

**Can Information Campaigns  
Overcome Political Obstacles to Serving the Poor?**

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**Abstract:** An innovative instrument that development practitioners and policy-makers are experimenting with is to spread information about public service delivery through grassroots “campaigns”, to mobilize citizens to demand better services from public providers. However, new political economy research suggests that the impact of such campaigns is limited by the extent to which they influence overall political incentives of governments to serve the poor. This paper proposes a new type of information campaign with the potential of strengthening political incentives by generating yardstick competition across political jurisdictions, and voter coordination in evaluating governments on the basis of improvements in actual development outcomes. The paper argues that experimenting with such a campaign would be valuable because if it works it is a specific instrument that international and local development agencies could use to address often intractable political obstacles to serving the poor.

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## **1. Introduction**

Strategies to promote “good governance” are centre-stage in current development policy discussions. One element that has been emphasized by several international aid agencies is to use pre-identified and, as far as possible, objective, governance indicators to determine aid flows. The underlying arguments for this approach consist both of fulfilling fiduciary responsibilities to donors, and to promote competition among countries to improve governance indicators in order to access more aid. In parallel, there is increasing discussion around how international agencies might strengthen the hands of citizens in developing countries to hold their own governments accountable. For some time now the aid community has engaged in large-scale consultation with civil society in developing countries, and moved away from the more traditional model of dealing only with political representatives and bureaucrats. This paper makes a new proposal of a structured intervention along these lines, based on political economy research on determinants of government accountability, with the potential of improving poor citizens’ capacity to demand and receive basic services for development.

The proposal lies in an area of growing interest—to use information as a tool to empower citizens in developing countries to hold their public agents accountable. Civil society organizations have recently experimented with grassroots “information campaigns”, organizing public meetings around how public resources are allocated and what services are delivered, to bear collective pressure upon local service providers and compel them to improve performance (Jenkins and Goetz, 1999; Goetz and Jenkins, 2001; Paul, 2002; Olken, 2005; Banerjee, et al, 2006; Bjorkman and Svensson, 2006). Governments have recently pursued legislation on “right to information” or “freedom of information” to increase transparency and enable their citizens to probe allocation of public resources and achievement of results (Banisar, 2004).

This paper reviews the literature on information campaigns and the role of mass media in influencing public policy and argues that there are significant gaps in knowledge and experience in this area, and that much work remains in exploring “information” as a tool to strengthen political accountability for development. It argues that local information campaigns whose immediate objective is to generate local participation cannot have sustainable or large-scale impact on public services unless they

change incentives of politicians who have ultimate authority over the management of public employees and public budgets. What kind of information to citizens can change political incentives to serve the poor? This is the question addressed in the paper. The answer that is proposed is information on development outcomes, that public policies are designed to address, that is statistically representative at the level of the lowest electoral district, or similarly disaggregated politically relevant jurisdiction in a country. The paper argues that if such information is made available in a credible manner to citizens on a regular basis, so they can compare performance in one electoral district to another in achieving development indicators, and monitor improvements (or lack thereof) over time within a district, it can potentially lead to voter coordination in evaluating governments on this basis, and thereby promote yardstick competition between districts to improve development performance.

The next section discusses why information might be a binding constraint on improving accountability of public providers and political representatives for basic services. Section 3 describes emerging policy experiments to address this potential constraint—information campaigns to improve public services for the poor by mobilizing local collective action. Section 4 proposes a new type of information campaign—designed to make basic human development outcomes more salient in political competition—and thereby strengthen incentives of political representatives to find solutions to development problems. Section 5 concludes.

## **2. Why is information a constraint to making services work for poor people?**

Basic political agency models demonstrate the simple proposition that citizens (voters) need information about government performance to hold them accountable (Barro, 1973; Ferejohn, 1986). This idea has recently spawned a literature on whether and how mass media, as the obvious purveyors of information to a large number of citizens, impact public policies. Besley and Burgess (2002) find that governments are more responsive to crises when more citizens have access to the printed press. Greater press freedom and newspaper circulation are found to be associated with lower corruption (Brunetti and Weder, 2003; Adsera, et al, 2003). Stromberg (2004a) finds that governments deliver greater targeted benefits, such as from welfare programs, where more households own radios. However, there is no evidence reported on whether greater access to and freedom

of mass media is similarly associated with better outcomes in broad public services, such as in education and health.

