

The Sustainability of the Community Score Card and its Effects in Dowa, Malawi



Overview

Two years after the completion of the Supporting and Mitigating the Impact of HIV/AIDS for Livelihoods (SMIHLE) project, a community in Dowa, Malawi has sustained the use of the Community Score Card (CSC) without NGO support. The CSC has been applied to a range of issues, and it has empowered community members, helped develop strong relationships between service users and providers, and improved service delivery.

Background

From 2004-2010, CARE Malawi implemented the SMIHLE project, which focused on strengthening food security service delivery and mainstreaming HIV/AIDS and gender, in the Lilongwe and Dowa districts in Malawi. The CSC was introduced in 2007 to improve communication between community members and CARE Malawi staff. As part of the SMIHLE exit strategy, 10 community members in Group Village Headman (GVH) Mwaphira were identified and trained to serve on the Score Card Committee. They were charged with continuing to facilitate the CSC process after the completion of SMIHLE.

What is the Community Score Card?

The Community Score Card (CSC) is a social accountability tool used for the assessment, planning, monitoring, and evaluation of service delivery. Through the CSC process, service users and service providers come together first to identify the underlying obstacles to effective service delivery, and then to develop a shared strategy for their improvement.

CSC Sustainability

Two years after the end of SMIHLE, the Score Card Committee in GVH Mwaphira has done just that—led the community in the continued use of the CSC. The community has expanded the use of the CSC, applying it not only to issues related to food security, but also related to education, economic development, health, and water and sanitation. It has engaged many power holders with the CSC, including teachers, the School Committee, agriculture extension workers, health surveillance assistants, chiefs, district government officials, and NGOs. The community has also applied the CSC in non-traditional ways to address cultural and family behaviors.

Why does the community still use the CSC?

Community members explain they continue to use the CSC for two primary reasons. First, the training the Score Card Committee members received about the CSC process equipped them with the technical capacity to continue using it. Second, community members expressed a sense of responsibility for the wellbeing of their community. They identified that the CSC had greatly benefitted their lives and felt compelled to continue using it. One person explained, *“We are the citizens of here, and we want to implement the knowledge we have and make things go well. Those things that are not going well, we should improve. We feel responsible for this area.”*

CSC Outcomes

With the help of the CSC, community members have become empowered to take collective action and hold power holders to account. One woman explained of service providers, *“After we were trained in the Score Card, we gained power. We are able to take those people, sit down, and tell them what is wrong using the Score Card method, and those people can accept.”* The CSC has given people a method for voicing their concerns and identifying solutions.

Power holders have become more accountable to the community. Health surveillance assistants and agriculture extension workers now know they must answer to the community, and local leaders are more open to increasing communication and improving transparency. As one woman explained, because of the CSC, *“People are free to ask the village head if something is wrong, and the village head is free to accept that he is wrong. He accepts advice from the people in his village. He has come to realize that people are in a democratic world.”*

Along with empowered community members and accountable service providers, service provision has improved. For example, because of the CSC, teachers now arrive to school on time, and agriculture extension workers and health surveillance assistants visit the area on a regular basis.

The community has also applied the CSC to cultural practices and family issues. By using the CSC with gravediggers, the community ended the practice of calling a witch doctor to burial ceremonies, a custom that was delaying community activities. In addition, families use the CSC to score themselves and plan for the future. One woman explained, *“We sit down and score why we did not prosper this year. We see the reasons why we did not prosper, and we make action plans for our families.”* The CSC has brought more *“freedom”* and *“peace”* to families.

What is the biggest success from the use of the CSC?

As reported by the community, recovering funds from the District Assembly is the biggest accomplishment achieved with the CSC. The District Assembly allocated 380,000 kwacha to the community after a storm destroyed the school roof, but the community did not receive the promised money. In the past, the community may not have known how to advocate with the government. With the CSC, the Score Card Committee scored the District Assembly officials and demanded accountability. One community member explained, *“The District Assembly knew that this community was empowered and that the Committee had scored them, so they knew they needed to return the money.”* With the CSC, the community secured the 380,000 kwacha promised to them for school repairs.

Conclusions

Through the implementation of the CSC, people in GVH Mwaphira have been empowered to identify and solve problems facing their community, and service providers have become accountable for their actions. Word of the community’s achievements has spread, and the Score Card Committee is training people from a neighboring village to conduct the CSC in their own community. The sustained use of the CSC in GVH Mwaphira suggests that this social accountability strategy is a powerful tool that can transform a community after NGO support has ended.

“It has improved even our family life. Before, a woman could live in fear, could not ask her husband things. Now, we can communicate easily, and we can score ourselves.... We can sit down with our husbands and say, ‘You are not performing well, you can go!’”

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