

Formative evaluation of the '*I Am Aware*' social accountability project in Ghana

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Executive Summary

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In partnership with


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'*I Am Aware*' is a social accountability project implemented by the Ghana Centre for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana) and funded by the Hewlett Foundation. The objective is to 'empower citizens and duty bearers by providing free, up-to date, user-friendly and accessible information on the state of public goods and services, to strengthen the demand and supply side of accountability.'

***I Am Aware* project**

CDD-Ghana collects and archives government data on service delivery at district level. The detailed sector data is provided on the *I Am Aware* website (iamawareghana.com). Information products are also created to make the data more accessible and useful. For example, the District League Table (a collaboration with UNICEF) ranks all districts in Ghana on the quality of key services, using a composite index. The website has apps that enable users to compare service quality in selected districts, which are presented as graphs. 'Bulletins' provide infographics that compare the quality of services in particular districts to national averages. A Free SMS platform has also been set up, for citizens to text requests for data which is sent to their phone.

I Am Aware is implemented in collaboration with selected civil society organisations (CSOs), media and technical partners, to strengthen its reach and influence. The information is shared through open access sources (e.g. the website, mass media and SMS) and in forums for dialogue with target stakeholders. The dissemination and engagement are done at national and regional levels, and in twenty project districts.

The evaluation is based on research with civil society and duty bearers at national level and in four sampled project districts. It explores the project assumptions, and key intermediate outcomes such as the relevance and accessibility of the information, how it has been used, and whether and how this influenced government responsiveness.

Summary of the evaluation findings

CDD-Ghana encountered various challenges with collecting government data. It required building trust and understanding among the key central ministries. **Yet some of the required data was not available and there have been challenges with its timeliness and accuracy.** These problems are underpinned by the weak government data ecosystem. In response, CDD-Ghana has started to raise awareness about the importance of quality data on public services, and more adequate government resourcing for data collection and management.

National level

The District League Table has been widely disseminated at national level. **Most sampled national CSOs and policy advocacy organisations had used the District League Table, which is a strong indication of its relevance.** They used it to plan their geographical focus, for advocacy in the districts, or for policy analysis. The District League Table has also gained wide media coverage. Yet the media stories often sensationalised the rankings (to shame districts with low performance) rather than analysing the deeper policy and budget issues.

Few non-partner civil society organisations were aware of the detailed sector data (available on the website and SMS platform). This highlights the need for stronger marketing. We facilitated a review of the data available on the website within the evaluation interviews. **The sampled CSOs thought that the sector data would be useful for advocacy, but felt that the website graphs could be clearer, and they suggested the creation of more compelling sectoral information** (e.g. sectoral league tables). They also called for more gender disaggregation and data on disability access. The

sector data is less relevant to national journalists, who prefer ready-made news (like the District League Table) and more current information.

CDD-Ghana's engagement with ministries and parliamentarians has promoted integration of the District League Table into national and regional oversight mechanisms. Some regional governments have also imposed targets on the districts (e.g. becoming 'open defecation free' by a certain date) to improve their District League Table rankings. **Yet the data has not yet influenced national policy or budget,** which would evidence greater central government accountability. This is critical since the district budgets are small and the central government directly manages some services. CDD-Ghana has influenced government debate on use of the League Table to determine district budgets; yet there is disagreement on whether to give more funds to districts with poorer services; or alternatively, to reward those with good performance.

District level

There has been greatest responsiveness to the data at district level. The publicity and pressure around the District League Table has been a key driver for this responsiveness because it created competition and embarrassment, and this opened space for citizen dialogue on the sector data. This dialogue was enabled by *I Am Aware* engagements with citizens and duty bearers.

The project has used three main channels to share the information with citizens in the districts: town hall meetings, local radio and the SMS platform.


- The town hall meetings engaged civic group leaders, opinion leaders (e.g. retired professionals) and community leaders. At these meetings, the district-level data on service quality were verbally explained and debated in relation to citizen experiences. The project partners also explained local governance systems. This **face-to-face engagement enabled most of these citizens to understand the information and it motivated collective action,** as explained below.
- The project has forged partnerships with local radio stations (one per region) to share the information with wider citizens, including on-air dialogue with duty bearers and citizen call-in. We found that **local radio is an appropriate channel for information sharing.** Most citizens listen to radio, and it is used by district authorities to communicate with citizens. Citizens also felt that calling-in to a radio programme is a less onerous way of raising issues than meeting duty bearers in

person. **Yet, the proliferation of radio stations limited the effectiveness of working with just one per region.** In response, the project has started to expand the strategy to include additional radio stations and regional trainings for journalists.

