Decentralization of public services to local governments and community participation in the monitoring of the delivery is now regarded as the key to improved public service delivery in developing countries. This paper examines bureaucratic delay within the allocation of small infrastructure projects in Bolivia, and it presents a randomized field experiment designed to improve public service delivery by promoting voice, transparency, and accountability among grassroots organizations. The findings of this paper suggest that monitoring tools designed to promote transparency and access to information by grassroots organizations might play an important role in improving public service delivery outcomes.

1. INTRODUCTION

Decentralization of public services to local governments and community participation in the monitoring of the delivery is now regarded as the key to improved social service provision in developing countries. The idea behind community participation in the monitoring of public service delivery is that community members are the people who ultimately benefit from a successful program and, therefore, they are the ones with better incentives to monitor, and should be given this responsibility (Stiglitz, 2002). The vision of community participation in the monitoring of public services is now indeed one of the cornerstones of the World Bank’s Comprehensive Development Framework (Philip et al., 2001). Despite the enthusiasm for community-level monitoring, however, there are many skeptics of the potential of these types of schemes to improve public service delivery. Bardhan (2002), Gong (2002), and others, for instance, suggest that the use of grassroots participation in monitoring might promote locally based corruption and even facilitate organized crime.

A second related study looks at the collective action problem within the context of the current flagship program of universal primary education in India (Banerjee et al., 2010). This flagship program organizes locally elected leaders and parents of children enrolled in public schools into committees, and gives them power over resource allocation and management of school performance. The experiment looks at alternative interventions aimed at encouraging participation of parents and local leaders on these committees, including provision of information, training of community members, and training and organization of volunteers to hold remedial reading camps for illiterate children. The results of the experiment

**Key words** — Bolivia, transparency, accountability, local-level monitoring, bureaucratic delay

**Summary.** — Decentralization of public services to local governments and community participation in the monitoring of the delivery is now regarded as the key to improved public service delivery in developing countries. This paper examines bureaucratic delay within the allocation of small infrastructure projects in Bolivia, and it presents a randomized field experiment designed to improve public service delivery by promoting voice, transparency, and accountability among grassroots organizations. The findings of this paper suggest that monitoring tools designed to promote transparency and access to information by grassroots organizations might play an important role in improving public service delivery outcomes.

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were overall not encouraging. None of the interventions resulted in a significant impact on community involvement, either on teacher effort or on learning outcomes. The authors suggest, therefore, that although communities care about education and are willing to do something to improve school quality, they face important constraints to participate in the monitoring.

There is also a small experimental literature looking at the effects of increased public access to information as a tool to improve public service delivery. This literature has focused on assessing the extent to which facilitating access to information by users might help reduce capture and misuse of public funds. This literature is more encouraging and provides convincing evidence that higher level of information and accountability might be able to improve public service delivery by limiting opportunities for corruption at the local level. For instance, that community participation might have not resulted in a significant reduction in overall missing expenditures. The monitoring of village infrastructure projects allocations. Second, is to explicitly alter the probability of detecting inefficient administrative practices by public officials within district councils and, therefore, to implicitly increase the expected cost of engaging in such practices among public officials.

A related study presents a randomized experiment looking at the effectiveness of a bottom-up monitoring scheme in reducing missing funds within the provision of village road projects in Indonesia (Olken, 2007). The experiment consisted of encouraging village members (through letters of invitation) to participate in accountability meetings organized regularly by local leaders. This intervention is then contrasted with a top-down monitoring scheme consisting of informing villages ex-ante that they will be subject to an audit visit upon completion of the projects. Although the letters of invitation intervention proved successful at raising community participation in the monitoring of village infrastructure projects, it did not result in a significant reduction in overall missing expenditures. Instead, the top-down monitoring scheme proved quite successful in these settings at curbing local corruption. The author suggests, therefore, that when incentives to monitor are weak such as in the case of infrastructure projects provision, top-down approaches to monitoring may be much more effective.

The previous literature identifies at least three necessary conditions for access to information to translate into improved public service delivery. First, beneficiaries must greatly value the public service in question. It has been suggested, for instance, that community participation might have not worked well to improve education outcomes because its benefits are not tangible for the community. Second, local leaders must have strong incentives to engage in monitoring activities to overcome the collective action problem. De Janvry, Fisman, and Sadoulet (2010), for instance, present evidence that local leaders’ political incentives significantly affect the educational outcomes of decentralized conditional cash transfer program in Brazil. Third, formal mechanisms of voicing complaints and punishing providers must be in place. If information and accountability mechanisms are weak, as is common in many developing countries, beneficiaries will not have incentives to engage in monitoring activities.

This paper examines bureaucratic delay within the allocation of small infrastructure projects by sub-municipal governments in Bolivia, and it presents a randomized field experiment designed to reduce bureaucratic delay by encouraging transparency and accountability among grassroots organizations. Our experiment consists of randomly providing district councils (or sub-municipal governments) with a tracking system, which provides public officials and grassroots organizations real-time information on the processing of small infrastructure projects requests by district councils. The objective of this intervention is twofold. First, is to facilitate the involvement of grassroots organizations in the process of reviewing, tracking, and monitoring small infrastructure projects allocations. Second, is to alter the probability of detecting inefficient administrative practices by public officials within district councils and, therefore, to implicitly increase the expected cost of engaging in such practices among public officials.

In 1994, as part of a global trend, the Bolivian government instituted an ambitious decentralization reform from the
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