

Briefing

Forests; Governance

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Policy pointers

In the Central African Republic, national CSOs play a key role in implementing sustainable forest governance projects. But to be effective, they need capacity-development support from donors and technical partners which goes beyond providing resources for implementing projects.

Donors funding CSO projects are encouraged to support organisation development, focusing on key issues identified by the organisation itself. This will lead to greater capacity for more impact and a stronger civil society.

Investments in 'hardware' (strategy, systems, structure) must go hand-in-hand with the 'software' (leadership, skills, staff, shared values) that CSOs require to improve their impact.

Organisation development is not a quick-fix solution. Donors should fund CSOs over the longer term to consolidate change and develop their own internal learning processes beyond project implementation.

Effective forest governance grows from strong civil society

Organisation development — supporting organisations to change and become more effective — can improve how civil society organisations (CSOs) contribute to key issues such as forest governance and social justice. This briefing outlines the approach and why it is important in the context of community forestry in the Central African Republic (CAR). By providing learning from practice, it highlights three key organisational changes that can enhance the performance of CSOs: improved strategic thinking, improved capacity to implement an organisational strategy, and improved organisational culture, including the ability to communicate more effectively internally and with external partners. But despite its potential to improve CSO effectiveness, the process itself is not a quick-fix solution. Donors funding CSOs to implement projects must combine project support with continued organisation development in the longer term.

In the Central African Republic (CAR), community forestry — where local and indigenous communities play a key role in sustainable forest management and benefit from its products — is a relatively new concept. Internationally, there is increasing evidence that good community forest governance is key to its success.¹ National civil society organisations (CSOs) have an important role to play in supporting communities, by helping them to secure resource rights and develop the required capacities to manage and benefit from those rights, and by advocating for policy changes in national forest governance and land-use planning processes. For community forestry to become more sustainable and profitable, better policy engagement and project implementation requires the collaboration of rights holders, CSOs and national institutions in sub-national, national, regional and international policy processes.² Yet CSOs often lack the technical and organisational capacity necessary to make these ambitions a reality.

Organisational capacity often refers to the skills, knowledge and attitudes of the people involved in an organisation, its overall culture, strategy and approach, and its structure and day-to-day functioning. One approach to capacity development that we use at Well Grounded³ is called organisation development. We work with African CSOs to help them realise their objectives and vision and make a positive change to community rights and natural resource management. We facilitate organisational capacity-development processes with our clients to help them achieve their goals (see Box 1).

How does organisation development work?

Organisation development starts with the client's expressed needs. The process frequently leads to examining and responding to underlying issues, internal or external. For the process to

work, the client needs to be willing to accept possible changes in how they work and be ready to embark on a time-consuming process. People are more likely to support and own changes they have shaped themselves.

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Well Grounded acts as a facilitator. Both we and our clients agree on expected outcomes, process, timetable, monitoring mechanism and each other's responsibilities.

These are drawn up into a collaborative agreement (memorandum of understanding). The client contributes to covering some costs, providing logistical support and committing time. The process includes both leaders and all other staff at all levels of the organisation, and values the perspectives and opinions of everyone.

Working with CSOs in the CoNGOs project

Between 2017 and 2019, as part of the DFID-funded NGOs collaborating for equitable and sustainable community livelihoods in the Congo Basin forests (CoNGOs) project, Well Grounded worked with five organisations in the Central African Republic to provide organisation development support:

- Réseau des Populations Autochtones et Locales pour la Gestion Durable des Ecosystèmes Forestiers de Centrafrique (REPALCA)
- Centre pour l'Information Environnementale et le Développement Durable (CIEDD)
- Plateforme pour des Organisations de la Société Civile pour la Gestion Durable des Ressources Naturelles et de l'Environnement (GDRNE)
- Initiative pour la Démocratie et le Développement Durable (I3D)

- Maison de l'Enfant et de la Femme Pygmées (MEFP)

The three CSOs (CIEDD, MEFP and I3D) and two platforms (GDRNE and REPALCA) all work for the rights of local and indigenous communities to participate in and benefit from natural resources, environmental management and decision making. All but I3D have been involved with implementing CoNGOs project activities with partners Fern, the Forest Peoples Programme and Rainforest Foundation UK at the national level and with communities in the southwest of the country. Advocacy is one of their major activities, through a platform or individually. All organisations faced a period of crisis in 2013–15 as a result of instability throughout CAR, followed by some time re-establishing themselves in 2015–16.

