

# Renos Vakis

*Economics · Behavioral Science · Human-Centered AI*

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## PROFILE

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Economist and behavioral scientist. I founded and lead the World Bank's behavioral science unit (eMBed), which works with governments and project teams in more than 100 countries to bring evidence about how people actually decide into the design of policies and programs. Behavioral design now informs more than \$10 billion in World Bank lending a year, around six times the share of operations it reached in 2015. Since 2023 I have also led work at the Institute for Economic Development on knowledge diffusion, impact analytics and applied AI.

## PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

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- 2015 – Present**      **Founder and Head, Mind, Behavior, and Development Unit (eMBed), World Bank.** Created and lead the World Bank's behavioral science unit, working with project teams, governments and a worldwide network of scientists and practitioners to diagnose, design and evaluate behaviorally informed interventions. It now sits within the Development Impact Department.
- 2023 – Present**      **Institute for Economic Development (IED), World Bank.** Lead work on knowledge diffusion, impact analytics and applied AI — including AI product solutions and the evaluation of IED products, services and diffusion. Coordinate AI work across the Development Economics Vice Presidency.
- 2003 – 2015**      **World Bank.** Various positions leading policy dialogue, analytical and experimental work on poverty, inequality and mobility dynamics, applied to social protection, education, social cohesion, climate change and health.
- 1999**      **Visiting Researcher, Grupo de Análisis para el Desarrollo (GRADE), Lima, Peru.**

## EDUCATION

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- 2002**      **Ph.D., Agricultural and Resource Economics** · University of California, Berkeley
- 1997**      **M.S., Agricultural and Resource Economics** · University of California, Berkeley
- 1994**      **B.A., Economics** · University of California, Davis

## APPLIED SYSTEMS AND PLATFORMS

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- AVA**      **An AI assistant for development evidence.** Grounded in the World Bank's report base, it answers with page-level citations and declines to answer where the evidence does not support one. I adapted it to that evidence base and set up its evaluation.
- Learning**      **Research-based learning at scale.** A platform that turns research into structured courses, with AI used in both course design and delivery. A personalized AI tutor is in development.
- STORY**      **A behavioral science platform for policymaking.** Built at eMBed. Development projects depend on people acting, yet the communication meant to influence that is briefed as production and rarely measured. STORY works backwards from the outcome: segment who needs to act, target message and messenger, test before spending, then measure against the project's own results framework.
- Diffusion**      **A multilingual research-to-policy podcast.** An AI-assisted, editorially controlled podcast that distills recent research into short briefings, published in several language editions.

## PEER-REVIEWED JOURNAL PUBLICATIONS

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- Karnatak, S.; Chatila, M.; Pinzón Hernández, D.; Yazdanfar, N.; Dugas, M.; and R. Vakis, **2026**. Learning from AVA: early lessons from a curated and trustworthy generative AI for policy and development research, *Proceedings of the 2026 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, ACM.
- Barrera-Rodríguez, O.; Macours, K.; Premand, P.; and R. Vakis, **2026**. Texting parents about early child development: behavioral changes and unintended social effects, *Journal of Development Economics*.
- Lim, J.; Moscoe, E.; Alqunaibet, A.; Pinzón Hernández, D.; Alruwaily, A.; et al., **2024**. Using social media surveys and interventions to address vaccine hesitancy in Saudi Arabia, *Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal*.
- Macours, K.; Premand, P.; and R. Vakis, **2022**. Transfers, diversification and household risk strategies: can productive safety nets help households manage climatic variability?, *The Economic Journal*.
- Strupat, C.; Farfán, G.; Moritz, L.; Negre, M.; and R. Vakis, **2021**. Obesity and food away from home: what drives the socioeconomic gradient in excess body weight?, *Economics & Human Biology*, 43, 101048.
- Laajaj, R.; Macours, K.; Pinzón Hernández, D.; Arias, O.; Gosling, S.; Potter, J.; Rubio-Codina, M.; and R. Vakis, **2019**. Challenges to capture the Big Five personality traits in non-WEIRD populations, *Science Advances*, 5, eaaw5226.
- de Hoop, J.; Premand, P.; Rosati, F.; and R. Vakis, **2018**. Women's economic capacity and children's human capital accumulation, *Journal of Population Economics*.
- Farfán, G.; Genoni, M.E.; and R. Vakis, **2017**. You are what (and where) you eat: capturing food away from home in welfare measures, *Food Policy*, 72, 146–156.
- Bryan, C.J.; Mazar, N.; Jamison, J.; Braithwaite, J.; Dechausay, N.; Fishbane, A.; Fox, E.; Gauri, V.; Glennerster, R.; Haushofer, J.; Karlan, D.; and R. Vakis, **2017**. Overcoming behavioral obstacles to escaping poverty, *Behavioral Science & Policy*, 3(1), 81–91.
- Cruces, G.; Lanjouw, P.; Lucchetti, L.; Perova, E.; Vakis, R.; and M. Viollaz, **2015**. Estimating poverty transitions using repeated cross-sections: a three-country validation exercise, *The Journal of Economic Inequality*, 13(2), 161–179.
- Schady, N.; Behrman, J.; Araujo, M.C.; Azuero, R.; Bernal, R.; Bravo, D.; López-Boo, F.; Macours, K.; Marshall, D.; Paxson, C.; and R. Vakis, **2015**. Wealth gradients in early childhood cognitive development in five Latin American countries, *Journal of Human Resources*, 50(2), 446–463.
- Macours, K.; and R. Vakis, **2014**. Changing households' investments and aspirations through social interactions: evidence from a randomized transfer program, *The Economic Journal*, 124, 607–633.
- Macours, K.; Schady, N.; and R. Vakis, **2012**. Cash transfers, behavioral changes, and cognitive development in early childhood: evidence from a randomized experiment, *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 4(2), 247–273.
- Beuermann, D.; McKelvey, C.; and R. Vakis, **2012**. Mobile phones and economic development in rural Peru, *The Journal of Development Studies*, 48(11), 1617–1628.
- Perova, E.; and R. Vakis, **2012**. Five years in Juntos: new evidence on the program's short- and long-term impacts, *Economía*.
- Macours, K.; and R. Vakis, **2010**. Seasonal migration and early childhood development, *World Development*, 38(6), 857–869.
- Premand, P.; and R. Vakis, **2010**. Do shocks affect poverty persistence? Evidence using welfare trajectories from Nicaragua, *Well-Being and Social Policy*.
- Deichmann, U.; Shilpi, F.; and R. Vakis, **2009**. Urban proximity, agricultural potential and rural non-farm employment: evidence from Bangladesh, *World Development*, 37(3), 645–660.
- de Janvry, A.; Finan, F.; Sadoulet, E.; and R. Vakis, **2006**. Can conditional cash transfer programs serve as safety nets in keeping children at school and from working when exposed to shocks?, *Journal of Development Economics*, 79(2), 349–373.

