

Advancing towards **promoting inclusive governance** in Fragile Settings

A Learning brief



This learning brief is developed to document and share key learnings of the 5-year programme, Every Voice Counts (EVC), which aims to contribute to effective and inclusive governance processes in fragile settings. The EVC program is implemented by CARE Nederland and its local partners in some of the most fragile settings in the world, including Sudan, Somalia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Rwanda and Burundi. The brief is a result of series of learning events which includes two international learning events, exchange visits and other learning sessions with country staff and civil society (CSO) partners. The learning centers around three themes 1) Adaptive programming in fragile contexts; 2) Building capacity of local authorities in fragile contexts; and 3) Capacity building of Civil Society to advocate on behalf of marginalised women and youth.

The main takeaways are:

- Social norm change is as essential in fragile contexts as policy change. Engaging with traditional actors has proven to be an effective strategy.
- Adaptive strategies are key to effectiveness of inclusive governance programming that use lobby and advocacy as a tool.
- The capacity building of Local Authorities and especially the follow-up of action plans that they develop is not a technical/operational matter, but is highly political.
- Moving beyond representation of excluded groups to real empowerment, and how to assess changes in social norms and in gender relations at the household level, are the biggest challenges for CSOs in the EVC programme.
- CARE and strategic partners need to invest in mapping the interests, legitimacy and perceived “power” of organisations which are best placed to advance the political agenda of marginalized women and youth.

1. Adaptive programming in fragile contexts

Background

A key obstacle for achieving sustainable development in fragile settings is the structural exclusion of particular segments of society from local and national governance processes. Dynamics of inclusion and exclusion are context-specific, requiring programs like EVC to tailor its country interventions to the context in which the program is operating.

Although context-specific theories of change (ToCs) for each of the EVC countries have been developed as well as specific advocacy strategies, disruptions caused by humanitarian crisis, informality of power relations and limited civic space demand CARE and CSO partners to not only be politically-minded but also fluid and innovative in their approach to dialoguing and influencing government authorities and other power holders. In contexts where formal power and leadership is unstable, and informality of rules and power are prevailing, implementing lobby and advocacy interventions is a complex exercise. In order to remain effective, EVC partners (including CARE) need to adopt an adaptive approach in their programming in order to navigate in whatever spaces for dialogue they can create or maintain, and adjust their interventions based on learnings from implementation and on key changes in the political and social contexts.

Thanks to some smart adaptations, such as shifting of project/activity locations and focused networking with government authorities, the programme was able to progress. Another successful strategy was to showcase some of the cases in which civil society worked together with authorities, instead of solely functioning as a watchdog. The benefits that were reaped from that process, helped to open up civic space.

Key learning

Understanding of the context matters a lot. Though most governance programmes such as EVC develop assumptions on why and how each of the governance actors (excluded groups, CSOs, power holders) should change, analysing the specific environment which dictates how these actors behave, is an important step which is often overseen. In most cases, the power and political economy analysis being done emphasises the current situation of excluded groups, such as, women and young people, as actors with no power, thereby overlooking their role as agents. This leads to interventions that want to “work within the system”, mostly focusing on influencing those who have visible and formal power (mostly men), and less on strengthening the capacities of women and young people to change the current system and make it more equitable and just. Within the Dissent and Dialogue Strategic Partnership framework that supports CSO lobby and advocacy capacity strengthening, the EVC programme was consciously designed to focus on strengthening the capacity not only of civil society, but also of women and young people as political agents of change. By doing so, women and young people are considered active actors in their own right who can make change happen, with or without the assistance of CSOs.

Social norm change is as essential as policy change. The importance of combining women’s empowerment with interventions aimed at enlisting men’s support to change harmful cultural norms that deter women from realizing their full potential, were highlighted as opportunities for the program to address. However, addressing social norms should be considered higher up in the results framework: it is as important as policy change especially in advocacy programmes that seek to make decision making processes more inclusive and effective. For example, we have learnt that changing attitudes and beliefs among Afghan men and women, is as important as having more government budgets and female teachers. Here, male role models (e.g. traditional and religious leaders) are able to support the transformation of social norms in the communities and they can be strategic allies in requesting the government to provide more government budgets.

