“IN THE SHORT BUT INTENSE TIME THAT I HAVE KNOWN AND WORKED WITH WELL GROUNDED, I AM STRUCK BY THREE THINGS: THEIR ABILITY TO BUILD TEAM AND SHARED RESPONSIBILITY; TO FIND FOCUS AND WORK WITH AN EAGLE’S EYE AND DEPTH; AND NOT LEAST, THE CARE AND COMPASSION THAT THEY BRING IN BUILDING AND SUSTAINING RELATIONSHIPS FOR THE WORK THAT THEY DO. IT IS A PRIVILEGE TO WORK WITH THEM.”

Davine Thaw
Organisation Development Practitioner
South Africa
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Well Grounded is an opportunity for non-governmental organisations and forest communities to make themselves stronger organisationally and to develop as institutions

Alphonse Muhindo Valivambene
Secrétaire Général, Réseau CREF
Democratic Republic of Congo

Disclaimer: Well Grounded receives support from UK Aid through the Department for International Development (DFID). However, the views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect DFID’s official policies.
Iola and I, who set up Well Grounded, have both worked on forest and natural resource issues for many years. Both of us started out with a fascination for the natural world and forests in particular, so each of us went into research – trying to understand how forests and ecosystems work. However, over time, it became clear to both of us in our separate ways that if we wanted to do something about the immediate threats that forests and other natural resources were facing, the solutions weren’t going to be technical. They were going to be political, social and economic – they were going to come down to people, the systems they establish and the decisions they make. So the two of us each found work with organisations that focused on the role of people in natural resource issues and in particular, those that focused on the rights of forest communities to take their own decisions and control their own development.

We both spent many years working for European NGOs who worked closely with African organisations who were dealing with just that: community rights and justice in natural resource management. We both met really inspiring people working in unbelievably difficult circumstances and yet still making a difference. In that time we both saw many good ideas and exciting projects and campaigns start up, get going – and then grind to a halt.

This was the origin of Well Grounded: we realised that in the work that was going on there was something missing, something that meant that the huge potential of African activists at all levels was getting blocked. It wasn’t due to lack of willingness and dedication on the part of the people involved, and quite often it wasn’t, oddly enough, due to a lack of funding. It struck us that one of the biggest stumbling blocks was connected with organising. Community groups, networks and non-government organisations throughout forest countries in Africa have amazing people working for them. But putting ideas for change into practice runs you up against challenges: how to open up a space where you can make your voice heard by decision-makers; how to get access to the information you need to challenge them; how to get the resources and training you need to be able to start something new; how to apply for and account for funding and so on. In the context of countries such as those in the Congo Basin, which have a long history of corruption and mismanagement from colonial times and up to the present day, national organisations face real difficulties in tackling these challenges.

So we came to the conclusion that someone needed to offer support in organising – to work with organisations in the countries of the Congo Basin, help them think through their own organisational development and get the training and resources they need to have an impact.

What we have tried to ensure from the start is that it is the national organisations that set the agenda: they decide what they need to do and we work with them to help them achieve it. We support them to obtain and manage the resources they need directly – we don’t act as a funding source and it’s up to each organisation whether or not to invite us in to provide advice and support at any stage. And the decision about whether they want to work with us will be based on whether our input genuinely enables organisations to better achieve real change, and to show to others that they’ve succeeded in doing so. That is quite a challenge for us since change is a complex and long-term process.

So far, it’s been an adventure. At first it was just me, working part-time from home. Quite soon, we got support from the UK Department of International Development, which meant that we were able to take on one person to work directly with organisations in the Central African Republic. Last year, in 2012, we grew still more and we now have a team of seven people: four in Cameroon, one in the Democratic Republic of Congo and two in London.

As we have grown we have learnt a huge amount from developing our own organisation and we have had great moments of learning with the many organisations we’ve worked with in Cameroon, CAR, Congo, DRC, Gabon and Liberia and in other parts of the world. The help we have had in the process has been invaluable. It’s been a privilege to work with so many great people, in our team and even more so in the organisations we work with day to day. The potential for change and action in the communities and organisations in African forests is enormous and we hope that Well Grounded can continue to play its part in ensuring that the potential is realised.
Introduction to
Well Grounded

Our vision is of a world in which all people are able to seek and secure justice and sustainability in the management of natural resources.

We contribute to this by providing organisation development support to civil society organisations (CSOs) in Africa so that they have real and sustainable impacts on natural resource governance and community rights. We also promote change by connecting organisations to build a strong civil society voice. We aim to provide a unique response through our work with each organisation, based on its particular needs and priorities.

