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Applying a community scorecard for rural water services in Timor-Leste

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Accountability of service providers to their clients/users is an essential condition for sustainability of water services. Social audit, Citizen Report Card and Community Scorecard have been widely utilised tools enabling citizens and communities to hold government to account for the delivery of basic services. WaterAid introduced a Community Scorecard Tool to Timor-Leste in 2012 to allow communities to assess the performance of WaterAid and their implementing partners. This tool was adapted in 2016 to enable communities to assess and improve the performance of the community based water management group and government frontline staff to deliver water services in their rural communities. The methodology includes provision of an immediate feedback loop and action planning component that involves government authorities, formal village leadership, service providers and water users. The tool was tested in eight locations by WaterAid and local NGO facilitators and to date has shown promise in motivating communities to improve their water services.

Background

A rights based development approach depends on service providers and authorities (duty bearers) being held to account by their clients (rights holders) for delivering quality, sustainable services. The lines between service providers and water users are blurred where voluntary community groups are responsible for the service delivery. This is the situation in the water sector which was radically decentralised in the 1990's when community management was the dominant paradigm.

There is a growing body of evidence that voluntary community management is not a sustainable approach for delivering rural water services (Chowns, E., 2015; Yee Chan, M. et al., 2014). The response of the sector has been to professionalise community groups that deliver water services, and strengthen the front-line government services to support them. Within this context, building accountability of the service providers to their clients or water users becomes more important.

In Timor-Leste, responsibility for delivering rural water services was decentralised to a community water management group (GMF) in 2004 through Decree law 04/2004. The GMF is formed through a participatory selection process in a community meeting, receive training from the government water services facilitators and technicians, and ongoing support from the government front line staff who are trained social facilitators.

Social audit and community scorecard

In his inaugural speech in February 2015, Timor-Leste's Prime Minister Rui Maria de Araujo announced the intention of his government to establish a partnership with civil society to ensure the institutionalization of citizen monitoring and social audit in Timor-Leste. The Prime Minister stated that: "*this government wants to establish partnerships where you will be able to have a more active participation through what is known as a social audit, where the indicators of government action are thoroughly reviewed with greater accountability, so that by working together we may be able to provide better services to our people*". Subsequently the government has institutionalised social audit through the creation of a Social Audit Unit in the Prime Ministers Office that has convened and partially funded two national conferences and a national

training workshop, as well as facilitated engagement between donors and civil society. The Social Audit Unit has also followed-up on the results of social audit processes with government ministries, assisting with monitoring the utilisation of the processes and their outcomes.

Social audit, Citizen Report Card (CRC) and Community Scorecard (CSC) have been widely utilised globally as tools enabling citizens and communities to hold government to account for the delivery of basic services. In the water sector, this has focussed on urban water supply delivered by government or autonomous water authorities, rather than the community-based service providers that have predominately taken responsibility for rural water services.

Other social audit tools that have been developed for rural infrastructure in Timor-Leste were identified. These tools were all focussed on the planning and construction phases of water supply infrastructure, rather than the ongoing service delivery, this included a WaterAid Community Feedback Tool developed in 2012. Following an assessment of the available tools (Table 1 below), the Community Scorecard methodology has been identified as the most suitable. The CSC is a community based monitoring tool that combines the strengths of the social audit approach, community monitoring and citizen report cards. Like the CRC, the CSC is an instrument to exact social and public accountability and responsiveness from service providers. However, including an interface meeting between service providers and the community, allows for immediate feedback on quality and adequacy of the services provided, and response by the service provider.

Table 1. Comparison of existing social audit tools

Name of tool	Construction or service delivery	Technical assessment	Service provider and community interface	Comments
Community Feedback Tool	Construction	Yes	No	WaterAid and partners partial CSC process
Social audit through Citizen Report Cards (The Asia Foundation)	Construction	No	No	Household survey focused on infrastructure construction outputs
Social audit (Hivos with LBF)	Construction	No	Yes	Community scoring of services, in the case of water supply focused on construction outputs
Health Sector Mutual Accountability Process (CARE)	Service delivery	Yes	Yes	Health sector focused process based on CSC
Community Scorecard (Ministry of Health)	Service delivery	Yes	Yes	Health sector CSC facilitated by Ministry of Health

There was a need for a tool that would focus on both the service provided by the community management groups to users as well as the support of local government to the community service provider. Understanding and rating this on-going service delivery is an important accountability tool for the WASH and other service sectors.