Spaces for dialogue across fragile countries differ. Their nature and way of working differs based on who initiated the space, the diversity of the participants, whether participation is voluntary or by invitation only and whether they are informal or in some way linked to formal governance processes. Programmes need to be adapted to the specificity of these spaces.

Adaptive strategies are key to effectiveness of inclusive governance programming that use lobby and advocacy as a tool. Flexibility is needed in order to be adaptive. Flexibility in systems and procedures and the way we plan (including budget planning). However, adaptation is more than just being flexible. True adaptive programming is programming that bases its decisions/strategy/direction on the changes it encounters. In Burundi for instance, the advocacy context changed in year 2 to such an extent that CARE and CSO partners had to formulate more realistic advocacy outcomes (e.g. on agenda setting rather than actual amendment of GBV law) and re-strategize based on the issues that they prioritized during the MEL training. The example illustrates the importance of developing multiple, though focused pathways of change and the need to change pathways in case of significant adaptations in the context. Overall, we learnt that through prioritizing advocacy issues, (and thus deciding not to focus on certain issues that are also important), and formulating advocacy objectives that specify the levels and domains of change related to advocacy, we can signal progress better and know and understand if change is actually happening.

Theories of change in advocacy programs have to balance the need to be flexible and the need to have specifically defined pathways of change to enable learning that can feed into key decisions around program adjustments. For example, in Burundi, CARE and CSO partners decided that in addition to raising awareness on the positive articles of the GBV law (which is the focus of the work of many NGOs), CARE and partners' leverage is to analyze the gaps in the current law and build commitment from the Gender Ministry and other key actors to put this gap in the GBV law on the agenda of the parliament towards creating momentum/commitment for its amendment (agenda setting). If ToCs are too generic and not focused enough, then the MEL frameworks will follow suit; indicators will not be clearly defined and measured. While reporting progress on indicators helps to unpack what change has happened, it does not indicate how or why change has (or has not) taken place. MEL tools like Advocacy After Action Reviews and Outcomes Harvesting help unpack the how and why of changes that are taking place after the implementation of advocacy initiatives.



Methodologies and approaches need to be adapted to advocacy for Inclusive Governance. One of the key methodologies used in the EVC programme is the Community Score Card (CSC), which aims to bring together different stakeholders to develop joint action plans to improve service delivery. However, the focus of EVC is to improve inclusive governance processes through advocacy and not directly on service delivery. Therefore, one of the recommendations from the CSC exchange visit was to adapt the CSC for it to be better at collecting data to feed into our advocacy strategies. In the case of CARE Rwanda, this exercise has been done and the adapted CSC collects information about the level of participation of women and girls in the Imihigo process (with a specific focus on GBV) instead of issues around GBV service delivery. This allows the development of advocacy messages to influence authorities to include women and girls in governance processes and decision-making. Our assumption is that through their participation, service delivery will better reflect their needs and priorities.

Recommendations

- Responding to changes in the context entails **regular monitoring of the political and social environment** and the key actors who are responsible for such changes, may it be a negative change requiring risk management, or a positive change that offers windows of opportunities for CSOs to influence.
- Introducing an advocacy programme in fragile settings requires more than just a new M&E framework - it requires fundamental shifts in the mind-sets of CSO staff and change in organisational culture. **Staff and Management need to be taken on board and be challenged to build reflection time into the programme on all levels and to do so with multiple stakeholders.**
- Capturing progress and learning of advocacy programming requires a **suitable M&E framework that is in alignment with the ToC.** Likewise, the need for adaptability requires **CSOs to capture and document “small” changes** made through their interventions. Proper documentation and reporting helps in guiding decisions related to any adjustments in program interventions that need to be made.
- In a lot of programmes, including EVC, most of the events or key moments that CSOs experience in advocacy, generate important information that can help them in reviewing their advocacy strategy and plans. But without proper documentation and reflection on key learnings and analysis of the outcomes, they get lost in the memory of people. Furthermore, collecting this type of information is not only important to promote learning but also for reporting on progress of advocacy work while providing evidence at the same time. In more service delivery oriented programming in fragile contexts, foreseen generic changes in the context are often boxed-in and captured in risk-analyses, mentioning mitigation measures to counter them. Changes in context are seen as unwelcome intruders instead of opportunities to adapt and learn from. Staff and also management need to be stimulated to see changes as opportunities and not as risks, this can be achieved by **conducting regular (policy) analyses that map changes and following these up with strategy planning** to discuss how changes can be capitalized on.
- **Narrowing of CSO/civic space can be addressed by promoting citizen’s participation and demonstrating how through this inclusive participation power relations can change/improve between citizens and their governments.** INGOs working in restrictive contexts need to determine their advocacy strategy/approach in consultation with in-country staff and even with unlikely local allies (e.g. religious leaders, community elders) when approaching and influencing (local) government actors and power holders. In certain contexts, like Rwanda, spaces for dialogue do exist but are not always effectively used. Therefore, focusing on making better use of existing spaces is more effective than creating new spaces.

