

Knowledge Network
Dutch Consortium for Rehabilitation
Research Brief #1

Local Governance:
citizen
participation,
accountability and
inclusion of the
poorest
Lessons learned in Burundi

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May-August 2012

This research brief is about ways in which the DCR programme in Burundi could better influence three areas of local governance; citizen participation, accountability of decision makers and equity in terms of the inclusion of the poorest in governance. The research was carried out by Clare Cummings in three Districts in the province of Gitega (Makebuko, Gitega and Bukirasazi) in the period May-August 2012. The member organisations in these Districts are CARE and HNTPO. The focus was on two research questions:

1. How do the DCR projects increase the accountability to communities of local service decision-makers?
2. How do the community organisations and structures which are supported by the DCR projects strengthen the voice of the poorest in local governance?

Lesson 1:

The need to increase knowledge around responsibilities and accountability

The concept of accountability is not well understood and citizens talk more about their responsibility to carry out the authorities' orders than the authorities' responsibilities to citizens. The majority of citizens interviewed were hesitant to pose questions to the authorities due to their lack of knowledge, their low expectations of the authorities' response or their unwillingness to confront unequal social relations to make themselves heard.

Lesson 2:

The need to create more space for community organisations to engage with local service decision-makers and hold them responsible

There are very few mechanisms for participation or accountability. The only spaces for citizen participation in governance are the village public meetings and elections where citizens can express their views to the village leaders but these meetings do not provide access to planning or decision-making. In general, the accountability mechanisms go upwards towards higher authorities, instead of downwards from authorities to citizens. The only form of downwards accountability is the transmission of information from the District to the villages via the village leaders during village meetings. If the committees would be institutionalised, the mechanisms for participation and accountability created by the projects would become part of the formal structures of governance. To achieve this, the DCR could organise regular meetings in which representatives from the committees and the District administration could exchange ideas and information about public plans and decisions. If the administration sees that such an exchange motivates citizens to engage more in village development activities, the administration may continue to work closely with the committees without NGO intervention.

Recommendations to increase the accountability of local authorities:

- Focus more on the capacity of citizens to access the commune administration and hold the decision-makers responsible;
- Lobby for more financial decentralisation so that local government is more able to meet citizens' needs;
- Organise regular meetings in which representatives from the committees and the commune administration could exchange ideas and information about public plans and decisions.

Lesson 3:

The need to ensure that action plans developed with the Scorecard methodology are carried out

The Scorecard improves local governance because it creates a neutral space in which citizens can express themselves freely and meet the people responsible for water provision. The officials who were interviewed commented that they had learnt the importance of listening to citizens and including them in the planning process. However, the space created is temporary and after the process, the majority of citizens interviewed were still hesitant to follow up the actions of the authorities even though they now knew who to address. Although the Scorecard strengthens the voice of communities in general, information about the process is not clearly communicated to the other community members so it is only the scorecard participants who gain new knowledge through the process.

Lesson 4:

The need to involve Water Source Committees in decision-making and planning

The Water Source Committees represent a new space for citizen participation in governance. The Committees work with the District governing body for water (RCE) to ensure the provision of clean water. The Committees also increase communication between citizens and the RCE because if there is a problem with a water source, the Committee reports it to the RCE. However, the Committees do not have access to decision-making or planning which may reinforce the idea of citizen participation as physical labour.

Recommendations in relation to the Scorecard:

- Ensure that the action plan is clearly explained to all the inhabitants of the villages involved;
- Work more closely with the authorities to motivate them to carry out the action plan;
- Encourage the citizens who participated in the process to contact the authorities involved and hold them responsible for fulfilling their part of the action plan;
- Ensure the clear communication of the action plan to all the inhabitants so that they understand the decisions taken and who is responsible for which actions

Recommendations in relation to the Water Source Committees:

- Make the role of Water Source Committees more significant by means of supervisory activities by the commune water governor;
- Create a management committee composed of representatives from the Water Source Committees who could work with the water governor to formulate plans and supervise the expenditure of funds.

