ACODE

Local Government Councils' Scorecard Initiative

Promoting accountability and effective service delivery in Uganda

What is LGCSCI?

The Local Government Councils' Scorecard Initiative (LGCSCI) is a social accountability initiative that seeks to deepen local governance by strengthening the political accountability of elected local leaders and citizens' demand for excellence in the provision of service delivery by their local governments. LGCSCI was launched in 2009 in 10 districts and currently covers 35 districts in Uganda. Through our partnership with Uganda Local Governments Association (ULGA), Urban Authorities Association (UAAU), and Ministry of Local Government (MoLG) ACODE can reach out and disseminate research findings and policy recommendations to all local governments.

Objectives

The conceptualization of the initiative was premised on the realization that while the decentralization policy in Uganda had registered significant social, economic and political progress, especially in terms of the provision of service delivery and political participation, there were significant gaps that required urgent action. Local Governments' performance in executing their mandates, especially service delivery was declining. Important to note also is that there was a general lack of political accountability among elected local leaders to the electorate. Over the years, the political discourse in the country led to a situation where citizens were disengaged and became mere receivers of services from the government without the courage and facts to hold their leaders accountable. Through the scorecard initiative, it was envisaged that local governance can be improved by complementing the government's current supply-side democracy interventions with demand-side solutions.

The intervention logic of the project therefore seeks to deepen local governance by strengthening local governance structures, processes and systems for improved service delivery by local governments focuses. The pathways to achieving this are through focusing on building citizen agency, strengthening local government governance and accountability structures and triggering responsiveness from central government entities for effective delivery of decentralised services.

Subsequently, the initiative has three outcomes namely; i) an engaged citizenry equipped with the knowledge and tools necessary to demand good governance; ii) strengthened local government systems; and iii) a central government responsive to local governance issues.

Why LGCSCI

a) Performance monitoring of elected leaders and district councils

The initiative pivots on an in-house assessment tool designed to guide local government council performance assessment. The scorecard indicators are derived from the principal roles and responsibilities of the local councils as stipulated in the Local Government Act. The tool is purposely designed to assess the council organs in four categories: The District Council, the Chairperson, the Speaker of the Council, and individual Councilors. The tool evaluates the leaders' roles in four main performance areas:
i) the legislative function; ii) contact with the electorate; iii) participation in lower local governments; and iv) oversight over government-funded development programmes that are aligned with the National Priority Programmes Areas (NPPAs). The assessments are undertaken on a financial year basis to enhance the capacity of these organs to fulfil their mandates.

b) Capacity building

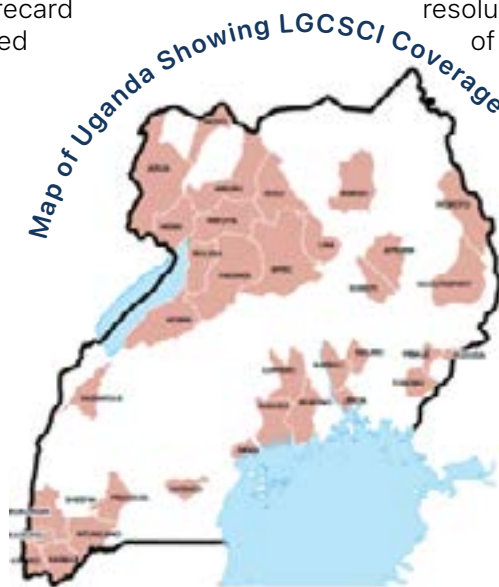The LGCSCI capacity building activities are premised on the identified gaps during the performance monitoring. The interventions are tailored for improvement in specific areas targeting key actors at local government level including technocrats and political leadership. LGCSCI interventions undertaken include; orientation of newly elected leaders, regular training workshops specifically targeting Speakers and Clerks to Council; one-on-one mentorship sessions for councillors undertaken by the district research teams; and multi-district leadership forums organized for purposes of peer learning among district local governments;

c) Conflict resolution

ACODE has been organising conflict resolution clinics in a number of districts covered by the project. Several demand-driven conflict resolution clinics are organised in different local governments to equip them with necessary skills for resolving these conflicts. This intervention arose out of the fact that many local governments had been crippled by both ethnic conflicts and conflicts between technical officers and elected leaders, among others. Through this intervetion, ACODE has been able to resolve conflicts in 7 districts which has fostered severed relationships and contributed to improvement in service delivery.

