

# Can Information Improve Rural Governance and Service Delivery?

Evidence from a Special Issue of World Development

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### Technological Advancements are Affecting Policies and Citizens' Welfare

#### **Autocratic politics:**

- "'Revolution 2.0': How Social Media Toppled A Dictator" (NPR, 2012)
- "How Social Media Helps Dictators" (Foreign Policy, 2016)

#### **Democratic politics:**

- High presence of elected policymakers on social media
- Influencing foreign and domestic policy

### **The Information Revolution**

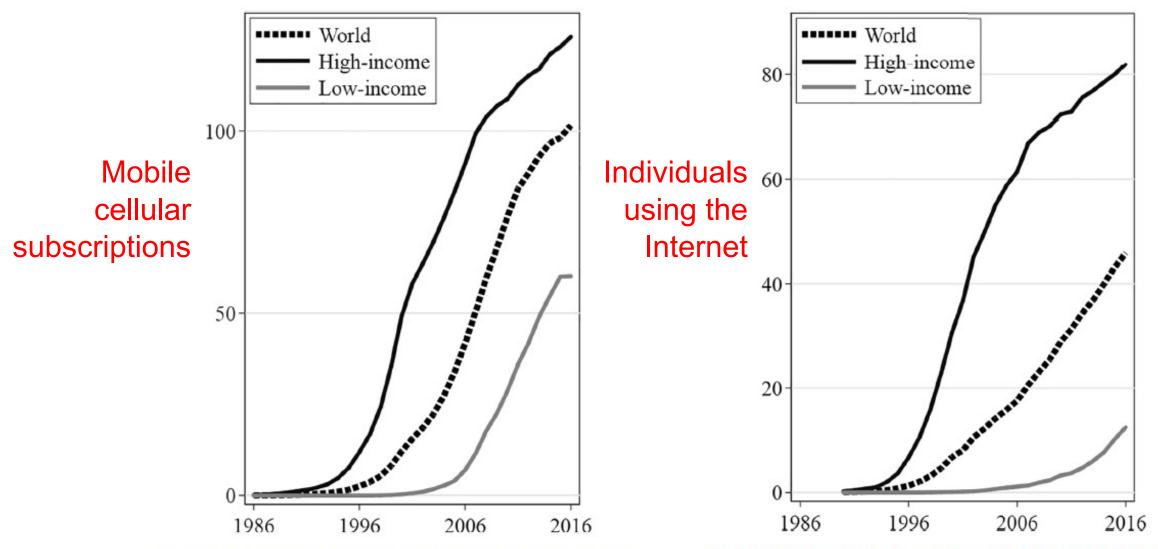


Fig. 1. Mobile cellular subscriptions. Source: World Bank (2017), Notes: "High-income" and "low-income" are country-level designations. Mobile cellular subscriptions are measured per 100 people.

Fig. 2. Individuals using the Internet. Source: World Bank (2017). Notes: 'High-income" and "low-income" are country-level designations. Individuals using the Internet is measured as the share of population.



### Beyond Technology, Many Other (Institutional) Information Innovations

- Information provided directly to citizens by an official/ service provider (e.g., information to parents from a school principal; newspaper campaign; leaflets)
- Information through deliberation, whereby information emerges as part of an exchange by a group/ collective (e.g., townhall meetings)





## Can Information Improve Rural Service Delivery and Governance?

- Rural areas (with 68% of the poor) are unique:
  - Costly to serve/ not well integrated
  - Service providers lack information about demands of service users
  - Service users know little about the mandates and capabilities of service providers
- Governments usually deliver public services precisely in sectors in which market failures prevail
- Poor rural service delivery (e.g., low access, low quality, low responsiveness) common in developing countries
- Improved access to information is a possible route to improved rural governance and service delivery







# Research to Help Uncover the Effects of Information is Being Increasingly Carried out via Randomized Control Trials (RCTs)



III. Niklas Elmehed. © Nobel Media.

Abhijit Banerjee



III. Niklas Elmehed. © Nobel Media.

Esther Duflo



III. Niklas Elmehed. © Nobel Media

Michael Kremer

2019 Nobel Memorial
 Prize in Economics went
 to Abhijit Banerjee,
 Esther Duflo, and
 Michael Kremer:
 Experiment-based
 approach to
 development economics



### Why is Information Important for Rural Service Delivery and Governance?

- Politicians base decisions about taxes, spending, laws, and policies not only on the set of rules and institutions in place, but also on the information at their disposal
- For electoral incentives to work, citizens must have information on what politicians' mandates are and how well they have performed vis-à-vis those mandates
- Even in more autocratic settings, information in the hands of citizens can discipline policymakers to respond (e.g., due to protests)





# Special Issue of *World Development*: "Information, Governance, and Rural Service Delivery" (2020)

- Introduction (Kosec and Wantchekon, 2020) presents:
  - A conceptual framework for predicting when information will bring about positive developments
  - A systematic review of the evidence (48 studies)
  - Lessons for development practitioners and researchers

https://www.sciencedirect.com/journal/world-development/special-issue/10HB9DTV77Q



