

Project Completion Assessment

CSO Name: Assembly of Youths for a Sustainable Environment and Development (ASYOUSED)

Project Titles	Grant Amounts	Dates of Implementation
Improving Communication between the Buea Municipal Council and the Population	\$14,981	July 9, 2010-February 28, 2011
Improving Transparency in Project Identification Process and Project Realization Cycle in the Tiko and Buea Municipal Councils	\$35,000	April 1, 2011-January 31, 2012

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Overview

“A lesson learned from the participatory process of the ASYOUSED project was the need to educate people about their rights under decentralization.” Namanga Joseph, Tiko Councilor and village chief

ASYOUSED’s request for PTF funding responded to a national initiative, begun in 2006, to reduce corruption among high-level government officials. Municipal Councils, the key administrative entities under Cameroon’s decentralization policy, represent the link between government and local constituencies. Their mission is to support local projects that improve the quality of life among constituents (communities). Yet, the history of Council selection of local projects is laced with corruption; budget deliberations have relied on a closed process and favored personal rather than public interest.



ASYOUSED Leader Asah Azefer, and his Deputy Beltus Atunsiri

The key objective of the two ASYOUSED projects was to reduce corruption during the identification and selection process of projects to be included in municipal council budgets. Moving away from the traditional top-down approach, the projects relied on a participatory project management model, emphasizing increased communication between relevant project stakeholders, especially Council administrative staff, Councilors and the local population. The adopted participatory methodology emphasized awarenessraising on issues related to

project identification and selection, citizen mobilization throughout the project process, and tracking of project progress by the key stakeholders. This approach contributed greatly to meeting project objectives, as reflected in the inclusion of a number of community-identified projects on the 2011 Buea Council budget (first project) and in the 2012 Tiko Council budget (second project), and active involvement of beneficiary communities and municipal councilors in the realization of these projects. The approach is seen as a key tool in facilitating the decentralization process in Cameroon by not only giving a voice to the local population, but also strengthening the role of municipal Councilors to work with their constituencies. It could serve as a model to other Councils within Cameroon and countries that wish to increase transparency in the decentralization process.

This Project Completion Assessment covers the two PTF projects with ASYOUSED, since both have the same objectives and use a similar methodology. In fact, the projects should be seen as a continuum since the second project includes follow-up activities on the first project in the municipal Council of Buea and replicates the experience of the first project in the Council of Tiko.

Approach and Project Design

“Communities were happy to participate in defining their needs and in the decision-making process.” Enoh Ferdinand, Tiko Councilor

It was “enriching to work with communities; in the past, the Mayor made all the decisions.” Mr. Ekema Monono, Buea Councilor

“ASYOUSED’s approach was timely and useful at budget time. It was all worthwhile since it provides a database of community needs and thus leads to less conflict of interests in decision-making”

Ms. Nganchi Pamela Nyemile, Secretary General of Tiko Council

The methodology used by ASYOUSED was based on a participatory decision-making model with the members of both Buea and Tiko Councils, who, in turn, used the model with their respective constituencies. This approach gave a voice to local communities to make their concerns and priorities known to the Municipal Councils, and empowered Council members to present and advocate for the priority projects selected by their constituencies during budget deliberations in each Council. To arrive at this bottom-up approach of priority setting, both projects focused on building the capacity of administrative Council staff, Councilors, and representatives of community-based groups. Key topics of the workshops organized by ASYOUSED were especially intended to strengthen participatory methods,



Meeting inside the Community Building...



...and being part of the overflow outside

transparency in public contract management, and monitoring of project implementation.

ASYOUSED designed a project that clearly addresses a spiny issue at the local level and adopted a bottom-top approach that could foster long-term impact. Prior to the first project, ASYOUSED staff members spent many months patiently waiting for the Mayor of Buea to grant them an audience. Once the Mayor saw that they were serious in their perseverance, he listened and accepted their proposal for a participatory, community-driven approach for the investment of decentralized funds. In fact, he participated in ASYOUSED's workshop and has become a champion for extending the participatory process in project identification to all other Councils in Cameroon's South West Region.

The M&E indicators of the projects were precise and easily measurable. They included: the percentage of councilors knowledgeable of the project identification process; the percentage of councilors able to carry out the participatory process with their constituents; the percentage of population informed and involved in the identification procedure; and the percentage of projects identified by the communities that were included in the Council budget.

The relevance and design of the project can each be rated as 4.5.

