

Every Voice Counts

Case study: Community Score Card Approach in Rwanda

INTRODUCTION

The Community Score Card (CSC) Approach is a participatory process that engages service users (citizens), service providers and authorities (duty bearers) in assessing the quality and effectiveness of public servicesⁱ (such as education, health, water/sanitation, agriculture, market development, and securityⁱⁱ). This culminates in a joint action plan for improving that service, monitored by the community. Cycles of the model are repeated to detect changes in the quality of the basic service delivery. Interface meetings between service providers, authorities and the community allow for immediate feedback, rendering the CSC a strong instrument for the empowerment of citizens, strengthening accountability and transparency of local government.

WHAT WAS THE SITUATION IN RWANDA BEFORE THE COMMUNITY SCORE CARD WAS INTRODUCED?

As part of the Every Voice Counts (EVC) programme the Community Score Card was introduced in 2 districts in Rwanda to score Gender based Violence health and protection services. In the communities that the CSC was introduced in, people were not aware of the ways to deal with Gender Based Violence. There were many cases of domestic violence on community level and the cases were not reported, as they were considered part of the culture. Next to the lack of awareness on GBV as such, the main issues raised by the citizens are: lack of privacy for GBV victims at health facilities, lack of qualified staff to receive and care GBV victims, insecurity to GBV victims (as perpetrators are not always punished), delays in handling community GBV cases by different local organs, lack of ambulances to transfer victims to the hospital, community dissatisfaction related to the execution of court decisions, high court fees that limit GBV victims to access legal services, charging GBV victims for health services (while those services should be free according to the law).

CARE learned that increasing citizens' voice and accountability will not necessarily lead to better service delivery outcomes, unless *spaces of dialogue and negotiation* exist, bringing together duty bearers and rights holders in a non-confrontational dialogue to evaluate gaps in basic service delivery, and find solutions. Practice has shown that where service delivery improvements are realized, it is because communities, service providers, local authorities and others work together to collectively solve service delivery problemsⁱⁱⁱ.

THE PROCESS

In the EVC programme, a 6 month CSC dialogue cycle was implemented. During the CSC process different community meetings were organized. The first one was about the purpose of CSC, types of GBV and victims entitlements related to the services. Consequently the CSC facilitators were elected by their peers. The second meeting with community members was aimed at choosing the service/domain, defining the issues and indicators (and scoring them). The third meeting was the interface meeting where the local leaders met with the community and discussed the issues. An action plan was elaborated at the end of the meeting. The changes that are a result of the interface meetings are monitored continuously and communicated to the citizens during the assembly meetings that take place on a monthly basis (or whenever needed). Also, the results will be compiled and used to facilitate dialogue sessions, to advocate for the issues that cannot be addressed by local entities (cell and sector).

So far, CARE Rwanda in partnership with Pro-Femmes have organized and facilitated 15 Community Score Card (CSC) meetings with 3,750 persons (1, 800 men and 1,950 women) in Kamonyi and Muhanga districts and 7 interface meetings with 6,768 people including public authorities and service providers.

WHAT MAKES IT UNIQUE?

Since the Community Scorecard approach specifically addresses topics such as transparency and accountability in a very sensitive and constructive way, it is specifically appropriate in a context like Rwanda, where there is a lot of distrust between citizens and state. In these contexts one runs the risk that a discussion about governance related issues easily becomes politicized or turns into a game of blaming and defending. This approach however is not meant to name and shame poor performance of authorities. Rather, it is an evidence-based process that seeks to identify key factors that inhibit the capacity of authorities to provide quality services to their users so that appropriate remedial actions are taken to improve performance. It leads to a concrete and specific discussion that is not directed at the local authority, but at the service provided. Next to that, it is not a standalone event and therefore is the start of a trajectory that gives the local authority the chance to make improvements. The initial assessment is followed up by an action plan to improve the service. At the end of the action-plan period, the community scorecard process is repeated against the same indicators. Increase of scores will lead to increased trust in and confidence of authorities. The project will provide outreach and capacity building activities aimed at increasing the effectiveness of authorities in providing the service.

