



Development
Learning
Lab

ANNUAL REPORT 2024

CMI CHR.
MICHELSEN
INSTITUTE

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UNIVERSITY OF BERGEN

Contents

About Development Learning Lab	3
Highlights 2024	5
Learning Arenas	6
Knowledge Reviews	12
Aid policy work	13
Ongoing Research	15
Management and Support	25

About Development Learning Lab

Development Learning Lab (DLL) is a research and learning centre working with development practitioners to improve outcomes of development programmes.

DLL partners with NGOs, multilateral organisations, and governments to provide evidence and do research at all stages of development projects and programmes.

Our contribution is to make research-based knowledge more accessible, fill knowledge gaps about what works and why, and provide a systematic approach to learning from research and experience – within and across organisations.

Development Learning Lab was established in 2021 as a collaboration between the Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI), the University of Bergen (UiB), the Norwegian School of Economics (NHH) and its Centre for Applied Research (SNF).

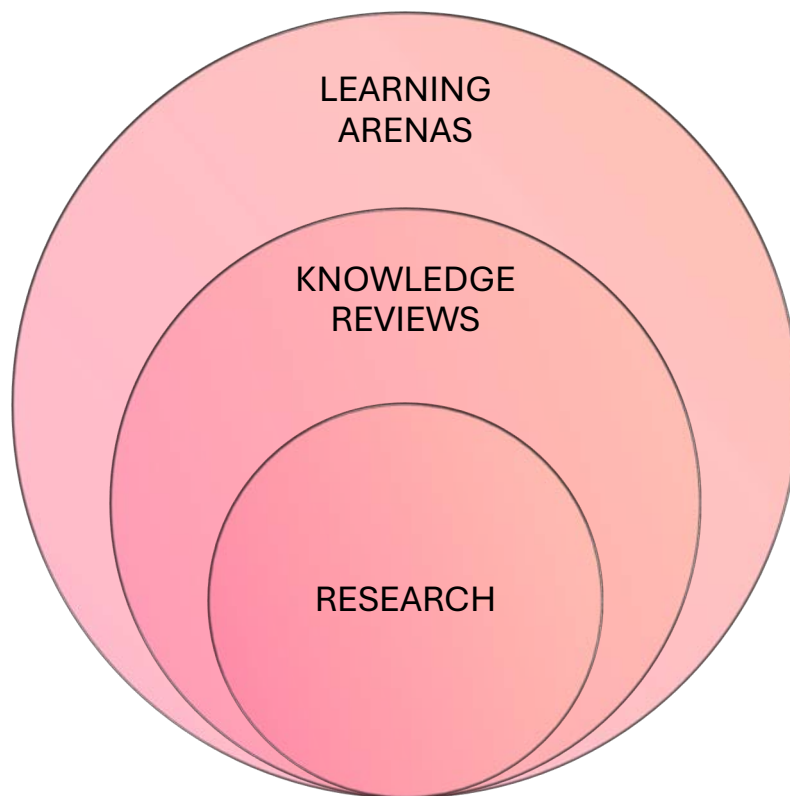
DLL originates from a long-standing collaboration between CMI and two Centres of Excellence at UiB and NHH: the Centre for Experimental Research on Fairness, Inequality and Rationality (FAIR) and the Centre for Intervention Science in Maternal and Child Health (CISMAC). At the UiB, DLL is part of the Global Challenges priority area.

DLL is physically located at CMI in Bergen.



More Learning
Better Outcomes

Our Core Activities



Research

Impact evaluations and other real time evaluations of development interventions to understand what works, why, where, and for whom.

Knowledge reviews

Reviews of existing research to make research findings accessible for practical use.

Learning arenas

Learning networks and other events that bring together researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to share knowledge and experience.

Aid policy work

DLL also engage in aid policy work that aligns with our purpose and ambition.

Highlights 2024

2024 has been an exciting and productive year. DLL established a new Helpdesk that provides knowledge services to organisations that are in the process of developing new aid projects and programmes. We supported three organisations in their preparation of new applications to Norad. Among the outputs were a series of knowledge reviews that now are publicly available.

We also established two new learning networks, one on Women’s Economic Empowerment and one on Climate Adaptation. In addition, we continued our collaboration with the MERLiN network (Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning in Norway) through several joint workshops.