Project Implementation

***"The community development committee was present in the village daily."** Mr. Ekema Monono, Buea Councilor*

***"There was a real follow-up during project realization with councilors by ASYOUSED."** Ms. Nganchi Pamela Nyemile, Secretary General of Tiko Council*

The activities of the first project in the Council of Buea included:

- A workshop on the participatory project identification process, resulting in the training of 53 participants: 38 councilors, 10 council administrative staff, and 5 representatives of community-based organizations; an output of the workshop was the elaboration/adoption of a communication plan to mobilize the population for project identification;
- Monitoring and evaluation of community mobilization for the identification of projects for the 2011 Buea Council budget, which was critical in keeping Council constituencies informed on progress during the budgetary process.

Building on the positive experience of the first project, ASYOUSED launched the second project with the aim of establishing an external tracking system for the realization of the 21 projects included in the 2011 budget of Buea, and of introducing the participatory model in the Tiko Council for the elaboration of its 2012 budget. Project activities for the Tiko Council were identical to those mentioned above for the Buea Council, namely:

- A workshop with 39 councilors, 13 council administrative staff, and 48 CSO, covering 8 topics related to project identification. It is worthwhile mentioning that a councilor of the Buea Council was a resource person, not only sharing the experience of the first project, but also involved in the workshop and during the execution of the Tiko project;
- M&E of community mobilization in 40 constituencies of the Tiko Council, including the short-listing of projects and the deliberations and debates during the project adoption process of the 2012 budget;

- The elaboration of a communication plan for community mobilization to be used by Tiko Council to identify project needs in a participatory manner for the 2012 budget.

For the tracking system of community-based projects in Buea, ASYOUSSED carried out a workshop on public contract management and project follow-up for 54 participants (similar in composition to the previous Buea workshop). Tracking of council projects was done at the community level throughout project implementation from the call for bids through project realization by Buea councilors, with regular support from ASYOUSSED.



Construction of the community bridge in Buea, selected as a priority project in agreement with the Council and Communities

The result of project activities in Buea was that the 2011 Buea budget included 9 community-identified projects, out of a total of 21 community projects. Due to a large drop in Council revenue (caused by a fall in funds transferred by the Central government), however, the Council was able to complete only 6 of the community-identified projects, representing 75% of the total projects identified through the participatory process. Although this result is slightly below the 80% target mentioned in the project's logframe, it

is a quite favorable result as compared to the past when the Mayor made all the decision on the projects to be financed by the Council. It is safe to say that the tracking system of Council actions, closely monitored by councilors and ASYOUSSED deserves a lot of credit for the positive results.



The completed bridge allows cars to pass from one side of the village to the other side

The activities of the Tiko project were carried out as planned and met the key project objective, namely to increase transparency during the identification stage of projects to be included in Tiko budget. The project partially met its intended outputs (35 out of 40 constituencies actually carried out mobilization activities). Yet, all 35 constituencies identified and proposed

projects for the 2012 budget to the Tiko Council. Of the 23 community-proposed projects, 8 were included in the 2012 Tiko Council budget (mainly drainage, culvert construction, and road maintenance).

Project funds were spent as agreed, with a slight under-run in the budget. The efficiency and effectiveness of the two projects can be rated as 4.

Outcomes, Impact & Sustainability

“The identification exercise was worthwhile and has led to a database of community needs for future; helpful in reducing conflicts of interest.” Ms. Nganchi Pamela Nyemile, Secretary General of Tiko Council

“Unlike the past, project proposals accepted by the Council ended up being cheaper partly due to labor contribution of population and strong involvement of Council technician.” Mr. Ekema Monono, Bouea Councilor



Meeting with Ms. Pamela Nyemile, Secretary General of Tiko Council

As mentioned above, the 33 Municipal Councils in the Southwest Region of Cameroon represent the basic development structures to manage development financing. These structures are generally viewed as corrupt. By applying a practical, participatory approach to the use of municipal funds, the two PTF projects have shown that there is a way to curb corruption and increase transparency.

The systematic process of community mobilization and tracking of progress (participatory model) created a check and balance mentality between Council administrative staff and constituents. The communication plan provided a channel for

exchange of information thus increasing transparency and promoted a spirit of collaboration between councilors and administrative staff.

These elements formed a good basis to follow-up on the realization of the 2012 Tiko Council budget, as reflected in the following actions after the completion of the PTF project:

- Councilors have consulted with and sought technical assistance/consultation from ASYOUSED project staff;
- Tiko Council administrators showed readiness to collaborate in external tracking system for project realization in 2012;
- The Tiko Council adopted the participatory process for project identification for future years (a letter was sent to councilors to mobilize their constituencies);

Following the positive experience of both projects, the Mayor of Buea and a number of councilors have expressed the need to continue the approach in the Buea and Tiko Councils for future budget years. They are strongly advocating the extension of the same approach to other Councils of surrounding communities (the Muyuka Council has already requested support). This could easily become a reality, as the Mayor of Buea is the leader of Mayors in 33 Municipal Councils of the South West Region of Cameroon.