- **Citizens with secondary education are the main target group for the SMS platform, and those sampled found it intuitive to use.** But it is not accessible to citizens with low literacy. Weak phone networks were a challenge in some areas, and some of the indicators require clearer descriptions. Educated citizens also felt that analysed data (e.g. child to school ratios) is more useful for advocacy than some of the empirical data provided (e.g. number of schools). However, most sampled citizens were excited that they could receive information about local service quality on their phone, and a few spoke of using the data to hold duty bearers to account.

We analysed the relevance of the data in focus group discussions with civic groups, including women's groups and disability groups. We found that **the sector data is largely relevant to citizen concerns, but with some variation.** For example, the data speaks to concerns about examination pass rates, open defecation, and the availability of boreholes (and for disabled people, borehole mechanisation). Yet citizens found the indicators on disease prevalence less relevant and more difficult to use. Some priority concerns are not captured by the data, such as service provider behaviour, drug availability, health insurance, and road potholes. CDD-Ghana has tried to address some of these gaps, but this is constrained by what data is available.

What sector data was most relevant to citizens?

| |  Education |  Sanitation |  Water |
|---|---|---|--|
| I Am Aware indicators (data provided for each district) | Primary and Junior High: # of schools, # students (male/ female), # teachers; # trained teachers; # textbooks available (science, maths, English), # chairs, # tables, # students repeating the year Outcomes: # students repeating the year, Junior high completion rate (male/ female); Basic Secondary Examination Certificate (BECE) pass rates per subject (male/female) | # sanitation officers, kg waste produced; # waste collecting trucks; # waste skips and dump sites Outcomes: # communities with open defecation free (ODF) certification | # sanitation officers, kg waste produced; # waste collecting trucks; # waste skips and dump sites Outcomes: # communities with open defecation free (ODF) certification |
| Do the indicators cover priority citizen concerns? | Yes. Combination of input and outcome indicators is useful for advocacy. Useful gender disaggregation. | Yes. Particularly open defecation, and refuse dumps/collection. | Yes. Particularly boreholes, and their mechanisation (for people with disabilities) |
| Citizen concerns not covered by the indicators | Disability access to schools, teacher behaviours and absenteeism, weak parental supervision of students. | Lack of public toilets; cholera caused by open defecation. | Water tap being turned off; water contamination caused by mining or open defecation. |
| |  Security |  Health |  Roads |
| I Am Aware indicators (data provided for each district) | # of police in district | Total hospital admissions; # beds per patient; # health facilities; # health workers. Outcomes: # communities with open defecation free (ODF) status; Rates of infant and maternal mortality; HIV/AIDS, diarrhoea, pneumonia, anaemia, typhoid | Data not yet provided. I Am Aware intended to collect data on the road network. |
| Do the indicators cover priority citizen concerns? | Yes. Security was mainly mentioned by men, and it was a larger concern in some districts than others. | Data is less directly relevant to citizen concerns, and the indicators are more difficult to use. | Data is less directly relevant to citizen concerns. |
| Citizen concerns not covered by the indicators | Police quality and behaviour/bribes; lack of street lighting (mentioned by women); crime prevalence. | Health insurance, drug availability, a lack of local health facility/staff, the poor state of facility buildings, and health worker behaviour. | Poor state of roads (potholes, dangerous bridges, etc). |

Website : Key Lessons



Advantages

- Accessible to key national target groups (e.g. CSOs, academics).
- Users found the apps to compare districts useful



Disadvantages

- Less accessible at district level: lack of computers, IT skills and weak internet connection
- Some target groups (e.g. journalists) lack time to seek data on a website



Lessons Learnt

- Requires a more user-oriented design, e.g.: simple steps to access data; user-oriented filing; clearer graphs
- More expansive marketing of the website is required

Free SMS: Key Lessons



Advantages

- Citizens have greater access to mobile phones than computers
- System does not require a smart-phone
- Primary target group (citizens with secondary education) found the system intuitive to use



