

**Lessons in Aid Effectiveness from Civil Society
Case Studies Prepared for the
Canadian Council for International Co-operation**

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**Coalitions for Women's Rights and Citizenship:
A Collective Force for Action and Influence**

Canadian Centre for International Studies and Cooperation (CECI)

1. Introduction

Since 1998, CECI has been operating the Women's Citizenship Rights (DCF) project, funded by CIDA. Planned to last five years, the project was extended one year to March 2004. As part of the project planning, a large number of civil society organizations and government bodies participated in identifying the strategic issues at the heart of the project: equality within the family, elimination of violence, citizenship and participation in power.

Through this project, CECI created a networking dynamic that has become a collective force for action and influence – the *coalition* – in Burkina Faso, Mali and Guinea. Today, these three coalitions are formally structured and include a total of 31 civil society organizations, women's and mixed, with complementary expertise, gathered around a common interest. Government departments participate as "advisory" members.

After four years, the three coalitions have gained considerable credibility among populations, local authorities and governments. They have created a formal structure, have developed a strategic plan and are seeking funding to strengthen their organizations and pursue collaborative action. CECI support during the current withdrawal phase is determined by the coalitions' strategic plans.

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2. A North-South Partnership Based on Responsibility-Sharing and Participation, with a View to Local Capacity Building

CECI and the coalitions have shared responsibilities in conducting activities and attaining project results.

The *role of the coalitions* is to define and carry out actions to promote women's citizenship rights, to be actively involved in collaboration and to commit to participate in and attain capacity-building results.

The *role of CECI* is to provide methodological support for analysis, planning, organization and monitoring, to lead and support processes, reflection and action among the coalitions and each NGO member, and to carry out the capacity-building program.

CECI has adopted a *multi-faceted and integrated capacity-building approach*: training, exchange of experiences, experiments in collaboration and management of action plans and projects, and support. This has contributed to building capacities for analysis, intervention and management and to solidifying the relationships among organizations.

Support in reflection and action is a success factor in management by the west African organizations. It allows for special training based on the needs of the moment. It encourages creativity, drives strategies and encourages questions. The CECI team accompanying the partners is made up of West African and Canadian resource people, including volunteers from the Canadian women's movement. When CIDA agreed to extend the project for one year, the three coalitions analyzed various scenarios and retained the one that would allow them to benefit from support for the longest possible time.

3. A Program for Capacity Building Identified by the Coalitions

A participatory diagnosis allowed the NGOs to identify their own strengths and weaknesses. A summary was shared and discussed within each coalition and served as the basis for developing a 4-year capacity-building program. Each year, the coalitions update the program. Sometimes, they review it during the course of the year, as needs arise in the action. The role of CECI was to develop and support the participatory diagnosis method, to propose a framework for the capacity-building program and to lead the program development process. It then organized training, ensuring the quality of the content and the relevance of the educational

approaches and tools, and monitored results. *Flexibility* in carrying out the program promotes empowerment, as it allows the project to meet the needs of the organizations, rather than the reverse. *The coalitions are actors, not instruments, in the project.*

4. Collaborative Action Plans Developed and Implemented by the Coalitions

The project has a support fund. Rather than adopt a project-based funding approach, CECI has proposed a collaborative approach within the coalitions for developing an action plan.

The coalitions first evaluated the problems related to each of the three issues to identify priority actions for each country. On this basis, updated yearly, they define action plan orientations, strategies and budgets.

The action plan is implemented through projects defined and carried out by the NGOs that are members of the coalitions. Some are collective, conceived by several NGOs, which together develop the awareness-raising messages and tools. Each NGO then carries out the same types of actions in its own area.

CECI's role was to propose a methodological framework for assessing issues and developing the annual action plan. CECI also leads the process, identifying results, encouraging debate, fueling analysis of context and reflection on strategies, and assisting in establishing a budget. Over the years, the coalitions have assumed an increasing role in the process, which, at the beginning, was very demanding and a source of tension.

At the project level, the role of CECI is to support the NGOs according to the specific needs of each: formulating results and indicators, strategy, budget, etc. It then monitors projects and supports the partners.