The channel through which mass media impacts outcomes has been theorized to be that of citizens having access to more information about government policies and actions and using that information to reward incumbents with re-election, or punish them by selecting competitors who promise to perform better (Besley and Burgess, 2002; Stromberg, 2004a). Is access to mass media associated with better information among citizens about public policies? Are more informed citizens more likely to turn-out to vote, and use information about public policies when making their voting decision? There is no systematic evidence on these questions for developing countries. Some emerging evidence from India suggests that education and accessing of information are stronger determinants of political participation than household wealth or social status. Individuals with more years of schooling and who access more sources of information (family, neighbors, radio and TV, newspapers, influential people, village assemblies) are more likely to participate in local political processes (Krishna, 2003).

Building on the original insight of Dreze and Sen (1989), Stromberg (2004b) argues that news in the media is more likely to cover extra-ordinary or sensational events, like epidemics and famines, than constant problems, like disease-ridden environments and endemic malnutrition, and hence media might inform citizens about targeted policies such as for disaster relief but not about common-place problems in broad public services. Furthermore, even if poor people might represent large demand for news on the status of broad public services and how to improve it, media markets might have limited incentives to service that demand because they cater more to those audiences that have purchasing power (and don't care about public services) and are the target audience for product advertisers (Stromberg, 2004b).

Clearly, the business of government is a complex one, and public budgets are massive documents of allocation of public funds to numerous "line items". It would be unreasonable to expect any lay citizen to be well informed about all these aspects of public decision-making and resource-allocation. So, what do we mean by citizens being "informed" about public policies and government performance? The existing studies on the impact of mass media suggests that phenomena such as misappropriation of public

resources (“corruption”), or lack of response to disasters, are newsworthy “stories” and the risk of such stories being broadcast can discipline politicians. What of other problems of day-to-day service delivery such as those documented in the *World Development Report 2004* (The World Bank, 2004)—provider absenteeism, provider misbehavior, and theft of public resources on a smaller scale at local levels which mass media is unlikely to pick-up? Are these the result of lack of information?

One could argue that citizens are likely to be well-informed about the physical conditions of their neighborhood public school and clinic, and about the presence or absence or misbehavior of teachers and health workers, because they live there and are the clients of these services. What they might not be informed about are public resource allocation for a road or a water body that is yet to be built, which local bureaucrats and project managers can potentially misappropriate. In the next section I describe one type of information campaign where a local NGO seeks to address precisely such information constraints about public resources allocated to local infrastructure. However, even with such potential information constraints the question arises why politicians (cabinet of ministers, legislatures) that presumably allocate these resources for local infrastructure would allow local bureaucrats to steal the funds? Wouldn't politicians have a lot to gain from providing visible roads and water bodies to their constituencies, and couldn't they devise mechanisms to minimize local corruption?

Evidence from voter surveys and government performance in the US suggests that improving accountability does not require that all voters be deeply informed, only that most voters share some information about political responsibility for key policy outcomes (Ferejohn and Kuklinski, 1990). These studies show that voters adopt simple voting criteria based on very limited information about politics and public policies. Fiorina (1990) emphasizes that the information that people use when they vote comes from the ordinary performance of social and economic roles and is therefore “free.” Fiorina and Shepsle (1990) and Chappell and Keech (1990) argue that citizens can employ voting rules requiring very little information and still motivate politicians to pursue policies in their interest. Ferejohn (1990, pp. 8-9) captures this process as follows: “find a way to get the electorate to commit itself to act as though it is a simple principal with a one-dimensional set of rewards. In this way, incumbents will be prevented from taking

advantage of the conflicting interests in the electorate.” This suggests that information can play a coordinating role, focusing public attention on particular policies for greater political accountability.

