



ded Cameroon | SNV Highlands

Networks and Networking in the Cameroon Highlands

*An occasional paper on capacity builders'
experience*

October 2007, Bamenda

Table of Contents

1	SUMMARY	1
2	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	2
3	INTRODUCTION	3
3.1	DED and SNV Highlands	3
3.2	Definitions	6
3.3	Methodology	7
4	FACTORS INFLUENCING CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE HIGHLANDS	9
4.1	Political and historical factors	9
4.2	Socio-cultural factors	9
4.3	Regulatory status	10
4.4	Economic situation	11
4.5	Environmental background	12
4.6	CSO networks in the Highlands	13
5	PROFILES OF NETWORKS IN THE CAMEROON HIGHLANDS	15
5.1	Western Highlands for Nature Conservation (WHINCONET)	15
5.2	North West Association Development Organisations (NWADO)	18
5.3	South West Civil Society Network	20
5.4	Union of North West Human Rights Organisations (UNOWHURO)	22
5.5	United Councils and Cities of Cameron (UCCC-NWR)	25
5.6	North West Female Mayors Association (NOWEFMA)	25
5.7	Responsible Citizenship-North West Chapter	25
6	THE CAMEROON HIGHLANDS NETWORK EXPERIENCE	26
6.1	Actors	26
6.1.1	The importance of initiators	26
6.1.2	Partners push and pull	26
6.1.3	Uneasy alliances: Government, traditional authorities and media	27
6.1.4	Target groups and beneficiaries	28
6.1.5	Members	28
6.2	Factors	30
6.3	Organisation	30
6.3.1	Strategy: difficult to develop	30
6.3.2	Staff: what staff?	30
6.3.3	Management style: leader, tyrant or visionary?	31

6.3.4	Systems: sadly lacking!	32
6.3.5	Structures: appropriate or unwieldy?	33
6.3.6	Culture: governance and learning	34
6.4	Mission	35
6.5	Inputs and outputs	36
6.5.1	Inputs: perennial problems	36
6.5.2	Outputs: services provided by network	37
7	RECOMMENDATIONS	41
7.1	For Networks	41
7.2	For partners, capacity builders and advisers	43
8	CONCLUSIONS	46
8.1	Meeting a network's objectives	46
8.2	Meeting capacity builder's goals	47
8.3	What is the added value of networking?	48
	ANNEXES	49
A.	Abbreviations	49
B.	Bibliography	50
C.	Authors	50
D.	Contact details	51
	FIGURE 1. ACTIVITIES EXECUTED UNDER THE SNV-DED-HELVETAS MOUS	5
	FIGURE 2. IDOS PROCESS	8
	FIGURE 3. INTEGRATED ORGANISATION MODEL	8
	FIGURE 4. NATIONAL INDEPENDENT ANTI-CORRUPTION COALITION	14
	FIGURE 5. NORTH-WEST COALITION FOR THE 2007 TWIN ELECTIONS	14
	FIGURE 6. MEDIA AND GOVERNANCE CAFÉ	17
	FIGURE 7. FEDERATION OF BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION IN CAMEROON...	25
	FIGURE 8. WHO IS IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT?	26
	FIGURE 9. MEMBERSHIP OBLIGATIONS	29
	FIGURE 10. UNOWHURO'S SANCTIONS	29
	FIGURE 11. NORTH WEST CRAFTS ASSOCIATION	30
	FIGURE 12. DOES A NETWORK NEED MONEY?	36
	FIGURE 13. ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIES TO CONVINCE MEMBERS TO PAY THEIR DUES	37
	FIGURE 14. WHY ARE NETWORKS ATTRACTIVE TO DONORS?	39
	FIGURE 15. DEVELOPMENT LIFE CYCLE OF CSO NETWORKS	40
	FIGURE 16. UNOWHURO TRAINING ON PROJECT DESIGN	44
	FIGURE 17. DEFINITION OF ADDED-VALUE	48

1 Summary

As capacity builders for civil society organisations (CSOs) and partners for over five years, SNV and the DED Program “Promotion of CSOs” have built up a wealth of experience, practice and knowledge on networking and supporting networks in the Cameroon Highlands. By capitalising the factors leading to the rise of CSOs and their networks, using examples, analysis and lessons learnt in developing these networks, this paper assesses if capacity building of networks has helped reach i) the goals of the capacity builders in enhancing Civil Society in their role towards alleviating poverty and ii) the goals of the networks.

The Anglophone Highlands (North West and South West Provinces) present a challenging context for development agencies. There is a gap between the region’s potential and achievements: unique natural resources and forest areas although poorly managed and threatened by degradation and extinction; an extremely dynamic economy, but with poor infrastructure, therefore unattractive to industry. There is also a vibrant and creative political sphere, being the base of the opposition parties, but characterised by little cohesion and consensus; and increasing poverty and social exclusion of minority groups and the population tending to be self sufficient, not relying on state institutions to improve their living conditions, but organising themselves to respond to their needs. The influence of this environment is indicated by the estimated 17,000 civil society organisations (ranging from Non-Governmental Organisations, Common Initiative Groups, economic entities, to Cooperatives, Associations and Federations) in the Highlands since the early 1990s. The Highlands have a high concentration of CSOs compared to the rest of Cameroon. Networks of CSOs are thus a significant development actor.

Focussing on four permanent networks, two DED partners, NWADO and UNOWHURO, and two SNV clients, WHINCONET and SWECSON, plus examples of other alliances in the Highlands, two models are used (Integrated Organisational Model and Institutional Development Organisational Strengthening). They help reflect on how organisations work and the capacity strengthening process. These frameworks help analyse and examine the experience of working with networks.

Experiences highlight many incongruities. CSOs do agree to commit and share resources as a group, this being supposedly more efficient and credible, and targeting more ambitious goals than an individual organisation could. Generalist or thematic, networks are typified by common interest, mission and goals, focussing on information and experience sharing, advocacy and avoiding duplication of activities. This joint effort is either to reach a one-off or long term objectives. But while some networks achieve their aims in some measure, others fade out before they even start functioning. Why? Networks face a multitude of problems related to their identity and functioning: unclear or broad goals (often donor-driven), activities not producing results, dictatorial or incompetent leadership, weak communication systems, lack of motivation and commitment of members, difficulties in resourcing the network, problems in sharing resources and knowledge, poor management and governance. A network, which theoretically should be more than the sum of the capacities of its members, is sometimes less efficient or credible than its smallest member. Contradictions are many: CSOs enthusiasm in creating networks followed by often inefficient and ineffective functioning; the use of similar organisational structures even if their efficacy appears irrelevant or outdated; the quest for a network’s unique identity versus the large number of networks.

Recommendations for networks include focusing on their identity, roles, partners, management and leadership, goals and staff, especially a coordinator. For partners, knowledge of each other is essential and regular contacts, both between partners individually and jointly with beneficiary networks, are necessary. For capacity builders the advisory process should be clear, a needs assessment is invaluable, and decisions on who to train, what and where to support, and jointly deciding the approach with the network, are vital.

Conclusions are that networks do have great potential for effectiveness and efficiency. They have an added-value for capacity builders, as well as for their beneficiaries and members, compared to an individual civil society organisation. A few networks have already proved this through their achievements, developing from internally focused talk shops to a more external, service providing mindset, also differentiating between the needs of members and the network. Others are still developing ways to be cohesive and implement actions, constrained by procedures, their structure and discussions rather than decision making. About half of the networks examined are actual, successful, at least partially meeting their own goals and missions, such as sharing information, advocacy, building members capacities and collaborating on specific themes. Highlands networks were arguably also able to add value, taking up initiatives that individual CSOs could not, creating strength by numbers and creating a voice that otherwise may not have been heard. Networks have also proved they can be sustainable, given a clear focus, leadership and a light structure, even with few resources. These positive outcomes; the change in capacity and performance of members and the network, as well as beneficial effects, such as network members being able to deliver better services to their beneficiaries, indirectly mean that goals of capacity builders in enhancing Civil Society in their role towards alleviating poverty are met. For support agencies and networks alike, working together was – and is - a learning process, requiring the development of specific approaches and tools.

2 Acknowledgements

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NWADO, North West Association of Development Organisations
 WHINCONET, Western Highlands Nature Conservation Network
 UNOWHURO, Union of North-West Human Rights Organisations
 SWECSON, South-West Civil Society Network
 UCCC- NW, United Cities and Councils of Cameroon North-West branch
 FOWIC, Forum for Women’s Information and Coordination

Also to the following persons in particular:

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Gaby Ambo, Human Rights Defence Group, UNOWHURO Vice President
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3 Introduction

A number of modern myths and questions surround Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and their networks; are they real organisations with staff, activities and goals that are being met, or just “briefcase organisations” established on paper to obtain funds or legitimise an individual’s activities? Are networks of CSOs actually active? Do they achieve anything or are they “talk shops” stimulated by donors and international organisations? Do networks have a greater impact and a multiplier effect, easily reaching more organisations and thus a wider number of people, or is impact lost in the layers from donor to network, network to member organisation, CSO to its members, stakeholders and target groups?

The DED Program Promotion of CSOs and SNV Highlands activities in capacity building of CSOs over the last five years in the North West and South West Provinces of Cameroon, known as the Highlands, has led to a wealth of experience in working with these organisations and their networks, with the goal of development and poverty alleviation.

This knowledge has been combined into this Occasional Paper, with the aim of characterising the factors leading to the rise of civil society organisations and their networks, presenting four networks as examples, followed by analysis and discussion of lessons learnt in developing these networks, particularly assessing if capacity building of networks has helped reach both i) the goals of the capacity builders in enhancing Civil Society in their role towards alleviating poverty, and ii) the goals of the networks as organisations representing their members as well as actors of development and governance.

This paper targets:

- Networks of civil society organisations
- DED and SNV staff worldwide
- Other capacity building organisations

SNV and DED welcome feedback and comments on this paper.

3.1 *DED and SNV Highlands*

DED – the German Development Service is one of the leading European development services for personnel cooperation. It was founded in 1963, since then more than 15 000 development workers have committed themselves to improving the living conditions of people in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Almost 1000 development workers are currently working in approximately 40 countries. It is financed by the federal budget of the German Government.

- It places professionally experienced and socially committed specialists at the disposal of developing countries.
- It supports local organisations and self-help initiatives by counselling, financing small programmes and promoting local specialists.
- It recruits German development workers wishing to serve as United Nations Volunteers (UNV).
- It promotes understanding for the situation of people in developing countries among the German public and draws attention to questions concerning the common interests and problems of the One World.

Who we are:

- DED is a non-profit organisation that offers its support to local partners by placing qualified professionals (expatriate and local) at their disposal.
- DED combines technical and intercultural skills with social commitment.

- The commitment of DED is centred on partnership, participation, and the proximity of the target groups.

What we are working for:

- The reduction of poverty.
- Concretisation of democratic principles by strengthening the civil society and decentralized structures.
- The durable development centred on self-determination.
- The protection of the natural resources.
- The equality of the sexes by strengthening the role of the women.
- The management of conflicts at the civil level and the promotion of peace.

The DED Program **Promotion of Civil Society Organisations** aims at supporting the development of the capacities of local non governmental organisations in order to ensure their efficiency and their participation in local, regional and national decision-making and policy-control processes in the Centre, Far North and North West (phasing out in 2007 and to be transferred to the West in 2008). Technical advisers and national experts support partner organisations (associations, NGOs and networks) in their initiatives and projects towards governance and decentralisation, through counselling, training and networking facilitation.

SNV, the Netherlands Development Organisation, is an international, Netherlands based, development organisation that provides advisory services to nearly 1800 local organisations in over 30 developing countries to support their fight against poverty, believing that poverty results from unequal access to resources and power, between different social and cultural groups and between men and women. SNV is dedicated to a society where all people enjoy the freedom to pursue their own development and contribute to this by strengthening the capacity of local organisations. SNV's goal is to support local actors to strengthen their performance in effectively realising poverty reduction and good governance. SNV has been working in Cameroon since 1963, in four regional teams, of which the Highlands team focuses on the Northwest, Southwest and Western Provinces. The fight against poverty needs strong organisations that serve the interests of the poor and are able to change the structures that sustain poverty, so SNV works with organisations operating at a meso level and function as linking pins between national policies and the people living in towns and communities. Its clients include private, governmental and CSOs, many of which are networks, served by locally present teams of national and international experts. SNV's motto indicates how its advisers provide support in building the capacities of local organisations: *Connecting People's Capacities*.

Capacity builders Memorandum of Understanding: in order to better achieve their common goal of reducing poverty in the Highlands of Cameroon, SNV Highlands and DED decided to collaborate and create synergies. The common local partners, service providers, clients and civil society organisations (e.g. associations) and the private sector (enterprises) led DED, SNV Highlands, together with Helvetas Cameroon (a Swiss association for international cooperation, which left Cameroon in 2007 after 45 years), to combine their energies in capacity building. Having worked informally together for several years, an annual, tri-partite Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed in 2005 and renewed in 2006. Each MoU aimed at strengthening the capacities of local partners, service providers and clients of the DED Program Promotion CSOs in the North West, SNV Highlands and Helvetas Cameroon through joint training addressing identified capacity building needs.

The MoU also aimed to give the parties feedback and build their own capacities in capacity building. The expected results of the MoU were:

- Eight capacity building events organised and carried out over 2 years
- Knowledge in capacity building shared between the parties
- Synergies created between the three parties and between participants to these training.

- Collaboration strategy between the parties was tested, evaluated and further developed for 2006 and beyond.

The MoU's resulted in the activities outlined in Figure 1. Evaluations of each activity by participants, as well as annual evaluations of MoU, indicated that:

- The workshops addressed the needs of the partners, clients and service providers, even if the groups were not always harmonized (different levels of expectations and experience).
- The workshops facilitated networking between the different organisations and service providers, as well as with and between SNV, DED and Helvetas.
- The impact is of course difficult to measure but some positive outcomes have already been witnessed (facilitation skills, concrete implementation of skills acquired, change of strategies, increased resource mobilisation etc).
- Some questions remained open: how will this knowledge/skill be multiplied, transferred to the rest of the organisations and network? How to capitalize that knowledge?
- Learning points were identified for the partners in smooth and concrete collaboration, improved facilitation skills and harmonizing work.

Overall the MoU was seen as very successful in reaching its aims and exceeded results, partnerships and activities.

Figure 1. Activities executed under the SNV-DED-Helvetas MoUs

Activity	Participants	Date
Gender approach & practices workshop (DED)	24 participants: members of 12 CSO and networks and 3 service providers	November 2005
Resource mobilisation & management (SNV)	30 participants: members of 5 CSO and networks and 4 service providers	September 2005
Participatory Planning: Approach & tools (Helvetas)	24 participants: members of 5 CSO and networks and 4 service providers	July 2005
Two workshops Training Trainers; Facilitation, moderation & adult learning (DED)	22 participants; members of 5 CSO and networks and 6 service providers	June 06
Two workshops Communication, media, public relations (SNV)	38 participants; 8 media, members of 10 CSO and networks and 6 service providers, 1 development organisation	April & November 2006
Media & Governance Café (SNV & DED, WHINCONET and Forest Governance Facility)	67 participants; CSOs, 5 Networks, media, councils, parliamentarians, government and traditional authorities	November 2006
Knowledge management, lessons learnt & capitalisation of tools; Planning, council support & governance processes (Helvetas)	35 participants: members of approx 10 CSO networks and 15 service providers	March 2007
HIV/Aids mainstreaming workshop (DED, facilitated by VSO)	23 participants: all members of CSOs and networks, including SNV's clients	July 2007
Networks paper (SNV & DED)	Occasional paper capitalizing the experience of SNV and DED, with the contribution of at least 6 partner networks	October 2007
9 Activities	Participants: approximately 12 CSOs, 5 networks, 6 service providers, 5 councils and 2 traditional authorities	2.5 years

3.2 Definitions

Civil society and networks often mean different things to different people, in different contexts and countries. The definitions below provide a useful anchor:

Civil Society	An arena in which organisations and individuals play intermediary role between the family and the state and the market, but which enjoys a degree of freedom from the state and market (<i>Buea Clerk & Heap 2001</i>).
Network	Coalitions, alliances; loosely organised groups of organisations that share values and ideologies and function primarily on the basis of information exchange (<i>Ashman 2001</i>). A social structure made of nodes (generally individuals or organisations) that are tied by one or more specific types of relations, such as values, visions, ideas, financial exchange, friends, kinship, dislike, conflict, trade etc. (<i>Wikipedia</i>). A structure that enables organisations, individuals to come together voluntarily to achieve a common purpose / objective (<i>HelpAge International</i>).
Alliance	Alliances often share common concerns, synchronise efforts and resources and have a well defined understanding of how to work together (<i>Ashman 2001</i>). An agreement between two or more parties, made in order to advance common goals and to secure common interests (<i>Wikipedia</i>).
Coalition	Coalitions are more tightly organised, groups of diverse organisations that need to work together to accomplish goals beyond the capacities of individual members (<i>Ashman 2001</i>). A union of organisations or political parties for a specific purpose and for a specific time.
Networking	An activity in which organisations and individuals come together to learn, share resources and experiences, and undertake joint activities and provide mutual support. Networking does not necessitate the existence of a formal structure like a network (<i>HelpAge International</i>).
Association	A group of persons joint together for a common reason and to achieve a common goal. Most CSOs in Cameroon are associations. Their legal status is approved by the Senior Divisional Officer of the area in which it is registered.
Non-Governmental Organisations NGO	Organisations that are not part of the government and generally owned by individuals or a group of individuals. Non-profit making or charitable, often with activities in development, human rights, economic development, culture, health, sports, education, environment etc. In Cameroon, their legal status is authorised by the Minister of Territorial Administration.
Common Initiative Group CIG	Organisations existing usually for economic or business reasons. Its legal status is authorised by the Provincial Delegation of Agriculture. Cooperatives are also recognised and registered by this government authority.

