

Report on learning visit to Cameroun 25/11 – 6/12 2012

Reflections from Cameroun - on potentials and challenges in rights-based advocacy

1. Background

In order to understand the context that CISU members are working in, CISU attempts to build up context specific knowledge, relating this to an area of interest for members in Denmark, their partners in the Global South and CISU.

To qualify this works CISU advisors conduct learning visits every year. The visits feed into the ongoing adjustment and development of trainings and advisory services.

A learning visit is different from a monitoring visit, because it focuses on a specific thematic subject instead of on a specific project or partner.

2. Objective

The objective of the learning visit is to **explore challenges and potentials in capacity building interventions in relation to rights-based advocacy work.**

3. Thematic issues for the visit

More specifically the objective for the trip has a focus on if, and how - the Rights-based Approach (RBA) to advocacy work is part of the capacity building.

In other words:

- Exploring existing advocacy approaches to - and experiences in relation to capacity building activities at target group - and organizational level.
- Exploring if - and how strategies reflecting RBA are included in the capacity building work.
- Exploring in which way working with capacity building (including RBA) in relation to advocacy work influences partnership relations (with Danish partners).

The following projects were visited:

Partner **Emergence** in Cameroon (Foundation for Education and Development) partnering with **Baha'i Samfundet** in Denmark.

Title: **Preparation for Social Action – Promoting Community Well-being**

The projects objectives: By July 2014 the following immediate objectives:

1. The capacity in 16 communities is enhanced by raising the number of residing Promoters of Community Well-being by at least 150 of whom at least 38 are female (25%)
2. Advocacy endeavors of the PSA groups and Emergence are developed, with a particular focus on collaboration with and capacity development of the GICs in at least 10 communities.

Partner **WCIC** (Women's Counseling and Information Centre) in Cameroon partnering with **RAW** (Rights for All women) in Denmark

Title: **Advocating Women's Rights in Cameroun.**

The project objectives: By December 31st 2015 the following immediate objectives:

1. To instigate (foranledige) the abolishment or change of gender biased legislation (by the middle of 2013) and hereafter support implementation of the change in practice in collaboration with key network partners within the provinces of Cameroon.
2. To provide counselling and representation in court for poor and marginalized women and increase public knowledge on the issue of women's rights. A minimum of 1042 (Project Fund 552, others 490) women will be addressed directly.
3. To secure WCICs sustainability through capacity building.

Short summary of the Partners and Projects visited:

The two visited CSOs and interventions were very different in terms of geographical and cultural setting. The CSO **Emergence** is implementing in remote Eastern part of the country (close to the border of the Republic of Central Africa) and **WCIC** in Doula, the second largest city by the coast of Cameroon. This is also reflected in the different approaches, methods and implementation of activities in relation to capacity building and the advocacy work. However, certain similarities were noticed, specifically in relation to the challenges in the capacity - and sustainability at organizational level.

The partner of Baha'i DK/**Emergence** takes its point of departure in a concept developed by Fundaec, a rural university and development organization in Columbia. This concept is called the PSA (Preparation for Social Action) program and is currently being implemented in 11 countries around the world and the learning is being systematized by the office of social and economic development at the Bahai' World Centre in Israel.

The PSA is a capacity building program with the goal of developing the capacity of rural populations to be in charge of their own social, intellectual, spiritual and economic development. The program contains a broad spectrum of fields such as biology, physics, mathematics, accounting, history, chemistry, agronomy and the PSA groups consisting of 10 to 20 persons and they graduate after 30 months.

WCIC (Women's Counseling and Information Centre) takes its point of departure in Doula, the second largest city of Cameroun.

The partnership has been running for around 6 years and this is the third phase out of four planned ones.

During the last 5-6 years WCIC has established itself as a considerable factor in and around Doula when it comes to counseling and legal aid to poor women. The main forces behind the organization are professional lawyers which constitute a great advantage when it comes to influencing the judicial agenda in relation to poor women's rights.

WCIC is now focusing on advocacy efforts in pushing forward changing a gender discriminating legislation.

