

MESAY M. GEBRESILASSE

270 Bay State Road

Boston, MA 02215

Mob: (207) 313-7163

Email: mmelese@bu.edu

Website: <https://sites.google.com/site/mesaymelese>

EDUCATION

Ph.D., Economics, Boston University, Boston MA, May 2013-2019 (expected)

Dissertation Title: *Three Essays in Development Economics*

Main Advisor: Samuel Bazzi

Dissertation Committee: Samuel Bazzi, Martin Fiszbein and Dilip Mookherjee

B.A. in Economics and Mathematics (*Magna Cum Laude*), Colby College,
Waterville, ME, 2006-2010

The General Course, London School of Economics and Political Science,
London, UK, 2008-2009

International Baccalaureate Diploma, United World College of the Adriatic,
Duino, ITALY, 2004-2006

FIELDS OF INTEREST

Development Economics, Applied Microeconomics

PUBLICATIONS AND SUBMITTED PAPERS

“Frontier Culture: Historical Roots and Persistence of “Rugged Individualism” in the United States,” (with Samuel Bazzi and Martin Fiszbein) (submitted)

WORKING PAPERS

“Rural Roads, Agricultural Extension, and Productivity” (*Job Market Paper*)

“Industrial Policy and Misallocation in the Ethiopian Manufacturing Sector”

WORK IN PROGRESS

“Frontier Culture, Economic Shocks and Mortality,” (with Samuel Bazzi and Martin Fiszbein)

“Industrial Policy and Development: Evidence from Ethiopia,” (with Ameet Morjaria)

PRESENTATIONS

Association for the Study of Religion, Economics, and Culture, Chapman University
Orange, California, March 2018

Advanced Graduation Workshop in Poverty, Development and Globalization,
Bangalore, India, July 4-18, 2016

CSAE Conference 2016: Economic Development in Africa, St. Catherine’s College,
Oxford University, UK

RESEARCH GRANTS

Summer Research Grant, Department of Economics, Boston University, 2017

Weiss Family Program Fund for Research in Development Economics (PI)

Title: “Priority Sector Targeting and Structural Transformation in Ethiopia”, 2015

FELLOWSHIPS AND AWARDS

2016 Rosenstein-Rodan Essay Prize for the Best Original Research in
Development Economics, Boston University Department of Economics, 2016
Dean's Fellowship, Boston University, 2013-2018
Phi Beta Kappa, inducted in 2010
Honors in Economics, Distinction in First Major, *Magna Cum Laude*, Colby College, 2010
Davis UWC Scholar, Shelby Davis Scholarship, 2006-2010

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Teaching Fellow, Introductory Macroeconomic Analysis, Department of Economics,
Boston University, Spring 2016
Teaching Fellow, Introductory Microeconomic Analysis, Department of Economics,
Boston University, Fall 2014, Spring 2014 and Fall 2015
Mathematics Teacher, Coach and Dormitory Parent, The Governors Academy, MA,
2010-2013

WORK EXPERIENCE

Research Assistant for Prof. Martin Fiszbein and Prof. Samuel Bazzi, Boston University,
2016 – Present
Analyst, Financial Institutions Group, UBS Investment Bank, London, Summer 2009

LANGUAGES

English (Fluent), Amharic (native), and Italian (basic)

COMPUTER SKILLS

STATA, PYTHON, ARCGIS, LATEX

REFERENCES:

Assistant Professor

Samuel Bazzi

Department of Economics
Boston University
Phone: (617) 353-6150
Email: sbazzi@bu.edu

Professor

Dilip Mookherjee

Department of Economics
Boston University
Phone: (617) 353-4392
Email: dilipm@bu.edu

Assistant Professor

Martin Fiszbein

Department of Economics
Boston University
Phone: (617) 353-4389
Email: fiszbein@bu.edu

Rural Roads, Agricultural Extension, and Productivity (Job Market Paper)

Low agricultural productivity is a persistent challenge for developing economies. Two policy innovations that have attracted significant attention include the expansion of rural roads and agricultural extension services that facilitate access to technologies and inputs. However, the studies that examine each of these policies in isolation provide mixed evidence on their effectiveness. This paper shows that it is important to consider roads and extension simultaneously due to the strong complementarities between the two factors. I study the concurrent but independently implemented expansion of rural roads and extension in Ethiopia to examine how access to markets and technologies affect productivity when available in isolation and together. Using geo-spatial data combined with large surveys and exploiting the staggered roll-out of the two programs, I show that there are strong complementarities between roads and extension. While ineffective in isolation, access to both a road and extension increases productivity by 11%. I find that roads and extension improve productivity by facilitating the take up of agricultural advice, credit and modern inputs such as chemical fertilizers. Furthermore, households adjust crop choices and shift across occupations in response to their changing comparative advantages in access to markets and technologies. Overall, while extension and roads increase farm income on average, the gains are concentrated in the villages that have access to both factors.

Frontier Culture: The Roots and Persistence of Rugged Individualism in the United States

(with Samuel A. Bazzi and Martin Fiszbein)

The presence of a westward-moving frontier of settlement shaped early U.S. history. In 1893, the historian Frederick Jackson Turner famously argued that the American frontier fostered individualism. We investigate the Frontier Thesis and identify its long-run implications for culture and politics. We track the frontier throughout the 1790–1890 period and construct a novel, county-level measure of total frontier experience (TFE). Historically, frontier locations had distinctive demographics and greater individualism. Long after the closing of the frontier, counties with greater TFE exhibit more pervasive individualism and opposition to redistribution. This pattern cuts across known divides in the U.S., including urban-rural and north-south. We provide suggestive evidence on the roots of frontier culture: selective migration, an adaptive advantage of self-reliance, and perceived opportunities for upward mobility through effort. Overall, our findings shed new light on the frontier’s persistent legacy of rugged individualism.

Industrial Policy and Misallocation in the Ethiopian Manufacturing Sector

In this study, I use a rich plant level census data from 1996-2009 to examine the effects of two policies designed to support prioritized sub-sectors and regions on the productivity of the Ethiopian manufacturing sector. The first policy, implemented during 1996-2002, was an activist industrial policy favoring import substitution while the second policy, active during 2003-2012, emphasized export promotion. I find that there is a severe misallocation in Ethiopian manufacturing sector, but it has lessened over the studied period. Although improvements in resource allocation across firms of different physical productivity contributed to the observed decline in the dispersion of revenue productivity, there are still large aggregate TFP gains, 92%-180%, from the removal of idiosyncratic distortions. The results suggest that the priority sector support policies have exacerbated the misallocation, and the sector-based variations (as opposed to location-based) of the policies largely account for the dispersion in revenue productivity. Following the amendment of the first policy, the decrease in the within-priority region dispersion of revenue productivity is the driving force for the observed improvements in allocative efficiency.