Community-based monitoring and accountability forums and public service delivery in Uganda

Impact and the role of information, deliberation, and administrative placement

Bjorn van Campenhout, Nassul Kabunga, Tewodaj Mogues, and Caroline Miehe

This policy note summarizes findings from an assessment of the impact of community-based monitoring and accountability forums – popularly known as barazas – implemented by the government of Uganda. The key messages from this study include:

- **Barazas are a worthwhile investment.** Because barazas impact a large number of households and cost relatively little, the rate of return is generally substantial, even if treatment effects are small in size.

- **A mix of sub-county level and district level barazas is likely to be most effective.** While for some outcomes, e.g., agriculture, barazas organized at the sub-county level are most cost-effective, for others, e.g., infrastructure, barazas at the district level provide most value for money.

- **Full barazas, in terms of both information and deliberation, are the best option.** Whether the information component or the deliberation component matters more depends on the sector. A full baraza contains both components and costs the same as an information-specific or a deliberation-specific baraza. Best to do a full baraza.

- **Take a long run perspective.** Sufficient time needs to pass before outcomes materialize.

- **Do not forget remote households.** For some outcomes, barazas may have smaller effects on households that live in remote areas.

**Background**

Public service delivery in Uganda has been greatly affected by ineffective monitoring and weak accountability mechanisms, especially with respect to beneficiaries holding service providers
accountable. In response, the Government of Uganda, under the stewardship of the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), started implementing community-based monitoring and accountability forums – popularly known as barazas. A key component of the program are large public consultative gatherings that are organized at regular intervals at sub-county or district level. In 2015, a study was designed to evaluate the impact and cost-effectiveness of this policy intervention.

Research questions

Barazas are platforms for enhancing information sharing between policy makers (the client), public servants (the implementer), and beneficiaries of public goods and services (the users). In addition, the forums provide the opportunity for citizens to ask questions of policy makers and civil servants and to deliberate among themselves. With barazas, citizens have the opportunity to participate in the policy process by directly engaging with service providers and to demand accountability for the use of public resources. It is expected that, ultimately, barazas will contribute to effective monitoring of public service delivery and increase accountability and transparency among all stakeholders.

The research involved answering the following three research questions:

1) What is the impact of sub-county level barazas as implemented by OPM on public service delivery in general, at sector level, and for selected individual outcomes?

Barazas have been implemented in Uganda since 2010. As barazas continued to be rolled out beyond the pilot communities, a rigorous impact study of their effectiveness was still outstanding. This first research question thus was posed simply to see if barazas have an impact.

2) What is the relative importance of the information component versus the deliberation component of sub-county level barazas?

The aim of barazas is (1) to inform people about the plans, public resources spent, and achievements of public service delivery, and (2) to provide citizens with the opportunity to engage with their leaders in questions and answers sessions, i.e., deliberation. To study the relative importance of the information component and the deliberation component, respectively, we developed two versions of the baraza intervention. The first focuses on information provision with

---


only limited opportunity for citizens to engage with leaders, while the second focuses more on deliberation with no information being provided apart from what is explicitly requested by citizens.

3) For increasing public service delivery, are barazas that are organized at the district level more or less effective than barazas organized at the sub-county level?

At the beginning of the 2012/13 fiscal year, changes in implementation of barazas were suggested. Specifically, barazas thereafter would target district-level reporting to increase participation at a higher level, while, at the same time, reducing implementation costs. From a policy perspective, it was judged important to assess if the switch from a focus on sub-county level barazas to district level barazas was cost-effective.

Results

The research questions above are answered for public service delivery in general and for public service delivery in each of four individual sectors – agriculture, infrastructure, health, and education. For this purpose, we combined a set of carefully selected variables into five indices corresponding to the four main sectors and one overall index.

The results of this analysis are summarized in Figure 1. In this figure, we show four comparisons. A first comparison (in grey, ‘sc baraza’) compares outcomes in sub-counties where a sub-county level baraza took place to outcomes in sub-counties where no baraza took place, corresponding to research question 1. In a second comparison (light blue, ‘info’), we compare outcomes in areas that were exposed to the information component of a baraza to those that were not, while in a third comparison (dark blue, ‘delib’), we compare outcomes in areas that were exposed to the deliberation component of a baraza to those that were not. These two comparisons are related to the second research question. Finally, to answer the third research question, we compare outcomes in areas that were exposed to a district level baraza to outcomes in areas that were exposed to a sub-county level baraza (black, ‘level’). Each of these comparisons is done for four indices that summarize impact on the four sectors, as well as on a single index that summarizes overall public service delivery. Effects are measured in standard deviations from the index mean.

Figure 1: Summary of impact on different sectors and overall public service delivery (index).

We find little evidence that the baraza intervention had an impact on public service delivery in general (index), nor on the different sectors. The only exception is agriculture, where we find that
sub-county level barazas have a positive impact, and that this impact is clearly superior to the (lack of) impact associated with district level barazas. (However, Box 1 suggests that localized impacts of barazas may be more significant than those measured in aggregate.)

---

Box 1: Reconciling qualitative and quantitative findings – Bagezza sub-county

The limited impact we find from the overall impact evaluation is puzzling, especially in light of qualitative research prior to endline data collection that suggested real effects from the baraza intervention.\(^2\) To look into this further, we link the endline data from the quantitative impact evaluation to what we learned in the qualitative fieldwork.

