The role of information, accountability and resource gaps in explaining poor urban services quality in Addis Ababa and its rapidly urbanizing surroundings

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Location: Addis Ababa, Oromia

Sample: 54 woredas (districts) in 18 zones and sub-cities

Initiative(s): Urban Services Initiative (USI)

Target group: Politicians and electoral candidates

Outcome of interest: Citizen satisfaction

Intervention type: Information

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Partner organization(s): Ethiopian Development Research Institute (EDRI), Stanford University Center for International Development (SCID)

Many rapidly urbanizing areas in Africa have unreliable services such as water and electricity provision. Providing information to local officials about their citizens' satisfaction levels with public services might enable them to make more informed investments in these services. In partnership with the Ethiopian Development Research Institute (EDRI), researchers are providing report cards that document citizen satisfaction with a range of public services to various levels of government officials to measure the impact of information and accountability on public service provision.

Policy issue

Many African nations have experienced rapid economic growth and urbanization in recent years, largely due to increases in industrial production and migration from rural areas. Yet infrastructure has not kept pace with growth, and coverage of basic services is poor in many of these areas. In Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, for example, a 2016 household survey indicated that families with active grid connections spent an average of 13 out of the last 30 days without any access to water and eight of the last 30 days with electricity interruptions.

The responsiveness of local administrations and service providers to these challenges is important for the well-being of urban populations. Local officials might be unresponsive to their constituents' public service needs for several reasons:

1. They might lack information on the citizen's priorities.
2. They might lack the incentives to respond to citizen's priorities because they are not held accountable for citizen's well-being.

3. They might lack the power to access the resources to respond to citizen's priorities.

Providing local officials with information on their citizens' satisfaction levels with public services might enable them to make more informed investments in these services. Furthermore, providing information on their neighboring districts' performance might create peer pressure for officials to be more responsive to their constituents' needs. Lastly, providing this information to more senior regional officials might create pressure for local officials to improve their service provision. While many studies have measured the effect of informing citizens of the performance of their elected officials, little evidence exists on the impact of informing officials of their constituents' needs.

Context of the evaluation

This study takes place in the outer limits of the capital city Addis Ababa and in the surrounding Oromia Special Zone (OSZ), a hub for Ethiopia's economic growth and urbanization. In the early 1990's, the Ethiopian government decentralized in order to promote greater regional independence and more localized public service delivery. Different administrative levels share responsibility for the delivery of public services including roads, water, electricity, health facilities, and schools. While the national government often provides broad service provision guidelines, more local zones and smaller woredas (districts) are largely responsible for implementation.

Despite these decentralization efforts, the surrounding areas of Addis Ababa often experience poor public service coverage. In a recent survey, approximately 24 percent of respondents reported having complained to a local official about electricity issues, and only 21 percent of these complaints were reported to have been adequately resolved. Administrators had low levels of awareness of their districts' problems. For example, a 2016 survey showed that only 35 percent of administrators could accurately predict at least one of their community's top two service priorities. Only 42 percent of administrators listed at least one of their office's top priorities as being what they expected the public's top priorities to be.

A water spigot in Ethiopia.

Details of the intervention

Researchers are partnering with the Ethiopian Development Research Institute (EDRI) to test the impact of providing local officials with information on their communities' satisfaction with public services on the officials' responsiveness to their communities' needs.

Researchers will provide information (e.g., structured report cards) on the community's satisfaction with public services to randomly selected officials at both the local and zonal level. With this design, they will be able to observe whether officials' responsiveness in a sector improves when they receive information about public satisfaction, and whether the improvement is larger when the higher-ranking district or zone-level manager was also informed.

The report cards will be delivered in summer 2017, and researchers will conduct follow-up surveys with officials and citizens nine to twelve months later.

Results and policy lessons

Research ongoing; results forthcoming.