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West Africa Civil Society Institute

# CIVIL SOCIETY
## SUSTAINABILITY AND
## LOCAL CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

### A Case Study in Cameroon

By Eric Ndeh Mboumien Ngang

## About the Author

Eric Ndeh Mboumien Ngang is a development practitioner with a unique mix of experience spanning social, economic and environmental impact assessment, networking, partnership building, organisational development, project life cycle management, project monitoring, evaluation and reporting. He has demonstrated analytical and strategic ability to utilise a consultative approach at all levels to effectively analyse and show programme requirements as well as building and maintaining relationships between diverse organisations and stakeholders. In addition, Eric uses his skills to capitalise on experiences and best practices through development and publication of research findings.

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# Civil Society Sustainability and Local Capacity Development:
## A Case Study in Cameroon

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# Introduction

Capacity development has been recognised as a fundamental component of development in the 21st Century. One conclusion from several major events of the last decade, like the Commission for Africa, the Millennium Review, the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the Gleneagles Summit, is that capacity development is a critical issue for both donors and partner countries (OECD-DAC, 2006: 3; Commission for Africa, 2005; World Bank and International Monetary Fund, 2004). However, many scholars and practitioners are unanimous in their assertion that the concept of capacity development, including its systems and approaches are not well defined (Ogunsola, 2011; Rugumamu, 2011:113; Collen, 2009:2; Theisohn and Land, 2009: 12).

This is demonstrated by the significant efforts made over the past three decades by different stakeholders, to define and improve on the understanding of these concepts while finding strategies to achieve successful and sustainable capacity development goals at global, national and community levels. Examples include conferences on technical cooperation, sponsored by institutions such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the UNDP and the World Bank, which have emphasised the need for more capacity development in different development discourses (OECD/DAC 2007; UNDP 2001a; World Bank 1998). In line with this, on-going discussions to arrive at a post-2015 global development agenda have increasingly indicated that adequately developed country capacity has been the missing factor in current efforts to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

After a review of over 40 years of development experience by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD, the latter posits that donors and partner countries alike still view capacity development mainly as a technical process. Through this process, knowledge is transferred from institutions in the North to those in the South, side-lining indigenous and home-grown capacity building processes. This notion originated from an early development like the Marshall Plan (the post-war European Aid Programme), which presents a simplistic and positive picture of how capacity development worked at that time (OECD, 2007; OECD-DAC; 2006: 7; Malloch 2002: vii-ix). According to the plan, capacity development was as simple as transferring human capital and know-how from the United States of America to weary and post-war Western Europe and later some countries in the global South with corresponding propulsions in their economies and growth engines.

Critiques of this approach to capacity development have been quick to point out that donors have failed to recognise the critical importance of country ownership and leadership and have grossly underestimated the place of the broader political context within which capacity development takes place. In addition, they [critics] have challenged this North-South approach to capacity development on the grounds that the substantial funds deployed for the purpose over many decades have not produced concrete results in terms of sustainable capacity. For example, the chair of DAC, Richard Manning (2006: 3), emphasises the need to think systematically through the capacity development challenge and calls for a fundamental change in development practice. In his paper, he insists that capacity development should be regarded as an endogenous process that places beneficiaries at the centre of processes, enabling them to define the country level objectives and participate in monitoring outcomes.

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This view is supported by the 2005 Paris Declaration, which indicates a growing consensus that capacity development processes should be strongly led from within a country with donors playing a supportive role. Thus the last decade has witnessed a gradual shift in thinking and practice on capacity development with greater emphasis on the importance of local knowledge, institutions and social capital in the process of social and economic change in local contexts. Lin and Wang (2013: 12), in their background research paper submitted to the High Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, discuss the need for New Structural Economics (NSE, which strongly emphasises that each country, at any specific time, possesses given factor endowments consisting of natural resources, labour and capital (both human and physical). The authors posit that this represents the total available budget or capacity that a country can allocate towards its development.

This has been re-echoed by NEPAD's 2009 Capacity Development Strategic Framework, which calls for a paradigm shift in capacity development. It entails capitalizing on African resourcefulness and being able to use the endowments mentioned through locally generated approaches and systems. Although there is this shift in thinking with some endogenous capacity development actions happening on the ground, many actors in the sector still insist that the Northern development actors and donors should continue to focus on deploying external resources (human, material and financial) to develop the capacity of local organisations as a key to sustainable development (Gyoh, 2009). Cairns (2012), Senior Policy Adviser at Oxfam Great Britain asserts that although the deployment of significant external resources contributes to the development of the local capacity of civil society organisations (CSOs) and communities in the global south, they have always side-lined the activism and inherent capacity of these local actors.

The Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC, 2013) of the African Union defines these CSOs and community as comprising social groups, professional groups, NGOs, community-based organizations (CBOs), voluntary organizations, and cultural organizations, among other segments of women, youth, children, national diasporas and elements of the private sector such as market women's associations and the media organ groupings. Thus, it is incumbent on these development actors, especially those in sub Saharan Africa to harness and value their potentials to enhance capacity development, bring about meaningful social changes and to be able to face the challenges of the 21st century. A rich pool of inherent skills, competencies

and abilities, including those acquired over many years of collaboration with the local and international capacity development agencies, is available locally. It is observed that though this huge potential exists locally, local communities and their institutions have failed to harness and value it. Rather, they have continuously placed a premium on external capacity building resources, which are top-down, prescriptive and side-line local contextual realities.

It is apparent that capacity development needs are changing, thus calling for innovative ways to constantly update the knowledge and skills bases to enable local development actors to keep pace with new development exigencies. In this process, the CSOs and communities need to find opportunities to generate innovative approaches to capacity development. This would entail not only the acquisition of new capacities but also harnessing those already acquired and at the same time valuing their inherent skills and knowledge acquired from one generation to another, enabling them to cope with continuous changes in their context.

This need is more urgent today, as Northern organisations become less visible in the development sector in the global South. The local communities and CSOs are required to play a more active role in pooling local resources (knowledge, expertise, material and financial), developing and promoting innovations, discourses and programmes that contribute to bridge the capacity development gaps and rising challenges they faced (Ekiyor, 2008: 27; Toure, 2002: 6; UNEP, 2002:11). Once these Southern actors and communities play this role, it will be a contribution towards breaking the status-quo of dependency on external capacity development resource, reduction of amateurism in the civil society sector with the view to ensuring the sustainability of CSOs and increasing the development potential of the communities they serve. Discussions about civil society has spanned hundreds of years with philosophers, sociologists and social theorists having different views about the concept.

There has been much literature on the concept of civil society and it is currently a buzzword in international development discourse. However, little has been done to build and sustain local capacity development processes in Africa. The hypothesis for this paper is that the organic process of capacity development of CSOs in the global south will contribute to address this sustainability issue and CSOs should evolve towards harnessing and valuing home grown capacity development processes. Trial, continuous experimentation, sharing and documentation of local capacity development processes and learning approaches

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lead to its refinement and adoption. In this process, the premise is that bottom-up locally owned approaches to capacity development is a cornerstone to sustain capacity development of local organisations.

