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Testing information constraints on India's largest antipoverty program

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Country	India
Organizing Theme	Economic Opportunities and Access to Assets
Status	Completed
Intervention Category	Information Campaign
Sector	Social Protection and Labor
Abstract	Public knowledge about India's ambitious Employment Guarantee Scheme is low in one of India's poorest states, Bihar, where participation is also unusually low. Is the solution simply to tell people their rights? Or does their lack of knowledge reflect deeper problems of poor people's agency and an unresponsive supply side? This paper reports on an information campaign that was designed and implemented in the form of an entertaining movie to inform people of their rights under the scheme. In randomly-assigned villages, the movie brought significant gains in knowledge and more positive perceptions about the impact of the scheme. But objectively measured employment showed no gain on average, suggesting that the movie created a "groupthink," changing social perceptions about the scheme but not individual efficacy in accessing it. The paper concludes that awareness generation needs to go hand-in-hand with supply-side changes.
Gender Connection	Gender Informed Analysis
Gender Outcomes	Knowledge about rights, employment
IE Design	Randomized Control Trial
Intervention	The intervention used a high-quality and entertaining 25 minute fictional movie to inform people of their rights under the National Rural Employment Act. It was shown in 40 out of 150 rural villages in Bihar. At each location, the film was screened twice, followed by a question and answer session and distribution of one-page flyers that pictorially illustrated the main entitlements and processes under the scheme.
Intervention Period	2010
Sample population	150 villages in Bihars. 40 received treatment. In total, 3,000 households and approximately 5,000 individuals were interviewed in both rounds. The balanced panel comprises 2,728 households and 3,749 individuals.
Comparison conditions	Control group did not receive the information campaign.
Unit of analysis	Individual level

Evaluation Period	2009-2010
Results	We find that the information campaign changes knowledge and beliefs about a public program in this setting. The movie significantly enhanced people's performance in tests about their rights and entitlements under the law. Perceptions of local processes related to the scheme also became significantly more positive for those who had access to the movie. However, our results also caution that public awareness and positive perceptions are not sufficient for positive change. Indeed, our field trial indicates little discernible average impact on seeking and obtaining employment when needed. We do find a modest employment gain for illiterate participating individuals, though still far short of their desired employment. Learning one's rights in this setting is not the same thing as being empowered to demand those rights or have them met. The movie did not significantly change aggregate objective outcomes, but appears instead to have created a "groupthink" within the treatment villages—a distortion to widely-held beliefs. Collective perceptions of program efficacy became more positive, but this did not translate into actual efficacy at the individual level.
Primary study limitations	
Funding Source	
Reference(s)	Ravallion, M., van de Walle, D., Dutta, P., & Murgai, R. (2013). Testing information constraints on India's largest antipoverty program. World Bank Policy Research Working Paper No. 6598
Link to Studies	http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2013/09/10/000158349_20130910085032/Rendered/PDF/WPS6598.pdf
Microdata	