Learning from randomized impact evaluations: Evidence on what works (and what doesn't) in citizen participation

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I. About Randomized Evaluations

II. Participation Theory of Change

III. Evidence in Community Monitoring

IV. Citizen participation in Sierra Leone

V. Evidence to Policy
Most development challenges have multiple potential solutions. Which one(s) should we implement?

**Question:** What helps citizens become drivers of accountability?

- Information (but delivered how?)
- Community block grants
- Providing feedback to implementers
- Participating in monitoring of service delivery
- Hotlines or complaints mechanisms
- Communication with politicians
- Electing responsive officials
- Ensuring representation of minority groups
Evidence can help measure the impact of potential solutions to development challenges.

![Diagram showing the impact of an intervention on children's test scores over time. The graph compares the change in test scores to a counterfactual scenario to calculate the impact of the intervention.](image)
Randomized evaluations are a type of impact evaluation that rigorously test the effectiveness of programs and policies.

Before the program starts, eligible individuals are randomly assigned to two groups so that they are statistically identical before the program.

Population is randomly split into 2 or more groups

Intervention

Two groups continue to be identical, except for treatment

Outcomes for both groups are measured

Any differences in outcomes between the groups can be attributed to the program
J-PAL started in 2003 as a center at MIT’s Economics Department and includes 150 professors from over 45 universities who use REs to understand what works or not in social policy.
J-PAL’s mission is to ensure that policy is informed by evidence and research is translated into action.

**EVALUATIONS**

J-PAL researchers conduct randomized evaluations to test and improve the effectiveness of programs and policies aimed at reducing poverty.

**CAPACITY BUILDING**

Through training courses, evidence workshops, and research projects, J-PAL equips policymakers and practitioners with the expertise to carry out their own rigorous evaluations.

**POLICY OUTREACH**

J-PAL affiliates and staff analyze and disseminate research results and build partnerships with policymakers to ensure policy is driven by evidence and effective programs are scaled up.
We have more than 861 ongoing and completed projects across 8 sectors in 80 countries.
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How can citizen participation in the political and policy process improve outcomes?

- Community monitoring
- Local governance structures
- Existing community skills and knowledge of service provision
- Level of social cohesion
- Community monitors should have a clear path for action
- People more likely to participate when they benefit
- Risk of elite capture
- Public goods or free rider problems
- Information provided is credible, relevant, timely
- Information is accessible
- Service providers exert more effort
- Service delivery improves
- Politicians more accountable to citizens
- Policies better aligned with citizens’ preferences
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Can community monitoring improve health outcomes?

- Report cards of health centers performance in Uganda
- Local NGOs facilitated three meetings:
  - Community members discuss steps for monitoring providers
  - Health workers discuss key constraints in health care delivery
  - Community members and health workers create a shared action plan
- 50 public dispensaries randomly assigned to treatment or control

Björkman and Svensson 2009; Björkman and Svensson 2010; Björkman, Walque, and Svensson, 2017
Results: Significant improvements in health care delivery and health outcomes

• Communities more involved in monitoring
• Health workers exerted more effort
• Large increases in utilization
• Improvements in health
  – 33% reduction in under 5-mortality
  – Increase in weight-for-age z-scores
• Impacts persisted four years after intervention

Björkman and Svensson 2009; Björkman and Svensson 2010; Björkman, Walque, and Svensson, 2017
But: Without actionable and relevant information, community monitoring was ineffective

- Researchers tested less expensive variation of program with no report cards
- Monitoring without information had no impact on health care use or health outcomes
  - Communities could not identify and challenge poor behavior

Björkman and Svensson 2009; Björkman and Svensson 2010; Björkman, Walque, and Svensson, 2017
Is community monitoring an effective strategy for reducing corruption?

• In Indonesia, funds provided for local infrastructure
  – Corruption accounted for 20%
  – Two main types of corruption: missing materials and missing labor costs
  – Probability of audit was 4%

• Two strategies:
  – Community participation
  – Increasing probability of top-down audits to 100%

• Innovative way to measure corruption:
  – Engineers measured core samples of constructed roads
  – Corruption = the difference between actual and recorded expenditure

Olken 2007
So which was more effective?

