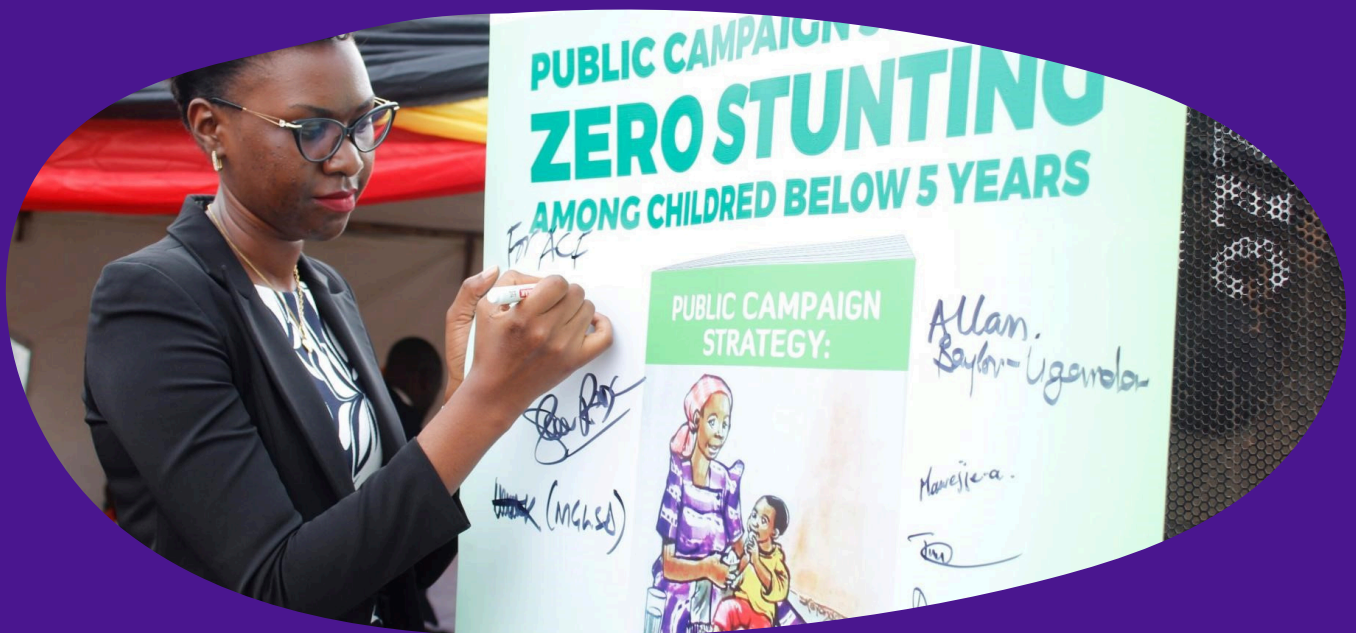


Right2Grow Learning Brief

How can we use **VCA**
(Vision Commitment
Action) and **CVA** (Citizen
Voice Action) to enhance
community engagement?





Context & intervention

Community engagement is at the center of Right2Grow programme. Putting people at the center, empowering communities and CSOs, enhancing local knowledge and helping them to become more vocal to ensure every child can reach its full potential are some of the objectives encompassed in our Theory of Change.

Different approaches were used for community engagement by R2G countries. This learning brief will focus only on CVA and VCA approaches, for which challenges and good practices were documented across 3 countries:

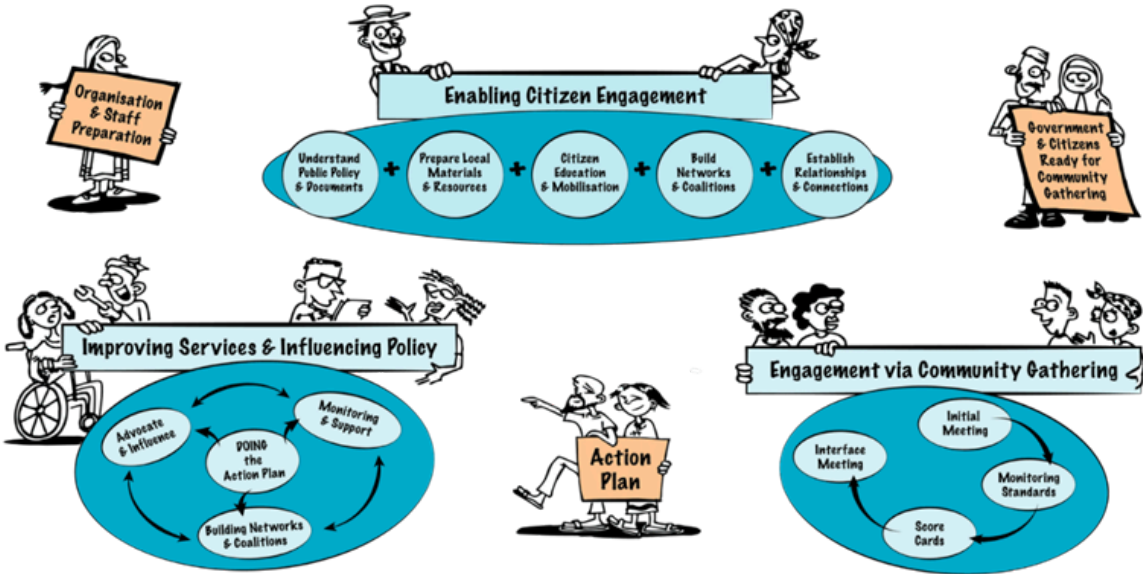
Citizen Voice and Action (CVA):

is a social accountability tool for local level advocacy that informs citizens on their rights and transforms the dialogue between communities, government and service providers to assess and improve services

Vision Commitment Action (VCA):

is a communication mobilization tool to build knowledge and skills of local communities and develop a shared vision, formulate commitments and an action plan to adopt good nutrition and wash practices in their communities.

The association of CVA and VCA to increase impact by merging 2 approaches one focusing on behavior change at community level and another at local/national government/service provider level



Results

Uganda

CVA task force demanded and obtained a water reservoir for the health facility from the Mobile Telephone Network hinging on the social responsibility requirements for the private sector companies.

Bangladesh

4 Community Clinics of 2 unions have been operating well, as the CVA task Force enforced the Community Clinics to run according to their ToR. One water tank and one water pumping system was set up in the premises of a Community Clinic as well.

Ethiopia

11 woredas (districts) allocated nutrition specific lines in their budgets and supported the establishment of house gardening. The council house of speakers gave directions for Kebele level Women's group to ensure the inclusion of women and people with disabilities into nutrition and wash programming.

Lessons Learnt (1/2)

CVA FACILITATORS SELECTION

Project management team on CVA needs to be selected carefully. A staff capacity assessment tool can be used to investigate their experiences, skills (on Citizen facilitation and mobilization, on local/regional Advocacy, on Policy Analysis, on Policy Influence (monitoring on its implementation), on networking and Partnering)

CVA Facilitators from the community should be selected based on their capacities and willingness to work for the benefit of the community without any incentives, and on their capacity to gain acceptance of the working group within the community, as well as with service providers and decision-makers. To ensure inclusivity, it is necessary to select facilitators who align with the gender-specific sessions, thereby providing gender-segregated support. A sustainable approach involves community members fulfilling the facilitator role instead of relying solely on project staff.

MODERATION SKILLS OF FACILITATORS

Proper training and exercise is the key to handle the possible conflicting situation. Service providers often hesitate to recommend their areas of improvement and tend to present their services in a positive light, particularly to government officials.

The aim is to foster constructive and objective feedback that can genuinely address the identified gaps in service provision. Building strong and sustainable ties with government stakeholders is the only way to minimize the challenge.

Lessons Learnt (2/2)

POWER IMBALANCE

It is important to avoid unnecessary engagement and dominations of facilitating organizations and government institutions to ensure there is no manipulation or overriding community led CVA Task forces advocacy efforts. Organization needs to take a step back and avoid providing their own inputs as CVA is a community led social accountability tool. Instead of solely focusing on what organizations can support within the community, CVA emphasizes the potential of society to utilize existing government support for their benefit. The focus is on empowering individuals and communities to develop the necessary skills and knowledge to access and make the most of the available resources.

