Fingerprinting in Malawi: The Challenges of Scaling Up a Complicated Technological Solution in a Resource-Constrained Setting

Convincing lending institutions to provide credit to the poor can be a challenge given that poorer clients often have limited to no credit histories and are therefore deemed high risk. A pilot study in Malawi showed that using fingerprints as unique IDs to track credit histories...
increased repayment behavior of microfinance borrowers, holding promise as a way to help more poor borrowers access credit. With support from USAID’s Development Impact Ventures, researchers collaborated with lenders and a centralized credit data repository in Malawi to evaluate the impact of this approach prior to its transition to scale. The implementation of the scale-up faced many challenges and researchers saw relatively low adoption of fingerprint identification by local microfinance institutions. These results highlight the challenge of scaling up a complicated technology in a resource-constrained setting, and the broader importance of evaluating interventions beyond the pilot scale before expanding them to reach larger populations.

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