Well Grounded therefore supports national CSOs in the Congo Basin and Liberia to become more effective, in particular those that are working for the rights of local communities and good governance of natural resources. We do this so that they can deliver on the rights and governance work themselves.

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1. Well Grounded views ‘civil society organisations’ as any groupings, formal or informal, that have purpose, people and process. They can include, among others, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), networks, platforms, community-based organisations (CBOs) and social movements.
The countries of the region are incredibly rich in biodiversity and there are also rich deposits of minerals and natural resources in many of them. People depend heavily on natural resources to survive, but they are having to compete with external interests who also have an eye on the same resources;

Much of the natural resource base is being managed according to models of natural resource management that don’t benefit local people and that don’t reduce poverty or protect the environment;

Laws and policies governing natural resources often ignore the rights of the people who live in and depend on them and frequently end up excluding those people from decision-making on issues that affect them, on being able to use their natural resources and even from living on their traditional lands;

High levels of corruption and lack of transparency within many governments exacerbate these problems and there is limited political space for people to criticise or to get involved in decision-making around legal and policy change;

There is a strong influence of external pressures that prioritise development approaches that may not meet the needs of people dependent on natural resources for their survival, or of the countries themselves;

There is little or no good quality information and analysis on natural resources, natural resource management and even such basic facts as population sizes and demography, which makes decision-making even more difficult;

There is not a strong tradition of questioning authority.

The countries in the region face common challenges:

Challenges facing national organisations

In response to the challenges listed previously, there are many inspirational and dynamic individuals and organisations in the countries where we work who are addressing the problems, coming from and working with the poorest and most marginalised communities that depend very closely on natural resources for their survival. They are beginning to achieve real advances in influencing the rhetoric about natural resource management at national and international levels and in raising the issue of community rights.

However, the next vital step of moving from rhetoric to real change on the ground is all too often still missing. As well as this being a process that inevitably takes time, one of the factors that acts as a hurdle is that locally defined priorities and needs can get ignored or distorted. We believe that national organisations play an important role in changing this, but many of them face problems of their own, such as:

Limited capacity in the collection, analysis and presentation of information, both quantitative and qualitative;

Limited capacity to develop strategic responses to evidence-based identification of problems and opportunities;

A tendency to emphasise priorities set by international actors, rather than set their own priorities as a basis for strategic decision-making;

Limited capacity in basic organisational management, which is required to attract and sustain funding, such as financial management systems, effective monitoring and evaluation, report and proposal writing skills, human resource development, etc.;

Over dependence on a small number of key internal resource people with the competences required for effective delivery of their work; frequently just one or two people in any one organisation;

Poor leadership and organisational governance;

Weak links with the communities and constituencies that they are acting on behalf of, and poor or non-existent mechanisms for accountability to these groups;

Limited representation of women, marginalised groups and the communities that they are working for within the organisations themselves;

Coordination between organisations that is limited or circumscribed by individual or organisational interests, with the result that the impact of collective action is weakened;

Limited recognition by national organisations that investment in themselves is important;

A piecemeal approach to investment in organisation development by international actors; an emphasis on strengthening the capacities of organisations in particular areas rather than looking at organisations as a whole;

A failure on the part of international actors to coordinate between themselves on collaboration with national organisations.

Well Grounded is thus trying to support organisations to overcome these problems so that they can be more effective in delivering real change.
Our approach

Organisation Development

In general, Organisation Development (OD) can be understood as a conscious process chosen by the organisation itself, to take its next development step.

Well Grounded defines OD more specifically as a long-term process that requires a ‘whole systems’ approach. This process is made up of a series of interventions that focus on supporting an organisation to make changes to its systems, structures or culture. These changes are made with the aim of improving an organisation’s potential and performance (ex. internal functioning) as well as their efficiency (ex. external impact).

Well Grounded’s approach to Organisation Development is expressed in the following way:

We support organisations to take action for change;

Our primary accountability is to national civil society organisations;

We work with organisations that approach us for potential collaboration;

We choose the organisations with which we work according to our values and our availability;

We adapt our work to take into account the fact that each organisation is unique;

We look at an organisation as a whole, rather than looking at individual parts in isolation;

We support organisations to take charge of their own development;

We identify issues and challenges with an organisation and not for them;

We do not tell organisations what to do; we may bring optional solutions, but they make their own decisions;

We will not do anything that an organisation can do for itself;

Relationships are at the centre of our approach;

We work with everybody in an organisation who is affected by a process;

We support organisations to see how they fit into the bigger context and to make connections with others within that context;

We facilitate processes to encourage collective action across organisations.
Our work

Well Grounded believes that for an organisation to have an impact, it needs a clear vision that builds on good information and responds to the people it works for.