The outcome and impact of the two projects can be rated as 4, while their sustainability would receive a score of 3.5, given ASYOUSSED's limited budget and staff.

Lessons learned

“Our experience with the PTF projects highlighted two key lessons in the fight against corruption: focus on collaboration, not antagonism; and target systems, not individuals.” Mr. Asah Azefor, Director of ASYOUSSED

“There is a need to strengthen the process of preparing proposals for councilors. ASYOUSSED should continue backing Councils during post-implementation of projects.” Bouea Councilor

“ASYOUSSED should continue its support, but needs means.” Secretary General of Tiko Council

The participatory model is fundamental to sustainability and a sound method to strengthen citizen engagement in a decentralized system. It is, however, a time-consuming exercise, requiring extensive follow-up and frequent consultation with relevant stakeholders. Keeping this in mind, it would be advisable that, in the near future, ASYOUSSED (with its limited human and financial resources) try to deepen the experiences it has undertaken in the two Councils by assisting them through another budgetary cycle, rather than attempting at this time to extend the participatory exercise to other Councils. This would allow ASYOUSSED to take into account lessons learned by refining its methodology (for example in extending capacity building activities to village chiefs during the project identification process and project realization), capitalizing on community “champions” by involving them further in training and promotional activities, setting up a simple and measurable M&E system for the two Councils, and continuing to build relationships with the Councils and administrative staff. Such a strategy would contribute to greater sustainability for this type of project.



The Mayor of Bouea and Asah Azefor of ASYOUSSED speak at a community meeting

Under the second PTF project, ASYOUSSED began putting in place a tracking system of the implementation process of the community-identified projects approved by the Bouea Council. ASYOUSSED recognizes that strengthening and maintaining a sound database is crucial not only to monitor progress of its interventions, but also to assess impact in combatting corrupt practices. Such a database would provide ASYOUSSED with a track record of its achievements and experiences and thus serve as a good calling card in its search for funding and technical assistance. This is an area for which ASYOUSSED requires (and would appreciate) advice and assistance (discussions have already begun on this, as well as on other capacity building activities (such as training on organizational strengthening), with the German Development Cooperation (GIZ) under its Decentralization Program and with the Netherlands Development Organization (SNV) under its capacity building program.

It should be noted that, as part of its ICT system, ASYOUSSED has already put in place a database of contacts of all stakeholders involved in the two PTF projects. The database includes a list of mobile

phone numbers, subdivided by geographical location. The database allows ASYUSED to keep communities and Councils informed of project progress and new developments by means of text messages. This initiative of keeping in contact with key stakeholders emphasizes the rationale of the participatory process introduced by the two PTF projects and confirms/assures communities that the process is not a one-time exercise, but a continuous one.

The staff of ASYUSED works under quite difficult circumstances – basic office space, no regular means of transport, limited Internet access, irregular funding sources, and a tough milieu to speak about corruption. Yet, despite these circumstances, ASYUSED has obtained positive results, without antagonizing “interested parties”, and has demonstrated the relevance and importance of the participatory process during municipal project identification and implementation stages. Moreover, the experience of the two projects complements and supports the decentralization policy that many developing countries are currently undertaking. For these reasons, the replicability of the projects is rated as 4.5.



The road to development is not always easy... ASYUSED team on a project-monitoring visit

Overall Score Calculation

Category	Raw Score	Weighted Score
Approach and project design	4.5	0.675
Project implementation	4.0	0.800
Outcome, impact and sustainability	4.0	1.800
Replicability	4.5	0.900
Overall score		4.175

Recommendations for PTF

The PCA team recommends the following actions for PTF:

- Disseminate the ASYOUSSED experience more widely amongst PTF Advisers and feature the ASYOUSSED report on the PTF external website
- Publish a series of blog posts on the champions that were instrumental in achieving the high quality of the project (ASYOUSSED staff, Mayor of Buea, Buea Councilor, Tiko Council Secretary General, PTF Adviser)
- Use the ASYOUSSED experience as a case study in Pierre Landell-Mills' upcoming book
- Search for interested donors to provide funding to extend the activity to other Councils in Cameroon, including international agencies that already expressed an interest in supporting ASYOUSSED (such as GIZ and SNV)
- Establish a small ASYOUSSED support group composed of two or three PTF Advisers who would continue to provide technical advice to ASYOUSSED (Strengthen tracking system, increase operational capacity, develop a model of additional steps and activities needed to go from a small case in two Councils to larger-scale and policy-level replication of the approach piloted by ASYOUSSED)
- Compare the ASYOUSSED case with similar initiatives in Kenya, Ghana, Uganda and relevant experiences outside Africa, arrange exchanges between the respective project leaders, extract policy implications and undertake steps to elevate the approaches at a policy level.