WCIC is characterized by transforming from a loose ad hoc organization to a more formal organization with a board consisting of 7 members, paid staff and voluntary activity groups. The application for this 3.phase indicates that WCIC develop a long term strategy for the consolidation of WCIC as an independent and sustainable organization.

4. Observations and findings on thematic issues

Emergence

The potential of creating even stronger linkages between a Rights-based Approach and the PSA Program

- As noticed by the Emergence staff and board-members themselves during the introduction and discussion of Rights-based approach (RBA) in head-office (HO)¹, the **PSA program** itself is much in line with the RBA. Mainly due to the empowerment approach in the PSA program in terms of the strong focus on capacity building of the most vulnerable communities in rural Eastern areas.

¹ The introduction and discussion of RBA in HO was focusing on the interaction between rights-holder (RH) and duty-bearer (DB) in capacity building activities - and that changes should take place for both RH and DB. For RH in terms of empowerment and inclusion and for DB in terms of strengthening accountability, interest and responsiveness to most vulnerable peoples needs.

- Moreover the formation of 'Promoteurs' in the PSA program is targeted towards ensuring access for all to education, health and information and focusing on the interaction between - and inclusion of all regardless gender, religious or tribal origin. The PSA concept like the RBA builds on developing human resources in order for people to take ownership of their own development.
- RBA principles such as participation, empowerment, and inclusion are all elements of improving the capabilities of local communities in the PSA Program.
- During debriefing and discussions it became obvious that the 'translation' of the PSA concept to the national context of Cameroon (including analysis of the specific, local context in which it is going to be implemented in) could be of highly relevance.

The challenge of including various local structures, the so-called duty-bearers

- There is a huge potential for building on the capacity gained from the PSA Program and provide good inputs for local development efforts through various local structures.
- However, through my participation in visits to local communities in the East; in PSA classes, two 'Vision-meetings' with tutors/members, community leaders and field-staff, and the following discussions with leadership and staff, it became clear that there are certain potentials and challenges in relation to sustainability of the project. Firstly, it is considered most useful to focusing more on the inclusion i.e. identification, assessment and capacity needs of relevant duty-bearers (DB). Some confusion and lack of knowledge with regard to the role and task of various official Governmental and local structures was observed especially during the two 'Vision meetings'. Who is responsible for what? How to avoid overlap and competitiveness among local structures? How to ensure more collaboration in relation to commonly agreed issues? It appeared that not only the GIC's (see objective 3) are relevant as a DB, but also the Committee de Groupement, the Committee de Concertation and the Committee de Developpement are of great importance both in relation to the capacity development to do advocacy work as well as to the sustainability of the interventions.

- The need for a more in depth analysis of the various local structures/Duty-bearers could be relevant and useful for the implementation of the last phase of the project. Also in order to avoid the competitiveness and/or overlap amongst these.

The challenge of mobilizing PSA Program participants and in particular women

- As acknowledged by Emergence in discussions during the stay, there is a challenge in relation to mobilising participants for the PSA groups. In particular to mobilize the targeted 25% of women in rural areas. I was informed that most women are illiterate (80% girls in the area are not attending school) and according to the staff, they find the PSA program a bit abstract. In addition women often had to bring the children to the PSA classes and thus finding it hard to concentrate and take actively part in the classes.
- In order to make more women participating in the PSA Program, a campaign, like the one the 'Committee de Groupement' was initiating, in order to make the girls attending school, could be initiated in collaboration with Emergence.
- Before starting up PSA classes, Emergence could consider developing strategies for where, how and who to mobilise local PSA groups including analysing who is the target-group (most vulnerable women and men) and how to address their needs. In other words, developing a strategy based on the analysis of the specific, local political, economical and cultural context and on the basis of an assessment of identified needs and strategic interests of men/women of all ages.

The need for capacity building of Emergence as an independent Civil Society Organisation

- Discussion during the stay arose around the theme: How to strengthen Emergence as a strong and independent CSO in future? How to ensure legitimacy, transparency and accountability of Emergence in future? How to fully separate Emergence as a CSO focusing on development from the Baha'i Society - also in order to avoid accusations of using activities to mobilising members to Baha'i Society?