2. Building capacity of local authorities in fragile contexts

Background

Working with local authorities (LAs) in fragile countries 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 programme. CARE and partners believe that responsiveness of public authorities increases when they have stronger capabilities and incentives to act. It is important to recognize and promote the role of CSOs in building/strengthening the capacities of state and public authorities so that they address the needs of the most excluded groups and respond when citizens demand for accountability.

Fragile and (post) conflict countries have characteristics that make interventions aimed at strengthening governance of special importance, including the strengthening of accountable, legitimate and participatory institutions and structures of authority. Both the state and the civil society have often been severely eroded in (post) conflict countries, or in some cases these institutions were never properly set up in the first place.

A recurring problem in fragile and (post) conflict states is the lack of trust and confidence among citizens as well as between citizens and the state and lack of downwards accountability. The quality of the relationship between citizens and the state depends for an important part on the capacity of the state to carry out its responsibility. A state that manages public affairs well, improves its legitimacy with the people. At the same time, a state that is regarded as legitimate can more easily count on the cooperation of its citizens in the implementation of its policies. Strengthening governance is therefore both about strengthening “soft” capacity such as the ability to build trust, confidence, social cohesion and legitimacy and “hard” capacity such as structures of service delivery.

Capacity Building of Local Authorities

One of the strategies used in the Every Voice Counts programme to build the capacity of LAs is through training. These trainings are implemented by The Hague Academy for Local Governance and supported and followed-up by CARE and partners. They are aimed at building the capacity of local authorities, in terms of knowledge and skills, on improving inclusive governance in public decision-making processes. The content of the trainings are on 1) IG Knowledge – underlying components and practices of Governance, Citizen Participation & Social Accountability, as well as 2) skills – exclusion analysis, planning for inclusion in the policy cycle and change management. The training is practice-oriented, participatory and stimulates self-reflection. The training also aims to change not only the individual but also the respective organizations. Finally the training leads to the development of an action-plan to make already existing activities more inclusive and effective and ensures that they link to the EVC programme.

Another way that local authorities are engaged with is through participation in the Community Score Card (CSC) methodology. Traditionally the CSC is a participatory process that engages service users (citizens), service providers and authorities (duty bearers) in assessing the quality and effectiveness of public services (such as education, health, water/sanitation, agriculture, market development, and security). This culminates in a joint action plan for improving that service, monitored by the community. In the EVC programme the CSC is used to collect data and is framed as a tool for lobby and advocacy agenda setting. The involvement of local authorities in this process is firstly by means of a self-assessment and they also participate in interface meetings with the community and service-providers that leads to the development of an action-plan.

Key Learning

Action planning is a tool and not an end goal. The process leads to more awareness of the need for and effectiveness of inclusivity.

In fragile contexts it is very hard to have LAs critically assess the nature of their organization/institution, but the **bigger, more diverse and specifically targeted the group of LAs** that is trained, the higher the likelihood that the individual actions might lead to institutional changes.

To ensure that the plans are feasible and don't create 'extra work' and are within the control of the EVC programme, it is important to emphasize that **actions should be related to existing activities** within the programme.

The capacity building of LAs and especially the follow-up of action plans is not a technical/operational matter, but is **highly political**. Therefore in each context it is important to determine who is best placed to follow-up with LAs and become their focal person. The follow up of action plans should become **part of the lobby and advocacy strategy** of the programme.

