



BLOG: Every Voice Counts

Speak up and be heard: this is what CARE wants to achieve through the Every Voice Counts program. Program staff Lori Cajegas, Jojanneke Spoor and Lenneke Kono Tange share their experiences during a field visit in Rwanda where they witnessed the interface meetings between the communities and public authorities to address issues related to Gender Based Violence through the community score card process.



Photo: Women in the Muhanga district in Rwanda who participated in the CSC meeting (Photo credit: Lori Cajegas)

In 2016 CARE started the program *Every Voice Counts (EVC)*. Lenneke Kono-Tange, program officer at CARE Nederland for Rwanda, describes “it is an interesting program because it focuses on inclusive governance, which is a way to address the root causes of injustice, poverty and non-functional systems”. The program works with communities in 6 conflict and post-conflict countries, Burundi, Somalia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sudan and Rwanda, to ensure that communities, especially women and youth, actively engage in decision-making that affect their lives. By linking communities to service providers and decision-makers, the communities can voice their needs, they can demand to improve services and ask for more accountability from public authorities and service providers.

The program works through the [Community Score Card \(CSC\)](#) approach, encouraging feedback and input from communities, as well as from service providers. This feedback and input is then channeled into meetings between different actors. Jojanneke Spoor, CARE program officer in Burundi reflects; “Community members voice their opinions in these meetings, which is good to see as usually they are more hesitant to criticize”. Those meetings will then result in a joint action plan to benefit everyone involved.

Using spaces for dialogue

CARE’s *Every Voice Counts (EVC)*-team from Afghanistan, Burundi, and Pakistan visited one of the program countries, Rwanda. At a three-day [event](#) which included a field visit, where relevant authorities, community members and EVC programme staff and partners of CARE were present, they had the opportunity to engage with the communities, share learnings and experiences to improve and successfully continue *Every Voice Counts*.

Arriving in Rwanda, the CARE programme team and key civil society partners were welcomed by an overwhelming crowd of people, eager to participate in dialogue with one another to address Gender Based Violence (GBV). Lori Cajegas, the EVC program coordinator of CARE Nederland, remembers taking a glance around and upon seeing a number of police officers in uniform, she remarked “in most politically unstable countries, it is unimaginable to see police officers who are

About the Every Voice Counts program

Countries:
Afghanistan, Pakistan, Burundi, Somalia, Sudan, Rwanda

Theme:
Inclusive Governance in Fragile Settings

Target groups:
Women and youth

Duration:
2016 – 2020

Donor:
Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs



engage in any social accountability process. Compared to other EVC countries, Rwanda shows a strong spirit of openness and collaboration between the community and public authorities. Such differences in EVC countries illustrate the complexity of the EVC program and the importance of considering local context in furthering inclusive governance.

A woman representing the District Office in Muhangga pointed out that Community Score Cards help cut the feedback loop. Before it would have taken so much time before the people at the district offices knew what is going on in the communities and with the *score card process* they could just get the feedback face to face". Spoor explains her experience during a meeting: In the presence of the district mayor, a young woman reported that her 3 years-old daughter was raped, but the rapist had run away and had not yet been prosecuted. Without hesitation, the mayor called for action to immediately find and prosecute the man. "*What we try to do is minimize the risks and ensure there is justice for the victims*", Jojanneke Spoor says. Indeed, apart from joint action planning, spaces like the CSC meetings can also be an opportunity for young women to speak up, and take advantage of the presence of decision makers, which often does not happen in most hard-to-reach communities.

The Every Voice Counts Programme, through the *Community Score Card*, has shown significant results in bringing communities closer to service providers and public authorities and vice versa. Not only did it facilitate dialogue but overall mind-sets are changing around issues concerning the communities. In Rwanda, the CSC process helped in making a private issue like GBV being publicly discussed and criminalized.

Let's talk more

Despite the achieved changes in inclusiveness and social accountability, often times positive change is still limited to receiving tangible products and services. Although services also play an important role in supporting communities and improving livelihoods, Lori Cajegas draws on a story a police officer told during the interface meeting: "*they arrested a man for domestic violence and the next day the wife is at the cell begging the police to release the man because her children are hungry and she has no income to feed the children herself*". To ensure that the CARE program supports the communities in achieving deeply rooted change, Cajegas emphasizes that "*to achieve transformational change you have to support the empowerment of people for them to exercise their rights as citizens, so that they speak up and demand to the government that they address the underlying issues which cause repeated incidences of GVB, in the case of Rwanda*". Kono-Tange further explains "*EVC is not a hardware program where you build something or you construct something like school buildings, but you really work on shifting mind-sets, attitudes and behavioral change, in order to achieve structural changes towards more inclusive governance. If you don't address the underlying causes of exclusion and increase the responsiveness of public authorities you won't achieve stability and peace*".

Although Rwanda is considered advanced in adopting the CSC approach, the EVC team in the country commits to make the CSC even more inclusive by also targeting young women and men in the communities. This is also reflected in the case of Burundi "*Sometimes people don't want to participate*", Jojanneke Spoor says "*The challenges might be that the meetings are very far from their house, so they would have to stop working in the land and walk by foot for long distances. That's why it is so great to see women and young people speak up in front of an audience with government representatives and that they are able to be critical. Especially in those contexts where there is so much restrictions to speak up. I come back from those meetings, motivated to continue this type of work because they are capable of creating change. We don't have to do it for them, we just have to make sure they are able to do it*". This highlights that the program in all 6 countries still needs sustained support to ensure that now and in the long run indeed **Every Voice Counts**.