Disadvantages

- Weak mobile phone network in some areas: error messages lowered confidence in SMS
- SMS platform not accessible to all civic leaders (requires literacy/numeracy)



Lessons Learnt

- Requires a more user-friendly design: e.g. fewer steps to access data; user-oriented indicator descriptions
- Sharing analysed data by SMS is more useful to citizens, than empirical data
- More expansive marketing of the Free SMS is required

Town Hall Meetings in Districts: Key Lessons



Advantages

- Face-to-face meetings aided citizen comprehension of the data and its relevance
- Provided space for citizen education on rights and governance systems
- Encouraged dialogue on service quality, and promoted collective action
- The project gained feedback about data relevance and citizen concerns



Disadvantages

- Meetings reach just a few citizens – the project focused on civic leaders
- The decline of community forums in some areas - reduced opportunities for direct representation of wider citizens



Lessons Learnt

- Need to strengthen representation of wider citizens in the process that follows the meetings
- Civic leaders need support and visual aids share the information with wider citizens

District League Table Poster : Key Lessons



Advantages

- **Colourful visual** - attracted attention
- **Hard-copy product**: preferred by CSOs; potential to reach citizens without access to technology



Disadvantages

- **Not intuitively understood by all**: literacy required to read the information key



Lessons Learnt

- **There is demand for wider distribution**
Some citizens and service providers wanted to display/explain the poster at schools, health facilities and church or mosque

Local Radio : Key Lessons



Advantages

- **Appropriate channel**: Common use for district communications, and most citizens listen to radio. For citizens, calling a radio show to raise a problem is less onerous than meeting duty bearers.
- **Platform for district assemblies** to explain the data to citizens (reduced tension about publication of the data)
- **Enabled public dialogue** about local service quality (citizen call in shows)



Disadvantages

- **The reach of the local radio programmes was reduced by**:
 - Partnering with one radio station per region, while many stations reach the districts
 - Radio syndication: Peak time on local radio is dominated by national programmes
- **Radio stations are for-profit**: Most required payment for dedicated airtime



Lessons Learnt

- **Need to expand reach to more local radio stations**. Approaches that worked:
 - trainings for wider journalists;
 - encouraging regional stations to share the information with community radios.

***I Am Aware* found that many citizens lacked the confidence to make demands, and there were few active civic groups in some districts. Due to this, the project has created 'social action groups' to lead advocacy based on the data.** These groups arose from the town hall meetings. They are comprised of some civic group leaders, opinion leaders and community leaders; and include women and people with disabilities. We found strong alignment between social action group advocacy and the service delivery problems that concern wider citizens. Yet few of the social action group members had discussed the data or advocacy priorities with wider citizens, which presents a risk of elite capture. This was affected by the decline of community forums, as well as difficulties with explaining the data.

CDD-Ghana and its CSO partners facilitated meetings between the social action groups and district duty bearers, in which the data was used to highlight sector challenges and to evidence citizen concerns. This included consultative meetings on the district medium term development plans, the timing of which was an opportunity for influence. Social action group members have also pursued independent advocacy at facility level and for specific local needs. Some of this advocacy focused on issues beyond the data, such as service provider behaviour.

The social action groups found the data useful because it evidences the extent of the problems and inadequacies. The district comparisons and provision of national standards (e.g. '1 policeman per 500 citizens') were especially useful for advocacy and made the data more tangible. The provision of both outcome and input data in some sectors also strengthened understanding of the underlying challenges.

Across the four districts, duty bearers reported that the data and dialogue has strengthened their understanding of sector problems; and helped them to identify priorities. Framed by the pressure to improve District League Table rankings, the dialogue and evidence led to commitments to improve services. All four sampled district assemblies have integrated some citizen priorities into their medium-term development plans; and three (Garu, Kwaebibirem and Ekumfi) have commenced service improvements, such as:

- *Education*: purchase of furniture for schools; intensified school monitoring; an award scheme to motivate teachers; in-service teacher training and mock exams.
- *Health*: public education initiatives on infant mortality and citizen rights to report poor health worker behaviour; and completing the construction of health facility infrastructure.

