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Book Reviews

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Book Reviews

STATA Survival Manual. *By David Pevalin and Karen Robson.*
Open University Press, McGraw Hill (Berkshire, England). 2009.
363pp

Statistical analysis has become the currency of academic research in economics and social sciences. Recent developments in software and user-written programming have contributed to greater use of statistical methods in research. STATA is one of the most powerful software for statistical analysis, with crucial advantages over alternatives such as SAS, SPSS, and so on. For seasoned as well as upcoming researchers STATA offers versatile and powerful software for much of what you need to do. The book by Pevalin and Robson is a contribution to the understanding of the use of STATA in academic research.

Pevalin and Robson have provided a simple, easy-to-read starter manual for beginners. Each chapter focuses on providing a step-by-step guide for researchers on how to implement various statistical methods. The book begins with a comprehensive introduction on how you can use STATA to enter data directly into STATA or export data from other formats (including copying and pasting from MS Excel and so on). Instructions on how to read and save data in STATA are clearly explained.

In chapters 3 and 4, the authors show with examples how one can manipulate variables or create new ones from existing variables. For example, the chapters illustrate how to create dummy or categorical variables from continuous data. Further, manipulations such as merging files containing different data files on the same unit of observation are demonstrated. Many survey data such as the Living Conditions Monitoring Survey or the Demographic and Health Surveys have different sections of data located in different files (chapters) only identified by a unique identifier. The authors show how to merge such files into a single file to facilitate analysis. Often, analytical work can require one to add or append two or more data files. Pevalin and Robson have demonstrated how this manipulation is done in STATA.

In Chapters 5-8, the authors also show how to run a battery of common descriptive statistics in STATA. Cross tabulations and other descriptive analyses are well illustrated with worked exercises. All the common non-parametric statistical tests such as chi-square, rank correlation and t-tests are performed with several examples. This section also includes procedures on how to conduct some basic multivariate analysis. An important plus about this book is that it demonstrates statistical manipulations with nuanced examples for researchers that operate in a variety of research fields.

The authors go on to show how to generate all associated graphs such as histograms, scatter plots, and so on. They introduce users to the new graph editor feature in STATA, which allows the user to customise their graphs according to

their needs. In summary, this was a very useful and practical manual which facilitates easy learning for new users of STATA. Being a most recent publication, it makes use of new features in STATA 9 and STATA 10. It is suited and beneficial to researchers in all social science fields.

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An Assessment of Poverty Reduction Strategies in Sub-Saharan Africa: the Case of Zambia. *By Augustus Kapungwe, Laurent C.W. Kaela and James S. Mulungushi. Organisation for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa. Addis Ababa: Ethiopia. 2008. 155 pp.*

This book is written under the sponsorship of the Organisation for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA). It is an assessment of poverty reduction strategies in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) looking at the case of Zambia. It is therefore a work of great significance to both policy makers and academics. The book uses Zambia as a case study of the processes of poverty reduction strategies embraced by most low income SSA countries during the late 1990s under the auspices of the international financial institutions (IFIs).

Before highlighting the contents of the book, important points that have surrounded policy making debate in SSA deserve our attention. First, the poverty reduction strategies were implemented in low income countries that were gripped with high poverty and unsustainable debt levels. Second, economic policy making processes in most low income countries during the 1990s were seen as being driven and undertaken by the IFIs with little or no local ownership. Third, policies were often criticised for not being in tandem with the reality of most host countries. Finally, the poverty reduction strategies were formulated with IFIs emphasising local policy ownership through the participation of both governments and other stakeholders such as Non-Governmental Organisations.

Unlike a number of books and articles written on policies and poverty in Zambia by foreign researchers, this volume consists of well researched papers undertaken by skilled local researchers drawn from among policy makers and academia. This localisation of the assessment of the poverty reduction strategies in Zambia brings out the reality tainted with the experience of the authors in an objective manner.

The introductory chapter traces the genesis of the poverty reduction strategies (PRS) in Zambia between 2002- 2004, as a pre-condition for receiving bilateral and multilateral debt relief. The chapter outlines the process and performance of the poverty reduction strategies that were implemented. The author using empirical data concludes that the PRS lamentably failed to achieve their objective of poverty reduction. The author partially attributes this failure to

the use of economic instruments for poverty reduction. The author suggests that emphasis should have been placed on aid alignment, policy harmonisation and coordination as well as scaling up of donor aid. In addition the paper recommends long term planning as a way of resolving constraints that inhibit development.

The second author concomitantly concludes that poverty reduction remained slow in the country despite the PRSs that were being implemented. The conclusion is arrived at after considering the overall macroeconomic performance and poverty levels in the country. The author attributes the slow progress in poverty reduction to several factors such as fiscal slippages arising from a high wage bill and domestic borrowing. Moreover the PRSs lacked implementation and monitoring, and evaluation frameworks. The third chapter traces the evolution of the economic crisis in Zambia that drove it into a debt crisis that gripped those countries up to 2006. The author innovatively links poverty to the performance of the external sector and the country's revenue generation side. He observes that the opening up of the current account contributed to the erosion of the tax base and greatly contributed to increased poverty levels.

The authors make bold conclusions without considering the complexity of the socio-economic variables. They do not comprehensively tie the various PRSs to potential outcomes and long-term effects on poverty reduction. For instance, the first author observes that the PRSs failed to reduce poverty while ignoring their effects on the debt overhang which is essential for long-term economic development and poverty reduction. While the third author correctly links the erosion of the tax base and formal employment to trade liberalization, he does not account for the large informal employment opportunities generated by the same. The author further puts more weight on the contribution of the external sector to poverty reduction than the role of government policies and fiscal prudence. A closer examination of these effects could possibly add some modification to the overall conclusions.

Overall, the book is rich and very informative. It provides systematic information on the PRSs in Zambia that could inform other countries. The material can easily be understood by even casual readers and could form a potential basis upon which more rigorous assessments of the PRSs can be undertaken.

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