Lesson 5:

The need to increase the skills of Health Committees

The Health Committees function as a mechanism for downwards accountability because they supervise the quality of health care in the health centres and the health centre managers must have the committee's authorisation before spending the centre's funds. Furthermore, the Committees participate in planning meetings and pass comments about the health centre from the community to the health centre staff. According to interviews with health centre managers, the staff appreciate these comments because they help them to know how they can better satisfy their patients and consequently receive a bonus. However, according to interviews with Health Committee members, the members lack knowledge and skills related to accountancy, management and the PBF system which limits their ability to supervise the management of health centres effectively. The role of the Health Committees does enable patients' voices to influence the management of the health centre, even if this isn't specifically the voice of the poorest.

Lesson 6:

The need to increase the influence of Peace Clubs over the delivery of public services

The Peace Clubs are successful in increasing their members' confidence to address local elected leaders. It seems that Peace Club members gain the respect of their community and elected leaders thanks to their work in conflict resolution. Consequently, in general, Peace Club members are not afraid to speak openly to their elected leaders. The Peace Clubs work together with local elected leaders and the Bashingantahe¹ to solve local conflicts. Peace Clubs manage to improve social cohesion and the behaviour of elected leaders but they have little influence over the delivery of public services.

¹ The "Bashingantahe" are traditional village leaders who are respected by the community and who have a strong role in the resolution of local conflicts.

Recommendations in relation to the Health Committees:

- Train the Committee members in the Performance Based Financing system and in basic management and accountancy;
- Work with the Health Committees to clearly explain to local citizens how their comments on the quality of health care have an impact on the health centre;
- Resolve the problem of the delay in payments through the PBF system to the health centres, to avoid the health centre staff and the Health Committee members becoming demotivated.

Recommendations in relation to the Peace Clubs:

- Train the Peace Clubs in human rights, lobbying and the concept of accountability. Explain who is responsible for which service at the commune level;
- Organise and facilitate discussion meetings between commune administrators and Peace Club leaders, making sure that they produce concrete benefits for all the participants so that they are motivated to continue the exchange without CARE's support.

Lesson 7:

Need to strengthen the role of women and young people in the Community Networks

The Community Networks appear to strengthen the formal structures of governance in bringing together social leaders in a single network which helps them to work together more effectively to solve community problems. Although there are women and young people in the village committees, it was noticed that their opinions are not always respected by the men who were often seen to dominate the networks. Community Networks have not yet been connected to District Committees so the project has not yet been able to increase citizens' capacity to influence local governance.

Lesson 8:

The need for more effort to identify and include the poorest as participants in the DCR projects.

The research identified the poorest of the poor as the people who are not capable of working and who are consequently dependent on others. In general, these people are the elderly, handicapped people, people who are chronically mentally and/or physically ill and young orphans. The research found that the lists of the "most vulnerable" compiled by CARE do not include the majority of the poorest people but rather the people who are poor but still able to join in savings and credit groups and other community activities. The people experiencing the most difficulties were not all identified and targeted by CARE's projects.

The Scorecard does not include the poorest people because it is necessary to know how to read and write to be able to participate which is a barrier to the most of the poor.

To be elected to a Water Source Committee, it is necessary to be active in the community and be in good health which can prevent the poorest people from participating.

In general, the poorest people do not participate in the Health Committees because they do not usually meet the membership criteria, but the committees do help the poorest to access health care by asking the health centres to treat them without demanding immediate payment.

Poor people do participate in the Peace Clubs and the Clubs support the poorest of the poor although they do not strengthen their voice in governance. Club members remarked that they have limited influence beyond their own villages.

The poorest do not participate in the Community Networks because they are not generally capable of participating. The needs of the poorest can however be represented by the associations which make up the networks.

Recommendations in relation to the Community Networks:

- Pay attention to the unequal social relations between members of the networks, strengthening the role of women and young people in the networks and ensuring that the community youth associations take part in the committees as well.
- Facilitate strong collaboration between community networks and district committees to develop more participatory and accountable governance processes.

Recommendation in relation to targeting the poorest people:

- Do a more rigorous and systematic identification of the poorest people in each village using a house to house survey.
- Reflect on the type of support which would be most beneficial to the poorest. The DCR partners could discuss this with the community associations and the poorest people themselves to find more effective ways of supporting them. Some of the "very poor" people are carers for the poorest people and so by assisting them, the poorest could benefit too.