The first part of this paper looks at current discourses around capacity development and its place in the global development agenda. It posits that there is a need for a paradigm shift in thinking around capacity development, to move it from a top-down, donor-driven and prescriptive process to an endogenous community driven process. The second part calls on external development agencies and donors to challenge the current unfavourable environment that hampers local capacity development by supporting the communities and local CSOs to pool local resources, harness inherent skills, knowledge and potential and only solicit for external assistance when identified gaps cannot be bridged using capacity available locally. It then concludes by highlighting a practical and successful approach developed and used by the North West Association of Development Organisations (NWADO), an umbrella association of civil society organisations in the Anglophone Highlands of Cameroon, to harness and value local capacity for development, which is contributing to the sustainability of the participating member CSOs.

The NWADO initiative seeks to promote an open, accessible and transparent market for local capacity development. This geared towards reducing local CSOs dependency on external resources, which is an impediment to their sustained growth, and their inability to improve legitimacy and accountability. The NWADO experience demonstrates that moving beyond traditional training and organisational development into processes that facilitate and promote learning and its integration into everyday work practices results in positive and lasting impacts.

## 1. Capacity Development and the Global Development Discourse

The concept of "capacity development" is gradually occupying centre stage in the development discourse in the past few years. Aid agencies, governments and multilateral organisations and NGOs involved in development are putting emphasis on capacity development as a fundamental element for sustainable development in general (Ulleberg 2009, p.9). This widely accepted concept does not have a unique definition. However, the varied definitions all point to a process whereby people, organisations and societies are able to mobilise and use their technological, scientific, institutional, organisational capacities to carry out functions, find solutions to problems, and set and achieve common goals (Ogunsola, 2011; Rugumamu, 2011: 113; Collen, 2009:2; Theisohn and Land, 2009: 12; DED Cameroon/ SNV Highlands, 2007; OECD, 2007; UNEP, 2002:11; UNCED, 1992). In the definitions, capacity development is viewed in a broader context that goes beyond human resource development and employment structures wherein focus is on the acquisition or enhancement of knowledge and skills. It also includes the ability to manage the diverse elements of capacity development in a given context over time.

Each society is endowed with capacities that correspond to its own purpose, configuration and objectives. For example, non-industrial societies, especially those in the global south (the developing regions of Africa, Asia and Latin America), though they have a few formal institutions have evolved towards the building of highly developed skills and intricately linked network of social and cultural relationships, which are hard to be understood by outsiders. These societies through a process of mutual and collective learning, often passed on orally and practically, have evolved over time, learnt to adapt and survive in complicated, and harsh conditions. This is different from most post-industrial societies that have complex social structures, which are more diverse and have specialist activities, and rely heavily on codified knowledge bases and specialist skills acquired through years of formal education and training.

Developing, expanding individual skills, the creation of opportunities, and the incentive for people to extend the acquired skills through institutions and networks is the central role of capacity development and is crucial to propel countries to greater transformation towards development. Furukka-Parr et al., (2002: 16) refer to this as the social capital of communities, which enables them to stick together with clearly defined rules for relationships. This gives another dimension to the definition of capacity development, emphasising the inclusion of the incentives for it in a given context and the governance issues related to it. Many international capacity development institutions

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recommend that in defining capacity development that focuses on the ability of communities to meet their quest for growth and development, due consideration needs to be given to what approaches work in given circumstances and particular attention to individual needs, organisational issues and the enabling environment for its thriving (OECD-DAC, 2006: 7; World Bank, 2005).

Eyong (2007:122) and Melchias (2001) posit that local knowledge and systems in Central Africa have over generations fostered relationships amongst groups, creating a complex web of high levels of cooperation, exchange and support that are essential for sustainability of local CSOs capacities and their work with communities. There is a need to challenge the colonial thinking, which still views local knowledge and systems as a process of trials and errors while western knowledge is science imbued with and characterised by experimentation. Although this Westernised thinking views local knowledge and capacities in the developing world as not justified by universal reasoning, it has failed to recognise that these have evolved through experimentations have been accepted by local groups and communities and strengthened under suitable institutional frameworks, cultures and practices (Nakashima and Roue 2002:314).

A major characteristic of the capacity development processes in the early 19th century was that most of the useful knowledge and practices were poorly documented and was passed from generation to generation discriminatorily. However, with close to a century of civil society growth, community based groups and micro level institutional arrangements with differentiated responsibilities, some codification and formalisation of local development processes is currently underway and this needs to be recognised. For example, some codification of CSOs as a legitimate partner in development based on their values, principles, norms and practices has been undertaken and are contained in the Statute of the Economic, Social and Cultural Council of the African Union (IJR, 2009).

Pollard and Court (2005) equally posit that the knowledge and expertise base in post-colonial Africa witnessed an upsurge of critical investigation and evaluation, theory building, evidence gathering, action research, analysis and codification related to development policy and practice. These have all been geared towards improving the impact of their work, sharing lessons with others and capturing the institutional memories and knowledge held within the CSOs sector in Africa. This challenges the colonial thinking and false dichotomy of a southern civil society bred on a diet of informality informed by community wisdom and that of donor organisations steeped in formal and rational institutional processes informed by expert evidence (Pollard and Court 2005).

The quest for more development and the dynamic environment in which humans find themselves have stimulated many countries and societies especially in the global south to evolve organically. These societies have used their own logic, local resources and strengths to achieve remarkable growth and development. This puts to question the assumption that developing countries with weak capacities can remake themselves based on top-down blueprints prescribed by developed countries. Contrarily, Fukuda-Parr et al. (2002:15) assert that a natural process which sees development as a transformation fosters home grown processes, builds on the wealth of local knowledge and capacities, and scales them up to achieve whatever objective and targets individuals, institutions at community level set for themselves.

At global level, capacity development institutions have focussed on developing the capacities of different countries' public sectors in specialised areas like decentralisation, health administration, public finance management, leadership development, accountability, and public policy analysis. There has however been little consideration for these country's local capacity developers including CSOs, think tanks and private sector actors that also work on participatory community development and participation while improving capacity in areas that directly address the needs of communities. These local capacity developers operating at local (district and community), sub-national (provincial), national and sometimes regional levels use different means and approaches to develop local capacities including training, organisational development advice, facilitation, project management support, coaching and mentoring, and knowledge brokering (Theisohn and Land, 2009:13; Ubels, 2009: 4).

The OECD (2006) recommends that care should be taken not to undermine existing capacities, including inherent ones and working with non-state actors and communities in ways that reinforce the development of these local capacities. It points out that decisions about the design of development cooperation for capacity development are typically made at high levels in often highly exclusive processes. However, learning and innovation are most likely to occur at grassroots or local levels and thus calls for a paradigm shift in thinking on capacity development with a focus on enabling local CSOs to pool local resources

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and harness inherent skills, knowledge and potential for development. Many donor organisations now prefer to work with 'grassroots' or local civil society organisations than urban based organisations, because it is believed these are directly in touch with the needs of their constituencies than the 'elite' highly institutionalised and bureaucratic organisations. This article is strongly focussed on these 'grassroots' organisations.

