



Strengthening Capacity of Local Leaders to Improve Inclusion and Equality

Increasing the Effectiveness, Responsiveness and Accountability of Local Authorities in Africa

EVERY VOICE COUNTS

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Introduction

Working with local authorities (LAs) to stimulate their responsiveness and accountability is a very important element of the theory of change on inclusive governance (IG) of the **Every Voice Counts (EVC)** programme.¹ CARE and partners believe that responsiveness of public authorities increases when they have stronger capabilities and incentives to act. It is important to also recognise and promote the role of CSOs in strengthening the capacities of state and local authorities, so that they can better address the needs of the most excluded groups and be responsive when citizens demand for accountability.

As part of the EVC programme, local authorities are trained and coached by The Hague Academy for Local Governance (THA) in inclusive governance, citizen participation methods and gender sensitivity. The capacity strengthening modalities include Training of Trainers (ToT), coaching teams of national trainers during localised trainings, distant coaching and facilitating action plan follow-up workshops.

This learning brief provides an overview of an internal study of THA's activities through EVC that strengthen the effectiveness, responsiveness and accountability of LAs. The broader internal study, conducted in 2019, consisted of an assessment of the global literature on this subject, followed by two in-depth case studies. Two programme countries in Africa were chosen as case to illustrate key transferable learning for other countries within the EVC programme.

Key Lessons from Literature

From global literature on effectiveness, responsibility and accountability, three main learning points can be drawn for capacity strengthening of local authorities:

- 1) the importance of context specificity;
- 2) the need to balance building capacity for both the supply and demand side of governance; and
- 3) moving from a "capacity" to a "capability" model for training.

STARTING WITH THE CONTEXT

"Context is all" has become a common saying, reflecting the growing consensus in the development sector that "best practice" solutions copied from one context to another are generally ineffective.² Rather, political and institutional context and "best fit" interventions are seen to be especially important for governance and accountability programming. Part of the reason for the

consistent failure of IG programming is argued to be the focus on selling solutions, toolkits and best practice rather than focusing on locally-identified problems and developing customized responses.

The question becomes when and how development initiatives should work with and against the grain. *Working with the grain* means reforms need to be aligned with a country's political and institutional realities. CARE's research into the comparative effectiveness of Community Scorecards³ in Malawi, Tanzania, Ethiopia, and Rwanda shows that adaptations to local context were key to success, and that plugging into existing reforms was important to overcoming barriers, especially in countries where there is more top down leadership and hierarchical compliance structures.⁴ Although *working with the grain* has proven to be effective, it should be based on a thorough power and context analysis, as it could enable bad practices or allow abuse of power to continue.

BRIDGING THE SUPPLY AND DEMAND SIDES OF GOVERNANCE

Another key issue related to effectiveness, responsiveness and accountability is **balancing the supply and demand sides of governance**. Success in improving public services almost always involves actors on both sides of supply (state) and demand (citizens).⁵ To overcome local-level accountability traps (at local level concerns are voiced, but they are not transferred to higher levels), it is argued that interventions need to include multiple tactics (e.g., complementary accountability mechanisms and advocacy processes) from local to national levels. These combinations of supply and demand side approaches are referred to as "sandwich strategies", which are designed to bridge inclusivity and accountability.⁶

CAPACITY STRENGTHENING AT LOCAL LEVELS TO MEET CITIZEN DEMANDS

Rocha Menocal and Sharma (2008) argue that increasing citizen voice requires a parallel and equal effort to build the effectiveness and capacity of state institutions to address growing demands and expectations. They argue that simply changing rules and regulations means little if there is no capacity, power or will by local authorities to enforce them. Therefore, capacity strengthening at lower tiers of government is a key to increasing citizen voice.⁷ Capacity strengthening must be complementary with the engagement of traditional power relations and the need for accompaniment, rather than one-time knowledge transfer.^{8,9} As such, capacity strengthening must be tailored not only to the local political context, but also to the nature

¹ EVC is financed by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2016 – 2020) and aims to contribute to more inclusive governance in six fragile and (post) conflict-affected settings: Afghanistan, Burundi, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Rwanda, Somalia, and Sudan.