At the same time, by including an interface meeting between service providers and the community that allows for immediate feedback, the process is also a strong instrument for **empowerment**. It raises awareness on citizen's possible roles and their right to being taken into account. In Rwanda, the hierarchical culture inhibits people from posing critical questions to their superior or to the elderly. In this context meaningful participation and **accountability** are therefore rare. The Community Scorecard is a way of addressing these issues, giving citizens the instrument to hold their leaders to account, while giving these leaders a platform to explain themselves, while also using the active contribution of citizens to improve services.

THE CHANGE

The CSC has proven to be a powerful tool to improve local governance and service delivery, even in fragile contexts. Key benefits include enhancing citizen's awareness of their rights, fostering dialogue, facilitating a common understanding of potential solutions to problems, helping to raise the quality of services, and promoting accountability and transparency.

In the EVC programme the following results were highlighted by the people involved:

Relationship building: The community score card builds relationships between people and their leaders/service providers. It is considered a bridge between the community and the authorities, from which solutions to everyday problems flow.

“The relationship is improved between various structures. CSC facilitators are serving as a link between local authorities with citizens.” (Angelique Dusenge - Pro-femmes)

“CSC is like a chain (urunana) that unites community with local authorities.” (Jeanne d’Arc Umuhoza – Farmer)

Openness: There is an increase of openness in reporting GBV cases. For example: there was a case of an alleged rape of a girl with a hearing disability. It was reported to her relatives and they also reported it to local authorities, who began to follow the case up, but unfortunately the perpetrators escaped from the area. This shows how people are becoming aware as a result of the CSC process and how they are concerned by the security of GBV victims.

Participation: The CSC is also seen as a tool that increases the participation of excluded groups, such as women. *“They realize that their voice can contribute to the governance of their village by participating in decision making processes for positive change at their level.” - Sylvestre Misigaro, Farmer and member of village committee.*

Not only has women participation increased during the CSC process, but the number of women that attend is currently higher than of men.

THE ROLE OF CARE AND PRO-FEMMES

CARE provides technical assistance to Pro-Femmes to implement the CSC, which includes the training of Pro-Femmes staff and members on the CSC, training of grassroots women facilitators on CSC, quality control and MEL through knowledge management. Pro-Femmes is in charge of the implementation of the CSC, which includes introducing the CSC to the citizens and to the local leaders, organizing citizens meetings and service providers to score and also organizing the interface meeting. It is also responsible to backstop the grassroots women CSC facilitators during the implementation and follow up of the agreed action plans.

HOW SUSTAINABLE IS THE PROCESS?

Local authorities and service providers have made commitments in the form of time, fuel and communication in response to the problems raised by community members. Although in most cases no specific budget has been allocated to the action plans that have been formulated, the authorities are initiating community awareness raising processes via different forums (community assemblies and Umugoroba w’ababyeyi). CSC facilitators and Local authorities are initiating security meetings, during which GBV issues are discussed. In Muhanga district (sector Nyarusange) they have also made more of an effort to visit quarrelling households as well as health facilities to follow up on the lack of access to health services by GBV victims, as sometimes they are charged for the services, while they are supposed to be free.

In collaboration with the National Women's Council, the Executive Secretary of Nyarusange sector has also taken the initiative of creating a space for dialogue for households that have problems. The initiative is called "a school for quarreling households" which takes place at the sector office every 3rd Friday of the month at 9:00 am. This has created a significant space for interaction and has increased the participation of women in decision-making processes. The training is geared towards couples who have domestic issues and wish to learn more about communication skills and reconciliation. The sector authorities cover the costs of the training.

WHY IS THE CSC IMPORTANT FOR THOSE INVOLVED?

Individuals involved in the process emphasized the practicality and thoroughness of the process, which helped them reflect, analyze and systematically find solutions to problems.