In the Cameroon Highlands, the networks consulted used the following terms for a “network”: a group of organisations with a common purpose, common problems, common objectives, different actors, different organisations and coming together. Two definitions can therefore be concluded:

- i. *A network is a “coordination forum or platform of organisations either working in the same field or not that come together to seek for common solutions to their problems”.*
- ii. *A network is the “coming together of organisations with the aim of achieving set objectives.*

The following terms are commonly used in this paper:

Effectiveness: doing what was planned, an actual, definite effect; if outputs lead to outcome

Efficiency: using resources optimally, getting things done, productive outputs with minimum waste or effort

Efficacy: doing things "right"

Results: results are all "changes" (intended / unintended) that are caused by an action or another change. SNV adopts a ripple model with 4 levels of interlinked results: output, outcome, effect and impact.

Input: financial, human, time, materials / equipment and resources

Output: the quantity and quality of support / services provided by a development organisation to their partners such as advice, training, networking, facilitation etc

Outcome: the change (strengthened) in capacity and performance of partners / group of partners

Effect: the change in performance of a partner / group of partners in their service delivery towards their beneficiaries / society

Impact: the change in situation (intended or unintended) of beneficiaries / society in poverty reduction and good governance

3.3 Methodology

This paper is based on a multitude of direct and indirect sources of data, which include:

- Reports on Cameroon (see Bibliography)
- Questionnaire completed by SNV and DED's partner networks¹
- Technical and financial reports published by networks
- Interviews with networks and their members
- A one-day editing and discussion exercise of the Paper and findings, in September 2007
- Workshops and capacity building exercises under the SNV, DED and Helvetas' MoU
- Institutional analysis and organisational strengthening processes (IDOS)
- Discussions and observation during capacity building

These sources were analysed by a team from SNV and DED using the Integrated Organisational Model (IOM) and Institutional Development-Organisational Strengthening (IDOS) model, see Figure 2 and Figure 3. They are used as frameworks to analyse and examine the experience of working with networks as organisations. These models show the process of building organisations by looking at the stages in capacity building, combined with learning, and how an organisation works. The models provoke an analysis of both internal aspects of the networks, the external factors and other stakeholders which can influence an organisation. The starting point is an undesired situation which calls for change. In a formal change process, e.g. a process guided by SNV or DED, the first step is to clearly identify the problem, and translate it into a question, as a solution cannot be found if the problem is not known. This baseline also helps to monitor the process and evaluate the results, outcomes and impact. The learning cycle for individuals and organisations includes reflecting, analysing, deciding and then acting, to increase knowledge and skills. Action provides information and feedback to start a new phase of reflection and leads to a situation in which there is scope for improvement. They have been used to show how capacities have changed during capacity building and if goals have been met.

¹ Questionnaire completed between January and March 2007 by WHINCONET, SWECSON, FOWIC, UNOWHURO, UCCC and NWADO.

Figure 2. IDOS Process

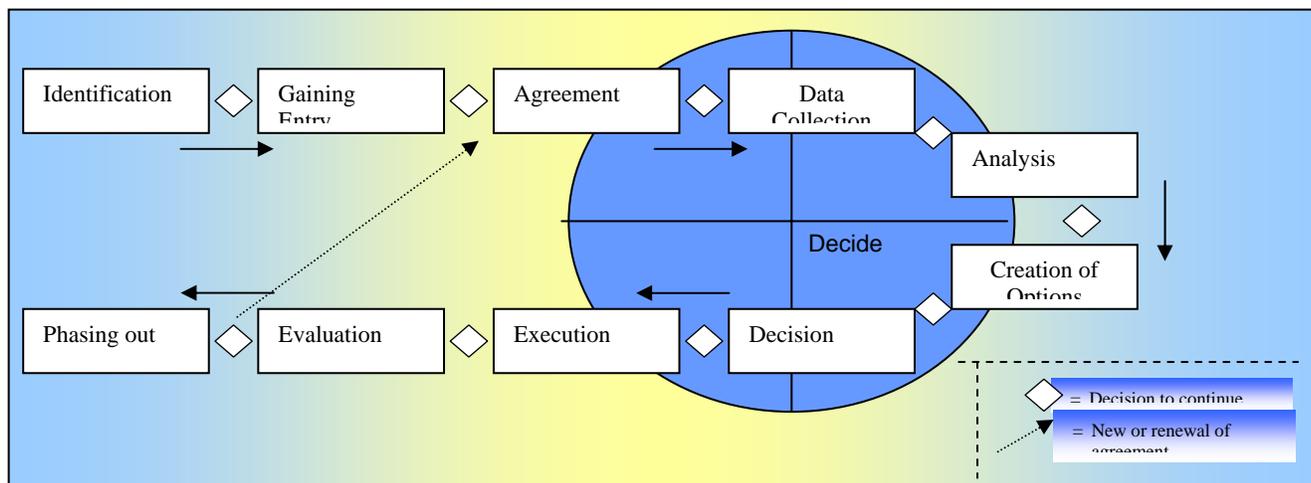
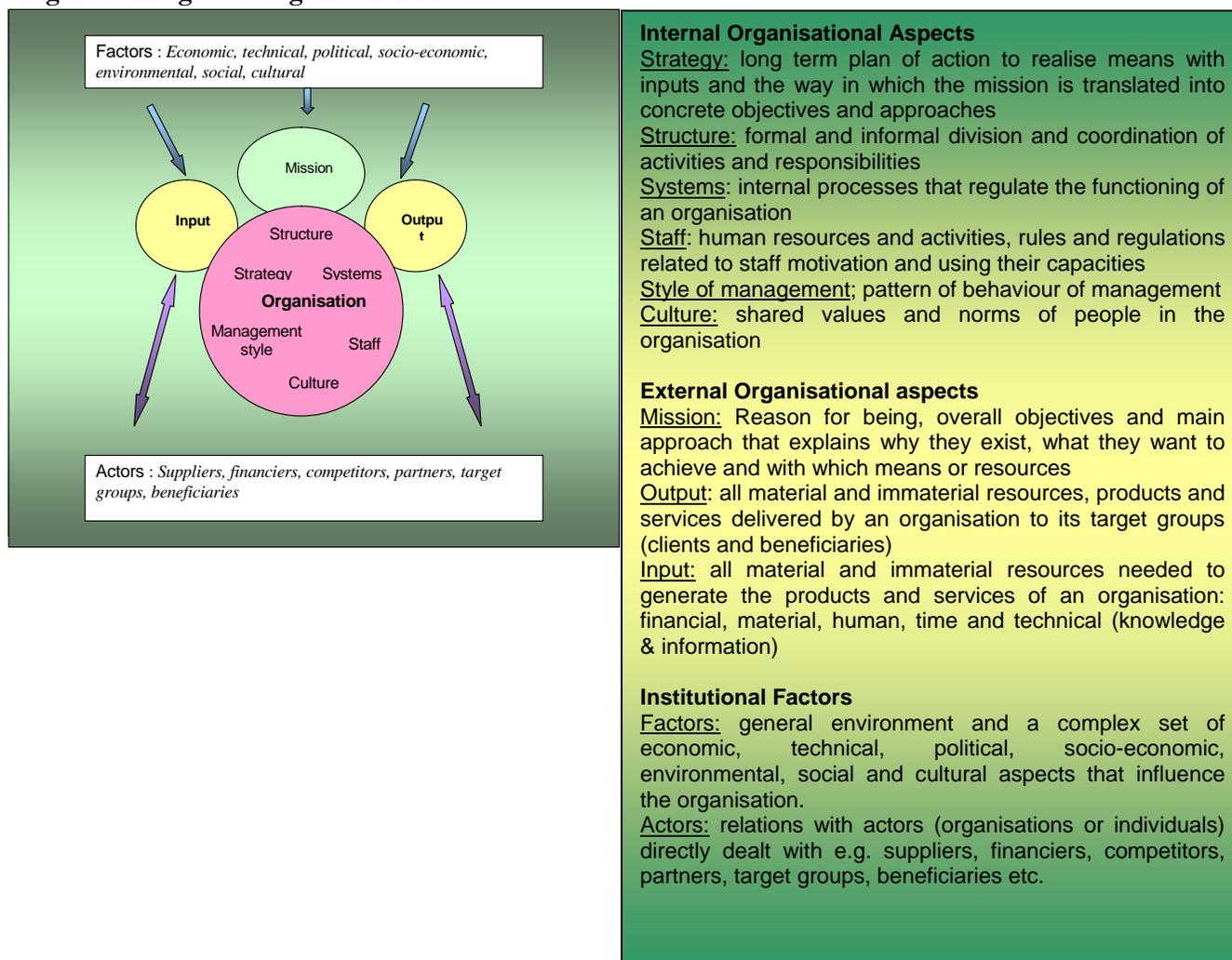


Figure 3. Integrated Organisation Model



4 Factors influencing civil society in the Highlands

This section introduces and describes factors influencing civil society in the Cameroon Highlands, their organisations and networks.

4.1 Political and historical factors



Cameroon, a place of origin of the Bantu people is a territory that experience colonization by three powers, Germany, the United Kingdom and France. Having gained independence on January 1st, 1960 with Ahmadou Ahidjo as its first president; “La République du Cameroun” (former French Cameroon) and the Southern British Cameroon merged on October 1st 1961 after a plebiscite conducted on February 11th 1961. This gave birth to the Federal Republic of Cameroon with John Ngu Foncha occupying the seat of vice president. The May 20th, 1972 referendum resulted in the unity of the two Cameroons and the country’s name changed to the United Republic of Cameroon and in 1984 changed again to the Republic of Cameroon.

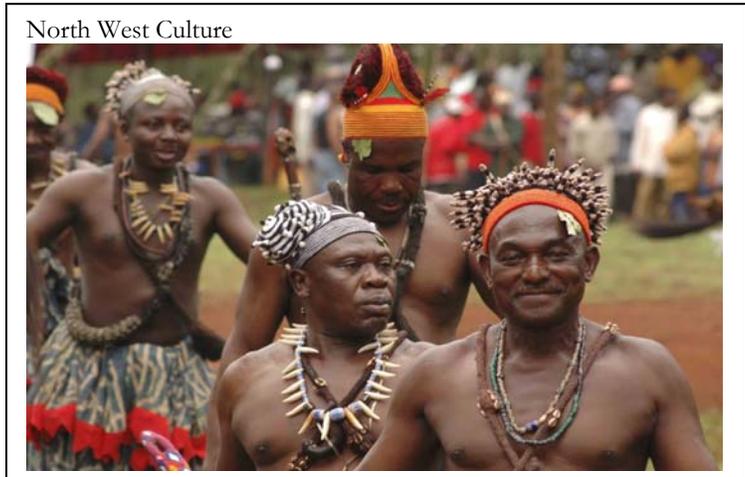
The Anglophone region is the “political hotspot” of Cameroon. This region is the cradle of both the ruling Cameroon People’s Democratic Movement (CPDM) born in 1985 and the leading opposition party the Social Democratic Front (SDF) born in 1990. The Southern Cameroon National Council (SCNC) that emerged in the early 1990s as a pressure group with the aim of reinstating the state of Southern Cameroons, was a clear indication of the socio-political diversity and need to scale up efforts to promote good governance at regional and national levels. Political rivalry is a major cause of human rights abuses and violation in this part of the country, marginal representation in government; high population density, cultural diversity, poverty and the need for survival have developed different forms of sensitivity in this region. Law No 2004/017 of July 2004 on the orientation of Decentralisation promised more regional autonomy, but has been slow in being put into place. These issues, coupled with the riots of the 1990s, gave birth to many CSOs with the aim of protecting human rights, especially the perceived victims of political upheavals, political opposition and promoting democracy, and have led to a well organised, dynamic Civil Society in this region, particularly in contrast to other geographical regions of Cameroon.

4.2 Socio-cultural factors

The 2006 Census pending, it is estimated that there are now 18 million inhabitants in Cameroon. Highlands tribes are approximately 13% of the population and constitute the third highest population density in the country, this region is one of the fastest growing areas with growth rate of over 3%; It is comprised of highly diverse, multi-ethnic groups such as the Tikar, the Widikum and the Fulani in the

North West, in which over 240 separate languages are spoken, with English (one of Cameroon's official languages) and Pidgin as the lingua franca.

The NW retains a very strong traditional administration, known as “traditional authorities”, with “Fons” (Chiefs) heading village communities and districts in a tiered system of authority recognised by the government, with varying degrees of responsibility for enacting and enforcing traditional customs, regulations, land tenure and disputes, leading to a dual system of administrative governance, albeit with the power of these traditional “big men” increasingly diminishing over the last 50 years. Christianity is the dominant religion, followed by Islam. Despite this, the



dominant belief and mentality of the people is animism. This dualism can be explained by the coexistence of imported Christianity and traditional animism. Consequently local customs and traditions are still very strong, exerting influence on, for example on the role of women in business, political leadership, concepts of time (time is often not seen having a monetary value) and governance. SW traditional culture has been more watered down than the NW, due to the large number of migrants, especially from the NW, who came to work in the plantations over the last century, and more recently, fishers from across West Africa.

Adult literacy rates in 2001 were between 75% - 82 %, above the nation ratio of 67.9 %. The average ratio of the number of students per classroom per province varies from 50 to 70. The number of doctors per inhabitants remains well under international standards (less than one doctor for 10.000 inhabitants). (CIA 2007). The effects of HIV and AIDS in the NW Province are one of the highest in Cameroon: 8.7% prevalence rate as opposed to 5.5% at national level. Women displayed a higher incidence of infection, 11.9% as opposed to men 5%. Nationwide, for 100 men infected, 170 women are infected, while in the NW for 100 men infected there are 204 women infected. (Chronicle, 2007).

This socio-economic situation has influenced the formation of CSOs strongly as the prevailing cultural factors positively support the organisation of individuals in both organisations and higher levels in associations, cooperatives, federations and other networks. The comparatively poor social situation has encouraged people to group together to address their common problems.

4.3 Regulatory status

The 1990s was a fertile period for the birth of CSOs in Cameroon with the stimulus of Law No. 90/053 of December 19, 1990 on the Freedom of Associations, which creates legal status for associations, being approved by the Senior Divisional Officer of the area in which it is declared upon presentation of the constitution, internal rules and regulations of the supposed association and a report of any meeting held so far including the names of members of the executive committee. This was followed by Law No. 92/006 of August 14, 1992 on Cooperatives and Common Initiative Groups; Law No. 92/07 of August 14, 1992 on Trade Unions and Employer Associations; and finally Law No. 99/014 of December 22, 1999 to govern Non-Governmental Organisations.

Most CSOs function as “charitable and non profit making organisations” which always take the form of CIGs or associations. Many of them collaborate with other local and international bodies and foreign

agencies active in Cameroon, both for financial and technical assistance. Individuals forming an NGO must not have been sentenced with a term of imprisonment.

About 19 legal NGOs exist in Cameroon. From 1993 to date, CSOs registering in the NW amount to: 10,379 CIGs, 667 cooperatives, 177 CIG Unions, 43 Unions of Cooperatives, 17 Federations of CIGs and 3 Confederations (NW Registrar Cooperatives, Pers. comm. 2007).. In the SW 5089 CIGs, 400 cooperatives, 7 unions of Cooperatives, 61 Unions of CIGs and 5 Federations have been registered since 1993 to June 2007 (SW Registrar Cooperatives, Pers. comm. 2007). An estimated 125 Associations are

“It is estimated that less 50% of these are active today, as most exist as suitcase CSOs”

Bruno Akouyu, Provincial Chief of Cooperatives/CIGs, NW

active in Mezam Division (NWADO Survey, ongoing 2007), with the majority of associations are concentrated in the provincial capitals in Mezam division in the NW and Fako division in the SW. An estimated 90% of CSOs registered are active in agriculture, livestock and forestry in both provinces.

4.4 *Economic situation*

Because of its oil resources and favourable agricultural conditions, Cameroon has one of the best-endowed primary commodity economies in sub-Saharan Africa. Still, it faces many of the serious problems facing other underdeveloped countries, such as a top-heavy civil service and a generally unfavourable climate for business enterprise. Since 1990, the government has embarked on various programs, supported by the international community such as IMF and World Bank, designed to spur business investment, increase efficiency in agriculture, improve trade, and recapitalize the nation's banks. In June 2000, the government completed an IMF-sponsored, three-year structural adjustment program; however, the IMF is pressing for more reforms, including increased budget transparency, privatization, and poverty reduction programs.

Main exports include crude oil, cocoa, coffee and timber (Economist 2007). International oil prices have a considerable impact on the economy. The fertile volcanic soils in mountainous areas and alluvial riverine and floodplains, with the wide diversity of microclimates, sustain a wide range resource based activities, with agriculture the mainstay of the economy in NW. In less than one hectare, households generally have multiple activities ranging from: Arabica coffee, maize, potato, oil palm, cassava, rice, vegetables, beans, plantain, livestock and dairy, particularly transhumance based livestock undertaken by Fulani. In the lower valleys, rice and fish are common. Subsistence agriculture generally engages over 70% of the active population, with most farmers also involved in food crop production. Other activities include petty commerce, handicrafts such as cane, bamboo, wood or bronze sculptures and embroidery. Small scale extractive industries based on sand, gravel and rocks occur throughout the Province. The rich volcanic soils of the SW favour export crops such as cocoa, Robusta coffee, tea, rubber, bananas and oil palm, with oil exploration increasing and timber the major source of income for the Manyu area. The mid 1980s witnessed significant price drops in export crops causing many small-holder cash crop plantation farmers to abandon farms a major cause of poverty whose effect is still very strong today. Fisheries are major source of income in SW coastal areas, both artesian and internationally managed.

The NW is heavily populated and fertile but otherwise resource poor area means it is a major source of migration for young people seeking better opportunities in bigger towns. Minors, especially young girls are caught in the web of child labour and child trafficking. Cameroon's Millennium Development Goal Progress report of December 2003 indicates that the NW is the second poorest region in the country with 52.5% of the population living below the poverty line as opposed to 40.2% at the national level. Infrastructure in the NW is relatively good, with an average of 0,4 km of roads per km². The SW in comparison has 0,1 km of road per Km². In terms of communication (internet, mobiles), most of the sub-divisions are now connected.

