



Giving rural communities voice at the table with local government

A case study in Ghana using community score card

Introduction

Hope for Future Generations (HFFG) is working with rural communities in Tarkwa Nsuaem Municipal Area in Western Region of Ghana; to empower citizens to do lobby and advocacy on water and sanitation. HFFG developed Community Score Card indicators with the citizens and the local government representatives that measure Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) service delivery and Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) in communities. The Community Score Card is a participatory tool for assessment, planning, monitoring and evaluation of these services. The objective of using a score card is to enable frank and face to face conversation in a participatory forum that engages both service users and service providers, and ultimately the goal is to positively influence the quality, efficiency and accountability with which services are provided and used.

This participatory approach advocates for equitable distribution of WASH services. It is trialed in six rural Ghanaian communities with low WASH service delivery. Half of the selected communities have water systems with low or partial functionality, and where water supply is consistent but it does not meet community demands. Community-level maintenance of these facilities is a challenge, especially in those communities that have not established Water and Sanitation (WATSAN) committees. In all communities, there are households (whether in minority or majority) that practice open defecation.

These communities scored WASH service delivery in the last quarter of 2018. Since then, the dialogue between communities and local government has been opened. This case study is an introduction to the Score Cards, and shares outcomes from the first round of 'Community Interface Meetings.

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Score cards

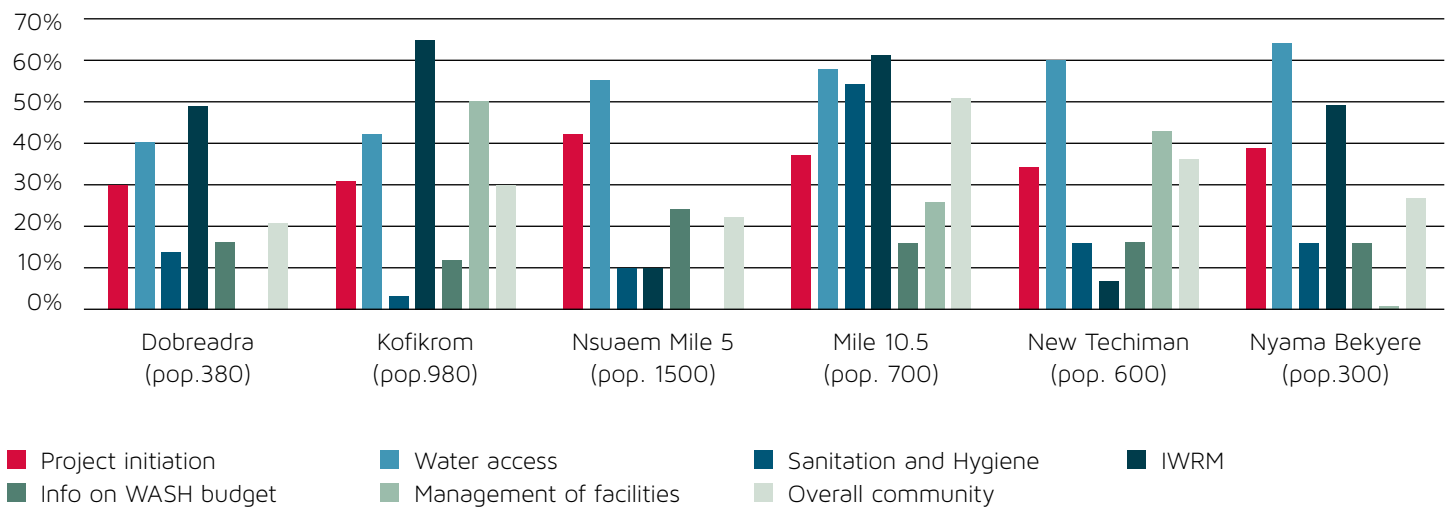
Community Score Cards look at the following aspects:

- **Project Initiation and Community Involvement:** Were communities involved in project planning of facilities?
- **Water Access:** Quality of water, regularity of flow, willingness to pay for water and/or repairs, etc.
- **Sanitation:** Do households have a latrine at home? Are refuse and fecal waste separated and disposed at designated dumpsites?
- **Hygiene:** Are hands washed after visiting toilets/farms and before eating?
- **Water Resources management:** Are heavy chemicals used in farming? Are trees cut along river bodies? Is there refuse disposal around rivers? Does the community have a way of maintaining resources?

- **WASH budgeting:** Are communities aware of the community WASH budget and has this been accessed through Assembly representative?
- **Management of WASH facilities:** Are WATSAN committee members trained? How satisfied is the community with the management of WASH facilities by the committee?

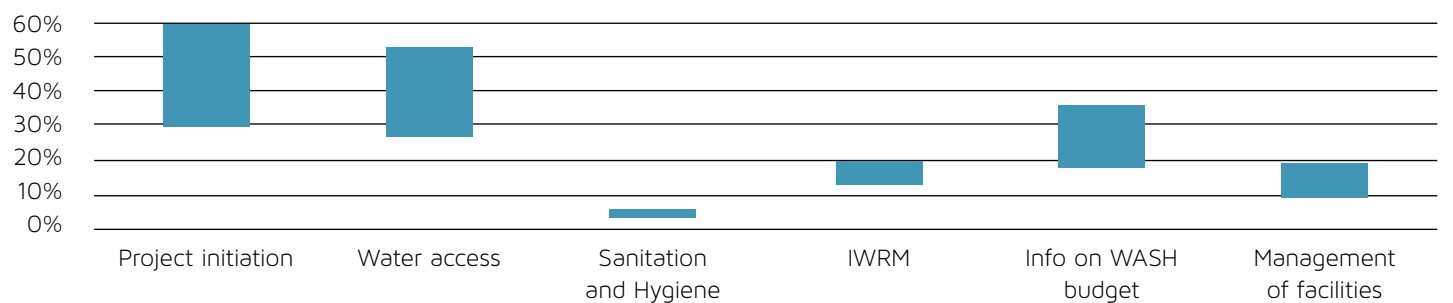
There is also a score card for the WASH service provider, which essentially assesses the local government (Municipal Assembly) for its response to maintenance and repair requests.

