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**Impact Pathways of a Participatory Local
Governance Initiative in Uganda**

A Qualitative Exploration

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ABSTRACT

The baraza project, initiated in 2009, is a government-led initiative in Uganda that aims to increase the quality of public service delivery through the provision of information and the involvement of beneficiaries in project monitoring by means of providing citizens with an advocacy forum. This study provides a qualitative assessment of the self-identified pathways through which barazas are expected to influence public service delivery, as expressed by participant stakeholders; and the motivating factors behind behavioral changes surrounding the baraza implementation, hindrances to achieving positive outcomes, and opportunities in the implementation of barazas in the future.

Keywords: public service delivery, accountability, transparency, Uganda

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ACRONYMS

OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
3ie	International Institute for Impact Evaluation
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
LC	Local Council
RDC	Resident District Commissioner
CAO	Chief Administrative Officer
BOQ	Bill of Quantities
OWC	Operation Wealth Creation
CSO	Civil Society Organization
RDP	Recreation for Development and Peace
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies

1. INTRODUCTION

Uganda's economic liberalization efforts in the mid-1980s and the decentralization drive in the early 1990s profoundly altered the functioning of the government in public service provision. However, public service delivery has continued to suffer from ineffective monitoring and weak accountability mechanisms, especially with respect to beneficiaries holding the service providers accountable (Bjorkman and Svensson 2009, Steiner 2007, Francis and James 2003, Muriisa 2008). Reinikka and Svenssons (2004) document massive elite capture of funds in the education sector as an example. Follow-up studies showed that the provision of information and the involvement of beneficiaries through village meetings can improve both quantity and quality of public service delivery (Reinikka and Svensson 2011, Bjorkman and Svensson 2009).

In response to the lack of monitoring and poor accountability processes, the government of Uganda initiated the baraza project in 2009.¹ Barazas are citizen advocacy forums, the stated aim of which is to “enhance public involvement in holding the government accountable for service delivery in relation to the resources spent” (OPM 2013). In practice, barazas are initiated by the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) and organized at the sub-county or district level. Barazas bring together government officials, policy makers and public service providers (civil servants) on the policy implementation side, together with the users of public services (citizens) on the other side. Key sectors for discourse include agriculture, education, water and sanitation, health, and infrastructure.

Currently, a large-scale impact evaluation of the baraza initiative, funded by the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie) and implemented by a team of researchers from the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), is ongoing.² Through a cluster randomized control trial, it will be possible to quantify the impacts of the baraza initiative on the quantity and quality of public service

¹ Baraza is a generic term for meetings in Uganda. Barazas are organized by different actors in Uganda, especially nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs). The barazas we are studying here are the “official” ones that are initiated by the office of the prime minister. While official barazas may be (and in the past have been) abused by politicians to get a forum, they may also be more effective in encouraging officials to show up.

² See <http://www.3ieimpact.org/en/evidence/impact-evaluations/details/2905/> for more information.

delivery in each of the sectors mentioned above. The quantitative research design will also allow the comparison of the relative effectiveness of the two main components of a baraza: (1) information provision, whereby officials report on planned activities and achievements and (2) deliberation, whereby citizens are encouraged to engage with and challenge civil servants. Furthermore, the quantitative analysis will allow comparison of district level barazas to barazas that are held at the lower sub-county level.

While experimental approaches are considered the best way to empirically establish causal claims, an important criticism is that these methods merely provide a black box view of causality and often fail to identify the mechanisms that link the intervention to the outcome. However, especially in the context of economic development, one does not only want to know if something works or does not work, but also why (Deaton 2009). While there exist formal ways to look at causal pathways such as mediation analysis, adapted research designs may be warranted (Kusoke et al 2013). Quantitative impact evaluations also sometimes attempt to open the black box by looking at intermediate outcomes: the baraza quantitative impact evaluation will also investigate changes in accountability and citizen empowerment. Often, however, intermediate outcomes and mediators are poorly defined or hard to measure.

In this paper, we take a qualitative research approach to explore the potential causal pathways that underlie outcomes that may emanate from baraza interventions and the behavioral change of actors, as well as examining hindrances to achieving positive outcomes and opportunities for the implementation of future barazas. Based on a series of semi-structured interviews with (a) politicians as the principals initiating and monitoring the services; (b) civil servants as the agents delivering the services; and (c) citizens as the clients consuming the services, we attempt to attribute potential impacts to the baraza interventions. In doing so, we engage these stakeholders to articulate their preconceptions of how the baraza will or will not achieve impact, also known as the “theory of change”.

This qualitative assessment has three key purposes: First, as the initial exploratory assessment, the study sheds light on what influences the already-conducted barazas may have had. One benefit of such an initial investigation is that it gives the OPM, the implementing government partner, something to have in their hands while waiting on the quantitative analysis that is still underway. Insights from such a study

provide a first take on how the barazas may be affecting the amount and quality of public services provided – or if they are not. Second, this qualitative analysis can help to identify potential impact pathways of the barazas through the exploratory approach described above, providing essential feedback as the basis for empirical cross-validation and potential revision of the theory of change underpinning the study. Third, the in-depth interviews provide the benefit of informing the design of the complementary quantitative surveys conducted as part of the larger impact evaluation and guide the interpretation of the analytical results by pointing to previously unexpected outcomes and issues and by suggesting hypotheses about key relationships and indicators tested in the quantitative analysis (Kabunga et al. 2014).

