Application package for
NBER Entrepreneurship Research Boot Camp 2026

Name	Anaïs-Tricia Toungui
Institution	Department of Economics, Tufts University
Address	177 College Ave, Room 652, Medford, MA 02155
Area of Interest	Development economics, with a focus on firms, entrepreneurship, and informality in sub-Saharan Africa
Year of Entry into PhD Program	2022
Expected Year of Completion	May 2027
Letter of Recommendation	Kyle Emerick (Faculty, Department of Economics, Tufts University)

Anaïs-Tricia Toungui
anais.toungui@tufts.edu

CONTACT INFORMATION

Department of Economics
Tufts University
177 College Ave, Room 652
Medford, MA 02155

EDUCATION

Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Economics and Public Policy 2022 - 2027 *(expected)*
Department of Economics and The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University

Master of International Affairs (M.I.A) in Economic and Political Development 2018
School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University

Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) in International Studies 2015
Marymount Manhattan College

FIELDS

Development Economics, Labor Economics, Agricultural Economics, Applied Microeconomics

PUBLICATIONS

"Impact of Technology-Aided Activity-Based Learning Approaches on Learning Outcomes: Experimental Evidence from Community Schools in Rural Zambia." with Thomas de Hoop, Hannah Ring, Garima Siwach, Paula Dias, Gelson Tembo, and Victoria Rothbard.
Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness, 2023.

WORK IN PROGRESS

"A Labor of Love, Necessity, or Greed? The Role of Institutional Advantages in the Misallocation of Entrepreneurial Talent", with Maakwe Cumanzala *(analysis ongoing)*

"Learning to Repay: How Screening and Experience Shape Borrower Success," with Andrea Cristina Ruiz *(analysis ongoing)*

"Who Learns From High Adopters? Ethnic Identity and the Diffusion of Agricultural Technology" *(analysis ongoing)*

"Enhancing Social Protection Programs through Digital Payments", with Justine Knebelmann, Albertine Bayombe Kabou, and Daouda Toure *(project development phase)*

RESEARCH GRANTS (TOTAL $43,324)

J-PAL's Jobs and Opportunity Initiative (JOI) ($10,074)	2025
The Weiss Fund for Research in Development Economics ($15,000)	2025
Tufts University Fletcher School ($5,000)	2025
The Institute for Humane Studies (IHS) ($1,300)	2025
Tufts University Department of Economics Summer Research Grant ($3,000)	2025
Tufts University Department of Economics Summer Research Grant ($2,600)	2024
Tufts University Graduate Student Research Competition ($1,000)	2024
JPAL DigiFI Proposal Development Grant ($5,350)	2023

AWARDS & FELLOWSHIPS

The American Association of University Women (AAUW)	2025 - 2026
Tufts University Graduate Institute for Teaching (GIFT)	2025 - 2026
The P.E.O. International Peace Scholarship Fund (IPS)	2023 - 2025
Tufts University Neubauer Family Economics and Public Policy Fellowship	2022 - *present*
Graduate Applications International Network (GAIN)	2021 - 2022
The Research In Color (RIC) Foundation	2021

WORK EXPERIENCE

The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University 2023 - *present*
Research Assistant for Prof. Jenny Aker

Development Impact Evaluation Unit (DIME), World Bank 2021 - 2022
Research Assistant/ Short-Term Consultant

American Institutes for Research (AIR) 2018 - 2021
Quantitative Research Associate

United Nations High Commissioner For Refugees (UNHCR) 2017 - 2018
Graduate consultant

Innovations for poverty action (IPA) 2017 - 2018
Data Curation Student Volunteer

KadAfrica Summer 2017
Monitoring and Evaluation Fellow

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Summer 2016
Policy Intern

Trickle Up Spring 2016
Monitoring and Evaluation Intern

African Union Permanent Mission to The United Nations 2015 - 2016
Economic Affairs Advisor

Teaching Experience

EIB E247: Econometric Impact Evaluation (for Development) (MA) Fall 2025
Teaching Fellow for Prof. Sally Zhang

EIB-E240-1 Development Economics: Macroperspectives (MA, PhD) Spring 2025
Teaching Assistant for Prof. Steven Block

The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy (MA, PhD) Fall 2023 - Spring 2025
Stata Instructor at the Edwin Ginn Library

Presentations

2020 Comparative and International Education Society (CIES)
2021 Comparative and International Education Society (CIES)

Skills

Computer Skills: Stata (advanced), LaTeX, SurveyCTO, R (intermediary), QGIS (intermediary), Microsoft Office
Languages: English (proficient), French (native)
Certification: Data Visualization & Dashboarding in R (April 2021)

Advisors

Jenny Aker
Primary appointment
Department of Global Development
Cornell University
Second appointment
The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy
Tufts University
jennaker@hotmail.com

Kyle Emerick
Department of Economics
Tufts University
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Last Updated: February 17, 2026

Research Statement

My dissertation studies entrepreneurship, informality, and firm dynamics in sub-Saharan Africa, with a focus on the constraints that prevent informal entrepreneurs from growing and on the policies that shape the environment in which they operate. Two projects are central to this agenda.