Keefer and Khemani (2005) argue that the nature of information likely to be “freely” available in developing countries is responsible for a “political market failure” in that it creates for undue public attention to inefficient, and sometimes ineffective, policies of targeted transfers in the form of public-sector jobs and price subsidies, shifting effort and resources away from public policies for basic development outcomes. Their analysis points to two kinds of information-related political market failures. One, although people know whether their own child died or not, and whether their neighborhood health worker did anything to help them, they are unlikely to hold their remotely located politician accountable for this private experience. They typically do not have information on aggregate development consequences that is more likely to be linked to the actions of their political representatives—they don’t know for example, how many children in their politician’s electoral district do not survive beyond the age of 5, and whether the politician is taking action in terms of greater immunization efforts or public health campaigns. Professional journalists are not trained to be able to generate the kind of data needed to calculate development indicators at the level of disaggregated political jurisdictions which citizens could use to evaluate their representative.

Two, even if they can guess that others in their neighborhood are suffering similar tragedies, people might be apathetic to using actual development outcomes as an indicator of politician performance, focusing instead on simple actions they can directly observe, such as announcement of a price subsidy or provision of jobs, because they do not expect politicians to be able to improve these difficult outcomes. They don’t have access to or the capacity to understand “expert” studies that argue that politicians could impact outcomes like the rate of child mortality and incidence of disease through simple policy levers. If a society is stuck in this vicious cycle of low performance and low expectations for broad development outcomes, with efforts instead expended upon scrambling for private benefits from public resources, incumbent politicians have stronger incentives to provide targeted benefits rather than broad public goods, and

opposition politicians have trouble mounting a credible challenge on the platform of broad development issues.<sup>1</sup>

The objective of this paper is to explore whether a purposively designed information campaign might address these “political market failures”. But before discussing this, in the next section I discuss existing experiments in conducting information campaigns to improve public accountability and evaluate how these might make a difference by addressing potential information constraints.

### **3. Information campaigns for local collective action**

Recently, various NGOs, civil society organizations, and reform-minded government ministries have pursued innovative campaigns that use information about public programs as a tool to mobilize poor communities to improve public services. One type of campaign is motivated by the observation that poor people have little or no information about resources that are actually assigned to schools, health clinics, and public works programs, and what they are expected to deliver, leading to widespread theft of public resources. When this information is generated and disseminated publicly, it might lead citizens to pressure politicians and bureaucrats to actually deliver those resources to schools, clinics, and public works, and pressure the public providers to deliver better services with those resources. Jenkins and Goetz (1999) and Goetz and Jenkins (2001) describe recent anti-corruption drives organized in developing countries by NGOs, consisting of public audits of particular spending programs—informing local citizens in large public meetings about what resources were allocated to local officials and how these were spent. Reinikka and Svensson (2005) describe how publicizing findings of leakage in funds intended to flow to schools in Uganda, reversed the process.

The experiments in public hearings to expose local corruption in India involved long-term and committed leadership by a group of altruistic ex-civil servants, and focus on individual public expenditure items, such as one road or one water body. The experiment in publicizing capitation grants to schools in Uganda involves one small item in a vast government budget, and it’s far from clear whether inundating citizens with detailed budget information on other larger items will serve any purpose. The question

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<sup>1</sup> Banerjee and Duflo (2006) describe such general public apathy to improving broad social services in developing countries.

therefore arises how such anti-corruption campaigns for intensive village-level action, or tracking of particular items of public expenditure, can be “scaled-up”? The answer appears to lie in the role some of these efforts have played in getting governments to legislate citizens’ “right to information”, where information refers to material held by public authorities in any form, including reports, documents, memos, records, opinions, advice, etc. (Goetz and Jenkins, 2001). Such legislation might facilitate greater reductions in corruption than have been documented with the mere existence of a free and independent press (as cited earlier), by allowing media greater access to government documents. But it does not address, by itself, the political market failure that leads to poor quality service delivery described in the previous section. Evidence of provider absenteeism and misbehavior, or inefficient allocation of resources by governments are typically not found in government records, and journalists and citizens at large are typically not trained to analyze raw data that might be available to generate such evidence.