² Andrews, 2013; Andrews et al., 2017.

³ Social accountability tool that brings citizens, service providers and authorities together to discuss local development priorities.

⁴ Chambers, 2015; Wild, Wales and Chambers, 2015.

⁵ Centre for the Future State, 2005, 2010, Houtzager and Joshi, 2008; Rocha Menocal and Sharma, 2008; CARE, 2011; McGee and

Gaventa, 2011; Booth and Cammack, 2013; Fox, 2014, Waddington et al., 2019.

⁶ McGee and Gaventa, 2011; Fox, 2014; Joshi, 2017; Holland and Schatz, 2016.

⁷ Rocha Menocal and Sharma, 2008.

⁸ Gaynor, 2011.

⁹ For example, action learning with coaching or problem-based learning with action plans.

of relationships between the state and other stakeholders. They suggest interventions should start with public authorities themselves and what they need, as they are not “blank slates”.

FOCUSING ON CAPABILITIES DURING TRAININGS

In terms of capacity development, training remains the default tool, yet trainings rarely take how power and politics shape capacity and LAs’ ability to deliver into account. The main pitfalls were argued to be that capacity development tends to over-emphasise tangible and quantifiable outputs such as trainings delivered and resources transferred. Furthermore, it was noted that, while popular, a training of trainers approach can lead to a process such as with ‘the telephone game’ with the message that is delivered at the beginning being markedly different from that which is received at the end of the chain.¹⁰ To account for these shortcomings, a “**capabilities model**” that considers capacity in terms of **relationship-building, achieving coherence, self-organisation, resilience and adaptation, and delivering results** may improve effectiveness.

Common shortfalls of trainings¹¹

- Trainings often assume that knowledge (rather than relationships or networks) is the missing ingredient of the participants’ capacities;
- Trainings are often not adequately adapted to context (or to local languages);
- Trainings offers limited space for participant input or exchange (e.g. adult learning techniques);
- Trainings are often too short-term focused, and one-offs rather than conducted as a series.

Key Lessons from Practice in the EVC Programme

TRAINING OF TRAINERS

The default tool for capacity strengthening employed in the EVC programme was training. While THA employed a Trainer of Trainers (ToT) model, this was done in an unconventional fashion. Firstly, THA trainers were **matched with the context** they knew best, so trainers typically had various years’ experience working with local authorities in that context. In both countries, THA also made sure trainers spoke **local languages**. This allowed space for contextual tailoring and benchmarking against similar contexts in the region.

Training often overemphasises tangible and quantifiable outputs.¹² However, in the EVC programme, teams are not

held to account at activity and output level, but instead the focus is on **explaining how efforts contribute to outcomes**. Budget disbursement timelines and reporting templates for consortium partners helped facilitate this new focus and allowed THA greater flexibility to adapt a standardised training package to evolving needs in each context.

THA developed a **co-training modality**, whereby THA coached and accompanied around a dozen local trainers. Training by CARE and civil society partners was conducted for local authorities over the course of three years. Having an external actor (THA trainer) in the room was seen by local trainers to be an advantage in many ways to local trainers. The THA trainers provided credibility and leverage with national-level government actors who were otherwise considered difficult for local staff to influence. This support thus **goes beyond one-off knowledge transfer** and avoids common risks of learning getting miscommunicated and misunderstood downstream.¹³

In one of the case countries, local trainers noted that the period of **time between training was too long**, which may have impeded knowledge retention. Support from THA intensified through the provision of **refresher trainings** in time windows before training. Local trainers in both countries were also trained on facilitation, public speaking, needs assessment, learning objectives, training design, coaching and constructive feedback skills.