Informality here refers to endogenous, spontaneous, sporadic and emerging forms of civil society operating locally as opposed to more formally constituted actors and counterparts. In the NWADO, Cameroon, emphasis is placed on promoting and upholding local and informal level institutional arrangements that promote an inclusive, participatory and locally driven development process. With this, chances of building "strong" institutional and bureaucratic structures in the civil society community that in itself constitute a hindrance to the thriving of local organisations and capacity development processes is minimised.

In Africa, NEPAD (2009) has identified capacity constraints as a major obstacle to sustainable development and propounds that without the development of sufficient country level capacity, development efforts in many of the poorest countries are unlikely to succeed, even if countries are supported with substantially enhanced funding. In the case of Cameroon, this is exemplified by the pull out of major capacity building funding institutions, including the German Development Service (DED) in December 2007 and Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) in March 2014.

## 2. Local Capacity Development in West African Communities

The rising quest for local capacity development that is driven by internal local CSOs needs and world financial crisis has resulted in cuts in development assistance budgets by many donors despite the fact that needs continue to increase, especially in developing countries. These needs are intensified today by natural and anthropogenic drivers like climate change with projected increase in their impacts especially in poor and most vulnerable countries (IPCC 2007). In the past, the capacity to manage these challenges effectively despite the deployment of substantial amounts of aid was compromised by poor governance, especially in nations that receive the most development assistance.

For example, Somalia and Afghanistan show very little prospects for sustainable peace despite receiving huge amounts of funding to enhance capacity development towards peace (Oxfam 2012). Alternatives are needed today more than ever before, given that donor resources with a greater proportion destined towards capacity development, records a continuous decline. For example, by 2009, the UN appeal for over a decade recorded a shortfall of 38 per cent and was projected to increase in the future (Gyoh 2009:42). With this state of affairs, it is obvious that the individuals and institutions in these affected developing countries themselves need to play a decisive role in reducing their dependence on external development assistance.

International capacity development bodies and donor agencies still have a very important role to play in supporting the resilience of states, CSOs and individuals and promoting a favourable environment where they can respond to these challenges (Cairns, 2012; Greijn 2009:3). Numerous examples have been cited where the contributions of local CSO have made a difference in the lives of many people, especially in disaster situations. Some of these include the provision of water to communities in drought and famine stricken Somalia by local CSOs, the response to Haiti's earthquake and the 2011 floods in Pakistan (Cairns 2012). In West Africa, CSOs have been actively involved in pre- and post-conflict management initiatives. For example, in Liberia and Sierra Leone, specialised CSOs including the Inter-Religious Councils of both countries and the Women in Peace Building Network (WIPNET) have worked to promote reconciliation, enhance local ownership of peacebuilding initiatives, contribute towards democratisation processes, assisted with socio-economic recovery programmes and establishment of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions in both countries (Ekiyor 2008:33).

Unfortunately, when the different contributions to solve these challenges were evaluated, it revealed that Western donors and development partners had overlooked the contributions of individuals, CSOs, local governments and affected communities. There seems to be a westernised notion that local responses based on local capacities, which are hinged on an understanding of local realities are often slow and ineffective. However, to contribute to meet the increasing and challenging needs, there is an urgent need to focus on harnessing and valuing the existing local capacities of CSOs and communities in the global capacity development discourse. This was also echoed in 2011 by the president of MERCY Malaysia when he posited that southern national and local CSOs need to play a greater role of harnessing and making use of existing local capacities as the only sustainable way to respond to increasing challenges they and their constituencies face.

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### 3. External Capacity Building Resources in Local Contexts

The early 70s ushered in a new impetus for development with developing countries hoping they could reach the same levels of development and wellbeing as the rich and developed countries by emulating their development paths. This North-South capacity building was similar to teacher/trainer-student relationship where the teacher did an analysis of knowledge gaps and prescribes solutions based on information and ideas from different sources (textbooks and handbooks). The assumption was that the countries in the South could take on templates, technologies and approaches developed, tested, refined and proven successful over time in developed countries (Furkka-Parr et al.:15).

During this period there was an influx of varied experts under different portfolios, with the assumption that gaps in capacity of the receiving countries would rapidly be bridged (Fukuda-Parr et al., 2002:9 and 10). The deployment of this huge expertise contributed to the attainment of educational goals including the improvement of teacher-student ratios, increased enrolments and increase in human resources for public sector management in many developing countries. However, development actions continued to lack adequate skills and strong institutions in countries that had received substantial capacity development aid (World Bank Operations Evaluation Department, 2005, Berg, 1993, OECD, 1987).

In addition, this practice contributed to prevent the emergence of a local sector of capacity developers and seriously disenfranchised the actors already operating in the local context (Greijn, 2009: 3). Ubels (2009:4) indicates that recent international policy statements such as the Accra Agenda for Action in 2008 emphasise that developing countries like Cameroon and communities need to make better use of and encourage the development of their own expertise rather than rely on external technical assistance. This equally supported by the findings of a reconnaissance report to rectify lack of knowledge of capacity developers after studies in five countries including Cameroon, Montenegro, Peru, Tanzania and Vietnam (Greijn, 2009:3),

### 4. Shifting Capacity Building: Top-Down to Bottom-Up

In the period leading up to the 90s, criticisms abounded on North-South capacity building cooperation characterised by prescriptive and top-down knowledge transfer. For example, a review of technical cooperation launched by the UNDP with 30 governments in Africa, revealed that capacity development approaches used were expensive, top-down, donor-driven, dependent, and less effective in developing local institutions or strengthening local capacity, as compared to endogenous and home grown processes (Berg and UNDP, 1993). Thus many capacity building institutions and donor agencies began reconsidering their approaches to capacity building. Their use of 'capacity development' in place of capacity 'building' is proof of this shift in thinking.

In the past, the use of capacity building suggested a process of erecting step-by-step in a void a new structure based on a preconceived design. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the endogenous demand for capacity development, consolidating and improving on what already existed was weak. The resulting approach to capacity 'building' still left considerable scope for implanting externally derived models without serious efforts to adapt them to local cultures and circumstances while harnessing existing and inherent capacities. This gives reasons why there has been some paradigm shift towards greater partnership building and fostering local processes and ownership. From the 1990s the World Bank and the IMF shifted from top-down approaches of structural adjustment programmes which have a strong focus on capacity development to more participative approaches, which give stakeholders a lead role in defining their national, social and economic policies for poverty reduction (Ogunsola, 2011; OECD-DAC 1996:13; Logan and Mengisteab, 1993).