The *accountability* of the coalitions for defining action plans, with the challenges of collaboration, is a source of learning and self-sufficiency. The search for *additional funding* for the action plans allows the organizations to become known by other donors and opens the way to support beyond the term of the project. For real appropriation of issues and actions, it is essential to respect *partners' paces* (faced with donors' schedules and payments) and learn to draw lessons from problems and mistakes. Such an approach allows local organizations to be *actors, not operators or providers of services.*

5. A Civil Society With Increased Capacities, Actively Committed to Women's Rights

Capacities for Collaboration and Co-operation

Co-operation has developed in the analysis of issues and socio-political context, the development of action plans and the performance of semi-annual evaluations. It has gradually evolved into collaboration in actions relating to collective projects and has even led to the sharing of tools and methodologies. The coalitions have succeeded in rising above political, ethnic and religious affiliations. Collaboration and co-operation have increased daily, despite conflicts between NGOs and tensions between NGOs and government agencies.

Co-operation and collaboration are management indicators. Co-operation provides opportunities for learning the exercise of democracy and allows the acquisition of skills for negotiation, dialogue, acceptance of differing points of view, etc.

Project and Program Planning Capacities

Since 1998, the coalitions have adopted results-based management and the member NGOs use the DCF project request forms to solicit funding for their organizations. Furthermore, by means of extensive and ambitious action plans, the coalitions have developed more targeted annual action plans with medium-term goals. In 2002, the three coalitions developed 3- or 5-year strategic plans.

Carrying Out Diversified, Innovative and Increasingly Strategic Initiatives

Apart from information, awareness-raising and training, strategies include co-operation, inquiry, advocacy and lobbying. Use of cultural tools, such as theatre, songs or proximity radio is widespread. In Guinea, the coalition has adopted a "pilot project" approach for innovative actions before adopting them on a large scale. Target groups vary: adults and youth of both sexes, law professionals, the education sector, the political sector, media and religious groups. Exchange of experiences among the three coalitions has permitted successful strategies to be reproduced. Elements that contribute to the success of actions include the creation of alliances and synergy, media collaboration, involvement of men as stakeholders and target groups, creation of a chain of local-level players and the translation of tools into local languages.

... That Prompt Change

- *Equality Within the Family*

In Guinea, 19,968 people, including 17,058 women, were educated by 154 paralegals in rural and urban areas. Among the paralegals were rural radio journalists and paralegals from the Ministère de l'Action sociale, de la Promotion féminine et de l'Enfance [department of social action, feminine promotion and children]. Based on a pilot project developed by a member of the coalition, with the technical support of a departmental legal officer, the project was renewed by three members of the coalition. Since that time, 700 cases of women's rights violations have been reported to the department. *In Mali*, women are saying that information regarding civil marriage and succession have changed their lives. They receive more respect from their husbands and the community and feel more at ease expressing themselves. In three villages in the Koulikouro region, civil marriages increased following awareness-raising.

- *Combating Violence*

In Guinea, "observatories on violence" were created in 14 rural and urban schools following awareness-raising among students, teachers and parents regarding violence toward girls. Girls are beginning to testify (rapes, sexual harassment, etc.). The pilot project has been extended to two other schools. *In Mali*, an NGO has broken new ground with awareness-raising tools: audiocassettes and video clips of popular stars singing about the hazards of female circumcision play regularly on radio and television. These tools are used by many stakeholders. *In Burkina*, 200 young men and women act as local-level players in 10 provinces, raising awareness

regarding female circumcision among their peers. They have the support of administrative, traditional and religious authorities. People approach them at home for further information.

- *Citizenship and Participation in Power*

In all three countries, diverse actions have led to marked improvement in women's participation in commune management and elections. In *Burkina*, advocacy among political parties has contributed to 13.25% of 1st and 2nd place candidates on the 2002 electoral lists being women, compared to 9.5% and 4.13% in 1997 and 1992. In *Mali*, close to 1,800 women leaders, trained in women's rights and commune affairs management, are actively involved in commune management. Of these women, 114 were candidates in legislative elections in 2002, and 100 were chosen by the Commission Électorale Nationale Indépendante [independent national electoral commission] as observers during elections. In *Guinea*, a 100% increase in the number of women elected to the National Assembly is due in part to the efforts of the coalition.

