



Aïssatou speaks at a national advocacy event in Yaoundé.

PLAN FOR GIRLS CASE STUDY: CAMEROON

The Young Citizen Score Card Initiative: A New Approach to Youth-Led Advocacy

How Aïssatou found the courage to connect with government leaders and push for improved public services

When asked to describe her personality, 22-year-old Aïssatou puts it simply: “Smiling. Stubborn.” With two words, she speaks volumes. Raised alongside 19 siblings in the Bénoué region of northern Cameroon, she’s learned both how to co-operate with others and how to stand her ground.

This skill set made her a valuable asset to the Young Citizen Score Card (Y CSC) initiative, introduced by the Plan for Girls (P4G) project in 2021 to help communities identify their most pressing issues and work together to find solutions. As a member of P4G’s Girls Advisory Committee – a group that provides input on project direction and priorities – Aïssatou had been honing her leadership skills and was eager to apply them in a new way.

“I wanted to fight for my community and contribute my ideas.”

—AÏSSATOU, 22

Community score cards are a participatory monitoring and evaluation method through which residents gather in a series of meetings to assess the quality of public services – such as schools, hospitals and water supply – identify areas for improvement and provide direct feedback to local leaders. While the process is often led by experts in community-based research, the YCSC approach used in the P4G project was driven by young people themselves. Implemented in 12 of the 60 villages involved in the project in Cameroon, it aimed to foster active youth engagement in decisions affecting their lives.¹

Aïssatou joined a team of youth volunteers tasked with recruiting trusted adults to participate. She sought out parents and community role models, explaining the group's mission: "It's up to us to advocate so decision makers can take action," she told them. "We're going to work to meet our needs."

The YCSC initiative in the commune of Ngong was led by Plan's local partner,² Femmes Porteuses d'Espoir (FEPES), with project officer Dr. Philippe Ayanawa playing a key role. Although he was experienced in participatory monitoring and evaluation, the YCSC approach was new to him. "FEPES was excited but also curious," he says. "We wondered if the children could truly lead the process and deliver meaningful results."

In the weeks before the event, Ayanawa and his team trained 25 youth leaders to familiarize them with the key steps of the methodology. Three of the strongest leaders, including Aïssatou, were selected to facilitate the upcoming session, while the others would engage as participants, with opportunities to lead future sessions.



TOP: A youth leader facilitates a YCSC workshop in Ngong, Cameroon.

BOTTOM: Village residents and leaders gather for a YCSC workshop.

Identifying challenges, finding solutions

On December 21, 2022, the primary school in Aïssatou's village, normally quiet during the holiday break, was bustling with activity. Participants broke into four discussion groups – 20 girls, 19 boys,³ 25 adults and 10 service providers – and headed to separate classrooms.

Aïssatou was asked to facilitate the service providers' meeting, which featured an impressive list of attendees, including the headmasters of the village's primary and secondary schools, the head of the social centre, the health centre manager, the village chief and several traditional leaders.

- 1 The YCSC initiative was also implemented in Benin, targeting 12 of the 60 villages involved in the P4G project. The project selected communities with accessible education, health and protection services for evaluation. Aïssatou's village was chosen for its primary and secondary schools, hospital and traditional chiefdom.
- 2 In the commune of Lagdo, the YCSC initiative was implemented by l'Union des Organismes d'Appui au Développement Durable (UNOADD), Plan's local partner in the region.
- 3 The youth ranged in age from 10–24.

Standing at the front of the classroom with a marker in hand, Aïssatou was ready to capture the key points that would emerge from the discussion. But even with her experience leading peer workshops, this assignment was daunting.

"I was worried about making spelling mistakes in front of all those authority figures," she recalls. Oddly enough, it was the senior-most person in the room who put her at ease. "I didn't know it was the deputy mayor before she was introduced. I thought to myself, 'Hey! She's a woman, like me.' And then I felt free."

Several priority issues were raised during the four-day session, including the lack of ambulances for the village, the shortage of classrooms and the widespread absence of birth certificates. On the final day, participants identified key stakeholders with the power to address these concerns and developed an action plan to advocate for improved services.

Aïssatou was deeply aware of the challenges surrounding birth certificates. She herself hadn't had one until recently.

In Cameroon, every newborn is entitled to a free birth certificate within 90 days, but many parents miss this deadline. Lack of awareness and distance



Community members take part in a YCSC workshop.



A chart showing residents' ratings of local health services.

from registration centres contribute to delays, forcing families to navigate a costly and intimidating legal process that few can afford. Without a birth certificate, children can be denied essential services – on average, 28% of students in Cameroon are unable to take their primary school exams or enter secondary school because they lack proof of identity.⁴

"They have to stop their studies when they find out that they don't have a birth certificate or that the one they have is fake," says Aïssatou, whose situation was the latter.

Securing her own document required multiple trips to the hospital, town hall and courthouse in the regional capital of Garoua, 90 kilometres away, where she ultimately had to plead her case before a judge. It was a gruelling process, but it taught her how the system worked.

Now she was determined to help simplify the process for others.

4 <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099080524210018449/pdf/P5050301f42c2f001a239143923a898693.pdf>

From navigating the system to guiding others

The YCSC action plan on the issue included two key steps: raising awareness among parents about the importance of securing birth certificates for their children and pushing the town hall to establish registration services closer to villages.

Aïssatou went straight to the mayor's office for guidance, and, to her surprise, he welcomed her and listened intently. He explained how the process should work as well as the gaps and corrupt practices, like forgeries, that undermine it.

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“He showed me the way, step by step. Before, I never thought I could speak to an authority figure. Now, I know I’m capable.”

—AÏSSATOU, 22

In March 2024, Aïssatou spoke at a national advocacy event in Yaoundé, organized by Plan Cameroon to present youth priorities to senators from the northern region. She discussed the lack of birth certificates, advocating for decentralizing the registration process and for funding to provide 12,000 certificates for children who had been forced to discontinue their studies. The senators voiced support for her proposals, acknowledging that sustained advocacy would be necessary to advance the issue.



Parents display their children's newly issued birth certificates, obtained with Aïssatou's support.

While pursuing this broader effort, Aïssatou continues to raise awareness in her community by holding sessions at schools, prenatal clinics and health centres and even going door to door to ensure parents have the information they need. She has also become an informal liaison for families, advocating on their behalf with the mayor and local authorities to help them secure their documentation.

The YCSC process has provided valuable lessons not only for the young people involved but also for those guiding the initiative. For Ayanawa, it underscores the importance of community-driven solutions.

“The success of the YCSC also speaks to the approach of the Plan for Girls project, which begins with the issues identified by the target group,” he explains. “In the end, the youth realized just how much they could accomplish and that there are actions only they can lead.”