Many other institutions and policy frameworks have reiterated the importance of bottom-up approaches that promote ownership and partnerships in capacity development as key to successful learning and development processes as opposed to the traditional top-down and prescriptive approaches. Some of these include the Accra Agenda for Action (2008), the Comprehensive Development Framework (1998), the Poverty Reduction

> *Many capacity building institutions and donor agencies began reconsidering their approaches to capacity building.*

Strategy Paper Initiative (1999) and the Rome (2003) and Paris (2005) declarations. In support of this approach, authors including Lindsay et al. (2006) and Madleys (1996) have emphasised the importance of stimulating grassroots participation and valuing existing local or home-grown and inherent local capacities aimed at adaptive management of social-ecological systems with case studies from Thailand and Botswana.

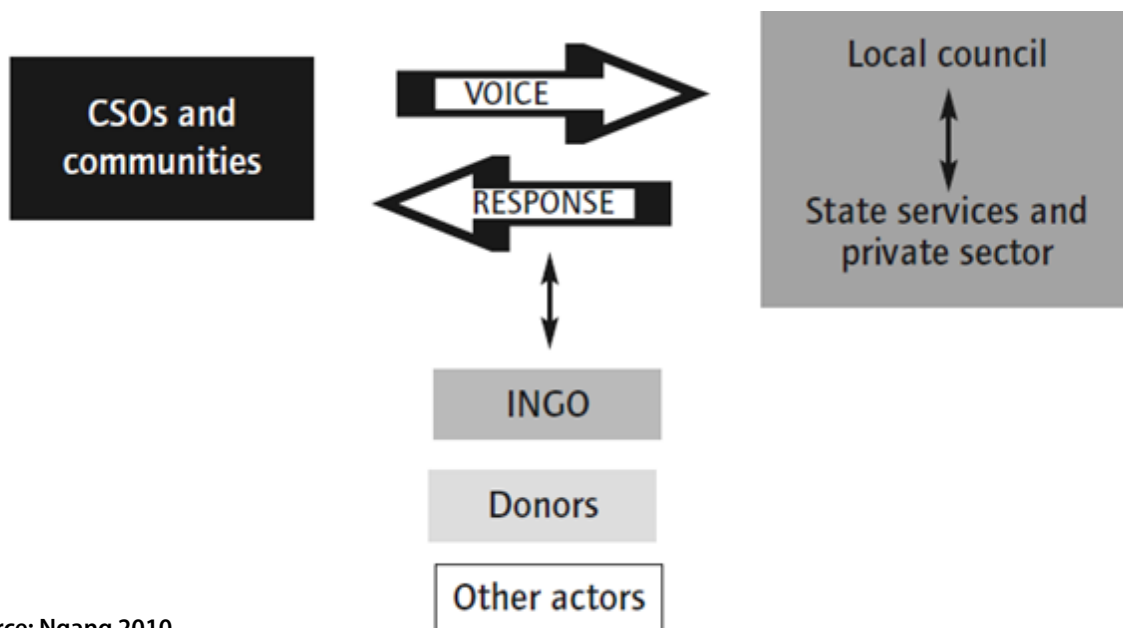## 5. Enabling Environment for Local Capacity Building in the Global South

The OECD (2006:17) reiterates the need to approach capacity development by thinking through what might work in a given circumstance and who participates in the process. The institution refers to this as the enabling environment of capacity development, which entails the prevailing political, and governance systems around capacity development in a given context. Thus donors and capacity development agencies need to support policy frameworks for capacity development that benefit from genuine commitment at high level and avoid launching parallel initiatives that fragment efforts and divert critical resources. These parallel initiatives have been observed to seriously contribute to stunt whatever capacity exists locally, demoralising local people and their ability to maintain local capacity (Marjanovic et al., 2012:6).

These external capacity development stakeholders can strengthen an enabling environment for local capacity development by supporting client and citizen demands and encouraging linkages and development of local communities of practice on capacity development between the CSOs, think tanks and the private sector at local and national levels (Theisohn and Land 2012:12). This is further reinforced by the African Capacity Building Foundation, which propounds that an enabling environment for capacity development is very important and calls on international partners to support the creation of an enabling environment where local expertise is valued, with generation of innovative approaches that do not erode or duplicate existing capacities within communities (ACBF, 2010). Until recently, the capacity development environment in Cameroon appeared highly donor driven and prescriptive.

The key stakeholders in the capacity building process including CSOs, local government and state services sought strategies to court donors, International NGOs (INGOs) and other partners in development to receive the maximum donor funds for capacity development initiatives, based on the respect of conditionalities imposed by this international community. As a result, there was lack of confidence, resistances, and passiveness around capacity development interventions and the deepening of disadvantage, as these were not driven by shared values. Today, these key stakeholders each have roles and obligations which if respected will enhance environment for capacity development in Cameroon. The international partners (INGOs and Donors) are focusing more on supporting the development and improvement of governance systems, structures, policies and practices that empower CSOs and communities to participate in the decisions that affect their lives (see figure 1).

**Figure 1:** Good governance model showing role of stakeholders in a capacity development environment



**Source: Ngang 2010**

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## 6. The NWADO Case Study

The various issues surrounding capacity development have been explored by different schools of thought and recently, practitioners are more concerned with the identification of local capacity development initiatives that are needed to accomplish defined development goals. Bolger (2000) posits that there is a need to search for approaches that achieve a "best fit" with the particular circumstances of the country, sector or organisation. The approach currently used by NWADO in the Cameroon, which is delivering positive results with respect to local capacity development is called the demand and supply of learning using a market approach and is an example for promoting local CSOs sustainability through local capacity development.
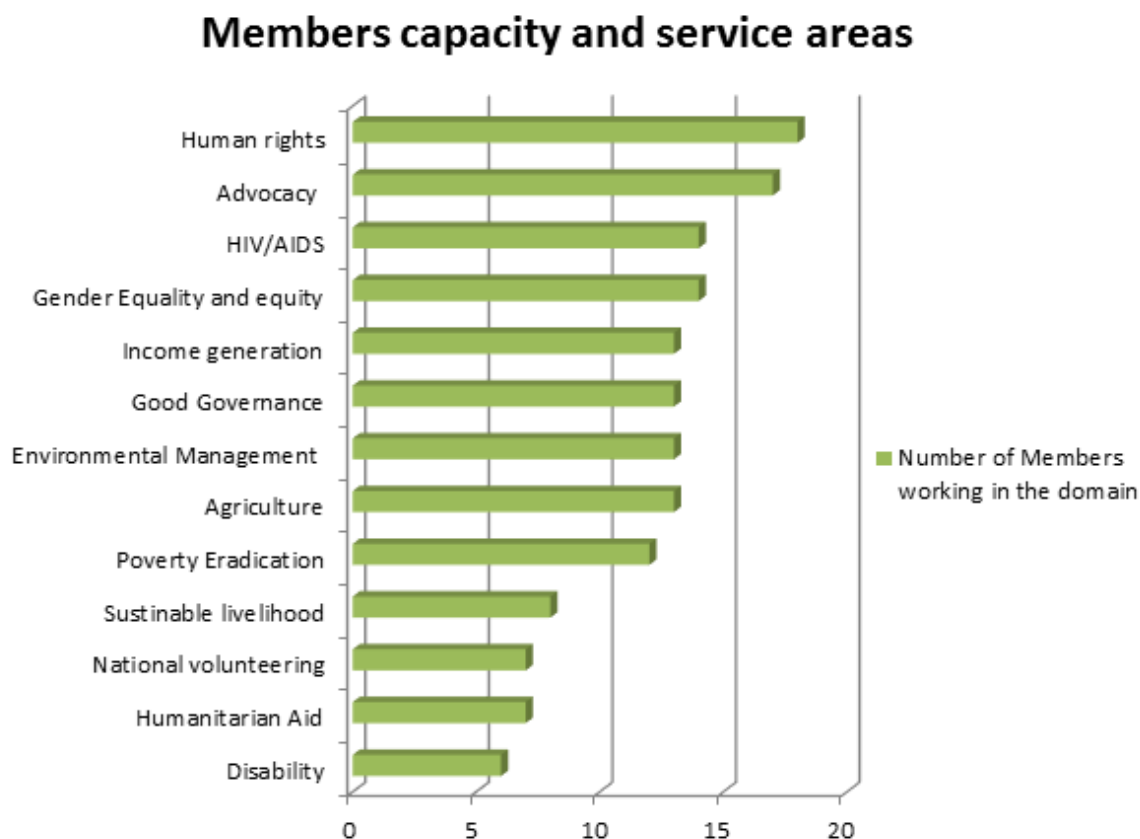
### a. The Context

