Contact Information

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Graduate Study Information

Program: PhD in Economics
Institution: Stanford University
Field of Study: Development Economics
Years of Enrollment: 2021 – Present (Expected completion: 2027)

My doctoral research focuses on market infrastructure, consumer behavior, and labor economics in developing countries, with particular emphasis on West African economies. My work combines experimental methods, econometric analysis, and field research to understand how policy interventions affect vulnerable populations and market outcomes.

Research Overview

My doctoral research studies how market infrastructure and program design shape firm behavior, consumer welfare, and labor outcomes in developing countries—especially in West Africa. I combine field experiments, administrative data, and structural/ reduced-form econometrics to generate policy-relevant evidence. Current themes include: (i) how cooperation and norms among small retailers affect variety, prices, and consumer welfare; (ii) how entrepreneurship programs—particularly business plan competitions and integrated support models—affect firm survival and growth, with attention to gender gaps; and (iii) how modernized market infrastructure and lighter-touch digital tools can reduce consumer search frictions and expand market access for informal retailers.

Research Interests

My research interests lie at the intersection of development economics, innovations, and entrepreneurship policy in Sub-Saharan Africa. Specifically, I focus on:

- **Small Firm Adoption of New Organization:** Evaluating how adoption of new organizational norms affects retailers' productivity
- **Entrepreneurship Support Mechanisms:** Evaluating business plan competitions, integrated support programs (financing + mentorship + AI tools), and their differential impacts on male and female entrepreneurs
- **Market Modernization and Consumer Behavior:** Analyzing how infrastructure improvements and market reforms affect different consumer segments, particularly in urban settings
- **Gender Gaps in Entrepreneurship:** Understanding constraints faced by women entrepreneurs and designing interventions to improve their participation and performance in support programs

Current Research Projects

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1. Retailer Cooperation and Market Outcomes

This project investigates how fostering cooperation among retailers affects product assortment, pricing decisions, and ultimately consumer welfare in developing country open-air informal markets. The research combines theoretical modeling with empirical analysis to understand strategic interactions between retailers and their implications for market efficiency.

Status: Manuscript in preparation

2. Impact Evaluation of PEJEDEC 3 Entrepreneurship Component (2025-2027)

Collaborators: World Bank DIME, ENSAE, Government of Côte d'Ivoire
Co-Principal Investigators: Patrick Premand (World Bank), Bruno Crépon (ENSAE)

This project evaluates the third phase of Côte d'Ivoire's Youth Employment and Skills Development Project (PEJEDEC), specifically its entrepreneurship component targeting urban young entrepreneurs aged 18-40. Using a randomized controlled trial with approximately 1,800 participants, the study examines:

- The causal impact of financing alone versus an integrated approach combining financing, mentorship, coaching, and AI-assisted support
- Differential effects on business creation, survival, employment generation, and firm performance
- Specific barriers and opportunities for women entrepreneurs in business plan competitions

The evaluation employs a 2x2 RCT design (financing only, integrated support, combined and control) with sufficient statistical power to detect economically meaningful effects, including subgroup analyses by gender.

Status: Baseline data collection in progress

3. Consumer Search & a Marketing Channel for Informal Retailer

This project investigates whether a lightweight two-sided information layer can function as a low-cost marketing channel for informal retailers while reducing consumer search frictions in urban West African markets. Retailers submit quick stock/price pings via USSD/IVR/WhatsApp; nearby consumers receive location-tailored prompts by SMS/WhatsApp and see market-board listings, creating visibility. Primary outcomes include consumer search time, consideration-set breadth, prices paid, and basket quality; on the supply side, retailer footfall, conversion, sales/margins, and product turnover.

Status: pilot instruments complete; vendor scoping and ethics approvals in progress.

Dissertation

Contact Information

Name: Eva Lestant
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Tentative Title: "Essays on Market Infrastructure, Entrepreneurship, and Youth Employment in West Africa"

Description:
My dissertation comprises three essays examining how policy interventions and market structures affect economic outcomes for vulnerable populations in West African economies, with a particular focus on Côte d'Ivoire.

The first essay evaluates the long-term impacts of dual apprenticeship programs on youth earnings, employment stability, and pathways out of poverty, contributing to evidence on effective skills development strategies in low-income contexts.

The second essay (based on the PEJEDEC 3 evaluation) provides causal evidence on the effectiveness of business plan competitions and the value added of integrated entrepreneurship support. It examines whether combining financing with mentorship, coaching, and AI tools enhances business outcomes beyond financial support alone, and analyzes gender-specific constraints and opportunities in entrepreneurship programs.

The third essay investigates how market modernization and retailer cooperation affect consumer search behavior, product availability, and pricing in urban markets, with experimental evidence on interventions to reduce search frictions for low-income consumers.

Committee Members:

- Melanie Morten, Professor of Economics, Stanford University
- Arun Chandrasekhar, Professor of Economics, Stanford University
- Matthew Gentskow, Professor of Economics, Stanford University

The dissertation combines rigorous experimental methods, detailed microeconomic analysis, and extensive field research to generate policy-relevant insights for development practice. All three essays involve partnerships with implementing organizations, ensuring that research findings directly inform program design and policy decisions in real-world settings.