

S.7 Community Score Cards for Improved Social Accountability, Equity and the Realization of Rights in Food Systems

1. What, in brief, is the solution?

There is broad consensus that more inclusive governance is required for food systems to deliver social, economic, and environmental benefits. While there is significant rhetoric on inclusive governance, more attention to models that work at community level is required. Community Score Cards (CSC) is an example of an approach that can be used to facilitate the improvement of governance through the promotion of participation, transparency, accountability, and informed decision-making. The CSC model brings together community members, service providers, and local government to identify service utilization and provision challenges, and to mutually generate solutions, and work in partnership to implement and track the effectiveness of those solutions in a process of quality improvement. Like similar models, the CSC is a two-way and ongoing participatory tool for assessment, planning, monitoring and evaluation of services. Such models are easy to use and can be adapted for any service delivery scenario. It brings together the demand side (“service user”) and the supply side (“service provider”) of a particular service or programme to jointly analyse issues underlying service delivery problems and find a common and shared way of addressing those issues. It is a constructive and accessible way to increase participation, accountability and transparency between service users, providers, and decision makers; and to realise rights embedded in national and international legislation. When applied in local food systems scenarios, the potential for positive impact is enormous.

2. What was/were the source(s) from which this solution emerged?

The emergence of this solution is due to persistent calls from action track leadership groups and summit-related discussions on the need to invest in and support better governance in and of food systems. The solution is also the result of significant deliberations in AT4 about social accountability and the importance of citizen led accountability processes and mechanisms. Academic discourse and evidence are also sources of this solution. Definitions of food systems differ with respect to views on components, boundaries, and interactions, which has implications for the scope of food systems analyses for addressing inequality. These differences surround the causes and consequences of food system performance and the political opportunities for influencing food systems governance. This solution is based on the increasing realization that inequity in food systems is inextricably linked with weak or restricted voice and poor accountability mechanisms for citizens within food systems and related systems of food provisioning and public services such as maternal and child health. This implies that improving social accountability will increase access to equitable livelihoods.

3. What problem is it trying to address within food systems?

This solution addresses lack of accountability in food systems that results in inequity. Approaches that are top-down and fail to engage with all relevant stakeholders struggle with accountability, credibility, and effectiveness. Failure to recognize multiple sources of knowledge through, for example, social accountability tools; failure to link farmers, researchers and extension agents, and; failure to hold private, public and voluntary sector bodies accountable to women and men at every level of the food system are aspects of this problem. Food insecurity is often attributed to poverty, which itself is created and sustained through unequal power relations and unjust distribution of resources and opportunities, which has particularly disproportionate effects on Indigenous Peoples for example and on women and

girls. Other drivers of vulnerability, based on age, disability, ethnicity or even geography, compound this challenge for many. Underlying the unjust distribution of power and resources are both social norms and poor governance – both manifested in the marginalization of people from decision-making roles. For example, despite the labour burden that they assume or are ascribed, women’s spaces for influence are restricted. In the public sphere, the largest gender disparity in the global gender gap indices is the political empowerment gap.[1] Social expectations on gender roles stigmatize working mothers and women in politics, restricting their economic and political leadership and compromising the representation of the interests of women.[2] This is despite evidence that women’s participation in local government contributes to improved food intake and wider development.[3] The limited presence and voice of certain food systems livelihood groups, such as pastoralists or urban street vendors for example, in public affairs means policies, investments and frameworks are less sensitive and responsive to their needs and constraints. Fewer people from minority livelihood groups are in leadership positions at regional and national levels than those from larger groups such as farmers. This absence of participation not only restricts ability to influence decisions, but it also hinders access to knowledge.

Inequality in food systems thus demands transparent, inclusive policies and processes and this implies more and better social accountability.

4. Why is addressing that problem important for achieving the goal of your working group?

AT4 seeks solutions that drive access to equitable livelihoods. An equity approach sees three key dimensions of recognition, procedure, and distribution.[4] Recognition is about acknowledging and respecting rights, and the diversity of identities, knowledge systems, values and institutions of different actors. Procedure is about participation of actors in decision-making, transparency, accountability, processes for dispute resolution. Distribution is about the allocation of benefits across the set of actors, and how the costs/burdens experienced by some actors are mitigated. This understanding of equity is clearly connected to governance – which relates to power, relationships and accountability (who makes decisions, how those decisions are made, how resources are allocated, and how stakeholders have their say and hold those in power to account). In food systems, when underpinned with social accountability mechanisms, issues of rights can be constructively addressed and the positive relationship between governance and equity realized.

