**Revision memo 2**

**Manuscript ref:** WD-20315R1

**“The impact of community-based monitoring on public service delivery: A randomized control trial in Uganda”**

*This memo provides a detailed response to the remaining concerns from the editor and one additional reviewer on our manuscript “The impact of community-based monitoring on public service delivery: A randomized control trial in Uganda” (WD-20315R1). Text in* **bold** *is the original text from the editor and reviewer. Our response is in italics. Indented text are parts that were inserted into the manuscript.*

**Reviewer #4: In this paper the author(s) conduct a field experiment to examine the effect of fora called baraza on service delivery outcomes in health, education, agriculture, and infrastructure. Overall, they find little impact of this program on service delivery outcomes.  
  
I can see that this paper is at the R&R stage and has already received a set of detailed comments from two reviewers. I think the authors have done a reasonable job addressing those comments. Nevertheless, I find the paper as it is currently written as difficult to navigate. That is due in large part to the fact that the way the paper is written it sounds like "Barazas did not impact service delivery. Except when you look at a particular level, a particular outcome, or a particular sub-group/heterogeneous effect." But we don't have a framework for thinking about the handful of places where they do find treatment effects so it feels both ad hoc and cherry picked.**

**My own read is that the main punchline is that barazas did not have the intended effects, with a few relatively minor exceptions. I think it would be more helpful to reorient the paper around understanding why that was the case than to delineate all the other places that some treatment effects were observed, especially if these were "exploratory" and not pre-specified.**

**The authors have begun to do this in response to R3's comments, but almost completely absent from the discussion is the political environment in which the barazas operate, the politics of the barazas themselves, how the program might have been received in pro-government and pro-opposition areas, how exactly elections impacted the program, the fact that the OPM has been embroiled in corruption scandals numerous times, etc.**

*Thank you for your suggestion. While most of the exploratory analysis was in fact pre-specified (as these variables are the basis of the indices we use to judge overall and sector level effects), we agree with your takeaway that barazas did not have the intended overall effect, and that we do not always have a good explanation as to why we do find some effects in isolated cases or for certain sub-groups, making the analysis seem ad-hoc at some points. We thus have removed the entire exploratory analysis (including the heterogeneity analyses) and are now clear that barazas did not have the intended effects. Following your suggestions, we now have an entire section that elaborates why this is the case (8. Discussion). We have grouped the potential reasons into three sub-sections. A first sub-section looks at links in the theory of change, partly building on the responses to R3’s comments. We then have a separate subsection discussing the political context in which the program is implemented. Finally, we discuss potential explanations that are related to the heterogeneity of community-based monitoring interventions, complicating the estimation of average treatment effects.*   
  
**Just to give a few examples - 1) there used to be meetings called ebimeeza which allowed people to discuss and raise issues in a public or quasi-public forum. This kind of meeting has been going on for a long time to greater or lesser degrees of institutionalization. The government banned these ebimeeza around the same time that the baraza program was rolled out. While they serve somewhat different functions, barazas should not be thought of as an entirely new institution and people probably have preconceived views about them, especially when they are implemented by the government.**

*Thank you for this interesting piece of history. We would however like to point out that these round tables meetings were differed from barazas in important ways. To the best of our knowledge, ebimeeza were organized by journalists. The structure of discussion was unknown and could change depending on the day's mood. They were, in a way, a representation of what people talked about in bars or in the marketplace. Barazas, on the other hand, are focused on public service delivery and responsible politicians and service providers are mandated to be present at the event.*

*Nevertheless, we agree that barazas are not entirely new and may be controversial if run by government. Therefore, we added the following text to the section “2.1 Nature of the baraza institution” to point out the history as a segway to a more elaborate discussion of the effect of political environment in the discussion (8.2 Political context – more below).*

*“The above shows that barazas have a long history in the region. The attempt of the Government of Uganda to leverage such an important institution to increase its own effectiveness is interesting and may lead to quite different outcomes than other community monitoring interventions. At the same time, community fora organized by the government may crowd out or even replace alternative community fora that are potentially more inclusive and more critical of those in power.[[1]](#footnote-2) In the limiting case, government-run barazas may completely bypass the initial aim of increasing accountability and simply become instruments of propaganda.”*

**2) The authors note that the RDCs office chairs the baraza in each district. The RDC is a political office and RDCs are presidential appointees. This is a curious feature of the program since one might think that this sort of meeting should be a purely bureaucratic affair run by the district CAO. It is a feature that might affect how people view the barazas but also indicative of what their purpose is, perhaps beyond simply improving service delivery.**

*Thank you for this interesting observation. However, to us, it is not immediately clear who should be organizing barazas. For instance, we are not sure that it is ideal that barazas should be initiated by the technical wing as the reviewer suggests. As the direct providers of services, public servants are likely to be most exposed to public scrutiny. Therefore, district CAOs may be reluctant to organize events where their local level counterparts (the subcounty chiefs) will be the primary targets. As client/principal, politicians are responsible for the planning of public services to be delivered, for instructing civil servants to provide the planned services, as well as to check if these service providers delivered on what was planned and agreed to.*