It will manage its resources and its people well, being clear about how it takes decisions. And it will work in a principled way and be ready to learn from experience and to share information with others.

We have articulated this in a series of eight ‘benchmarks’ that together reflect the pillars of a strong organisation. Well Grounded works with organisations to support them in tackling any or all of the challenges they face in relation to these eight benchmarks. Each organisation will have its own interpretation of how it wants to progress in relation to them, however, for Well Grounded, the minimum is that an organisation be committed to the basic principles expressed in each of the benchmarks.

On the following pages, each benchmark has been illustrated by a case study.

The Benchmarks

Benchmark 1
A vision aimed at environmental and social justice

Benchmark 2
Programmes, projects & campaigns based on evidence and analysis, with clear rationales

Benchmark 3
Accountable and responsive to the communities and groups with which the organisation is working

Benchmark 4
A functioning internal system of governance that is transparent and reflects the vision and values of the organisation

Benchmark 5
Mobilise & manage resources needed responsibly and transparently, accounting for them clearly and on time

Benchmark 6
Provide appropriate management and support for the people involved in the organisation

Benchmark 7
Work to the highest possible ethical standards

Benchmark 8
Open and ready to learn from experience and from others and to work with others
Benchmark 1 Case Studies

Réseau de Ressources Naturelles (RRN)
Democratic Republic of Congo

Réseau de Ressources Naturelles (RRN) is a national network of NGOs that work on natural resource and community rights issues in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), set up in 2002. It has more than 200 members, spread throughout the country, who work on a range of issues, from supporting local communities to develop community forest management, to working with groups of artisanal miners to understand the law, campaigning on oil exploration and extraction and carrying out participatory mapping with forest communities.

Well Grounded has worked with RRN since we began as an organisation, supporting it on project planning, strategic planning and securing funding on a range of issues. One of the biggest challenges for a network that covers such a huge country with such poor communication and transport links is how to ensure that the network itself continues to be able to reach all its members and that they all feel some common sense of purpose and added value for the network.

It was with this challenge in mind that RRN started to look at its core work and its planning processes. In mid-2012, it had an external evaluation that took a look at its structure and function, done by Kim Brice, an independent consultant, together with Well Grounded. In December 2012, the members met and looked at the ideas from this evaluation and their own ideas in order to confirm their vision and to clarify their long-term objectives and those for the next five years – and to make sure that they were organised in such a way as to be able to achieve them.

In this way, RRN is working towards Benchmark 1: A vision aimed at environmental and social justice, and in particular the network is making sure that all the work it engages in is aimed towards this vision.

Field Legality Advisory Group (FLAG) Sub-Regional

The Field Legality Advisory Group (FLAG) is a new sub-regional organisation, based in Cameroon, started up by a group of Cameroonian NGOs who have been supporting independent forest monitoring work in the Congo Basin for the past 10 years. The overall vision of FLAG is to provide technical, legal and practical support to national-level organisations that are doing independent forest monitoring work: this can be either ‘external monitoring’ by CSOs, or formal independent monitoring processes linked to Voluntary Partnership Agreements (VPAs). FLAG will also function as a coordinating mechanism – to collect information coming from monitoring projects in the various countries, and then to collate and analyse this information to pull out trends and produce reports for various audiences. This will be done to improve on information exchange, learning and strategising at a sub-regional level.

The core team who are setting up FLAG are technical and legal experts who have a lot of experience managing projects, overseeing teams, and participating in multi-stakeholder dialogues around forest governance. However, none of them have previously started up a new organisation, which is no small task! Therefore, in mid-2012, FLAG decided to start working with Well Grounded to get some support around their organisational set-up and strategy.

We have been helping FLAG to reflect on and define their priorities for the development of the organisation from a holistic perspective. More recently, Well Grounded has been working with FLAG to support them in a visioning process that will be the basis for a more intensive strategic planning session later on this year. We have also been supporting fundraising efforts by linking FLAG with potential donors and providing feedback on proposals and budgets.

