

# Comments on Jerven and Economists in the Tropics

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# Jerven's main points

- African growth failures over stated (height of concern was just as the recent 10+ year growth spurt was getting started)
- Anyway, how can we know whether Africa grew since the measurement of GDP is so bad?
- But current growth is based too much on natural resources (not on good policies)
- Cross-country growth econometrics uses suspect methodologies; so do case study analyses such as Acemoglu
- Context matters; study economies and focus on growth trajectories, not levels

# Methodologies and learning

- Economics (and other social sciences) are evolving. We discover things. We solve some problems and turn to others. Pioneers are helpful in pointing out new directions.
- Cross country comparisons throw up hypotheses. For example:
  - Why are African economies so fragile?
  - Why do African mineral economies generate so little employment transformation?
- RCT and experimental analysis in microeconomics certainly doesn't generate all the practical policy ideas we need, but it gave a huge boost to behavioral economics and kicked the legs out from under "homo economicus" .

# What do we actually know?

- Yes, African statistics are not good. But they are getting better.
- Not a money problem but a governance problem
  - Why don't African countries release data?
  - Why don't African statistical offices adopt new technology, good practice
  - Why doesn't donor coordination work (e.g. Paris 21, UN stats system)?
- Same as any other public service problem – need to change culture, norms, get incentives right
  - Start somewhere, set standards, monitor results, show benefits
  - Data bases should be transparent