

STORIES OF CHANGE: FLAG

Strategic thinking and planning boosts FLAG's organisational growth

By Jimm Chick



The Field Legality Advisory Group (FLAG) is a regional organisation working to promote good forest governance, and supporting forest resource monitoring in the Congo Basin. Well Grounded worked with FLAG from 2012 - 2014 focusing on organisational strategy and resource mobilisation, and they are now also participating in the Canopy leadership programme. In this story, Horline Njike, FLAG's Secretary General reflects on how working with Well Grounded enabled FLAG's founders to dream bigger, and move beyond a 'project mentality' towards building a sustainable organisation and expanding their reach and impact.

From humble beginnings, Field Legality Advisory Group (FLAG) has morphed into an icon in forest governance and forest resources monitoring in Central Africa.

Currently operating as a well-structured and coordinated organisation, FLAG was founded by a team of three civil society actors who brainstormed on establishing a project to promote forest governance in Cameroon in 2012. From a project idea, the group of three have worked assiduously to transform the project idea into a civil society powerhouse in the forest governance sector in Central Africa.



FLAG working in the field

Key Information

Country: Cameroon/ Countries within the Congo Basin Forest

Period of collaboration

FLAG collaborated with Well Grounded from 2012 to 2017.

Domains of collaboration

Well Grounded supported FLAG to identify its organisational needs, reflect on and develop an organisational strategy for 2014 - 2017, and develop a resource mobilisation strategy and strategise towards organisational sustainability.

FLAG was supported to harness its structure which led to the development of an organogramme and definition of roles and responsibilities of team members.

Furthermore, the collaboration enabled FLAG to develop some essential organisational policies notably an anti corruption policy and conflict of interest policy



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With a current staff capacity of 17 full-time personnel, FLAG has fixed its sights high, aiming for bigger transformative goals within the region.

“We dream of being bigger”, says Horline Njike, Secretary General of FLAG and one of the co-founders of FLAG.

The organisation is now working towards an African society in which the principles of good governance are applied in the management of natural resources.

But this grandiose vision was not the initial ambition of the three founders...

Strategic thinking guides FLAG to blossom

According to Njike, their goal was to solicit funds to implement projects aimed at

promoting independent monitoring of forest resources.

The organisation made some significant accomplishments against this initial goal. It has contributed to nurturing independent forest monitors in the region and has set up a training centre which will be nurturing its second cohort of forest monitors in 2023. But the organisation has since evolved far beyond the scope of this initial vision.

Reflecting on the growth trajectory of FLAG, Nike said: “We did not visualise this. We did not envision that we would be the organisation that we are today. It is an accomplishment that cannot be ignored.”

She recounts that this evolution, over the course of a decade, is the fruit of a collaboration with a partner they could rely on: Well Grounded.

Njike explains that their first encounter with Well Grounded was to seek guidance to develop a project proposal and to solicit funds to implement the initial ideas they had conceived.

However, as discussions ensued, they quickly realised that a project-driven approach wouldn't create a sustainable societal impact.

“Through discussions with Well Grounded, we



A FLAG team meeting

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understood that operating on a project basis would not guarantee the impactful results and transformation we sought.”, Njike explains.

These discussions centred on reflections on their vision for society, an analysis of their needs, brainstorming on their strategic priorities, orientation and approach, among others.

“These sessions with Well Grounded enabled us to critique our initial modus operandi, which was to seek funds to implement projects”, she further explains.

With support from Well Grounded, Njike and colleagues understood that they could think bigger and aim for greater ambitions.

The making of FLAG

“We needed to operate as an organisation because, with an organisation, it is more sustainable and more interesting. As an organisation, we could engage in other important activities. We can have the possibility of being renowned and to achieve more important milestones as opposed to sticking to a project idea”, she further narrates.

These encounters with Well Grounded during the first few months were critical for the establishment of the organisation known today as FLAG; and they are nowadays not only known in Cameroon, as they also have an increasingly recognised role in the Congo Basin at the regional level.

“Hence, we dumped the project-driven approach and adopted an organisational approach”, Njike affirms with a show of satisfaction.

“We are an organisation because we met Well Grounded, and we started to understand what an organisation is”, Njike explains.

She is very satisfied with the encounter with Well

Grounded because it resulted in the outstanding organisation FLAG is today.

Strategic reflections shaped FLAG

Well Grounded, being the ‘midwife’ that welcomed FLAG into the world of civil society organisations, provided guidance to FLAG that contributed to the latter’s establishment as a credible, well-functioning and credible civil society organisation in the Congo Basin.

This support enabled the three co-founders to have thorough reflections on a strategy. This enabled them to define their *raison d’être*, hence, having clarity and a deeper understanding of who they are.

“Yes, it helped us to define our identity, frame or priorities, make us define and explain to others who we are, what we want to do and how we want to do it”, Njike reiterates.

The support enabled FLAG to develop its first organisational strategy. The organisation also has a procedures manual, an anti-corruption policy, and a resource mobilisation strategy, among other key institutional policies that facilitate its operations today.

The entire team at FLAG is fully satisfied with the facilitation support from Well Grounded. They hold the collaborative process in high esteem. To them, it was a golden opportunity that cannot be underestimated.

The author

These stories were collected and written by Jimm Chick, an organisation development and communication specialist, based in Yaounde, Cameroon.