Through a rigorous evaluation of different mechanisms to combat local corruption, including both grassroots information dissemination among beneficiaries and audit from higher-tier government authorities, Olken (2005) found that audits-from-above were more effective in reducing corruption. This brings us back to the question posed in the last section—if local corruption is a big problem for public services, why don’t politicians have stronger incentives to put proper audit mechanisms in place, the threat of which can significantly reduce such corruption?

Paul (2002) describes a second type of campaign, where “citizen report cards” are created by collecting information on citizen perceptions of the quality of services provided by various government agencies. These report cards are then publicized through local media and meetings with service providers. Paul (2002) describes how this tool was used to improve municipal services in the city of Bangalore in south India. It served as a massive, collective complaint to the public providers, which either “shamed” them into improving services, or sent a strong signal to local politicians that citizens care about service delivery and the politicians in turn put pressure on the providers to improve performance. This experience with report cards therefore suggests that their promise lies

in playing the kind of vote coordinating role suggested by Ferejohn (1990) that would generate strong political incentives for particular outcomes.

Recent experience with such “report cards” in rural areas of India, where the majority of citizens are poor (as compared to the more middle-class and affluent citizens of Bangalore) and where media interest is likely to be less strong, indicates several problems with this approach. In a survey of 280 villages in the state of Uttar Pradesh in north India, Banerjee et al (2006) find that large numbers of children have not acquired basic competencies of reading, writing, and arithmetic; yet, parents, teachers, and local government officials are not aware of the scale of the problem, and seem not to have given much thought to the role of public agencies in improving outcomes; parents do not know of the existence of local education committees, sometimes even when they are supposed to be members of it; education committee members are unaware of even key roles they are empowered to play in education services; public participation in improving education is negligible, and correspondingly, people’s ranking of education on a list of village priorities for public services is low. That is, learning failures coexist with public apathy to improving outcomes through public action.

Between September and December 2005, an Indian NGO, Pratham, intervened in 190 of the 280 villages surveyed with different types of information and advocacy campaigns that communicated to village citizens the status of learning among their children, and the potential role that education committees and local governments could play in improving learning. The basic format of the interventions was to organize a village meeting on education, with the attendance of the head of the local village government and the head teacher of the village public school, who are the key members of the education committee, from whom the village community is urged to ask and receive basic information about local agencies in primary education.

The issue raised most frequently in the village meetings, and about which people were most animated, was a government scholarship program intended to provide cash assistance to students from “backward” castes. Parents complained that they were not getting these scholarships, whilst teachers complained that parents inappropriately enroll under-age children, that can’t and don’t attend school, just to lay claim to the scholarships. The second issue that attracted attention was a new government mid-day

meal program. Actual learning levels attracted the least attention, and the facilitators had a difficult time steering the conversation away from scholarships and school meals to the broader issue of learning. That is, the field experience lends support to the story of Keefer and Khemani (2005) that citizens often mobilize to demand private transfers from public policies, but less so for broad public goods such as improvements in service quality for everybody.

The average attendance in these meetings consisted of about 108 villagers, which seems a large gathering, with village total population (all ages) ranging from five hundred to five thousand. These meetings were followed-up with small group meetings with education committee members who were provided with pamphlets about their roles and responsibilities in education service delivery. The hypothesis behind these interventions was that once key community members were informed about local agency, they would participate more actively through it to improve services, and citizens at large would thence become informed and aware of local agency.