The **phasing** of training was also important. Training was planned to precede key local planning moments. In one country, training took place a few months before the start of the next annual local government planning process. In the other, the training took place a few weeks before the start of the participatory needs’ assessment of the new generation of the five-year plans. Where possible, the goal was to synchronise training with advocacy efforts by the CARE country teams and partners, though this was a challenge in practice.

GOAL SETTING IN ACTION PLANS

Many research programmes have identified the importance of organisational mandates, resource flows, and prioritization of local-level problem solving to ensure that commitments by LAs are credible.¹⁴ One THA trainer noted that, in the past, local authorities would often make **unrealistic commitments** despite knowing they would be unable to keep these in practice. The first action plans developed through the EVC THA trainings had targets that were not initially clear if they were within the training participants’ spheres of control and influence. In order to overcome this issue, training participants were encouraged by THA to be more realistic, **focusing on short-term achievable targets**. Quick wins were thought to help build confidence to take on bigger challenges.

¹⁰ Jackson, 2015, in Denny et al., 2017.

¹¹ According to an appraisal of trainings by the World Bank in Sierra Leone, South Sudan, DRC, Pakistan, and Afghanistan (World Bank, 2011).

¹² Denny et al. 2017.

¹³ Denny et al. 2017.

¹⁴ Andrews, 2013; Booth and Cammack, 2013; Andrews et al. 2017.

Ensuring Action Plans of the Local Authorities are implemented and sustainable¹⁵

Preparation stage

- Trainers need to know the mandate of the trainees (local authorities) in advance to know what kind of actions are feasible to include in the action plans and to be able to give more concrete and relevant guidance.
- LAs should be asked to map their constraints in implementing the action plans in advance to ensure they are fully prepared and there are no negative surprises.
- Trainers should showcase examples of successfully implemented action plans to participants to inspire them and show the impact.
- As it is very difficult for LAs critically assess the nature of their organization/institution, bigger, more diverse, and specifically targeted groups of LAs should be trained in improve the higher the likelihood that the individual actions might lead to institutional changes.

During the training

- To ensure ownership and participation, it is very helpful if higher-level authorities are included in the trainings, which will simplify the follow-up of change processes within the organization.
- Focus on individual actions and responsibilities instead of organizational ones that might not be feasible to influence or change.

Follow-up of the training

- Having a focal person who is assigned to following up of the action plans is essential. Decide for each contact who is well placed, and the follow-up of action plans should become part of the lobby and advocacy strategy of the programme.
- Have coordination meetings with LAs: ask for evidence of implementation directly or via the community. Alternatively, have reflection meetings, during which learning is central and there is room for sharing failures.
- Lobby and advocacy with higher level authorities should be considered if plans are not implemented.
- In some contexts, the Community Score Card (CSC) could be used to monitor the implementation process of the action plans developed by groups of LAs during the trainings.
- Make a booklet or another product to share with colleagues of the trainees to share the knowledge more broadly and prevent mitigate consequences of high turnover rates.
- Ask the LAs to do a presentation for their colleagues of the Inclusive Governance training.

EVC's focus on **setting realistic goals** seemed to have partly contributed to a "low accountability trap"¹⁶ in which only very local level problems were addressed in the action plans, because they seemed the most realistic. To overcome this trap, the EVC programme combined accountability processes at a lower level with advocacy towards higher level authorities. The action plans developed by the local authorities in the trainings, were intended to trigger "institutional commitment" by **extending accountability upwards** through different layers of government and at the same time budget was secured through advocacy.

ACTION PLAN COMMITMENTS AND MONITORING

In EVC, LAs engage in capacity strengthening with THA-developed action plans as part of the trainings. While most action plan commitments were achievable (A), relevant (R) and time-bound (T), they were not always specific (S) or clearly measurable (M). **Targets were sometimes vague, and it was not clear when they were considered achieved or implemented.** The best results were attained in cases where tracking of action plans was systematic, and timelines were clear yet adaptable.

