

AFRICA AND COLUMBIA

STUFF FROM A PH.D. STUDENT AT COLUMBIA WITH AN INTEREST IN AFRICA.

SUNDAY, APRIL 4, 2010

Sierra Leone and network data.

Last Thursday - together with colleague and friend Neelanjan Sircar - I visited the IRC HQ and had a meeting with Paul Amendola and Jeannie Annan (IRC's Director of Research and Evaluation). I met Paul two weeks earlier when he told me about an interesting project that he is spearheading for the IRC. In brief, because of the high cost of conducting large surveys to obtain mortality data, the IRC is embarking on a twelve month project in Sierra Leone to test whether these surveys can be replaced by having selected health workers report mortality data via cellphones. By surveying several complete villages at t=1 and again at t=12 the real mortality rates are obtained. This true picture will then be compared with the data obtained via cellphones from the health workers.

The part especially interesting for us is that *complete* villages will be surveyed. This is a unique opportunity to obtain so-called network data; how people are related to each other and what their position in a society is. Few complete networks (e.g. a complete village) are ever sampled. Moreover, not only will this network data be informative for the IRC, networks are a central topic in our dissertations. Neelanjan focuses on the role of brokers in the political process because of their knowledge of local-level networks. I, on my turn, will focus on the network impact of village cleavages - especially those formed by migration - on public good provision.

I just finished reading an interesting working paper by Rachel Glennerster, Ted Miguel, Alexander Rothenberg on Sierra Leone [*] that relates closely to this project and my dissertation. In brief:

They look at the impact of ethnic diversity on public goods provision and collective action in post-war Sierra Leone, and find that local ethnic diversity is not associated with worse local public goods provision across a variety of regression specifications, local outcomes, and diversity measures. Given the large migration flows

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due to the 1991-2002 civil war, a big problem is sorting. That is, individuals from a particular ethnic groups or with certain (unobserved) tastes for public goods, could migrate to more or less diverse areas. To address this concern of endogenous local ethnic composition they use an IV strategy that relies on ethnic diversity data from 1963. Next to concluding that ethnic diversity has not a negative impact on public goods, the paper discusses how the historical development of inter-ethnic relations in Sierra Leone, as well as the continued strength of local tribal chiefs could be possible explanations for this finding. Nice paper!

[*] Rachel Glennerster, Ted Miguel, Alexander Rothenberg. 2009. Working Together: Collective Action in Diverse Sierra Leone Communities. Working paper, November 2009.

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