

ORGANISATION DEVELOPMENT

SUCCESS STORIES

ACCOUNTABILITY, PARTICIPATION AND ORGANISATIONAL GROWTH

SUPPORTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DYNAMIQUE DES
GROUPES DES PEUPLES AUTOCHTONES (DGPA),
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO (DRC)



Key **OD ISSUES** that the DGPA and Well Grounded have worked on together :

- I. Accountability to an organisation's constituency.
- II. Influencing the development of national policies.
- III. Dealing with the moment that an organisation grows beyond its founders.

BACKGROUND

The DGPA is a network in the DRC that is made up of more than 43 member organisations, which are CSOs that are run by, or working with, indigenous Pygmy populations across the country. The goal of the network is to protect and promote the fundamental and specific rights of these indigenous peoples, as well as the forests and ecosystems that are central to their lives. The DGPA has been in existence since 2005, starting off with a core of people (the plaintiffs) who decided to challenge the World Bank following its failure to implement operational policies (OP 4.10 and OP 4.12) in relation to indigenous peoples in the DRC.

This national network currently includes organisations from all over the country that are working on indigenous rights and environmental issues. These days, the DGPA has a small executive coordination team of paid staff based in the capital, Kinshasa, who provide services and support to member organisations based in provinces and districts across the DRC. The DGPA has various internal policies to ensure that indigenous people are represented throughout the structure and that they have the space to inform strategic decisions; the current President of its Board of Directors is an indigenous woman, and other indigenous people are key members of the Board and coordination team.

The DGPA has a great track record of promoting and defending indigenous peoples' rights: it has been instrumental in getting a specific law on the fundamental principles relating to the rights of indigenous Pygmy populations before the Congolese parliament, for which it was awarded the prestigious Equator Prize in 2015. A particularly exciting and innovative aspect of its work around development of the law was the way in which the DGPA managed to bring policy makers and parliamentarians (both Deputies and Senators) together with indigenous communities on the ground. It meant that indigenous communities could share experiences of their day-to-day lives directly with decision makers and make sure that the law was grounded in reality.

These days, the network's priorities are to ensure that the law on indigenous rights is adopted at the national level and that provincial-level implementation decrees are developed, and to continue its work on peaceful coexistence between indigenous and other local communities. The DGPA also organises a biannual international festival that involves indigenous and non-indigenous musicians and artists from around the world, which provides an opportunity to celebrate the significant contributions of indigenous Pygmy populations to Congolese culture.

COLLABORATION WITH WELL GROUNDED

The DGPA first approached Well Grounded in 2011: the network had had a major success with its work on lobbying the World Bank, but some members felt it had somewhat lost its way and was having trouble focusing on what to do next to promote indigenous peoples' rights. Some in the DGPA felt that its members needed to better connect with the communities they worked with, so that they could develop a programme that indigenous communities felt some ownership of and that really met their needs and aspirations. This was true both at the national coordination level and for individual members.



OD ISSUE I

ACCOUNTABILITY TO AN ORGANISATION'S CONSTITUENCY

The first area of support that Well Grounded provided was to help the DGPA think through how to develop work that was informed by community priorities. We tried out a number of approaches together, including:

- A. Working with a small team of DGPA members and advisors to do a piece of **PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH** with one indigenous community. This was to explore and understand what approaches worked best in this particular context, to expose some key DGPA members to the ideas and principles of participatory research and to help them produce a lobbying document that detailed what challenges indigenous communities face.
- B. Delivering a **TRAINING** for individuals from all the DGPA member organisations on **PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES** and how they might use them in their own work. This took place in a community in Equateur province. Participants went home with a toolkit of participatory approaches and a local member continued working with the community after the training was over.



C. Developing a detailed **PARTICIPATORY VIDEO PROCESS** with one particular community to explore "peaceful coexistence": how indigenous and other local communities can address issues of discrimination and inequity in a peaceful way at a local level. This was intended as a pilot that the DGPA Coordination team could then introduce to any members who wished to use the technique in their own work.

D. Using a second participatory video process to support a different indigenous community to document its history, relationship to and use of the forest.

The final video produced was used as part of the DGPA's **LOBBYING CAMPAIGN** aimed at decision makers to support the law to protect and promote indigenous peoples' rights



All of these initiatives were very successful in the short term: participants went home enthused and communities felt positive about the process. However, although DGPA members now had more information and some ideas about participatory approaches, they still struggled in applying them on a day-to-day basis and felt a bit overwhelmed at the idea of using them. Nonetheless, DGPA members did take on some of the core key principles and these then led on to inform the exciting and innovative work related to the law. Added to that, the pilot participatory research and participatory video work have developed into innovative indigenous community development projects in each of the communities where the methods were tested.

