

Who Watches the County Governments? Let The Citizens Do the Scoring

Good governance is the bedrock of sustainable and inclusive development within County Governments. At the heart of good governance lies the concept of accountability, acting as a vital catalyst that allows the 'cake' of good governance to rise. Just as baking powder gives a cake its texture and form, accountability fosters service delivery devoid of abuse of power and corruption.

To appreciate the centrality of accountability in Kenya's governance journey, one must reflect on the pre 2010 constitutional order. The centralised system of governance under the repealed constitution fostered a widespread perception of a distant, unresponsive and largely unaccountable state. Patronage networks flourished and citizens often felt disconnected from the decision-making processes that directly affected their lives.

The promulgation of the Constitution of Kenya, 2010 marked a turning point. The new constitutional order promised something radical: proximity. Power closer to the people, resources directed to where needs exist and leadership that is accountable at the grassroots level. Devolution, therefore, stands as Kenya's most consequential governance reform designed to confront the deep-rooted accountability deficits that once plagued our country.

At its simplest, accountability refers to the obligation of public officers and public institutions to exercise their authority responsibly and answer for their actions. While definitions may vary across disciplines, the essence remains the same: power ought to be exercised in trust, and that trust must be continually earned through transparency, responsiveness and performance.

Accountability operates along three mutually reinforcing dimensions, namely horizontal, vertical and diagonal accountability. Horizontal accountability exists where state institutions such as Parliament and the Judiciary, check and balance one another. Vertical accountability is exercised by citizens through elections, where leaders are rewarded or sanctioned at the ballot box. Diagonal accountability empowers citizens to directly engage in oversight processes, enabling them to monitor, question, and influence public service delivery in real time, rather than waiting for electoral cycles. It bridges the gap between citizens and state institutions, transforming governance from a distant exercise into a lived, participatory experience.

One of the most practical and impactful expressions of diagonal accountability in Kenya today is the Community Score Card (CSC). The Community Score Card is a tool used to assess and improve the quality of public services in a community. The CSC is a participatory approach that engages the citizens in evaluating and monitoring the performance of the duty bearers. What makes the CSC particularly compelling is its emphasis on constructive

engagement rather than adversarial confrontation. It transforms citizens from passive recipients of services into active partners in governance. By fostering mutual accountability, CSC builds trust, enhances transparency and promotes responsiveness within public institutions.

Further, the CSC aligns seamlessly with constitutional principles, particularly the principles of good governance including public participation, transparency, and accountability enshrined in Articles 10 and 174 of the Constitution. It also complements existing oversight frameworks by providing real-time, local level feedback that can inform policy decisions and resource allocation.

County Governments, as the primary providers of essential services such as health, water, and agriculture, are uniquely positioned to benefit from this approach. The CSC offers Counties a structured mechanism to deepen public participation, moving beyond compliance to meaningful engagement that yield co-production of solutions.

However, for the CSC to realize its full potential, several critical enablers must be in place. Firstly, there must be political will and administrative commitment at the county level to institutionalize the tool in all sectors and within planning and budgeting processes. Secondly, capacity building is essential to ensure that both citizens and public officers understand the methodology and can engage effectively. Thirdly, there must be clear mechanisms for tracking and reporting on agreed actions.

Importantly, the CSC should not be seen as a standalone intervention but as part of a broader ecosystem of social accountability initiatives. When integrated with tools such as public expenditure tracking and participatory budgeting, it can significantly enhance governance outcomes and service delivery performance. At a time when citizens are increasingly demanding greater transparency and value for public resources, the Community Score Card offers a timely and practical solution. It operationalizes diagonal accountability by creating structured spaces for dialogue, evidence generation and joint action.

Ultimately, the promise of Devolution will not be fulfilled by systems alone, but by the strength of relationships between the citizens and the government. The Community Score Card reminds us that accountability is not merely about oversight—it is about partnership. By embracing this approach, County Governments can move closer to a governance model that is not only accountable but also inclusive, responsive and transformative.

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<https://www.the-star.co.ke/opinion/star-blogs/2026-05-12-mwiti-who-watches-the-county-governments-let-citizens-do-the-scoring>