Does Information Lead to More Active Citizenship? Lessons and New Directions

Evan S. Lieberman

Princeton

Daniel N. Posner

UCLA

Lily L. Tsai

MIT

Twaweza Evaluators Meeting
3-4 Oct 2013

Motivations, and Research Design of Initial Study

- Goals
  - Test whether providing citizens with information about their children's learning outcomes through assessment, combined with battery of materials about how to act, generates activism on behalf of improved learning (first piece of broader Uwezo intervention)
  - Identify channels / mechanism

- Research design (post-treatment matched village)
  - Emphasis on depth over breadth
  - Two districts: Kirinyaga and Rongo
  - Within each district, six non-contiguous villages selected at random from among the 30 that had received assessments ("treated villages")
  - Six additional villages in each district, each matched to a treated village on basis of population size, electoral constituency, educational attainment, access to radio and mobile phone ("control villages")
  - Total sample of 550 households

Average Treatment Effects: Citizen Actions
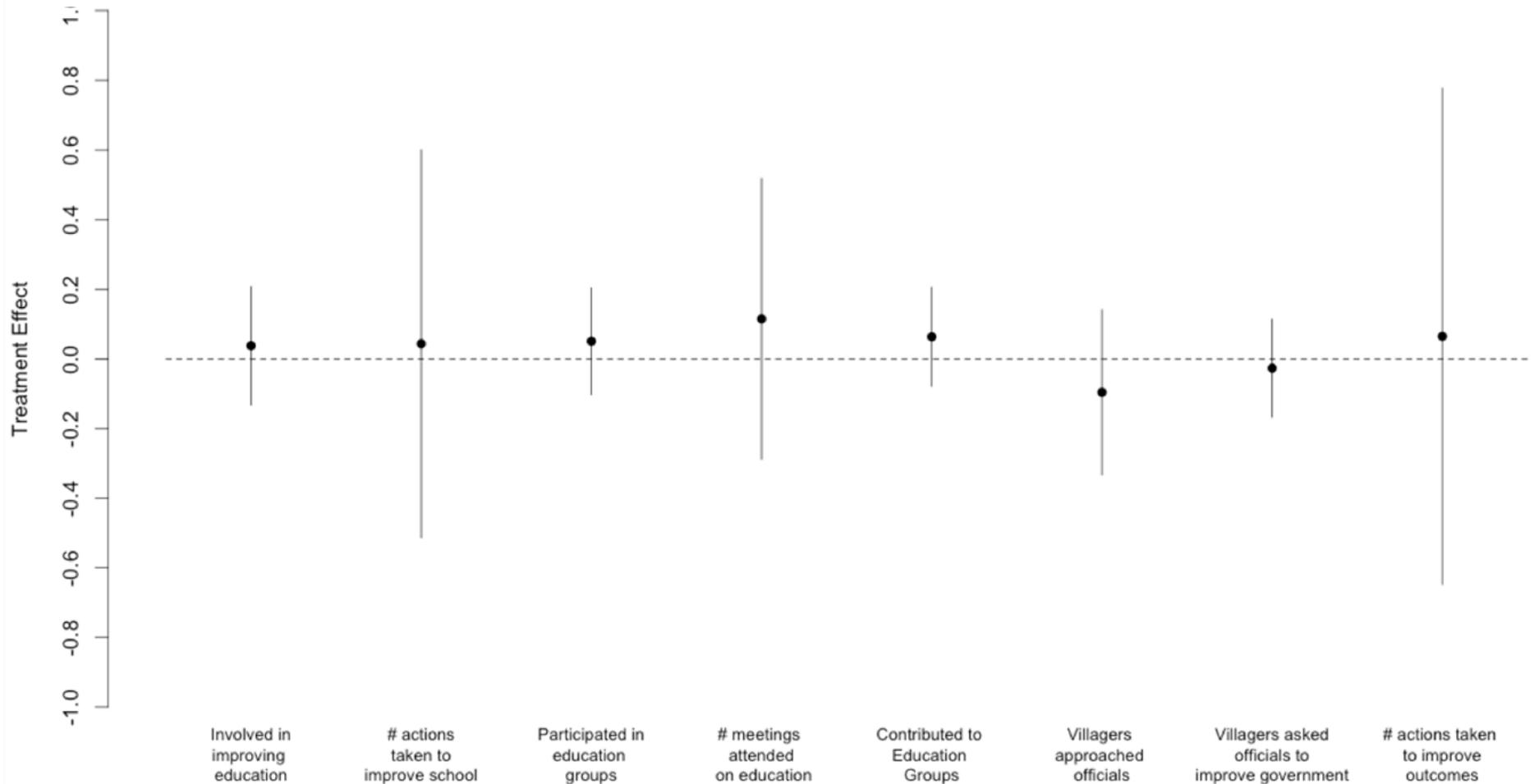
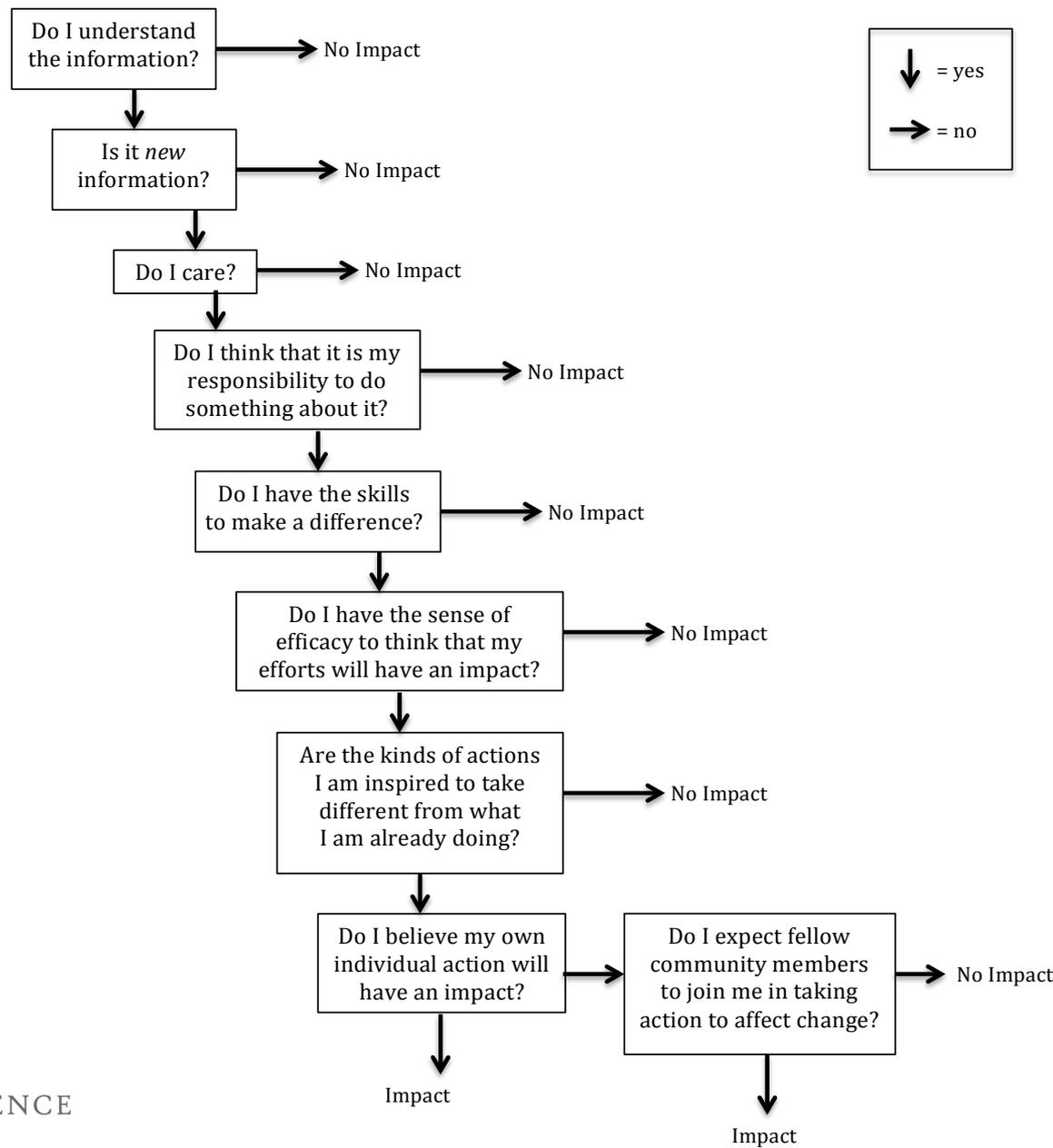# Average Treatment Effects: Private Actions
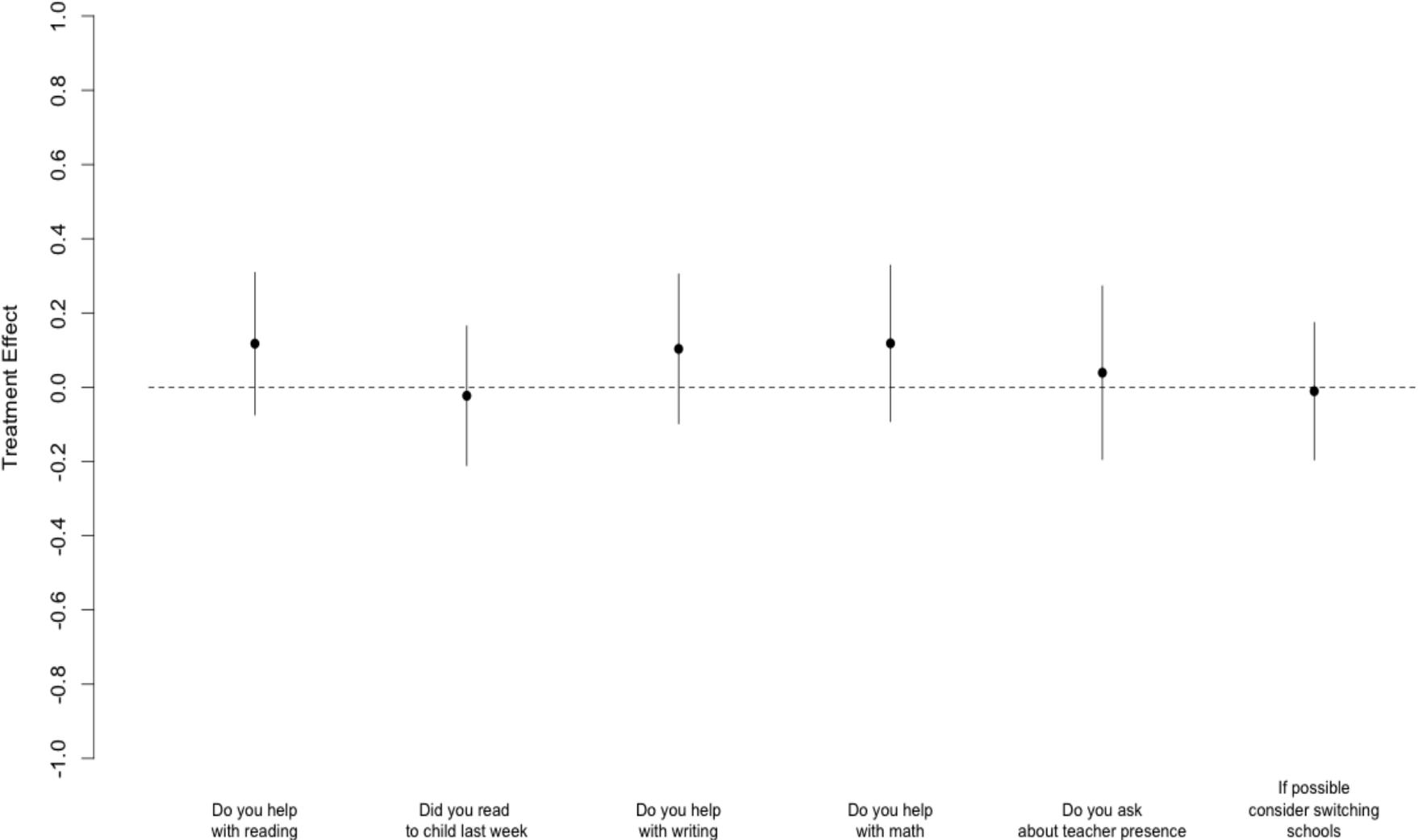
Additional Confirmatory Evidence