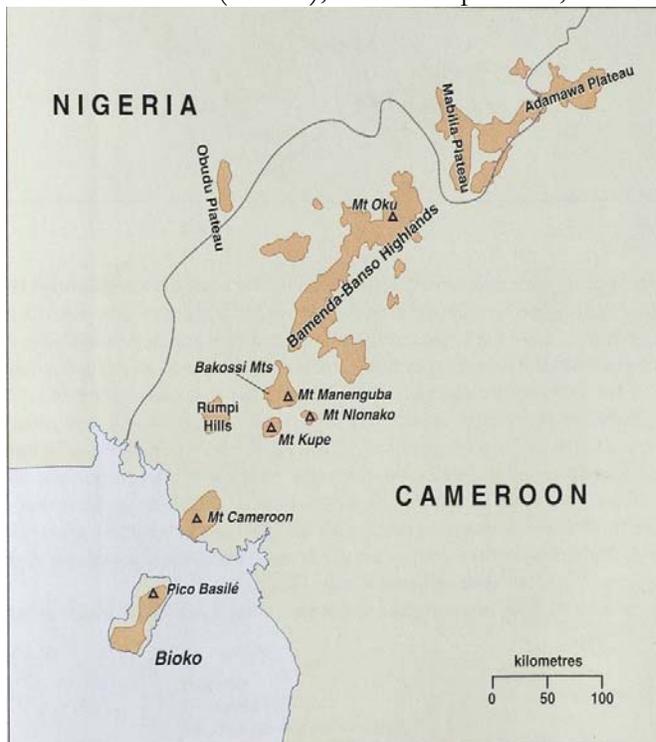
Cameroon's qualification as a Heavily Indebted Poor Country Initiative (HIPC) since 2000 and the struggle to attain the completion point, which was reached in April 2006, required active participation from the government, donors, partners and all citizens (civil society) to implement the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper. This contributed to the encouragement in the growth of CSOs in the late 1990s and early 2000.

With the 1992 Law on Cooperatives, more savings and credit institutions were registered in the region, and many other agriculture based unions and cooperatives have since been created or restructured. Many national and international organisations have been or are active in the area in the last 20 years, ranging from major development projects, setting up organisations such as MIDENO, and long term conservation-livelihood projects such as Mt Cameroon Project and the Kilum-Ijum and Bamenda Highlands Forest Project, including DED in the craft sector, a CSO Program and in HIV, SNV in capacity building, Heifer International in livestock, Plan in education, GTZ in HIV, HELVETAS in council support and infrastructure², the HIPC Maize, Roots & Tubers and Plantain projects, SAILD and CIPCRE in agriculture, the Institute for Research in Agriculture (IRAD) Roots & Tubers Project and two provincial development projects: GP DERUDEP in NW and RUMPI in SW.

The economic situation has lead CSOs to predominate in the areas of livelihoods, being predominately focussed on either specific economic sectors such as coffee, cocoa, rice or crafts, or on region specific mixed farming, with CSOs and particularly their unions or federations playing both technical, agricultural inputs acquisition and marketing roles, often combined with micro credit services.

4.5 Environmental background

The Cameroon Highlands consist of a chain of volcanic mountains stretching from the Atlantic Ocean archipelago islands to the mainland through Mount Cameroon (4095m), the Rumpi Hills, Bakossi Mountains, Mount Nlonako, the Kupe-Muanenguba mountains, the Bamenda Highlands, containing the Bamboutos and Mount Oku, at 3011m, the second highest peak in mainland West Africa, and North East towards the Mambila Plateau in Nigeria. The habitat ranges, with increasing altitude, from sub-montane to montane forests and ultimately subalpine grasslands. These Highlands contain the largest remaining patches of lowland rainforest (such as Korup) and afro-montane forest (such as Kilum-Ijum) in West Africa. The World Wildlife Fund define this area as one of 200 worldwide *Ecoregions* as the forests are particularly diverse and rich in endemic plant, bird, amphibian, reptile, mammal and insect species. However, they are under threat from inadequate management and control of forest resources, the inability of communities to manage resources sustainably, a lack of protection and clearance for agriculture, which has reduced the forests to isolated fragments, especially within



² Left Cameroon in 2007 after 45 years development presence

the Bamenda Highlands, the northernmost part of the range. The largest remnant of these and the most important patch of montane forest in West Africa is the Kilum-Ijim Forest.

Government responsibility for biodiversity and natural resource management lies with the Ministries of Environment & Nature Protection and Forestry & Wildlife supported by the 1996 Framework Environmental Law and the 1994 Forestry Law. These encourage communities to manage their local forests as Community Forests. In the Highlands 38 communities have applied for their own forests, of up to 5000 hectare each; with the area under community management in 2007 at 72,681 hectares. Communities are therefore playing an increasing role in protecting and conserving biodiversity, and working on sustainable livelihoods through income from activities such as harvesting of non-timber forest products (e.g. *Prunus africana* bark, bamboo, cola nuts, honey and Eru), hunting, timber and fuel wood. The forest provides other vital services and benefits: water, fuel wood, medicine, fertile land, animals, sacred shrines and ecotourism. This unique natural environment has led to a growing number of CSOs in the region, estimated currently at over 50, which concentrate on sustainable natural resource use and management, on protected areas such as reserves and community forests, often combining these activities in agriculture and HIV-AIDs.

4.6 CSO networks in the Highlands

The rise of CSOs in the Highlands can be attributed to encouragement to organise groups by development projects such as MIDENO and SOWEDA. Cameroon's qualification as a Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) by 2000 arguably influenced the rise of CSOs, as with the struggle to attain the completion point of this initiative by 2006, donors and partners requested active participation from all citizens (civil society) to implement the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper.

Today there are estimated 17,000 CSOs (associations, NGOs, CIGs and their unions and networks) in the NW and SW, with a main aim of freeing the region from poverty, focussing on economic development, social, health, cultural and environmental aspects.

In recent years, these organisations have increasingly worked together, taking the form of networks or coalitions. These networks have often been created to achieve a specific purpose, motivated by common goals or activities and resource mobilisation, with an emphasis on financial resources. Some of the networks can be seen as donor-driven since networks are more and more attractive to donors, see section 6.5.2.

Three different types of networks can be seen in the Highlands, mainly depending on their objectives:

1. *Permanent networks*: groups of CSOs, operating with formal members and agendas, shared values, established objectives, planned activities and membership requirements, meet regularly and are formally organised (having an elected board or management) and often legally recognised in sectors seen as the main drivers in development. There are networks focusing on agriculture, such as the North West Farmers Organisation (NOWEFOR) and the North-West Coffee Association (NWCA); and on economic activities for example North-West Crafts Association (NOWECA) and Fako Tourism Board. The Western Highlands Nature Conservation Network (WHINCONET) and the Network for Sustainable Agriculture (NESA) are active in sustainable development. The Union of North-West Human Rights Organisations (UNOWHURO) is specialised in human rights, the Platform of Actors for the Fight Against HIV/AIDS in Cameroon (PAFAC) in health. There are as well those representing civil society, such as the North-West Association of Development Organisations (NWADO), the South West Civil Society Network (SWECSON), the Cameroon Associations of Voluntary Organisations for Development (CAVOD) in the NW, SW and Centre provinces; and associations of local governments or elected bodies such as North-West Female Mayors Association (NOWEFMA) and the United Cities and Councils of

Cameroon in each Province (UCCC). Most of these networks have objectives to avoid duplication of activities and waste of resources and to share information and experiences amongst its members.

2. *Coalitions* that come together for a specific objective, purpose or activity, often with loose membership “conditions”, after which they dissolve when the activity has been executed, often meeting on an ad-hoc basis for specific activities and becoming inactive and only regrouping if necessary. Figure 4 shows an example of such an initiative.

**Figure 4.
National Independent Anti-Corruption Coalition**

NIACC was created in December 2005 with the main aim of fighting against corruption as a step in the promotion of governance and democracy. The coalition meets when there is a particular activity to execute after which they separate until the next activity that will bring them together. There is no fixed membership and members are not obliged to take part in an activity. Participation or membership is voluntary. Nevertheless, a board was elected for the management of this alliance

3. *Alliances* that share a loose membership around a specific theme, joining together for a specific purpose or activity, often for a specific, temporary or short time and/or for a specific event e.g. election monitoring. They are also known as *Platforms* or *Forums* and are often spearheaded by a single organisation that

**Figure 5.
North West Coalition for the 2007 Twin Elections in Cameroon**

Initiated by NWADO, this coalition was made up of NW based organisations working in democracy and human rights. It was formed to harmonize CSO activities for the 2007 legislative and municipal elections, avoid duplication of sensitization and observation activities and run a common advocacy campaign on transparency. A larger objective was for CSOs to join in developing a unique report of the elections. This coalition inspired the national network, Dynamique Citoyenne, lead by COMINSUD, to implement a similar initiative at the national level. Interestingly, this platform in a few months conducted more advocacy than NWADO, whose main aim is advocacy, in more than three years of existence. While the NW CSO platform was meant to “live” a few months, its success has prompted Dynamique Citoyenne to perhaps continue it up to the Presidential election planned for 2011.

convinces others to join. It is illustrated by Figure 5, another example is the group of CSOs across Cameroon who have come together since 2006 to lobby and propose amendments to the legal “Procedures for Attribution for Community Forests”, which included WHINCONET representing community forests in the Highlands.

It is difficult to classify a network: Is it a formal network, a coalition, an alliance, a coalition likely to become a formal network in the future, or both an alliance and a coalition? Networks themselves cannot always define precisely their own structures! For example, the NW CSO Platform began as a coalition, but ended as an alliance with a long term perspective. Such an initiative can evolve with time and for example formalize in a network specialized on election-related issues.

Thus, the idea is not to define precisely the infinite types of CSOs grouping initiatives, rather to acknowledge the existence and pertinence of this diversity. The term “network” can include all the approaches to networking, but it is important for CSOs to find their own efficient and pertinent way to network. The tendency in Cameroon is sometimes to formalize quickly into a network, even before having initiated any networking activity; that makes the networking heavier in terms of procedures and administration and often less attractive to new members who would prefer to witness results and concrete activities.

5 Profiles of networks in the Cameroon Highlands

This section introduces a selection of networks based in the Highlands, particularly their mission, start date, members, leadership, strategy, structure, management, style, activities and financial resources.

5.1 Western Highlands for Nature Conservation (WHINCONET)

WHINCONET began in 2002 as six organisations collaborating in the “Community-Based Conservation in the Bamenda Highlands Project” in the Kilum-Ijim community forests. The Project sowed the idea that a network could be beneficial for the service providers / consultant organisations and provide a good “exit” model for the project. The Network was called Western Highlands Community Forestry Network. Other organisations working in nature conservation subsequently joined, resulting in a broader name and mission change to the Western Highlands Nature Conservation Network. It currently has twenty-one registered members, predominately associations and CIGs operating as CSOs and/or consultancies, and three Community Forest Management Institutes (FMIs). 62% of members are located in the NW, with over 40% based around Bamenda, with the FMIs geographically remote with poor phone networks, no internet access and poor road access.



Mission

WHINCONET’s mission is the promotion of sustainable biodiversity conservation and natural resources management.

Objectives

Biodiversity conservation and poverty alleviation in the Western Highlands, specifically:

- Enhance biodiversity conservation and sustainable management of natural resources,
- Share experiences and information on biodiversity conservation and sustainable management of natural resources to improve performance.
- Provide a forum for members to appreciate capacities available so that collaboration in project planning, implementation and/or evaluation can be fostered,
- Collaboration with other network projects and organisations having similar objectives be they provincial, regional, national or international.

Whinconet presentation during World Environment Day 2007



Membership

Membership is by registration (20,000 FCFA for CIGs and associations and 10,000 FCFA for FMIs and their associations), after Coordination Committee (CoC) approval of their application and confirmation of the potential organisation’s activities in environment and nature conservation. To remain a member, each organisation has to pay annual fees; 40,000FCFA, down from 50,000 with effect from 2008, for Membership is by registration (20,000 FCFA), after Coordination Committee (CoC) approval of their application and confirmation of the potential organisation’s activities in environment and nature conservation. To remain a member, each organisation has to pay annual fees; 40,000FCFA, down from 50,000 prior to 2007, for CIGs and associations and 20,000 FCFA for FMIs and their associations, previously 25,000 FCFA. Membership dues up to 2005

constituted the majority of income. In 2006 only 33% of dues owing had been paid by the 20 registered members, previous years being similar. A Committee decision in 2006 ruled that if members have neither been active and/nor paid for more than two years, they can no longer be members. Paid and active members enjoy more privileges than unpaid members, such as participating in and benefiting from projects.

Resources

From 2005 to 2007, donor-funded projects were the major source (over 90%) of income for the first time, amounting to 3 million in 2005, 7 million in 2006 and an 11 million project financed by the Forest Governance Facility (FGF) in 2007. Previous projects were mainly related to technical capacity building by SNV. Turnover in 2006 amounted to nearly 8 million FCFA, with expenditures including administration (office running, communication, radio and press coverage, long distance transport, Annual General Meeting and Coordination Meetings, Organisation of workshops, seminars, conferences and projects proposal preparation, publicity for the network, and the majority on project implementation (89%).

Management system

The CoC leads the network, with the Coordinator, a person nominated by the elected member leading the network. The first coordinator was on seat for 3 years, followed in quick succession by 3 coordinators in 18 months, including the networks first female coordinator. The CoC comprises five members (Coordinator, vice coordinator, secretary, Treasurer and financial secretary), and supported by four sub committees (project, finance, information and publicity and conflict management). Decisions are taken at the level of the CoC, although the various sub committees make proposals. Proposals have been put forward to separate the organisation into SW and NW regions, to overcome absenteeism in meetings, related to the high travel costs for members. Informal systems exist for financial management, book keeping, communication rules for contacting members, disseminating information, arranging and reporting on monthly meetings and annual action plans with subsequent technical and financial reports, which are presented at the annual General Assembly, to which approximately 60% of members attend. Procedures for distinguishing between a member's interest and the network's, for example, in making project proposals, have evolved.



Activities realised

In the last 2 years activities include;

- *Environmental Education*: essay competition for schools in the NW on Community Forestry.
- *Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)*: workshops to build member's capacity, financially supported by the International Association for Impact Assessment (IAIA) and technically by SNV. Resulted in a project website in December 2005 and member's now practicing EIA in their areas of intervention.
- *Lobbying and Advocacy*: organising activities for World Environment Day in 2006 and 2007, Lobbying for revisions in the Manual of Procedure and Norms for Attribution of Community Forests, incorporating EIA into the Procedure, Advocating for forest users' group's inclusion and improved governance, sustainable *Prunus africana* harvesting, wildlife conservation and protected area management, assisted in Media & Governance Cafe organisation.
- *Marketing*: Organising a Honey Market Forum to bring together stakeholders in the sector, and capitalise a market study, leading onto capacity building in the honey chain.
- *Geographical Information Systems*: organised capacity building (supported by SNV) in GIS.
- *Capacity Building in Ecological Monitoring and Biological Survey Techniques*: financially supported by SNV, recruited an expert for over 2 years of field-training.

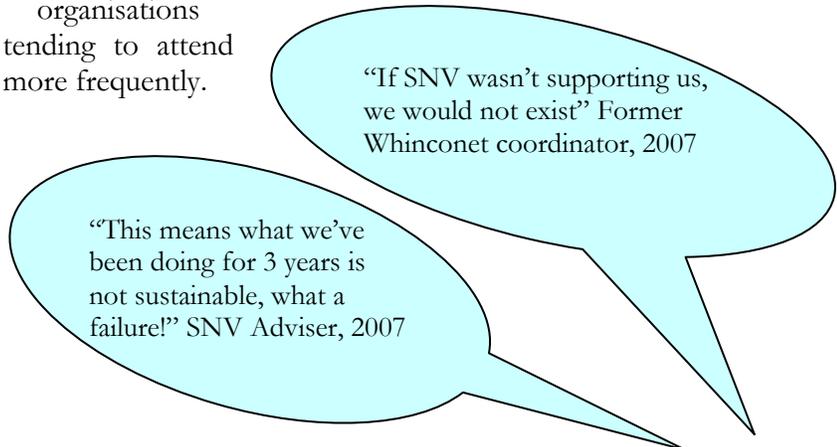
Culture

Whinconet’s culture could be described as democratic and open. With the advent of larger projects, the CoC members have developed in status, power and responsibility. Delegation of responsibility is common and different members are often called upon to replace those absent or unavailable or best placed

Figure 6.
Media and Governance Café
28 November 2006

Organised by SNV and DED, with financing from the FGF and DED, the Café aimed to create an opportunity for exchange and debate between all stakeholders (CSOs, government, elected and traditional rulers, media, researchers, development organisations etc) on hot issues such as media transparency, public budget tracking, forest and pasture governance and gender in politics. Involving most CSOs networks of the NW and SW, the event initiated and intensified relationships between CSOs and local councils, media organs, etc. A number of participating CSOs now put the accent on this multi stakeholders approach in their various activities; long term expected effect is that all stakeholders consult regularly and favour collaboration with the civil society.

technically, to represent the network. There are frequent meetings and interaction between members, with the Bamenda based organisations tending to attend more frequently.

