GIVING LOCAL COMMUNITIES A GLOBAL VOICE

Cordaid has developed an innovative new methodology for the objective and inclusive assessment of the development priorities of local communities with a focus on fragile contexts. The Flourishing Community Index (FCI) captures the needs and aspirations of communities independently of specific projects, development actors or donors. Cordaid has piloted the FCI in two communities in Burundi. Modern technologies make it possible to collect, aggregate and share information at a large scale; local communities get a global voice. Cordaid uses the FCI for programming, lobby and advocacy, and as a tool for impact monitoring.

Features of the FCI:

**Smart data collection:** By using the FCI Sensemaker® app with tablets or smart phones communities articulate what matters most to them through storytelling, complemented with questions for signification. This provides a unique combination of independent and authentic qualitative and quantitative information that can be aggregated and analyzed.

**Community-owned information:** The primary beneficiaries of the FCI are communities themselves. Information is fed back through workshops, local radio, billboards, newspapers or SMS. Communities use this information to prioritize the development activities they need most.

**Multi-use:** The analyzed information can also be used by service providers, local and national governments, social enterprises and (I)NGOs.

**Scalable:** The simple, easily applicable and replicable methodology can be used on a large scale in local communities in different countries.

What makes the FCI unique?

The FCI is a unique participatory tool that collects stories from communities to create a detailed portrait of life in a community. The FCI generates both qualitative and quantitative data by combining storytelling with survey questions about these stories and about the people sharing the story. This mixed-methods approach offers a methodological breakthrough for measuring ‘soft’ indicators such as trust, community cohesion, and perceptions of wellbeing, to recognize patterns and trends from these indicators. This approach enables local communities to be part of an informed discussion about development in their own communities. Measurement over time provides information about the changes that community members perceive and about specific interventions that contributed (impact monitoring).

The FCI meets the demand from academics, development communities and donors for impact evaluation methods that are sensitive to local contexts and social difference. In light of the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in September 2015, the FCI offers a detailed and inclusive assessment tool to measure and monitor relevant SDG indicators, especially in fragile contexts.

This leaflet gives an impression of the qualitative and quantitative information generated with the FCI based on the pilot results in two communities in Burundi.
FCI: HOW DOES IT WORK?

Trained local people collect the data with tablets or iPads. This provides a combination of qualitative data, by collecting stories about how people perceive the situation in their community, and quantitative data, through survey questions about the community and about the person telling the story. In each community a random selection of at least 200 community members is invited to share their story and to answer the questions. This way the FCI gives independent, non-biased and representative information. After collecting the data, a session is organized with the community and/or with other stakeholders to make sense of the data and to define action plans.

INFORMATION GENERATED WITH FCI

- Quick scan of how people perceive the situation in their community, collecting stories (positive and negative) and questions on the meaning of the story.
- Changes over time; comparison between communities, and aggregated data.
- The same indicators are used for different communities, so data can be aggregated and compared between contexts.

USERS AND USE OF THE FCI DATA

- Communities: issues and priorities for programs and advocacy.
- Policy makers and program implementers: responsiveness to needs and priorities of communities; measuring changes over time.
- Wider public: Complement national statistics and data; inform about local realities.

COSTS

The estimated operational costs of implementing the FCI in one community (collecting 200 stories) are between €3000 - €5000.
EXAMPLES OF FCI GENERATED DATA FROM A COMMUNITY IN BURUNDI

Below you find some examples of how FCI collected data can be presented. These data are based on stories collected from 138 respondents (65 men; 73 women) from a community in Burundi.

MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES IN THE COMMUNITY

Stories told by the community members reflect the most important issues and themes experienced in the community (in positive and negative sense). This is based on multiple choice questions, with predetermined themes.

EMOTIONS RELATED TO STORIES TOLD

The story tellers are asked to indicate the emotional tone of their story. This graph reflects both positive and negative emotions.

FACTORS THAT AFFECT THE ISSUE

So called ‘triads’ are used, whereby people position their story on a field between three possible answers. Each dot on the triad represents a story. This triad presents the answers to the question: what are the factors that affect safety in your community?

LEVEL OF INFLUENCE OVER THE EVENTS OF THE STORY

The question ‘What influence did you have on the events in your story’, is posed to assess to which extent people see themselves as passive or active agents in these events. Measurement over time gives an indication of the agency of community members.
In this community conflicts are a critical issue. Many families have conflicts related to land, either within the family, with neighbors or with outsiders. When these cases are brought to court, many people experience corruption as people with money can bribe judges. “The most unpleasing thing we have here is land conflicts” says one man, while another explains, “We are helpless...Some cases are in the court for 8 to 10 years. Some even abandon their cases.”

Related to healthcare, people in this community suffer from malaria, typhus and other diseases, but access to healthcare is not much an issue. The community is positive about access to family planning; it improves families’ health and also has a positive influence on land conflicts. A mother explains, “That will help me to rest and get pregnant when I want it… I was very happy because it helps us to avoid problems.”

Associations play an important role in these communities, especially for agriculture, where people use the animals they receive from these associations to provide fertilizers and enhance their crop production. In this community there is a concern about improvements to agricultural production and diversification; people do not understand why they are not allowed to grow stevia (a sugar substitute). On the other hand there is satisfaction with tea companies because they give good prices for the tea.

**Themes for Programming and Lobby & Advocacy**

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<td>Food security, through local associations</td>
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