Objective and methodology

The objective of this project was to develop and trial a social audit tool for rural water supply services, demonstrating an effective process to improve rural water supply services and engage communities in improving government services, strengthening participatory democracy. WaterAid worked with two national NGOs to build their capacity and experience to develop and facilitate these accountability processes.

The CSC was run in eight trial communities across Timor-Leste (Table 2), identified by the National Directorate for Water Supply in consultation with the sector. The community water supplies were largely Gravity Flow Systems (GFS), the most common form of water supply technology in Timor-Leste and managed by a community group (GMF).

Table 2: Overview of community scorecard location information and number of participants in the CSC process

No	Location of the project	Year	Water Supply technology	Number of HHs served	Women	Men	Service provider	Total
1.	Gaiguinia B, Metagou, Likisà	2015	GFS	78	10	10	5	25
2.	Gole, Lolotoe, Bobonaro	2014	GFS	110	24	18	8	50
3.	Oho-Ana, Cailaco, Bobonaro	2014	GFS	131	11	32	3	46
4.	Kotaheu, Ponilala, Ermera	2013	GFS	108	11	7	6	24
5.	Leborema, Samalete, Ermera	2015	GFS	70	7	13	5	25
6.	Samalari, Laga, Baucau	2015	Electric Pump	400	10	10	7	27
7.	Daisua Lama, Same, Manufahi	2014	GFS	60	9	6	11	26
8.	Caibair, Vatuboro, Likisà	2014	GFS	135	7	11	5	23
			Totals		**89**	**107**	**50**	**246**

The purpose of the Community Scorecard (CSC) exercise is not just to assess the service, but also to initiate a dialogue among service users and providers at the community level to produce demonstrable improvements in service delivery. As such, implementing teams formulated the objectives and focus areas for the CSC exercise based upon potential synergies with the broader institutional and policy environment, including developing the technical indicator scorecard inline with national and international standards for quality of service, however communities determine the indicators against which they will measure the performance of their service providers. The six main stages of the process are listed below (Figure 1):

1. Preparatory work
2. Application of Technical Indicator Scorecard by CSC Facilitators
3. Performance Scorecard: Community Assessment
4. Performance Scorecard: Service Provider Self-Assessment
5. Interface meeting between service users and providers
6. Post-implementation activities (including analysing and consolidating data and feedback to stakeholders, review and adaptations, follow-up on agreed actions etc.)

Preparatory groundwork

It was agreed with key stakeholders at the beginning of the activity that the scope of the CSC trial should cover rural water supply services that had been ongoing for at least two years. The CSC coordination and facilitation team, made up of experienced and trained WaterAid and partner NGO staff (6 men and 4 women), reviewed the community information, demographics and water supply implementer's design documentation. They then planned meetings and verified some of the technical indicators based on this information.

Technical Indicator Scorecard

The Technical Indicator Scorecard is a list of technical indicators (Table 2) for the expected quality of service and is assessed by the NGO facilitators prior to the service user and provider's self-assessments and interface meetings. The technical review also included a technical sanitary survey of the water source that followed the WHO Water Safety Plan guidance.

