CARE Uganda

Taking Forest Governance to Scale: The Experience with Media

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ECSA PARTNERING INITIATIVE:

Case Study

Introduction

CARE International in Uganda has , over time, implemented various environmental governance initiatives. These have evolved from typical service delivery to building community structures, policy advocacy and promoting social accountability and fighting corruption in the forest sector. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) defines social accountability as " a form of accountability that emerges through actions by citizens and civil society organizations (CSOs) aimed at holding the state to account, as well as efforts by government and other actors (media, private sector, donors) to support these actions" (UNDP, 2010, p.10).

 From December 2011 to March 2013, CARE Uganda piloted a project to combat illegal trade in timber and charcoal through stakeholder cooperation. CARE Uganda, in partnership with civil society organizations registered achievements particularly citizen mobilization to fight corruption. The initiatives are in line with the government laws i.e. the whistle blowers protection Act 2010 and the Anti- Corruption Act 2009, despite existence of the laws, the country remains at a higher rating of 142 out of 175 countries (The corruption perception index 2014 by Transparency International).

In view of increasing citizen capacity to fight corruption in the forestry sector, CARE realized the need for media assistance to amplify voices of citizens in environment, deepen democratic governance and social accountability in the forestry sector. Therefore CARE Uganda through the Forest Sector Resources Transparency Programme (FOREST), partnered with media capacity building organizations and a network of Water and Environment journalists from different media houses to expand the scope of monitoring illegalities in the forest sector. Media is largely viewed to play a role of informing, educating and entertainment, media is seen as private companies and institutions that stand for profit. Therefore, CSO activists have often complained of limited coverage of environmental issues in the press.

CARE initiated partnership with PANOS Eastern Africa, an organization that undertakes activities in development communication and a network of environmental journalists. In this case CARE has been able to engage both the traditional and electronic media to widen to scale the social accountability agenda in forestry.   Through PANOS East Africa CARE has got access to 12 media houses (1 urban Television, 1 newspaper and 10 radio stations). The Network of journalists has provided opportunity for CARE to access 10 media houses (3 newspapers, 1 television and 6 radio stations).

In 2013 CARE's FOREST program partnered with Civil Society Organizations to train a team of journalists to increase their understanding of forestry governance, and the role of media in promoting social accountability. Through the partnership we secured commitment of journalists to produce articles and features in the newspapers and on television .

The baseline study indicated that; the capacity of media to make in depth and analytical reports on forest governance is very limited, journalists obtained training support from organizations outside the media houses mainly charities and CSOs, there lack of in house training also meaning that less importance is attached to forestry governance issues by the journalists since the institution does not pay much attention, there is more event based reporting than self-initiated reports and there is limited support by media houses for journalists to extensively conduct research for analytical features.

What kind of partnership is this?

The partnership with the media has been largely advocacy that is aimed at pursuing lobbying and advocacy related objectives with government agencies. The media has tools such as investigative journalism to expose factors and actors perpetrating forestry illegalities and corruption. The media provides some scope of evidence that CSOs and citizens may not be able to get, therefore media compliments advocacy work. The other purpose of the partnership is capacity building, CARE provided thematic policy information on forestry, introducing the media to government agencies and building rapport between forestry management agencies and the media.

Key Lessons Learnt

Media can play a critical role as a whistle blower towards improving democratization. In the last 2 years of engagement, media has caused investigation and triggered dialogues between CSOs and government agencies, and response from forest management agencies on key issues raised by the media. Media does not stand for profit alone as perceived by CSOs, it is possible to negotiate for fair access as long as the agenda for engagement is clear, involves capacity building and opportunities for learning for both parties.

Media Capacity improved: Procurement and distribution of media equipment to partner media houses has improved not only the number of stories but as well the quality of media productions on forest issues. As noted at the start, a number of rural radios did not have voice recording and production equipment to tap rural voices and bring them into radio programs and debates. With the equipment support (Recorders and Computers) and modest transport facilitation, rural journalists are now able to reach remote areas within their radios radius of coverage to tap rural voices on FG issues and bring them on air.

Journalists' skills and interest in Forest Governance issues built: It is important to build the skills of journalists in investigation and deeper analysis of issues. We see that presently there is clout of journalists who have developed interest in reporting forest governance issues as a result of CARE and PANOS training an engagement. Our field exposure visits, workshop sessions, networking with duty bearers and CSOs working on Forest Governance nurtured throughout project implementation has further improved journalists understanding and interest in Forest Governance issues. We are confident that this may lead to emergency of a club or network of Environment and Natural Resources specialized journalists with same

understanding of FG issues as their more exposed and enlightened counterparts at national level. So far, we can't claim that forest issues have reached the level of setting the political agenda in the region but if the media houses continue to drum forest issues at the observed pace, there is hope that this could become reality by the year 2020. There a few shortcomings are there as well. We observe that some journalists after getting the much wanted skills have found themselves no longer fitting in the small salaries that these rural media houses pay. So remotely, there is turnover of journalists to well-paying media houses at the national level

The overall process of partnership building should remain a loose network, flexible to adjust to the different scenarios and environments. There many dynamics in the media and agenda setting is based upon the context and the operating political environment.

CARE staff should be exposed to skills and principles of partnering with media and how the media works. It is very clear that the style of writing by media and CSOs is different, CSOs writing is characterized by jargons, lots of abbreviations and yet media requires precise statements, simple but clear. Beyond communication strategies, there is need to come up with a strategy of partnering with media agencies, as CARE go deeper into advocacy initiatives.

Media is a good and critical whistle blower: media houses and journalists anticipate that when they have raise issues the civil society should make a follow up with government and or engage. The journalists state that they cannot raise the flag and then be the ones to make a follow up. The media expects that once information is given out in the press, CSOs will make a follow up. For instance such an alarming story in the photograph above triggered response from the forestry agency (the National Forestry Authority)

Increased and improved media reporting of Forest Governance Issues

In 2014, there were 87 media articles, 55 radio debates; 5 interviews; 4 public announcements and 3 broadcast news features that were published by media houses, while by September 2015, 108 Newspaper articles, 18 Interviews, 7 Clips, 65 Debates, 75 Public Service Announcements and 10 Features have been published. This is a great achievement compared to 40 articles per year as at 2013 baseline. A journalist network has been strengthened and has been able to access $56,000 from another donor agency as a result of the CARE partnership.

Our partnering with media organizations and houses has increased reporting and coverage of forest governance issues at especially at the local level throughout the project areas. This has increased not only visibility and interest in forest governance issues but also increased recognition of forest issues by the local communities and authorities in the local development agenda.

Critical Challenges

⇒ Monitoring the impact of media work.

⇒ Investigative journalism is expensive, requires time and resources and commitment of the media houses to support the initiative/cause.

⇒ At times the information given is insufficient and the agencies challenge credibility of the information and the source, the information may not be used for advocacy.

⇒ There is still need to identify the suitable media for advocacy to ensure the right audience is targeted. For instance social media does attract lots of debates around forest while print i.e. newspapers and radio triggers action.

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