This case study shows how FLAG, with support from Well Grounded, is working towards the achievement of Benchmark 1: A vision aimed at environmental and social justice.
The Sustainable Development Institute (SDI) is a Liberian NGO that has been working on community rights and justice in natural resource management for many years. It was instrumental in ensuring the passage of the Liberian Community Rights Law and has been actively engaged in forest and land issues.

SDI takes a regular look at the context in Liberia to make sure that its programmes are responding to real needs and that the organisation is playing to its strengths. In 2010, Well Grounded got involved with helping SDI explore its role in community forestry in Liberia. Liberian civil society had had a lot of success in campaigning to open up political space for the recognition of community rights. So much so that NGOs needed to start exploring how to support communities to take the next steps – managing their forests and showing that they could do so.

Well Grounded thus helped the SDI team to think through a pilot project that worked with communities in Rivercess County in Liberia, which explored options for communities to start actively managing their forests and improving their livelihoods. Our support involved working with the team as they thought through ways of exploring the questions with community groups and drawing up proposals and ideas for the next steps in making community-led forestry a reality in Liberia.

This is how SDI continues to work towards Benchmark 2: Programmes, projects and campaigns based on evidence and analysis, with clear rationales.
La Dynamique des Groupes des Peuples Autochtones (DGPA) is a non-profit network of organisations run by indigenous people and those that work to defend and promote the rights of indigenous people in the DRC. DGPA is made up of 43 member organisations that work in the 10 provinces in the DRC where indigenous people live. Its core objective is to promote and protect the rights of indigenous people.

DGPA has identified that one of its challenges is how to ensure that it is genuinely responding to the needs and priorities of the indigenous people it is working with and, at times, representing. DGPA is also keen to see far more direct involvement of indigenous people at every level in the organisation, particularly in relation to major decisions. The network has therefore made a conscious decision to use a ‘bottom up’ approach in all of its work to ensure that the realities and priorities of indigenous communities define the advocacy work of DGPA members as well as the National Coordination team. Well Grounded has thus been working with DGPA’s National Coordination team and some of its members since 2011 to help them develop skills and experience in participatory approaches to project and programme design and delivery, as well as exploring consultation and consent processes.

Benchmark 3 Case Study
La Dynamique des Groupes des Peuples Autochtones (DGPA)
Democratic Republic of Congo

Well Grounded has been working with DGPA to help design a consultation process that aims to gather feedback from indigenous people on a draft law that is being developed to protect and promote the rights of indigenous people in the DRC.

All of these examples indicate that DGPA – in partnership with Well Grounded – is committed to working towards the achievement of Benchmark 3: Being accountable and responsive to the communities and groups with which it is working.
Benchmark 4 Case Study

Environnement Ressources Naturelles et Développement (ERND)
Democratic Republic of Congo

Environnement Ressources Naturelles et Développement (ERND) is a non-profit activist organisation, carrying out actions for the recognition, promotion and protection of the rights of indigenous people in the DRC. In particular, ERND conducts advocacy to promote the rights of indigenous people to access land. ERND’s structure has changed considerably since 2010, when it expanded its largest programme called the Indigenous People’s Judicial and Administrative Support Programme (PAJA) and extended its geographical area of intervention. Following this growth period, ERND found that it had failed to harmonise its methodology, appropriately channel information and develop strategies. This led to misunderstandings between ERND and its financial partner about the organisation’s priorities and the communication chain within PAJA.

In 2012, ERND and its partner Rainforest Foundation Norway (RFN) identified two challenges: how to improve internal communication and to better prioritise actions. They decided to approach Well Grounded to facilitate the process of addressing these challenges.

As a result of this activity, ERND and RFN realised that, despite carrying out the same programme, they had different visions and that ERND’s vision was wider than the scope of the work funded by RFN. For ERND, its vision is very much focused at the local community level and ERND would like to keep concentrating on certain actions even though they are not a priority for RFN. This prompted ERND to think realistically about its funding strategy and general intervention strategy.

The strategic planning process resulted in re-designing the programme’s scope of work and structure: new sharing of responsibilities, new team organisation, new mandates for each team and new communication lines between RFN and ERND. This step marked the start of a long-term collaboration between ERND and Well Grounded to address these issues in 2013 beyond the programme.

This experience demonstrates that ERND is committed to working towards the achievement of Benchmark 4: A functioning internal system of governance that is transparent and reflects the vision and values of the organisation.
AZUR Développement (AZUR) is a women’s association that started up activities in the Republic of Congo in 2003 under the leadership of a group of women motivated to improve the conditions of women and children. Since then, AZUR has implemented projects within the country and has also engaged in regional initiatives in francophone Africa. The core programmes of AZUR address violence against women, HIV and AIDS, indigenous women’s rights and, most recently, sustainable resource management from a gender perspective.