The monitoring of the implementation of these action plans, however, was identified during an international learning exchange event in 2018, to be a key challenge by all countries involved in the EVC programme. Staff from partner organisations primarily were responsible for regularly reviewing the plans as carefully as possible, organising meetings with local authorities to discuss planning, and making phone calls to follow up on commitments. In one country, due to lack of budget, the direct monitoring was conducted by field assistants that did not have the appropriate training. Eventually responsibility shifted to be shared jointly with the CARE country office, but monitoring challenges remained.

Especially with regard to actions that required budget, authorities were often reluctant to make budgets available. This finding was echoed through an EVC study on social norms of public authorities. The study found that inclusive governance activities are heavily under-resourced (time, money, training, and human resources). Due to pressure of LAs to be accountable upward (to their superiors) rather than downward to the general public, resources are often allocated elsewhere and away from IG activities. Further, when (I)NGOs are involved, LAs often become less accountable and responsive to communities if they believe (I)NGOs will play that role and provide

¹⁵ These lessons were shared by EVC practitioners during an EVC international learning event in Bangkok in September 2019.

¹⁶ Fox, 2014.

resources instead.¹⁷ Thus, we learnt that it is important to determine and understand the **interests and incentives** of the authorities and **engage with actors who have the most influence on LAs** to be able to ensure proper **monitoring and implementation** of actions plans. Overall, we have learnt that more time and resources should be devoted to planning, monitoring and adapting of action plans by CARE and partners.

As part of the EVC mid-term review (MTR), outcomes were harvested that reflected the lack of local authorities' responsiveness and the importance of social norms and practices. The MTR, however, did not capture learning on the capacity strengthening of local authorities. This reflects a wider issue of linking monitoring data sources, such as the Community Scorecard, CSO action plans, and local authorities (formal) action plans. Comparing and streamlining this data should make a significant difference going forward.

Conclusion

Overall, THA's efforts within the EVC programme appear to have made progress in strengthening local authorities' responsiveness, accountability and capacity. The trainings were well received by participants and flexibility was appreciated, including support with soft skills such as facilitation, coaching and constructive feedback.

The key successes learnt of the efforts include:

- THA's **co-training modality with coaching** over the course of three years was perhaps the most promising innovation which may merit replication. Such a form of support helps move beyond once-off knowledge transfer, mitigates against common risks of messaging being mistaken or rephrased over time, and makes it possible to draw attention to contextual issues often taken for granted. The modality also enables participants to talk about sensitive issues at a lower level of risk for local trainers by having an external trainer present.

- **Focusing on local authorities at an individual level** helped change "mindsets," questioning relevant social norms, perceptions of gender roles and practices in participants' own lives and address issues of multi-layered discrimination, and community heterogeneity.
- Encouraging local authorities to make **credible commitments that were within existing mandates and resources available** was a wise decision early on in the project in order to help gain traction and momentum.

The lessons learnt for improvement of the approach include:

- Relatively **long periods of time between trainings** may have resulted in a loss of knowledge and lower accountability and responsiveness. Therefore, the trainings should be no more than 6 months apart with consistent follow-up on action plans by a responsible, legitimate, and trained party (e.g., CARE).
- The approach of focusing on short-term and realistic action plans ran the risk of **low accountability traps** in some districts and communes. Consequently, INGOs and CSO need to develop IG programming from the bottom up, get PAs and local communities to work together to define a vision for IG and where IG programming needs to deliver.
- The greatest impediment to authority effectiveness in worse-performing areas was a **lack of financial (rather than human) resources** to reach and include marginalised groups, and also an **incapacity to shift formal rules**. Notwithstanding, there was some evidence of stretching mandates and protocols that were predominantly within existing mandates and resources available. Therefore, encourage identification of champions within and between communities, and fund at the intersection (e.g., authorities that are able to model, promote and engage within and between communities).

¹⁷ CARE Nederland, 2019.

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