



Case Study: Citizens Manifesto in Action

Consortium: Citizen Election Watch with IT
(Partners: Deniva, Pac, Ceford, Acord and Rweco)

Country: Uganda

Posted on: 2012



I. Summary

Cotton farmers in Uganda asked the president to take action against the sharp decline of prices. To underline their demands, they used the Citizens Manifesto. The president pledged to stabilize the price. The example illustrates the potential of the Citizens Manifesto, in which the rights of citizens are listed. This project supported by Oxfam Novib succeeded in popularizing the Manifesto as a tool for Ugandan citizens to enhance their participation in decision making on issues facing them.

II. Full description

Aim

The aim of the project is to raise the voices of citizens in the democratic governance process in Uganda through empowerment of citizens and strengthening of civic organization's capacity to demand political accountability.

Context

Uganda's political and democratic history has been described as 'two steps forward and one step backward'. Considerable democratic gains have been achieved. There are however also many instances to demonstrate how some of those gains have been lost along the way. Ordinary citizens have in most cases by and large remained political spectators quietly suffering the agony of misrule and its ugly consequences on their livelihoods.

The Uganda Governance Monitoring Platform in 2008 conducted an extensive five year *Governance Trends Analysis Study*. It was noted that despite commendable gains in the democratization process, Uganda still faced systemic governance challenges. Other scenario building exercises identified that the government was increasingly becoming unresponsive and insensitive to citizens' concerns. Unless citizens assumed the power bestowed upon them by the constitution, and became active rather than passive players in their governance, little or no progress would be attained in the area of good governance. Consequently, the Platform conceived the idea of the Citizens Manifesto (CM) as an effective tool to address these underlying governance challenges.

The tool reminds the citizens that ‘people should express their will and consent on who will govern them and how they should be governed, through regular free and fair elections of their representatives or through a referendum’.

Main actors

The CM as a process involves a multiplicity of actors from civil society, broadly defined to include NGOs, professional associations, workers unions, farmers’ federations, students and youth movements.

Members of the Citizen Election Watch with IT (CEW-IT) consortium have been at the centre of promoting good governance and democratic accountability in Uganda. They have implemented similar programmes before and have solid structures in place. Many of them and the regions they operate, have been involved in development of the CM. The consortium has a wide membership coverage of Civil Society Organisations (over 800) located all over the Uganda who will support in dissemination of information and sharing best practices to a wider constituencies of citizens.

Why did Oxfam Novib get involved?

Within the consortium of 5, 3 organisations have been ON partners before the CEW-IT project. Deniva and Acord have been partners with ON for over 12 years which means that soon the partnership as it was will cease to exist while new ways of partnering will be agreed upon. CEFORD has been ON partner since July 2003 PAC and RWECO only partnered with ON after the approval of the *Citizen’s Manifesto in Action* project in 2011, a partnership whose contract is only one year. The consortium is a counterpart of Oxfam Novib since 2011.

Methodology

The Citizens Manifesto is the basis of engagement in 29 districts. This strategy was chosen because it reflects the needs of the citizens, and because the citizens that contributed to the CM will also be targeted by the project.

As a process, the CM is an organized political process that aims at mobilizing Ugandans to create a *citizen vision* for the country. This vision then becomes the rallying point for citizens in their diversity. Their social, economic and political aspirations are expressed in the form of *demands*, which are spelt out clearly and shared with representative leaders at the level of local governments, parliament and the executive. The demands eventually form the substance of a *social contract* between the elected leaders and citizens who lend them their mandate to govern them.

At the end of the one year project (mid 2012), at least 100,000 citizens will be capable of demanding and transferring knowledge of the CM. They will be empowered with skills to engage their leaders effectively and constructively in the democratic and electoral processes. Cultural and religious institutions, which are highly regarded, and have a great following in Uganda, will be used to channel knowledge and awareness on the CM.



The first targets are 150 direct and 725 indirect civil society organizations (CSOs). A lot of emphasis will also be given to district CSO, networks that have members on ground. This way the leaders at the local government level, as well as at least 290 community process facilitators and monitors, will be engaged. This group will support the sensitizing of citizens. They will be drawn from the participating CSOs and the community that will have undergone the training.

Election candidates from the different political parties, government officials – local councilors, members of parliament, technical staffs – are also targeted.

Results

CSOs, and specifically those active at the grass roots level, have received training in civic education to promote political empowerment within local communities. CBOs have trained 10,000 citizens who are now able to demand the CM's implementation from the elected and appointed leaders. Elected local and national leaders in 29 districts are aware of the priority needs of the citizens as stated in the CM. 20 CSOs established sustainable participation mechanisms/platforms (like people's parliaments and social media in ICT hubs) that will allow continuation of dialogue and mutual accountability between citizens and leaders. CBOs have been trained in monitoring and evaluation tools to gauge the impact of CM.

Impact

The project is midway. So far all five implementing organizations have initiated neighbourhood assemblies where citizens meet to discuss issues affecting them, inviting their leaders for dialogue and accountability. A few examples: the Kasesero assembly has drafted a petition to the district administration on the appalling state of education. RWECO facilitated cotton farmers in Kasese to write a petition to the president through the media, which was followed up with an engagement meeting and a radio talk show with the district MP. The president responded to the issues raised in the farmers' petition by promising to save the falling cotton prices. CEFORD organized a meeting for all parliamentarians and a cross-section of citizens from the West Nile region to address critical issues such as access to the national electricity grid and the rampant deforestation in the region.

III. Lessons learned

Consortiums consisting of several partners bringing in different strengths have proven to work. This model is favoured by external funders such as the EU. An additional strength of such a consortium formation is that Oxfam Novib is able to work with organisations that have not been partners before.

Facilitating beneficiary access to information equips these partners to undertake informed advocacy hence an unquestionable voice.

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IV. Colophon

Consortium (A-01986): Members of the Citizen Election Watch with IT (CEW-IT) consortium have been at the centre of promoting good governance and democratic accountability in Uganda. They have implemented similar programmes before and have solid structures in place. Many of them and the regions they operate, have been involved in development of the CM.

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Project: Name: Citizens' Manifesto in Action, activity: building a Social Contract between Citizens and their Leaders, aim: raising the voices of citizens in the democratic governance process through empowerment of citizens and strengthening

of civic organisations' capacity to demand political accountability, project period: July 2011-June 2012, Financial contribution ON: Euro 61,480.

Bureau/field office dealing with the project: HECA/Uganda

Country and further context: Uganda's political and democratic history has been described as 'two steps forward and one step backward'. While there are many examples to show how the country has achieved considerable democratic gains, there are also many instances to demonstrate how some of those gains have been lost along the way. What is not disputable in this political gymnastics is that ordinary citizens have in most cases by and large remained political spectators quietly suffering the agony of misrule and its ugly consequences on their political, economic, social and cultural livelihoods. This projects aims to give voice to the citizens, through CSO's and CBO's.

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Aim of the Case: selling and telling

Approval for publication: approved by Thur de Kuyjer, ACD Uganda

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