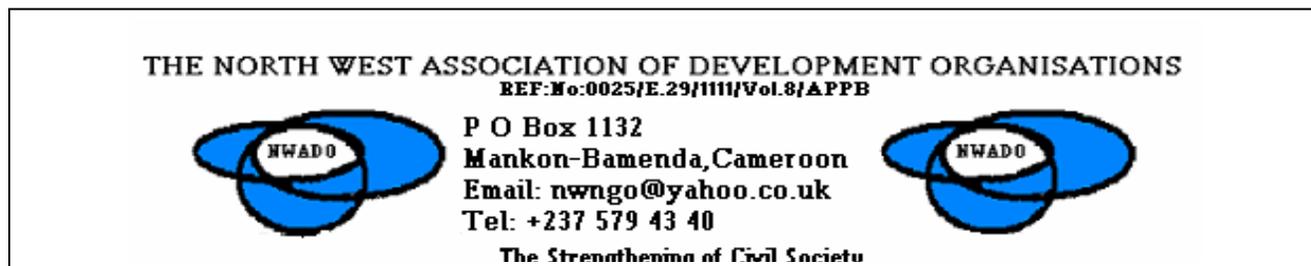


Partners

SNV has been the major partner since 2004. After field verification, an 18 month capacity building agreement was signed in May 2005, addressing Resource mobilisation; Monitoring and evaluation; Biodiversity impact assessment; Internal development of Whinconet and service provision to members, advocacy and lobbying. A subsequent agreement till November 2007 includes these areas and

additionally, product marketing and developing market chains to increase revenue, income and employment. SNV and its contractors have provided over 400 advisory days to WHINCONET during this period, with 12 million FCFA spent on reinforcing this support via training and advocacy plus gifts of 2nd hand small equipment. Other project partners include the FGF and IAIA. Technical partners include the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife, Ministry of Environment & Nature Protection Conservation and GP DERUDEP. Other network partners include NWADO and the Network of Community Forest Associations and the platform that formed around the legislation on community forests.

5.2 North West Association Development Organisations (NWADO)



The North West Association of Development Organisations (NWADO) was created in 2002 by organisations active in the development of the North West. Some of them are: Society for Initiatives in Rural Development and Environmental Protection (SIRDEP), Community Initiative for Sustainable Development (COMINSUD), Grounded and Holistic Approach for People's Empowerment (GHAPE), National Development Foundation (NDEF), North West Craft Association (NOWECA) with support from Helvetas, SNV, SAILD, Inades Formation, MIDENO, Plan International, Heifer International and DED program Promotion of CSOs.

Mission

NWADO's mission is to contribute to a sustainable and equitable development process in which different stakeholders cooperate and contribute to each other's activities, in line with favourable government policy, norms and values of the people of the North West province.

Objectives

- To share experiences and information on issues related to development and development stakeholders (State and non-State actors) amongst its members
- To create opportunities for the coordination of activities to avoid duplication and waste of resources.
- To initiate advocacy and lobbying for common development goals.

NWADO members during a Workshop



Membership

Membership is open to all development organisations in the North West province. Members are required to pay registration fees of 15 000 FCFA and annual dues of 25 000 FCFA. NWADO is a "generalist" network, currently made up of 17 registered members involved in diverse activities such as micro credit, gender, human rights, agriculture, local governance etc. DED, Helvetas and SNV used to be members of NWADO but decided in 2005 to withdraw from the membership and to have the position of observers and advisers, in order to avoid conflict of interest and promote local ownership of the network.

Resources

NWADO depends mainly on the members contributions (250,000 FCFA in 2007) and benefits from some material and financial support from some of their capacity builders. The salary of the coordinator is

“Through building partnerships, we believe we are the voice of the North West civil society!” Eric Ngang, NWADO coordinator

secretariat moved to NWADO’s president office, COMINSUD. SNV contributed equipment and stationary. Helvetas financed part of the project “North West Civil Society Open Days for Information and Experience Sharing”. Since May 2007 VSO has placed one volunteer two days per week in NWADO to support the organisational development of the network. DED, SNV and Helvetas supported the reinforcement of the capacities of NWADO through the MoU since 2005. As a close partner of the DED program “Promotion of CSOs”, NWADO benefits from training, counselling and facilitation on regular basis.

Management system

NWADO is managed by an elected executive committee. The functioning of the network is ensured daily by a permanent coordinator who does not belong to any of the member organisations. The coordinator reports to the executive committee and to all the members during their General Assemblies held every three months.

The circulation of information from the coordination to the members is systematic, using the internet. So far though, there is no regular exchange between members themselves, and from the members to the coordination. Before general assemblies, the agenda is sent to members and minutes of the meeting are disseminated in the days following the meeting. A simple bookkeeping system is in place and NWADO reports to its members and partners at the beginning of each year.

Activities realised

Until 2006, NWADO was mainly functioning for information and experience exchange between members.

Since 2006, NWADO increased the volume and quality of its activities:

- NWADO organised an Open Day for Civil Society in the NW. The objective of this event was to bring to together state and non state actors to identify areas of collaboration. Another major objective was the effective collaboration amongst CSOs in the North West Province. No CSO had ever taken such an initiative before and the event resulted in improving the image of civil society in general, as being a serious actor of development and a speaker to the State. It motivated the negotiation of a partnership between NWADO and the National Employment Fund (for common projects on Youth employment) as well as institutionalising coordination with UNDP (United Nations Development Program) for their grants in the NW.
- NWADO contributed to organize and facilitate a training trainers workshop (moderation and facilitation).
- NWADO initiated and animated a platform of North West CSO on the 2007 twin elections, from January to July 2007.
- NWADO has also been serving as a contact office between international organisations (donors) such as the European Union, United Nations Development Program, and CSOs in the North West province.



supported for 2/3 by the DED, who also supported two projects, one training workshop and financed office equipment (laptop and printer). For the years 2006 and 2007, DED’s financial support to NWADO added up to eight million FCFA. The office of the program “Promotion of CSOs” hosted the NWADO secretariat for one year in 2005, and then the

- NWADO is creating a database of CSOs in the North-West.
- Exchange visits on good practices with SWECSON.

Culture

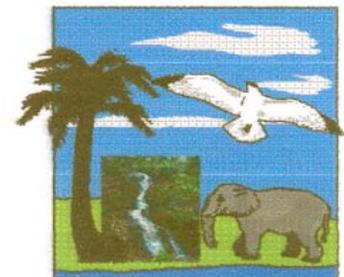
NWADO believes in the democratic election of their executive committee and leaves the entire execution of decisions made by the General Assembly and the management in their hands. The coordinator (staff) is very much empowered: a lot of responsibilities are delegated to him and the network appreciates his initiatives. Members believe that if everything is left in the hands of someone who is not member of any of the organisations, information will equally be shared amongst them as there will be no instance of discrimination. NWADO members meet at least four times per year for their general assemblies, which often give space for information sharing: e.g. the general assembly is always organized in the premises of a member, who then organizes a visit and a presentation. Being a generalist network, NWADO sees now the necessity to facilitate thematic working groups within the network, in order to improve efficiency and concretize partnerships; that is a lesson learnt after an exchange visit to SWECSON. NWADO strongly believes in a multi stakeholders approach: the coordinator is very active in creating and maintaining contacts with public institutions and international organisations.

Partners

NWADO has many development partners. These are mostly some international organisations active in the Cameroon highlands. One of NWADO's main partners is the DED - German Development Service (mainly the DED Program Promotion of CSOs) who for the past years has been the key capacity builder and donor of this network. SNV Highlands commenced as a partner, then joined as a member in 2003, becoming an adviser in 2005, and finally as an observer and informal adviser of the network by 2006. SNV also contributed to facilitate exchanges between SWECSON and NWADO. Heifer International Cameroon, and Plan Cameroon are observers and plan closer collaboration in the future. In 2006, NWADO formed partnerships with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the National Employment Fund. NWADO recently engaged a strong and long-term partnership with Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO). This partnership aims at enhancing the organisational capacities of the organisation. Some government ministries' provincial delegations (e.g. small and medium size enterprises, Agriculture and Rural Development, Scientific Research and Innovation) count also among their partners. NWADO is an active member of a national network, Dynamique Citoyenne: NWADO is the communication and information officer for the North West Chapter.

5.3 South West Civil Society Network

The South West Civil Society Network (SWECSON), registered as a CIG in August 2003 when seventeen CSOs came together to concert their efforts and work for credibility and reliability. Initially known as the South West NGO Forum (SWENGOF), they subsequently they registered as an association of CSOS, due to difficulties with the administration in using the term NGO when not all members of the proposed forum / network were registered as NGOs, in 2006.



Objectives

SWECSON's mission is to serve and promote the interest of CSOs in partnership with the local population to further sustainable development in their spheres of operation in the SW. It aims to:

- Bring together all legalized CSOs operating in the SW Province
- Facilitate the exchange and dissemination of information among its members (information clearing house)
- Promote credibility and commitment among CSOs in service to the local population.

- Serve as an advisory organ on general issues about CSOs functioning in the SW and carryout advocacy accordingly.
- Strengthen capacities of member CSOs in relevant areas of skills need.

Membership

The network has about 40 registered members, all associations or NGOs operating as non-profit and/or consultancies. In 2006 17 were full members, with 6 partial members, according to the membership obligations which require a minimum of three years of existence; to have carried out at least one project successfully; to have office premises; to fill an application for membership form and pay registration and annual dues. These organisations are based across the SW, although the majority (90%) is in Limbe, Buea, Kumba and Bangem. Members work in multiple and diverse sectors, with common themes being natural resources, forestry, conservation and environment; HIV/AIDS; access to markets; rural development; good governance and council support; youth and education; infrastructure and eco-tourism.

Resources

Financial resources are limited to member’s contributions, averaging between 155,000 to 195,000 FCFA per year for the last 3 years, and financial assistance supporting capacity building activities from SNV in the last 2 years amounting to about 3 million FCFA plus 80 days of capacity building over the period, plus small donations of 2nd hand equipment.

Activities

In Swecson's first two years activities consisted of irregular meetings. With the advent of a capacity building contract with SNV, strategic planning and annual action plans were set as priorities. In 2005 and 2006, activities were centred around capacity building workshops; on media and communication, on decentralised forest governance, on resource mobilisation for members. Internal organisation and strategic choices were addressed during executive committee meetings and capacity building sessions; in a Reflection workshop on the organisation an, aims and structure of Swecson as well as during ExCo meetings. Low level lobby and sensitisation of local and international partners about Swecson also took place. In 2007 Swecson professionalized, producing annual technical and financial reports, increasing network activities and links with CSOs, particularly with NWADO, as well as on a national level with OSIWA, Dyamique Citoyenne, Multi Actors Concerted Programme Cameroon (PCPA) focussing on the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, human rights, HIV/AIDS and corruption. Activities have intensified in 2007 following the NWADO experience sharing visit, with the founding and equipping of a Swecson office and recruitment of a desk officer.

“Networking: do not become the coco leaf... Who collects water and sheds it to all around itself but none to its stem”
SWECSON, 2007



In 2006 SWECSON developed its first Plan of Action for 2007. This included objectives to constitute and functionalise thematic groups, launch SWECSON, capacity building of members and the strengthening of capacities in financial management, strategic planning and proposal writing, in social communication, a membership drive and sensitization, fundraising, advocacy and lobby activities on topical issues to be identified and holding executive and general assembly meetings.

Management systems

Leadership is primarily in the hands of the coordinator, supported by a five-person Executive Committee (ExCo) and selected Thematic Group Leaders. The network is governed by a General Assembly of all members. The GA makes the decisions on the recommendation of the ExCo. Leadership qualities of the ExCo members seen as important include, level-headedness, lobbying skills, coordination skills, financial management skills, report writing skills.

SWECSON has systems in place for basic book keeping, informal communication “rules” for contacting members and emerging informal procedures on disseminating information, arranging and reporting on monthly meetings. It produced its first technical and financial reports at the end of 2006.

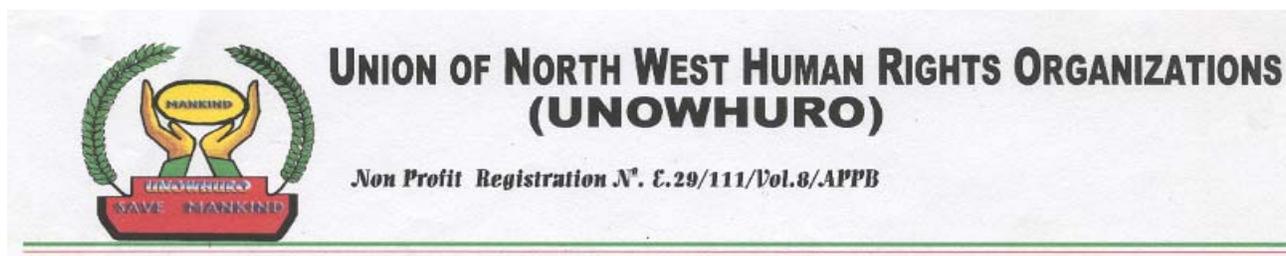
Culture

SWECSON indicated in a “reflection workshop”, that their traditional culture was not as collaborative, with group working less common than compared to, for example, the NW or Western provinces. SWECSON’s culture could be described as democratic. The elected Coordinator is the leader of the network, with some activities delegated to ExCo members. There are occasional meetings and interaction between members, which this tends to be more among the Fako based organisations.

Partners

SNV has been SWECSON’s main partner since 2004. After verification and fact finding, SNV signed a capacity building contract for one year until October 2006, focussing on jointly identified needs including resource mobilisation; radio & communication with the media; internal development of SWECSON and members; strategic & project planning; conflict management, and advocacy and lobbying. SNV linked SWECSON members to other donors and arranged for a 3 month semi-financed student internee as part of capacity building process. Other partners include RUMPI, a five year AFDB and government of Cameroon financed SW regional development project. In 2007 NWADO made an exchange and experience sharing visit to SWECSON, supported by DED and SNV, to establish links as “sister” organisations. Three groups of SWECSON members have recently been awarded project grants for activities in forest governance by the FGF, at the second attempt of project applications.

5.4 Union of North West Human Rights Organisations (UNOWHURO)



Created in 2003 and registered in 2004, the Union of North West Human Rights Organisations (UNOWHURO) resulted from proliferation of human rights organisations in the NW and a duplication of services rendered in the field. These organisations felt a need to network with each other to serve as a catalyst in the attainment of each other’s goal and objectives. UNOWHURO also came into being as a consequence of the creation of a branch of the National Commission for Human Rights and Freedoms (NCHRF) and their need to work with locally based human rights organisations.

Mission

To promote action towards the respect, protection and promotion of human rights amongst its members.

Objectives

Main objectives include:

- To bring human rights organisations together in the province
- Address human rights issues and problems of common concern
- Use each others experiences and expertise
- Avoid duplication of efforts



Membership

The Union has 16 registered members, all human rights organisations with different focus (gender, HIV, consumers' rights etc). Membership is open to all human rights organisations active in the NW. Each member is required to pay a registration fees of 5000 FCFA and an annual due of 25 000 FCFA. Full accreditation in UNOWHURO does not only necessitate the fulfilment of the financial requirements. Potential members also need to be affiliated to the National Commission for Human Rights and Freedom; the organisation must have existed for at least three years and should present an activity report of the past three years.

Resources

Membership contributions constitute the main financial resources of the union. They have started to raise funds externally for specific projects. In 2007, they got support of 1.516.400 FCFA from DED to implement the first phase of their project on monitoring elections. Since 2005, UNOWHURO receives technical assistance from DED (approximately 100 advisory days).

Management

The Union is managed by an elected executive committee. They do not have a permanent coordinator. The general assembly is divided into thematic committees. Each committee has a head and accounts to the rest of the members during their gatherings held twice a month. The information circulates mainly during those meetings; the Union did not yet systematise the circulation of information through internet. The Union's meetings are hosted by its president, Centre for Human Rights and Peace Advocacy (CHRAPA), but the network has no physical secretariat yet.

Activities

- *International Human Rights Day*

In December 2004, UNOWHURO celebrated the international Human Rights Day, which included:

1. A round table discussion on the state of Human Rights situation in the NW, taking place at the CRTV provincial station.
2. Noah's ARK, one of its member organisations, presented gifts to orphans and held a talk on child trafficking in the province.
3. Visits to detention centres such as the Bamenda central prison, public security and the judicial police stations. During the visits, discussions centred on the detention conditions of cells and the rights of the detainees.
4. At the end of the day, they organised a press conference on the activities of the union and future perspectives.

- *Other human rights interventions*

i) The Union intervened in human rights abuse in the following situations:

1. On the murder of John Kohntem, SDF electoral district chairman for Balikumbat sub division. The union on this occasion issued a communiqué denouncing the incident and informed several administrative, legal, judicial and diplomatic missions in Cameroon
 2. The indiscriminate shooting of passengers in a taxi by the forces of law and order early in 2005 was condemned by the union and authorities were informed
 3. The Union addressed a memorandum to the head of state on the poor handling of the Buea University crisis where students were refused the rights to protest and indiscriminate shooting led to the death of two students
 4. The handling of the Fon Doh's case in the murder of John Kohntem by the Ndop High Court Judge of who sentenced him in 2006.
- ii) UNOWHURO put in place the Regional Human Rights Observatory, together with their homologue from the West, the network Collectif Article 17, financed by the Multi-Actors Concerted Programme.
- iii) The Union recently set up a Project Committee, in charge of producing a proposal, following up with potential donors and producing reports during the conception and the implementation of their project on monitoring the 2007 twin elections. It trained observers and monitored the elections in NW divisions. Though not able to mobilise sufficient funding for this project, they self sponsored the monitoring while DED financially and technically supported the training of election monitors.
- iv) The Union has been monitoring the succession question of the Lamido (traditional ruler) of the Mbororo community in Sabga.

“Poverty and underdevelopment are a result of continuous violation of human rights”
UNOWHURO, 2007

Culture

UNOWHURO believes in a democratic and participatory management of their network. The Union puts a lot of efforts in improving the quality of management and leadership (including decision-making process), as well as the sharing of roles and responsibilities, since an “Executive Committee diagnosis” facilitated by DED in 2006. The regular meetings and the fact that most human rights organisations are Bamenda-based ensure that members know each other, communicate and debate freely.

Partners

DED's Program Promotion of Civil Society Organisations has been one of UNOWHURO's main partners since 2005.

