

## CASE STUDY 85

### Establishing LCDF in Cameroon: a journey of discovery

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#### Context

One of the main challenges of capacity development practice in the developing world is that of recognition and acknowledgment that capacity development services are often supply driven and rarely based on genuine user demand. Capacity development services tend to be identified, designed and funded by a wide range of suppliers who for the greater part are based in national urban centres, or outside the country, far removed from users of the services. Because services are supply driven, they have a high risk of being inappropriate, hence intended impacts remain elusive.

In its 2007-2015 Strategy Paper, SNV presents an innovative delivery mechanism to address this challenge: LCDF or Local Capacity Development Facility. The LCDF aims to promote demand-oriented and tailor-made capacity development of local actors. It aims to do so by constituting a market-based mechanism where demand and supply for capacity development services are able to meet, where negotiation can take place, and where funding is available so that engagement occurs and robust demand driven capacity development services are delivered.

Transformation of the LCDF "idea" into a locally owned and living institution positioned on the capacity development services market, prepared to take on the challenge described above, is the objective that SNV has set itself. The story of LCDF in Cameroon is one of a journey of discovery.

#### Client and partners

##### 1. The 'client': the capacity development services market

The capacity development services market is made up of actors from government, civil society, the private sector and international development-oriented organisations. In spite of the acknowledgement that capacity development is a requisite for development, there is surprisingly little recognition of the existence of a capacity development services market and that it operates like any other market, with supply and demand actors, and that it needs promotion and structure in order to function optimally.

Not unlike in many other countries, the Cameroonian capacity development services market is one that is dysfunctional. Often demand is not articulated. Where demand is expressed, accessibility is often a problem: demand and supply actors have difficulty finding each other, whether for geographical, cultural, social or other reasons. In some cases there is a high level of inappropriateness between the expressed demand and the proposed supply. In other cases funding is absent, or excessive subsidising is found to affect functioning of normal market forces. The situation has led to a distorted market for capacity development services, with low competition and disempowered demand and supply actors.

LCDF wishes to make the capacity development services market more functional. It believes one way of doing so is by becoming a "mini market place", a place where demand and supply actors can meet, negotiate and find funding in support of demand side actors' needs. In order to do this, LCDF must establish itself as one of the operators on the market.

## 2. The partners

The multi-stakeholder process described below aimed at identifying a core group of partner organisations to lead the shaping and creation of LCDF. In Cameroon 6 civil society organisations, operating in different sectors came together voluntarily and invested significant amounts of time and effort. The experience, insights, contextual knowledge and networks of each of these partner organisations have been invaluable in mobilising a diversity of local stakeholders and getting them not only interested, but involved.

### **Intervention logic and methods**

A strong foundation for the LCDF is considered to be one where a broad base of local institutions drives not only the evolution from "idea" to "on the ground reality" but also that these institutions become the owners of the entity itself. It is considered equally important that the environment in which LCDF operates has been analysed and understood as best as possible so that LCDF's actions are both focused and measurable. In order to ensure these two important considerations, the LCDF establishment phase has focused on two courses of action: implementing a multi-stakeholder process and executing a series of reconnaissance studies to obtain a realistic view of the capacity development service markets that LCDF is setting out to improve.

#### Multi-stakeholder process

The multi-stakeholder process aimed at reaching key players of the capacity development service markets, demand and supply actors as well as funding agencies, in order to present the LCDF concept, obtain feedback and gauge interest levels. A multi-stakeholder process is all about communication. Therefore, after having prepared a number of support materials (such as brochures, PowerPoint presentations and visual representations of the LCDF mechanism), high level visits were solicited and undertaken to government ministries and key actors of the civil society, private sector and international community. In addition, wherever possible, opportunities were seized to present LCDF at events, thus making it possible to reach different segments of the public.

To elicit commitments, a national workshop was organised during which participants were invited to influence the shaping of LCDF. This national workshop was followed by de-central workshops which ensured a countrywide coverage. The workshops were vital in identifying a core group of persons, both at central and de-central levels who were willing to invest time and effort, on a voluntary basis, to develop the LCDF. Activities undertaken by the core group included many meetings to discuss and debate the shaping of LCDF and to identify an appropriate legal structure. The core group was instrumental in planning and implementing the de-central workshops, it produced the constitution and planned and realised the general assembly for the creation of LCDF. De-central workshops were important to ensure the rooting of LCDF into the local contexts, and they ensured inclusiveness. They also allowed for the identification of focal points (one man and one woman) for each of the 10 administrative regions of Cameroon. The workshops were vital in transforming the LCDF concept into a tangible, locally appropriate and locally owned reality.

In order to maintain the interest generated and the goodwill of the many institutions and individuals that have been reached, newsletters are prepared to inform and invite feedback on a regular basis.

The multi-stakeholder process is not yet at journey's end; it is an activity which will be maintained over time. It is expected to continue to be an essential and powerful tool eliciting engagement and commitment and ensuring inclusiveness, transparency and rooting in the local context.

## Reconnaissance studies

Studies were commissioned to analyse and produce a clear image of the capacity development services markets in the forestry and pastoralist sectors, the two sectors in which LCDF wishes to initiate its operation. An additional study comprised production of an inventory of existing funding streams and mechanisms for the two focus sectors, so as to determine on the one hand which are possible sources of funding that can be accessed in support of LCDF, and on the other hand which possibilities exist for housing LCDF.

The results of the studies will be used to fine-tune the objectives and operational strategy of LCDF. They also constitute a baseline against which future result measurement will occur.

