

Clustered Sovereign Defaults

Clustered sovereign defaults are a recurring phenomenon. In order to understand the nature of shocks and the mechanism through which these shocks lead countries to clustered defaults, the paper starts with a joint estimation of the structural parameters driving the output process of 24 defaulting countries and a process for the world interest rate. The postulated output process includes transitory and permanent global components as well as transitory and permanent country-specific components. The paper then builds a sovereign default model augmented with financial frictions at the firm level. In spite of the fact that the shocks are estimated independently of the model or of default data, once fed into the model, they reproduce the clustered default of 1982, providing a joint validation of the model and the estimated driving forces. The model predicts that it is the global shocks to the transitory component of output that are most important in leading countries to default in clusters. Contrary to what is commonly believed, the Volcker interest-rate hike was not a determinant factor of the 1982 developing country debt crisis.