Disseminating Agricultural Technologies in Developing Countries through Social Networks

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Proposal Description:

Improving agricultural productivity in developing countries could have a huge impact on global poverty because large parts of the world’s population are farmers who rely on subsistence agriculture. While improved technologies show great promise in increasing yields, finding effective technology is only the first step. Even technologies that have been shown to substantially improve agricultural outcomes in an experiment could fail to become popular. A technology’s adoption rate depends on how it is communicated from the disseminators (e.g. the government) to individual farmers.

To explore how to effectively disseminate technologies to populations in developing countries, a Randomized Control Trial (RCT) was conducted in Nepal, for which data collection has recently been completed. Agricultural technologies were disseminated through different kinds of “communicators,” some of whom were also promised incentives if certain percentages of the farmers in their areas learned the technologies. One particular question is whether the technologies would be more effectively communicated through “lead” farmers, i.e. farmers who have higher social status and are more educated than the rest, or “peer” farmers, i.e. farmers who are representative of the general population of farmers and whose experiences should be similar to the average farmer’s.

Primary RA responsibilities for this project include: data cleaning, data analysis, and translating analysis into clear and ordered graphs, tables, etc. RAs may also need to communicate directly with field teams in Nepal.

Requisite Skills and Qualifications:

Ability to work with STATA at a basic level is a must. A quantitative background, especially in statistics, data analysis or economics, is a strong plus, as is any experience with Randomized Control Trials. Although learning from and collaborating with more senior researchers is an important part of the job, RAs should also be motivated and independent problem solvers.

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