DLL also started a new long-term research collaboration with Hauge Microfinance to evaluate the impact of providing business investment grants to their clients in Burundi.

DLL has increasingly engaged in aid policy work. In 2024, we contributed to discussions on the financing of global public goods, on investment opportunities in global health, and on knowledge-based aid.

We are very grateful for the economic support from Open Philanthropy, which has funded most of our activities in 2024.

DLL has established itself as an important provider of knowledge services to aid organisations and research institutions. A more sustainable funding arrangement needs to come in place for us to further develop this role in years to come.

You will find more about these and other highlights below.



Learning Arenas



Helpdesk

The new helpdesk provided knowledge services to three organisations – Plan International Norway, Care, and SOS Children’s Villages – in their preparation of new funding applications to Norad.

Through the helpdesk we developed a series of knowledge reviews of direct relevance to the organisations’ programmes. We met with the organisations to present the knowledge reviews and discuss their implications for programming.

We also assisted organisations in developing knowledge-based theories of change and offered support in the development of knowledge plans.

As many organisations are working on similar topics, the helpdesk is a mechanism for coordinating the search for research-based knowledge across organisations. This saves time and resources.

Our knowledge reviews will be regularly updated and will over time be developed into a knowledge hub that is a public good for aid organisations.

Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) – network

Women's economic empowerment plays a pivotal role in fostering development and addressing gender inequality.



In DLL's new learning network on Women's Economic Empowerment, we ask how aid organisations can support women in their access to income earning opportunities, productive assets, and resources.

The aim is to enable the design and implementation programmes that effectively strengthen the economic position of women.

Members of the learning network will:

- become familiar with recent research on women's economic empowerment,
- learn from the experiences of other organisations on how to successfully implement programmes in a variety of contexts,
- be part of a community that shares knowledge and resources that can make women's economic empowerment programmes more effective.

The network meets physically for four half-days seminar each year and currently has more than 40 members from more than 20 organisations.

Climate Adaptation – Network

Effective adaptation to climate change will be an essential part of development work over the coming decades.

In DLL’s new learning network on Climate Adaptation, we ask how aid organisations can design and implement effective climate adaptation programs that can improve resilience and food security, particularly in smallholder agriculture.

The climate adaptation learning network cultivates a community that brings together researchers and practitioners and facilitate collaborative exchange of knowledge and resources.



Members of the learning network will:

- become familiar with recent research on climate adaptation,
- learn from the experiences of other organizations on how to successfully implement climate adaptation programmes in a variety of contexts,
- be part of a community that shares knowledge and resources that can make climate adaptation programmes more effective.

The network meets physically for four half-days seminar each year and currently has more than 40 members from more than 20 organisations.

DLL/MERLiN workshop series

DLL collaborates on a workshop series with the MERLiN network (Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning in Norway), which gathers experts in these areas from most Norwegian aid organisations.

The aim of the series is to share ideas about how to enhance learning, including how knowledge management systems may need to adapt to promote learning.

Two workshops were held in 2024. The first workshop focused on how to **generate research-based knowledge as part of the project cycle** and how to utilise **3ie’s Development**

Evidence Portal to identify relevant research. Invited speakers were Arianna Legovini, Director of DIME/World Bank, and Mark Engelbert, Senior Evaluation Specialist & Leader at 3ie.

The second workshop focused on **how to develop good knowledge plans**. Knowledge plans describe what knowledge will be generated and made available, for what purpose, and how this will be done. Knowledge plans are currently requested by Norad as part of grant applications. However, there is little guidance on what to include in knowledge plans and how to go about developing such plans.

The purpose of the full-day workshop was to share ideas and jointly develop a structured approach to developing good knowledge plans. Around 40 representatives from more than 25 organisations participated in the event.



Impact evaluation incubator

DLL organised another impact evaluation incubator in cooperation with Norad. Four organisations participated.

Aid organisations bring to the incubators a project that they would like to make subject to an impact evaluation. Over three days, 3-6 staff from each organization work intensively with a dedicated researcher to develop their impact evaluation proposals. Key concepts and methods are presented in lectures, but most of the time is spent working on the organisations' impact evaluation cases.

In addition to DLL's own researchers, the incubator benefited from contributions from Shree Kullenberg (Airbel Impact Lab, International Rescue Committee) and Alfredo Burlando (University of Oregon). The incubator was very favourably evaluated by the participants. A large majority were very satisfied with the content and support they received.