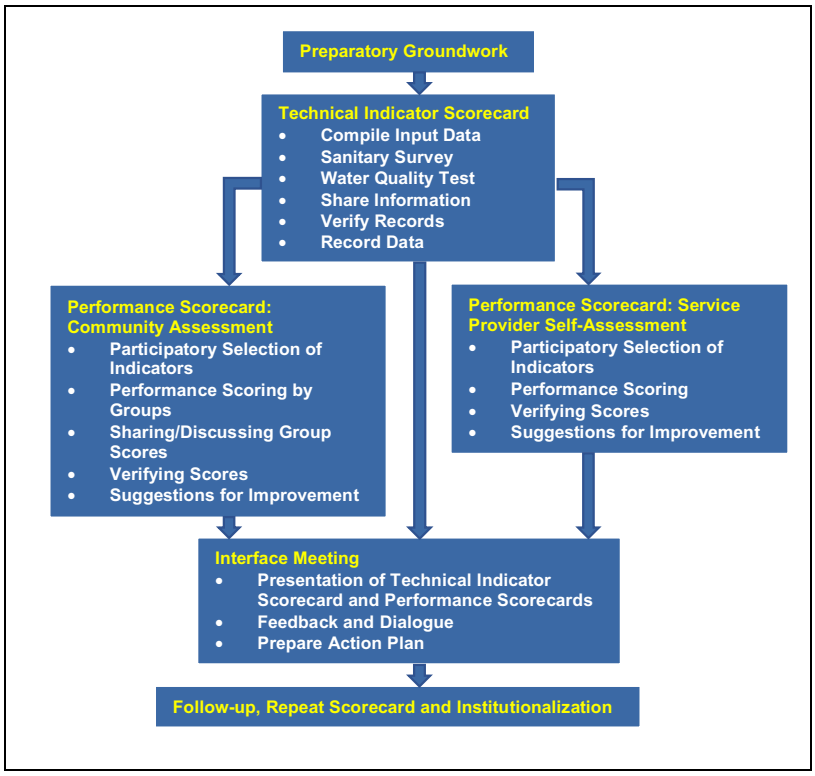

Figure 1. Flow diagram of Community Scorecard Process

Table 3. List of technical indicators included in the Technical Indicator Scorecard

No	Indicator
IT1	Water access - time for household to collect water
IT2	Water access - number of people per tap stand
IT3	Water access - inclusion of people with disability
IT4	Water access - accessibility for people with disability
IT5	Reliability of water supply
IT6	Water Quantity – quantity per person
IT7	System Functionality – percentage of taps functioning
IT8	Government Support - Visit from FPA
IT9	GMF Function - Regularity of meeting
IT10	GMF function - Collection of contributions from HH
IT11	Water quality – smell
IT12	Water quality – taste
IT13	Water quality – colour

IT14	Water quality – monitoring by government
IT15	Water quality – count of bacteria
IT16	GMF Function - gender balance in GMF

The Technical Indicator Scorecard provided a 'reality check' on the self-assessments and were presented to each of the groups as part of the introduction to the CSC process and their self-assessment. The scorecard is based on current national guidelines and standards with a 'measurement feasibility' filter applied by the facilitators.

The measurement of water quality was an important input of the technical assessment to the scorecard meetings. Only one of the systems supplied water with 'zero' E. coli contamination, one was of limited risk and the remaining six community water supplies tested at unsafe levels of bacteriological contamination. This reinforced the need for testing as the reality can be very different to the perceived quality of water in communities. It was also found that the Aquagenix Compartment Bag Tests (a WHO approved test system) used for assessing water quality produced a 'hydrogen-sulphide' smell when the sample was contaminated with E. coli providing a useful perceptive-link and indicator for communities to better understand that although a sample is clear and looks clean it can still have bacterial contamination.

Performance Scorecard: community assessment

For each water supply system, separate men and women's groups were facilitated to develop and apply a Performance Scorecard of the service provided by the GMF and support provided by the DNSA Facilitator. Each group developed their own indicators of the adequacy of their water supply and ranked the performance of their water services against these (1-5 scale).

The groups tended to generalise and the identification of focussed and quantifiable performance measures required skilled facilitation. Reviewing the Technical Indicator Scorecard with the groups helped raise awareness of national service standards and the quality of service that they should expect from their system and service provider.

Performance Scorecard: service provider self-assessment

For each water supply, the community group responsible for water management (GMF), along with the local government out-reach staff with the responsibility for supporting the group, underwent a similar process to that described above to develop and assess themselves on service provision as the "Self-evaluation Scorecard". Even the frontline government staff and the GMF were not aware of the national standards for water supply provision, and the review of the Technical Indicator Scorecard (same process as for the community groups) helped them to understand the level of service they were expected provide, perceived to be relatively high for some indicators.