The socio-economic instability in 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. This resulted in a well-organised, dynamic civil society in Cameroon.  In the case study, the North West region is chosen as a result of its comparatively poor socio-economic situation and the prevailing cultural factors that have encouraged people to group themselves into civil society groups including associations, cooperatives, federations and other networks to address their common problems.

The influence of this environment in this region of Cameroon is indicated by the estimated 11,519 diverse CSOs (10,379 Common Initiative Groups - CIGs, 667 cooperatives, 177 CIG Unions, 43 Unions of Cooperatives, 3 Confederations and 250 associations (DED/SNV 2007: 11, NWADO survey 2007). This Region in Cameroon records a high concentration of CSOs particularly in contrast to other geographical regions of Cameroon. These CSOs groupings have been actively involved in different self-reliant development actions including the mobilisation and use of different capacity development resources that complement the Cameroon government's development actions (GESP 2010).

The capacity development landscape in Cameroon has not been different from the global picture. It has witnessed a shift from donor driven, prescriptive and top-down process to one that sees actors especially local CSOs driving their own capacity development. This has been through the harnessing of already acquired capacities and the use of their inherent skills and knowledge to foster different development processes. The North West Association of Development Organisations (NWADO) is a non-profit network of more than 250 CSOs with its members working with communities and organised in community-based groups. It was created in 1990 with a mission to motivate and strengthen member CSOs through networking and partnership building to enhance capacities necessary for the improvement of the local economy and environment. NWADO came about as a result of the state of the international capacity building system to harness the capacities that are inherent to citizens and civil societies so as to cut costs and promote ownership. Since 2008, NWADO has been promoting the Demand and Supply of Learning Using a Market Approach as an example of promoting local CSOs sustainability through local capacity development. It is worth mentioning that the use of the economic terms 'demand' and 'supply' in the context of this initiative does not entail the use of significant financial resources by participating local CSOs, but a pooling, mutual sharing of locally available knowledge, skills and expertise, peer-to-peer coaching and training for the development of local capacities (institutional and individual levels).

After two decades of collaboration with capacity developing service providers locally and internationally including; Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO), German Development Service (DED), Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV), Welsh Assembly Government through the Emerging World Leaders Programme and the European Union, NWADO was keen on weaning itself of dependency on external capacity development aid. An exhaustive survey involving the members in 2008 using organisational tools including SWOT, stakeholder analysis and mappings, revealed a wide range of stakeholders, varying strengths and weaknesses amongst the membership. This exercise served as an evaluation of the past practices in enhancing members' capacities to evaluate if they had improved their practice in working with and meeting the needs of their constituencies and at the same time remaining relevant. Figure 2 is an outcome of a survey conducted with NWADO members to inform the NWADO management of areas of capacity strengths and weaknesses.

**Figure 2:** Areas of work of 143 NWADO members following SWOT analysis and membership survey.



**Source: NWADO 2010**

In the NWADO initiative, the network seeks to overcome three major challenges that have characterised local capacity development approaches and have been impediments to the sustainability of NWADO member CSOs in Cameroon:

1.  Enabling the local CSOs understand that demand for capacity development from external sources should be expressed only after every opportunity to address the identified needs at local level has been exhausted.

2.  Enabling local CSOs understand that they are not only recipients of capacity development interventions based on supply-driven products, but are also capable of supplying contextual based experiences, local capacity development blueprints and models.

3.  Creating opportunities where local CSOs and other development partners connect more with each other, engage in dialogue and exchange, harness knowledge and gain new insights.

In doing this, two mutually interdependent levels of capacity development with a clear focus have been emphasized namely, the individual and institutional levels, as represented in the table below.

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| Level | Focus |
|---|---|
| 1. Individual | Engaging individuals in a continuous process of learning, recycling of knowledge, valuing existing knowledge and skills while taking advantage of new opportunities requiring application of learning. |
| | |
| 2. Institutional | Building and valuing existing capacities within local CSOs and other partner institutions. Seeking for innovative ways to revitalize existing initiatives and enhance their growth. Creating and finding different kinds of opportunities, whether in the public or private sector, that enable people to continuously grow their capacities, preventing these from becoming obsolete. |

### b. Description of the process

The NWADO initiative goes through a six stage iterative process as follows:

1. Local CSOs who are members of NWADO (staff and board members) are encouraged in a joint working session to brainstorm and come up with areas of individual and organizational strength in terms of capacity. They are encouraged to reflect on and record their existing capacity and focus on those they are able to "Supply" or offer to other individuals and organizations interested in acquiring those capacities. Creating more informal learning atmosphere gives room for greater learning, generation of knowledge, sharing and identification of mutual capacity development needs (See photograph one below).

2. Participants are encouraged to brainstorm on their weaknesses, generating those areas of capacity gaps where they would like to 'Demand" or request for assistance for capacity development. These are equally clearly recorded on conference papers.