In Bagezza sub-county in Mubende District, lack of safe drinking water was mentioned as a serious problem, so was discussed extensively during the baraza. When we went back to the sub-county for the endline work, it appeared that the government had fulfilled their promises and the sub-county now had better access to safe drinking water. To check this, we used baseline and endline data to simply compare means between Bagezza and a random control sub-county in the neighborhood (Bwanswa in Kibaale district).

**Figure 2: Use of unprotected water source before and after baraza in Bagezza**

![Figure 2: Use of unprotected water source before and after baraza in Bagezza](image)

Source: Analysis by authors.

At the time (time 1) of baseline data collection before the baraza, Figure 2 shows that more than half of households in Bagezza reported relying on an unprotected drinking water source. In neighboring Bwanswa, the control group, unsafe drinking water was less of a problem, with only about 10 percent of households using an unprotected source. After the baraza, the situation improved in Bagezza. By the time of endline data collection, only one quarter of households reported to still be relying on an unprotected water source.

Diverging results between qualitative and quantitative investigations may be due to baraza interventions being broad interventions that attempt to address a range of issues in heterogenous settings. It may be that the baraza intervention is effective in some contexts, but not others. However, if a simple average treatment effect is estimated, the intervention effect may be found insignificant because it averages over context-specific sub-groups.

---

**Impact on agriculture**

While we do not find that barazas positively impact public service delivery in general, we do find a variety of interesting effects when we look at individual sectoral outcomes and consider heterogeneity in the treatment effects.

If we consider access to extension visits at home for instance, we find that sub-county level barazas increase the share of households that were visited by an expert by about 6 percentage points, which corresponds to 306 more households per sub-county. We also see an increase in the likelihood that farmers received seed from government. This is consistent with the positive effect sub-county barazas seem to have on the likelihood that cooperatives or farmer groups are formed in the village, and an increase in the likelihood that such institutions are assisted by the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) or Operation Wealth Creation (OWC). We find some heterogeneity with respect to location. Among remote households, we see that the impact of baraza interventions on the agricultural sector vanishes. For example, the impact of sub-county level barazas in terms of higher access to extension does not persist in more remote areas. Care should be taken to make sure agricultural service delivery reaches the last mile.

**Impact on health**

We do not find any impact of the baraza program on the health index. However, if we only consider sub-counties whose officials recall that the baraza took place, we do find an effect on the health sector. The deliberation component increases the likelihood that a household seeks treatment in a government health facility when a member is ill. The information component is associated with increased use of government health facilities for maternal health, and increases the likelihood that a Village Health Team is present. Both components also reduce waiting times before an individual is attended at a local health facility.

**Impact on infrastructure**

We find that a baraza intervention at the sub-county level reduces the waiting time at the water source by about 29 percent, which corresponds to a reduction of about 11 minutes. We further find that effects become stronger if we restrict attention to households where sufficient time has passed between the baraza intervention and the measurement of outcomes. Finding more pronounced effects on infrastructure when restricting our sample to cases where sufficient time has passed between the baraza and endline data collection stands to reason, because infrastructural works take time. We also find indications that district level barazas are more effective than sub-county level barazas for infrastructure. This also seems reasonable, as infrastructure improvements depend on the availability of resources, most of which need to be obtained from the central government.

In addition to heterogeneity with respect to time elapsed between when the baraza was held and the measurement of outcomes, we find that especially households in remote areas benefit from barazas in this sector.

**Figure 1: Sub-county baraza in western Uganda with local leaders and heads of public service delivery agencies presenting to attendees, 2017**

Source: Authors.
effect is seen in a reduction in waiting time at the water source and in the distance to the nearest water source. Perhaps, households living close to sub-county headquarters have sufficient access to clean water, and so a baraza may not affect their situation in this sector. Not taking this into account may lead to the conclusion that barazas do not influence access to water (Box 1).

**Impact on education**

We find that a baraza intervention at the sub-county level improves the infrastructure around electricity provision and water supply for public schools. As for infrastructure, it may take some time for outcomes to be realized in the education sector. If we allow for sufficient time between the baraza event and measurement of outcomes, we find an increase in the number of children in public schools.

**Impact on other outcomes**

We also explore if the baraza program affected various aspects that are at the core of community-based monitoring, such as participation in election of local leaders, interfacing with politicians and civil servants, perceptions of service quality and prioritization, and contributions to public goods (both cash and in-kind). Analyzing whether citizens interact more with politicians and service providers, we find mixed results. Furthermore, we find no impact of barazas on participation in elections. When comparing the share of households with a member holding a political or traditional position in areas with a sub-county level baraza to areas with a district level baraza, we see that the proportion is higher in the former. We find that the information component of the sub-county baraza reduces in-kind contributions, but increases cash contributions. This may indicate that barazas increase trust in officials and strengthens the social contract. We further find that cash contributions are higher in areas that were exposed to a district level baraza than in areas that were subjected to a sub-county level baraza. Finally, we find that barazas changed citizens’ perception of a range of problems.

---

**ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

Bjorn Van Campenhout is a Research Fellow in the Development Strategy and Governance Division (DSGD) of the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and is affiliated with LICOS – the Center for Institutions and Economic Performance, at Katholieke Universiteit (KU) Leuven, Belgium, where he is based. Nassul Kabunga at the time this research was conducted was a Research Fellow in DSGD of IFPRI, based in Kampala. He is now with UNICEF-Uganda. Tewodaj Mogues at the time this research was conducted was a Senior Research Fellow in DSGD of IFPRI, based in Washington, DC. She is now with the International Monetary Fund. Caroline Miehe is in the PhD program at LICOS at KU-Leuven, Belgium, where she is based.