

Effect of Public sector provision, governance and institutionalization intervention on Civic participation

Evidence shows that horizontal pressure for reforming village governance has a harmful effect on the legitimacy index of leaders.

Geographic focus: Sub-Saharan Africa

Effect: Harmful effect ($g = -0.007$)

Confidence in study findings: Low (1 study with 12 effect sizes)

Short Summary

Evidence shows that horizontal pressure for reforming village governance had a harmful effect on the legitimacy index of local leaders. The intervention aimed to improve village governance in Zimbabwe by training village heads on regulations and conflict management. Two training variants were tested: one for village heads alone and another including a civil society leader. While training both leaders slightly improved legitimacy compared to training the village head alone, overall the intervention had a negative effect on perceived legitimacy.

Long summary

The intervention

The intervention involved horizontal pressure to reform village-level governance in rural Manicaland, Zimbabwe. An international NGO collaborated with a local NGO to train village heads on regulations and conflict management best practices. The training was delivered in two three-day modules, spaced three months apart. One variant trained only the village head, while the other included an additional civil society leader to support oversight and dispute resolution. The intervention aimed to reduce decision-making bias and strengthen legitimacy, but village heads who were more biased or less effective risked losing legitimacy, creating a cycle where citizens' negative perceptions undermined governance.

How the intervention is expected to work

The legitimacy index consisted of four sub-components. Training the village head alone had a negative (though statistically insignificant) effect on legitimacy, driven by worsened household perceptions and increased suspicion. Training both the village head and a civil society leader had a positive, though still statistically insignificant, effect, with the additional leader improving trust in the village head. Despite this, the overall impact remained slightly harmful.

The evidence base

The cell contains 2 studies - 1 study designed as randomized controlled trial and 1 study designed as qualitative study (Arjona 2016).

The study was conducted in Zimbabwe (1) and Colombia (1).

Evidence findings

The intervention showed a harmful effect on the legitimacy index of local leaders. Training village heads alone reduced perceived legitimacy, whereas including a civil society leader partially mitigated this effect but did not fully reverse the negative trend. There is 1 impact evaluation in the cell and evidence summaries of the study are thus provided here:

Baldwin (2017) examines the potential for reforming village-level governance in Zimbabwe through horizontal pressure from civil society leaders. The intervention involved training

village heads on governance rules and regulations, with a variant that included training a civil society leader alongside the village head. This approach aims to reduce the abuse of power by village heads and improve governance by leveraging the influence of local civil society leaders. The study was conducted in 270 villages in Zimbabwe, randomly assigned to two intervention variants: one where only the village head was trained, and another where both the village head and a civil society leader were trained. The training sessions were divided into two three-day modules with a three-month gap in between. Surveys were conducted three months after the training to assess the impact on governance outcomes. The inclusion of civil society leaders in the training significantly improved village heads' knowledge and adherence to procedures, with a notable increase in procedural compliance by more than half a standard deviation. The intervention also reduced bias in decision-making, particularly in food aid distribution and dispute resolution, with a 15-percentage point increase in the likelihood of receiving food aid for those with different political views from the village head. Additionally, the presence of civil society leaders increased the perceived legitimacy of village heads among citizens. The study is rated as **low confidence** due to the limited description of the intervention and evaluation questions.

Confidence assessment

Overall low confidence as there is only 1 study in the cell.

Other outcomes in this study:

Social cohesion / Feelings of trust & acceptance of diversity / Willingness to participate or help
Community and state governance / Access to justice, rights, and public services / Civic
Participation
Human security/ Educational security / Intermediate social cohesion outcomes