Participants at the impact evaluation incubator in December 2024. Digital participants are unfortunately missing.

Jobs and Employment seminar series

DLL continued its seminar series on Jobs and Employment in collaboration with the Department for Climate, Nature and the Private Sector in Norad. This included a two-day workshop in Oslo.

The seminar series is a part of the Jobs Network, hosted by CMI and partner institutions in Ethiopia, Nepal, and Tanzania. The network has an annual workshop in partner countries, which this year was held in Dar es Salaam on the topic of job creation in Tanzania.

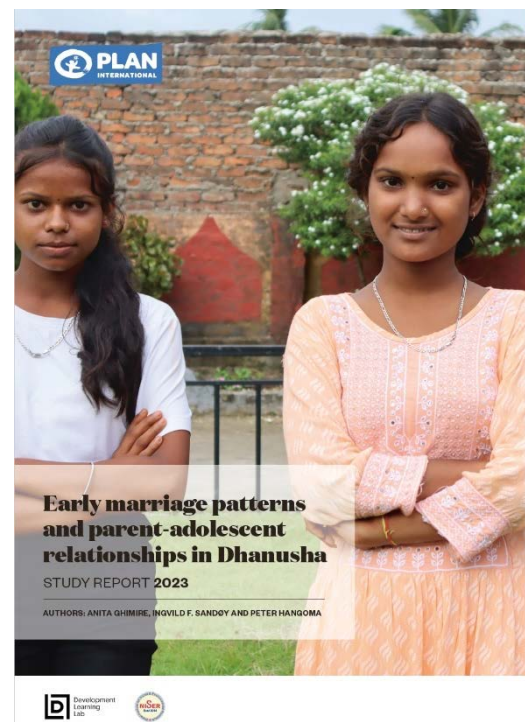


Key topics include:

- What is the government and donor role in job creation?
- How can a country secure a balanced transition out of agriculture?
- How can access to jobs be secured for the poor and marginalized, and for women?
- How can the productivity of subsistence farmers be improved?
- What are the effects of different skill training programmes?

Network on Harmful Practices

DLL contributed to the network on harmful practices by presenting our report from formative research on interventions to reduce early child marriage in Nepal. The report argues that traditional drivers of early marriage, such as dowry, remain important in some areas. In addition, school dropout and fear that children will self-initiate marriage, combined with communication gaps between adolescents and parents, prompt parents to marry off their daughters early. The report argues that addressing early marriage requires multiple interventions, targeting parents, adolescents, and society as a whole. The report is a result of a collaboration with Plan International Norway.



Knowledge Reviews

DLL offers three types of knowledge reviews to cater to different audiences and needs:

Knowledge Briefs. Concise, 3-4-pages documents are designed for practitioners, offering actionable insights and practical guidance.

Evidence Reviews: Designed for practitioners who need more detailed information than what is provided in Knowledge Briefs. These reviews can be *rapid literature reviews*, *umbrella reviews* (review of systematic reviews), or a combination of these.

Systematic Reviews: These comprehensive analyses are written in a more academic style, providing detailed evaluations of the effectiveness of development interventions and exploring the nature and causes of development challenges.

The knowledge reviews are living documents that we aim to update regularly to incorporate the latest research and insights.

In 2024, DLL published eight evidence reviews:

- Climate adaptation interventions in small-holder agriculture.
- Conflict and turmoil: A review of intimate partner violence in conflict settings.
- How (not) to enhance women's access to dignified work and earning.
- Impacts of Village Saving and Loan Associations (VSLAs).
- Impacts of parenting programs in low- and middle-income countries.
- Promoting women's economic empowerment through business trainings.
- Violence against children: Impact of parenting and community-based programs in LMICs.
- What works in combatting gender-based violence?

The following reviews are in the pipeline:

- Supporting small scale vs large scale agriculture.
- Shrinking civic space: Drivers, consequences and responses.
- The effects of anticipatory action in humanitarian settings.

Knowledge reviews are available at the [DLL webpage](#).

Aid policy work

Aid and Global Public Goods

DLL contributed to the debate on the financing of global public goods – such as climate, pandemic preparedness and clean oceans – through several op-eds and by publishing the report “[Aid or purchase of services: How to finance global public goods](#)”.