Follow-up surveys were undertaken in the same 280 villages in March 2006, 3-6 months after the information campaigns were implemented, and we are currently in the process of analyzing impact. The most surprising fact emerging is that the campaigns did not lead to any improvements in citizens' lack of knowledge of local agency, specifically of the formal education committees. We also find no effect on school performance and learning, but this is less surprising given the narrow time frame in which we attempt to measure impact, and our field experience which suggested that the odds were heavily stacked against the interventions with existing public apathy to learning. But at the very least, if community participation is to have any hope of influencing service delivery, we expected a significant number of citizens to become aware of the existence of local education committees and its potential role in improving service quality.

In sharp contrast to this experience with education services in India, a similar experiment with citizen participation in health services in Uganda resulted in substantial improvements in service provision in village health clinics, reductions in under-five child mortality, and weight-gains of infants (Bjorkman and Svensson, 2006). Why these experiences are so different requires more time to answer convincingly—these results are

only just emerging. However, I explore some preliminary hypotheses below for why experiences might be sensitive to local context.

All of the approaches for “information campaigns” described above are based on the assumption that information alters the incentives of frontline service providers and local bureaucrats by mobilizing citizens for collective action. However, a large literature on local participatory institutions suggests that success is context-specific—some areas with pre-existing institutions of civic engagement might succeed, whilst others with entrenched social inequalities might fail (Baland and Platteau, 1999; Mansuri and Rao, 2003). Poor people might indeed be well aware that teachers, doctors and local officials are not doing their job, but feel powerless to change anything because teachers and doctors are elite members of the community, or people with political influence. Drèze and Gazdar (1996) recount how a village school in Uttar Pradesh can be non-functional for as long as ten years due to teacher absenteeism and shirking, without any collective protest being organized. Developing countries are characterized by historical institutions of social inequality and social polarization whose impact is persistent (Banerjee and Iyer, 2005), which likely makes local collective action for improvements in public goods for everybody difficult to sustain.

Furthermore, Keefer and Khemani (2004, 2005) argue that public service providers have weak incentives to improve performance quality because their jobs are protected by political agents—politicians have stronger incentives to provide secure public-sector jobs as teachers, health workers, and local bureaucrats, than to pressure these job-holders to improve service delivery. If information campaigns are designed to galvanize local collective action to improve local services, they might be successful in temporarily improving outcomes around the campaigns, but the political analysis suggests that their impact will die out once “politics-as-usual” kicks in unless they also change broader political incentives. From this perspective, it would be worthwhile to study successful experiences like the one in Uganda analyzed by Bjorkman and Svensson (2006) over time to see if the impact is sustained.

#### **4. Information campaigns to change political incentives**

A different strategy for an information campaign is to address the political market failure directly. Information failures are one way of accounting for the observation that even

widespread participation by the poor and disadvantaged does not guarantee that public policies are sufficiently geared towards providing broad services that promote human development outcomes (Keefer and Khemani, 2004, 2005). Citizens appear to pay more attention to policies designed to provide them with private transfers, rather than to the quality of broad public services, possibly because informational problems make it difficult for them to assess politician contributions to the quality of public services as opposed to the provision of visible inputs (Mani and Mukund, 2002). Politicians therefore prefer to expend resources in constructing schools and clinics and hiring workers on public pay rolls, even if schools are empty and health workers are absent, as they get some credit for the easy to observe building activity and the provision of public employment, but little or no credit for the quality of services available.

Such political incentives in the state of Ceara in Brazil were tackled head-on through massive information campaigns by a state government that took office in 1987. The state government flooded radio airwaves with messages about how infant and child mortality could be drastically reduced through particular public programs of municipal governments, thus bringing political pressure to bear upon the mayors to actually deliver basic health services. The state also created a new class of public health workers through a publicized recruitment effort that conveyed information to communities about the valuable role the workers could play in improving public health through community-wide effort. Such information campaigns have been credited with bringing a remarkable turnaround to the politics of the state—from being “clientelist” and patronage-based, to becoming service-oriented (Tendler, 1997). Tendler (1997) describes how in only a few years this government tripled the coverage of measles and polio vaccination to 90 percent of the child population, and accomplished a fall in infant deaths from 102 to 65 per thousand births.