In 2011, AZUR decided to partner with Well Grounded to work on building the capacity of NGOs in the Republic of Congo to monitor the implementation of the VPA between the European Union and the Congolese government. The specific objective of the project is to reinforce the organisational and professional capacities of 20 Congolese NGOs to improve their participation in the implementation of the VPA.

During the partnership, AZUR and Well Grounded have worked together on a range of activities to help national organisations better understand the issues concerned within forest policy and to improve their development, delivery and reporting of projects. Well Grounded’s support has ranged from helping AZUR to carry out a diagnosis of organisations and their strengths and weaknesses, developing resource materials and tools and contributing to training and mentoring support on project design and management. The project included a process of giving out small grants to several other organisations, which has been a great learning opportunity for AZUR, Well Grounded and for all the organisations that put in proposals. Managing the small grants has involved a great deal of work on planning budgets, managing funding and reporting on it accurately.

Within this project, it has been clear that AZUR – in partnership with Well Grounded – is committed to working towards the achievement of Benchmark 5: Mobilising and managing resources needed responsibly and transparently, accounting for them clearly and on time.
Cercle d’Appui à la Gestion durable des Forêts (CAGDF) is a CSO that was founded in 2010 to focus on issues of forest governance and community rights, particularly in relation to independent monitoring. CAGDF was founded within the context of a project focused on establishing a formal Independent Observer (IO) to monitor implementation of the national forest code in the Republic of Congo. In order to effectively establish itself, the organisation benefited from support from two international NGOs in particular: Resource Extraction Monitoring (REM) and Forests Monitor (FM).

Since 2010, CAGDF has partnered with REM and FM to implement a project called Independent Observation of the Implementation of the Forest Code and Forest Governance to Support the VPA/FLEGT* Process in the Congo Basin (OIFLEG). Throughout the duration of this project, CAGDF has benefited from a transfer of skills from these partner organisations. Based on this experience, the next phase of OIFLEG, which will begin at the latest in 2014, will be managed entirely by CAGDF, which will also take over the role of formal IO within the VPA process.

CAGDF is made up of forest engineers, socio-economic experts and a lawyer. As a team they have a wealth of expertise and experience. Since its creation, most of the CAGDF members have worked on the legal and technical side of things: organising and carrying out field missions to document the activities of various forest companies operating throughout the country; writing up reports; and presenting key findings to government, private sector and other CSOs. However, very few of the CAGDF members have experience of starting up and running an organisation. For this reason, they approached Well Grounded in mid-2012 to get some support in thinking through and developing a transition plan, as REM and FM wound down their involvement in managing the OIFLEG project in Congo and CAGDF prepared to step into the formal IO role and to take on full responsibility for this work.

Over the past year, Well Grounded has worked with key individuals within CAGDF, as well as with the whole team, to accompany them in thinking through their transition. Well Grounded designed a methodology and a series of tools to analyse the roles and responsibilities of all individuals who have been involved in the IO project to date, as well as other members of CAGDF. The idea of this analysis is to evaluate who does what at the moment, which gaps will be created when REM and FM are no longer involved in the project, and what strategies CAGDF can put in place to address these gaps based on its existing strengths, competencies and partnerships.

The analysis that is underway is the first step in a longer-term collaboration between CAGDF and Well Grounded, and shows the commitment of CAGDF staff and members to work towards the achievement of Benchmark 6: Provide appropriate management and support for the people involved in the organisation.
In the Republic of Congo, we are working with the Observatoire Congolais des Droits de l’Homme (OCDH), an organisation that monitors and campaigns on human rights in Congo, including environmental rights and the rights of indigenous people.

With Well Grounded’s support, OCDH has been taking a look at how it is structured and how it works, and has been going through some fundamental reforms in the organisation. One issue that was particularly important for OCDH’s members and staff was connected to ethics: as a human rights organisation, advocating dignity and equality of all people, were they putting those principles into practice within their own organisation and in how they behaved with one another? In exploring this, they agreed that although they tried to do this in practice, it could be helpful to write down what they considered to be those principles to be, and how the organisation would promote its values and combat what they considered to be negative behaviour.

OCDH therefore drew up a ‘Code of Ethics and Good Conduct,’ which everyone who joins the organisation as a member or a member of staff signs up to and commits to putting into practice. They hope that this will help them scrutinise their own performance and be confident that they are practicing what they preach.