The report presents a new framework for how contributions to global public goods can be categorised either as development aid or as purchase of a service that would not count as development aid.

DLL, in collaboration with Save the Children Norway, also hosted an event at Arendalsuka to discuss alternative proposals that have been made on how to finance global public goods.



Panel at Arendalsuka (from left): Anne Marie Helland, Nikolai Hegertun, Ottar Mæstad, Kari Elisabeth Kaski.

Investments in global health (Stoltenberg-utvalget)

DLL Director, Ottar Mæstad, participated in the expert committee, led by Camilla Stoltenberg, which made recommendations on how Norway can best contribute to the field of global health.

The committee's report, "Norway can, Norway should: Take the lead in halving premature death within 2050", proposed a dual objective for Norway's investments in global health: first, to reduce global health inequalities, and secondly, to increase health security in Norway and other countries.

While financing for the first would come from the aid budget, all new investments under the second objective should be funded outside the current development aid envelope.

The report has generated significant interest among policymakers and politicians across the political spectrum.



Next steps for knowledge-based aid

DLL participated in a task force initiated by the MERLiN network to identify next steps for implementing the knowledge-based aid agenda. The task force had members with a background from civil society aid organisations, research institutions, and Norad. The report, "[Next steps for knowledge-based aid: Fostering collaboration between NGOs and research institutions](#)", has as one of its main recommendations to address the public goods problem involved in knowledge generation and management.

The report recommends to:

- establish a funding scheme with top-up funding for knowledge investments that have the character of a public good.
- establish a knowledge centre which produces knowledge reviews, maintains an up-to-date knowledge repository, and provides other knowledge services to aid organisations.



Ongoing Research

Agricultural resilience through climate services



Implementing partners

Development Fund, NorCap

Study participants

3,000-4,000 households

Type of study

Randomised evaluation

Timeline

2024 – 2027

DLL fellows involved

Jon Einar Flåtnes, Carlo Koos, Erik Kolstad

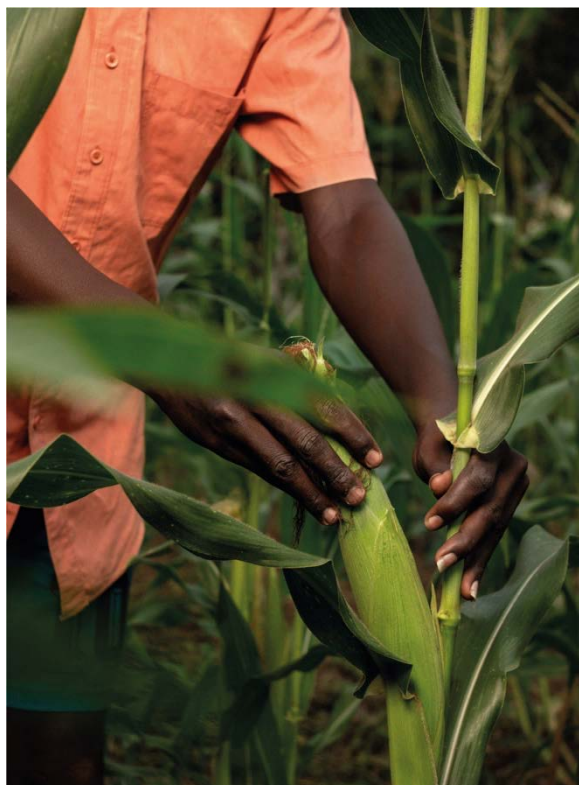
The project will study the impact of a customised climate services program among smallholder farmers in Malawi and Ethiopia.

Climate services refer to weather forecasts and weather-contingent agricultural advice that have the potential to make farmers less vulnerable to climate change.

The research will produce evidence that civil society organisations, policymakers, and funders can use to decide whether and how to scale up climate services projects throughout the region.

We will measure the effects of the program on short-term outcomes like agricultural decisions and yields, but more importantly on long-term outcomes like food security, income, and resilience. We will also work closely with the Development Fund on more frequent monitoring of development indicators.

