

Making all voices count

Case study: Enhancing Women's Participation in Devolved Governance Project

PROJECT NAME

Enhancing Women's Participation in Devolved Governance Project (EWPDP)

IMPLEMENTING INSTITUTION

Caritas Kitui

FUNDING INSTITUTION

Making All Voices Count Programme (MAVC)

LOCATION

Kitui County, Kenya

BUDGET

£40,000 grant

AIMS

Improve Kitui County government accountability. Strengthen inclusion of women in planning, budgeting and implementation processes by:

- Helping women's groups in four sub-counties to produce material for and participate in local radio programmes with county government representatives.
- Using SMS to inform women when these radio programmes were on and to invite them to question service providers and elected leaders in public meetings.

PROJECT CONTEXT

The 2010 Constitution, County Government Act 2012 and Public Finance Management Act 2012 provide a legislative framework that promotes citizen participation in devolved government decision-making in Kenya.

In practice, however, public consultation is only apparent, with meetings convened at the last minute to demonstrate technical compliance with legal requirements. This reflects the weak capacity of newly established county administrations, the lack of information available to them and officials' traditional attitudes.

To improve the situation, the National Controller of Budgets now only approves county budgets if public participation is deemed adequate. For example, it requires minutes of consultation meetings.

In this context, elected local representatives are starting to exert pressure on officials. The Kitui County assembly initially rejected the current Kitui County Government Integrated Development Plan (CIDP) and referred it back to the county executive for redrafting and validation with citizens.

The county government has also been building administrative capacity over the life of the project and has been raising awareness of the public services it provides.

EVALUATION DETAILS

The evaluation design is quasi-experimental. The radio was used with the control group while both the radio and SMS were used with the treatment group. Moreover, women's groups were established within the treatment group. Methods include a panel survey (baseline/endline), focus groups and key informant discussions.

KEY FINDINGS

The project's combination of technology (radio/SMS) and women's groups in the community has increased constructive engagement by targeted women with county government planners and service providers. This has resulted in improved service delivery, such as access to fresh water in Kyome Thaana ward and meaningful consultation on the Finance Bill.

Qualitative findings strongly corroborate panel survey results. External pressure for local government to engage with citizens and other development programmes within the county have certainly contributed. However, the progress made by women in the treatment areas across many indicators is striking relative to control groups in neighbouring sub-counties.

The project has enabled women to take advantage of new opportunities. Radio programmes gave women a platform to reach out and speak to other women on issues that were previously considered outside their domain. These include county governance, service delivery, budget making and public participation processes. Moreover, women taking part in the radio programmes provided role models.

Radio programmes even received calls from other counties, confirming their success in raising awareness. Moreover, the addition of SMS and women's groups support enabled women to make use of the radio messages to secure greater engagement with government.

Role of government

Kenya's devolution process has provided a unique opportunity for MAVC support. Pressure from the National Controller of Budgets has made it more difficult for councils to undertake cosmetic public consultation on development plans.

Partly for this reason, elected council representatives have encouraged officials to improve consultation. The newly created county government has also worked hard to educate citizens on its role. As a result of the general increase in staffing and information over the past year, the council has greater capacity to consult and engage.

Role of technology

FM radio, particularly in the local language, Kikamba, has a wide reach in this area. Radio programmes that have been supported by MAVC have contributed to an expansion of radio for governance locally – with a new early morning programme being launched called 'Amukya mutongoi' (in English, 'wake up the leader').

These radio programmes reach over 1 million people across two radio stations in the area. Women's group members are typically not young but more than 90% use mobile phones and social media are more and more popular among them.

The project benefitted from having one of the first tech Fellows and a number of lessons have emerged. These include ensuring both grantee and tech Fellow have a common understanding of this role and clearly specified deliverables.

As SMS messages sent and received were in the local language which the tech Fellow did not speak, this required time-consuming translation.