

Making all voices count

Case study: Increasing Citizens' Voice in Governance in Ghana

PROJECT NAME

Our City, Our Say (OCOS): Increasing Citizens' Voice in Governance in Ghana

IMPLEMENTING INSTITUTION

Global Communities – Cooperative Housing Foundation in conjunction with Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan Assembly (STMA)

FUNDING INSTITUTION

Making All Voices Count Programme (MAVC)

LOCATION

Ghana

BUDGET

£100,492 grant

AIMS

- Support and enhance the creation of feedback loops between citizens and government.
- Increase women's participation in local government.

PROJECT CONTEXT

This 18-month scaling grant aimed to support and enhance the creation of feedback loops between citizens and government and increase women's participation in local government. The OCOS project aimed to increase the capacity of the Citizens Report Card (CRC) team to sustainably support mechanisms for frequent feedback from citizens on service quality. It also aimed to improve the ability of the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan Assembly (STMA) to track, analyse and promptly resolve service delivery complaints in a city of more than 500,000. Key project activities included using Smartsol software for interactive SMS messaging. Websites and monthly call-in radio programmes were also used to gather citizens' feedback. Training and capacity building of CRC team members was undertaken to improve their ability to resolve service delivery issues.

EVALUATION DETAILS

Quasi-experimental design (package of interventions including Smartsol vs. interventions excluding Smartsol). A panel survey at baseline and endline was used together with extensive focus groups and key informant discussions (FGDs and KIIs). Around half of those who were surveyed and in FGDs at baseline also participated at endline. This summary was written by Gil Yaron drawing on evaluation reports by Adobea Owusu, Daniel Mwero and Felix Wood.

KEY FINDINGS

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There was very little use of Smartsol interactive messaging but much greater use of the monthly radio call-in programme that had service providers as interviewees. Local radio is a popular medium, particularly among the poor. By the end of the project, 67% of the respondents who listened to this radio programme and had service delivery problems within the previous 12 months, made a follow-up call/reported such issues to STMA or other service providers. Although this reflects a statistically significant increase in citizens interacting with local government and its representatives over the project lifetime, feedback from 16 FGDs suggests that this has primarily been driven by factors outside the project, specifically:

- A large increase in electricity supply problems and introduction of prepaid meters that drove complaints and a requirement to address these to secure payment.
- New legislation that mandated citizens across the country to participate in a monthly national cleaning exercise on the last Saturday of every month – bringing them in contact with traditional leaders.
- Elections for Assemblies in the project period that prompted interaction between assembly members and citizens.

Although the project has had some success in improving citizen awareness of and engagement with governance issues, it has been much harder to get service providers to respond to issues raised. Four of 14 service provider interviewees felt that the radio programmes had facilitated their work. This involved improving public understanding (such as the police example above), an example of improved coordination between STMA and service providers and the Waste Management Department of the STMA identifying Smartsol as a way of responding more quickly to citizens that does not need capital investment. Given the very limited use of Smartsol, this is more an indicator of the positive mindset of the manager in question than changes seen by citizens. STMA also noted that by putting in place feedback mechanisms, the project has helped them meet performance indicators – increasing their demand for using this type of technology. However, the evidence from 16 focus groups and community key informants is overwhelmingly that these early steps have not generally translated into meaningful responses by service providers.

The STMA and service providers were still seen as being very unresponsive to citizens, particularly women. Men were far more likely to engage these institutions regarding services and, where someone got a response, it was much more likely to be a man.

In person/face-to-face contact with service providers and members of local government remained by far the most common means of citizen engagement at endline. This reflects established norms and power relationships that have not been changed by the project.

Regression analysis of survey data showed that the increased contacts with Assembly members, the STMA and traditional leaders over the project life reflected increased face-to-face/in person contact. Indeed, some older people and male focus group participants said the STMA had asked them to pass their service delivery needs through their Assembly members, when they tried to contact STMA as individuals.

Focus groups also found that while a fair number of citizens were aware of the hotlines, very few used them. Moreover, survey data suggests that while 92% of the poorer intervention group could access phones, only 54% could send and receive texts. Few citizens were aware of Smartsol technology and among those potential users actual use was extremely rare and restricted to men. Main reasons were limited access to smartphones, costs related to units for using the Smartsol, problems with internet connectivity and unstable electricity supply.

While the OCOS project has not been able to close the feedback loop and deliver widespread changes in responsiveness by service providers, it did achieve a number of specific project objectives (that we would describe as project outputs rather than higher level outcomes). For example, CRC members mentioned that their training on the project had equipped them to better engage and express themselves in public, and saw the skills they acquired under the project as skills they would use for the rest of their lives. Moreover, STMA customer service unit members felt their training had been useful, and the radio call-in shows had increased citizen awareness and participation, especially for women. Nearly all interviewees across the range of stakeholder groups felt that changes the project had put in place were sustainable, contingent on funding, particularly from STMA. Early indications are encouraging as STMA have paid for continued use of the toll-free numbers and additional attempts to use radio to reach out to citizens. RoK FM radio station mentioned that in the aftermath of the OCOS project they run similar programmes while Global Communities stated that their success with the project had prompted three more radio stations in the STMA to contact them for partnerships.