Organisation development: the process

In our organisation development work with these five organisations, we combined the Integrated Organisation Model⁴ with the 7S model⁵ to explain the components of an organisation (Figure 1). The process focused on developing both the 'hardware' of an organisation (strategy, structure, systems) and its 'software' (leadership, skills, staff, shared values). 'Hardware' tends to be tangible (such as recorded in documents). But 'software' is less so. It is more difficult to change and often left undeveloped, although its influence on functioning and achieving impact is huge.

Well Grounded facilitated these processes during planned interventions, based on needs expressed by the organisations themselves. With each client, we identified key issues affecting them in order to understand possible underlying causes and solutions. We analysed successful and challenging events by visualising a historic timeline, followed by an in-depth analysis of the 7S of the internal organisation (shared values, structure, strategy, systems, style, skills and staff). We then agreed which areas to work on and integrated them into the MoU.

After each intervention, the client further developed the outcomes, with remote support from us. Strategic elements developed during the interventions were written down as a plan. It is important that strategic decisions are validated in a document, to guide the implementation of activities and to promote the organisation to potential partners and donors.

Training: developing capacity for sustainable forest governance

Organisation development facilitation was complemented by training to further develop capacities needed for sustainable forest

Box 1. Organisation development: taking a holistic approach

Well Grounded views organisation development as a long-term process that looks at an organisation holistically and as constantly evolving. The aim is to support an organisation to decide on a course of action so that they can become more sustainable, effective and accountable. Well Grounded accompanies its clients through a reflective process to assess their strengths and weaknesses, and prioritise areas for improvement and action, with a view to supporting them to improve their internal functioning and external impact.

The process is as important as the final product and is based on a balanced relationship between Well Grounded and its clients. Fundamentally, the process must be tailor made, client led, participatory, inclusive, holistic and change oriented. The client identifies the need for development, and responsibility and investment are shared by both.

governance, bringing different organisations together:

- Leadership development
- Diversity and inclusion
- Participation and forest governance.

The training was invaluable for further enhancing capacity, taking a participant-centred approach and involving a range of participatory methods. The learning and inspiration also fed into each organisation's ongoing development as participants committed to running their own training sessions with their colleagues afterwards.

Leadership development. This started and finished with a one-week residential course attended by team members from I3D and MEFP. It examined leadership at an individual, team and organisation level and involved practical exercises to expand on theory. Participants implemented a small project at their own organisation, tackling key leadership issues. Each participant had six hours of coaching to support their personal development plan.

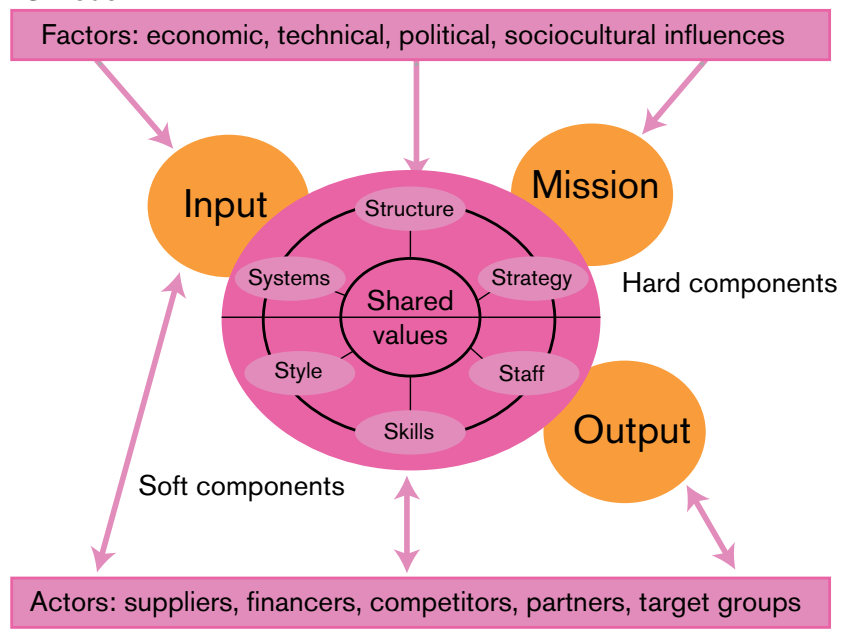
Diversity and inclusion. This training was developed in response to an issue identified by several CSOs. Each organisation aims towards gender equity and upholding the rights of indigenous peoples. But they felt they lacked the appropriate analysis or tools for in-depth work. MEFP was involved in an initial consultation to identify needs and REPALCA participated in the subsequent training. Participants began by examining their own assumptions and behaviours and moved on to exploring concepts of diversity, inclusion, gender and rights. Participants also identified how to integrate their learning into practice.