We find that stakeholders think barazas are useful at improving public service delivery across all sectors, especially in Bagezza where the barazas took place at the sub-county level. Stakeholders had no difficulty providing examples of changes they felt were the direct result of the baraza being held: projects that were previously dragging were finished or taken up afresh; sub-standard work was redone; and in some instances, priorities were changed to better align with citizens' needs. A substantial part of these outcomes seemed to derive from the baraza's potential to simply fix information asymmetries. The focus group discussion suggests civil servants responded to the consequences of the increased likelihood of sub-standard work being exposed, and politicians responded to electoral considerations. There are also indications that barazas increased community involvement, as well as top-down monitoring.

The structure of the remainder of this paper is as follows: Sections two and three offer a summary of the primary stakeholders involved in the barazas, and the methodology used to interview them, respectively. Section four describes the study areas for this qualitative analysis. Section five enumerates the perceived influence of the baraza intervention by the interviewed project participants organized by sector theme. Section six outlines the potential pathways to which respondents attributed the changes that they feel they have observed, while section seven recounts respondents' understandings of the underlying motivating factors evidenced by the changed behaviors or norms other participant groups displayed. In section eight, we report the given factors that reduced the desired effectiveness of the barazas. We conclude with the recommendations offered by the interviewees for future barazas in section nine.

2. KEY PLAYERS IN THE BARAZA

A baraza aims to provide a platform where three types of stakeholders interact: politicians, civil servants and citizens. Elected politicians initiate and formulate development plans and oversee and monitor the implementation of policies and programs. They are mandated by the citizens, and as such are supposed to be sensitive to their priorities and uphold their interests. Second, citizens are the main beneficiaries of the public services. They contribute through taxes (or in some cases, directly through labor) and are required to utilize the services according to regulations and safeguard public infrastructure. Third, there is the technical staff, who are contracted by government and are responsible for service provision and implementation of government programs and projects.

Under the local government system, there are five administrative levels, organized as local councils (LCs), within the districts of Uganda. The lowest administrative level is the LC I, responsible for an individual neighborhood or small village. LC II through LC IV cover a range of sub-district local government while the LC V has responsibility over the district. A council is the highest political authority within the area of jurisdiction of local government and has the legislative and executive powers which are exercised in accordance with Uganda's constitution. In regard to public service delivery in rural Uganda, LC III and LC V at the sub-county and district level, respectively, are the most important political and administrative units.

In contrast to the former centralized government structure, where public service officials at the LC III level would implement the development plans formulated by the central government at the LC V level, then report back to the LC V central government again, the decentralization of the government led to the design by which LC III technical staff became responsible to report to LC II or LC I officials, who are directly accountable to the citizens within their purview. In a similar manner, the structure by which a problem or issue identified at the local level is to be handled is first to bring it before the local LC I, after which it is passed up to subsequent LC levels as required until it reaches the administrative level in which there is sufficient authority over the issue to resolve it (Murissa 2008).

On a given baraza event, the three stakeholders are each represented by both district level and sub-county level equivalents. The political wing government officials are represented by the District LC V chairperson and the Sub-county LC III chairperson.³ As mentioned earlier, these are political heads that constitute committees that initiate projects, approve budgets, and monitor government programs and service delivery. The technical wing is also assumed to be represented at both LC III and LC V levels: the head of civil service at the district level, the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) who oversees the various sectors and each of the sector heads (e.g. agriculture, education, health, and roads), is expected to attend the baraza event. The sub-county equivalent of the CAO is the sub-county chief. There may also be civil servants that are responsible for different sectors at the sub-county level. While most of the information will be provided by the district-level politicians and civil servants, the district-level officials may provide clarification if needed.

Until the onset of this research, each baraza in Uganda was initiated, coordinated, and logistically supported by the OPM. However, today, barazas are still logistically supported by the OPM but implementation has been decentralized. While the selection of baraza intervention sites is dictated by independent random assignment as stipulated in the study design (Kabunga et al. 2014), local coordination and mobilization is led by the office of the Resident District Commissioner (RDC) in each respective district. Moreover, RDCs and carefully selected baraza moderators have now been equipped with additional skills on how to facilitate barazas and report in a timely way to relevant authorities, especially the OPM. Additionally, barazas are now preceded with posters relaying information about service delivery in strategic locations across the sub-county where barazas will take place.

To date, a smaller proportion of barazas have been held at the district level while the majority were organized at lower local governments specifically at the sub-counties. One of the major empirical questions in the impact evaluation is to assess whether district barazas, while cheaper to implement, are as

³ Note that the positions of chairperson and vice-chairperson, among others, are identical within each LC level, and these are all elected positions. There is also a special government official that plays an important role in Uganda: The Resident District Commissioner (RDC). RDCs are government-appointed positions at the district level, who are assigned the purpose of representing the national government's interests.

effective as sub-county barazas. It is important to note that even when the baraza is organized at the sub-county level, the main representatives for the government that are invited to the baraza are from the district level. The CAO and each sector head present plans and accomplishments for the sub-county.