## **Outcome**

- Although LCDF, at four months from the start of the multi-stakeholder process is still young, the following outcomes are worth mentioning:
- To date more than two hundred institutions have been reached with many of them expressing keen interest in the LCDF.
- Articles have started to appear in local newspapers, and an occasional news bulletin was aired on radio and TV; instances have been recorded where the term "LCDF" was heard to be coined in far flung areas of Cameroon.
- De-central workshops were organised by volunteer organisations.
- Participants at workshops voluntarily organised restitutions about LCDF within their own networks, either formally by holding meetings or workshops with their members, or in informal ways.
- The core group has become a tight-knit group of volunteers, working together effectively and stimulating each other for the creation of LCDF.

## **Impact**

Though it is too early to speak of impact at this stage, elements of future impact are discernible. Through increased recognition and understanding of the capacity development services market and assuming that LCDF becomes effective in its future operation, the stage looks set for empowerment to be brought about:

- Of those actors closely associated with LCDF's operation (together they will have been able to influence and improve the capacity development services market),
- And of those actors that constitute the future beneficiaries of the LCDF (improved and accessible services are expected to contribute to increased production, employment and income of especially the poorest actors operating in the forestry and livestock value chains).

## **Lessons learnt**

The LCDF experience, though still short in Cameroon, is rich and has yielded interesting lessons:

- The importance of moving away from SNV's traditional partners and clients to ensure inclusiveness, allow for innovation and to capture energy where it is available, thereby giving LCDF the greatest chance of success.
- The fact that LCDF meets with a strong need as shown by how enthusiastic people and institutions are to get involved on a voluntary basis.
- The importance of stimulating a spirit of voluntary contribution for cultivating commitment and trust and creating the foundation for working together in the long term. Factors of success are not only the felt need for LCDF but also the use of facilitation skills and techniques based on transparency, sharing of information in a timely manner, sharing of responsibilities, holding regular face-to-face

meetings, cultivating trust and confidence that SNV will support the setting up of LCDF all the way.

- The requirement of a core group of dedicated volunteers was found to be instrumental to move ahead. They are the motor, providing ideas, ensuring local anchorage and possessing extensive networks which they can put to good use. All of these elements are essential for the localisation of LCDF.
- The need for a strong "secretariat", right from the very start, must not be underestimated. The transparency resulting from producing and sharing information (minutes of meetings, reports of visits, restitution of workshops etc) creates trust and motivation and helps to bind the group. Provoking and responding to feedback are necessary to maintain the pace and ensure everyone's participation. Organisational and planning activities are needed to move ahead in a focused manner. In the start-up phase it is logical that the SNV advisor takes on this role.
- The realisation that as facilitator in the process one can and should plan only so much. The role of facilitator is to constantly assess the delicate balance between contributing too much and contributing too little. On the one hand one may risk imposing one's own ideas and suppressing those of local partners by contributing too much, while on the other hand one could risk losing the forces that bind the group together due to insufficient stimulation. At every step of the way the facilitator needs to carefully weigh what, how and how much to contribute. To do this well, anticipation skills are needed for predicting the likely effects of contributions in terms of local initiative, ownership and appropriateness but a strong focus on the task at hand is also of great importance.

Establishing LCDF is a genuine journey of discovery! The true guides on this journey are our local partners; it is them that determine not only LCDF's destination but also how fast we go and how we get there. There is so much to be discovered along the way; what an exciting journey it is!

### **Photos and quotes :**

*'In the wake of the publication of our national development plan\*) LCDF has appeared at the best possible time. The activities LCDF proposes are totally in line with our national development plan and they address the concerns of our Government expressed therein. LCDF constitutes a true goose worth golden eggs; let us prospect it well.'* a participant at the closing session of the de-central LCDF workshop in Douala made the following remark

\*) The Cameroon Growth and Employment Strategy Document, or national development plan, sets out a pathway for the country to become an emerging nation by 2035.



Participants in the de-central workshop held in Garoua

## Realities of the market



In cities like Douala and Yaoundé, every neighbourhood has a number of small wood processing enterprises; a total of 5000 such enterprises employing 12,000 persons have been identified in these two cities. In a country with an abundant resource of the world's best quality timber, these enterprises suffer from a lack of access to the material from legal sources. An estimated 97% of legally harvested timber is destined for export markets

either as logs or planks. By not processing these vast quantities of wood into finished products such as doors and furniture, Cameroon's carpentry sector is losing immense opportunities in income and employment. It is estimated that 3 million dollars' worth of low quality furniture is imported into the country every year to supply a burgeoning middle class.

While a start to solving the problems of small wood processing enterprises can be made by linking them with community forest groupings for supply of legal timber, another problem that needs solving is the lack of diversity in the furniture items being manufactured. The range of products is small with the same or similar designs being used from one wood processing enterprise to another.



An association of more than 50 small wood processing enterprises in Douala, CJMB (Cercle de Jeunes Menuisiers de Bepanda) has been involved in setting up LCDF because they see a benefit. They want to find a service provider and funding for their demand for innovative designs for a range of furniture items; designs which respect international standards and that are patented. The wood processing enterprises have expressed the desire to collaborate with ENSET (Ecole Nationale Supérieur de l'Enseignement Technique) to produce such designs. The designs will allow them to specialise and position themselves for capturing a larger segment of the furniture market. In this way they will increase their competitiveness, grow and create employment and start to influence the wood processing market which has such enormous potential in Cameroon.