@berkeley.edu	vrao@worldbank.org
	Agricultural & Resource Economics	Agricultural & Resource Economics	Development Research Group
	UC Berkeley	UC Berkeley	The World Bank

Placement Officers	<u>Prof Sofia Villas-Boas</u>	<u>Prof Max Auffhammer</u>	<u>Ms Diana Lazo</u>
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Prior Education	London School of Economics	M.Sc. Economics	2012
	Indian Institute of Technology Madras	M.A. (5 year integrated undergraduate) Economics	2011

Research Papers “The Moneylender as Middleman: Formal Credit Supply and Informal Loans in Rural India”
(JOB MARKET PAPER) [[Available Here](#)]

Abstract. A majority of household borrowing in developing countries is from informal lenders. In this paper, I exploit exogenous weather-induced shocks to household credit demand and variation in bank credit supply to demonstrate that informal moneylenders rely on bank credit to ease lending capital constraints in rural India. I document that informal moneylenders use loans from banks as lending capital, and they increase borrowing from banks following weather-induced increases in household credit demand. Moreover, following an equivalent demand shock, districts with higher predicted bank credit supply see larger increases in household borrowing from moneylenders than those with lower predicted bank credit supply — driven by changes in moneylender supply rather than in household demand for credit overall. These results help explain the persistence of informal credit since they indicate that, rather than competing with informal moneylenders, banks effectively collaborate with them.

Coverage: [Ideas of India \(podcast\)](#); [Ideas for India \(blogpost\)](#)

“Relief from Usury: Impact of a Self-Help Group Intervention in Rural India” (with Vivian Hoffmann, Vijayendra Rao, Upamanyu Datta)
Journal of Development Economics, Vol 148, January 2021. [[Available Here](#)]

Abstract. Provision of low-cost credit to the poor through self-help groups (SHGs) has been embraced as a key poverty-reduction strategy in developing countries, but evidence on the impact of this approach is thin. Using a randomized program rollout over 180 panchayats, we evaluate the impact of a government-led SHG initiative in the Indian state of Bihar. Two years after the start of the program, we find a dramatic increase in SHG membership, borrowing from SHGs, and a corresponding decline in the use of informal credit. Fewer informal lenders are operating in treatment villages, and those who do charge lower interest rates. While these credit market impacts could lead to substantial improvements in economic well-being over time, the short-run impact of the program on such outcomes is modest.

Research Papers	“Access to Finance, Empowerment and Women’s Employment: Experimental Evidence from Rural India” (Draft Available upon Request)		
	Abstract. Across the developing world, women’s groups provide access to low-cost credit and savings with the dual intent of financial inclusion and women’s empowerment. I exploit the randomized roll-out of a government-sponsored women’s self-help group program in the state of Bihar to evaluate its impact on women’s labor supply. I find that the program had mixed effects across caste categories. Women from more privileged caste groups increased their labor supply, while both women <i>and</i> men from disadvantaged caste groups decreased their labor supply. The decline in labor supply among disadvantaged households is driven by reduced participation in agricultural wage labor, and is associated with an increase in agricultural labor wage rates. For women from more vulnerable households, these results suggest that better access to finance reduces the need to sell labor to smooth income; while, for women from privileged households, they suggest that better access to finance allows them increase their labor force participation in more ‘suitable’ occupations.		
Research in Progress	“Gender-Wage Gap in Agricultural Labor Markets in Rural India” with Manaswini Rao. “Debt-driven Consumption Growth in Rural India” with Vivian Hoffmann and Vijayendra Rao.		
Teaching	UC Berkeley	Department of Economics, <i>Introduction to Economics</i> , Martha Olney	2015, 2017, 2018, 2019
	UC Berkeley	Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics, <i>Microeconomic Theory with Application to Natural Resources</i> , Jeff Perloff	2017
	UC Berkeley	Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics, <i>Microeconomic Theory with Application to Natural Resources</i> , Ethan Ligon	2016
	UC Berkeley	Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics, <i>Environmental Economics</i> , David Roland-Holst	2016
Grants, Fellowships, and Awards	2019	The Jean O. Lanjouw Memorial Endowment Grant, UC Berkeley Conference Travel Grant	
	2018	ARE Travel Grant, IRLE Graduate Student Research Grant (with Manaswini Rao)	
	2017	The Dennis J. Aigner Endowed Graduate Support Fund, Maharaj Kaul Memorial Research Travel Grant	
	2016	UC Berkeley Graduate Division Summer Grant	
	Earlier	Marjorie Deane Financial Journalism Foundation Studentship (LSE), Institute Merit Prize (IIT Madras), Swati/Jayalakshmi Memorial Award (IIT Madras), MITACS Globalink Scholarship (University of British Columbia)	
Talks	2021	PacDev, UC San Diego (online)	
	2020	WEFIDEV (online); NEUDC, Dartmouth University (online); Center on Food Security and the Environment, Stanford University	
	2019	Summer School in Development Economics, Prato, Italy	
	2017	NEUDC, Fletcher School at Tufts University; PacDev, UC Riverside	
Prior Employment	UC Berkeley, IRLE, Graduate Student Researcher (Aprajit Mahajan)	2018 - 2019	
	World Bank, Development Research Group, Consultant (Vijayendra Rao)	2015 - 2019	
	Centre de Science Humaines, Research Assistant (Nicholas Stern, Himanshu)	2012 - 2014	
	LSE, Research Assistant (Nicholas Stern)	2012	
Languages	English (fluent), Hindi (fluent), Tamil (native), Telugu (basic)		
Activities	2018	Organizing Committee, Graduate Student Summit for Diversity in Economics	
	2015 - 2019	Leadership Board, Women in Economics at Berkeley	
	2008	Summer Reporter, The Economic Times	