In this way, they are working towards Benchmark 7: Work to the highest possible ethical standards.

WELL GROUNDED HAS SUPPORTED OCDH TO DRAW UP A ‘CODE OF ETHICS & GOOD CONDUCT,’ WHICH EVERYONE WHO JOINS THE ORGANISATION SIGNS UP TO AND COMMENTS TO PUTTING INTO PRACTICE.
The Centre pour l’Information Environnementale et le Développement Durable (CIEDD) was created in 2010. CIEDD’s focus is on promoting the sharing of environmental information, the sustainable management of the environment and natural resources, and the defence of the rights of local and indigenous communities in the Central African Republic (CAR). Forêts et Développement Rurale (FODER) is a Cameroonian NGO with rich experience in external independent forest monitoring.

CIEDD and FODER, together with Well Grounded, developed a project that would support Central African civil society to explore how it might develop and implement independent forest monitoring in CAR, in order to contribute to the implementation of the VPA/FLEGT process. Well Grounded got involved as a strategic and organisational development partner to support this collaboration. CIEDD was responsible for management and coordination of the project, representation and relations with the donor; FODER provided legal and technical assistance and coordinated exchange of experience during project implementation; and Well Grounded helped with reinforcing organisational capacities, monitoring and evaluation and facilitating relationships between CIEDD and other partners.

Well Grounded has worked with CIEDD since we began operations in CAR, supporting them on planning, strategic planning and developing a learning and communication system for transparent reporting. One of the innovations that CIEDD and FODER developed during the project was an extensive involvement of many other CSOs from CAR at every stage of implementation of the project, so that they all felt involved. This not only proved to be innovative and a plus, but most especially demonstrated CIEDD’s willingness to network, collaborate and learn from other CSOs.

This was happening for the first time within CSO circles in CAR: that one organisation was so willing to actively engage so many others in a project seen as its own.

In this way, CIEDD is working towards Benchmark 8: Open and ready to learn from experience and from others and to work with others.
We have a non-hierarchical structure

Well Grounded is an organisation with a non-hierarchical structure. This means that all staff participate in strategic decisions, with each person having an agreed level of autonomy in day-to-day decision-making. We have a shared responsibility for the major decisions taken, as well as accountability to other members of the team for our own decisions. To facilitate this process, we use a consensus decision-making model to help us move forward with an action.

The non-hierarchical structure was chosen by the founders to reflect the values inherent to Well Grounded. We seek to be not only accountable but also transparent in our actions. We aim to foster an environment in which each person's position in the organisation and his/her contribution is valued.

We are also regularly documenting and analysing our practice through our learning strategy to inform the decisions we take so we can ensure the work we do remains pertinent and effective.

Role of directors

Well Grounded has two voluntary directors and one staff director who share the same set of responsibilities. Principally these are to contribute to the development of our organisational strategy and approve any changes linked to this, as well as to keep an eye on how we are performing against our objectives. Directors also have financial and legal responsibilities in terms of reporting and play a secondary role in supporting staff. Being a non-hierarchical organisation, the directors share the same weight in the decisions taken as the other members of the team.

Our way of working

Our approach is tailored to each organisation that we work with. It involves getting to know the people within an organisation and their priorities, strengths and weaknesses and then creating together a programme of actions to help them develop. This might include training, coaching, facilitating meetings and planning sessions, as well as helping to write funding proposals.

Although Well Grounded is registered in the UK, most of our team is based in Yaoundé, Cameroon, with one person in Kinshasa. This means that we can be more available and connected to the organisations we are working with in the Congo Basin and can follow what is going on in the sub-region more closely.

Although we seek to make face-to-face support available to CSOs in the Congo Basin, we also offer support at a distance. This is partly practical and partly a strategic choice: organisations need time and space to develop themselves and if we are too present, it could distort their own progress.

Country and organisational focal points

Each country in which we work has a member of the Well Grounded team who acts as a focal point: someone who has an overview on what is going on there and on Well Grounded’s programme of work and collaborations. We also have a focal point for each of the organisations we are supporting: someone who is our principal contact point for that organisation and who has an overview on the work we do with it. Any one organisation may work with different members of the Well Grounded team based on the area(s) of support it has identified as needing, so the focal point maintains an overview and ensures a good coordination between the organisation and the members of the Well Grounded team working with it on its organisational development process.