Furthermore, women are more aware of their rights, claim them or denounce violations. In *Mali*, women took action against a credit officer who abused his authority; they won their case, which gained them respect in the community and from authorities. In *Burkina*, a civic education campaign reached more than 15,000 people, including 10,858 women and 368 leaders in 273 citizenship IEC clubs. Seventy-four cases of women's rights violations were reported to them and were resolved. Several women from the clubs were named as members to departmental commissions during legislative deliberations in 2002. In *Guinea*, an awareness-raising project regarding women's rights reached 13,000 people, including 8,000 women. Synergy with a literacy program and local radio contributed to improving respect for women's rights and encouraging women to express their opinions more during village assemblies.

6. A Civil Society That Dares To Go Further

Capacity for Political Dialogue

The three coalitions include representatives of government departments as "advisory members." Co-existence, although difficult at the beginning, opened the way to dialogue and allowed the departments to participate in directing the plans of action and to be informed of actions taken. In all 3 countries, the departments in charge of promoting women's rights and justice recognize that the coalitions are contributing to the attainment of their goals. In effect, governments have responsibilities in terms of women's rights, but to appropriately assume those responsibilities, women's rights must be known, there must be recourse, and legal decisions must be understood. Therefore, government cannot do everything. The contribution of civil society is essential. The experience of the coalitions shows that, if this contribution is achieved through dialogue and co-operation, based on common interests and concrete proposals, it is very effective.

... And For Advocacy

Encouraged by the success of their dialogue with the departments, and by the concrete and recognized results of their actions, the coalitions gained assurance and legitimacy in creating alliances with other players and in advocacy. Practical training gave them the technical tools.

... That Becomes a "Joint Effort" for Increased Results for Women and Better Governance

- *The revision of the Guinean Civil Code* in sections that discriminate against women, through a coalition initiative with the participation of the Ministère de l'Action sociale, de la Promotion féminine et de l'Enfance and the department of justice, led to an overhaul of the Civil Code. Legal texts from the sub-region were used as examples. Civil society and administrative, political and religious authorities validated the proposal, which was endorsed by the Justice Minister and filed with the government's general secretariat. The Justice Minister is leading the adoption process.
- *The acquisition of 50,345 civil status documents in the three countries*, including 28,382 for women: In the three countries, the government agreed to relax conditions for obtaining the documents. The operation netted \$26,000 for communities in Burkina and \$8,000 in Mali. Civil registers were harmonized throughout Burkina. The new training manual for department of justice courts incorporates a Gender and Development framework, based on a coalition test training.
- *An agreement between the department of communication and the Mali coalition* allowed 24 radio and television hosts (private and public), trained by the coalition, to contribute to a broad awareness-raising regarding participation of women at the legislative level. The same will be done at the community level in 2003. They make up a network of communicators regarding women's rights for the department and field contributors for the coalition.

7. Conclusion

The experience of the DCF project shows that the *appropriation* of issues and actions by local organizations and the *sustainability* of co-operation and actions are increased by:

- A North-South partnership in which local organizations are at the heart of project orientations and have a wide margin of analysis, proposals and actions, permitting them to assume the role of player rather than operator, from the outset.
- Capacity building of local organizations, based on self-diagnosis that is adjusted to needs that arise from the action and lessons learned.
- A structured approach, in which the Northern NGO encourages and supports co-operation (proposed by Southern NGOs), encourages and fuels innovation, proposes methodological support, provides support for action, encourages questions and meets needs practically and specifically.
- Respect for the pace of local organizations and the flexibility to adapt to changing needs and lessons learned.

The project completion report (CIDA, April 2002) notes that [translation] "the coalition approach was highly innovative (...) This new mechanism for civil society in the three countries (...) will play an increasingly important role in the future."