Supporting business growth in a context of extreme poverty



Implementing partners

Hauge Microfinance

Study participants

3,000 enterprises

Type of study

Randomised evaluation

Timeline

2024 – 2029

DLL fellows involved

Vincent Somville, Alexander Bjerck
Hagen

This project assesses the impact of a direct financial grant to established small and medium-size enterprises in Burundi. The grant will enable greater investments in business growth.

The study also investigates the optimal size of the grants needed to make a meaningful impact on businesses and livelihoods. Will allocating larger grants to fewer businesses be more effective than providing smaller grants to a larger number of recipients?

The key policy question how unconditional cash transfers of varying sizes influence business growth and poverty alleviation.

We measure the effects of cash transfers on business development outcomes such as investment levels, job creation, revenue growth, and business survival. We also collect qualitative data to better understand business behaviours, preferences, and constraints that might shape the effectiveness of the transfers.

Throughout the implementation process, we provide regular feedback to implementers to ensure the intervention is delivered effectively and remains aligned with the needs of the target population.

Career exploration programme for young women



Implementing partner

Local NGO implementing career exploration program

Study participants

7,000 students from 45 schools in urban India

Type of study

Randomised evaluation

Timeline

2022-2026

DLL fellows involved

Viola Asri

Deciding about a professional path is difficult for everyone, even more so for girls who lack role models and financial resources. This project assesses the causal impact of a program called “career exploration”, which encourages students to explore different careers and plan their professional futures, on their skill formation and labour force participation. We focus on young women in the final grade of secondary school, given India’s low female labour force participation and rigid gender roles.

The policy question is whether providing career exploration in secondary school can increase the share of students completing a formal skill formation after secondary school and entering the labour force.

We conduct a clustered randomised controlled trial and measure the impacts of the program on students’ plans and what they end up doing in terms of continuing their skill formation as well as their future labour market outcomes. We also measure to which extent mechanisms such as increased information, peer effects, parental or community support, and role models contribute to the effects of the programme.

Work training for young women



Implementing partner

HIP Edutainment

Study participants

400 secondary school girls in Tanzania

Type of study

Controlled before-after study

Timeline

2024

DLL fellows involved

Kjetil Bjorvatn, Arne Nasgowitz

In this project, we address the issue of job search and employment using an experimental approach, where we offer young women a *work training* programme allowing them to better understand and navigate the labour market. The programme consists of factual information about the job market, as well as inspiring stories from role models who share their experiences and give advice.

The results of our research will be useful for employers and policy makers, who will get a better understanding of how to attract workers, reduce labour turnover, and improve productivity.

A fundamental contribution of our project is that we combine the experiment with lab and field evidence. We follow the participants over time, collecting lab evidence on mindsets and beliefs and field evidence of both job search and early job experiences. In this way, using both the lab and the field, our project allows us to both get a profound understanding of the psychological mechanisms of job search and career choice, as well as evidence on choices outside the lab setting, thus adding external validity to our study.

Interventions against female genital mutilation and child marriage in Ethiopia



Implementing partners

Norwegian Church Aid
Save the Children, Norway

Study participants

3,100 parents, 12,000 children

Type of study

Controlled before-after study +
randomised evaluation

Timeline

2020 – 2025

DLL fellows involved

Espen Villanger, Charlotte Ringdal

The project assesses the impacts of an intervention to reduce female genital mutilation and child marriage. The intervention aims to change norms, attitudes and behaviour through a range of activities including awareness raising, community mobilisation, training, capacity building of institutions, and support at the policy/government level.

The policy question is whether such a comprehensive approach to reducing FGM and child marriage affects parents' intentions to cut their daughters/marry them early, and whether it affects FGM and child marriage incidence.

We measure effects on norms, attitudes, and beliefs about others' attitudes and intentions to cut and marry their daughters. We also measure the effects on the incidence of FGM as well as on the age at marriage. We follow the implementation process and provide regular feedback to implementers with qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis during the implementation phase.

Kizazi Kijacho (“The Next Generation”)



Implementing partners

Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation (EGPAF), D-Tree International, EDI Global

Study participants

5,700 households

Type of study

Randomised evaluation and nationally representative longitudinal cohort study

Timeline

2021 – 2026

DLL fellows involved

Ingvild Almås, Bet Caeyers, Charlotte Ringdal

This programme aims to make a major scientific contribution by establishing and analysing a large and rich nationally representative longitudinal cohort dataset using state-of-the-art methods to measure child development and its multi-dimensional inputs from in-utero until age 3. The programme also carries out a large-scale randomised controlled trial (RCT) in the Dodoma region to test the relative cost-effectiveness of a parenting programme, an Unconditional Cash Transfer programme and a programme combining these two.