3. METHODOLOGY

We use semi-structured interviews with focus groups consisting of different stakeholders, at both the district and sub-county level, to elicit key political and socioeconomic differences that can be implicitly linked to the baraza intervention. We interviewed (1) the political leaders in selected districts and sub-counties responsible for planning, approval, and monitoring of the various government programs and projects; (2) the technical staff responsible for service provision; (3) residents/citizens, as the main beneficiaries of public services; (4) community baraza facilitators; and (5) other key informants knowledgeable about the baraza and public service provision.

Politicians such as the RDC and the LC chairs were interviewed in one-on-one interviews, to enable them to speak more freely. CAO were also interviewed individually. Sector heads were interviewed in small groups of 2 or 3 people. Citizens were interviewed in groups of between 5 and 10 people. For citizens, we made sure to have a representative group of society, making sure to include youth, women, farmers, businessmen, CSO members, etc. We conducted interviews at both the district level for the district-level baraza we study and at both the district and sub-county level for the sub-county level baraza (see study area below). In total we conducted about 20 interviews, of which 2 were focus groups with citizens, 3 were semi-structured interviews with small groups of service providers, and the rest were semi-structured interviews with politicians, higher level civil servants and experts.

Both semi-structured interviews and focus groups discussions were structured around the same three questions. The interviews began first with a general question, asking if a particular stakeholder thought public service delivery in any sector had changed after the baraza. We then often probed if information about this aspect of public service delivery was given or if the topic was discussed during the baraza.

Second, we asked each of the three main actors (politicians, civil servants and citizens) if the performance, behavior, or perceptions of the other stakeholders had changed after the baraza. For instance, we asked citizens if they felt civil servants such as doctors and nurses addressed concerns that

were brought up during the baraza. We asked if the citizens thought politicians altered the way they do business. We also asked politicians if civil servants changed their behavior after a baraza. The same politicians were also asked if citizens have changed their behavior or expectations as a result of the baraza. Finally, civil servants were asked if politicians now act differently from how they acted before the baraza, and if citizens changed their behavior following the event.

Finally, we inquired about likely motivations behind any of the observed changes in the performance, behavior, or perceptions of stakeholders. For instance, we asked citizens what they thought led civil servants to change behavior or about the likely consequences if they had not altered their behavior. Again, these kinds of questions were asked of each stakeholder group, concerning their impressions of the others.

4. STUDY AREA

Interviews were conducted in Bagezza Sub-county of Mubende District where a sub-county baraza was held on September 16, 2016.⁴ About 210 people attended the baraza in Bagezza Sub-county. Bagezza consists of 8 parishes, and posters were put up in each parish. The five sectors of agricultural production, education, health, water and sanitation as well as rural road infrastructure were discussed and issues and concerns raised. The event was coordinated and attended by the RDC. The baraza was also attended by the Minister of General Duties in the OPM, the LC V, the CAO, and sector heads of the following areas: education, health, road works, agriculture, water, and sanitation, among others. Participants were reportedly very assertive, many pointing out empty promises made by the government.

We can use the baseline data that was collected as part of the quantitative impact assessment to get an idea of how the sub-county is doing compared to the overall average. For instance, with respect to public service delivery in the agricultural sector, we find that about 11 percent of households received a home visit from an extension officer in the previous year. In Bagezza Sub-county, this proportion is slightly higher. Only about 12 percent of households report that they received a visit by a member of the Village Health Team, suggesting the poor performance of the public health system within the sub-county. For the country as a whole, more than half of the households report they have received a visit in the last year. Looking at the main source of water, we find a very high reliance on rainwater in Bagezza. While on average about 22 percent of households depend on rain as their main supply of water, this percentage is as high as 70 in the sub-county. When we asked villagers to rank sectors, we find that water is the main problem within the district, with 43 percent of households mentioning that this is the most important sector that needs improvements. This share is 30 percent for Uganda as a whole.

The second location of interviews was in Masindi, where a district-level baraza was held on October 14, 2016.⁵ In keeping with the quantitative research design, the district-level baraza involved an

⁴ Interviews were conducted in July 2017. As such, about 10 months have passed since the sub-county baraza was held.

⁵ Interviews were conducted in July 2017. As such, about 9 months have passed since the district baraza was held.

information and dissemination component, as did all the other district barazas. This baraza was also fairly attended with representatives from the OPM, with the district political and technical teams making presentations and receiving feedback from the citizens as appropriate. Discussions quickly revealed challenges in the district due to poor working relationship between the political (LC V) and technical (CAO) leaders of the district.

We can again use data from the baseline to get a sense of the relative state of public service delivery within the district. For agriculture, only about 4.8 percent of households were visited by an extension worker in the last year, while this was 11 percent nationwide. For the health sector, we find that almost 30 percent of households within the district were visited by someone from the Village Health Team in the past 12 months. While this is higher than the proportion reported in Bagezza Sub-county, this is still substantially below the national average. In Masindi, most households seem to obtain water from a protected source (53 percent, while the national average is 46 percent). In the district, 31 percent of households mentioned that health is the most important sector, closely followed by water. However, the proportions are in line with the national averages.