- More emphasis on formulating strategies for the sustainability of Emergence could be of relevance. For example by ensuring a broader membership base by opening up Emergence towards the inclusion of PSA participants or tutors in the organisation as members.
- Leadership and staff are very committed. The areas of concern expressed during the field visit, was the need for more internal sharing of knowledge and experience from the field-work. The idea of, for example conducting regular team-meetings and perform regular field-visits by HO in order to systematically monitor and learn from good and bad experiences and results came up.
- In order to making the PSA program sustainable in the long run, the need for methods and tools for documenting results and change processes was identified. For example to perform evaluations after each PSA classes and to follow up on a regular basis if and how the 'Promoteurs' have transferred the knowledge gained from the classes into local social action.
- The need for developing internal governance structures of the organisation seemed to be another challenge discussed during the debriefing with leadership. For example to develop a senior-management team in order to take over leadership, when and if needed, but also more generally to develop internal procedures ensuring a clear distinction between board, daily leadership and staff/volunteers. The role of board in Emergence in relation to leadership development could be further developed.
- Do the experiences and challenges faced by Emergence affect the partnership and/or the development of Baha'i Denmark?
RBA hasn't explicitly been discussed in the partnership, but during debriefing and discussion with a representative from Baha'i Denmark, it was argued that Baha'i as a Danish CSO most probably could benefit from linking the RBA to the PSA approach in future interventions in the partnership and projects with Emergence.

Main **observations** and **reflections** in relations to **WCIC** (Women's Counseling and Information Centre) in Cameroon partnering with **RAW** (Rights for All women) in Denmark

The visit to WCIC was much influenced by the planning and implementation of a large public seminar² concerning the discriminating legislation during a campaign called "16 days of activism". **The theme for the campaign was: The sale of matrimonial home without the consent of the other spouse: A multidimensional violence.** Parliamentarians as well as other authority figures, such as judges, political and religious leaders, law professors etc. were participating as well as Women associations and NGOs from all over Cameroun. A national pop diva sympathising with the cause as an additional popular attraction, made the seminar a huge success. Over 500 people from all over Cameroun attended the seminar and several television and radio channels covered the event.

The seminar brought on suggestions from a wide range of stakeholders that WCIC will integrate into their efforts, in the process of engaging the network they have established. The end goal is getting the proposal of legislative change brought before parliament during mid 2013.

Potentials and challenges in using the CEDAW Convention as a strategic platform for Women's Rights

- From a WCIC perspective, the CEDAW Convention is a good strategic platform for planning and implementing advocacy work, but WCIC expressed that it can be challenging to 'translate' the articles into concrete action and making them relevant for poor women in the villages. Lots of capacity building for the poor women and other stakeholders is needed in regions and districts, which is considered very demanding for WCIC in terms of time and resources.
- The CEDAW has more concretely been used as a platform for WCIC in order to change the Cameroon civil code especially article 1421, which stipulates that a husband can dispose, sell and reign over joint property without the wife's

² The seminar was not originally planned for as an activity in relation to the project, but came up as a relevant ad hoc advocacy intervention and as an alternative to inviting parliamentarians for a lunch in order to put pressure on them for changing the law.

consent or knowledge and which WCIC during their counselling services has found most damaging to poor women of the society. It will be interesting, in the Final Report, to learn from the experiences in the advocacy intervention, when focusing on one specific element or theme of CEDAW in the Cameroun context namely: The sale of matrimonial home without the consent of the other spouse: A multidimensional violence.

- WCIC is aware of how gender discriminating laws affect poor women. Lots of focus and resources have been on taking up cases at court and provide counselling services. Now focus is more on developing advocacy strategies and hereby gaining public support for the change of the law. But it was also acknowledged that it is a challenge to balance the work of WCIC in future; between the obvious need of providing services for poor women (counselling and taking cases to Court), and doing advocacy in order to put pressure on duty-bearers for legal changes and ensure public support and at the same time build up the capacity of WCIC as a strong sustainable CSO. Or as one of the staff members in WCIC put it: how to balance the judicial work with a stronger focus on the social issues of poor women's lives?

