

Leader Networks and Targeting: A randomized controlled trial testing the effectiveness of local religious and Governmental leaders*

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Abstract

Households in developing countries rely on both religious and secular networks for informal access to jobs, insurance, information, and a variety of other services, but there is little evidence on the relative effectiveness of religious versus secular organizations in providing public services in developing countries. We randomly varied the local promoter of water treatment tablets assigned by an NGO program in 193 villages in Western Uganda in order to test the effectiveness of religious versus secular leaders in encouraging take up of water treatment tablets within their villages. We find that secular LC1 leaders were most effective at increasing the purchase of water-purifying tablets. Protestant and Muslim leaders did increase the take up of the tablets, but there was no increase in use of the tablets in villages randomly assigned to have the intervention lead by Catholic leaders. We develop a simple theoretical model which shows that leaders focusing on poorer populations may end up with lower overall take-up rates for a given effort level and project budget. We investigate several mechanisms through which the impacts of the leaders differ including effort level, marketing ability, monetary incentives, and targeting.

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