This partnership aims at enhancing their organisational capacities. A two years collaboration agreement was signed in September 2005, defining the areas of capacity building: resources mobilisation (fundraising strategy), management (human resources, finances), project design, participatory planning, monitoring and evaluation, human rights instruments and tools, advocacy, HIV mainstreaming. The National Commission for Human Rights and Freedoms (North West regional branch) is also one of their technical partners since creation. They help the union to carry out human rights observation activities in the province. A potential partner of the union is VSO. Discussions are still going on between VSO and the Union to plan for an organisational development process starting in 2008.

Learning from each other



5.5 United Councils and Cities of Cameroon (UCCC-NWR)

UCCC is an umbrella association of Councils in Cameroon. It has ten regional decentralized branches, with the NW branch bringing together 35 councils in the region. It was formed with the aim of bringing together the 339 councils in Cameroon into a unique corps in a bid to jointly contribute to foster national unity and well-being based on local realities. UCCC was formed in 2003, merging the association of mayors and the association of councils of Cameroon. The objective of UCCC-NWR is to promote development in the region by identifying problems common to councils and to seek for common solutions. UCCC main activities in the past few years include: training in UNDP and HIPC project writing; preparation and conduction of a road study together with CESO etc. UCCC-NWR, like UCCC national, benefits from the financial assistance of the special council support fund (FEICOM) and some other international organisations such as the DED, GTZ, the French cooperation etc.

5.6 North West Female Mayors Association (NOWEFMA)

This is an association of female deputy mayors in the NW of Cameroon. It brought together the 13 female deputy mayors of the region in 2005 with the objective of working as a team and foster development in their respective constituencies. Membership is open to all the female mayors and deputy mayors in the province. Registration is 2000 FCFA and members are required to pay an annual due of 50 000 FCFA before march 31st each year and a social due of 10 000 FCFA is paid one week before any sitting to the host. NOWEFMA recently obtained funding from the Canadian Cooperation (17 million FCFA) for sensitising and training female leaders for the 2007 elections. They also received a 2 million FCFA grant from Helvetas Cameroon for the running costs of the organisation and for some capacity building, provided by DED. The DED program Promotion of CSOs facilitated two training sessions on communication, public talk and use of media tools.



5.7 Responsible Citizenship-North West Chapter

This coalition of CSOs, known in French as *Dynamique Citoyenne*, operates at national and regional levels with the objective of ensuring an effective involvement of the civil society in debates, especially on the independent follow-up of public policies and cooperation with state actors in decision making processes. It aims to be a strong force in the process of promoting democratic principles in Cameroon and to promote participatory development, social equity and guarantee good governance. They recently carried out a follow-up of the 2004 budget in the education sector in the NW. Most networks in the NW are in the board of the DC-NW chapter. DC-NW has turned into a network of networks.

Figure 7. Federation of Beekeepers Associations of Cameroon; a network that didn't survive.

Not all networks once started still exist. FEBAC started in 1995 as an initiative of four associations working with beekeepers in three provinces. Two members submitted competing proposals to HIPC, but both were unsuccessful. One year later the association, as well as one of its founder members, did not exist. Actions are now afoot to revitalise the Federation, but concentrate on strong members to build good foundations, and on jointly reaching results such as advocating for honey quality standards, an export scheme and raising consumer awareness about honey, rather than focusing on internal organisation, articles of association and getting representative members from all provinces. SNV estimates only one in six networks or associations survive.

6 The Cameroon Highlands network experience

This section examines the experiences of and with networks, including their capacity building partners, DED and SNV Highlands, in developing the networks, to meet both the networks goals and ultimately, poverty alleviation.

6.1 Actors

Experiences show that some types of actors are very influential on how networks develop.

Figure 8.

Who is in the driver's seat?

SNV's approach to the process of capacity has moved from financing projects to technical capacity building in 2004. This move aims to encourage the client to sit in the « driver's seat », and not the capacity builder. The client, such as a network, should thus determine its own missions, vision, strategy and particularly action plan to achieve these. Financial independence from the capacity builder is also important, as it is rare that the client and capacity builder have exactly the same goals and means of achieving them. SNV may help the client read their own "road map", but will not steer, preferring to sit in the back seat, and let the client do the driving, at their own speed. Maybe even having some accidents along the way, but wearing a seatbelt provided by SNV, these shouldn't be too serious and will be learnt from.

6.1.1 The importance of initiators

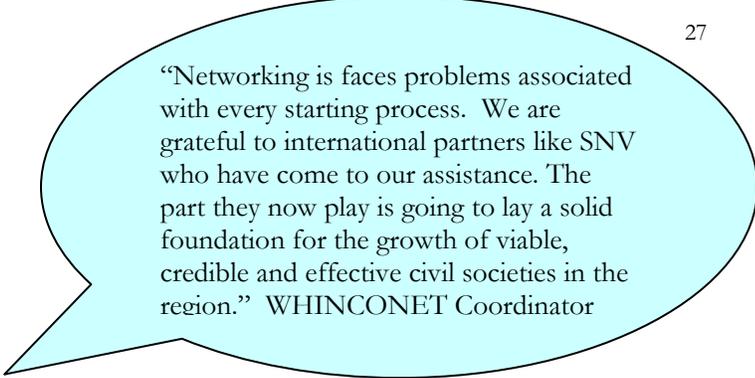
When the initiators of a new network have clear vision about why a network is needed and a strong sense of purpose and activities, and can communicate this so that other organisations become members, networks seem to flourish, such as NWADO, compared to networks that are the result of one organisation, or one person's vision. The initiators can help drive and direct a network to grow with a long term vision and importantly, commitment. Failed networks, such as FEBAC, see Figure 7, provide an example of what happens when the initiators leave without the network having been established and missing for example, a mission, inputs or outputs.

6.1.2 Partners push and pull

Almost as important as the members, are the partners that a network links up with, for example technical advisers and financiers. Nearly all networks that are achieving their goals have involved actors (other than their members), in their internal organisation, such as advising on their strategy or systems, and/or in assisting with outputs and, especially, inputs. Partners can add status, credibility and may even be a strong incentive for organisations to join a network, particularly when there is an international organisation as a capacity building partner. Even more so if the partner is foreign, what can be called the "white man syndrome".

Influential partners can push and pull networks towards their own agenda's and objectives, mission and even determining a networks objectives or outputs, as key founders. Examples occurred with NWADO during its early days as the NW NGO Forum when its main international partners tended to set agenda. Reasons for this "pull" include novelty, learning opportunity, conditions attached to financing and a feeling that international organisations "know" the way better than a new, local, network. This conscious or unconscious effect of partners can also be a way for the partner to fulfil *their* goals. However, it appears that maximum impact and long term sustainability is where the network is in the "driver's seat" – see Figure 8 – so that a network outlives its partners and the changing fads and fashions of the development world. It also appears that networks can influence donors, for example UNDP and World Conservation Union – Netherlands both have programs supporting networks and SNV also favours networks, having

had positive experiences across Cameroon in the forestry sector over the last decade. DED, SNV and Helvetas – as part of their MoU - relied upon needs assessments for capacity building, which were conducted individually with their own clients and partners. These were then discussed amongst the three partners. An advantage of this was that problems in general from the partner's perspective could be efficiently, confidentially discussed and lessons shared. Other partners, for example the NW Environmental Stakeholders Platform, where SNV met with WHINCONET and other CSOs and partners, have tended only to meet all together: sometimes this encouraged openness, but the presence of some partners, such as government representatives, could also inhibit some actor's contributions.



“Networking is faces problems associated with every starting process. We are grateful to international partners like SNV who have come to our assistance. The part they now play is going to lay a solid foundation for the growth of viable, credible and effective civil societies in the region.” WHINCONET Coordinator

6.1.3 Uneasy alliances: Government, traditional authorities and media

Increasingly, development agencies prefer multi-stakeholder partners to address persistent poverty issues that have been able to be solved by one actor alone. Civil society partners have requested to work with government, elected authorities and groups seen as influential, such as media and research institutes. This can sometimes force relationships to be forged between CSOs and other actors in society. Using the Driver's Seat analogy in Figure 8, this is equivalent to asking other passengers to get on board to go both faster and smoother towards a final destination. In some cases this turns out effective; CSOs which may have previously mistrusted or actively opposed government, traditional authorities, start to cooperate and produce results, such as in the lobbying activities of WHINCONET against illegal harvesting of the bark from the highly medicinally valued *Prunus africana* or “pygeum” tree.

Relations between networks and government are not always cordial, particularly where the status quo is challenged, in fields such as human rights. A promising development is the collaboration between the National Commission for Human Rights and Freedom and human rights organisations. In contrast, in the agricultural, livestock and environmental sector, there tends to good collaboration as the mutual benefits are clear for both partners. This is supported by the longer tradition of cooperation and consultation in the agricultural sector between farmers groups and government agencies. But “forced” collaboration can also give rise to distrust, feelings of competition or a diversion of power and resources, particularly from government to CSOs. An illustration is the forest and environmental sector in both the NW and SW, where CSOs initially usurped the traditional role of government, but by cleverly involving government, are now able to mitigate any negative results by sharing activities, information and results. Positive examples, such as the multi-stakeholder “Upper Noun Valley Resource Users Platform for Dialogue” to address conflicts between pastoralists, farmers and fishers by members of WHINCONET and MBOSCUDA, the Mbororo Cultural and Development Association, have shown that collaboration between stakeholders can increase trust and achieve results that no one group has been able to achieve alone.

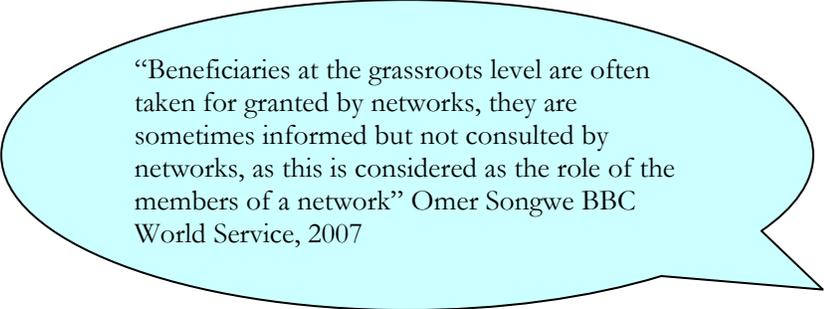
Traditional rulers usually see CSOs as opponents, threatening their authority. It depends on how the CSOs promote their activities and the topic: e.g. women's empowerment is often harder to “sell” than income generating activities. Traditional authorities however are acknowledged by CSOs unavoidable partners in community development and need to be at least consulted and engaged.

Relations between the media and CSOs and their networks have often been based on mutual distrust and finances, but have improved with training and the realisation of mutual benefits. Relations with private owned media tend to be more cordial, compared to the state owned media, due to more affordable

coverage but also because of a preoccupation by the state media in covering government affairs rather than civil society or business.

Approximately 30% of CSOs use the media (NWADO 2006), with CSOs traditionally paying for coverage, although payment does not guarantee coverage. Despite several networks attempts to engage with the media, opposing messages confuse many CSOs, from “We’ll give you free airtime because civil society is important” to “You have to pay for what you get”. Contradictions also abound when members of networks are *themselves* media houses or have financing to provide media services (newspapers, journals, radios). When networks and their members have created media awareness, usually with external donor assistance, coverage of both the members, their networks and specific topics, increased dramatically - giving them and their advocacy topics a much wider coverage and boosting results, as well as motivation. Networks such as NWADO and WHINCONET have good examples of how media and communications had been used to attract new members, partners and inputs, for example the Civil Society Open Day in 2006 and a Honey Marketing Forum. Informal marketing also proved successful, such as members promoting their network, as in the case of SWECSON growing by almost 50% in registering members. Networks such as NWADO have played an intermediary and facilitating role between media and member organisations, being in a better position to reach, negotiate and communicate with media. This service is welcomed by members who often have seen the media as expensive and unreliable “paid for advertising” rather than as an independent news service. Optimum results have been obtained where networks have a media database (contacts, main interests, conditions for coverage etc) at the disposal of members.

6.1.4 Target groups and beneficiaries



“Beneficiaries at the grassroots level are often taken for granted by networks, they are sometimes informed but not consulted by networks, as this is considered as the role of the members of a network” Omer Songwe BBC World Service, 2007

Interestingly, none of the networks seem to have been influenced to form or develop at a request of their target communities or beneficiaries. Beneficiaries may even be unaware that their interests or needs are being promoted or addressed in networks. This may be partly due to the tendency for organisations and networks only to

communicate directly with beneficiaries on projects or programs being implemented, and only once these are confirmed, to avoid over-expectations of beneficiaries. It may also stem from low levels of experience in advocacy and public relations. Advocacy - giving voice to their beneficiaries - is stated as a capacity building need and a priority by all networks for both themselves and their members.

6.1.5 Members

Arguably the most influential actors in a network, CSOs in the Highlands have joined networks for both individual and collective reasons. Membership is more about “what do I get” and less “what do I give”. Sometimes the individual motivation outweighs the collective, thus making it detrimental for the success of the network. A member’s understanding of a network’s mission can hugely influence its effectiveness.



“No one feeds the child without licking their fingers”
SWECSON, 2007

Some CSOs prefer to belong to generalist networks (development), providing a holistic approach and providing the possibility for thematic groups and coalitions, whereas others favour thematic networks (HIV, prisoners etc). In effect there is a fluctuation of member’s commitment of time and resources, also between networks, when a CSO belongs to several networks e.g. COMINSUD and ERUDEF.

Experiences indicate that networks tend to be ineffective if:

1. There is only a “one way benefit”: a CSO member contributes little or nothing (in terms of time, finances, staff or technical inputs) to the network but only reaps benefits.
2. The CSOs objectives or activities are not in line with the networks (especially for thematic networks).
3. Membership conditions are not fulfilled, for example, only 50% of SWECSON’s, WHINCONET and NWADO’s members fulfil their financial commitments. Figure 9 illustrates conditions in two networks.
4. Membership conditions are not enforced, such as irregular and late payment of annual membership dues (one of the most common problems in all networks examined) and irregular attendance / participation in meetings. Most network’s constitutions, for example NWADO’s, do not provide sanctions, and where set out in internal regulations, such as WHINCONET, or UNOWHURO’s see **Error! Reference source not found.**¹⁰, networks tended not to enforce them, for fear of alienating or loosing members – another double edged sword!

Figure 9. Membership obligations

Union of North West Human Rights Organisations (UNOWHURO)	North West Association of Development Organisations (NWADO)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All members are requested to honour all dues (registration fees and annual dues) and invitations within the stated norms ▪ Abide to the constitution and internal rules and regulations of the union ▪ Shall pay and own a copy of the constitution and internal rules and regulations ▪ Activities of the network must be reported in writing within 7 days followed by restitution during general assembly meeting ▪ Render an account of money put at their disposal for the execution of union activities within 7 days following the execution ▪ Attend monthly meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Attend all meetings and participate fully ▪ Pay registration and annual dues ▪ Submit proof of registration and being operational (Annual plans, reports, details of the organisation (e.g. addresses or NGO contact person (s) and a short profile) ▪ Obtain proof of registration by means of letter of attestation ▪ Explore accounts of the Forum ▪ Vote and be voted

Figure 10. UNOWHURO Sanctions

Indiscipline	Sanctions
Three consecutive absences at union’s meetings without prior notification.	Reprimand (verbal or written)
Misappropriation of union’s funds	Written warning
Misrepresentation of the union in public	Suspension of membership
Any act civil or criminal that tarnishes the image of the union	Expulsion
Acts judged inconsistent with members (respectful, committed, honest etc).	Fines (not exceeding 2000FCFA) by disciplinary committee

5. *Size matters*: “big” (in size, age and/or resources) organisations often dominate smaller members within a network. This can lead to the non participation of smaller members, reducing their commitment.

6.2 Factors

External factors, detailed in Section 4, have had a fundamental influence on the formation of networks in the Highlands. Its environmental uniqueness has led to many CSOs working on conservation-livelihood issues. The economic importance of agriculture similarly has led to a proliferation of networks that focus on or include this as one of their core activities. The cultural customs with cooperation and group work combined with the human rights focus and Anglophone opposition movement have also arguably led to a higher incidence of CSOs in the Highlands than in other areas of Cameroon. Government and donor programs and policies, have also profoundly influenced the areas in which CSOs and their networks are active e.g. HIV/AIDS, women's empowerment, council governance; either because the government and donors have encouraged CSOs to develop to match, encourage or support government and donor led initiatives, or as a resistance against government (in) action. Political factors, such as development projects, have encouraged the formation of CSOs, but also - "suitcase NGOs" set up for political reasons. But reliable statistics are lacking on the actual number of active CSOs. Many networks consulted, are of the opinion that the large number of CSOs in Highlands region is due it being "disadvantaged in terms of getting a slice of the national cake".

Figure 11. North West Crafts Association

Created by the craftspeople of Bamenda in 1997 to improve their crafts activities, NOWECA is an association network that emerged in 2002 and began to expand across the NW, aiming to improve knowledge, capacities, inputs by supporting apprenticeships, participating in trade fairs, organising capacity building workshops, and a loans system. It now covers six divisions with approximately 2500 craftspeople and their apprentices. The member societies elect a divisional level Board of Delegates and Supervisory Committee, which in turn elects a Provincial Board and Supervisory Committee. A two person Coordination Unit, part of the Management Team, is funded by Bread for the World (BftW) as the main funder, coordinates daily running and executes decisions from the Provincial Executive. Partners include DED as financier for four years and technical adviser for six years, and SNV for two years as capacity builder. NOWECA is itself a member of NWADO and National Corps of Craftspeople in Cameroon (NCCC). www.wagne.net/noweca

6.3 Organisation

6.3.1 Strategy: difficult to develop

Half of the Highlands networks examined have a strategy, mostly developed with external assistance from partners. This was often a long and tortuous process producing much discussion and paper. Few networks have turned the mission into a strategy and subsequently into operational action plans. This time consuming and intensive process is often limited by the time and resources available by members able to be devoted to such an exercise. For example WHINCONET developed its strategy during a three-day meeting in an ad-hoc fashion over the course of two years. Strategy development in a network though, particularly if facilitated, can help organisations to develop their own strategies. SNV and DED estimate that a third of all network members have their own strategy.

