Universidad de Navarra

Regional Studies:Africa

Teaching guide 2026-27

INTRODUCTION

Course description

This course is designed for students interested in understanding the economic development challenges and opportunities of Sub-Saharan Africa (Eastern Africa, Middle Africa, Southern Africa and Western Africa). Through the lens of modern development economics, we will examine some of the most pressing social, economic, and political issues shaping the region today, using recent data, contemporary case studies, and current policy debates.

We begin by exploring the many dimensions of human development. These include education, health, gender, family and kinship networks, demography, land relations and customary tenure, inequality, risk and vulnerability, migration, informality, social norms, public policy, and institutions. We will analyze how these factors interact to influence economic outcomes and human well-being across African countries.

The course then turns to the role of politics, institutions, and governance in shaping development trajectories, from colonial legacies and borders to state capacity and taxation. Drawing on both theoretical insights and empirical evidence, we will study why some policies succeed while others fail, and how institutions affect growth, inequality, poverty reduction, and social mobility. Throughout the course, students will engage with real-world examples from Africa and other developing regions, and will be introduced to modern empirical methods used in economics and public policy research.

Students will learn how economists use data to evaluate policies and better understand complex development issues.

By the end of the course, students will have a strong understanding of the key debates in development economics, the major challenges facing Sub-Saharan Africa today, and the policy tools available to address them.

Among the questions we will explore are:

- Is extreme poverty becoming a thing of the past, or an increasingly African problem?
- Why do poor households make the decisions they do?
- What economic and social constraints shape those decisions?
- How do inequality and informality affect development?
- What role should governments, markets, NGOs, and international organizations play?
- Does foreign aid help or hinder development, and what happens when it is cut?
- Which policies have been effective in reducing poverty and promoting growth?
- How do political institutions influence economic outcomes?
- Can Africa's young population become a demographic dividend?
- Where can policy interventions have the greatest impact, and how can data and evidence improve public policy?

The course is ideal for students interested in economics, public policy, international development, political economy, and the future of Africa.

- **Degree:** Degree in Economics + Diploma in Leadership and Governance
- **Module and field**: Módulo 7: Optativas Materia 7.2: Optativas Específicas no oficiales
- **Type of subject:** Required (OB)
- **Number of Credits**: 3 ECTS
- **Year and semester**: 5th year / 2nd Semester
- **Language**: English
- **Title**: African Economic Development
- **Instructor**: Sandra Polanía-Reyes

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- **Lecture schedule**: Wednesdays, 12:00 to 14:00, Check also the WebUnits calendar
- **Aula**: Ed. Amigos. AMI-P0-Aula09
- **Department:** Economics
- **Office:** Ed. Amigos, Torre, 2490, second floor
- **Prerequisites:**
  - **Math:** Calculus and Algebra. (Eb+IF: Quantitative methods I, II, III). The lectures will occasionally discuss simple mathematical models that economists find helpful to describe some aspects of the data.
  - **Intermediate Microeconomics and Macroeconomics:** We will cover a large set of different topics in economics and examine some of them from the lens of micro and macro concepts, mechanisms and models. The intuition behind those models will always be made clear.
  - **Probability and Statistics:** For each topic, we will study several concrete examples chosen from around the world, and use statistics to understand these examples quantitatively. Almost all of the required readings and lectures will use elementary statistics.
  - **Econometrics:** You must know what a linear regression is. Some readings will use more advanced statistical tools (such as correlations and regressions) to dig deeper into the data. Econometrics is not a prerequisite for this class. I will provide all the materials you may need.
  - **Applied tools:** Confidence with at least one software that allows you analyze data and produce results and graphs (Excel works) is a must.

LEARNING OUTCOMES (Competencies)

At the end of this course, students should have a good sense of the key questions asked by scholars interested in poverty today and hopefully a few answers as well.

Goals

- Develop a perspective on African development
- Master critical issues and controversies
- Employ systems thinking
- Employ data and evidence to frame recommendations
- Prepare to be a highly professional policy analyst

Specific Competencies

SSOP11 Acquiring principles of leadership, argumentation, and/or communication that allow for navigating complex and globalized economic environments.

SSOP12 Acquiring basic principles of philosophy and understanding their relationship with economics in a globalized environment.

SSOP13 Acquiring basic knowledge of law and understanding its relationship with economics in a globalized environment.

SSOP14 Acquiring basic principles of politics and understanding their relationship with economics in a globalized environment.

SSOP15 Acquiring basic principles of international relations and understanding their relationship with economics in a globalized environment.