"CSC is like a calendar to someone. It is a guideline showing where you come from and where you go. Other dialogues are not shaped to help communities to deeply analyze their problems, they simply pass over the issue, but CSC is a journey from one step to another." – Sylvestre Misigaro, Farmer and member of Village Committee

"It helped me understand the importance of good communication and collaboration. I realized how important it is that two parties sit together, identify issues and come up with concrete solutions and an action plan. It gives an opportunity to share feedback and on to reflect on how one perceives things. This helps in avoiding conflicts and accelerates the process of reaching goals (objectives)." - Andre Murigande, EVC Project Officer

Interviews with grassroots women from Muhanga and Kamonyi districts validated the benefits of using CSC in addressing GBV: community members are becoming more vocal and confident - GBV is now discussed as a public issue and community members are offering help to GBV victims. There is active participation and interaction between service providers, authorities (e.g. National Women Council) and community which resulted in improved scores (e.g. granting of safe rooms in district police stations; provision of ambulance services in villages; increased awareness on the different services available for GBV victims).

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES?

Challenges that have to be dealt with have to do with the limited time that people have available to participate in such processes, as well as their limited willingness on behalf of some of the elders to participate due to a lack of ownership of the process. These elders unfortunately claim that there is no gender based violence.

Community facilitators have expressed that community members have very high expectations of them. People have the tendency to raise personal issues at the plenary sessions during the interface meeting. They expect that their issues will be solved immediately, because the authorities are present. But it is important to always link personal issues to the general action plan during the interface meeting. Hence, facilitation is very important. If not done well, the meeting can become a venue for complaining and exchanging accusations back and forth which can be time-consuming

Service providers on the other hand have too many expectations of NGOs. They expect CARE or ProFemmes to address the needs of victims. They expect CARE to do a training on the law, and/or provide livelihoods services. Sensitization and awareness raising takes a lot of time during the interface meetings. When addressing the community, public officials always refer to the laws, however the disconnect between the law and their role in implementing the law is not always addressed.

The follow-up of the action plans is also a challenge. If action plans include something that is beyond the capacity or reach of the service provider it could be because of (lack) of budget and/or the responsibilities might go beyond the mandate of that specific service provider.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO INCREASE THE IMPACT OF THE CSC:

CARE and Pro femmes were advised to keep the momentum, keep providing technical support and roll out the CSC process in more locations as well as in different sectors. It was also recommended that more funds are allocated to the follow up of the action plans and especially with regards to the socio-economic rehabilitation of GBV victims, as this regularly comes from discussions with the community and local authorities. It was also suggested that safe spaces should be created for GBV victims to talk about their personal experiences.

For effective interface meetings, there is a need to invest in the training and coaching of (community) facilitators. Facilitation of the participation of hard to reach groups (who live far away, who can't travel due to age, physical disabilities) also needs to be incorporated during the preparatory phase of the CSC process. One recommendation is to hold separate meetings with vulnerable groups as part of phase 1 and/or before the interface meeting, to ensure their voices are also heard. Equally important is to invest in awareness raising on inclusive governance among community representatives before the CSC is introduced or as part of phase 1 of the CSC to ensure that those who score on the services are aware of their entitlements and rights.

CSC facilitators and service providers should have a preparatory meeting to explain the "action planning" objective of the interface meeting and agree beforehand on the content of the action plan and on how the service providers should present it.. CARE/Profemme need to support/coach them to make their follow-up actions more concrete and make this the focus of their speeches during the interface meetings.

ⁱ CARE Peacebuilding toolbox. A collection of inspirational Peacebuilding approaches from around the world (2013).

ⁱⁱ In the Peace Under Construction programme (Burundi) CARE and partners apply the CSC for gathering evidence on security at community level, using this evidence for CSO advocacy for improving security at community level.

ⁱⁱⁱ Wild & Harris D., The political economy of community CSCs in Malawi, 2011 (p.33)
<http://www.odi.org.uk/resources/docs/7543.pdf> (2011, p. 33).