3. Participants through an "open Market" are encouraged to share their strengths and weaknesses with other participants. In this process, each participating organization and individual takes notes of areas where they would like to "supply" and "demand" capacity. Mutual identification of capacity development areas for "demand" and "supply" is encouraged and participants who identify matching capacity development needs and areas for mutual sharing are encouraged to discuss the possibilities of the exchange happening as much as possible. This could be through day-to-day formal and informal often mutual peer-to-peer coaching, mentoring, training and facilitation resulting in cross-fertilisation of ideas and approaches to solving identified capacity gaps. At this stage, identification of areas of coincidence of capacity development needs forms the basis for reciprocal and mutual capacity development processes ( See Photograph 2)

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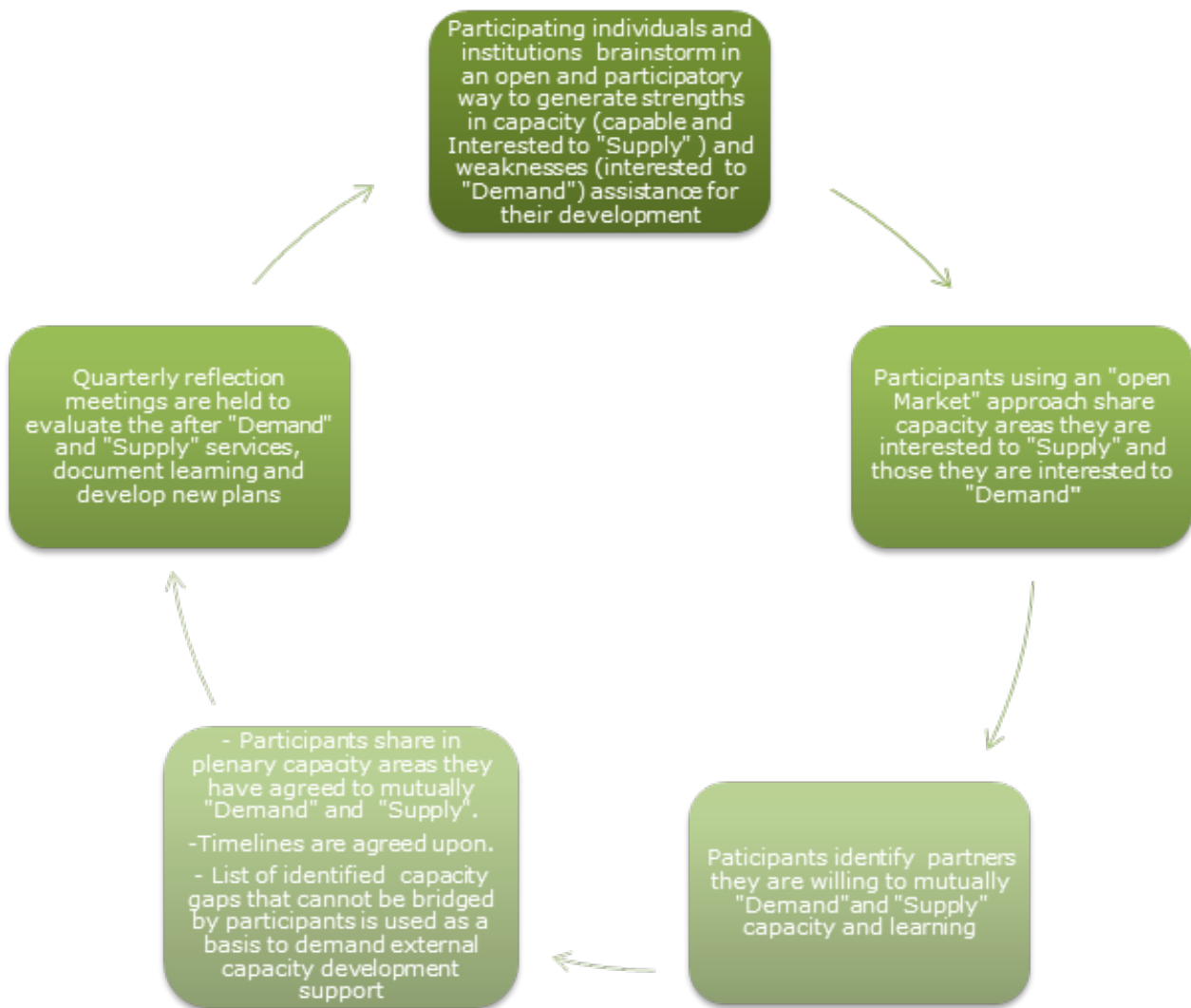
**Photograph 1**



**Source: NWADO 2009**

4. Participants then share in plenary what individual and organizational capacities shall be "demanded" and "supplied" as post workshop services. At this stage, participants agree on clear timelines for "demand" and "supply". Once these are agreed upon, they are clearly documented to enable follow-up.

5. A list of capacity gaps "Demanded" which cannot be bridged by participating organizations is documented. This constitutes a basis for the demand of external support from capacity building partners like Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) and the German Technical Cooperation (GIZ).

6. The members hold quarterly reflections during which joint evaluations of the initial rounds of mutual "Demand" and "Supply" of capacity are conducted. In this process, new gaps are identified and new plans generated, resulting in an iterative process facilitated by NWADO. Figure 6 gives a simplified schematic representative of this iterative process.

**Photograph 2:** Informal interaction between participants



**Participants through an "open Market" are encouraged to share their strengths and weaknesses with other participants.**

NWADO members during an interactive session, build a web of capacity development links amongst themselves (Source: NWADO 2009)

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**Figure 3:** A brief schematic representation of the "demand" and "supply" for adding value and development of local capacity



Participating individuals and institutions  brainstorm in an open and participatory way to generate strengths in capacity (capable and Interested to "Supply" ) and weaknesses (interested  to "Demand") assistance for their development

Participants using an "open Market" approach share capacity areas they are interested to "Supply" and those they are interested to "Demand"

Paticipants identify  partners they are willing to mutually "Demand"and "Supply" capacity and learning

- Participants share in plenary capacity areas they have agreed to mutually "Demand" and  "Supply".

-Timelines are agreed upon.

- List of identified  capacity gaps that cannot be bridged by participants is used as a basis to demand external capacity development support

Quarterly reflection meetings are held to evaluate the after "Demand" and "Supply" services, document learning and develop new plans

**Source: Ngang 2009**

**c.        Outcomes**

Between 2009 and 2013, 80 local CSOs were involved in both individual and institutional capacity development by mutually "demanding" and "supplying" capacity development on areas including;

- promotion of local/national volunteering,
- capitalization of results and best practices,
- advocacy and lobbying,
- fundraising,
- monitoring and evaluation,
- project proposal development,
- skills on advocacy on issues affecting communities at the grassroots levels,
- networking, communication, and partnership development,
- gender sensitive development,
- reporting,
- development oriented journalism, and
- use of ICT tools in development (see photograph3)

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**Photograph 3**



Mutual and reciprocal capacity development between members of NWADO on the use of ICTs for development (Source: NWADO, 2009)

### d. Impacts of the NWADO Initiative

The impact of the NWADO initiative has been assembled through the collection of feedback from the evaluation by participating individuals, institutions and the beneficiaries.

