

CITIZEN AT THE HEART OF COMMUNAL SERVICES THROUGH COMMUNITY SCORE CARDS



46 communes in Madagascar have used their unique position in the community to mobilize public service providers and citizen for an evaluation of basic health care, primary education and land management services. This process is ultimately aimed at improving the responsiveness of decision makers to local demands and thereby the inclusion, efficiency, effectiveness and quality of targeted services to the benefit of the whole commune.

Even though Madagascar already had previous experiences with citizen evaluations, they were one-off initiatives designed to reach project objectives and therefore not embedded in local communal systems. The innovation and success of the “new” approach resides mainly in the strong ownership of all involved parties in the process and their trust in it. Its anchorage in the “local consultation structure” (SLC or Structure Locale de concertation) was essential for this. The SLC is an institutionalised participatory space at communal level put in place nation-wide by decree since 2015, endorsed by a communal by-law. CIMSI supported its operationalisation in a sample of communes. In these communes, the SLCs embed the value and principles of public participation and is considered as a legitimate exchange platform that enhances accountability through the involvement of communal actors - whether citizen, CSOs, elected councils, deconcentrated administrations and service providers. The SLC allows to exchange, hold each other accountable and emit recommendations to communal decision makers.

The combination of these efforts generates enhanced transparency and local accountability mechanisms as well as active citizenship through dialogue with informed citizen and local civil society. It empowers citizen to submit

prioritised and actionable proposals to communal decision-makers and service providers.

This process was no easy task. It involved devising an adapted evaluation methodology, the effective mobilisation of citizen and capacitating local civil society to facilitate the evaluation process. However, beyond these more technical dimensions of the process, the success driving factors were the political commitment and of the Mayors and decision makers in the operationalisation of the process and the competences of the external facilitators - especially their ability to involve citizen.

In this blog, we give an insight into how CIMSI implemented by the SAHA NGO and its Implementing Partners with the support of the World bank’s « Global Partnership for Social Accountability », has supported this citizen evaluation process.

The community score cards evaluation methodology was chosen as it is often used in low-resource settings and was already known and tested in Madagascar. Previous experiences highlighted the lack of sustainability of such evaluation processes. The institutionalisation of the co-engagement of duty bearers and right holders in the evaluation process in the SLC, ignited a collaborative approach toward social accountability valuing both the journey (process) and the destination (results). Thereby increasing the likelihood of sustainability drastically. The methodology was adapted based on this and related technical guidance was devised by the project.

Indeed, the choice of services to be evaluated was determined jointly in the SLC with the support of the CIMSI project. The SLC was also at the heart of

the mobilisation of citizen. CIMSI supported SLCs to inform and communicate effectively with civil society and service providers about the evaluation process and the importance of their involvement in it.

Mandated local civil society organisations were the centrepiece of the facilitation of the evaluation process. Ten out of eighteen involved CSOs were based in the communes while seven of the participating CSOs were women's associations. CIMSI (ONG SAHA together with the Network for Transparency and Social Accountability in Madagascar) capacitated them with training to fulfil this important role: this training of trainers for evaluation facilitators allowed the local CSOs to train even more local facilitators to support the evaluation process. The evaluation consisted of chronological follow-up of 1) a self-assessment of the communal services, 2) an assessment session of communal services by the SLC "colleges" comprising representatives of the citizen and 3) face-to-face sessions with the SLC "colleges" and the communal services to discuss the results related to citizen's perception of the management of services, their availability, the wait time for delivery, the quality and cost of the evaluated service as well as whether the appeal/redress mechanism worked.

The whole process helped the public and citizen to get more clarity about the roles and responsibilities of everyone in the social contract and according to the law. It also allowed users to finally express long-stifled complaints or grievances and experience they were heard.

For the health service, significant efforts must be made to increase users' perception of the availability of services and the implementation of recourse mechanisms. For the education service, specific efforts must be made on the criteria of quality of

service, cost of service and recourse mechanisms. For the land sector, the efforts to be made must address the problems of service costs, recourse mechanisms and participatory governance of the service.

Based on these findings, suggestions to improve the evaluated services were discussed and prioritized within the SLC - considering the availability of resources at the communal level. The conclusions of these discussions were presented to the executive and concerned deconcentrated technical services.

The next steps, following up the citizen evaluation, called for rapid, effective and creative responses by duty bearers on the follow up of the recommendations of the evaluation. It was stimulating to notice that recommendations and requests for improvements were integrated into communal plans and budgets. While the scarcity of public resources to satisfactorily meet all the needs for improvement is a central challenge, the need to also support the mobilization of such resources was identified. Following the face-to-face sessions with citizens' representatives, positive changes were brought about in the "bad practices" of service providers brought to light through the evaluation.

Further institutionalizing the citizen evaluations to become even more sustainably embedded, financially feasible and thereby not a one off "project" activity is very important and needs further future investments. There is still relative absence of an evaluation culture generating some fear and apprehension both at the level of citizens and decision-makers. A more effective decentralization could help to improve this perception of evaluations while institutionalizing an evaluation culture at the national level would enhance its acceptance at all levels.

