**Call for papers
NBER-AfDB Conference on Transforming Rural Africa**February 28 – March 1, 2019

Sub-Saharan Africa is in the early stages of agricultural productivity growth and structural transformation. Agriculture’s share of GDP and of employment have declined in recent decades across the continent and uptake of modern agricultural inputs has expanded along with rural communications and transport infrastructure, though slowly and unevenly. These trends have vast implications for the continent, especially for the region’s poorest individuals, who are concentrated in rural regions and most of whom base their livelihoods in agriculture. Given that the World Bank projects 80% of the world’s extreme poor will be in sub-Saharan Africa by 2030, the transformation of rural Africa is of tremendous global importance.

High quality economic research contributes a great deal to the design and advance of inclusive and environmentally sustainable economic growth and large scale poverty reduction and wealth creation in the region, as the complex, dynamic process of structural transformation unfolds, albeit unevenly in space and time. Unlike elsewhere in the world, where economies largely shifted towards manufacturing, Africa’s structural transformation process has, to date, taken place off a still-low-productivity agricultural sector and tended mainly towards non-tradable services. Such a trajectory risks sending the continent into a pattern of high urban poverty and growing rural-urban inequality relative to the structural transformations experienced in Asia, Europe and the Americas. Indeed, we see inequality increasing in about half of sub-Saharan African countries and this relationship is strongly associated with urbanization. It is an open question as to how policy can ensure that the transformation that happens will be as broad and inclusive as possible. Policies that influence the nature of the transformation may be found as much in those that influence the expansion of non-tradeable services versus manufacturing, as those that bolster productivity growth and stability of the smallholder agricultural sector.

To explore these phenomena, the NBER will host a research conference in Cambridge, MA, February 28-March 1, 2019, with the support of the African Development Bank, to bring together cutting edge research offering a range of perspectives on the structural transformation process underway in rural Africa, especially drawing on micro-scale evidence from households and firms. The African Development Bank (AfDB) seeks rigorous research to inform its efforts to ensure an inclusive growth trajectory based on its [‘high five’ priorities](https://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/african-development-bank-accelerates-pace-with-high-5-priorities-15879/): Light up and power Africa, Feed Africa, Industrialize Africa, Integrate Africa, and Improve the quality of life for the people of Africa. The conference will be organized by Chris Barrett (Cornell), Michael Carter (UC-Davis and NBER), Abebe Shimeles (AfDB), Tavneet Suri (MIT and NBER), and Chris Udry (Northwestern and NBER). Per NBER policy, papers and presentations may not include any policy recommendations. All conference papers will be eligible for distribution through the NBER working paper series. Presenters will need to provide an executive summary of up to 1000 words prior to the conference. These will be gathered into a summary report to AfDB.

Researchers are invited to submit their papers through the [NBER website](http://papers.nber.org/confsubmit/backend/cfp?id=TRAs19) no later than midnight (Eastern Daylight Time) Thursday, November 1, 2018. Proposers with and without NBER affiliations are welcome. Proposals from African or Africa-based schools and early career scholars are especially encouraged. Decisions about which proposals are accepted will be announced in early December.

NBER will cover the hotel and economy class travel cost for one author per paper and will pay an honorarium for each paper/executive summary selected. Co-authors and other participants may also attend the conference, space permitting. The NBER provides breakfast and lunch each day. Anyone interested in attending the meeting, but who does not have a paper to submit, may [click here](http://conference.nber.org/confer/reply/TRAs19.html). Please direct conference questions to Carl Beck (cbeck@nber.org)