

Data Use Case Study: Using citizen-generated data to improve school performance in Kenya

Wolde works to strengthen the quality of education in Kenya by making performance information available to students, parents and officials.

Wolde Wesa is a Regional Coordinator at the Kenyan National Taxpayers Association (NTA). He runs the School Report Card project, a feedback mechanism that enables students and parents to hold teachers and educational officials to account, with the aim of improving educational performance.

Wolde's goal, and that of the NTA, is to strengthen good governance in Kenya – working towards a transparent, accountable and citizen-responsive government that delivers quality services to all



Wolde works for the National Tax Payers Association (NTA). The NTA aims to promote accountable, effective and efficient collection and use of public resources. Wolde works on the School Report Card project, looking at primary-level education throughout Kenya. The Government of Kenya has achieved free primary school education for all children, so the focus has now shifted from access to education to improving the quality of education. The School Report Card is a tool

for parents to assess the performance of their children's schools, and a tool to inform education officials about which schools are performing poorly, so that they can take appropriate action. Wolde explains, "It is about giving parents and their children a feedback mechanism to have their voices heard and it is a means to hold the head teacher, teachers and School Board of Management to account. Head teachers are placed under pressure to drive up performance and spend the school budget in ways which support the interest of students and parents." The data collected through the School Report Card project could also be a useful resource for other development actors, such as international organisations planning education projects in Kenya.

Previously, the NTA has tried to gather information about schools from central government sources such as the Kenya Open Data Platform, although the information was out of date and only available for 2008/09. To get more up-to-date data, Wolde approached contacts in the Ministry of Education but they were unable to provide the depth of detail needed. Through their unsuccessful attempts to gain access to the necessary data, NTA identified an important data gap – without accurate, up-to-date and disaggregate data about school performance, it would not be possible to hold educational authorities to account for how they are using public resources to deliver education services. The NTA realised that if government was unable to provide this information, they would have to find an alternative route to generate the data. For this, they designed the School Report Card. The School Report Card allows Wolde to crowd source information from a range of citizen-generated data while at the same time engaging the community in government accountability. The process involved parents carrying out assessments of the schools, for example documenting the number of toilets per child, and whether they are appropriately located. This information is then used to rank the schools across ten criteria – for example, pupil discipline, school facilities, access to textbooks, continuous assessment, water and sanitation, parental responsibility, teacher attendance. "We collect this data because it captures a very accurate picture of the quality of education across Kenya", says Wolde. The data collected via this route is accurate, timely and detailed, and so it is effective in informing educational authorities of the current schooling situation. By publishing these rankings, Wolde hopes that resources coming to these schools are more likely to be used effectively. "It also provides policy makers with up-to-date and disaggregated information with which to make decisions".

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There are some challenges to Wolde's work: "The data that comes from the schools is massive and in hard copy". He has to transfer large quantities of information into Excel format before he can analyse the findings. This takes a lot of time and manually inputting leaves margin for error. He has also found that some of the head teachers of schools that he is ranking perceive this information-gathering process as a 'snooping' exercise, rather than seeing it as improving transparency and accountability.

With the information gathered by the School Report Card scheme, Wolde tries to identify where money is being wasted, how educational resources are being spent by individual schools, and where educational authorities can target their efforts to improve the quality of education in Kenya.

“The real impact of the data is that it increases pressure on head teachers, who control the school budget, and improves parent–teacher accountability. This helps ensure funds are being well spent”. Wolde shares the information he learns via radio and television, using partnerships that the NTA has developed with local FM radio presenters. He also holds roundtable events where he launches the findings in the relevant constituencies and publishes both on and offline (hardcopy) summary reports.

Case study insights

This case study is an example of an organisation working around the limitations of the data available to them. As timely, disaggregate and detailed data was not available from official sources, the NTA has developed and used an alternative approach to collect information, seeing school-by-school data as the key ingredient needed to help education officials improve the quality of education in Kenya. Through engaging citizens in the data-collection process, the NTA has helped to involve communities in monitoring their schools and providing feedback for improved educational performance and accountability.

22 May 2015

This case study is available online at <http://devinit.org/#!/post/using-citizen-generated-data-to-improve-school-performance-in-kenya>. A shorter-form version of this case is available from DI's Access to Information programme.

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