KEEPING THE PROMISE
Lessons in Sustaining CARE’s Community Score Card
WHAT WE KNOW

For over 20 years CARE Malawi has led in adapting, testing, and innovating CARE’s Community Score Card (CSC). Since 2011, we have been partnering with communities in Ntcheu to identify effective, participatory, transparent, and equitable ways of increasing access to quality reproductive and maternal health services. Our collaboration with the district government of Ntcheu has led to a successful scale-up of the CSC across 10 health facilities, and we’ve supported more than 20 youth groups in implementing the CSC to improve education, health, and environmental outcomes in their communities.

In 2018, we began a qualitative study to learn how communities in Ntcheu were adapting and sustaining CSC processes. We spoke with over 200 people, including youth groups, Community Health Action Groups (CHAGs), local government, national government, partner organizations, and CARE Malawi staff. We asked about the motivating factors, challenges, and successes of groups implementing the CSC.

We’ve learned that many groups have continued using the CSC to create change in their communities. The district government is using the CSC to identify, prioritize, and plan for reproductive health services, while local healthcare workers are using the CSC to improve delivery and utilization of services. At the community level, traditional governments, youth groups, and CHAGs have used the CSC to collectively name problems, identify solutions, and enact and track changes with the support of civil society and government actors.

Healthcare workers harnessed the power of the CSC to address bottlenecks in service utilization and to improve health outcomes, observing:

- A reduction in maternal and infant deaths;
- An increase in attendance at antenatal care (ANC) and postnatal checks;
- More male involvement in maternal health visits;
- An improvement in the quality of services in health care centers; and
- A reduction in unplanned and teenage pregnancies.

Youth groups mobilized their communities to bring about transformative change on cross-cutting and pressing issues, including:

- Working with chiefs and local/sub governments to reduce child marriage practices;
- Conductiong CSC processes with school age adolescents to reduce school dropout rates;
- Building latrines and guardian shelters at health facilities; and
- Negotiating young women’s access to farm land to both address land-holding power dynamics and build-in conservation approaches.

Communities came together to expand spaces for negotiation and collective action, working to:

- Strengthen relationships and improve attitudes between community, the local government and health care workers;
- Open channels of communication between community members and the health care system;
- Enhance transparency and accountability of local development processes;
- Improve the planning and allocation of resources to address local needs; and
- Increase community engagement in problem identification and solution generation which in turn enhances a sense of ownership of community assets.

ON ACCOUNTABILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY: LESSONS FROM NTCHEU

Community members cited several factors that contributed to their decision to independently use or continue using the CSC process. Primary among these was the training, support, and supervision CARE provided to the different partners implementing the CSC. Communities noted the importance of designing with sustainability in mind, ensuring that local government ownership was built into the process from the beginning. Other factors that greatly contributed to sustainability included community perceptions of improvements in health outcomes and quality of care, including better maternal and infant health outcomes, and reductions in unplanned
pregnancies. People also cited the **structure of the CSC** as one that organically promotes sustainability; mainly the opportunity for communities to collectively define a problem, identify solutions, and track progress. For young people, the opportunity to **elevate their voices and impact change** were factors that contributed to sustainability. Youth groups appreciated the CSC as an opportunity to create change and as a channel to have their voices heard and respected by the larger community.

Community members working with the CSC also named several challenges that impacted their ability to use and ensure long term sustainability of the CSC. They mentioned a **need for increased oversight** as communities prepared to independently implement and follow-up on the CSC process. They suggested that refresher trainings for new personnel might solve this problem and ensure process quality. Community members also suggested developing a clear transition plan to prepare them to take ownership of the CSC process including a clear outline of resource needs and fundraising approaches. Other challenges included **limited participation and attendance** during CSC meetings mainly due to limited visibility and incentivization, and the **lack of resources** including for supplies and transportation.

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUSTAINING THE CSC**

Communities see the power and value of the CSC as a transformative approach that generates local solutions to pressing issues. As we look to the future of the CSC, communities provide the following recommendations to support usability and sustainability:

- **Coordinate consensus among the various organizations supporting and implementing the CSC regarding best practices and strategies for working with communities.**

One of the ways CARE Malawi is working to address this is through digitization of the CSC process, working with partner organizations to innovate a new data platform. This platform will provide an infrastructure to aggregate citizen-generated CSC data, such that civil society organizations, governments, and researchers will be able to access quality aggregated data and advocate for better services.

- **Develop innovative and sustainable approaches to encourage meeting attendance and involvement by the various stakeholders that are key to the success of the CSC process.**

One of the ways we hope to achieve this is by strengthening our partnerships with youth leaders. Youth groups have demonstrated strong leadership in implementing the CSC across multiple communities, addressing issues from child marriage to deforestation. CARE Malawi began a pilot initiative this year, where youth leaders work with the district government to facilitate the CSC across three health facilities to improve access to family planning services, with attention to the needs of adolescents.

**Institutionalize periodic capacity building and refresher trainings for facilitators and key stakeholders, and coordinate with community members to ensure continued community, local, and district government buy-in.**

CARE Malawi will work with the CSC Consulting Group to support training-for-trainers and other initiatives to continuously build-up capacity in communities where we work.

**Identify sustainable ways to generate income or obtain resources (transportation, supplies, etc.) necessary for implementation.**

CARE Malawi has worked to address the resource issues through various approaches including integrating the CSC within district planning efforts and supporting youth networks in implementing the CSC. However, the question of better resourcing the CSC within communities remains a pressing issue that requires collective efforts.

Sustaining the CSC will continue to be an iterative and ongoing process, one that will need to be examined through continuous learning from the perspectives of the communities facilitating the process. While challenges remain, our findings on the sustainability of the tool support the ability to think about implementation beyond one community, district, or country.
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care.org/CSC