Interface meeting

Immediately following the individual scorecard meetings (facilitated simultaneously), all of the participants (men, women, service providers, government frontline staff and their manager, village leaders) came together to compare the identified performance indicators and their ratings from each meeting, and reach consensus about the performance of their service providers and water system across all of the agreed indicators. A key output of the interface meeting is an agreed action plan (what, who when) to improve performance for each of the indicators that rated three or less.

The highly-structured interface meeting comparing the scoring across each group for specific indicators, depersonalised any performance issues and allowed for focused discussion, compartmentalisation of contentious issues and creation of a clear plan with joint ownership by all stakeholders. The most successful interface meetings had the active engagement of the village and hamlet chiefs (formal local leadership) as observers and mediators. In reality, the delivery of water services to the population within their hamlets and villages is ultimately their responsibility.

Follow up, repeat scorecards and institutionalisation

The facilitation teams returned to communities to follow-up on the action plans, disseminate the report with the local government and monitor progress in improving water services. Where the village chief was engaged in the process it was found that there had been timely and effective implementation of action plans.

One village chief decided to allocate US$25 each month from Village Operational Funds received from central government to top up funds collected through tariffs by each GMF in his jurisdiction. Many of the technical actions have been implemented with pipes buried, taps repaired and a program of decalcification of pipes completed. In one village, the village chief had engaged in reforming the GMF structure and in another, the village chief and GMF had made contact with the government frontline staff and started coordination on future support to keep the service functioning.

Lessons learnt and future perspectives

The results from this trial across eight communities show that none of the water supplies were found to be delivering services to the complete satisfaction of users or meeting all of the relevant national standards or international targets set for the level of service provided as a technical input. As previously discussed, water quality was "unsafe" in six of the eight communities and none of the systems met the national minimum standard of 30 litres of water per person per day across the whole year. The percentage of taps functioning varied from 25% to 100% and none of the systems provided tap stands with adequate access to the elderly or people with disabilities. The community management groups generally did not score well in undertaking their responsibilities of operating and maintaining the water system, undertaking timely repairs, collecting funds and keeping the water users and village leaders informed about the utilisation and management of the funds. When there were issues with access to water and the management of the system, users were less likely to pay for the service.

The CSC tool can improve rural water services through two processes. At the village level, the local leadership and water management group, supported by the government frontline workers can take action to improve the water service in individual communities. Engagement of the village chief and council was found to be the main enabling factor in implementing action plans, indicating that applying the CSC process and action planning on a village-wide basis would be the most effective approach to taking the CSC to scale.

The head of one of the municipalities declared that the process was a good foundation for government planning and progress tracking and would like to introduce the methodology across other service delivery areas. The Director of another Municipal Water Supply Department also saw the value in the process, and plans to work in a more integrated manner with the village chiefs and village councils to support them to oversee the management of water supply in their jurisdictions.

The consolidation of Community Scorecard data and meta-analysis of the assessment results can provide evidence for policy recommendations. Through this trial a number of policy recommendations emerged. They included improvements to water safety planning, water resource management and accessibility of water supply. The skills and experience are now available within the East Timorese NGO networks, and it is recommended that the process be scaled up on a suco-by-suco basis along with water safety planning and water resource management processes for the suco, with the aim of institutionalising the CSC process within local government planning processes.

The Community Scorecard process was found to be effective, empowering and practical. The process includes an effective local-level feedback loop and action plan that both the community, local leadership and local government can be engaged in implementing, strengthening communities' participation in improving government services and participatory democracy. It can play a crucial role in strengthening rural service provision and should be a continuous process.

In late 2016, The Asia Foundation and NGO Forum (the umbrella organisation for NGOs in Timor-Leste) launched a two-year program, with funding from the European Union, to improve government accountability through social auditing. The Institute for Sustainable Futures was contracted to work closely with the Office of the Prime Minister, NGO Forum and its members (including WaterAid and its partners) to develop a handbook to support civil society organisations' practice of social auditing. In a March 2017 workshop, WaterAid and partners shared knowledge and learning from the CSC process to be incorporated into the handbook. WaterAid and partners will continue a close engagement with this broader social audit initiative as another key strategy for the institutionalisation and continued evolution of the CSC process so that water users can hold their duty bearers to account for the quality of services they deliver.

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