

Services Delivery and Centralization in Urban Slums

Summary

As growing numbers of migrants are drawn by the opportunities in Indian cities, providing infrastructure and public services for city dwellers has become increasingly urgent. Yet public services in cities, and particularly in slums, remain of low quality. This has far reaching effects on the quality of urban life, and on health, education, and mobility—with broad repercussions for growth and development. Our study examines the relationship between public service delivery and the quality of life in Delhi's slums, and examines the channels through which information can affect the quality of their delivery.

By mobilizing voters through information campaigns about their local elected officials in the form of newspaper report cards, we sought to study the impact that differential information has on electoral preferences. We will make use of three rounds of public service audits collected in Delhi slums. The first round was conducted in early 2011, and the second from late 2011 to early 2012. With funding from USAID, a third round of audits will be conducted in April-May 2012, following Delhi's municipal elections. These audits provide new information on the quality of garbage and toilet facilities in a random sample of 102 of Delhi's 272 wards. To understand how public service delivery influences the health and decisions of slum dwellers, we make use of two concurrent surveys of the inhabitants of these communities, also funded by the IGC.

Preliminary results find a significant association between the quality of toilet and garbage facilities and childhood nutrition. Holding wealth constant, families living near a clean public toilet, with hand-washing facilities and without human waste, have better-nourished children. When nearby public toilets are dirty, however, these health benefits disappear. Children with access to a private toilet fare best. Similarly, families who have someone pick up garbage directly from their home tend to have better-nourished children. The presence of informal trash piles is associated with worse child nutrition, whereas formal dumpsters have no detectable relation. Our results suggest low quality sanitation services have no positive influence, but by investing in the quality and cleanliness of toilet and garbage facilities, health—and hence development outcomes—may be improved.

Our study also looks at how information affects politician behavior. We aggregated information from the service audits at the constituency level and sent report cards to a random group of Members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs) and Municipal Corporation of Delhi Councilors (MCDs). We find that provision of an MLA or MCD report card is associated with an increase in toilets closing, but an increase in the number of toilet facilities (taps, lights, etc) and the total number of toilet seats, in those toilets that were kept open. MLA and MCD report cards are also associated with increasing problems of severe garbage overflow in dumpsters—an apparently perverse effect that will be explored further. The effects of report card distribution differ between MLAs and MCDs, suggesting different responses or methods of influence on service delivery.

These results are preliminary. Any treatment effect will be magnified in the lead up to the 2012 elections, and we will be better equipped to analyse effects after the third round of audits are collected. Also, the results of the voter information campaigns will be seen after the April elections.

Steps taken until endline

- 1) Mobilization of Resident Welfare Associations

- 2) Round One and Round Two of public service delivery audits and report cards

- 3) Round Two of distribution of newspaper report cards in slums (on-going)

Policy Implications

1. Politicians respond to information about the quality of the public services, albeit sometimes in unexpected ways.

The initial results of the randomized control trial indicate that provision of an MLA or MCD report card is associated with an increase in toilets closing. However, we also find a significant increase in the number of toilet facilities (taps, lights, etc) and the total number of toilet seats in areas where MLAs received a report card, suggesting that the report cards may have prompted MLAs to shut down some toilets while increasing the usability of others. MLA and MCD report cards are also associated with increasing problems of severe garbage overflow in dumpsters, with a stronger effect for MLAs—further work will be required to interpret this apparently perverse result. The effects of report card distribution on MLAs and MCDs vary substantially, suggesting that each arm of government may have different methods of exerting influence on service delivery.

2. High quality of garbage and sanitation facilities is associated with better childhood nutrition.

Analysis of the descriptive patterns in the cross-section finds that, after holding wealth constant, families living near a clean public toilet, with hand-washing facilities and without human waste, have on average better-nourished infant children. When nearby public toilets are dirty, however, these health benefits disappear. Children with access to a private toilet fare best. Similarly, families who have someone pick up garbage directly from their home tend to have better-nourished children. The presence of informal trash piles has adverse effects on child nutrition, whereas formal dumpsters have no detectable effect. While these are not experimental results (and so patterns may be affected by unmeasured influences) the results suggest that childhood health can be improved by investing in the quality and cleanliness of toilet and garbage facilities, while the mere presence of sanitation facilities of low quality has no impact. This can have important long-term influences on the future human

capabilities of children. (These effects are in addition to gains in the quality of life of better facilities for households in slums.)

1. Governance changes have implications for the interpretation of our results.

In July 2010, the Delhi Legislative Assembly shifted the responsibility for many critical services from the municipal to the Delhi state government. This was effectively a partial centralisation of service delivery. From interviews with government officials, we have learned that the majority of public toilets were moved to the control of State government, while garbage collection remained with the municipal government. This may help to explain some of the apparently negative impacts of information provision. Further qualitative research can help shed light on this question.