CSC provides an opportunity to boost transparency and accountability because the interface meetings facilitate face to face discussions between citizens and public authorities, with hence a possibility for citizens to raise questions or put forward pressing demands.

Ways to ensure that Action Plans of the Local Authorities and of the CSC are implemented and sustainable

Preparation stage

- Trainers need to know the **mandate of the trainees** in advance, so that they will know what kind of actions are feasible to include in the action plans and be able to give more guidance.
- LAs should be asked to **map their constraints** in implementing the action plans in advance. That will ensure that they will have thought through the process in advance and there are no negative surprises.
- **Showcase examples of successfully implemented action plans** to participants of the training and to CSC participants to inspire them and share these stories broader, to show the impact.

During the training or the CSC process

- To ensure ownership and participation, it is very helpful if **higher level authorities are included** in the trainings or the CSC as well, which will simplify the follow-up of change processes within the organization.
- In restrictive environments it could be favorable to **focus on individual actions and responsibilities** instead of organizational ones that might not be feasible.

Follow-up of the training/CSC

- Having a **focal person** who is assigned to following up of the action plans is essential. Per context it needs to be decided who is well place to take this matter up with the LAs. In some cases this might be CARE, but in others it needs to be an institution with more legitimacy.
- Have **coordination meetings** with LAs: ask for evidence of implementation directly or via the community. In other cases it might work better to have reflection meetings, during which learning is central and there is also 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) Process** could be used to monitor the implementation process of the action plans developed during the capacity building trainings. This is only possible when the action plan was developed by a group of LAs and not individually, because then the CSC process would be too confrontational.
- **Making a booklet or other product** to share with colleagues of the trainees or CSC participants might be helpful to share the knowledge more broadly and prevent brain-drain in case of high turnover rates. Another option is to ask the LAs to do a presentation for their colleagues of the Inclusive Governance training.



Recommendations to guarantee the effectiveness of the training programme for LAs

- 1. Key EVC staff training:** CARE and implementing partners involved in THA trainings should be trained (at the beginning) on inclusive governance (country's legal framework, key policies, consultation mechanisms). In this way, they will be better equipped to facilitate the process, and even provide advise/suggestions.
- 2. Context analysis:** Ensure that a good context analysis is conducted before the needs assessment: involve other people aside from LAs to inform the context analysis (e.g. someone from community) to ensure objectiveness, avoid biases, generate a more realistic analysis of situation
- 3. Be more inclusive:** Ensure that LAs at grassroots level are also prioritised as participants for the training (because they are close to those who are living in the villages and know the situation).
- 4. Type of activities in action plans:** Ensure that action plans of LAs include engaging with women and youth and CSOs and not only actions within the organisation/government. Also, closely link actions to the existing duties and responsibilities of the trainee (who represent the LA) to make it more realistic and emphasise that actions do not always have to cost money.
- 5. Dealing with turnover amongst all stakeholders:** trainees should offer Inclusive Governance training to other EVC staff. With regards to LAs; if there is a government change (due to elections), the same training should be offered to new government officials. If the same officials remain, one should offer a refresher course (this should already be include in the design of the programme; it needs flexibility in allocation of budgets)
- 6. Include follow-up mechanisms into the training process:** organise Reflection Days with LAs; organise meetings with LAs; organise follow-up workshops to reflect on the status of action plans; provide coaching; invite senior officials during this workshop to get their support in the process.
- 7. Scaling up:** Ensure that the challenges faced by LAs can be integrated in the advocacy plan of CARE and partners
- 8. Coaching:** CARE staff to receive trainings on coaching to ensure that they can facilitate the follow-up and implementation of action plans; integrating the issues in their advocacy plans
- 9. Include effectiveness in monitoring:** assess whether needs and interests of excluded groups are reflected in the government plans and budgets
- 10. The Community Score Card process:** It can be an entry point to engage with local authorities, but there is a need to also stimulate more autonomous spaces for dialogue that are initiated by local authorities themselves.