Collaboration with international non-governmental organisations

Well Grounded was in part created to fill the gaps in support that other international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) working in the region are not targeting. To ensure our work is complementary, we actively engage in exchanging information and coordinating our efforts with these organisations. These collaborations can be of an informal nature; they can be through project partnerships and sometimes Well Grounded is financed by an INGO to deliver a specific piece of work with a CSO (for example, facilitating a national civil society platform meeting or providing technical input into a programme or project).
How we choose which organisations to work with

Many of the organisations we work with at the moment are ones that our staff have known for a long time and with whom we have talked about the idea of Well Grounded from its inception. However, as time goes on, we hope that organisations will start to approach us.

When we are considering whether we can work with an organisation or not, we take into account the following issues:

**Country:** at the moment, we work with organisations from Cameroon, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, Liberia and the Republic of Congo only.

**Impact:** we have to make a judgment about whether working with Well Grounded will make a difference to an organisation and to wider civil society in that country, or not.

**Our own capacity:** we are a small team and sometimes, however fantastic an organisation is, we cannot take on a new one because we simply would not be able to commit enough staff time and resources.

**Willingness and interest:** we want to work with organisations that meet the minimum criterion for each of our eight benchmarks and that are interested in improving on at least one of them. The minima are as follows opposite:

### Benchmark

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<tr>
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<td>Open and ready to learn from experience and from others and to work with others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### Benchmark 1

A vision aimed at environmental and social justice

Everyone involved in the organisation shares a common vision that is linked to at least one social or environmental issue

### Benchmark 2

Programmes, projects & campaigns based on evidence and analysis, with clear rationales

What the organisation does is in response to one or more identified needs, priorities or problems

### Benchmark 3

Accountable and responsive to the communities and groups with which the organisation is working

The organisation knows on whose behalf it is working

### Benchmark 4

A functioning internal system of governance that is transparent and reflects the vision and values of the organisation

People involved in the organisation can explain who takes key decisions

### Benchmark 5

Mobilise & manage resources needed responsibly and transparently, accounting for them clearly and on time

More than one person involved in the organisation can explain where its funding comes from and how it plans to spend it

### Benchmark 6

Provide appropriate management and support for the people involved in the organisation

The organisation wants to manage and support people justly in a way that serves its purpose

### Benchmark 7

Work to the highest possible ethical standards

The organisation wants to ensure ethical behaviour and tackle unethical behaviour

### Benchmark 8

Open and ready to learn from experience and from others and to work with others

The organisation wants to be transparent in sharing information and learning from others
We are a learning organization

Well Grounded considers itself to be a learning organization. This means that we see learning as essential to the development of our practice, the continual improvement of our services, and as the foundation to our impact.

One of the benchmarks that Well Grounded uses to help national organisations in Africa reflect on their own performance is about learning. Benchmark 8 looks at whether organisations are open and ready to learn from others and from their own experience, and to work with others. While we think this is something important for national organisations to do, we also think it is just as important for us to do the same. In fact, we believe that it is important for us to regularly reflect on and measure our performance based on all of the benchmarks, to assess our progress in achieving them in the same way that we encourage others to do. This is a part of our learning strategy!

Why is learning so important to Well Grounded? First of all, Well Grounded is a very young organization – we have only been around for three years. We are also pioneering a new approach in the region: organizational development. Both of these things mean that Well Grounded has a lot to learn, and also we have a lot to share.

In 2012, Well Grounded developed and adopted a learning strategy in order to build systems into our regular work cycle to allow for reflection on what we are doing as individuals, as a team and as an organization. This is based on the idea that we learn some things from experience, but we learn more deeply when we reflect on an experience.

Well Grounded has decided to use an approach called action learning: this is a process of consciously learning from experience in order to improve future practice. This involves stopping to identify a situation that we want to learn from, reflecting on what happened, pulling out lessons from the experience, planning what we would do the same, or differently, the next time, and acting by doing things differently, based on the new organization.

We believe that there are basically three sites for learning: the individual (personal and professional development); the group (how a team works together and relates); and the whole organization. As part of our learning strategy, Well Grounded has adopted three systems that relate directly to the three sites/locations for learning listed above: learning journals (individual); debriefing sessions after missions (group); and case study reflections (whole organization).

Beyond this, Well Grounded has also taken on board some other learning initiatives over the past year. For example, in September 2012 we engaged a seasoned organizational development practitioner from South Africa to facilitate a strategic meeting for us, to help us more clearly define our practice, structure and strategy. We are continuing to work with her as a mentor, to accompany us in our own organizational development process.