## BOOKS, BOOK CHAPTERS AND POLICY PUBLICATIONS

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- Lourenço, J.S.; Vakis, R.; and L. De Castro Zoratto, **2022**. The Behavioral Professional: Improving Decision-Making and Performance in the Public Sector. World Bank Group. [Book]
- Lim, J.; Vakis, R.; Cameron, M.; and M. Dugas, **2022**. Behavioral Science and COVID-19: An Interactive Solutions Guide for Better Policy Design. World Bank.
- Gauri, V.; Vakis, R.; Afif, Z.; and A. Dalton, **2020**. Behavioural science for global development, in C. Yeung and D. Soman (eds), The Behaviourally Informed Organization. University of Toronto Press. [Chapter]

- Manning, L.; Dalton, A.; Afif, Z.; Vakis, R.; and F. Naru, **2020**. Behavioral Science Around the World, Volume Two: Profiles of 17 International Organizations. *World Bank Group*.
- Macours, K.; and R. Vakis, **2019**. Sustaining impacts when transfers end: women leaders, aspirations, and investments in children, in C. Barrett, M.R. Carter and J.-P. Chavas (eds), *The Economics of Poverty Traps*. *University of Chicago Press & NBER*. [Chapter]
- Afif, Z.; Dalton, A.; Valcarcel Benítez, B.; Batada, A.; Walsh, J.; León, R.; and R. Vakis, **2019**. Behavioral Strategies to Support Social Stability in Lebanon. *World Bank Group*.
- Vakis, R.; Rigolini, J.; and L. Lucchetti, **2016**. Left Behind: Chronic Poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean. *World Bank*. [Book]
- World Bank, **2015**. A Measured Approach to Ending Poverty and Boosting Shared Prosperity: Concepts, Data, and the Twin Goals. *Policy Research Report*, *World Bank*.
- Ferreira, F.H.G.; Messina, J.; Rigolini, J.; López-Calva, L.-F.; Lugo, M.A.; and R. Vakis, **2013**. Economic Mobility and the Rise of the Latin American Middle Class. *World Bank*. [Book]
- Perova, E.; and R. Vakis, **2013**. Improving Gender and Development Outcomes through Agency: Policy Lessons from Three Peruvian Experiences. *World Bank*.
- Escobal, J.; Saavedra, J.; and R. Vakis, **2012**. Level Playing Field for Children in Peru: Measuring and Understanding the Evolution of Opportunities. *World Bank / GRADE*.

