

Knowledge Network  
Dutch Consortium for Rehabilitation  
Research Brief #2

# From Community Participation to Political

## Accountability

*Raising citizens voice in  
post-independence South  
Sudan*

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This brief is part of a series of research briefs of the DCR consortium. The purpose is to communicate lessons and corresponding recommendations for programme quality improvement. For information on the research methodology please refer to the full report, available upon request.

This research brief is about ways in which the DCR programme in South Sudan could foster meaningful and effective community participation, that will increase local governance accountability and generate decision making processes that are responsive to people's needs and result in improved service delivery.

The research was carried out by Mor Ben Atarin 3 Payams in Jur River County, Western Bar el Ghazal, South Sudan, period July-October 2012. The member organisations in this area are Save the Children and HealthNet TPO. The focus was on the following research question:

*How can community participation increase local governance accountability in relation to basic service delivery?*

#### **Lesson 1:**

##### ***The need to raise awareness about rights and responsibilities in relation to service delivery***

The research demonstrates a lack of knowledge that is hindering the effectiveness of community participation. In order for communities to understand their rights and obligations they first need to be aware of them. Therefore, it is important to raise awareness regarding citizens' rights and responsibilities, as well as the responsibilities of governments toward their citizens. Legal rights and obligations should be clearly defined, and clear links should be established between rights and service delivery. Raising awareness within the community will increase both the capacity of communities to hold authorities responsible and the willingness of people to take active part in the process.

#### **Lesson 2:**

##### ***Training of the committees should address processes for claiming and enforcing rights and responsibilities***

Training and guidance should establish clear expectations and roles for the community as well as for different institutions and organizations. It is important to define goals pertaining to service delivery and to directly relate these goals to the roles of the group. It is also important to address accountability processes as much as outcomes. The committees need to develop a set of practical skills that will enable them to monitor and report issues concerning services. This includes keeping records, reaching out to authorities and lobbying.

#### ***Recommendations:***

- Ensure that the action plan is clearly explained to all the inhabitants of the villages involved;

### **Lesson 3:**

#### ***The need to create a platform where committees can participate in policy dialogue.***

Special attention needs to be given to the role of sectorial committees and CBOs as they are supported by the organization and have great potential in serving as mechanism for participation and increased accountability. There is a need to work towards shifting the roles of these groups to a platform in which they can participate in policy dialogue. Changing the role of the committees to political forums will create better chances to improve decision maker's accountability. This will entail changing the activities of the groups from focusing on the operational aspects of services towards the management and governance of service provision. Moreover, the committees should become part of the formal structures of governance. Institutionalizing the committees can facilitate better engagement with Payam administration and ministries concerning service delivery.

### **Lesson 4:**

#### ***The need to work with and train the traditional leaders***

Fostering participation will work best when taking the local context into consideration. Therefore, interventions should work within the existing social and political structures of the community. There is a need to better engage with traditional leaders as hierarchy is a key precept within the community. As leaders have great influence in shaping the community and enabling participation, working closely with them will greatly increase the prospects of creating change in the community. Traditional leaders should take part in the trainings of the committees and advocate within them for the importance of participation. Training for community leaders should also include ways of sharing information with the community, leadership skills, inclusion and how to engage with county and state governmental authorities.

### **Lesson 5:**

#### ***The need to work on more equitable access to knowledge and resources in the community***

NGOs should be attentive of the possibility of reinforcing power relations and dominance of local elites and excluding some segments of the community. Currently, there is only a small part in the community that enjoys the personal benefits of being in committees (knowledge, training, respect, future prospects etc.). This situation strengthens only a small part of the community, rather than building an egalitarian, empowered community. It both hinders the effectiveness of community participation and can cause conflicts within the community. There is a strong need to find opportunities to involve wider segments of the community in decision making processes and making it less exclusive, especially regarding clan relations and gender relations. One way to address

#### ***Recommendations in relation to the Health Committees:***

- Train the Committee members in the Performance Based Financing system and in basic management and accountancy;

this issue is to develop a 'code of conduct' with community leaders that facilitate equitable access to knowledge and resources in the community.

**Gatekeepers**

Gatekeepers present a challenge in reaching out to the wider community. One way to approach this is by directly engaging with community members without mediation. Although it is not particularly useful with large scale programs, this method can serve as means to better interact with the community and to find out needs of excluded people. Correspondingly, these reforms also involve building the capacity of organization staff in a way that will allow them to work with the community towards greater, more involved participation.

**Recommendations in relation to the Community Networks:**

- Pay attention to the unequal social relations between members of the networks, strengthening the role of women and young people in the networks and ensuring that the community youth associations take part in the committees as well.