The main policy objective is to yield actionable evidence for policy makers, donors and practitioners about the design of cost-effective, scalable, sustainable, integrated Early Childhood Development (ECD) programs, from the prenatal period until the child’s 3rd year of life – the “first 1,000 days”.

The experimental and longitudinal data that we will collect will be used to assess the relative impact of different ECD intervention packages, to track progress in ECD over time and to construct a comprehensive empirical model suitable for ECD policy analysis of the determinants of parental behaviour and child development.

Peer counselling to address psychological distress and exposure to violence among the LGBTI population



Implementing partners

Blue Diamond Society

Study participants

1,000 individuals

Type of study

Randomised evaluation

Timeline

2023 – 2028

DLL fellows involved

Ingvild Sandøy

Sexual minorities in many low- and middle-income countries face discrimination, marginalisation, and abuse. They have a higher risk of mental health problems than the majority population but often have little access to mental health services.

This project will examine the effect of training peer educators from the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex (LGBTI) community in Nepal to provide psychological counselling to their peers who suffer from mental distress.

The programme question is whether psychological counselling and safety planning by peers can reduce mental distress and exposure to violence among LGBTI individuals.

We will conduct a randomised controlled trial to test the effectiveness of psychological counselling and safety planning. Participants will be randomly allocated to receive such care or be in a control group, and the effects will be measured after 3 months and after 1 year.

Water and social cohesion in refugee settings



Implementing partners

UNICEF, UNHCR, KfW

Study participants

6,000 respondents in
6 refugee camps

Type of study

Randomised evaluation

Timeline

2022 – 2026

DLL fellows involved

Carlo Koos

Water and sanitation (WASH) are often scarce in refugee settings. WASH projects are implemented across the globe in an attempt to alleviate water-borne diseases, improve health and livelihoods as well as foster sustainable development. WASH projects therefore have marked impacts on local communities' social fabrics and are a plausible driver of social cohesion and peace. Whether and, if so, by what mechanism this link comes about, however, has received all-too little scrutiny in the academic and policy literature.

The policy question is whether water and sanitation interventions can reduce scarcity-related resource competition and contribute to social cohesion within and between refugee and host populations.

This evaluation relies on the design of a six-year cumulative study on the effects of WASH on social cohesion. A key innovation of the project is to bridge quantitative difference-in-differences models with fine-grained qualitative evidence in a Bayesian framework. We measure social trust and prosocial behaviour.

Investing in safe deliveries



Implementing partners

World Vision Zambia

Study participants

480 savings groups

Type of study

Randomised evaluation

Timeline

2022 – 2024

DLL fellows involved

Peter Hangoma

Though high-quality health facility delivery can be lifesaving, many women in LMICs fail to access it because of financial barriers.

The project investigates whether community owned informal savings groups can be induced to give maternity grants to women to help them deliver in high-quality health facilities.

We measure effects on facility delivery and amount of maternity grant given to pregnant women, in addition to pregnancy related savings, expenditure on maternal health, perceived quality of facility delivery, and healthcare utilisation as secondary outcomes.

Incentives for tax compliance



Implementing partner

Tanzania Revenue Authority

Study participants

4,900 businesses

Type of study

Controlled before-after study with synthetic control

Timeline

2019 – 2024

DLL fellows involved

Odd-Helge Fjeldstad, Ingrid Hoem Sjursen, Vincent Somville

The project studies whether incentives can be used to improve collection of value added taxes (VAT). VAT receipts are used as tickets in a lottery with monetary prizes. The idea is to motivate customers to ask for receipts and that this will lead to more receipts being issued. Increasing the issuance of VAT receipts will make more information about transactions available to the tax authority. This makes it easier for them to estimate and enforce taxes, and may therefore increase VAT revenues collected.

The policy question is whether positive incentives for customers in the form of a lottery can improve VAT revenue collection and affect business development.

We measure effects of the VAT receipt lottery on issuance of receipts, VAT revenues collected and business development using administrative and survey data.

Management and Support

Management Team and Coordinators (31.12.2024)



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