5. PERCEIVED PATHWAYS OF INFLUENCE

According to the respondents in this study, the barazas were generally useful at improving public service delivery across all sectors, especially in Bagezza where the barazas took place at the sub-county level. Stakeholders had no difficulty providing examples of changes they felt were the direct result of the baraza being held: projects that were previously dragging were finished or taken up afresh; sub-standard work was redone; and in some instances, priorities were changed to better align with citizens' needs. A substantial part of these outcomes seemed to derive from the baraza's potential to simply fix information asymmetries. As expected, civil servants responded to the consequences of the increased likelihood of sub-standard work being exposed, and politicians responded to electoral considerations. Overall, barazas, as intended, increased community involvement but also top-down monitoring.

The following subsections outline specific examples given by the respondents in this study concerning the effects of the barazas held, organized by the following sectors: roads, water, education, health, agriculture and others.

Roads

- Citizens that attended the Baggeza Sub-county baraza reported that the construction of a six-kilometer-long road, stretching from Majani Chai (a tea plantation) to Nabikakala Parish, took place as a direct result of the baraza. Citizens feel the baraza significantly accelerated the work.
- The Masindi District baraza was said to have affected planning with respect to road infrastructural works. Financial resources had been allocated to widen a particular stretch of road where a few serious accidents had taken place in the recent past. However, during the baraza, the situation in Kiizi swamp was highlighted. A bridge had been washed away there, and children on one end of the bridge could no longer cross to get to the school on the other end. After the baraza, priorities were changed and Kiizi swamp was considered an

emergency. Since the baraza, the bridge has been repaired and even some additional work on the road has been completed. It was felt that the baraza was instrumental in aligning government priorities with community interests.

Water

- There were many complaints about access to safe and clean water in Bagezza Sub-county that were raised at the baraza. Water scarcity was mentioned as a major problem. Following the baraza, water pipes were brought on site and trenches were dug, beginning from the tea plantation up to Mugungulu Parish. While the digging was still ongoing at the time of the interviews, villagers expressed hope that the residents of this area would soon have piped water access.
- At the Masindi District baraza, complaints concerning stolen water meters, overbilling, and general poor attendance to water-related problems were voiced. In one sub-county of Masindi, water had been tapped and transported to another sub-county, with no benefit accruing to the residents of the originating sub-county. After the baraza, some improvements were cited, such as chlorine dispensers being fixed and stolen meters replaced.

Education

- During the Bagezza Sub-county baraza, residents complained that the government promised a “seed” secondary school in Mugungulu Parish, but that no follow-up action had ensued.⁶ During the baraza, officials from the education department explained that the district accounts had recently received substantial funds from the central government for the construction of this school. After the baraza, land surveying took place and it was reported that the government had hired 21 new teachers in January 2017, giving the impression that plans for

⁶ Seed schools were established by the Government in sub-counties for the implementation of the Universal Secondary Education program.

the school's construction and operationalization were becoming more concrete. According to stakeholders interviewed, the barazas were important in making this information available to all parties involved.

- During the Masindi District baraza, the community raised concerns regarding the mushrooming of several private but poorly performing schools in the area. In many of these schools, local elites have invested heavily, making the matter somewhat sensitive. As a result of the baraza, respondents reported that there are now more intensified inspections in these schools. The Masindi District CAO also confirmed that the school inspection system was strengthened following complaints about the quality of schooling, especially in private schools.

Health

- Citizens that attended the Baggeza Sub-county baraza raised complaints of medical staff absenteeism in health centers and poor conduct by health workers. In response, the health-sector head explained that many of the medical staff were on study leave. This information prompted the RDC to request that the CAO should compile a list of medical staff with detailed information about the study leave and put in place disciplinary measures to reduce absenteeism that is not related to study leave. After the discussion at the baraza, respondents reported that health staff started reporting at 8 am, when formerly they came in at 11 am or noon. In addition, health workers who used to be very rude to patients have changed their behavior and respondents attributed the changes to the baraza.
- At Baggeza Sub-county baraza, it was mentioned that a water tank was needed at one of the health centers. After the baraza, a tank was constructed at the respective health center.
- Insufficient provision of medical supplies such as essential drugs, necessary equipment and accessories such as gloves, were brought up at the baraza meeting at Baggeza Sub-county

baraza. Unfortunately, the problem of insufficient medical supplies had not been addressed by the time of our interviews. However, the Mubende District CAO reported that, in response to the report of missing medicines in the health centers, an investigation was instituted after the baraza and several individuals had been arrested for drug theft. In addition, a full-time guard was hired for increased monitoring of the premises, and some deliberate staff changes were also executed in relation to the events that took place.