How to ensure legitimacy - and how to do networking?

- WCIC leadership raised the issue of legitimacy as a precondition for establishing confidence amongst duty-bearers. The fact that so many women and men (Rights-holders as well as Duty-bearers) attended the seminar was an important success. However the question is how to follow up and thereby maintain and develop the support among CSO's, not only in and around Doula, but also more broadly in all of the 10 regions. As a major advocacy organisation for women's rights they expressed that they are very vulnerable for being accused of only representing themselves and being looked upon as small elite without any anchoring in the broader society of Cameroon. The question remains to be answered: how to further establish and improve the legitimacy of WCIC in future?

- As part of creating legitimacy, networking is considered highly relevant by WCIC.

Establishing a network is a vital part of doing effective advocacy work. But as noticed by RAW during the debriefing in DK: Be only the network you can take care of and make sure that participants in the network are balancing between giving and taking.

Some considerations and choices are to be made continuously during the implementation and process of the time consuming and hard work of networking on specific advocacy issues (but also rewarding when successfully implemented!).

The analysis of the specific economic, political and cultural context should be raised by relevant stakeholders in- and outside WCIC. What is the purpose of the network and who should be participating (both Rights-holders and Duty-bearers)? Is the purpose still to build up a regional structure in the 10 regions? Or is it, as some participants suggested during the seminar: Why not start up with the mobilisation of the 2000-3000 women's associations in and around the Doula region? What are the **prioritized** target and success criteria of the network? How to ensure good strategic communication between participants of the network? And how and who should govern the network? Etc.

How to further develop the partnership? How to develop the capacity of both WCIC and RAW and ensuring 'mutual contributions' of both partners?

- During debriefing in Cameroon and upon return in Denmark with RAW, the possibility of applying for a **Partnership intervention** was discussed. The project is now running into its fourth phase and in order to ensure sustainability of the interventions as well as of WCIC and the partnership, it seems to be the right time, that both partners (and other involved stakeholders) sit down and brainstorm and discuss the lessons learned so far and the possible (exit) strategies in relation to the continuation of the processes and results of the intervention.
- The question in the coming years is to match the growing importance and ambitions/work- burden of WCIC (as well as of RAW) with the available

resources including the internal governance structures. In other words, the role and function of leadership, staff and volunteers needs to be re-assessed and maybe even a personnel policy needs to be put in place, especially if more donors are being appointed.

- The **role and functioning of the newly established board** was shortly discussed during the stay. How can the board fulfil its political role in WCIC for example in developing **strategies for advocacy work** in WCIC i.e. creating linkages to both the political level and mobilizing at grass root level? How can the board develop the frame work and overall **strategies for realistic fundraising?**
- Conclusion: There is a strong sense among both partners of a strong and long lasting partnership between RAW and WCIC of developing 'as twins' (as expressed by WCIC). A mutual inter-dependency has taken place during the last 6 years of implementation of a highly demanding project focusing on advocacy work. Now it seems to be the time to assess the partnership process and results in order to ensure the right match between the vision, mission and goal of the partnership and the available resources in future.

Recommendations to CISU

- In order to stimulate the Danish CSO's and their partners to apply a Rights-Based Approach to development in future, it could be relevant to design trainings and advisory services that build on the existing approaches and practices from the partnership including results and processes from already implemented interventions. In other words develop a much more practice-based approach to Rights-Based Advocacy work.
- The capacity building of Danish CSO's should in general include a stronger focus on context relevant information with regard to general as well as specific issues in relation to the Human Rights situation of any country.
- The 'Country Profiles' at CISU's homepage could be further developed in that direction, so that North as well as South CSO can withdraw from Human Rights relevant information.

- The collaboration with capacity building networks and Human Rights organizations in Denmark and in Global south could ensure the integration of specific Human Rights issues in any CS intervention where relevant and needed.

4. Outputs and Dissemination

The experiences from this visit will be shared with:

- To the organisations involved in Denmark as well as in Cameroun through the dissemination of this report

To CISU members through:

- Posting of the report on the CISU webpage
- Incorporating findings into trainings and advisory services where possible to CISU colleagues through presentations of findings