*Some may argue that community monitoring interventions should be organized by the community. Indeed, many civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations organize barazas. Unfortunately, the problem here is that officials may simply not show up, making the community-based monitoring less effective. This is consistent with the finding in Raffler et al that their (NGO initiated) community-based monitoring events seemed to be more effective if there were also government officials in attendance.*

*In light of the above, the fact that the RDC as the highest political office initiates barazas is therefore maybe not that curious, at least in a functioning democracy where politicians are sensitive to the needs of their constituents. At the same time, we agree that the fact that a political office organizes the baraza is potentially problematic in the Ugandan context and that (perceived) associations with the political elite matters for effectiveness. We have therefore added a separate section on the political context in the discussion section (8.2 Political context). This subsection now includes a new heterogeneity analysis related to a sub-county's connection to people in power to explore how the program was received in pro-government and pro-opposition areas.*

**3) A major challenge for the study was that the roll out of the program was severely delayed as well as interrupted by the 2016 elections. However there is no context provided about how the elections affected the program and thus whether there were additional impacts beyond simply slowing down the timeline.**

*During the elections, OPM essentially paused the roll-out of barazas. We do not think that besides slowing down the timeline the elections had an additional effect (as the situation mostly stayed the same before and after elections). However, we cannot be certain and so we indicate in the section on political context that barazas may turn into political rallies when elections are approaching (which was indicated by some focus group participants).*

**All of this is to say that the paper is lacking political context, which seems critical for understanding why the program was implemented, how the program was implemented, how it was perceived by the public and the bureaucracy, and thus the ultimate (lack of) impacts it had.**

*In the Discussion section where we explore some of the potential reasons why barazas do not seem to translate into large overall or sector-wide improvements in public service delivery, we now have a separate section that explores the political context. We added the following text in the manuscript where we discuss the importance of the political context and also provide some suggestive evidence that connections to the ruling elite matters for the effectiveness of barazas:*

*The political environment in which barazas are organized may also affect their effectiveness. Indeed, drawing on a systematic review of more than 90 social accountability interventions, Hickey and King (2016) argue that politics and contexts are critical for success. Raffler et al. (2020) note that citizens can only apply bottom-up pressure on political representatives if they are responsive to electoral pressure and that this condition is often not fulfilled in countries with uncompetitive, semi-democratic political systems.*

*Barazas are organized by the OPM and several officials who belong to this office have appeared in the news in the context of large corruption scandals over the last decade. We also saw in Subsection 2.2 that the meetings are chaired by the RDC's office. RDCs are direct representatives and appointees of the president, and this may affect how the public views barazas. Some may even argue that barazas cannot be characterized as a form of community-based monitoring or any collective bottom-up action at all because they are helicoptered into communities by the OPM and to some extent impose interactions between citizens, politicians, and civil servants. Instead, some groups in society (for example, supporters of the opposition) may not perceive barazas as open fora but as highly politicized events, especially in comparison to the ebimeeza meetings which the government banned when the baraza program was rolled out (see Subsection 2.1). Government officials may abuse the meetings to pursue their own agenda, and indeed, some reports indicate that barazas turned into political rallies, especially when elections were approaching.*

*To explore the importance of the political context and how the program was received in pro-government and pro-opposition areas, we look at treatment heterogeneity related to a sub-county's connection to people in power. The assumption is that a sub-county is more likely to be pro-government if it delivers higher-level politicians, such as ministers, members of parliament, heads of government agencies, RDCs, and other district- or central-level officials. One may expect that in these areas, barazas are more effective, since citizens can use their connections to the center to attract funding to issues raised, and politicians may want to reward their constituents. Figure 5 reports interaction effects between the different interventions and an indicator variable that takes the value of one if a sub-county is well connected to people in power. Based on the indices, we do not find significant interactions. However, coefficients are generally positive, especially for interactions with deliberation and district-level barazas.*

*As a final and more informal note on this, we understand the reviewer’s skepticism about a government run program by an office that has been marred by corruption in a country that has increasingly become autocratic. This skepticism seems widely shared among development partners (NGOs, donors,...), something we learned when we toured various embassies in Uganda to raise additional funds to cover the extra cost of the delayed roll-out.*

*We shared the skepticism to some extent, but also over time learned to appreciate that what happens at higher levels does not always replicate at lower levels. During focus group discussions at various points in time, we spoke with many people at all levels that were genuinely concerned with public service delivery and how to improve them (both politicians and public servants). We also made sure that there was always a research assistant present during barazas to signal irregularities (eg if certain people were excluded or RDCs did not stick to the protocols) but we rarely got reports that barazas were abused for political reasons. Our own experience is that in general, barazas were pretty genuine with heated discussions (eg with citizens breaking down in tears) and officials being put on the spot (with RDCs and higher level government officials often putting their weight behind the cries of the citizens). Civil servants and local politicians to some extent fear the events and RDCs and OPM use their mandate to summon them to the meetings.*

