

Effect of civil society capacity building and civic engagement and empowerment initiatives on access to justice, rights and public services

Civil society capacity building and civic engagement initiatives had a small effect on access to justice, rights, and public services, with declining local government knowledge but improvements in nationwide budget awareness and district performance information.

Geographical region: Sub Saharan Africa

Effect size: Small effect ($g=0.027$)

Confidence in study findings: Low confidence (1 studies; 4 ES)

Short summary

Civil society capacity-building and civic engagement initiatives in Rwanda had a small effect on access to justice, rights, and public services. Perceived local government knowledge and influence slightly declined, but nationwide improvements were observed in budget awareness (18–33%) and district performance knowledge (20%). Confidence in these findings is low due to the limited number of studies.

Long summary

The intervention

The initiatives, including the *Every Voice Counts* campaign, focused on enhancing civic engagement and government accountability by installing anonymous complaint and commendation boxes. These mechanisms aimed to empower citizens, strengthen trust in governance, and improve transparency in public service delivery.

How the intervention is expected to work

By providing a safe and anonymous channel for citizens to report or commend public officials, the campaign aimed to increase civic participation, reduce corruption, and improve government responsiveness. The Rwanda National Police (RNP) reviewed submissions to enhance accountability and public trust, supporting access to justice, rights, and public services.

The evidence base

The cell includes one primary study, uses a quasi-experimental design and is conducted in multiple districts across Rwanda.

Evidence findings

The initiatives had a small effect, showing a 2% decline in perceived local government knowledge and influence, no change in direct access to information, but nationwide improvements in budget awareness (18–33%) and district performance knowledge (20%).

Included studies

Nichols-Barrer (2014) The Rwanda Threshold Program's "Every Voice Counts" campaign was implemented to enhance transparency and accountability in the Rwanda National Police (RNP) through anonymous citizen complaint and commendation boxes. This initiative was part of broader efforts to improve public perceptions of governance. The study was conducted in Rwanda, covering multiple districts. A quasi-experimental design was used, comparing sectors with complaint boxes (treatment group) to those without (comparison group), supported by surveys in 2011 and 2012. The study surveyed a nationally representative sample of 10,032 respondents in 2012, alongside qualitative interviews with stakeholders. The study found a statistically significant negative impact of 2 percentage points on knowledge about local government affairs and perceived citizen influence. Access to government information showed no significant change. The treatment group's perception of having enough information to assess local government performance declined by 2.5 percentage points but was not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$). In contrast, nationwide trends indicated an 18% to 33% increase in citizens reporting access to district budget information and a 20% rise in those who felt informed about district performance. The study is considered high and medium confidence quantitative study.

Confidence assessment

This cell has low confidence due to a limited number of studies.

Other outcomes in the study

- Community and state governance/Civic participation/Government performance