- *Sanitation*: new public education initiatives on open defecation and hand washing; the construction of public toilets for women; and refuse disposal areas.
- *Security*: renovation of local police posts to help retain security personnel.

However, district assembly responsiveness is constrained by their relatively small budgets. The assemblies also contest the validity of the District League Table, since it is based on government data with gaps and errors, and the central government directly manages some of the services. CDD-Ghana and its partners facilitated dialogue on these challenges. They also emphasized that the District League Table is an assessment of the district as a whole, including central government accountability. In response, some assemblies have used the *I Am Aware* data to influence central government to post more police to the district (Ekumfi), or to gain NGO support (e.g. funding for school furniture in Garu).

What kind of data was useful and for whom?

Analysed comparative data



Comparison of district service performance to regional/national averages and standards

were especially useful for citizens. They made inadequacies clear and strengthened advocacy

Comparisons to nearby districts

were meaningful and tangible for citizens and useful for advocacy. Also a focus of local radio debate

District League Table:

Newsworthy information for media.

Yet most media stories sensationalised the rankings, without drawing attention to systemic issues.

Useful for national and regional government:

It was integrated into monitoring frameworks and used to impose targets on districts.

Drove district authority responsiveness:

It created competition and embarrassment. Yet District Assemblies contested its validity as it is based on data that has gaps and errors.

Detailed empirical data



Enabled broader analyses by some CSOs and academics, that was used for policy papers and advocacy

Less useful and accessible for citizens and journalists who lack the capacity or time to analyse the data

Providing data on both service inputs and outcomes



Enabled understanding of the linkages between inputs and outcomes - for both citizen groups and district duty bearers.

Service input data was more tangible for citizens than outcomes data. It highlighted specific intervention needs to district authorities.

How the Process of Influence Played out In Practice

■ government responsiveness outcomes

■ civil society action outcomes

■ project activities



National government

Why they responded

Project dovetailed with ambition to improve District responsibility for service quality

How they responded

- Integrated District League Table into monitoring frameworks
- Some dialogue on using League Table to inform budget allocations
- Yet no responsiveness yet in regard to national policy or budgets

Advocacy to access government data, and to promote responsiveness at national level



Regional governments

Why they responded

League Table created competition and drive to improve regional rankings

How they responded

- Integrated District League Table into monitoring frameworks
- Called meetings with district assemblies to discuss League Table
- Some imposed targets on districts to improve League Table scores

Bureaucratic accountability - downward push on districts

District assemblies used data to call for more support from National Government and NGOs

Disseminations and dialogue on District League Table



District Assemblies

Why they responded

Publicity & pressure around League Table created incentive to improve scores and engage citizens. Citizen use of evidence made problems clear and demands credible

How they responded

- Integrated some citizen concerns into district plans
- Implemented various initiatives in response to citizen demands
- Emerging change in perceptions of accountability relationships in some districts

Engaged district assemblies: dialogue on the sector data, and promoted citizen engagement

Vertical accountability - civil society demands for District Assembly responsiveness



Engaged citizen groups

Why they engaged

Feel empowered by the project engagement, data and new knowledge of government systems

How they engaged

Met District Assemblies to discuss service concerns and citizen priorities

Used existing engagement channels to advocate for specific initiatives

Met service providers to discuss concerns



Wider civil society

Data dialogues motivated advocacy

- Media used League Table to name and shame districts
- Local radio programs on service quality
- Some CSOs used data for advocacy, mainly in districts



Wider citizens

For those reached, district comparisons raised awareness and concern about poor local services

Some citizens met District Authorities to complain about League Table scores

Some citizens called into radio dialogues, to raise service quality concerns

Engaged civic leaders: dialogue on the data and supported advocacy

- **SMS and local radio** to reach wider citizens.
- **Data dialogues** with some wider civil society

Project implementation through partnerships

Building partnerships with other organisations helped to extend the project's reach and influence. Such 'infomediaries' are often seen as key to open data initiatives because they can help to translate data into accessible information, and support data use. CDD-Ghana built the partner's capacity to use the *I Am Aware* data. The partners especially appreciated CDD-Ghana's ongoing technical support and the peer learning in bi-annual partner meetings.