*As is always the case, the truth will probably be somewhere in the middle, with some barazas becoming a platform for excuses for poor service by officials, and others a public trial for a particular corrupt politician. This heterogeneity may be another potential reason why we do not find convincing average treatment effects, as we elaborate in sub-section 8.3.*

**If it is the case that the authors do think that the various exploratory analyses point toward a clear set of conditions under which barazas have the intended effect, then they should make this case much more clearly. To me this feels like a stretch.**

*We agree that the exploratory analysis does not enable us to identify a clear set of conditions under which barazas have an overall effect. As mentioned above, we have changed the tone of the article in line with what the reviewer suggested and focus more on potential reasons why barazas do not have more general effects (instead of claiming barazas work for certain outcomes or subgroups without providing a framework).*

**Minor notes:  
\* Uganda now has 140 districts, so either update in the paper or say that it was 112 at the time of the study**

*Thank you. We added a footnote that reads:*

*“Since the beginning of our study, the number of districts has increased to about 140, primarily by splitting larger districts into smaller ones. We worked with the districts and sub-county boundaries as they were defined at the start of the study.”*

**\* The authors suggest that their finding that there are larger treatment effects in areas with high ethnic fractionalization suggests that the program can help in areas with weak social ties. What are the correlates of high ELF? In my experience these tend to be relatively more urban areas, but in any case it would help to show the correlates of ELF to assess other possible mechanisms linking the two.**

*In the revised version where the focus is more on the overall impact (and on exploring why barazas fail to deliver on overall public service delivery) and less on specific results, the section on impact heterogeneity (of which heterogeneity with respect to ethnic fractionalization was part), has been deleted.*

**Comments from the editor:**

*Most of these issues were addressed in a previous round of revisions, we repeat (and adapt if necessary) responses here:*

**In addition to reviewer comments, I would like you to address three issues in your revisions that we are asking all authors to address to promote consistency across the research papers along a given theme for which World Development is a vehicle. One, this is a subject on which there has been some significant research, reported in interdisciplinary development journals. It would be useful for you to engage with available findings in the interests of engaging with the relevant audience to ensure both that your paper is speaking to the literature and demonstrating its additional contributions clearly. World Development is committed to the principle of fair intellectual acknowledgment without bias or discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity, race, class, professional standing, or other similar attributes. As such, we encourage all our authors to be vigilant in attribution of intellectual debt and citations, attending in particular to acknowledging authors, scholarship, and literatures often overlooked as a result of above biases.**

*In response to requests from reviewers in previous revisions to include more qualitative data to explore potential reasons why we fail to find impact, we added sections where we use a mixed methods approach, which will contribute to making the article even more appealing to a development readership.*

**Two, please provide a set of 3-5 highlights that convey the message and findings of your paper succinctly and clearly to the general reader.**

1. *The Government of Uganda organizes community fora—popularly known as barazas—where citizens receive information from government officials and get the opportunity to challenge them.*
2. *Following a pre-specified confirmatory analysis, we do not find that barazas have significant effects on general public service delivery, though there are signs of improvement in agricultural sector public services.*
3. *We explore potential reasons why barazas do not seem to translate into overall improvements in public services including problems with the theory of change, the political context in which the program was implemented, and methodological challenges.*
4. *More research is needed to identify the conditions and complementary interventions needed to leverage the voices of citizens.*

**Finally, please avoid references to gray literature to the greatest possible extent.**

*We tried as much as possible to avoid the gray literature. However, we still refer to the following unpublished paper as this is a key study for our paper that is currently under review:*

### [*Can citizen pressure be induced to improve public service provision*](https://scholar.google.com/scholar_url?url=http://danielnposner.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/RPP-ACT-Health-220323.pdf&hl=en&sa=T&oi=gsb-ggp&ct=res&cd=0&d=9762133320474264771&ei=iTUiY6SiB8iTywTTs62IBg&scisig=AAGBfm1s-JwRNrdZlnZ_g5LugJSzbrMDzg)

*P Raffler, DN Posner, D Parkerson - Unpublished manuscript, 2020*

*We also refer to a key policy document from OPM*

*OPM. 2013. Implementation of the Baraza Initiative: Progress Report. Technical report*

1. *For instance, in Uganda, there used to be meetings called ebimeeza which allowed people to discuss and raise issues publicly or quasi-publicly. These gatherings have been taking place for a considerable period, varying in terms of the degrees of institutionalization. The Government of Uganda prohibited these ebimeeza meetings around the same time when the baraza program was implemented. We are grateful to an anonymous referee for pointing this out.* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)