Academic Engagement with Missions, Implementers & Governments: Ghana, GSAM and Beyond

Erik Wibbels
Department of Political Science
Cofounder, DevLab@Duke
Duke University
Districts spend huge sums on important capital projects.

35 percent of projects are never completed. Waste equivalent to 667 additional three-room schools every year (about 73,000 children).

Widespread citizen dissatisfaction and distrust with district governance.
GSAM: Design

• Governance project in 150 districts that aims to improve efficiency of & accountability for expenditures on development projects
  – Designed as an RCT with mission (while acting as DRG Center “Outcome Lead Expert”)
  – G-to-G
  – Very regular engagement with implementers (GAS, CARE International +)
  – Evaluated by Wibbels et al. under contract w/Social Impact

• Two randomly assigned interventions:
  1. **Top Down: Performance Audits by Central Government**
     • Performance audits of projects conducted by Ghana Audit Service
     • Scorecards + public information campaign
  2. **Bottom Up: Social Audit by Local NGOs**
     • NGOs trained & provided with tech to monitor k projects
     • Scorecards + public information campaign
GSAM: Initial Findings (Administrators)

- Top-down and bottom-up interventions both increase likelihood of having an active ARIC in the district.

- Bottom-up audit generates stronger sense that citizens are engaged in the development process
  - Admins say they spend 2+ more hours a week responding to citizen concerns and working with citizen groups.

- Bottom-up audit $\rightarrow$ Perception that the current projects are more deficient in absolute terms ($\#$projects delayed/abandoned).

- Top-down audit $\rightarrow$ Perception that projects are more deficient in relative terms (worse performance compared to neighbors).
Extension with GoG and AidData

- The project has implications for the efficiency of projects, but also potentially for their *location*.
- AidData (HEPI-funded) grant with CERSGIS (Univ of Ghana), National Development Planning Commission, Ghana Statistical Service, etc.
  - Geolocation of each district’s “Annual Action Plan”: from 2010-2016 (approx 46,000 projects)
  - Overlaid with EA-level census data and voting booth level electoral data
Extension with GoG and AidData

• Foundations for a national infrastructure map.
• Identify shortcomings in government base maps (jurisdictional boundaries, villages, etc.).
• Expand geospatial capabilities of GoG.
• Academically, the single most extensive dataset on the political economy of infrastructure. Important implications for received wisdom wrt distance to services and service outcomes.
Key Implications

• Rigorous designs and IEs are feasible in the context of governance programming.
  – IEs bearing on governance face some particular challenges.
• Early, frequent engagement with missions, governments & implementers is beneficial.
• There are huge benefits across the practitioner-academic boundary.
• These benefits persist beyond the life of individual projects.
  – DevLab@Duke, the Mission and the Ghana Audit Service wrt future programming....