Coastal Climate Change and Demographic Transformation in Bangladesh.

Seminar presented by Dr. Valerie Mueller, Arizona State University.

The recent adoption of the Global Compact on Refugees formally recognizes not only the importance of supporting the 25 million people escaping conflict but also of easing the pressures on receiving areas. Few countries may enforce the resolution out of concern over the repercussions of hosting refugees. We examine whether narratives of refugee-led environmental degradation are empirically generalizable to continental Africa, which fosters 34% of all refugees. Estimates of the causal effects of the presence, intensity, and density of refugees—located in 493 camps distributed across 49 African countries—on vegetation from 2000 to 2016 are provided. Using a quasi-experimental design, we find refugee camps bear a small, positive impact on vegetation. Positive economic externalities driven by refugee camps possibly outweigh the deleterious environmental consequences. Our study generates empirical evidence that refutes popular misconceptions that refugee camps systematically degrade the environment in receiving areas.
About the speaker: Valerie Mueller is currently an assistant professor in the School of Politics and Global Studies. Prior to joining Arizona State University, she was a senior research fellow at the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) in Washington, D.C. Mueller’s research falls largely into three main themes. The first quantifies rural household vulnerability to climate variability, focusing on migration, nutrition, and health markers in Africa and Asia. The second area of research uses randomized controlled trials to identify mechanisms to improve the delivery of rural services (legal justice for women, agricultural extension, and the equitable allocation of irrigation water) in East African countries. Her third area of research is on the prospects of youth employment in Africa. She is currently co-editing a volume, which studies the evolution of youth employment and its role in the structural transformation process in Africa.

Her research contributions have been featured in Nature Climate Change, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, American Economic Review, American Journal of Agricultural Economics, and the Journal of Development Economics, and have received significant media coverage in over 15 major media outlets (including Le Monde, Science, and Scientific American). Despite her presence in the research community, she remains involved in the field and aims to provide relevant technical expertise by repeated interaction with donor communities, local policymakers, and government officials.

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