Public Information as an Incentive for Public Good Delivery

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Sector(s): Political Economy and Governance

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Location: Rajasthan, Dehli, India

Sample: 240 municipal wards

Target group: Politicians and electoral candidates Urban population Voters

Outcome of interest: Citizen satisfaction Social service delivery Transparency and accountability

Intervention type: Audits Information

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Research Papers: Public Information is an Incentive for Politicians: Experimental Evidence from ...

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Although 20 percent of the population in New Delhi, India live in slums and represent an important voter group for politicians, public service provision in slums remains inadequate. In an ongoing study, researchers evaluated whether providing information to government officials and slum dwellers can lead to higher accountability and improved service delivery.

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Over the past three decades, the urban population in low- and middle-income countries has increased significantly. Migration, both temporary and permanent, from low-income rural areas to larger urban centers has usually promised large improvements in welfare, but these improvements may be mitigated by poor urban infrastructure and ineffective governance. Almost a billion people (more than one third of the urban population) currently live in slums, which are characterized by overcrowding, deficient urban services (water, sanitation, education, and heath), high levels of unemployment, and widespread insecurity.[1], With the number of people living in cities in Africa and Asia expected to increase by 150 percent by 2025, there is a critical need for innovative methods to improve urban service delivery.[2]

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Between 2001 and 2008, the urban population in India increased from 240 million to 290 million, and it is expected to rise an additional 40-50 percent over the next 20 years. Delhi, India's second largest metropolis, has a population of around 18 million, 20

percent of which live in slums. Although the population of slum dwellers represents an important voter group for politicians, the provision of public services in slum areas remains vastly inadequate. One possible explanation for this discrepancy may be a lack of information between slum dwellers and their elected representatives. Although voter turnout among slum dwellers in Delhi is high by Indian standards (approximately 57 percent), most voters tend to know little about the performance of their legislators.

Citizens line up to vote in India.

Photo credit: Hafiz Ahmed, Shutterstock.com

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Researchers used randomized evaluations to test whether providing information to government officials and slum dwellers can lead to higher accountability and improved service delivery. The evaluation consisted of two interventions: one targeting voters and the other, councilors.

The first intervention was designed to measure the effect of voter information campaigns on voter turnout and electoral outcomes. Similar to earlier evaluations, report cards of local councilors' performance measured in terms of spending, committee membership, and meeting attendance were published in the local newspaper, Hindustan. A total of 240 of the 272 municipal wards in Delhi were randomly assigned to one of two intervention groups, or a comparison group. Report cards of the councilors for the 58 wards in the first intervention group were to be published only before the election in 2012. In the 110 wards in the second intervention group, report cards for the relevant councilors were to be published both at the midterm in 2010 and again before the election in 2012. In order to assess whether direct provision of information amplifies the impact, newspapers were distributed door-to-door in a random subset of slums within each program group.

The second intervention was designed to examine the effect of information provision on councilor spending and quality of public services, and whether elected officials are more responsive to additional information during election sensitive periods. Audits were conducted of garbage and toilet services in slums in a sample 100 wards. The results of these audits were then compiled into ward-level report cards, which were mailed to randomly selected councilors. Two rounds of audit report cards were sent: the first, in August 2011 (a non-election sensitive period) and a second in January 2012 (the lead up to the April elections).

النتائج والدروس المستفادة بشأن السياسات

Results forthcoming.

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1. UN Habitat. 2003. "Slums of the World: The Face of Urban Poverty in the New Millennium." Working Paper.
2. United Nations. 2007. "World Urbanization Prospects: The 2007 Revision." Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, United Nations.