5. How can this solution address that problem (theory of change)?

Social accountability consists of strategies, approaches, and tools that enable service users to voice their concerns and hold service providers accountable for the quality of the services they are providing. The ability to voice interests and concerns around the services that have a direct effect on an individual or community’s wellbeing and welfare is a significant marker of an engaged citizenry and an informed community. The theory of change in this solution is thus that: *If citizens are empowered, if power holders are effective, accountable, and responsive, if spaces for negotiation are expanded, effective and inclusive, then sustainability and equity in food systems can be achieved.* Change needs to take place and be sustained in all three domains to achieve this impact. This theory of change does not see empowerment as a bestowal. Systems, processes, norms or even laws that exclude or stifle women’s or Indigenous People’s participation or voice in decision-making cripple their potential and productivity in food systems. Advancing social accountability leads to self-empowerment of individuals and groups because they can articulate needs and priorities and play active roles in promoting these interests.

Amplifying voice will increase political representation and drive more responsive governance and accountability.

6. Why does this solution align to the definition and criteria for a ‘game changing solution’ developed by the Summit?

This solution can have significant impact at scale, is easily actionable and would result in sustainable (institutionalized) improvements in food systems governance. It would have wider impacts across all action tracks. Collective action by communities demanding and contributing to change within political processes and institutions improves the responsiveness of duty bearers and service providers. Local movements require space and resources to localize control of food systems.

7. Existing evidence supporting the argument that this solution will work/achieve initial outcomes

Exclusion from social and economic processes and institutions deprives many people of access to public goods and services, as well as to economic opportunities in food systems. There is widespread discrimination in terms of access to decision-making on social and economic issues, and being rural and unorganized means that individual response to challenges is unlikely to have impact.[5] Typical constraints faced by women include inadequate business skills; insufficient market information or transport; social barriers placed by men on women’s engagement in markets or in collective action; and lack of time. Formal and informal collectives such as producer groups, cooperatives or savings groups and related social and vocational learning platforms such as field schools have, however, been effective in increasing women’s empowerment and their control over resources and agricultural value chains.[6]

Sustainable management of common property resources is also facilitated by collective decision-making that is mediated by institutions – either formal or informal.[7] Community-led collective action in natural resource management and governance, can bring socio-economic and environmental returns while delivering food and nutrition security outcomes.[8] As a result of the evidence generated from social accountability approaches, there is a strong case for scale up. In India, a social accountability model implemented to help realise rights under India’s National Food Security Act led to improvements in service provision and access to the Public Distribution System; a food support service; as well as enrolment in a maternity benefits scheme[9]. In Tanzania and Ghana, the World Health Organization has invested in adapting the CSC to improve family planning services. The US Government Initiative, PEPFAR has also adapted and utilized the CSC in PEPFAR’s guidance to enable community monitoring of the services they access. While the CSC has been implemented in more than 30 countries, experiences in Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Tanzania demonstrate the power of such tools to leverage and scale the model. For example, in Tanzania, the Canadian government invested nearly \$11 million into replicating the CSC model. Collectively, the project has been able to influence more than 13 additional donors in more than 11 countries to adopt and scale the model for a total of \$83.5 million.

8. What is the current and/or likely political support for this idea?

There is growing awareness of the need for more action by governments, international agencies, the private sector, trade unions and civil society organizations for more and better social accountability in food systems. In India, a country that has been at the forefront of innovation in social accountability

approaches, the government has already taken the step of formally institutionalizing social accountability approaches as part of national food security legislation.

9. Are there certain contexts for which this solution is particularly well suited, or, not well-suited?

Communities everywhere are central to generating solutions to local challenges. When communities—rights holders—can exercise their rights and join local stakeholders, institutions and government—duty bearers—to participate in dialogue that can spur change and action—social accountability is in effect and this is a *sine qua non* for equitable livelihood in food systems.

[1] World Economic Forum, 2020, *Global Gender Gap Report*

[2] FAO, IFAD, 2015, *Promoting the leadership of women in producers' organizations: Lessons from the experiences of FAO and IFAD*

[3] Rao, N., 2020, *The achievement of food and nutrition security in South Asia is deeply gendered*

[4] *Global Nutrition Report 2020 Chapter 1*; Salm et al. 2020; Ericksen et al. 2018

[5] Bosc, P-M., 2018, *Empowering through collective action. IFAD*

[6] FAO, 2016, *Farmer Field Schools and Empowerment*

[7] Ostrom, E., 2009, *A general framework for analysing sustainability of social-ecological systems*

[8] Skinner, A., et al, 2019, 2019, *Social Outcomes of the CARE-WWF Alliance in Mozambique: Research Findings from a Decade of Integrated Conservation and Development Programming*

[9] Gordon, J., Nisbett, N. and Tranchant, J.P., 2020, 'Using Social Audits to Improve Delivery of State Nutrition-related Services: Lessons from the CAN Program', Brighton: IDS