d) Citizen engagement

The project recognizes that citizens are a critical catalyst in ensuring good governance and effective service delivery. Citizens, therefore, form the basis of change in LGCSCI's theory of change. As such, they need to be empowered first with knowledge of their rights and responsibilities; second, the roles and responsibilities of their leaders, and third, with how they can contribute to the development process in their

Map of Uganda Showing LGCSCI Coverage

communities. ACODE specifically designed a Citizen Engagement Meetings (CEMs) methodology to bridge the knowledge gap, provide avenues for interaction between the citizens and their elected leaders and build the capacity of citizens to participate in monitoring the services. The Civic Engagement Action Plan (CEAPs) are then drawn as an agreement among the citizens with their local representatives on clear actions to be undertaken within specified timelines and clearly spelt out responsible persons for follow up.

e) Policy advocacy

Under this project, there have been several evidence-based policy advocacy interventions. Using different research products such as Policy Research Papers; Policy Briefs; policy memos; the local governance briefer; and newspaper articles among others, ACODE has been able to engage the central government Ministries, Agencies, Departments and the local governments on targeted policy issues aimed at improving the performance of local governments. These efforts have won ACODE nomination to sit on Technical Working Groups of the Ministry of Local Government and Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development to support the government in designing and generating policy proposals to improve the functioning of local governments.

Demonstrable impact of the initiative

Over the years of implementation, the initiative has registered a number of achievements in line with its objective of strengthening decentralized structures and citizen agency exemplified by the following:

- *Improved performance of intervention districts*

There is evidence of better service delivery and accountability in LGCSCI intervention districts as they performed better in national assessments compared to the non-intervention districts. The annual Local Government Performance Assessment conducted by the Office of the Prime Minister in 2019, 2020, and 2021 have consistently showed that districts covered by LGCSCI demonstrated higher performance with an average score of 5 per cent, 4 per cent and 4 per cent respectively more than the non-intervention districts.

- *Remarkable improvement in the attitude of the citizens towards their participation in governance and engagement of leaders and local governments*

Citizens have been supported to write petitions, and letters and participate in community meetings and radio programmes to demand better services from their leaders. This has resulted in several service delivery outcomes such as the construction of classroom blocks, repair of water sources, rehabilitation of roads, construction of pit latrines in schools and health centres, and provision of furniture in schools. See detailed report here.

- *Improved response rates to citizen service delivery concerns*

A number of concerns that citizens have raised in their petitions to councils, letters, radio talk shows, and community meetings have been addressed. The local government responses have been documented as indicated in the impact booklet available here.

- *Increased interest in local CSOs in local governance issues*

Many local CSOs have acted as intermediaries in amplifying citizen service delivery concerns to the local governments. This intermediary role has led to an increase in citizen active participation in engaging the local authorities and also led to the increased local government response to citizen concerns.

- *Contributed to policy and legislative processes*

The project has made significant contribution to the policy formulation processes around

decentralisation. Through research papers, policy memos, and advocacy engagements, the project has been able to influence key processes. For instance, a study on the performance of the COVID-19 District Task Forces in Uganda elicited funding for previously underfunded local government structures; the study on local government financing prompted the Ministry of Finance Permanent Secretary to issue a directive to all government MDAs to release funds meant for decentralized services; and a memo to the Ministry of Local Government resulted into a moratorium on the creation of new districts.

- *ACODE nominated to Technical Working Groups of MoLG and MoFPED*

ACODE's contributions to local governance, the organisation was nominated by the Ministry of Local Government to be a member of the Local Leadership Transformation Technical Working Group and by the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development to sit on The Local Government Technical Working Group. The nomination has helped to establish key partnerships with the Ministry of Local Government (MoLG); the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MoFPED) and the Local Government Finance Commission (LGFC). This has given ACODE a national platform to directly make input in government development programmes and work plans.

Rationale for scale-up

The LGCSCI has demonstrated that evidence-based advocacy and capacity building interventions can create the real change in decentralized service delivery. Challenges of governance in a growing democracy however still remain as exemplified by low civic competence, high turnover of elected officials every 5-year election cycle, limited resources by the line ministry to undertake orientation and follow up of decentralized units and a largely weak policy implementation mechanism. Although limited in geographical scope covering only 35 out of 147 districts and 11 cities, the project has demonstrated that once an initiative plays a complimentary role to ongoing government processes, provides issue-based and research-led advocacy and can craft partnerships and collaborations with local governments, CSOs and MDAs, efficiency and effectiveness in delivery of public goods and services can be achieved.