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### **Conceptual Framework: When Does Information Work?**

- Information can help improve rural governance—but only if it is:
  - 1. Perceived as <u>relevant</u> by recipients
    - Boas and Hidalgo 2018; Grossman, Platas, and Rodden 2018; Batista, Seither, and Vicente 2018
  - 2. Recipients needed to have the <u>power</u> to act on it
    - o Mogues and Olofinbiyi 2019; Buntaine, Daniels, and Devlin 2018
  - 3. Recipients need to have the incentives to act on it
    - Mogues and Olofinbiyi 2019; Evans, Holtemeyer, and Kosec 2019
- When all three are in place, this can improve governance-related outcomes
  - o Kumar et al. 2018; Wantchekon and Rias 2019; Evans, Holtemeyer, and Kosec 2019



#### What Does it Mean for Information to Be Relevant?

- Touches on an issue or concern that is salient to the recipient
- Not already known
- Individual has the education, knowledge, and/or skills to understand it
  - Different individuals may understand the same piece of information differently
- Perceived to be accurate, credible, meaningful, and sufficiently specific in a world with increasingly more abundant information
  - High signal-to-noise ratio
  - Often occurs when the sender is perceived as credible
  - Individuals must be able to discern true from "fake" news



### What Does it Mean to Have the Power to Act on Information?

 Policymakers: resources, capabilities, and mandates must permit them to meaningfully change their behavior in response to information

 Citizens: their rights as citizens and their position within the community—in which elite control is often present, and poor and rural citizens often have low physical mobility—must permit them to respond to the information



### What Does it Mean to Have the Incentives to Act on Information?

- Acting on the information can be costly; costs include:
  - For citizens: attend a village meeting, vote, petition government, participate in a protest, travel to meet a policymaker, share information with a neighbor, etc
  - For government: survey service users about experiences, invest more in service delivery, design and implement better monitoring systems for frontline providers, hold a townhall meeting, engage citizens in budgeting processes, etc
- Acting on the information must be net beneficial, if one is to incur the costs
- Political budget cycles may explain a failure to act on information



# Reviewing the Evidence on Information's Impacts on Rural Governance and Service Delivery

- Systematic literature review identified 48 empirical studies of the effects of information on rural service delivery from developing countries
- 58 percent positive impact, 42 percent mixed/ zero/ negative
- No cases of positive impacts when any of the three conditions was missing
- All mixed/ zero/ negative impacts had at least one of the three conditions missing (average of 1.25 missing)
- Supports our interpretation of the three conditions (relevance, power, and incentives) as necessary ones
- NOT sufficient conditions (e.g., even if someone acts on information, others may block them from impacting service delivery)



### **Details from Eight Education Studies**

Authors	Country	Type of Info.	Outcome	Effect	Relevant	Power	Incentive
Duflo et al. (2015)	Kenya	Governance program for parents	Teacher effort; hiring practices	Positive	Y	Y	Υ
Duflo et al. (2012)	India	Camera monitoring of classroom	Teacher attendance	Positive	Y	Y	Υ
Keefer and Khemani (2018)	India	Existing differences in transparency between states	Health/ education expenditures, collective action	Positive	Y	Y	Y
Reinikka & Svensson (2004)	Uganda	School system awareness of public school grant program	Official capture of grant funds	Positive	Υ	Y	Υ
Reinikka and Svensson (2005)	Uganda	Newspaper campaign encouraging parents to monitor misuse of public funds	Enrollment and student learning	Positive	Y	Y	Y
Lieberman et al. (2014)	Kenya	Parent information on child's performance, with advice on how to be more involved	Public and private actions to achieve learning gains	Zero	N	N	Υ
Banerjee et al. (2010)	India	Information on educational institutions, training on testing, training volunteers to teach	Learning, community involvement, teacher effort	Mixed	Y	N	Υ
Chaudhury and Parajuli (2010)	Nepal	Participatory decentralization of schooling governance	Education access, learning outcomes, school administration	Mixed	Υ	N	Υ



### **Key Policy Take-Aways**

- The institutional context, type of information, and information transmission mechanism hugely matter
- May need to temper enthusiasm about the prospects for information to generate accountability (be careful in RCTs)
- More modest goals may be more appropriate (e.g., increases in knowledge rather than immediate changes in behaviors or policies)
- We need more work on how to bring about relevance, power, and incentives
- Government wields tremendous power to affect the flow or relevant info:
  - Supportive: Supporting free press, setting up government websites, publicly posting information, encouraging citizen dialogue, involving citizens in decision-making
  - <u>Blocking</u>: Crack down on free flow of information, disseminate fake news, engage in vote-buying to ensure that voters do not use their information against the government
- So do non-state actors (e.g., media/ civic orgs/ NGOs/ donors/ researchers)