- Top-down government audits reduced missing expenditures by 8 percentage points
  - Auditing agency itself is highly corrupt
  - Benefits outweigh cost of audits
- Community monitoring did not reduce corruption
  - Public goods problem
  - Elites captured the process
- Community participation should not be seen as a panacea for corruption

Olken 2007
How can citizen participation in the political and policy process improve outcomes?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intervention/Program</th>
<th>Local Conditions</th>
<th>Generalized Lessons on Behavior</th>
<th>Local Implementation</th>
<th>Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</table>
Why else might community monitoring be ineffective?

• Established committees may not have power
  – In Indonesia, community health councils needed to be linked to powerful village leaders.

• Large-group participation may be less efficient
  – In India, monitoring had no impact on learning compared to training volunteers to start after-school reading classes.

• Risk of elite capture
  – In São Tomé and Príncipe, discussion leaders influenced community feedback.

Pradhan et al. 2014; Banerjee et al. 2010; Humphreys et al. 2006
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To transform the way the world deals with conflict, away from adversarial approaches towards cooperative solutions.
WHAT WE DO

Search works at all levels of society to build sustainable peace through three main avenues:

1. Community Outreach: soccer matches, participatory theater, shared farming projects, etc.

2. Media: TV dramas, call-in radio shows, music videos, etc.

3. Dialogue: mediation, track II diplomacy, capacity building, etc.
Sierra Leone

• Context

2. Culture of Centralized Decision Making
3. Lack of venues to discuss national policy issues
4. Ethnic Loyalty

[Map showing ethnic composition and winning MP Party]
Theory of Change

• *If* citizens are:
  1. well informed about policy issues and party agendas, and
  2. are provided with venues in which they can constructively engage with candidates,

• *then*
  1. political parties will be encouraged to develop issue-based agendas that address citizens’ concerns, and
  2. citizens will vote along policy lines rather than ethnic lines.
MP Debates Project in the run up to 2012 elections

1. Search organized and recorded debates in 14 of the 28 most closely contested constituencies. Followed by townhall meetings.

2. Search screened debates in 112 of the 224 polling stations followed by town hall meetings (reaching 19,000 individuals).

3. Aired the debates on the radio.
Designing the debates randomized evaluation

• Randomly selected 14 of 28 constituencies to film debates
  – 244 polling centers; half were randomly selected to host public screenings
  – Panel of experts scored candidate responses
  – Audience judged debate winner

• What type of information drives changes?
  – 40 polling centers: individual debate screenings
  – Full debate on tablet
  – Only “Get to Know You” section
  – Radio summary of debate

• Measured voter information and behavior and candidate behavior
  – Exit poll surveys, official voting records
  – Track MP performance in spending, engaging with community, participation in parliament

Bidwell, Casey, and Glennerster (2016)
Debates can change voter and candidate behavior

- Voters knowledge increased
  - General political knowledge
  - Knowledge of candidate qualifications
  - Knowledge of candidate policy stances
- Voters changed their voting behavior
  - More likely to vote for candidate aligned with their policy preferences
  - More likely to vote for debate winner
- Elected MPs changed their behavior
  - Politicians increased campaign spending in areas with debate screenings
  - Once elected, MPs from debate areas spent more on development assistance

Bidwell, Casey, and Glennerster (2016)
Partnering with Researchers on RCT: Challenges

1. Need Vs. Randomization
2. Accessibility Vs. Randomization
3. Extended Timeframe
4. Program Funding Vs. Research Funding
Partnering with Researchers on RCT: Benefits

1. Causality
2. Learning
3. Value for Money
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SFCG debates scale-up in Sierra Leone for 2018 elections

- Search use of evidence for scale up in Sierra Leone
  - 45 constituencies will receive debates
  - Testing more cost-effective dissemination strategy at scale
  - Debates at primaries level to increase electoral competition

- Use of evidence in broader Search portfolio: Potential to bring debates to other countries

- Search actively partnering with J-PAL to find new evaluation opportunities (Nigeria, DRC, etc.)
From policy change to people reached
Thank you. Questions?

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