- At the Masindi District baraza, it was realized that there was a mismatch in the report presented by the District Health Officer (from Masindi Main Hospital) between the number of motorcycles destined for distribution to rural health centers (HC IIs) and the actual number of the motorcycles distributed. After this was raised at the baraza, all the motorcycles were recovered and distributed to the intended recipients (HC IIs).
- At the Masindi District baraza, it was reported that work on the construction of a soak pit was not complete, even though a proof of completion had been issued by the contractor. As a result of the baraza, the concern was followed up and the contractor was forced to finish the job.
- At the Masindi District baraza, there were also complaints about blood shortages in the hospital. After the baraza, Masindi Hospital teamed up with Hoima Referral Hospital to ensure a better supply. Blood donation campaigns were also organized.
- It was further reported at the Masindi District baraza that there was no proper waiting room at Masindi District Hospital. After the baraza, a small makeshift structure was set up for patients as they wait for additional funding from the center to construct a proper waiting area.
- It was learned during the Masindi District baraza that the access road to Masindi Hospital was in very bad shape. Stakeholders reported that there was progress in the repairing of this

access road. The engineer is now awaiting the Bill of Quantities (BOQ), an itemized budget for the construction and maintenance of this road.

Agriculture

There were complaints in the agricultural production sector related to extension and input provision through the government agency, Operation Wealth Creation (OWC).

- Before the baraza in Masindi District, many promises had apparently been made by OWC about distribution of planting material, especially mango and orange tree seedlings, which were never fulfilled. Since these issues were raised at the baraza, people have started receiving the promised seedlings. One farmer in the focus group recounted having personally received 10 kg of bean seed while another farmer had received 10 kg of improved maize seed. The respondents attribute these changes to the baraza. Goats had also been brought for distribution two weeks prior to the baraza event. However, when they were proven to be of poor quality by the LC V chairperson, they were taken back. One farmer in the focus groups stated that: "...Before a baraza, all these government supplied inputs would reach sub-county headquarters but would never reach citizens. Until now we have not accessed one goat or cow supplied by OWC ... Even if they [the goats] had been of good quality, they would have been given or distributed to selected individuals known to officials in charge of inputs and they would never reach intended recipients."
- During our interviews, citizens concurred with the district CAO that there is now better planning by OWC in distribution and monitoring of inputs as a result of the discussions held at the Masindi District baraza. OWC began making announcements on the radio about inputs received for distribution and farmers now know when and how many of the resources would be distributed.

- It was revealed at the Masindi District baraza that a government-provided tractor and an insemination machine had been lost. A search thus ensued for these missing items. Our interviews with stakeholders revealed that the insemination machine had already been found. Efforts to recover the tractor are still underway.

Others

- The CAO took up the issue of an employee who retired prior to the start of a project that provided a gratuity to pensioners. This resulted in a committee formed by the minister to address this case and similar future ones.
- In Masindi District, wetlands have also been mapped and demarcated with concrete stones and citizens have been urged not to encroach on them.
- Citizens at the Masindi District Baraza also used the baraza to demand higher quality services. For instance, market vendors forced district authorities to remove poor quality anti-burglary windows which had been installed in a new market building. Subsequently, better quality windows were procured and installed. Citizens attributed this change to the empowerment of market vendors through the baraza.

These improvements in public service provision aside, it was clear from the interviews with baraza participants that not all promises made during the barazas had materialized by the time of our interviews. In Masindi, many issues raised at the baraza persisted by the time of the follow-up focus group discussions, including issues related to poor roads, electricity, officials not showing up for work, poor to non-existent extension services, and limited information on recruitment criteria for public servants, especially for army and police. In Bagezza Sub-county, the Minister for General Duties had promised iron sheets and a brick-making machine at the baraza, but these have not yet been delivered. Some of these delays in fulfilling commitments and improvements in service delivery could be the result of the short time span between the time when the barazas were conducted and the time of our follow-up interviews.

6. REFLECTION ON POTENTIAL PATHWAYS

In this section, reflections are made concerning the key impact pathways identified in the interviews, highlighting the reduction of information inefficiencies and increased top-down monitoring, among others.

Reducing information inefficiencies was one of the key impact pathways repeatedly mentioned by stakeholder groups.

The Bagezza Sub-county LC III chairperson noted that provision of more information during a baraza is important because citizens get to understand what “belongs” to them. He further noted that many stakeholders that were present at the baraza confessed that information deficiencies seemed to be a real issue. The example of the school was used: Both technical and political staff at the sub-county level heard of the plans to open a new school in the sub-county, but it was only after questioning the CAO during the baraza that they learned that the funds were there and a school board meeting had already taken place. It was pointed out that it is the CAO’s responsibility to ensure that the school is constructed and the CAO now knows people’s priorities.

More generally, the LC III chairperson emphasized the fact that barazas gave him information on what communities prioritize. He explained that the flow of information used to be poor, but after the baraza, it was much better. He cited that there had been a great deal of improvement in the flow of information at all levels (district, sub-county, parish, and village) which had not been the case before the baraza. One example of this was the creation of a WhatsApp group as an information sharing platform, created by the CAO (with the deputy CAO as the administrator of the group), specifically about service delivery issues in the district. Several sub-county leaders and citizens became part of this WhatsApp group since its inception and this has empowered citizens to demand services from their leaders.

The LC III chairperson acknowledged that his work is made much easier if information is flowing, both to and from service providers and service recipients. Information that flows from

government officials to citizen helps in managing expectations. The fact that community members can raise concerns and feel listened to also has a direct impact on their levels of satisfaction with the services.