## WORKING PAPERS

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- Gill, M.; Afif, Z.; Dugas, M.; Ikindji, M.; Li, G.; Lim, J.; Nasr, S.; and R. Vakis, **2026**. The Behavioral Dividend: Solving the “last mile” Problem in Digital Government, *World Bank*.
- Pinzón Hernández, D.; Lim, J.; Dugas, M.; Moscoe, E.; Chatila, M.; and R. Vakis, **2024**. Behaviorally Informed Messages Increase COVID-19 Vaccination Intentions: A Global Meta-Analysis, *Policy Research Working Paper*.
- Dugas, M.; Pinzón Hernández, D.; Lim, J.; Vakis, R.; Afif, Z.; and A. Hasumi, **2024**. Find the Fake: Boosting Resistance to Health Misinformation in Jordan with a WhatsApp Chatbot Game, *Policy Research Working Paper*.
- Farfán Bertran, G.; Holla, A.; and R. Vakis, **2021**. Poor Expectations: Experimental Evidence on Teachers' Stereotypes and Student Assessment, *Policy Research Working Paper*, WPS 9593.
- Outes-León, I.; Sánchez, A.; and R. Vakis, **2020**. The Power of Believing You Can Get Smarter: The Impact of a Growth-Mindset Intervention on Academic Achievement in Peru, *Policy Research Working Paper*, WPS 9141.
- Johnson, H.; Pinzón Hernández, D.; Trzesniewski, K.; Indrakesuma, T.; Vakis, R.; Perova, E.; Muller, N.; De Martino, S.; and D. Molina, **2020**. Can Teaching Growth Mindset and Self-Management at School Shift Student Outcomes and Teacher Mindsets? Evidence from a Randomized Controlled Trial in Indonesia, *World Bank Group*.
- Macours, K.; Premand, P.; and R. Vakis, **2020**. Long-Term Evaluation of Atención a Crisis Interventions, *World Bank Group*.
- Farfán, G.; McGee, K.; Perng, J.; and R. Vakis, **2019**. Poverty Measurement in the Era of Food Away from Home: Testing Alternative Approaches in Vietnam, *Poverty & Equity Working Paper*, No. 187.
- Jamison, J.; McGee, K.; Oseni, G.; Perng, J.; Sato, R.; Tanaka, T.; and R. Vakis, **2018**. Conflicts, Economic Shocks, and Mental Health in Nigeria: Impacts on Economic Activities and Human Capital Investment, *Poverty & Equity Working Paper*, No. 186.
- Hatzimasoura, C.; Premand, P.; and R. Vakis, **2017**. Productive Transfers, Intra-Household Bargaining and Empowerment: Evidence from a Randomized Trial in Nicaragua, *World Bank*.
- Macours, K.; Premand, P.; and R. Vakis, **2013**. Demand versus Returns? Pro-Poor Targeting of Business Grants and Vocational Skills Training, *World Bank*.
- Vakis, R.; and S. Schmidt, **2010**. Innovations in Poverty Measurement: Seven Design Lessons on the Use of Advisory Committees to Improve Official Poverty Estimates in Peru, *World Bank*.
- Perova, E.; and R. Vakis, **2010**. El impacto y potencial del programa Juntos en Perú: evidencia de una evaluación no-experimental, *World Bank*.
- Vakis, R., **2006**. Complementing Natural Disasters Management: The Role of Social Protection, *Social Protection and Labor Discussion Paper*, *World Bank*, No. 35378.

Vakis, R.; Kruger, D.; and A. Mason, **2004**. Shocks and Coffee: Lessons from Nicaragua, *Social Protection and Labor Discussion Paper, World Bank*, No. 30164.

Vakis, R.; Sadoulet, E.; de Janvry, A.; and C. Cafiero, **2004**. Testing for Separability in Household Models with Heterogeneous Behavior: A Mixture Model Approach, *Agricultural and Resource Economics Working Paper, University of California, Berkeley*.

Vakis, R.; Sadoulet, E.; and A. de Janvry, **2003**. Measuring Transactions Costs from Observed Behavior: Market Choices in Peru, *Agricultural and Resource Economics Working Paper, University of California, Berkeley*.

Full list and preprints: [Google Scholar](#) · [RePEc](#) · [SSRN](#)

## TEACHING

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- 2022 – Present**     **Behavioral Insights for Policy.** Adjunct Professor, University of Cyprus — joint MSc, Departments of Economics and Psychology (graduate).
- 2003 – Present**     **World Bank training programs.** Behavioral science for policy (2015–) and poverty, inequality and statistical capacity (2003–), for government counterparts and Bank operational teams.
- 2007**     **Applied Econometrics.** Adjunct Professor, Johns Hopkins University (graduate).
- 1998 – 2000**     **Development Economics.** Teaching assistant, U.C. Berkeley (undergraduate).
- 1995 – 1996**     **Macroeconomics Principles.** Teaching assistant, U.C. Davis (undergraduate).

## ADVISORY ROLES AND AFFILIATIONS

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- 2025 – Present**     **Co-chair.** Global Behavioral Evidence Network for Development (GBEND).
- 2022 – Present**     **Advisory board.** Penn Center for Social Norms and Behavioral Dynamics, University of Pennsylvania.
- 2022 – Present**     **Advisory board.** CUBIC — Center for Utilizing Behavioral Insights for Children, Save the Children International.
- 2021 – Present**     **Advisory board.** Master of Behavioral and Decision Sciences (MBDS), University of Pennsylvania.
- 2021 – Present**     **Advisory council.** The Alliance for Advancing Health Online — Vaccine Confidence Fund.
- 2020 – 2023**     **Head.** Behavioral Insights Network (BRAIN), Latin American and Caribbean Economic Association (LACEA).

## JOURNAL REFEREE

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Economic Development and Cultural Change · Journal of Development Economics · Journal of Development Studies · World Development · Journal of Environmental Economics and Management · Journal of African Studies · World Bank Economic Review · Economía · Journal of Economic Inequality.