Participation and forest governance. The third course examined key issues around empowering forest governance and strategies for promoting and ensuring participation. It included relevant aspects of diversity and inclusion and an analysis of where and how organisations can positively influence forest governance in CAR. They could then apply the principles of participation in forest governance to specific activities such as independent observation, advocacy, community forestry and community capacity development.

Identifying signs of change

To monitor the effects of two years of organisation development support, the CSOs identified signs of change they had observed. At first, change can be difficult to measure (apart from documents produced). 'Software' changes are intangible, subjective and based on the expressed perceptions of individuals — although they

Figure 1. The Integrated Organisation Model integrated with the 7S model



become more visible over time. Therefore, each organisation undertook a short self-evaluation to identify signs of change — both 'hard' and 'soft' — at the individual, organisation and activity level. From this, we observed change in three key areas.

Strategic thinking. All five organisations identified developing a strategy for the coming years as important. The strategic planning process led to greater clarity among team members of what the organisation is trying to achieve. It enhanced the comprehension, motivation, proactivity and professionalism of staff and their ability to clearly communicate their organisation's plans externally. For each organisation, reviewing their organisational structure has made them leaner and more flexible, and able to respond to fluctuations in funding and activity.

Box 2. Impact of the organisation development process on MEFP's work⁹

As a result of strategic thinking and focusing its work, MEFP is increasing its credibility influencing government and other entities. They have influenced the University in Bangui to include governance and climate change themes in their curriculum. MEFP is now solicited for lectures at the university.

The process has helped MEFP to develop a participatory approach to working with communities and strengthening its advocacy through engaging better with other CSOs in the country. MEFP considers Well Grounded's approach efficient because it is client-led and non-prescriptive: not dictating to clients but working with them to understand their objectives and explore ways and means of achieving these. They have been inspired to replicate this approach in their work with forest communities.

The MEFP coordinator observed significant change in their awareness of their strengths and restoring confidence in their organisation and themselves, helping them to think and plan their work strategically and be more focused after having gone through a period of political unrest in 2013–15.

A strategic annual plan is key. It can be presented as the organisation's 'business card' to potential partners. Three clients also worked on communication and preparing key messages for different audiences for developing partnerships⁶ and mobilising resources.

Capacity to implement the organisational strategy. The process has improved the collective consciousness of all staff with regard to their shared vision, mission and values and how to achieve these. At organisation level, larger concepts (such as good forest governance, participation, equity/equality, indigenous rights) were unpacked within the context of each organisation and its strategy. We also worked with two clients to develop a strategic resource-mobilisation plan using a five-step tool: identify, engage, negotiate, manage and communicate results.⁷

Developed organisational culture. The self-evaluation showed that the process has enhanced collaboration and communication within the teams, as well as with partners and beneficiaries. Organisation development has brought together teams through new ways of working and thinking, which have in turn built thrust and motivation.⁸ Individual capacity to lead or implement the organisational strategy has also improved. One organisation asked for support in personal leadership skills, developing their preferred leadership characteristics and defining areas for further change.