3. Capacity building of Civil Society to advocate on behalf of marginalised women and youth

Background

The EVC programme aims to build capacity of excluded groups, civil society organizations and public authorities to achieve its intended results. The ultimate goal of capacity development here is that well established local partners, and sustainable community structures, will be able to function and continue their work without support of CARE. More specifically, the aim is to enhance the effectiveness and performance of the partners in order to achieve the greatest possible program impact by improving their organizational practices.

The program is implemented by strategic partners (1st-tier partners) which receive sub-grants for implementation, in cooperation with community based CSOs and community-based organisations (CBOs) (2nd-tier orgs), which do not receive direct funding. Some of the challenges of this model have been that 2nd-tier CSOs were assumed to have legitimacy with women and girls, but in reality they were often more focused on having legitimacy towards the government and donors. Because 2nd-tier organizations don't receive funding through the EVC programme, it is also often hard to monitor them and to receive feedback with regards to their interventions.

Part of CSO capacity strengthening is to enable the poor and marginalised, particularly women and girls, to be aware of their rights and to have a stronger voice to demand change, by organising and acting collectively. In short, the EVC programme's aim is also to enable women and girls, as well as young people, to increase their agency, get organised and link to CSOs to put forward their demands, at all levels (community, local, and national or above). Another important element is to work on assuring that CSOs do effectively represent the priorities and needs of their constituencies.

Key Learning

- 1. Moving beyond representation of excluded groups to real empowerment, and how to assess changes in social norms and in gender relations at the household level,** are some of the most difficult areas in which CSOs need capacitating. This requires challenging the CSO staff's very own understanding of gender relations, and how to challenge unequal power relations in their communities. Conceding that in many cases change is slow and difficult to quantify, CARE and EVC partners emphasized addressing the opportunity of building greater synergies in community-level work, for instance linking support for women's savings and loans associations with programmes that target men in order to bring about more fundamental changes to attitudes and behaviour that are harmful to women and girls.
- 2. Support to 1st-tier CSOs (mentoring, coaching) should not be contractual but strategic.** Given the assumption in the theory of change that these organizations would have a large role in the management and strategic planning of the programme, they should also receive support that helps them to live up to these expectations.
- 3. There are many different kinds of 2nd tier organizations involved** in the programme. They differ per context. It is however unclear overall what their profile is exactly, what their rationale is to be involved in the programme, what their relationship is with the marginalised women and girls and how to increase their effectiveness.

4. It seems that **most outcomes of the programme so far are direct results of CARE and 1st-tier CSOs**, and a little bit of joint work with 2nd-tier CSOs. This could be because the 2nd tier organisations are not effective, or because 2nd-tier outcomes were not harvested (and captured in regular reports), or because it is hard to hold them accountable as there is no contractual agreement with them.
5. **Unclear to what extent women and youth and their groups are involved in CSO advocacy.** In fact given that their legitimacy and effectiveness is questionable at times, CARE and strategic partners need to ask themselves if the right type of organizations are involved. Perhaps the ones which are selected don't have a clear political agenda, but have been selected because they 'fit' the donor chain of upward accountability and reporting.
6. **Testing different approaches in working with 2nd-tier CSOs has positively changed the mindsets of staff** and ways of working with other CSOs.

Recommendations

1. **Integrate outcome harvesting into the regular M&E practices** of all stakeholders in the programme in order to monitor effectiveness of CSOs (2nd tier) who received capacity building support.
2. **Consistently engage second tier organisations in approaches such as the Community Score Card (CSC).** In that way CSOs can have a more active role in monitoring civil authorities.
3. **CARE and strategic partners need to get better at mapping the interests, legitimacy and perceived "power" of organisations** which are best placed to advance the political agenda of marginalized women and youth. This analysis will help us to determine which CSOs we need to be working with.
4. **Revisit and discuss the roles of first tier partners** on how to strengthen their representation function, how to improve their link with authorities, as well as on how 2nd-tier organizations can better engage with EVC advocacy work.
5. In conjunction with local advocacy groups, continue efforts on **community awareness raising, in particular addressing harmful practices** stemming from existing social norms around early marriages, extrajudicial marriages, divorce, inheritance, emphasizing the link with limited participation opportunities for women, as well as addressing how to seek assistance when these rights are violated. This would require involving both male role models as well as protagonists of harmful practices. Special attention should also be paid to strengthening of capacity on monitoring social norm change.



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