

Incentivizing administrative work through social recognition programs and ceremonies increased recordkeeping accuracy by 18% in a program in Ekiti, Nigeria.

Motivating Public Sector Workers in Nigeria

Accounting and auditing tasks can be important bulwarks against corruption – if they are effectively implemented. But many bureaucratic tasks, including resource tracking, are considered minor, repetitive, and trivial by politicians and employees alike. Providing appropriate financial or social incentives to workers is crucial in Nigeria, where 38% of public sector projects never start, and only 31% finish.

The Project

As part of a larger World Bank-sponsored Public Expenditure Tracking Survey (PETS), which recorded information on resource flows in real time, we tested two behavioral incentives – social recognition and lottery tickets. They were designed to improve record keeping related to the uses and sources of funds in 140 randomly-selected health facilities in Ekiti and Niger states.

In the social recognition experiment, carried out over an eight-week period, an enumerator scored workers on how well a cash book had been filled out. The scores were converted to stars and displayed for visitors to see. In addition, the accounting staff of the best performing facility were honored by the Secretary of Health and had a photograph taken with the official in a special ceremony.

In the lottery experiment, each star was converted into a lottery ticket that would be drawn at the end of a four-week period. This incentive took advantage of the human tendency to overestimate the likelihood of small, favorable probabilities.

Effective bureaucracies are crucial for economic growth and poverty reduction.



The Results



Social incentives can work, but the context is crucial.

Social recognition motivated individual bureaucrats to perform 13pp better in Ekiti (equivalent to an 18% increase), but made no difference in Niger. The lottery incentive showed no impact in Niger while it was inconclusive in Ekiti.

The experiment suggests that the same incentives can produce different results in different localities, even when the implementing agency is the same. In both states, the health service interventions were led and driven by a single federal ministry of health organized under the same bureaucracy and the same general incentive structure.

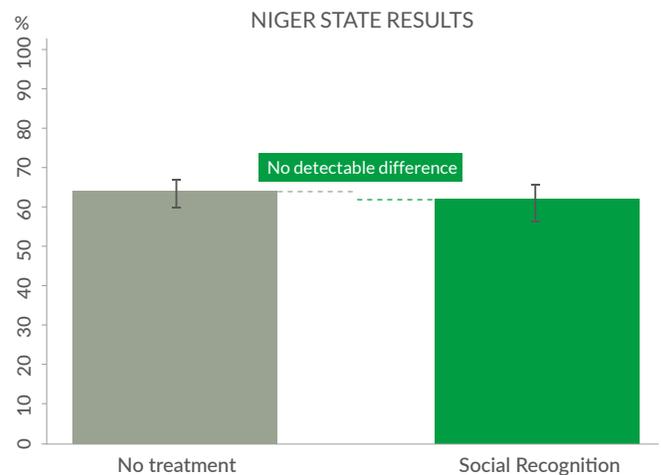
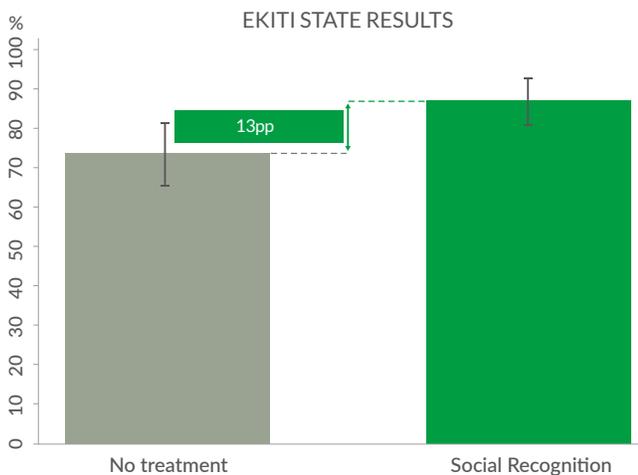


The impact of social incentives may depend on human capital.

Ekiti outperforms Niger in several social indicators, including the quality of vital statistics, live births attended by skilled personnel, adult literacy, and immunization rates. Health personnel are also better educated. The different results between the states may mean that the social recognition incentive requires higher levels of training and organization by health officials in order to be effective.

SOCIAL RECOGNITION EFFECTS

Score on cash book form





Policy Implications

As eMBeD's research shows, policy makers can look to behavioral science for potential policy improvements that seem intractable but essential, including improving essential bureaucratic inputs. Social incentives can motivate public officials to complete low-profile, low-salience tasks, such as bookkeeping. But they do not work in every circumstance. Testing and adaption are required to see where they work and to tailor the social incentives to the economic and social environment.

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About eMBeD

The Mind, Behavior, and Development Unit (eMBeD), the World Bank's behavioral science team in the Poverty and Equity Global Practice, works closely with project teams, governments, and other partners to diagnose, design, and evaluate behaviorally informed interventions. By collaborating with a worldwide network of scientists and practitioners, the eMBeD team provides answers to important economic and social questions, and contributes to the global effort to eliminate poverty and enhance equity.



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