

Title: Can political decentralization improve citizen welfare? Evidence clues from a Lab-in-the-Field Experiment in India

Speaker: Prof. Kunal Sen (United Nations University (UNU-WIDER))

Area: ESS

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Abstract:

While developing countries have undergone waves of decentralization, motivated by the scope for strengthening accountability and participatory democracy, progress may be held up by bureaucratic inefficiency, office holder misconduct or other institutional weaknesses. We replicate such a real-world environment in a controlled lab setting with politician participants in rural India, and provide new evidence on how political decentralization works. Using a modified dictator game, we mimic steps towards political decentralization by varying treatments across anonymity and a promise. With anonymity and no promise, politicians behave selfishly, but distribute small amounts when forced to make an upfront promise. With personalized interaction and no promise, they give around one third of their endowment. In the personalized interaction, promise treatment, politicians promise and distribute half of their endowment. Our findings shed new light on how and why political decentralization can reduce inequality and improve citizen welfare

Speaker Profile:



Professor Kunal Sen has over three decades of experience in academic and applied development economics research. He is the author of eight books and the editor of five volumes on the economics and political economy of development. From 2019 he is the Director of UNU-WIDER, and he is a professor of development economics at the Global Development Institute, University of Manchester.

Professor Sen is a leading international expert on the political economy of growth and development. He has performed extensive research on international finance, the political economy determinants of inclusive growth, the dynamics of poverty, social exclusion, female labour force participation, and the informal sector in developing economies. His research has focused on India, East Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa.

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