Figure 1: Community scores for WASH and IWRM services



There are several lessons that can be drawn from the community scores above, importantly that when citizens are not involved at the beginning of a project (project initiation), they are usually not involved in management of the facility.

Figure 2: Community scores for the WASH service provider (local government), presented as a range (lowest to highest score)



There is an urgent need for local government to improve sanitation and hygiene conditions in these under-served communities, where open defecation is common practice.



Community interface meetings

As a CSO operating in Ghana and an implementing partner of SIMAVI on the Watershed Programme, Hope for Future Generations (HFFG), conducted and facilitated conversations between representatives from the communities and local government – in this case the Tarkwa Municipal Assembly. Community members, community WASH advocates, chief, elders and Municipal WASH stakeholders, including the Tarkwa Municipal WASH engineer and Community Development Officers, worked together to agree on scores and the way forward.

At the community meetings issues discussed include the benefit of WATSAN committees to take ownership, manage and overlook maintenance of WASH facilities. (The Municipal Assembly requires all communities to have a volunteer WATSAN committee). Therefore the Assembly tasked the chiefs and opinion leaders of communities that do not have trained WATSAN committees to select seven members (both male and females) to be trained by Municipal Assembly.

The second largest community in this sample is Domeabra (population of 980). Households in this community have access to water from a borehole and a hand dug well. Demand at peak times is greater than available supply, and so the community retrieves water in shifts. During the Interface Meeting, the local government offered the community the choice of an additional water point or a school. The community preferred funds to be directed to construction of a new school (Junior High School) to prevent teenagers especially girls from walking to another village every day to attend school – **which highlights the priorities that compete with WASH/IWRM services.**

A town hall meeting at the district level was held and the scorecards were used to lobby for improved WASH and IWRM

services in the Municipality. The town hall meeting was also used to share learnings from the scorecard development and the interface meetings as well.

Key learning points shared were:

- Citizens/communities members do not understand government WASH policies, programme and plans
- Initial project implementation meetings mostly target only male community opinion leaders – youth and women do not have equal information on capital project constructions.
- General information on WASH financing is not readily available to communities – communities do not know the cost of WASH facilities they have abandoned.
- Untrained community members manage WASH facilities leading to poor maintenance of such facilities at the community level
- There are limited toilets facilities available in all the project communities; both at the household levels and for communal use.
- Communities with functional WATSAN committees do not have bank account and therefore not accountable to community members
- There are no or limited activities in place to address the issue of Integrated Water Resources Management
- In every community where the scorecards were developed, women and youth scored all the indicators low except water access.
- Women, children and young people play critical role in water, sanitation and hygiene at household and community level – their involvement must be a priority to all WASH and IWRM discussions.
- The willingness of women and young people to participate actively in scoring WASH services delivery was due to their involvement in the design of the score card indicators and all other processes involved in scorecard development

Successes & challenges

The participatory Community Score Cards approach is analysed based on OECD-DAC criteria: effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability.

The Community Score Cards are effective at giving communities a simple way of collecting evidence of quality of service. The Community Meetings are effective at opening the conversation between some of the most under-served communities and local government accountable to provide services.

The scores efficiently demonstrated to the local government (Municipal Assembly) that involving community members early on in the design helps cultivate a sense of ownership for better management results.

Through the open dialogue, local government encouraged formation of WATSAN committees, which the local government in turn rewarded with a training on simple maintenance and budget tracking. The role of the WATSAN committees can be effective at ensuring sustainability of the service. The local government will need to improve transparency on facility budget, making WASH financing available and accessible to all citizens.

The impact of the tools can be measured by the fact that the local government has already improved its accountability to communities, and committing to improving access to WASH/IWRM.

The Tarkwa Municipal Assembly retrained and revamped forty communities (40) in the Municipality including the Watershed programme beneficiary communities that do not have functional WATSAN committees.

The processes involved in developing community score cards as well as organizing community interface meetings in each community for face to face interaction between WASH providers and WASH users are cost effective and time consuming. It is unlikely that these scorecards development and associated processes can take place without external donor funding, and therefore affect sustainability.

Conclusions

In just one year's time, the score cards along with community interface meetings seem to have positively influenced the local government's commitment and accountability in delivering WASH services. This participatory mechanism is proving to be quite impactful: improving governance and management of WASH and IWRM services in rural, under-served communities, and the local government is in process of preparing Municipal WASH/IWRM plans for equitable distribution of WASH services.

Based on experiences in six rural, under-served communities in Ghana, the Community Score Cards approach is embraced positively by both the community and local government. The Community Score Cards seem to be an effective tool to collect evidence that communities can use to speak up in the forums with local government (Municipal Assembly). At the same time, the local government is responding very positively, as the scores are a means for a constructive dialogue that also manage community expectation and can be used to increase community involvement in ownership and maintenance of water and sanitation facilities.