The views from NWADO's direct beneficiaries (over 250 CSOs) and the direct interviews and collection of proxy or alternative feedbacks from delegated representatives of indirect beneficiaries (community members) have provided reliable indicators of what matters to the beneficiaries when local CSOs work with them. These actions provide information and feedback to start new phases of reflections

*These actions provide information and feedback to start new phases of reflections and also give a scope for improvement.*

and also give a scope for improvement. These interactions with beneficiary communities have been used to determine if capacities in communities have improved and if the local CSOs are still relevant and meeting their goals.
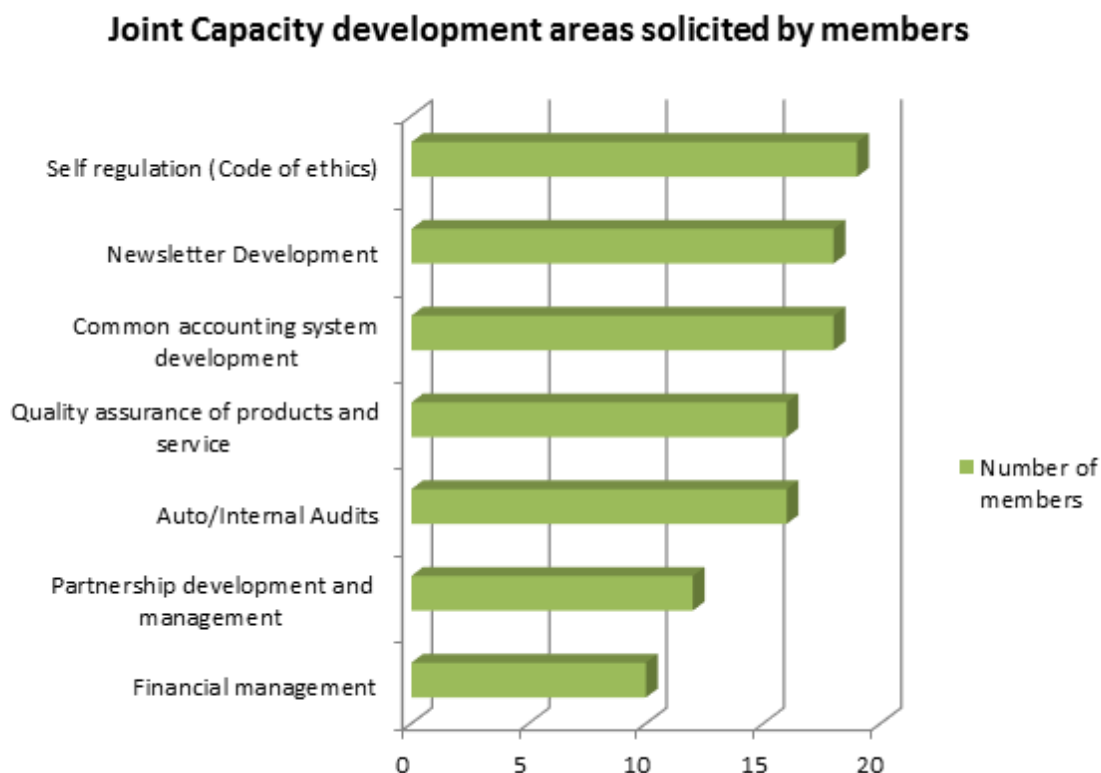
**Participants in a joint evaluation organised by NWADO at the close of 2010, revealed the following;**

• Participants were amazed by the level of knowledge, skills and expertise available locally. Thus they applauded the innovative approach to capacity development as a truly local and demand-driven process that puts them at the centre of the actions. They also indicated that the approach offers them the opportunity to share and exchange varied information, experiences, ideas, successful and unsuccessful methodologies, and moral support, all resulting in the enhancement of their capacity development, since they are working with their peers.

• By promoting a truly open, participatory, local peer-to-peer demand and supply-driven approach to capacity development, the pressure is less on capacity building networks like NWADO. This is because the constant request fo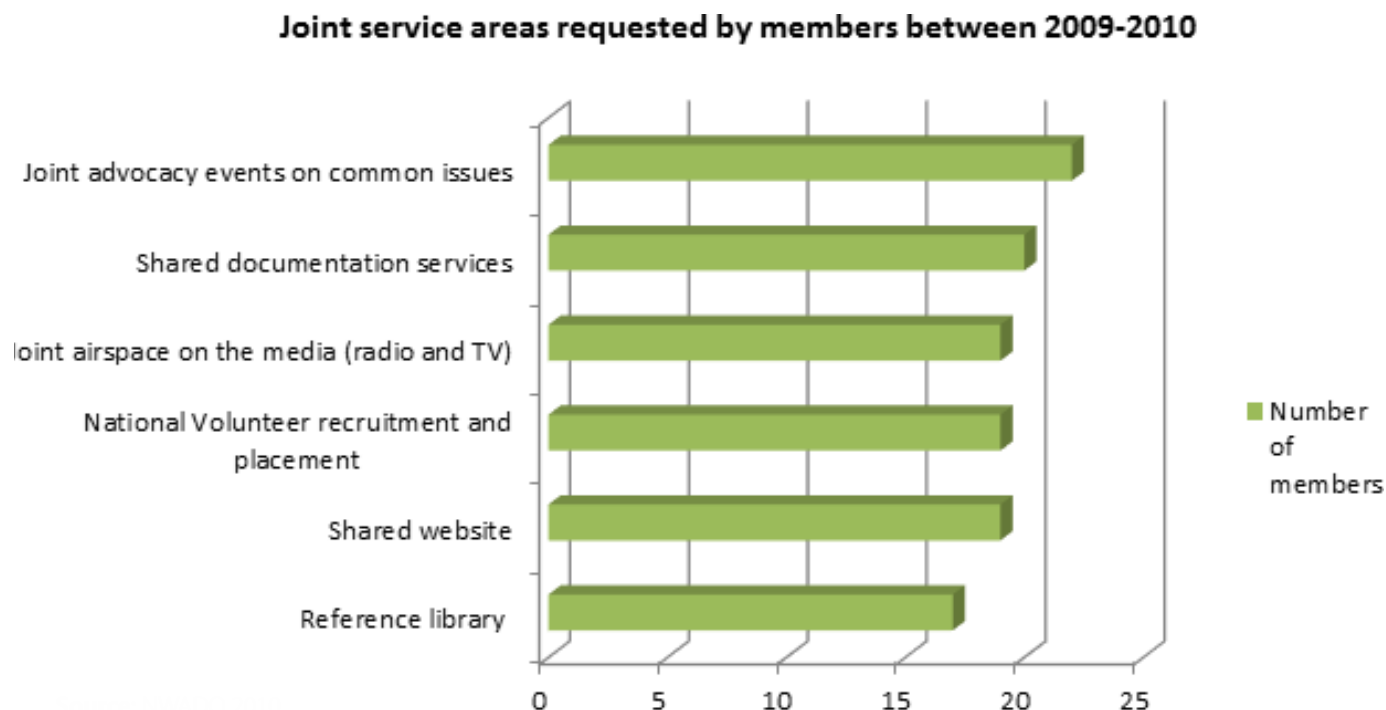r capacity building from member organisations on individual basis is greatly reduced. In this case, joint capacity building sessions have been organised by NWADO on common themes that cannot be addressed through the peer-to-peer coaching and training.

• It has been agreed by participating individuals and organisations that NWADO's approach generally reduces the overdependence on external capacity development support. This is because solicitations for external capacity development support only happen when the needed expertise and resources are not found locally. In addition, external requests are based on common capacity development gaps identified by a cross section of the membership resulting to joint request submitted to external capacity developers as opposed to individual requests. For example, figure 4 and 5 show joint capacity areas and services, which members have requested from NWADO membership. These areas of capacity development needs have informed the capacity building agenda of NWADO as a capacity development network. In addition, these areas have informed the request for capacity development packages targeting external capacity development agencies submitted by NWADO.