6.3.2 Staff: what staff?

Human resources are a key element of the strength of an organisation. The human force is normally delegated by members to the network. Most networks do not have "paid" staff, but a voluntary executive or coordinating committee, volunteer students and occasional contractors, service providers and trainers.

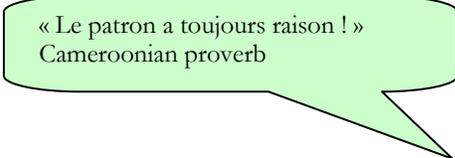
Very often a few committed persons, usually members of the elected Executive and/or initiators of the network, are the main human resources. No networks were able to ensure that *all* members equally dedicate human resources to the network (working groups, committees etc).

Two networks have a paid desk officer or coordinator; NWADO and SWECSON. None have a paid secretariat, although some members of networks, who are themselves networks, such as NOWECA (see Figure 11), do have paid secretariats. WHINCONET is working on recruiting one. The big question here is: how will the coordinator be paid? Many networks believe it is only possible if a coordinators salary is paid by an external organisation i.e. a donor, rather internally. A paid coordinator's salary, even if part time, may result in envy by active "voluntary" network members, due to the financial gain, even though those networks with "independent" coordinators appear more successful in implementing their actions plans and meeting aims, than those networks without. Those who can afford a salaried coordinator tend to delegate the implementation of the entire action plan, leading the network's outputs to be totally coordinator-dependant, thus fragile: if the coordinator leaves or if the network cannot afford the position anymore, the network risks becoming inactive, demonstrated temporarily by NWADO in 2005.

Forming working groups (according to speciality and interest) or ad hoc committees has proved a successful human resource strategy. It allows members to delegate staff temporarily to network activities, according to interest (personal motivation and individual learning) and to member's interest (institutional learning, capitalizing good practice etc). The recipe for success seems to be that working groups report to and take instructions from the Executive and General Assembly, but have a margin of autonomy.

6.3.3 Management style: leader, tyrant or visionary?

Power sharing and delegation are not common in Cameroonian culture. A leader in the Highlands is seen as having "absolute powers", which, combined with a traditional high regard for authority, makes it difficult for change to occur even if it is in the vested interest of members. The importance of the leader and members agreeing and setting roles and responsibilities to allow "team work", especially for the Executive committee, has been demonstrated during the ongoing capacity building of all networks. Executive Committees are often not well handed over after elections (on average between every one and three years). This frequent change and subsequent learning or reinvention of roles and responsibilities, also adds to internal dysfunction. Individuals often seek power by becoming elected into a position of responsibility in a network, but once on seat do not fulfil their commitments or abuse their position, especially regarding finances, access to information and visibility.



« Le patron a toujours raison ! »
Cameroonian proverb

The style of managing a network implies the process of organising the network. Most networks are managed by an Executive or Coordinating Committee, often with an elected President, who manages the human, material, technical and financial resources.

The President of a network is a demanding and key position in the network; being leader, manager, visionary, bank account signatory and implementer; often in their own organisation and for the network. The elected leader (generally known as President, Delegate or Coordinator) may be held by a founder member, in most cases one with the most resources. Where networks employ a management team or secretariat, the secretariat of the organisation is often located in the President's premises, especially for networks that are not yet financially sustainable e.g. NWADO harboured by COMINSUD, UNOWHURO located at CHRAPA, WHINCONET located at SIRDEP etc. This may mean that the network "owes" the presidential organisation and is obliged to unofficially render services. On one hand, this is a service for the unpaid resources provided by the organisation holding the Coordinators post, but

it can also consume much of a networks efforts and materials. Leadership styles may be imported from individual organisations to the network. This does not seem to work when a “one-man show” style is applied to a network.

Many internal conflicts in networks stem from leadership issues. There is a knife-edge balance between a strong leader and a dictator. Many coordinators, once in the position, find it difficult to be willing and able to change, both personally and for their organisation. Once in a position of power, some leaders find it difficult to abdicate, even though members indicate their disapproval. They usually find it difficult to “oust” a leader with whom they are unhappy but may have ongoing rivalries that disrupt the effective functioning of networks.

Power struggles between a coordinator and the executive body of a network can jeopardise the relationship or balance between members, or reinforce their relationship to improve the network. Attributing and sharing leadership often prove difficult. Power abuse, refusal to delegate responsibilities and share the information by the leaders of the network has created internal conflicts putting at risk the existence and the credibility of the network.

Although majority of CSOs and their networks in Cameroon embrace the principles of democracy and good governance, practice differs from rhetoric. Shared, participatory and delegated leadership often remain jargon. In most cases, presidents play all the roles of the Executive Committee members and do not tolerate contradictions or differences in opinion on decisions or authority. The absence of the president is a reason for inaction: without their signature or agreement, nothing can be done. Frequently, a network’s inactivity and die-off occurs when the leader is busy with their own organisation. This dilemma of where scarce and valuable time, effort and resources be placed, and where the priority lies, is often very difficult for network leaders. A solution is to appoint a coordinator or facilitator who does not belong to any of the member organisations, whose job description is to “coordinate and initiate activities of the network for the benefit of its member organisations”, such as with NWADO, and recently by WHINCONET and SWECSON. Depending on the management style of the executive and particularly the President, conflicts can occur between these two critical positions, caused by perceptions of status, power, struggles, access to information and resources.

6.3.4 Systems: sadly lacking!

Communication is the core aim of most networks; with “sharing information and experience among members” as universal goals. Communication includes public relations: implicitly selling or marketing the network, its members and their activities. However, systems of communication in all networks are often inadequate, inefficient or inappropriate to meet objectives and produce results.

Internal communication: most networks use internet to circulate reports and information, as well as social news, and to dialogue with members. Networks consulted estimate that approximately 70% of information circulated in networks comes from external sources and concerns mainly financial opportunities. Internet is often the easiest, fastest and cheapest means of communication with donors and partners. However problems arise:

- Many organisations within networks (for example, the three Community Forest Associations who are members of WHINCONET), especially more geographically remote, newer or smaller members either do not have access, can not afford or are not well acquainted with the internet as a communication tool.
- Procedures governing access to network e-mail accounts are often unclear: who has the right to consult and send from the network email, who is in charge of the account (forwarding mails to members, deleting old mails etc), should partners send direct to the network or to all members?

External communication: most CSOs have an idea of how to market themselves (presentations at conferences and workshops, flyers, videos, project proposals, press articles etc) but networks experience more difficulties as there are sometimes conflicts between the visibility of the network and that of individual organisations, with only some network members appreciating that a network's high visibility can serve their own visibility and reputation. Especially the more active leaders of networks seem increasingly to value being a member of a prestigious network.

A network's external communication strategy is quite different from their member's, as it has to serve both itself and its members, thus working at two levels. Networks tend to be cautious in not favouring some members more than others in their marketing campaigns and ensuring that the message the network spreads is relevant and represents all members. The role of capacity building in assisting networks to provide publicly available information on its members, financial transparency, decision-making processes via annual reports, websites, budgets and minutes of meetings has been reflected in the increase in resource mobilisation possibilities for both members and networks, demonstrated by for example WHINCONET and SWECSON and their members both being awarded FGF projects.

Systems or procedures for planning, budgeting, filing, information dissemination and reporting are basic, informal, weak or non-existent in all networks. Often if these do exist, they tend to break down with changes in Executive Committee members. Even where member organisations have good quality systems, most members do not transfer these systems to a network due to lack of resources or willingness for such investment in their networks. Their own organisations usually take precedence (with logic; if their organisation dies, there would be no organisation to be a member of a network...). The transfer of management systems and skills from network members to the network institution is possible, but tends to be on a strictly "as needed and essential basis" e.g. SIRDEP has transferred its bookkeeping system to WHINCONET during the execution of the network managed FGF project.

A human resources management system within networks, even where there is a coordinator, volunteers or other "staff" (e.g. Service Providers) is also noticeably absent. It is rare to have performance evaluations, career plans or feedback on reports. This can negatively affect the performance of "staff" and can also have negative publicity (feedback from disgruntled internees or students) in the long term. Here, NWADO successfully experienced a coordinator performance evaluation by the executive committee in 2006, whose positive results influenced a salary increase for the year 2007.

Networks that are staffed tend to have developed more systems or procedures and be maintaining them. The most successful procedures in place were those seen by networks were low maintenance, simple and easy to manage systems.

6.3.5 Structures: appropriate or unwieldy?

All Highlands networks analysed have very similar structures: Board of Directors, an elected executive committee with a delegation of authority and with decisions theoretically made by majority voting, members in general assembly, set roles and responsibilities. They follow the hierarchical models popularised by the Anglophone administrative and culture, based on a 1950s cooperative / association model. Often formalised in articles of association and internal regulations, these tend to be procedure based rather than result orientated. To develop such organisational structures and procedures, often done by majority vote, can bind organisations together but is often very slow and costly, distracting the network from producing results and services for members. Even if organisations and their networks operate more as consultancy business, than share owing cooperatives or charitable not-for-profit organisations, this model prevails. Recent looser, less formalised platforms, forums and networks have however emerged e.g.

NW Environmental Stakeholders Forum and NW Platform on the 2007 Elections. A contradiction can be seen between the most common methods of “democratic” organisation and the “big man” cultural traditions in the Highlands.

The predominant structure of used by networks is a meeting. The main commitment and activity of network members is to meet other members when the network calls for a general assembly or meeting. All networks had in common that they produce and disseminate agendas before the meeting and send a report after the meeting. Nevertheless, meetings and their results are often not well exploited: agendas may not be circulated prior to the meeting, members rarely had time, understanding or opportunity to oppose or amend an agenda; thus, not being directly requested to contribute to the planning of the meeting they mostly consume it instead of really participating in decision making. Some networks have however positively started to exploit meetings: using “information corners” (e.g. NWADO), during breaks to expose documents, flyers, donor information, sell or display products etc. Boards, walls and tables are used to spread information and consult members.

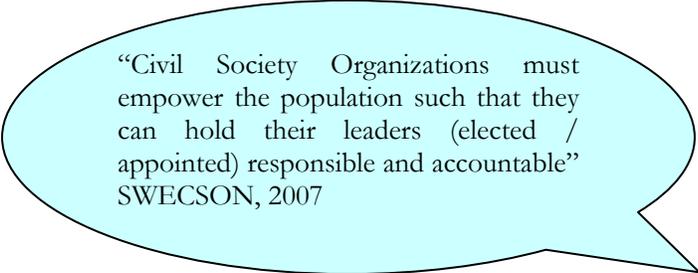
Network meetings are often chaired and moderated by the President or an Executive member. Experience has proved that the results and efficiency of a meeting are higher when a well trained moderator facilitates the discussion, especially if s/he has no power position in the network (people feel then freer to discuss matters). Also, room set up, quality of the visualisation and presentations have shown to improve the efficiency of discussions and reduce time.

Meetings are also often vital for experience and knowledge sharing. Experiences indicate that visualized presentations (handouts, flipcharts, blackboard etc) proved more successful in enhancing understanding, creating specific links between organisations active in the same field of work and thematic groups stimulate informal exchange. Networks such as NWADO and WHINCONET have also successfully used meetings to market their network and its members by inviting key stakeholders to join in at least part of those meetings, for consultation, contribution or just as observers.

Reporting meetings is difficult for networks. Minutes are usually incomplete, sent too late to be of interest or both and members do not agree on how to distribute information. Formalised minute taking (how it’s written, what’s included, level of detail etc) has proved to be vital in decision making, especially in cases of conflict and in avoiding repetitions or contradictions of previous decisions.

6.3.6 Culture: governance and learning

Most networks have been operational for between two to five years. Some have existed for longer e.g. Network for Sustainable Agriculture (NESA). During this time a cyclical culture of learning and development can be seen; starting small with a few key organisations and strong leadership, usually from a larger, more sophisticated CSO, trying to attract members and being mainly very internally focussed (membership fees, organisation, structure) - so that there are no results, which then affects the motivation of members and is not attractive to potential members - leading to a loss of members, leading then to a focus on external actors and factors, and especially results. It appears that if a network can learn to improve and grow to become externally focused and achieve some results - its success, and therefore maintenance of its membership, is more assured. However as none of the networks are over 10 years old, this can not be seen in practice. The development cycle is shown in Figure 15.



“Civil Society Organizations must empower the population such that they can hold their leaders (elected / appointed) responsible and accountable”
SWECSO, 2007

Most Highlands networks have a democratic based, consensus culture. This leads to never ending meetings, discussions, correspondence, with sometimes some lobby groups forming within the network and creating conflicts between the members. Managing different ideas, opinions and actions of members in this culture is often very difficult for leaders.

Most networks can tell tales of poor governance; particularly problems of transparency, equity and accountability, such as networks being “hijacked” by member organisations, usually those in a position of power, misusing resources or misappropriating network resources for individual use. Participation of beneficiaries in decision making is also absent in many CSOs and their networks particularly, most members playing a “representation” role for either geographic communities or parts of society they purport to represent. This is maybe not surprising given the predominating culture in Cameroon and its status as one of the world’s most corrupt countries (Transparency International 2006), but is remarkable given the many networks active in promoting good governance and democracy, such as NWADO, SWECSON and UNOWHORO. Contrary to some areas of the world, such as East Europe, there are no codes of conduct, ethics or guidelines set up for CSOs in Cameroon to steer CSOs own good governance, although UNOWHURO does have an internal code, many networks state that they have unwritten codes or that ethics are part of their internal rules and regulations. This absence was even a reason setting up of SWECSON: to give legitimacy to “real and active” CSOs, but has not subsequently been developed by any of the networks into practical codes to direct Highlands CSOs and their networks. Many networks indicated that the focus on good governance in the last decade has prompted CSOs to pay more attention to this issue.

6.4 Mission

All networks examined have as a mission to coordinate or assist their members to better realize their objectives. Common themes, whatever the technical focus or theme of a network, were “facilitate, share, exchange and disseminate information”; “promoting”, “contributing”, “bringing together” and “collaborating” with each other. Objectives tended to centre around coordination and avoiding duplication, as well as acting on common concerns e.g. training or lobbying and advocacy and communication / information facilitation. Although most networks have brief mission, vision and objectives they tend to be very vague or broad in nature and allow nearly any activity or initiative. Some networks follow the objectives of their donors rather than their own objectives, but some donors also dictate what they think a network is supposed to achieve. However, often the mission stated on paper, is also not the same as the actions implemented. Most networks only partially executed their annual action plans.

Many members however do not work in line with their network mission or objectives. It is common to find several members carrying out similar activities in the same area, or similar activities in different areas, and not sharing this information. A key cause is competition. This shows that the entire mission of a network may not be shared by all members. In practice networks also do not avoid duplication of activities despite sharing information. For example, information may be shared, but not necessarily by the network, often by the capacity builders, donors or service providers. Information has also been hidden, especially when concerning access to resources (especially finances) such as news on projects and funds. Information is power, but some members of network see power as retaining information and not sharing! Experiences show that networks do recognise and discuss their common problems, but that only occasionally are the solutions implemented jointly. Most often the solutions are put into practice by members.

Donors often drive CSOs to work together in a network, to achieve the donors’ mission, avoid duplication Networks acknowledge that whilst “the piper plays the tune”, this push and pull can positively

influence CSOs to collaborate, work more efficiently and increase transparency and accountability. An example is the CSO election platform 2007.

The majority of network's mission statements and objective's have a hidden agenda, omit or camouflage that they aim to increase access to resources (human, financial, materials) for the networks and/or their members. Resource mobilisation is often the most commonly executed part of the mission, and is the most frequently requested assistance from donors and capacity builders.

6.5 Inputs and outputs

Many members perception of the inputs and outputs necessary to make a network effective and produce results is contradictory. Members are not willing, or able, to commit sufficient inputs, especially time or money, to allow a network to function. But they are often unsatisfied with the outputs (e.g. services provided to members) even members who are in relatively influential role in decision making in a network. This contradiction leads to many tensions.

6.5.1 Inputs: perennial problems

When networks emerge there is generally a period of zeal, commitment and planning: members agree why they come together and dedicate time and energy to create and give an identity to what they wish to be their network. Once it exists, though, networks face many challenges, not least concerning resources. Welcoming new members, loosing funding, divergence from plans and differing member commitments can divert the network from the road map traced in early life. Input problems in the Highlands include:

- Membership: it is “easy” to gather and agree on an enthusiastic idea, more difficult to continue a common effort in the long run. Convincing other organisations to join and adhere to the network means demonstrating that the network is beneficial to members, worth the investment of the membership fee and the time. Strangely most networks do not have a strong focus on recruiting new members, boosting numbers or strategies to maintain members. Many inflate their actual membership numbers to partners. Often upon inspection of meetings, activity reports and membership fees (the three common conditions of membership), up to 50% of initial registrations have lapsed. Whilst a member's commitment is obligatory, most networks are very “easy” with reluctant members, accepting the situation and delaying sanctions. Most either do not have, or do not implement, clear and strict rules regulating membership.
- Time: active membership of a network, especially in the executive, implies an enormous investment of time. In the highlands this is also called a “sacrifice”. Arguably, those that invest, both individual and organisations, do so ultimately because of the gains at both member organisations and individual levels in terms of profile, learning, access to resources, career development and networking.
- Sharing technical knowledge, information, ideas, sources and experiences: many members like to receive but not always to give.

Figure 12. Does a Network need money?

A network may be independent and sustainable with just internal contributions; if it runs no office and if reasonable membership fees are regularly paid: a network can still meet, exchange, publish using emails, advocate and function. It all depends on the aim of the network: if the main purpose is to carry out activities together, the network needs to raise funds. But actions done together are activities members don't have to implement alone – and members raise funds regularly for their own activities!! The question of the sustainability and of fundraising for network remains a question of mentality and conviction of each member to belong to that network and to dedicate to it the necessary efforts, sources, resources and knowledge.

