RECRUIT, TRAIN, AND MOTIVATE: IMPROVING THE PERFORMANCE AND RETENTION OF HEALTH WORKERS IN ZAMBIA

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IN BRIEF

» Incentives in the selection of public service delivery workers are essential to improving their motivation

» Researchers used field experiments with Community Health Assistants in Zambia to evaluate different recruitment strategies

» Compared to social incentives, career incentives attract more productive applicants

» The Ministry of Health has decided to further scale-up the CHA programme and has requested follow-up work by the IGC with the aim of gathering further support for the programme

Governments are the primary provider of services for the poor in developing countries. Yet, low productivity among government employees is a significant problem. The Government of Zambia approached the IGC about assisting them with the evaluation of their new National Community Health Assistant (CHA) programme.

This project addressed growth policy challenges faced by Zambia and other developing countries by providing direct guidance to the Government of Zambia as it aims to recruit, train, motivate, and retain an at scale target of 5,000 new Community Health Assistants . The study aimed to provide policy guidance on how, in the face of severe human resource constraints, governments can best manage their human resources and deliver basic services by adjusting two key human resource levers: recruitment and incentives.

The project's findings allay the concern that career benefits may lead to adverse selection by attracting those who are not intrinsically motivated. More importantly, large and robust selection effects were observed on job performance. After 18 months of deployment, CHAs recruited with career incentives conduct 29% more household visits (their primary job task), organise twice as many community meetings, and see an equal number of patients at the health facility, with no differences in retention.

This project has influenced government recruitment policies for subsequent cohorts of the CHA as the government seeks to reach the at scale target of 5,000 CHA's.

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