- **Partnerships with other CSOs** expanded the project's reach and influence at district level. This required quite intensive CSO engagement and was enabled by existing social capital in the districts. Yet low financial support for partner activities reduced the scope of CSO work.
- The **technical partners** (Wigal, and the Centre for Geographical Information Systems) developed the SMS platform and a website application, which CDD-Ghana could not have achieved alone.
- The **national media partners** did not use the *I Am Aware* information as extensively as CDD-Ghana had anticipated. Most of them covered the District League Table, as did wider media, but they did not use the more detailed sector data. This was affected by a lack of time to seek data and a preference for 'ready-made news'.
- The **local radio partnerships** promoted on-air dialogue about the district level data, which made it accessible to citizens. Yet, the strategy of partnering with one radio station per region limited the reach of the programs.

The evaluation assessed the following theory of change assumptions:

| ASSUMPTION | ASSESSMENT |
|---|--|
| Comparisons of districts would make the data more accessible and powerful | True |
| National civil society partners would use the <i>I Am Aware</i> information to strengthen their existing work. | Partially true: The national CSO partners had relevant projects but few used the data until additional financial support was provided for activities. National media partners used the District League Table, yet few used the sector data (partly because they need more up-to-date information and prefer 'ready-made' news). |
| Partnerships with citizen groups would build their capacity and motivation to use the data for advocacy, and they would know and represent wider citizen concerns. | True , although their direct representation and engagement with citizens could be strengthened. |
| District duty bearers would be more responsive when citizens make demands. | Partially true: intensive and strategic advocacy is required and limited resources constrain their ability to respond. |
| Parallel engagement at district and national levels would strengthen responsiveness | Partially true: Engagement at both levels is certainly critical, and national government use of the data for oversight strengthened district assembly responsiveness. Yet more concrete outcomes at national level, in terms of policy and budget, have been more difficult to achieve. |

Summary of key insights and lessons learnt

The *I Am Aware* initiative has generated various lessons and insights that may be useful for wider transparency and accountability projects.

- **The weak government data ecosystem was a challenge** for the timeliness, completeness and accuracy of the data, which also affected its relevance. Yet, the publication of the data has encouraged greater attention to data quality in some districts; and it opened space for civil society dialogue with government on the need to improve the data ecosystem.
- **The design and dissemination of information products require an audience-focus**, to ensure that they are relevant, accessible and compelling to that audience. There were challenges with the accessibility of technology-based information platforms (especially in rural areas) and they require expansive marketing.
- **Citizens found comparative information more accessible and useful** for advocacy, than empirical data. The provision of both service input and outcomes data enabled understanding of the linkages and informed specific interventions.
- **National civil society did not demand data in the way that CDD-Ghana assumed.** So, the project moved toward a more active approach to encourage data use such as creating more compelling information and engaging civil society in dialogue.
- **At district level, verbal explanation of the information supported civil society uptake**, as did citizen education on local governance systems. Partnerships with citizen groups also strengthened their capacity to use the evidence in engagements with their district assembly.
- ***I Am Aware* found that it is important to foster citizen champions** to advocate on behalf of others, since many citizens didn't have the courage to make demands. Yet, while there was alignment between advocacy and wider citizen priorities; partnering with small groups of citizens bears the risks of elite capture, particularly given the decline of community forums.
- **District assembly responsiveness to the League Table was partly influenced by regional government pressure, and its integration into national monitoring frameworks.** This resonates with recent social accountability analysis (e.g. Fox 2016), which finds that citizen 'voice' is most effective when it triggers such horizontal government accountability ('teeth').
- Yet, **the way that the League table has been used has placed pressure on the district assemblies to respond, while their capacity for responsiveness is constrained.** Through dialogue on these challenges, *I Am Aware* encouraged the district assemblies to press central government for more support - which achieved some (albeit piecemeal) responsiveness.
- As such, ***I Am Aware* has taken a strategic approach, by working at all levels of government to promote collective responsibility for the delivery of quality services.** This has started to influence central government dialogue on policies and resource allocation that would improve service provision, although as yet there have been no outcomes in this regard. A key challenge is the way that national policy and decisions are made: they are based more on party manifestos and politics than evidence. This highlights the need for more intensive national level engagement, including building political support. Working towards this, CDD-Ghana has tested some approaches which hold potential, such as fostering government champions in key ministries, and engaging national CSO coalitions in dialogue on the data.

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