Reducing information inefficiencies by means of enhanced information provision was also listed as the main impact pathway by the Mubende District RDC. She noted that since the baraza took place, significantly more citizens directly speak to her. To illustrate, she showed the researchers an example of a text message she had received that day from a parent complaining that teachers are not showing up for work. Similarly, the Mubende CAO commented that due to increased communication and information sharing, the sector heads seemed to conduct business more seriously after the baraza.

A second major impact pathway was through **increased top-down monitoring**:

According to the Chief of Bageza Sub-county, barazas are capable of exposing shoddy work. Therefore, the baraza makes service providers more conscious of the quality of their work. Health assistants now go to communities to inspect households. Councilors now make sure they know what is in the sub-county budget. For new projects initiated in the sub-county, the sub-county Chief now receives full details about them, and she is instructed to supervise the work of these projects. All this did not happen in such a systematic and organized manner before the baraza.

In Masindi, it was also stated that, as a result of the baraza, monitoring has improved and councilors are now very critical, requesting details and BOQ. The winner of tenders now needs to be declared publicly. Auditors are frequently called in and further substantiation at the site is being sought to verify the contents of reports rather than relying only on written statements as was done in the past.

One interesting observation from the Masindi Town Clerk (equivalent of the sub-county Chief for urban sub-counties) was that councilors “learned to monitor” projects as a result of the baraza. According to the Town Clerk, there have been significant changes in the way councilors interpret reports and in the type of questions that councilors ask technocrats. According to the Town Clerk, politicians in Uganda are often poorly educated. After a baraza, he noticed that politicians started to imitate more vocal and educated citizens such as CSO members or local businessmen who often speak out during barazas.

Another impact pathway identified was related to increased **community involvement in monitoring government projects**. For example, in Masindi, a local councilor reported that local citizens are now better informed as to when a project starts, what it entails, and when it is expected to be finished. The local citizens are also provided with the BOQ to make sure that what they expect corresponds to what was planned (e.g. only a murrum road was planned when citizens may expect a tarmac highway). Villages are even encouraged to set up their own monitoring teams to make sure no fuel and other supplies are stolen.

The sub-county Chief has also observed many changes among the citizens themselves with respect to **clarified roles and responsibilities of different actors**. For instance, before the baraza, citizens would request the sub-county Chief for boreholes, even though this was an intervention that only the district could handle. After the baraza, citizens first ask if what they complain about is under the mandate of a sub-county or district.

Citizens are thought to have become more active **in reporting concerns**. They have also become more vocal and confident when reporting issues. For example, the Mubende District RDC mentioned that one of the main benefits of the baraza is that citizens now know that it is their responsibility to report problems such as health workers that do not show up, boreholes that have dried, or when wetlands are destroyed. She mentioned that when complaints are made, she will intervene by going personally to inspect the issue, then discuss the issue with the sub-county Chief, CAO, and/or any other official responsible.

Since the baraza, **radios play a more active role in catalyzing accountability**. This is because officials are less likely to decline an invitation to participate in talk shows where citizens can call in with issues and questions; these programs are very popular in Uganda.

The CAO of Masindi District applauded the baraza as a good institutional governance project, explaining that Africans tend to fear governments due to Africa's history of colonization and subsequent autocratic regimes. Any initiative to **bring the government and citizens closer together** rather than perpetuating the "we versus them, the government versus the people" attitude, is a big step in the right

direction, the public official said. He further stated that “officials are more able to realize, as they should, that office bearers are there because of and for the citizens, and the citizens are more able to realize, as they should, that they also have a responsibility in service provision (e.g. civic education)” (personal communication).

The same government official at the local level (CAO) also commented that barazas **empower people to question government decisions**. They have started to write letters to him, asking more questions and demanding accountability. Market vendors, for example, have demanded accountability for the market dues collected from them.

Finally, citizens noted that there are **other “private” barazas** which have since been introduced in in Pakanyi Sub-county in Masindi District by Recreation for Development and Peace (RDP) and in Kimengo Sub-county by an NGO forum. They relayed that these have also increased awareness about different projects and programs implemented in the district.

7. MOTIVATING FACTORS

Service providers, citizens and politicians were each asked to comment on the likely reasons behind observed changes in the actions and attitudes of the other stakeholders as a consequence of the baraza.

Service providers acknowledged that citizens are now more compelled to report service delivery issues than before and that their complaints are holding service providers to account. The increased flow of information about what is expected and what has actually happened with respect to public service delivery leads to a change in service providers' norms and practices due to a fear that they will be reported to their bosses such as the CAO and LC V chairperson and that this may result in indictment. For example, in Masindi District, an engineer and his whole staff were arrested and a sub-county Chief in one sub-county was indicted as a result of endorsing payments for shoddy work. The contractor was paid a sum of 11 million Ugandan shillings (roughly 3,000 USD) for work that was only valued at 2.5 million Uganda shillings. This incident was confirmed by citizens that attended the district-level baraza in Masindi.

Citizens mentioned that **service providers fear being arrested**. They fear that citizens will report shoddy work or irregularities. A Masindi District council member noted that some service providers have been summoned to the parliamentary public accounts committee.