PROGRAM

A distinctive feature of the course is its focus on recent problems and current data. We will discuss contemporary challenges such as:

- persistent inequality
- inflation and currency crises
- public debt distress

- conflict and fragility
- coups and democratic backsliding
- climate vulnerability
- youth employment and labor market informality
- migration and displacement
- mobile money and digital transformation
- regional trade integration
- shrinking foreign aid
- the long-term consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic

EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

I. Classroom teaching activities

We will have a combination of formal lectures and class discussions. This will only be possible if you consistently work on the new material. The material for each topic will be posted weekly, and you should keep pace with the rest of the class. Please don't be shy about seeking help if something is unclear or confusing! Ask questions as they arise during lectures and make sure you read all mandatory background readings. Be ready to discuss their content on the day that they are due.

1. Lectures. Lectures are given by the professor and guest lecturers on the themes indicated in the syllabus with the help of power point presentations and videos. The professor will post on ADI the power point presentation, the notes for each topic and some recommendations for further reading.

2. Class discussion and case studies

II. Personal work

Students must understand themes covered early in the course to be able to comprehend information presented later in the course, and will have to be able to integrate material learnt throughout the course. Therefore, it is important that they do not fall behind and try to set aside regular times outside of class to work on the course material on a daily basis.

1. Students must read the assigned reading for a subject before the lecture covering that topic. Being familiar with topics beforehand will allow students to get the most out of the lecture.

2. Students should conduct personal study using the professor's notes, notes taken in lectures and recommended readings.

There will be extra points oportunities for those who want to go deeper in the topics, and the first person that finds a mistake in the slides.

Time Commitment: Credits/hours distribution of the activities. 3 ECTS= 75 h (25 h/ECTS).

1. Lectures (theoretical and/or practical) 0.48 ECTS 12h 16%

2. Discussion and/or case study analysis 0.48 12h 16%

3. Individual directed work 0.24 6h 8%

Total classroom activities 1.2 ECTS 30h 40%

4. Personal work 1.8 40h 60%

Total 3 ECTS 75h 100%

The minimum commitment will be approximately 5 hours per week for attendance (2 hours), doing the readings, and completing the assignments.

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ASSESTMENT

Honor Code

Note that any attempt at fraud, copying, plagiarism, or other irregular behavior constitutes a serious offense as outlined in Title IV, “Academic Disciplinary Rules for Students,” within the University of Navarra's Code of Conduct, HERE

In#Class Technology Policy

This course adopts a “screens down” policy to protect attention, improve the quality of discussion, and support learning for all students. Research syntheses comparing **handwritten vs electronic note-taking** report worse learning outcomes on average with electronic note-taking, and experimental/field evidence indicates that **restricting phone access** can improve academic performance and student focus, particularly for lower-performing students.

- **Laptop computers and tablets are not permitted in class.** Students must keep laptops/tablets **closed (“lids down”) and stored away** for the full class period.
- **Mobile phones and smart devices (including smartwatches) are not permitted for use in class.** Devices must be **silenced and kept out of sight** (e.g., in a bag /pocket) for the full class period.
- **Handwritten notes are encouraged.** Students are welcome to use **pen-and-paper** and to bring **printed readings**.

Exceptions

- **Accessibility accommodations:** Students who require a device as part of an approved accommodation may use it. Please notify the instructor early in the semester so we can implement the accommodation appropriately.
- **Urgent circumstances:** If you anticipate an urgent call/message (e.g., medical /family), please inform the instructor **before class** and step outside to respond if necessary.

Enforcement: Non-compliance may be treated as a disruption to the learning environment. The instructor may ask a student to put a device away immediately; repeated violations may affect participation credit and/or result in being asked to leave for the remainder of the session.

AI policy for this class

Students are allowed to use advanced automated tools (artificial intelligence or machine learning tools such as ChatGPT) on assignments in this course if that use is properly documented and credited. For example, text generated using ChatGPT-3.5 should include a citation such as: “Chat-GPT-3.5. (YYYY, Month DD of query). “Text of your query.” Generated using OpenAI. https://chat.openai.com/”. Material generated using other tools should follow a similar citation convention.

Final grade

There will be 1 multiple choice (MCQ) midterm exam and a MCQ final exam. Exams questions will be drawn directly from lectures, class discussions and mandatory readings.

Attendance is mandatory. Justifications for missing class will **only** be received by ADI and be considered if submitted prior to the start of the class.

To calculate the final grade, course performance and grading will be determined as follows :

- **Class participation, Country case studies and discussion (18% sessions 1-4) (22% sessions 5-9):** The use of a desk name tag card is **mandatory**. Frequency of contributions, quality (relevance, depth, originality) of contributions, preparedness, engagement with peers.
- **Mid term exam (20%) - TBD Feb, 2027**
- **Final exam (40%) - May TBD, 2027, time/place TBD**

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Grade System (cfr. Art. 5, Real decreto 1125/2003, Spanish Ministry of Education)

Criteria to pass the course

- Students whose final grade is 5 points or more will pass the course.
- Students whose final grade is below 5 points will not pass the course and will be graded as *Suspenso* .
- Students who do not take the final exam will not pass the course and will be graded as *No presentado*.