BE CAPABLE OF EMBRACING COMPLEXITY

It is important to understand the political and social context in relation to citizen and governance issues. Shrinking humanitarian space or human rights can be a challenge for this approach. The practice of Citizen Voice and Action must be responsive and flexible to the local situation. It may look different in each situation and country. However, all Citizen Voice and Action practice should include elements of information, voice, dialogue, and accountability.

LACK OF EVIDENCE AND RESULTS

It requires time and space until service deliveries get improved and existing policies influenced. Local level advocacy and Social Accountability effort is a process and requires time and space till its fruits ripen. It is important to avoid having high expectations on local level outputs within short period of time

There are limitations in generating evidence to back up community concerns, which makes duty bearers non-responsive to key asks from the community. However, R2G can build Community structures capacity in advocacy tools as Photo voice methodology or MOJO (Mobile Journalism) or Photo Voice for example as a way of capturing talking photos/videos to back up their Community Issue Briefs. When collecting evidence on public services the focus should be more on quantitative data rather than qualitative data. (quantity and quality of drugs, number of professional qualified staff...)

INVEST TIME IN COMMUNITY SENSITIZATION

Conduct an assessment on awareness raising and community mobilization by identifying the best communication channels as markets, schools, a household compound... Community members should be invited for sensitization meetings on scheduled days through various platforms such as an announcement during church service, routine village meetings, door to door outreach and a village public address system where available. Think of the best places to easily get the people together, consider the season e.g don't target farming time when citizens are in gardens.

CONTINUOUS TRAINING

Continue to build capacity of duty bearers and public service providers and CVA taskforce in budget advocacy, as well as in facilitating/leading dialogue sessions and platforms meeting to meaningfully participate in consultative workshops organized through CVA approach as well as in planning and budgeting processes at both sub county and district. This will lead to purposive allocation of resources according to community concerns, so that they manage local level advocacy efforts by using step wise CVA approaches. In Ethiopia for instance council members received trainings on rights and entitlements, CVA approach, lobby and advocacy and nutrition leadership.

Good Practices (1/2)

WORK CLOSELY WITH GOVERNMENT AND SERVICE PROVIDERS

From the beginning create a climate of trust and confidence with district/government officials. Consider it as a long term relationship and build ties outside of the professional arena to better know each other. ex : Uganda organized football games between CVA team/ district teams. Spend time identifying the influential persons in each department/structure (at the health facility who is responsible for wash and nutrition ?)/district level/department head...)

Work with responsible local government offices to give an official approval letters for CVA Task force and Accountability Action team so that they work for their community on advocacy to ensure social services improvement and enhancing accountable systems. It is vital that those responsible for the services participate, especially the service providers themselves.

There must be a policy backup for setting up the monitoring standards which must be agreed upon by decision makers and service providers. If feasible, train government officials to facilitate the CVA process to ensure they have a deep understanding and strong commitment towards the process. In Ethiopia for example woreda (district) council members, elected members of the community were trained on VCA to ensure they can best advocate for the VCA action plan. In Ethiopia for instance council members engaged in the CVA process played the advocacy role at kebele (smallest administrative unit) and woreda (district) levels to implement action points and allocate specific budgets for nutrition and wash. Even if they don't play an active role in the CVA or VCA process it is important that government officials, sub county leaders, district stakeholders are aware and understand the processes.

It is important not only to consider government bodies as the only influencers. Results can also be obtained from private sector, faith institutions... Ethiopian Orthodox Church committed to construct 11 water points for example.

MAKE POLICIES ACCESSIBLE

In the enabling Citizen Engagement phase it is critical to invest time and energy in finding at which the level of government which defines the standards of service delivery /Pull together information from policies, frameworks ect on nutrition and wash/Analyze /simplify and summarize/produce a summary translated into local language and prepare flipcharts in local language for ex.