**Figure 4:** Diverse capacity development areas requested by members



**Joint Capacity development areas solicited by members**

**Source:** NWADO 2010

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**Figure 5:** Services requested from NWADO by the members

## Joint service areas requested by members between 2009-2010



### e. Downward versus Upward Accountability

NWADO as a network of local CSOs is recognised locally and nationally as a partner in enhancing access to and the delivery of basic services and at the same time working directly with grass root population to build a stronger voice to effectively demand these services. NWADO has joined counterparts to request for more accountability and transparency from national governments, donors and international NGOS who tend to focus on their priorities and on meeting objectives. From 1980, the legitimacy, accountability and transparency within and amongst CSOs in Cameroon have been an issue of on-going debate. The inadequate promotion of these values and principles amongst others resulted in a strained relationship within and amongst CSOs. In addition, the relationships between CSOs and the government, other development partners and the grassroots beneficiary communities have increasingly been strained due to the inadequate promotion and upholding of these principles and values by CSOs.

In an attempt to tackle this legitimacy, accountability and transparency deficit, NWADO facilitated a national civil society consultation that led to the development of a Code of Ethics for Cameroon Civil Society organisations in 2008 (One World trust and World Vision 2010:7; NWADO, 2008). In the processes, using forums and questionnaires, NWADO conducted research on the major issues for CSOs in Cameroon. Transparency and the signalling of quality were the issues most raised and in response NWADO developed a code of ethics and a certification scheme with three levels of accreditation. The code addresses issues such as governance; organisational integrity and independence; human resource management; financial management and accountability; communication and networking and conflict of interest. Generally, the Code serves to improve partnerships between CSOs and the public sector, other CSOs and the private sector including overseas development partners and most especially accountability towards the beneficiaries or constituencies of the CSOs by defining accepted and acceptable behaviour, promoting high standards of practice and providing a benchmark for CSOs to use for self-evaluation. The code emphasises that member CSOs improve the quality of their evidence as this is a reflection of their own reputation and helps them maintain credibility with local communities. In addition, the Code of Ethics is used as a tool to clarify relations between member CSOs external partners and lays emphasis on demand-driven partnerships informed by local CSOs agendas rather than by external agendas.

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### f. Incentives and Safeguards against External Influences

The NWADO experience is not void of challenges. The variety of Cameroonian civil society organizations, in mandates as well as structures and history, speaks to the considerable flurry of activity. This environment is in a state of flux, with the legal framework not having adequate provisions for checks and balances in the creation and operation of civil society in Cameroon. A few organizations often referred to as "GONGOs" (Government Owned NGOs) have been created by state agents for political and economic reasons. However, these organizations lacking legitimacy in the communities often go extinct especially when the motives behind their creation phase out.

Another challenge faced is that some locally based CSOs following long term collaboration with external donors and multilateral organisations in the past have become very elitist and refuse to identify with their local counterparts. NWADO does not have the powers at the moment to curb these malpractices in the civil society sector in Cameroon. However, it is taking steps to ensure that its members remain legitimate, accountable and transparent. Although membership into NWADO is voluntary, potential members are however required to sign up to the Code of Ethics for Civil Society Organisations and adhere to the principles of integrity, transparency, accountability, competence, professionalism and respect. NWADO has been promoting the code of ethics as a tool for self-regulation in the sector to both the government and international development agencies and they see signing and adherence to it as an important indicator of integrity of local organisations. It is anticipated that as this civil society self-regulatory tool evolves with the establishment of a quality assurance mechanism and certification schemes, blacklisting these organisations will contribute to maintain order in the sector.

Furthermore, NWADO secretariat has currently evolved into a resource centre, which assembles and makes available materials and expertise to enable newer organisations to draw on lessons learned, obtain information on best practices and seek advice. This pooling of local capacity development resources acts as an incentive for new membership and places the local CSOs in a position not to solely depend on externally tailor-made solutions to local capacity development challenges but to make use of and also be contributors to these resources.

NWADO is currently developing a user manual on the initiative as a way of improving the brand power. The expectation is that even if current aid dynamics change with the improvement of fiscal position of donors, the CSOs are not conditioned by donor finances, priorities and interests but operate in a capacity development market to be determined by their own real needs.

### g. Future Perspectives on the NWADO Initiative

This initiative is highly scalable and can involve other development stakeholders like the media and decentralised local councils. For example, after the initial phase that ran from 2009 to 2011, NWADO initiated a similar exchange between twenty CSOs and twenty media organs in the two English speaking regions of Cameroon by the close of 2011. These partners have explored ways of working together in a more professional way. Mutual exchange and peer-to-peer training on reporting on development oriented news events, how to approach the media, developing media-CSOs advocacy initiative, project proposal writing and fundraising, writing news worthy information based on their areas of interventions and professionalization of information packages to inform and provoke the needed social changes.

As a result of this collaboration, there has been an increase in confidence and trust building amongst the development partners where before there was very little. In addition, the grass root communities today are more informed through the work of these media organs and the CSOs and are approaching them to provide news worthy issues necessary to provoke social changes at community and national levels. The success of this process has motivated the CSOs in the two English speaking regions of Cameroon, under the umbrella of the two regional networks NWADO and the South West Civil Society Network (SWECSON) to explore the possibility of exchanging human resources to build skills on networking, project proposal writing and fundraising strategies for networks using existing capacities found in both networks. There is thus a great potential to scale up the NWADO demand and supply of learning for local capacity development which hinges on already existing resources and capacity potentials of participating stakeholder groups, without the use of signifcant financial resources at local, national and international levels.

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# Conclusion

This paper looked at the critical issue of capacity development and affirms that it is an investment in the sustainability of CSOs especially those in the global south. Given that if civil society capacity development is effective, their ability to remain focussed on their mission and their ability to have a positive impact in their work with their constituencies is enhanced. The paper further posits that capacity development support from the developed countries has been crucial in fostering development of the receiving countries. However, every country needs its own intelligence and expertise to support its change and development. Given the current significant socio-economic and political challenges faced by many developed countries that have traditionally been active in providing capacity development support, the paper advocates for more consideration of alternatives to the existing model of one-way North-South capacity development flow.

It emphasizes the need of the Northern partners to support the Southern development actors including the CSOs to harness and value the existing local capacities and to generate context based bottom-up approaches to local capacity development. Focusing on the local CSOs and West African communities the paper indicates that sustainability of local CSOs in West Africa lies in local capacity development, which is essential to set a stable foundation from which to launch solutions to address urgent development challenges of the African community. The NWADO approach to local capacity development using the marketing theory of demand and supply was presented as an example of promoting local CSOs sustainability through local and home-grown peer-to-peer capacity development process and the promotion of an open, accessible and transparent market for local capacity development.

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