Exams review

Students will be able to review the exams in an interview with the professor, after publication of the grades, in a day and place that will be indicated.

Students with special learning needs

Accommodation will be provided for students with special learning needs, either regarding the methodology and/or evaluation of the course, but they will be expected to fulfill all course objectives.

Evaluation in the extraordinary call

For those who do not pass the course in May or did not take the exam (grades *Suspenso* or *No presentado*) there will be a **MCQ extraordinary exam in June**. The final grade for this extraordinary exam will take into account all other activities or exams the student has previously passed. Under no circumstances may the professor consider any failed assessments from the regular exam period.

In person individual Exam on **June 13, 12h at Aula 13, Ed. Amigos.**

OFFICE HOURS AND FEEDBACK

Prof. Sandra Polanía-Reyes

Office: 2490. Ed. Amigos, Torre, Planta 2.

Office hours: Book the appointment here **https://calendar.app.google/u1trCZR9qoNnzAzX9**

Website: https://spolaniareyes.github.io/

E-mail policy ONLY THROUGH ADI

Do not expect responses outside during week-ends or holidays.

Questions about reading assignments, assessment, class schedules, dates and venues should be clarified with the info here in ADI or in class.

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND RESOURCES

Required textbook

Abhijit Banerjee's and Esther Duflo's ***Poor Economics: A Radical Rethinking of the Way to Fight Global Poverty.*** PublicAffairs, 2011. ISBN: 9781586487980. Find it in the library.

Frankema, Ewout, Hillbom, Ellen, Kufakurinani, Ushehwedu and Meier zu Selhausen, Felix (Eds.) (2022). The History of African Development. An Online Textbook for a New Generation of African Students and Teachers. African Economic History Network. Chapters 1-4. We will go through this book during the following sessions. https://www.aehnetwork.org/textbook/

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The instructor will also provide additional materials and handouts of the class slides. We will build up a Handout file with excellent resources on Dev Econ. We will also refer to other resources (videos, book chapters and articles) that will be available every week.The instructor will refer you to course notes or further readings if you want to dig deeper into certain topics.

Other readings

Glennerster, R., & Takavarasha, K., (2013). Running Randomized Evaluations: A Practical Guide, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ. Chapter 1. http://assets.press.princeton.edu/chapters/s10085.pdf

Duflo, Esther, Pascaline Dupas, and Michael Kremer. "Peer effects, teacher incentives, and the impact of tracking: Evidence from a randomized evaluation in Kenya." American Economic Review 101, no. 5 (2011): 1739-74. here.

Gertler, Paul J., Sebastian Martinez, Patrick Premand, Laura B. Rawlings, and Christel M. J. Vermeersch. 2016. Impact Evaluation in Practice, second edition. Washington, DC: Inter-American Development Bank and World Bank. doi:10.1596/978-1-4648-0779-4

Africa's growth performance and outlook amid the Covid-19 pandemic. African Economic Outlook 2021 HERE

Artuc et al (2020) Toward Successful Development Policies: Insights from Research in Development Economics. HERE

"The Indiana Jones of Economics," Part I ; Part II ; Part III (*Freakonomics* blog post by Robert Jensen on his work on Giffen goods)

WB 2015 World Development Report 2015: Mind, Society, and Behavior. Overview HERE

VIDEO Behavioral Science for Development: A Storytelling Event

UK Behavioural Insights Team. "EAST: Four simple ways to apply behavioural insights." Behavioural Insight Team, London (2014). Executive summary. Pp 1-7.

IDB 2018. Lessons from the Behavioral Sciences for Policy-Making in the Social Sector HERE

Optional BUT extremely useful for your PBs

Manning, Lauren; Dalton, Abigail Goodnow; Afif, Zeina; Vakos, Renos; Naru, Faisal. 2020. Behavioral Science Around the World Volume II: Profiles of 17 International Organizations (English). eMBeD report. Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group HERE

Bryan, C. J., Mazar, N., Jamison, J., Braithwaite, J., Dechausay, N., Fishbane, A.,Vakis, R. (2017). Overcoming behavioral obstacles to escaping poverty. Behavioral Science & Policy, 3(1), 81–91. HERE

IDB 2020 Rapid Toolkit for Behavioral Interventions and COVID-19 HERE

IDB 2017 Behavioral Insights for Development : Cases from Central America HERE

WB 2022 The behavioral profesional. HERE

We will also have some guest lectures from the African History through the lens of Economics. An initiative by the Wheeler Institute for Business and Development. This course will cover recent contributions in economic history that, using geospatial data from anthropological maps, colonial archives and secondary sources, will explore current economic and development challenges by drawing parallels between the past and present.