Based on the view of information as a “political market failure” and the evidence from Brazil, this paper proposes the following idea for an information campaign. First, pinpoint two or three major development outcomes that public policies in a country are designed to address. Let us consider three outcomes, that are included in international Millenium Development Goals as possible to address through public agency and resources: 1) child school enrollment and literacy; 2) under-five child mortality; and 3)

incidence of communicable and preventable disease. Collect government documentation and official opinion on what public programs and policies have been designed to address these development indicators, what resources they have been allocated, and summarize how the government plans to achieve these ends. Second, collect data on the development outcomes that is representative at the level of the smallest political unit in a country—a local government or an electoral district. That is, develop indicators for district  $d$  along the following lines:  $x$  percent of children between the ages of 7 and 10 (say) are not in school,  $y$  percent of all births results in death before the age of 5, and,  $z$  percent of households suffer debilitation of their main income earner from a widely prevalent (though preventable) communicable disease. Such information is difficult for media markets to generate even if they are responsive to poor listeners and viewers, even if there is freedom of information legislation, and even if such indicators are likely to be “newsworthy”.

Generating this data on a regular basis with a specified interval, such as every two years, if not annually, through politically independent and credible agencies, using objective statistical techniques, is the most costly and difficult part of this idea. If financed by within-country public budgets and delegated to a bureaucratic agency, such as a national statistics bureau, *perceived* risk of political manipulation might be so large as to make the data non-credible to citizens, even if actual manipulation might be prevented. What is perhaps more likely to succeed is financing by a group of domestic citizen associations or a group of international aid agencies, with widespread credibility as non-partisan and non-ideological agents in development, and subsequent competitive procurement of independent and private research organizations to undertake the data collection.

This is daunting, so the immediate proposal is to experiment with the idea on a small scale, by identifying a context in which credible and reliable data *can* be produced by an independent agency. Once the data is produced the dissemination strategy can range from minimalist to intensive interventionist. At a minimal level, the data on development indicators, and the government documentation on public programs designed to address them, should be visibly and accessibly placed in the public domain, perhaps with a press release by the independent agency. One could then monitor if and how these

indicators become a part of public debate, and more specifically whether they become part of the policy platforms on which elections are contested. Finally, one could evaluate whether making such data and information available eventually improves public policies and the development indicators.<sup>2</sup> The assumption behind why such a minimalist strategy might work and is worth testing is that local media markets and civil society organizations would pick-up and publicize these indicators on their own because they are dramatic demonstrations of development, or lack thereof, at politically relevant levels of aggregation; and because by dissociating the production of the data with its dissemination it might be easier to establish the credibility and political independence of the data producers.

At an intensive interventionist level, this campaign might partner with local NGOs and civil society organizations, with local credibility in genuinely working towards improving development outcomes, to share the information with citizens through participatory methods like the “report card” campaigns discussed in section 3. The difference with the “report card” campaigns that have happened thus far is the nature of the information being shared—combining public education about public policies with measurable and regularly available indicators of their success or failure at the level of politically-relevant jurisdictions.

At an intermediate level of intervention, brief advertisements might be prepared for district-level radio and/or TV broadcasts announcing the district’s development outcomes, relative to the country or regional average, and the official view of the major public policies being pursued to address them, ending with an advocacy message that citizens should raise questions with their political representatives on how these outcomes can be improved. These advertisements need to be designed to capture the attention of a large number of people, so they are likely to be brief, but can alert listeners to newspaper advertisements for more details. That is, the radio and TV spots could be followed by a newspaper advertisement which provides the same information in writing, with some

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<sup>2</sup> In keeping with cutting-edge evaluation methodology, the strategy to evaluate impact can be one of randomized experimentation. Data on development performance could be collected for a selected sample of jurisdictions in a small geography, and the information would be revealed in the first and experimental stage for only a randomly chosen sub-set of jurisdictions constituting the “treatment” group. The group whose information would be collected but not revealed would be the “control” group.

more detail. This campaign could be intensely pursued both around elections and in the middle of a political term in office. After an initial investment in directly publicizing these district-level development indicators, and official view of public policies designed to address them, the development agency engaged in this effort can revert to the minimalist agenda of ensuring public availability.