Also, in mid-2013 we commissioned an external consultancy group to do an evaluation of Well Grounded’s approach; to talk to people whom we work with in Africa and Europe to get some feedback on how well we are doing in responding to the real needs of national organisations in the Congo Basin, communicating our core business, and developing our practice.

How we work Continued
Annual accounts summary

Summary of Income and Expenditure
2010 – 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Expenditure</th>
<th>Carried Over</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
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<td>2012</td>
<td>£405,705</td>
<td>£395,111</td>
<td>£19,963</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Well Grounded • The First Three Years • June 2010 to June 2013

Country Organisations A-Z

Cameroon
Field Legality Advisory Group (FLAG)
Forêts et Développement Rurale (FODER)

Central African Republic
Centre pour l’Information Environnementale et le Développement Durable (CIEDD) www.ciedd.over-blog.org
Maison de l’Enfant et de la Femme Pygmées (MEFP) Plaforme Gestion Durable des Ressources Naturelles et Environnement (GDRNE)

Democratic Republic of Congo
Cercle pour la Défense de l’Environnement (CEDEN) Dynamique des Groupes des Peuples Autochtones (DGPA) www.dgpa.cd
Environnement Ressources Naturelles et Développement (ERND) www.erdinstitute.org
Réseau de Ressources Naturelles (RRN) www.rrmdc.org
Réseau pour la Conservation et la Réhabilitation des Ecosystèmes Forestiers (Réseau CREF): www.reseaurecf.org

Gabon
Brainforest www.brainforest-gabon.org

Liberia
Sustainable Development Institute (SDI) www.sdliberia.org

Republic of Congo
AZUR Développement (AZUR) www.azurdev.org
Cercle d’Appui à la Gestion Durable des Forêts (CAGDF)
Observatoire Congolais des Droits de l’Homme (OCDH) www.blog.ocdh.org

Organisations we work with

Well Grounded staff based in Yaoundé, Cameroon:
Abongta S. Moncha Organisational Development Practitioner
Emily Wilson Organisational Development Practitioner
Jean Fogang Administrative and Finance Assistant
Mireille Kayijamahe Organisational Development Practitioner

Well Grounded consultant based in Kinshasa, DRC:
Bernardin Kakundika Finance and Human Resources Advisor for Civil Society

Well Grounded staff based in London, UK:
Cath Long Organisational Development Practitioner & Staff Director
Emma Almeras Organisational Development Practitioner

Well Grounded non-staff directors:
Iola Leal Will Campbell

Thanks

The following individuals and organisations have been key to Well Grounded’s development and have helped us enormously in terms of funding, advice, sharing ideas, providing us with meeting space, time and energy. We appreciate the help offered by all of them and we know that we could not have done this alone (listed in alphabetical order):

Abdoullahi Danlami Hamidou
Audrey Long
Axyom Consulting
Blaise Fokou
Brian Layng
Centre for Environment and Development (CED)
Centre for International Development and Training (CIDT)
Davine Thaw
Department for International Development (DFID)/UK Aid
FERN
Forests Monitor
Global Witness
Jennifer Wilson

Khadidja Amine
Kim Brice
Kyeretwie Opoku
MDF
Muna Muna & Associates
Nathalia Dukhan
Penny Davies
Rainforest Foundation Norway
Rainforest Foundation UK (RFUK)
Resource Extraction Monitoring (REM)
Robinson Djeukam
Samuel Nguiullo
Samuel Nnah Ndobe
Saskia Ozinga
Silas Siakor

IOLA LEAL RIESCO
CO-FOUNDER
Thanks to well grounded, MEFP [an organisation supporting pygmy women and children] has carried out its first organisational audit, which will enable it to make better forward projections. Additionally, its dream of developing and owning its own projects is now becoming a reality.

Saint-Jérôme Sitamon
Coordinateur Adjoint, MEFP
Central African Republic
“WELL GROUNDED’S UNIQUENESS LIES IN THE FACT THAT IT PLACES A GREAT DEAL OF EMPHASIS ON STRENGTHENING THE INSTITUTIONAL AND ORGANISATIONAL CAPACITY OF LOCAL ORGANISATIONS... BECAUSE OF THE OBJECTIVES IT SETS ITSELF AND WHAT IT DOES, WELL GROUNDED DOES NOT IN ANY WAY COMPETE WITH NATIONAL NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS”

Roch Euloge N’zobo
Interim Director, OCDH
Republic of Congo