



HARVARD UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS
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Dear Selection Committee:

A. Nilesh Fernando is an excellent development economist, and I highly recommend him to economics departments, business schools, and policy schools. He could be considered for even the most competitive positions searching for a development economist, and economics departments outside the “top 10” should consider him strongly regardless of field. Nilesh would be a particularly good fit for the best policy schools, but economics departments and business schools should give him close consideration.

Nilesh’s job market paper examines how inherited land can have some detrimental effects in settings with substantial rigidities in land markets. Inherited land could then keep people in agriculture, whereas there may be advantages to leaving agriculture. The paper uses variation in land inheritances due to cultural norms and the sex composition of siblings, estimating some substantial disadvantages to inheriting this asset. Indeed, in contexts where rigidities are largest, inheriting small amounts of land has negative impacts on household consumption. The most plausible channels, which the paper shows, are that inherited land discourages non-agricultural work and migration to urban areas.

This job market paper has a good chance to be published in a top economics journal, and would an excellent contribution to journals such as *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*. The empirical results are striking and the analysis is remarkably thorough. There are potential concerns, for example concerning whether sibling composition affects household consumption through other channels, and Nilesh has brought together a variety of data and extended tests to explore this and other potential concerns.

Nilesh has an extensive research pipeline, which includes a productive series of collaborations with Shawn Cole (HBS). A common theme running through this agenda is the importance of information in rural developing contexts, particular agricultural contexts. The other common theme is Nilesh’s creativity in determining interesting questions and his dedication in collecting the relevant data to answer those questions.

Nilesh is an engaging and thoughtful scholar, though sometimes overly modest, and will be an excellent teacher and colleague. Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,

Richard Hornbeck