- Material inputs; often members, and partners, provide small material and equipment inputs e.g. SWECSON members donated most of the office materials. Materials therefore tend to be efficiently resourced at the absolute minimum needed.
- Office space: most networks stress on the need for permanent office space. All networks are harboured in the offices of their presidents. Major problems here are that as presidency rotates, moving is inevitable, space is often limited for documents and secretariat staff.
- Finances: all networks experience financial challenges in fundraising to cover their activities, pay staff, run training programs and lobbying. This is probably the most common complaint by networks. The major problem in all networks is collecting membership dues in time, especially when membership fee are high (over 10,000 CFA on average is regarded as high), with many networks having over two years arrears for still semi active members. Donors are the most commonly seen solutions for this problem, but many networks succeed in self financing their

Figure 13.

Alternative strategies to convince members to pay their dues

1. SWECSON like other networks has a problem with members paying their annual dues on time. The visit from the American Embassy prompted the ExCo to quickly update the list of paid-up members and invited only them to the meeting, with instructions to not invite members who had not paid their dues. The information leaked out and when confronted for explanations, the ExCo replied that it had to use an objective measure to ensure that only paid-up members benefit from potential donors. Within a week, three organizations paid their dues and two others indicated their willingness to join SWECSON.
2. NWADO used a different strategy on the occasion of the visit from the US Embassy. It opened the meeting to all NWADO members, paid or unpaid, and even issued invites to potential members, as a way to show the added value of being a member of NWADO and stimulating membership. This resulted in two new members joining. Although it did not stimulate unpaid members to pay their dues!

functioning costs. All networks aimed at having projects as resource inputs, implemented by the network (e.g. NWADO's Open Day), or members use the network to coordinate a joint initiative (e.g. UNOWHURO members monitoring the 2007 election, WHINCONET's FGF project). Usually the project is externally donor financed, albeit with a member contribution. Most networks however have not managed to convince donors to become "faithful" to them and support activities in the long term or have a "bank" of donors who regularly support activities. Some networks occasionally sell specific skills, activities or equipment e.g. NWADO rents out a

laptop and hires out its coordinator. Most network members favour their own income generating activities above those of the network as a more direct income source. There is a fine balance for a network in generating its own financial resources affecting its efficiency in providing its core service and activities.

6.5.2 Outputs: services provided by network

The *services* provided by a network can be broadly analysed by comparing outputs against those indicated in their mission statements, objectives and action plans and seeing how satisfied their stakeholders are (members, beneficiaries, financiers, staff or partners). Looking at the services broadly provided by all networks indicates that:

- Service provided: “assist members to better realize their objectives / training and capacity building”. For many networks, this mission is fulfilled either by internal exchanges or, particularly, though external partners. Many networks seem to exist, in the short term, entirely on capacity building and training exercises, either for the networks and/or their members. Equity is critical here; when one or some members benefit more than others, the network provides less value, motivation and commitment (in terms of inputs) creating a vicious spiral.
- Service provided “facilitate and exchange information”. Networking can indeed be a good instrument for information exchange. Particularly during meetings and joint activities, many networks facilitate communication between members, their partners and indirectly, towards their beneficiaries by allowing members to improve communication. Often the informal contacts between members are as important, if not more, than formal communiqués. Particularly effective are when networks introduce new information, organisations, or partners, that members otherwise would not have met. Members compete for information, having the feeling that if they share, they may lose competitive advantage.
- Service provided: “collaboration, coordination and avoiding duplication”. Most networks have regular meetings, attended by a majority of members, which result in an increase in coordination between members. In many networks members do duplicate activities or even “reinvent the wheel”, especially on technical and resource mobilisation, indicating that networks are not always efficient in exchanging information. However, most donors and capacity building partners are satisfied when CSOs collaborate, see Figure 14.
- Service provided: “promoting / lobbying / advocacy”. This output is the one most rarely put into action. Specific and dedicated coalitions appear more successful at executing lobbying and advocacy activities on one-off or “hot” themes than permanent networks that focus on their members own issues. Lobbying is one of the most cited reasons for forming a network. Nevertheless after a few years of existence, most networks had no advocacy campaigns. Lobbying is therefore seen as one of the weakest capacities. Recent initiatives by NWADO on the Elections (Figure 5) and WHINCONET on Community Forests are however encouraging.
- Although not a stated output, networks also provide credibility and visibility to their members. Many CSOs feel that by being part of a network, especially in the board, they gain legitimacy, mainly towards donors.

Efficient? As most Highlands networks work by consensus, many resources (especially time, finance for travelling and feeding) are spent reaching agreement. Looking at whether networks use their resources optimally, compared to actual, tangible outputs, networks do not seem efficient. However, if intangible outputs such as networking to further collaboration, information exchange and coordination are assessed, most networks do seem rather efficient, at least more than if they remained as individual organisations. A major weakness is that most networks do not evaluate themselves and most have never measured their efficiency. Monitoring and evaluation is often seen as a waste of resources, yet this self-analysis has shown to save resources. Other reasons for the lack of evaluation are; a fear of annoying and eventually losing members, not wanting to seem too successful for fear of raising expectations and scaring off external stakeholders.

An indicator of efficiency is if networks provide *value for money*. Most members, by voting with their purses, don't seem to think so, as on average only 50-60% of members pay their dues. Most seem more motivated and perceive that more services are provided when the network links with external partners, especially financial partners- who can bring to a network often the scarcest resource. Generally, the costs of forming and maintaining a formal network (registration process, membership fees and obligations, general assemblies etc) almost outweigh the benefits of services provided (*if* they are provided after the administration and structural costs). Less formal “gatherings”, meetings or alliances of organisations with very similar interests appear more efficient in that they produce more outputs with more focused resource use. Another cause of inefficiency is when members “pay” for rendering services to themselves. It might

be better for them to render services for the network freely and rather use the resources to obtain the skills they don't have.

Effective? It is difficult to measure effectiveness (if networks do what they planned and have an effect) when not all networks have clear goals, and if they do most don't measure if they meet them or have impact indicators and criteria. Most networks perform some sort of evaluation as part of creating their annual action plans, where they examine achieved activities against those planned. Effectiveness though can be measured as members vote with their feet; leaving or not attending activities, or with their purses: not paying subscriptions. Some networks have proven very effective: having definite outputs even with few resources. Examples include UNOWHORO, being able to commit internal funding to monitor the 2007 elections (they self financed the process, which cost 500.000 FCFA). When networks are not effective a “*development dilemma*” tends to happen; if a network is not effective and asks a partner for help “as we're so weak”, they may be accused of being too weak. Conversely if a network shows it is successful, they could be seen as not needing. SNV has used both arguments to NWADO at different times!

Most networks examined do actually exist, defying the ‘modern myth’, despite networks occasionally being “one man bands” (private vehicles for individual persons or organisations than real networks) or acting as coalitions (meeting only when they want something externally rather than to share information).

Sustainable? Outputs can also be seen in terms of their sustainability. Most networks *do* try ensure medium to long term effects of their and/or their members activities, using the principle of capacity building: “teaching the poor man how to fish instead of giving him a fish”. Networks indicated that they are sustainable technically (they possess the techniques and information) to keep themselves going, but not the finances.

Sustainability is “a characteristic of a process or state that can be maintained indefinitely and meeting present needs without preventing future generations from meeting their needs” (Brundtland Commission)

Figure 14.

Why are networks attractive to donors?

- Donors want to encourage and value networking and coordination efforts of member organisations. The network in itself is not particularly attractive to the donors; the networking initiative and activities are.
- Joint projects avoid duplication of activities and resources.
- Donors want to promote coherence of development intervention.
- Donors want to increase geographical impact
- Networking ensures more transparency over the finances: members control each other.
- Donors like the snow ball effect: multiply the beneficiary organisations and therefore the beneficiary population.
- A network often counts a few strong well recognised member organisations, on which the donor can rely to provide proper data and reporting.
- More members means supposed continuity of results and impacts.
- CSOs offer potential for “multi-stakeholder” problem analysis and solution implementation and ownership, seen as essential for complex development issues.

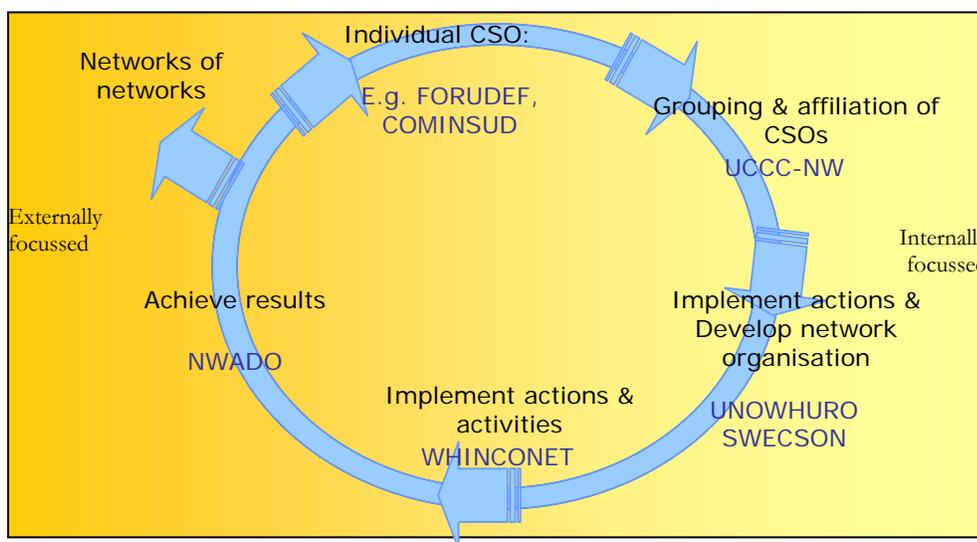
However, most Highlands networks do not seem durable as organisations, although, a network may live longer than its members. For example, the National Geographic Society, an international network, has existed over 120 years and outlived the majority of its members! In order to last, a network must reflect the identity and the wishes of its members, in the long run, as well as answer a social need. The estimated high number of CSOs, and their networks, that cease to exist (such as FEBAC, see Figure 7) and of members leaving, indicate that maybe half of the Highlands networks are sustainable. This raises the question of if a network should be maintained indefinitely. This emphasises the difference between network and networking. Coalitions have demonstrated that it is possible for organisations to work together and achieve great goals without creating a structure for it. A network is the structure facilitating networking among members;

unfortunately, in many networks the structure itself becomes the main goal of networking and absorbs most resources and energy dedicated by members (registration, election, constitution etc). By the time this structure is in place, most members' lost interest. The advantage of an informal network is that members gather on purpose, according to interest, commitment, resources available and time. Once the activity (the purpose of the networking) is accomplished, there is no obligation for the members to keep the network functioning. The platform on the 2007 election is an example (see Figure 5).

Another aspect is long term resource mobilization. External resources (donors) are the most common source of finance for a network, but to secure a minimal, indefinite financial independence, a resources mobilization strategy is necessary. Most networks do not have this and work ad-hoc and opportunistically. In the Highlands, most networks have clear membership regulations, but very few have a fundraising strategy and regular contacts with donors. A sustainable network implies that it has sufficient resources to conduct its activities. It does not matter where those resources are coming from. A network can be considered sustainable, if support is secured for a long time and if the network has an efficient fundraising strategy to secure future support. Occasional donations are not sustainable, only helping the network create favourable conditions for it (visibility, credibility, management and reporting capacities). Experience indicates that networks that rely solely on external funding tend to be less sustainable, and are liable to collapse once the main funder exits. Most networks do not have their own dedicated office, but running costs include: stationary, acquisition and maintenance of equipment, meetings and communication. In some cases, expenses are covered by external support (e.g. NWADO salary by DED, computer and stationary by SNV and DED), or by member organisations. This "help" is rarely enough, often being one-off. Most networks however successfully cover low running costs using members' contributions and other donations (by members or stakeholders). Indeed, members are usually unhappy with higher membership fees to cover increased running costs; but conversely they do not actively try to increase member numbers to cover higher running costs. Highlands' networks have demonstrated that they can continue to function and cover these costs, even without external funding.

Ultimately, a network's sustainability depends on the human resources of its members, their capacity and dedication to develop it. As a network evolves, grows and learns, it seems to become more effective at reaching its own goals as well as being more effective in delivering to its own and other stakeholders (its actors) and deliver a more efficient and effective service, fulfilling its mission. Networks in the Highlands have changed their missions and activities over time, examples being NWADO and WHINCONET, to adapt to the needs of their members. Networks can be compared to an organism that is born, grows, matures and dies, Figure 15 illustrates this a "life cycle".

Figure 15. Development life cycle of CSO networks



7 Recommendations

Suggestions are made for improving networks and their capacity building based on the experiences and analysis. These are made on two levels; for networks themselves and for partners and capacity builders.

7.1 For Networks

Your identity

- What is unique about your network; your “unique selling point”, your “image”?
- Do not hesitate to be dynamic, to evolve and change, bringing innovations, whilst staying focussed and keep your identity, remaining pertinent and adequate in the socio-political context
- Regularly review your identity and purpose; and the activities to meet these, to continue meeting the needs of members. Your environment changes; move with it!

Your roles

- Network for learning! And then manage that knowledge! Publish, release, and disseminate information and knowledge.
- Produce results and outcomes! Be result orientated. There should be an added value for an organisation to be a member.
- Represent your members’ interests – and their beneficiaries interests - but keep clear the difference between members and beneficiaries interests.
- Look for issues, especially national issues, where a network can have a bigger impact than its members working individually.
- Be a facilitator.
- Develop strategic alliances, network with other networks and stakeholders.
- Ensure participation and representation. Make sure that:
 - Members share. If they are not all ready for it, create favourable conditions and atmosphere of trust, and show example. Prove that members will get more than they will give, if they play the game right.
 - All members contribute: not only money, but technical skills, expertise and time.
 - Members are committed. Network’s priorities are members’ priorities; that is how it works. Members should accept to be patient to see results.
- Remember: networking is not just about organizing meetings and workshops...

Your resources

- Keep your running costs as light, low and affordable as possible: a network will rarely secure long term funding and generally members cannot afford to contribute to high running costs. Remember that some organisations are members of several networks, which multiply their contribution to networking.
- Do not count on external support for running costs. The members should be able to provide essential means to their network.
- Develop a financial sustainability strategy:
 - Advise your members to include in their project proposals a specific line on networking, which will benefit to the networks they belong to.
 - Create opportunities for and multiply financial sources: do not rely on one or two sources of income (donors, projects, members etc).
- Develop innovative ways of generating income: your expertise is in information sharing and dissemination and knowledge management. Why not sell it?

Your partners

Members should seriously reflect together on the key partners their network needs and for which purpose:

- Strategic partners for the members: the network has then a role of facilitator for fundraising or access to information, for the benefit of the members. Those concerned are donor agencies, government and international institutions such United Nations and European Union. Those partners can also of course be of interest for the network itself, and for the same purposes. Look for South-South partnerships from other developing countries – not just towards the North / developed country partners
- Strategic partners for the network: those partners can be of use for the network to know how to better network and position itself strategically on the social and political scenes.
- Complementary partners: other networks at the same geographical level, national networks, public consultation committees and any other institution or framework which can reinforce the position and the credibility / reputation of the network.
- Diversify - don't rely on just one partner! Don't put all your eggs in one basket!

Your services

- Do you act as platform for scaling up? For disseminating best practice?
- Ask yourself if you add value, if you provide services to your members?
- Advocacy should play an important role for all networks

Your management and leadership

- Be strict on membership issues and conditions!
- Refuse dictatorial leadership. A network does not need a director but rather a visionary leader and animator! A leader must implement the decisions taken by the general assembly of the members; he does not decide for the members. Members are responsible for positive leadership: they are in the position to negotiate with and sanction leaders.
- Leaders should be able to make decisions when there is not consensus or controversy within the network.
- Make sure all members, especially the executive, are clear on their roles, responsibilities and tasks.
- The leader or manager should energize: boring meetings and long speeches are not attractive.
- Make simple procedures and regulations – but do not let them dominate above members' needs: a level of flexibility makes things easier!
- Be transparent and have a clear and detailed management system, in particular concerning the budgeting, accounting and financial reporting.
- Report to the members on a documented, regular basis.

Your goals

- Dream, have a vision, be ambitious... but be realistic!
- Better achieve modest objectives than to run after too ambitious and unreachable goals. If the vision of a network is the common dream of its members, its objectives and plans should be very realistic: people usually commit more than what there are able to do.
- Have a long term view of what the network should achieve; this can evolve and change but remain a guideline, a “push” and a reminder for members to know why they are part of it and to commit to it.

Is it necessary to have a paid coordinator?

Most networks express the need for a desk officer / coordinator, for better functioning, to plan and implement activities successfully. A coordinator *can* play a key role in enhancing a network, taking over responsibilities and managing public relations and information dissemination from the executive committee. A coordinator can reinforce and spice up a strong network, especially when a network

matures, is bigger, and is actively executing activities. But a desk officer is not a replacement or panacea for a weak network!

When means are insufficient for full time staff alternatives can be found:

- A dedicated, ambitious person from a member organisation can ensure day-to-day running, it could be an informal or elected position, taken in turns.
- A network could contribute to the salary costs of staff from a member in exchange for part time work for the network. This is less costly than to cover a full salary, can be more sustainable and can ensure continuity with another staff from the same or another member organisation, if a part time coordinator loses interest or is no longer available.
- A long term intern / student willing to learn a profession at the end of their studies may be cheaper than a professional coordinator, but managing them may require more monitoring, motivation, energy and supervision by the executive.

7.2 For partners, capacity builders and advisers

Know the other partners

- You should know who you are getting into bed with! Are other partners of the network complementary to you? What are their plans, budgets, policies, approaches and priorities?
- Are you all going in same direction? Or will your activities and wishes for the network counteract each other?