During citizen education: think of the critical messages, prepare your speakers, think of the action you would like them to take and consider it in your communication. Public policies need to be simplified and translated to enable local understanding and ownership. This informs meaningful engagement with duty bearers during dialogues. Give time and space for CVA Task force so that they internalize the CVA Process by adapting it to their contexts and existing situation.



Good Practices (2/2)



STRENGTHENED MULTISECTORAL INTEGRATION:

By sitting together and capacitating the various government sectors at local level (Agriculture, Health, Education) through the VCA and CVA process, nutrition taskforces at village level were established chaired by the kebele manager (smallest administrative unit in Ethiopia) with members from the various sectors according to the Food and Nutrition Policy and Strategy. The engagement of private sectors in both CVA & VCA capacity development brought their commitment in the efforts to fight against malnutrition.

CVA & VCA: BETTER AND FASTER RESULTS:

The combination of VCA and CVA provides a good package of capacity building for the communities which produces better outcomes. Communities are empowered and prepared to become change agents in their communities through VCA, whereas CVA is able to amplify community voices in order to enhance services. As a result, the combination of the two tools produces quick results. Prior to CVA, it is crucial to use VCA to empower the community. By combining these two techniques, a larger variety of issues can be identified and solutions found. As a result, Ethiopia (the only country which combined both approaches) was able to obtain community and government commitment in a short period of time. A number of community-doable actions have been confirmed through VCA in addition to improving the services of public facilities. After CVA and VCA schools in Ethiopia, woreda sector offices, kebele level health posts, health centers, Farmer training center (Agriculture offices at Kebele level) were able to get water access, latrine access and engaged in vegetable and fruit production. The joint technical support from government sectors to the community was enhanced.

BUILD CITIZENS' ENGAGEMENT

To ensure sustainable and powerful impact it is key to build networks, coalitions to scale up advocacy to achieve greater impact.

Provide CVA Task forces refreshment, stationery materials, office and furniture ... to encourage their commitment and motivation to work for their community. During the community engagement gathering kick start the day with a breakfast (to ensure people arrive early and have eaten before starting the discussions) and announce a lunch will close the gathering (to ensure people stay until the end and thank them).

For the mobilization of participants in the gathering meeting invite participants 3 weeks in advance and ensure the invitation and reminder are shared several times.

MONITOR PROGRESS AND COMMUNICATE ON IT

After every three months the updates and progress of CVA action Plan monitoring has to be updated and Monitoring & follow-up should be organized with presence of CVA facilitators, Govt. service providers, CSO/CSG representatives, CG leaders, Men and Women UP members & Guests (Chairman & UH&FPO) based on the previous action plan.

Always showcase success of the approach to both duty bearers and community bearers for all actions completed to motivate them. Use existing meetings/spaces to repeat commitments and share progress

·ALIGN WITH NATIONAL BUDGET PLANNING

The CVA model should be linked to government planning and budgeting cycle. When implementing CVA there is a need to align with the government annual budgeting process . In Uganda, a good practice was to link the community gatherings during CVA to the Village consultation meetings, such that villages use the same platforms during the budget planning processes to raise community asks and also develop action plans. Thus, community sensitization should be part of ongoing and planned engagements for local governments for sustainability and reduction in mobilization costs. So implementers should work hand in hand with local authorities to fit their sensitization meetings with government planned activities

Useful Resources

- World Vision [CVA Field Guide](#)
- The Hunger Project [VCA manual](#)
- Right2Grow [Impact story](#)

- Learning brief [CVA Bangladesh](#)
- Learning Brief [CVA Ethiopia](#)
- Learning Brief [CVA Uganda](#)
- Learning brief [CVA+VCA Ethiopia](#)

- Uganda [monitoring standards](#)



Right2Grow is committed to a world in which every child can develop to their full potential, which means tackling the root causes of hunger. Right2Grow is a strategic partnership between Action Against Hunger, the Centre for Economic Governance and Accountability in Africa (CEGAA), Max Foundation, Save the Children, The Hunger Project and World Vision. Right2Grow works with communities, community-based organisations and civil society organisations in Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Mali, Southern Sudan and Uganda.