Politicians stated that they are beginning to fear that if they do not do their job to their constituents' utmost satisfaction, they will **not be voted into office when their mandate expires** in 2021. This has reduced corruption. For example, civil servants and politicians who would connive to award themselves contracts have stopped. Politicians have pulled out of tender bids once they realize that a time will come to account to the citizens. Before the baraza, civil servants would often be held at ransom by politicians: civil servants would make a budget but the politicians, who often are signatories, would not approve the budget unless their companies are awarded lucrative deals.

8. HINDRANCES TO BARAZAS ACHIEVING THE GOAL OF ENHANCED SERVICE DELIVERY

Focus group discussions suggest barazas are a good governance tool to curb corruption tendencies and improve accountability and public service delivery. However, a baraza can only be effective if there is follow up by all the stakeholders involved. In particular, it is important that a subsequent baraza is organized in the same area in a relatively short period such that residents can be updated on the steps taken to resolve the issues raised at the previous baraza. In principle, OPM is supposed to conduct barazas every six months but this has not happened as designed. **Failure to follow up** on issues raised during the baraza, both in terms of action and information, may be a real threat to barazas as a governance tool. The optimism among the stakeholders, the citizens in particular, may quickly turn into disappointment if none of the issues raised during the baraza is addressed, leaving communities worse off than before the baraza. This is also reflected in a recent study by Buntaine et al (forthcoming). They warn that there can be unexpected consequences of information sharing among citizens, such that citizens who were previously unaware of or unaffected by a problem in a neighboring village may become aware of an issue being discussed in a way that leads to an increased sense of disempowerment or exclusion. This recent study showed that information sharing actually led to new resentments rather than helping to drive participatory community-led development.

Another clear hindrance to achieving improved outcomes from the introduction of a baraza in a community, is the often **poor relationship between politicians and technical personnel**. Particularly in Masindi, we found that the relationship between the CAO and the LC V chairperson was quite bad. We received signals that the situation got even worse after the baraza (culminating in the chairperson confiscating the CAO's vehicle because the latter used the vehicle after business hours). It may not be conducive for service provision if a baraza exposes to the wider public issues beyond accountability mishaps.

Another hindrance to achieving optimal baraza impacts relates to the fact that **some civil servants may be nearing retirement** and thus have little incentive to hold staff answerable to them accountable

for their shortcomings. For example, a local councilor in the Masindi District mentioned that absenteeism is still a problem in the hospital. Staff obtain additional employment at private health centers and dedicate limited time to their public health center posts. He conjectures that the District Health Officer is about to retire and has no incentive to address the problem.

Some of the issues that are mentioned during the barazas simply fall under the **responsibility of higher levels of government or other institutions** that are beyond the operational jurisdiction of the baraza.

- One official was very critical of OWC, stating that it does more harm than good. He explained that 90 percent of inputs for distribution are centrally produced. OWC advertises what they need and producers apply. If the producer wins, they get a three-year contract to supply OWC the inputs (e.g. seed, heifers, etc.). However, most of the input providers cannot handle the volumes. This results in maize seeds arriving late, off the main planting season; heifers never being delivered; and so on. This was all explained during the barazas and citizens now understand but obviously this did not solve the problem.
- The issue of jurisdiction is also sometimes used in bad faith. During the barazas, it was mentioned that some teachers have been in the same school for more than 15 years. The consensus was that teachers with such experience should be relocated to help build up new schools. Although the CAO has the mandate to relocate teachers, this has not yet happened partly because the CAO insists on first consulting the central body, the education ministry, which often delays decisions.
- The limits of what a baraza at a certain level of government can achieve was also mentioned by the Masindi District CAO. The CAO noted that he has personally forwarded some of the policy-level issues to the center for consideration. He also noted that lower local governments now know that they are there to serve people. He noted, however, that not all issues should be handled by his office since his office may not have the capacity to reach everywhere and do

everything on time. He gave the example that health-related issues or complaints should be handled by Health Unit Management Committees (HUMCs) rather than forwarding them to the CAO, as “At that level, HUMCs have the mandate and powers to resolve some of the issues/complaints” (personal communication).

Problems related to incompatible command hierarchies and incentive structures have been documented also in the government-led yellow-star initiative. This initiative was introduced in 2001 in Uganda as a means to increase quality monitoring within local and district health centers. The study found out that after attaining the yellow star, it was still possible for patients or other community members to report breaches in the standard of services (Berlan and Shiffman 2012). A recent reassessment shows that the yellow star program can make a difference in the behavior of and service provided in the hospitals of Uganda, but multi-faceted underlying issues that deter health care workers from improving their service must be addressed. For example, local authorities had little to no say on hospital staff behavior if they had no responsibility over remuneration. In other words, the reward being offered by the yellow star was not felt at the level of those responsible for the service provision (Baufoff and Oroxom forthcoming).

9. OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE BARAZAS

Drawing on the reflections of participants on the impact pathways, motivations, and hindrances to optimal public service delivery outcomes, we also asked our participants to help us pull together recommendations for future barazas to be held.

One commonality that came through in the responses reflected insufficient and tardy publicity concerning the event. A lesson learned was for barazas to be **announced early enough** for information to be passed from posters, for example, to as many people as possible, especially given that word-of-mouth advertising is a primary vehicle for publicizing information, in part due to the high rates of illiteracy in the area. Furthermore, when barazas are publicized earlier, it allows citizens, especially those traveling from far-away parishes, the opportunity to look for transport to the baraza venue.