Meet or interact with each other: with and without the network

- Partners should have their own networks
- It is good for partners to all meet together (transparent) but it can sometimes be necessary to meet separately; looking at how to avoid duplication, inefficiency, poor governance

One plus one is three!

- Partners can join and coordinate specific activities or actions, creating a multiplier effect to strengthen and conduct joint opportunities
- Agreements or memorandums of understanding between partners on their work with the same networks can provide good road maps for action

Follow an advisory process

- Define your process and don't miss out vital steps such as problem definition and monitoring!

Collaboration between a partner and a network

- Obtain baseline data on not only the client / partner but also their beneficiaries, preferably gather both with and without the network. This is invaluable to measure effects and impacts.
- Do not provide the network with knowledge, capacity and training that the / some members already have (and sometimes sell!). The capacity builder of a network should help the network solve its difficulties or fulfil its needs when members cannot do it on their own. Though, it is most often necessary to accompany and facilitate this process of knowledge and expertise sharing: the capacity builder may have here the role to encourage, support (technically and even sometime financially) and value such initiatives.
- The first purpose of collaboration between a network and a support agency is most often to develop the capacities of the network to fulfil its roles and to reach its objectives. It implies therefore:
 - Counselling and training of the elected leaders (mainly the Executive Committee, but also heads of committees and thematic teams)

- Close collaboration with the coordinator and/or the Executive for the development of instruments of networking (communication tools, meeting methodology and style, marketing, fundraising etc)
- Proposing ways for organisational learning and restitution of knowledge to members.

Encourage capitalisation and communicate experiences on the process

- Capitalization is essential to facilitate transmission of knowledge over time (e.g. when an Executive Committee takes over from another one, after election) and transmission / restitution of a training or event by a representative who attended it to the rest of the network
- Capitalization of capacity by the network (institution) and not only by the persons or the member organisations. Indeed, usually networks delegate one or two members to attend training workshops, while planning to organize later a network meeting for sharing the knowledge acquired. In many cases, and despite formal commitments, this restitution does not take place or is not satisfactory (too short, too general, not participatory, not visualized nor documented).
- The capacity builders facing this situation took several types of measures:
 - Including this obligation of restitution and capitalization in the collaboration contracts they sign with their partner networks
 - Training representatives of organisations and networks in training and moderation techniques and methodology
 - Proposing assistance in preparing and facilitating restitution (progressive learning process)
 - Nevertheless, the quality of commitment to restitution is not yet satisfactory
 - Should document best practices in capacity building, what works what doesn't, together with the Network

Training the network or training the members?

- The specificity of contributing to the development of the capacity of a network is that this network expresses first of all the needs and expectations of its members as individual

<p>Figure 16. UNOWHURO training on project design As part of the collaboration agreement between DED and UNOWHURO, a request was made for training on project design. This aimed to reinforce capacities of member organisations as well as the network itself. A two-day workshop was organized by UNOWHURO and facilitated by DED, with theory, practical, a case study and an open space. The pros and cons of such an approach are:</p>	
<p>Advantages / outcomes</p>	<p>Disadvantages / weaknesses</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ High result; large number of organisations benefit ▪ Common understanding and coherence of subject by members ▪ Members networking; emulation and motivation for joint projects (2 members & non-member later designed a project) ▪ Network provide a service to members and stimulates interactions ▪ Increased impact; several members individually presented project proposals for proof-reading and editing ▪ Post-training counselling and follow up could easily occur for the network itself ▪ Post-training, network elaborated a project and proposal, involving most members. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Levels of experience, knowledge and interests of participants were very different ▪ Therefore the content of the training remained quite general, except for the case study and the open space ▪ Most member organisations were represented by only one staff, which does not ensure a serious and complete transmission of the knowledge to the rest of the member organisation ▪ Impossible for DED to ensure follow up for all twelve participating organisations ▪ Impossible to measure precise result on impact and knowledge for members.

organisations formed in a group. It is always a challenge to distinguish the support to the network as an institution from the support to the members through the network, though the two of them are not incompatible.

- The capacity builder should position itself clearly: does it support the network, the members or both? A main risk here is that most requests formulated by the network may be very member-oriented, when the main actual need resides in reinforcing the network in its role of coordination and information dissemination, as well as in his advocacy role.

Targeting CSOs through a network?

- An advantage for the support agency to reach more organisations by providing training through the network. Instead of focusing on a few organisations, the collaboration with a network enables training to benefit to all members.
- On the other hand, representation of those members in training events is then quite reduced (one or two employees of each organisation in most cases). It means that assimilation, utilization and transmission of the knowledge acquired are not ensured like in training session provided to one organisation (where most staff members attend). Beside, training may not be specifically aimed at the particular needs of each organisation and may only remain at a general level (general knowledge and practices, common needs). Eventually, follow up of the implementation of the resolutions and knowledge is very difficult to ensure, due to the number of the participating organisations. The benefits and costs of such an approach are elaborated in Figure 16.

Externally pushed networks often fail!

Do not push the creation of the network. Donor or partner driven networks are never sustainable since the members do not really know why they come together or do not fully agree with the mission of the network. Do not be in the driver's seat, do not be in the co-driver's seat, stay in the back of the car!

Promote informal networking *before* formalization and registration of the network

This "probation" period will allow the potential members to test and prove their interest and commitment. It will also ensure that the group of organisations involve directly in concrete activities instead of focusing on structuring the network: registration, by-laws etc.

Define and agree

Before the constitution of the network, propose to the members and partners to hold a working session defining precisely and concretely why they come together and what they are ready to commit to their network.

Clarify membership

- Do not be a member and a capacity builder!. Better play a more neutral role of counsellor and trainer.
- If the constitution, by-laws and other rules and regulations and policies already exist, advise to regularly review them and discuss possible amendments.
- Raise the attention of the network on the necessity to anticipate and regulate misbehaviours of members (membership, non attendance, etc).

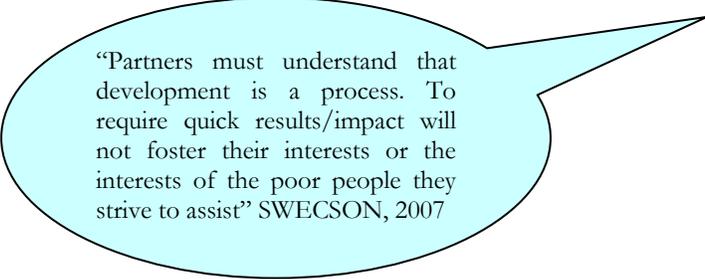
Other tips!

- Be aware of the specificity of such a partner or client: a network usually has a slower speed of growth and a variable level of commitment.
- Propose to the network to think of and formalize an effective communication and information circulation system.
- Insist on / propose systematic ways of capitalization of knowledge and capacity at the level of the network, and not only at the level of member organisations

- Sensitize members on leadership issues and quality management. Each member has its own agenda (sometimes a hidden one!) in joining a network...
- If your institution can also finance some activities or needs of the network, remember that mix of advisory services and financing is probably most effective, after a grace 'prove it period'. In this case, try to finance activities or investment that are in line with the level of development of the network and that benefit the network as a whole and not only part of the members.

8 Conclusions

CSOs and their networks are still relatively new phenomena in Cameroon. The social, political, economic and environmental situation means that this area has been a hotbed for both their emergence and development in the last fifteen or so years. Like any organisations, networks have been learning by doing, falling down and standing up again, with maybe half dying, but the most successful ones surviving and performing well. This paper aimed to assess if capacity building of networks has helped reach i) the goals of the capacity builders in poverty alleviation and ii) the goals of the networks.



"Partners must understand that development is a process. To require quick results/impact will not foster their interests or the interests of the poor people they strive to assist" SWECSON, 2007

8.1 Meeting a network's objectives

DED and SNV's experiences of networks in the Cameroon Highlands indicate that they are bonafide organisations and at three-quarters of those surviving are in the process of meeting their own missions and objectives, such as

sharing information, building member's capacities and collaborating on specific themes. Some networks have already proved this through their achievements, developing from internally focused talk shops to a more external, service providing focus, also differentiating between the needs of members and the needs of the network. Others are developing ways to be cohesive, implement actions and advocate, although still constrained by procedures, their structure and discussions rather than decision making. Many networks believe it is too early to prove the results of capacity building, as networks grow slower than their members. Another issue is that networks either do not possess or do not use tools to measure results, and focus on the short term visible resources rather than long term (i.e. up to 5 years) monitoring and evaluation.

Results so far are thanks to the efforts of their members, as well as their partners and financiers. The motivations behind inputs contributed by members in financial, human and material resources, show that there is both a common and a self interest. It is inevitable that there is a fine balance needed between these inputs. Objectives are not achieved as successfully when an individual members interest's predominates over the group, and services and benefits provided by the network are not equitable, or when they are not valuable to the member. This creates a vicious circle leading to fewer inputs by both members and partners, especially financial and human, leading to a less successful network with reduced credibility for its members and other stakeholders. Most networks are adjusting at least some aspects of their internal organisation to overcome this problem, for example defining strategies, changing the structure, becoming more output and result orientated, usually formalising coordination of activities and responsibilities, developing systems to regulate the network, employing staff, electing new leaders with different management styles, and together defining a shared values systems and communication methods. This credibility could also be enhanced by networks centring their activities towards the dissemination of information to members, inciting members to mutually share information amongst them and, where possible really representing members in lobbying and advocacy activities, instead of solely focussing on the execution of projects. If outputs and services can address all the objectives equally, more members and stakeholders may be equally satisfied and see the value of a network, creating a positive spiral of

commitment. Networks have also proved they can be sustainable, given a clear focus, leadership and a light structure, even with few resources.

8.2 Meeting capacity builder's goals

Capacity builders such as DED and SNV have as a major objective poverty alleviation. Working with CSOs is seen as a way to achieve this, networks being a way as avoiding duplication and provide efficient multiplication of activities and resources, coherence of development interventions, an increased geographical impact, ensuring more transparency, a multiplier effect, allowing a “highest common dominator effect” and continuity of results and impacts, plus a chance to tackle “multi-stakeholder” issues. However, donor oriented networks have difficulties to find their own identity and be sustainable, as external stakeholders especially partners, having a strong influence due to their powerful role as resource providers, which is exacerbated when donors are unclear about their role, approach and methodology. In the search for results and impact, donors can also become impatient. Experience indicates it is better to accompany a slow process than influence one! A network whose creation was influenced by a capacity builder has little chance to be sustainable when this capacity builder withdraws its support

So far, there has been a very close relationship between existing networks and capacity builders in the Highlands, mainly SNV, DED and Helvetas. The *inputs* (especially for SNV which calculates days per client and direct and indirect advisory costs), the *outputs* of capacity building for networks have been clear, see for example the MoU activities listed in Figure 1. However, it has been very difficult to measure the *effect* (change in performance of a network and members in their service delivery towards their beneficiaries) and *impact* (change in situation of beneficiaries in poverty reduction) of networking with networks. The only available indicator is when networks state that they are better able to deliver improved services to their beneficiaries. Part of the reason is a lack of baseline data on the networks' beneficiaries, also due to the often very limited contact between capacity builder and the networks beneficiaries. The preoccupation with measuring poverty alleviation impact is also mainly a capacity builders concern, rather than networks, which focus mainly on outputs. But this attitude is starting to change as CSOs take inspiration from capacity builders: “our work should not be donor driven but rather because of the needs of our population” Omer Songwe BBC World Service.

Usually capacity building *outcomes*, the changes in networks and/or their individual members capacities straightened (albeit less often than the members and sometimes difficult to distinguish), have been measured, as part of individual evaluations and monitoring between the capacity builder and their client. These have been positive to date, also supported by evaluations as part of the MoU. It is also very difficult to attribute or link capacity building advice directly to outcomes, impacts and results. Partly as a capacity builder is often not the only adviser (evidenced by the need for the MoU) and partly due to autonomous changes and other influences in the networks. We might have been spending more resources and achieving less and vice versa.

Working with networks is not always as *efficient* as presumed. Often network members have a wide variation in capacities, knowledge and skills levels, meaning efforts may be wasted or duplicated in a bid to find a common level, limiting the benefits of being able to impact a number of individual organisations at once. Support such as training courses can also only benefit other network members who have not attended if it is “transmitted”. However, the common goals and needs in networks mean that, given an appropriate methodology and bearing variations and diversity in mind, working with networks can be a more effective use of resources and have potentially larger geographic and beneficiary impacts, than working with one individual organisation.

Capacity building of networks also does have a potential to be more effective than with an individual. Dependent upon the choice of a network and agreement on capacity building services, experiences show that definite effects and results can be seen; lobbying becomes a reality in networks where previously it

was limited to words in a mission statement, events are organised, regulations created and members do share information. For support agencies and networks alike, working together was – and is - a learning process, requiring the development of specific approaches and tools. This paper itself is evidence of the process of “analyse - act – assess” process!

8.3 What is the added value of networking?

Highlands networks are arguably also able to add value, see Figure 17, taking up initiatives that individual CSOs could not, creating strength by numbers and creating a voice that otherwise may not have been heard. The added value of networking can therefore be seen from two angles:

Added value for beneficiaries & society A majority of networks’ activities would arguably not have been initiated by individual organisations, due to lack of interest, credibility or capacity, or simply because the idea would not have arisen. Joint initiatives have often ensured coherence and a higher quality of results; the value of activities is therefore increased and benefits are assumed as more available to society in poverty alleviation and development. Examples of such achievements are the Civil Society Open Day organised by NWADO, as a credible network, who was in the best position to propose and carry this activity, the Media and Governance Café and the Platform on 2007 Twin Elections.

Added value for members: a CSO becomes a member of a network expecting that this networking effort will give more value to its own organisation and activities. Therefore, the networking effort of the member and its contribution to it, are in a cost-benefit balance with the increased “value” of the member organisation, mainly in terms of quality of the service (activity), in terms of capacity (knowledge and information available within the organisation) but also in terms of visibility and credibility (a well known credible network spreads its aura on its members). Above all, the negotiation power of the network is exponential, having a better chance to achieve objectives together than separately, by joining resources, ideas and energy.

Examples from all networks include access to training and information: where some CSOs have benefited from access to training (e.g. training events organized under the MoU) or benefit from knowledge and information dissemination (e.g. funding opportunities) purely because they were members of NWADO. This helps increase the quality of the services provided by the organisation or its own management (= value). The CSO COMINSUD is member of at least eight networks; where in most it plays an active role. This effort and contribution to networking enables COMINSUD to be a credible, visible and appreciated CSO in Cameroon; indicated by their collaboration with organisations and networks at the national level and by donor organisations, believing that the CSO is open to share knowledge and experience acquired.

<p>Figure 17. Definition of Added Value</p> <p>This concept is an economic term meaning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ An increase in value acquired by materials, components, or other commodities (including labour for example) as a result of any input, whether processing, assembling, handling, distributing, or any other marketing activity. ▪ The value that is added to a product or a service as a result of a particular process ▪ The increase in worth of a product or service as a result of a particular activity - in the context of marketing, the activity might be packaging or branding ▪ The increased worth of a organisation's offering as a result of marketing; factors which generate the additional value are features, quality, customer perception (or image) and exclusiveness. <p>A proposed definition of what added value means in terms of networking is: <i>The value (weight, power, quality) added to member-organisations and/or to their individual or joint services as a result of networking.</i></p>

Annexes

A. Abbreviations

AfDB	African Development Bank
CATTU	Cameroon Teachers Trade Union
CSO	Civil society organisation
CAVOD	Cameroon Associations of Voluntary Organisations for Development
CBO	Community Based Organisations
CIG	Common Initiative Group
CIPCRE	Cercle International Pour La Promotion de la Création
CHRAPA	Centre for Human Rights and Peace Advocacy
COMINSUD	Community Initiative for Sustainable Development
CTRV	Cameroon Radio & Television, state owned media
DED	German Development Service (Deutscher Entwicklungsdienst)
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
FCFA	<i>Franc Communauté Française d'Afrique</i> / French Central African Community Franc, currency of Cameroon with fixed exchange rate 655.957 FCFA = 1 Euro
FGF	Forest Governance Facility –SNV/UK Government financed 3 year programme
FORUDEF	Food and Rural Development Foundation
FOWIC	Forum for Women's Information and Coordination
FMI	Forest Management Institute
GP-DERUDEP	Grassfields Participatory Rural Development Project in NW
GTZ	German Technical Cooperation
HELVETAS	Swiss Association for Technical Assistance
HIPC	Heavily Indebted Poor Country Initiative
HIV/AIDS	Acquired immune deficiency syndrome / Human immunodeficiency virus
IAIA	International Association for impact Assessment
IDOS	Institutional Development Organisational Strengthening
IOM	Integrated Organisational Model
IRAD	Government Institutes for Research in Agriculture
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
MBOSCUDA	Mbororo Cultural and Development Association
MIDENO	Mission de développement de la province du Nord Ouest / North West Development Authority
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NESA	Network for Sustainable Agriculture
NIACC	National Independent Anti-Corruption Coalition
NOWECA	North West Crafts Association
NOWEFOR	North West Farmers Organisation
NOWEFMA	North West Female Mayors Association
NW	North West Province
NWCA	North West Cooperative Association
NWADO	North West Association of Development Organisations
OSIWA	Open Society Initiative for West Africa, International CSO
PCPA	Multi Actors Concerted Programme Cameroon
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper of Cameroon
RUMPI	Participatory Rural Development Project in SW
SAILD	Service d'Appui aux Initiatives Locales de Développement
SIRDEP	Society for Initiatives for Rural Development & Environmental Protection
SNV	Netherlands Development Organisation
SOWEDA	South West Development Authority
SW	South West Province
SWECSON	South West Civil Society Network
SOWEFCU	South West Farmers Cooperative Union
VSO	Voluntary Service Overseas
WHINCONET	Western Highlands Nature Conservation Network
UCCC-NW	United Councils and Cities of Cameroon – North West
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNOWHURO	Union of North West Human Rights Organisations

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