Procurement and Firm Growth in Gabon. My first chapter studies a 2023 procurement reform in Gabon that reserved contracts below 150 million FCFA for domestic small and medium enterprises. Using the universe of public contracts, business registry data, and a randomized information intervention, we examine whether the reform expanded access for Gabonese firms and how firms responded on the extensive and intensive margins to formalize. Our paper builds on a central findings from our preliminary research: the reform induced higher firm entry but very to little job creation. We argue this reflects a typology of entrepreneurs. *Opportunistic* firms register to capture procurement rents but have neither the intention nor the capacity to grow. *Necessity* entrepreneurs formalize under external pressure. *Aspiring* entrepreneurs have growth ambitions but face binding information and administrative barriers. The policy transferred opportunities away from foreign firms toward Gabonese ones, yet concentrated gains among opportunistic entrants who are least likely to expand employment. As a next step, we are hoping to test whether a simple information provision experiment can raise tender access to all typology of firms and increase hiring intentions.

Learning to Repay. My second paper studies how location shapes the economic lives of motorcycle-taxi (boda-boda) drivers in Kampala, Uganda. Drivers finance motorcycles through lease-to-own contracts and operate from stages, designated waiting locations that provide customer access, peer monitoring, information, and informal insurance. In January 2024, the Kampala Capital City Authority closed 248 boda stages, generating plausibly exogenous variation in drivers' location choice. I use this shock to study how spatial reallocation affects income, loan repayment, and the value of peer networks. Boda drivers are informal entrepreneurs: they bear earnings risk, make capital investment decisions, and manage liquidity across time. Understanding how stage closure disrupts their operations thus speaks directly to the economics of entrepreneurship at the bottom of the income distribution, where market frictions and information gaps are sharpest.

Future Research. Three extensions follow naturally. First, my co-athour and I are developing a randomized evaluation of a business incubator program in Gabon to study whether soft skills training and mentorship shift aspiring entrepreneurs toward sustainable growth, and which components of support are most valuable. Second, separately, I plan to study the rise of gig workers across African cities, asking how platform-based work interacts with informality, capital access, and human capital accumulation in contexts where formal employment is scarce. Third, I am interested in how social networks mediate technology adoption and business practice diffusion among informal entrepreneurs, a question I am hoping to explore to pursue using the rich peer-network structure of boda stages.

Why the Boot Camp. The ERBC would expose me to the frontier of entrepreneurial finance, measurement of entrepreneurial quality, and structural models of entry and growth, areas directly relevant to both of my projects discussed above. The reading list alone, covering measurement, venture finance, and the organization of entrepreneurial activity, would sharpen how I frame my Gabon typology results and calibrate my structural model. In addition, I believe that being able to engage with researchers such as Antoinette Schoar, Josh Lerner, and Scott Stern, whose work on entrepreneur heterogeneity and policy design underpins questions I am actively working through, would be invaluable. I am especially keen to learn how the field has approached the distinction between subsistence and transformative entrepreneurship, a distinction central to my Gabon paper's argument that procurement policy must be designed with entrepreneur type in mind.

Tufts UNIVERSITY | School of Arts and Sciences

Kyle J. Emerick, Associate Professor of Economics
Department of Economics
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Telephone: 617.627.6972

February 18th, 2026

Dear Colleague:

I am pleased to write this letter to strongly recommend Anais Tricia Toungui for the NBER Entrepreneurship Research Bootcamp.

Anais is working on two projects on entrepreneurship in sub-Saharan Africa. Her first project tries to understand why unemployment remains high in Gabon despite a large amount of firm creation over the last several years. High rates of youth unemployment are concerning in many African countries. Anais is trying to determine whether a government policy that reserves tenders for small firms has led to the creation of "opportunistic firms" that are created to obtain these contracts, but do not hire many workers. In effect, it is possible that government policy is incentivizing firms to stay small, reducing overall employment. She has assembled data directly from the government on new firm registrations and government contracts. She will use the newest differences-in-differences methods to determine whether the policy is keeping firms small. These methods are well accepted in the applied microeconomics field.

Anais is using a differences in differences strategy where she compares firms that were more/less affected by the government policy change in November 2022. Again, this policy change reserved government contracts below a certain amount for small and medium firms. The policy affects some firms more than others. In particular, firms in certain sectors are more likely to receive government contracts due to the nature of the types of tenders put out by the government. Anais will compare changes over time between these more/less affected firms to determine whether the policy influenced labor demand.

I find this project to be highly original because there isn't that much high-quality empirical work explaining low labor demand by African firms. Anais has a clear hypothesis about how government policy could be creating incentives for firms to stay small. I think this project has the potential to grab lots of attention of people who are looking for answers as to why job growth remains stubbornly low in many African settings.

Anais has a second exciting project where she has also put together some really neat data. This project studies moto-taxi drivers in Uganda. Anais has a partnership with a firm that provides in-kind loans to new drivers. She has received data on monthly repayment history and GPS tagged driving activity for around 8,000 drivers. She plans to use this data to study how a policy that closed a subset of waiting stands (where drivers wait to pick up passengers) affected

driving activity and repayment behavior. She has just received the full dataset and has started analysis. I think this is a highly promising project because there are interesting questions to be answered about whether and how fast these entrepreneurs learn in response to changes in regulation. The large dataset on driving behavior and repayment (performance) make this possible.

Anais would benefit from the boot camp because she is at the stage where learning exactly where the frontier lies in the field of entrepreneurship would help her position her own research. She is highly skilled at identifying policy relevant questions based on discussions with stakeholders. Speaking to a broader set of researchers that focus on entrepreneurship will no doubt help her to broaden the academic appeal of her work.

Once again, I strongly support Anais' application to the boot camp. Please do reach out to me at the email below if I can support her application in any other way.

Sincerely,



Kyle Emerick
Associate Professor
Department of Economics
Tufts University
Research Affiliate, CEPR
Affiliated Professor, JPAL
Panel Member, Standing Panel on Impact Assessment
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