- Focus groups and repeated visits to our 26 study villages

- Preliminary analysis of Tanzania baseline data

- Moreover, nothing we have learned in subsequent phases of our work in 2012-2013 has given us reason to rethink these null results.
  - Investigation of Uwezo-identified "success stories" in summer 2012
  - Findings during piloting of new research in summer 2013

What Have We Learned?

- About generating citizen action
  - There are lots of prerequisites to behavioral change

The Information-Citizen Action Causal Chain

Do I understand the information? → No Impact

Is it *new* information? → No Impact

Do I care? → No Impact

Do I think that it is my responsibility to do something about it? → No Impact

Do I have the skills to make a difference? → No Impact

Do I have the sense of efficacy to think that my efforts will have an impact? → No Impact

Are the kinds of actions I am inspired to take different from what I am already doing? → No Impact

Do I believe my own individual action will have an impact? → Impact

Do I expect fellow community members to join me in taking action to affect change? → No Impact

→ Impact

↓ = yes

→ = no

MIT POLITICAL SCIENCE

What Have We Learned?

- About generating citizen action
  - There are lots of prerequisites to behavioral change
  - The usefulness of ICTs for generating citizen action is likely oversold
  - Uwezo's focus on "being everywhere" has compromised success (scalability ≠ rolling out at scale)
- About information
  - For it to have an impact, information must be
    - from a trusted source
    - "cool"
    - repeated
  - Does not travel as much as assumed
  - Information asymmetry less than assumed
  - Most informational interventions provide "bad news"
- About education
  - Few levers for citizens to effect change, even if motivated to try
  - Most action about education is *private* action (including exit)
  - Low salience/relative prioritization of education
  - Inputs/money do matter

Next Steps: Good News, Bad News?

- Two stylized facts
  - In a context where service delivery is poor by international standards and by the standards of local aspirations, informational campaigns deliver *bad* news
  - Most Kenyan citizens are cynical/have low efficacy
- Hence informational campaigns, including Uwezo's, may reinforce cynicism/low sense of efficacy
- Good news, on the other hand, may reduce cynicism and increase efficacy
- We seek to develop a design that will randomize the valence on the information to test these hypotheses

- We are also developing a separate design that involves directly increasing citizens' (external) efficacy