Many participants requested greater engagement in simultaneous citizen education. For example, while the Mubende District CAO was supportive of the idea behind the baraza, he stressed that the approach should be changed to fully encompass an integrated **civic education** component. He voiced his frustration that citizens often expect too much from service providers and complain about things that are a citizen's own responsibility. As a service provider, there is only so much one can (and should) do.

Examples include the following:

- Service providers construct boreholes but citizens should still boil water before drinking (instead of complaining that the water from the bore hole makes them sick).
- Service providers can provide farmers with seeds but it is up to the farmer to apply recommended practices to achieve a good harvest.
- Service providers construct wells but it is up to parents to make sure their children do not play on the structure.
- Service providers can build a road but this may not lead to a relevant outcome, as people may not be using it for the intended purpose but to dry their cassava, for example.

For inputs to translate into improved living conditions, citizens also need to be made aware of their own roles and responsibilities. Barazas could thus be improved by **focusing more on how citizens contribute to translating outputs into outcomes**. This was also echoed by a technical staffer who lamented the focus on measurable output indicators: "It is not enough to simply count the number of boreholes put in

place because the boreholes must be used to contribute to its intended outcome: to provide water to citizens in a way that improves health and sanitation among communities” (personal communication).

The Masindi District Town Clerk commented that information gaps sometimes exist because councilors at all levels do not always report back to their constituencies. Along with civic education, the clerk specifically recommended improved **management of expectations** for citizens. For instance, when there is discussion about the construction of a road, citizens may think of a highway, while what is planned is a murrum feeder road. Figures quoted should be put in context for the benefit of the public.

It was also recommended that **other actors need to take up a more active role** in civic education: it has been shown that FM radio stations have been instrumental in effecting change, so the government should facilitate the distribution of information by means of these radio stations to educate citizens about things like the correct processes to pursue change or accountability in their communities. Religious institutions have a role in educating citizens regarding issues affecting their lives that they have not been addressed. The Kingdom and other cultural institutions, for instance, should also be actively involved in development activities.

Citizens that received district-level barazas mentioned that barazas should not stop here but should also drill down to lower (sub-county) levels. The Masindi District CAO contends that **barazas should be organized at the sub-county level as well as the district level**, to get a more complete view of the diversity of government programs and projects. Moreover, it becomes complicated for citizens to trek long distances from their communities to attend barazas at the district headquarters.

The fact that users started to use social media such as WhatsApp to monitor public services suggests that **technological innovations** may play a more prominent role in continuous monitoring in the future. While the mobile technology and ICT revolution has not gone unnoticed in areas such as micro-finance (Suri and Jack 2016) and agricultural extension information provision (Van Campenhout et al. 2017), research on the use of these technologies to improve governance is relatively new. One ongoing study at a more aggregate level produced only mixed results up to now (Grossman et al. 2016).

Other suggestions for improvement included that barazas should not be organized just once, but at least **twice a year**, and that barazas should **avoid technical jargon** to make sure citizens understand what is communicated.

10. CONCLUSIONS

Based on focus group discussions, this paper explores the potential causal pathways that underlie changes in outcomes that may emanate from baraza interventions in Uganda and the behavioral changes of actors. From discussions held with different stakeholders, we examine hindrances to achieving positive outcomes of the baraza and enumerate opportunities for the improvement of future barazas. This analysis will benefit the proper alignment of causal pathways in the forthcoming quantitative impact evaluation. Lessons learned from these assessments will improve the OPM in planning and implementation of future barazas with the ultimate goal of enhancing public service delivery.

We focus on two barazas, one held at the district level and the other at the lower sub-county level. For each baraza, we perform a series of focus group discussions with the 3 main stakeholders (politicians, civil servants and citizens), as well as some additional semi-structured interviews with experts. We inquire about changes that happened since the baraza was held and are likely to have happened because the issue was raised during the baraza. We also ask respondents to reflect on how this change came about and what motivated the agents involved to affect the changes. We also point out some of the factors that may reduce the effectiveness of the barazas and provide some recommendations for improvements.

In general, stakeholders were very positive about barazas. We were able to collect a long list of improvements that were thought to emanate from the baraza. Barazas seem to be especially important to reduce information asymmetries, as government officials learn about the priorities of the citizens, and citizens' often unrealistic expectations are matched up against reality. In addition, the bottom-up approach of the baraza leads to an increase in top-down monitoring, as officials learn from vocal citizens how to scrutinize public services delivered.

Failure to follow up on the issues raised during baraza is a real threat to the baraza model. As a baraza raises awareness about issues and increases expectations, it may backfire if no action ensues. People may become disillusioned and completely lose faith in government and service providers. It is thus important that barazas are held at regular intervals.

Instead of just holding government accountable, barazas can also become a platform to collectively reflect on how inputs can be most effectively translated into outcomes, and what the role of each stakeholder is. Therefore, barazas should not only focus on the responsibilities of politicians and public servants and provide statistics on goods delivered and services rendered. Attention for civic education, where citizens are sensitized about proper use of services and their responsibility in maintaining public infrastructure, are also important to lead to improved outcomes in terms of general well-being.

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