More support is needed

Our experiences have shown that organisation development has already helped to create positive change. For example, MEFP has now developed a participatory approach to working with communities. It has strengthened its advocacy work by better engaging with other CSOs in the country and government agencies (Box 2). For GDRNE, the strategic planning process was a way of clarifying what members expect of their platform and what it can accomplish, and changing its strategic objectives accordingly.

But longer-term support and the inclusion of more CSOs is needed to enable organisations like these to consolidate change and continue growing. Donors supporting an organisation to implement projects are encouraged to combine their support with the development of the organisation itself, leading to better organisational capacity for better results, more impact and a stronger civil society. Ideally this support needs to be long term — going beyond the project life — to consolidate change and provide time for the organisation to develop its own internal learning processes. Therefore, donors should provide additional funding specifically for organisation development and to enable CSOs to monitor and build on progress through continued self-evaluation.

Stephany Kersten

Stephany Kersten is organisation development practitioner at Well Grounded.

About the project

This briefing is one of five on the 'NGOs collaborating for equitable and sustainable community livelihoods in the Congo Basin forests' (CoNGOs) project. Launched in 2016 in the Congo Basin — where the second-largest tropical rainforest provides the livelihoods of 40 million people — the project aimed to improve the livelihoods of forest-dependent communities through better governance and practice. The project partners believe that strengthening the organisation and capacities of CSOs and local communities to secure and develop community forestry rights and enterprises have been central to achieving this. CoNGOs was led by IIED with a consortium of NGO partners in five countries. UK: ClientEarth, Fern, Forest Peoples Program, Rainforest Foundation UK, Well Grounded. Cameroon: Association OKANI, Centre for Environment and Development, INADES-Formation. CAR: Réseau des Populations Autochtones et Locales pour la gestion durable des écosystèmes forestiers de Centrafrique, Centre pour l'Information Environnementale et le Développement Durable. ROC: Organisation pour le Développement et les Droits Humains au Congo, Forum pour la Gouvernance et les Droits de l'Homme, Comptoir Juridique Junior. DRC: Tropenbos International.

Notes

- ¹ See for example Gritten, D (2 August 2018) Good governance is key to community forestry. RCOFTC Stories. <http://bit.ly/2Fbmx8m> / ² IIED, CoNGOs: NGOs collaborating for equitable and sustainable community livelihoods in Congo Basin forests. <http://bit.ly/2RFPTB7> / ³ See <http://well-grounded.org> / ⁴ MDF (2004) Tango Toolkit for Organisations: 40 tools for institutional development and organisational strengthening. MDF Training and Consultancy, the Netherlands. <http://bit.ly/2lfbior> / ⁵ Peters, TJ and Waterman, RH (2006) *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies*. Collins Business Essentials. / ⁶ Well Grounded and Maliasili Initiatives (2017) Building strong partnerships: designing healthy partnerships for African civil society organisations working in natural resource management and conservation. <http://bit.ly/2lqV8j> / ⁷ Development Connect (2016) How to approach resource mobilization – key steps. <http://bit.ly/31HpGXo> / ⁸ IPE Triple Line (2018) Impact evaluation of organisation development support to African civil society organisations in the Congo Basin. Well Grounded. <https://well-grounded.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/IMPACT-EVALUATION.pdf> / ⁹ Asfaha, S and Handja, GT (2018) Stories of Change: Organisation Development Support to African Civil Society Organisations in the Congo Basin. IPE Triple Line consultants and Well Grounded. <https://well-grounded.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/MEFP.pdf>



Knowledge Products

The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) promotes sustainable development, linking local priorities to global challenges. We support some of the world's most vulnerable people to strengthen their voice in decision making.

Well Grounded provides organisation development support to civil society organisations in Africa so that they can have real and sustainable impact on natural resource governance, community rights and social justice to build a strong civil society voice.

Contact

Anna Bolin
anna.bolin@iied.org

80–86 Gray's Inn Road
London, WC1X 8NH
United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0)20 3463 7399
www.iied.org

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