Also, the DGPA's advice and support on peaceful cohabitation and mediation between communities are being sought in other parts of the country where intercommunity conflict over land and culture has resulted in violence and even deaths.



OD ISSUE II

PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES TO POLICY MAKING

The next major piece of work that Well Grounded delivered with the DGPA was in relation to the process of *developing the indigenous rights legislation*. Well Grounded supported the DGPA to think through its strategy for *consulting communities* as part of the process for developing a draft legal text and then undergoing a participatory editing and validation process for the final text. This involved DGPA members and parliamentarians spending several nights staying in remote indigenous communities and talking through ideas. The end result was very positive: communities felt heard and saw their concerns taken into account, the parliamentarians were proud of their work and defended the text vigorously in Parliament, and the DGPA members broadened and deepened their understanding and experience of working with communities and on legal and policy work.



OD ISSUE III

DEALING WITH THE MOMENT THAT AN ORGANISATION GROWS BEYOND ITS FOUNDERS

Despite all this excellent work with its core communities, the DGPA faced some major internal challenges. As the network grew, there were a lot of tensions amongst members as the people involved had to accept change and challenges. New members joined, the organisation grew into something larger and more formalised and priorities shifted in a changing context. Perhaps the biggest hurdle was that when personal relationships broke down or were damaged due to disagreements about direction, funding or decision making, people descended into arguments about legalistic and technical issues rather than acknowledging and trying to resolve more profound underlying issues. There was a danger at times of people getting so embroiled in such arguments, and in power struggles around who could have a voice, that the spirit in which the organisation was developed and its vision could have been lost. This did not happen, thankfully: there were enough good will and commitment of all concerned to work their way through it.



During this time, Well Grounded acted as a facilitator for a whole series of internal reflections and diagnoses that allowed DGPA members and staff to articulate their concerns and priorities. Well Grounded also supported the organisation to **draw up documents and processes that strengthened the organisation** to act in line with its values rather than those formal systems becoming a barrier. Our role was frequently to help the people involved to identify for themselves what was really at the core of the conflicts that were arising and to find positive solutions to them. This took time and involved large, formal discussions of the whole membership as well as a series of conversations at the local level.

By the end, the network pulled through, and the award of the Equator Prize, as well as the successful delivery of a really exciting Indigenous Peoples Festival in Kinshasa in 2015, underlined the strength and resilience of the organisation and the people involved. The next Indigenous Peoples Festival is planned for August 2018.

NB : Rainforest Foundation Norway has been a key partner for the DGPA over many years and its support has been critical throughout the whole time that Well Grounded has been working with the DGPA.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The DGPA, along with many other networks in the DRC, still faces the enormous challenge of coordinating a national network with very limited resources in a country with poor communication and transport links. This is an area that will be interesting to explore more: the DGPA has started experimenting with online decision making and voting so that members can participate from all over the country without having to physically travel to join in discussions. It is also rolling this out to try and give communities themselves a direct voice in decision making.

Patrick SAIDI HEMEDI,
Coordinator

The support of Well Grounded has been critical for us. At the start, the challenge was how to marry the priorities of the coordination, the members and grassroots communities, and the solution to that was to build participation and accountability at every level. Our guiding principle is now that our direction comes from the ground up: what we lobby for and what our programmes involve have to be guided by what communities themselves identify. Even when something we've done with Well Grounded hasn't seemed to deliver exactly what we planned, we have always found that we have unexpected and positive results and we have learned from each of the things we've done and each has informed our next step. In the future, we want to keep on exploring how we can make indigenous voices even stronger, inside our own organisation but also in other institutions and bodies in the DRC.

FACTORS OF SUCCESS

- An organisation that is clear about and committed to what it wants to achieve;
- A core of champions within the organisation who have identified the need for change and are willing to push for it internally;
- Partners and funders who are willing to fund such work and be patient whilst organisations are resolving their internal problems;
- A willingness on the part of the organisation to learn and to make use of that learning for its next development step;
- Flexibility and a willingness to adapt on the part of the OD practitioners.





Well Grounded provides organisation development (OD) support to African civil society organisations (CSOs) that work on community rights and the protection of forests and natural resources.

This series of success stories is designed to share our experiences of OD with CSOs, identifying factors that we consider have been important in enabling those CSOs to become more effective and to have more impact.

We hope that our learning can be of use to others who are facing similar challenges.

We also hope that these success stories highlight the importance of investing in organisations as well as in projects.

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