MASTER THESIS REVIEW

Author: Amna Babar

Thesis: Assessing the Effectiveness of Proxy Means Testing in Targeting: A Case Study of Kenyan Cash Transfer for Orphans and Vulnerable Children

Reviewer: Prof. Maria Sassi

Content

The author has made a simulation of Proxy Means Testing (PMT) in an updated Kenyan dataset referring to the Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) program. In doing so, the author has established the relevance and effectiveness of using an econometric approach in identifying poor households for food and cash assistance. However, the econometric approach is often debated against the ideologies of universalism in assistance distribution. The author has highlighted this debate and as well have made references to existing theoretical literature concerning both of these approaches. The analysis offered by the author, therefore, can be considered as a successful attempt in contributing empirical evidence to the ongoing debate between the universal and targeting approach.

However, any analysis in the field of assistance targeting is met with both practical and methodological limitations. While on the practical side, the trade-off between leakage and coverage errors are inherent in any form of assistance distribution, on the methodological spectrum, a vast array of methods exists as to how to identify those who are eligible for the assistance. The author has rightly pointed out these dilemmas, and have offered a review of literature that has, in turn, shaped her methodological decisions, including the choice of variables. The decision on the interaction of some of the variables was taken in consultation with the Thesis supervisor and an additional resource person at the University of Pavia.

Besides, the author has also made a deliberate effort in considering the prospective strength of alternative models comprising Poverty Weighted Least Squares, and rural-only OVC samples. In doing so, the author has pointed out an important direction for future research, especially concerning the prospective inclusion of welfare-based indicators and geographical characteristics in the Proxy Means Testing model.

Literature and references

The list of literature referenced by the author is in accordance with the general academic requirements, and as required by the topic under study.

Formal requirements

Barring a few punctuation errors, the author has made a clear presentation of her analysis. However, the report needs some restructuring of the main part for the publication in Journal, especially in relation to the brevity and conciseness of results.

Topics for discussion

1. Do you think your results would vary if you had only considered the urban OVC households? Why?

2. What was the reason that you have not included the migration status of the household in your model? If it was due to the lack of data in the dataset, do you think its inclusion would change your results considerably? If yes/no, why?

Overall evaluation and proposed grade

Overall, the author has produced relevant empirical work in the field of food and cash assistance. It should be noted that the author had initially worked on a slightly more comprehensive research topic, and she had already finalized the review of the literature. However, the author had to redefine her topic and rework on the literature review in the context of the COVID pandemic. The author acknowledges the sheer limitation thus posed by the COVID pandemic. Despite such limitations, the author has produced a sound empirical work, and this thesis work envisioned, adapted, analyzed, and written in a limited period reflects the author's strong commitment and dedication.

I do recommend the thesis for defense with grade A.

Date: June 15, 2020   Signature: Marie Sassi