The driving assumption behind the idea proposed here is that the information constraint that reduces government accountability for broad development outcomes cannot be usefully viewed as simple “lack of” information, and thence be addressed by providing more and more information, because of serious limits on people’s cognitive abilities. Recent work on the psychological underpinnings of social communication indicates that getting information to have the desired impact on actual outcomes is a particularly difficult mechanism design problem (Lupia, 2003). The problem is as follows—suppose there is a target audience that lacks sufficient information to accomplish certain tasks; what kind of information and dissemination strategy is necessary and sufficient to give the target audience the requisite skill to accomplish those tasks? Lupia (2003) provides a framework for thinking about the content and nature of information dissemination—that it should be designed to maximize the possibility that the target audience digests and retains the information, and actually uses it when making a choice for which it is relevant.

If the target audience is poor citizens in developing countries, and the task is for them to hold their governments accountable for basic development outcomes, the new idea proposed here is based on the assumption that providing information on the final outcomes, which have dramatic value, to large numbers of citizens can shift public focus to these outcomes, and make them politically salient in the sense that voters can coordinate on them as the basis for evaluating their governments. Such coordination is likely to be further facilitated if these indicators are developed at the level of electoral districts or local governments, because they can then be used to compare performance across political jurisdictions, thus generating yardstick competition among political representatives.

Voter coordination and yardstick competition among politicians on the basis of development outcomes shifts the burden of designing policies and allocating scarce

public resources effectively to accomplish them, onto political representatives with access to “experts”. This is similar to ideas in the literature on corporate governance where the principal-agent problem is almost identical—there are multiple principals, “shareholders”, with attendant problems of collective action and lack of expertise, and agents, “managers”, whose actions and their impact on outcomes, “profits and dividends” are difficult to observe and understand. Prat (2005) draws upon this literature to show that if the agent is an “expert” and principals are amateurs, the expert agent’s interest will be more aligned with the principals’ interest when the latter is informed about the consequences of the agent’s actions rather than the actions itself.

The above is an idea, not a formal argument based on systematic evidence on what people know of development outcomes and public policies, nor on systematic evidence on how poor people evaluate governments, because of lack of such evidence from developing countries. The proposal here is for a policy-relevant research program that collects such evidence, designs a campaign along the lines suggested above, experimentally implements the campaign in a few jurisdictions, and evaluates impact in terms of changes in politics, public policies, and finally, the development outcomes.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This paper has argued that there is a role for information campaigns to shift the platforms of political competition in developing countries away from inefficiently targeted programs such as public-sector jobs and subsidies and on to broad public policies that effectively (and efficiently) promote basic development outcomes. It has presented a proposal for a specific kind of campaign that requires investment in collecting and publicizing data on development outcomes—such as child literacy and mortality, and incidence of preventable diseases—representative at the level of politically-relevant jurisdictions, such as the lowest level of government or an individual electoral district. The broad objective of such investment is to make governments in developing countries more accountable to their citizens for basic development outcomes. This objective appears to be the cutting-edge of international aid policy, as it has moved from viewing development assistance merely as a means of transferring resources to credit-constrained environments, to viewing it as a means of building local institutions for self-sustained growth. Experimenting with such a campaign would be valuable because if it works it is a

specific instrument that international and local development agencies could use to address often intractable political obstacles to serving the poor.

As discussed in the introduction of the paper, international donors are already engaged in collecting data on governance indicators at the aggregate national level, and using these as the basis for targeting aid. The arguments in this paper suggest that this approach could be extended, with multilateral financing of data collection on development performance at disaggregated and politically relevant jurisdictions within countries. Aid might be conditioned on the regular production and public release of such data by credible and politically independent agencies, so that citizens might use them to hold their own governments accountable.

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