

## 2004 External Evaluation: Community Resource Center in Morocco

In 2002, Search for Common Ground-Morocco (SCGM) began working in douar chanti, one of the poorest districts of Sidi Yahia al-Gharb (SYG). An urban development project was already underway in that district, administered by USAID and ANHE, a parastatal holding company. One of the outcomes of their work was the creation of community-based organizations, or *amicales*. These local organizations were to act as a point of contact between the local authorities and the population during the reconstruction process within the district. The *amicales* were arranged by neighborhood, each district drawn along electoral lines and numbered accordingly.

SCGM's involvement was originally conceived as a conflict resolution workshop program which would build on an existing USAID training program, but over the course of the two years, the program evolved to meet other community needs. From December 2002 to September 2004, the *amicales*, SCGM, local authorities, the *Association Nationale pour la Lutte Contre l'Habitat Insalubre* (ANHI, now OMRANE), and USAID collaborated on the building of a Community Resource Center.

SCGM initially started providing workshops on conflict resolution skills for the *amicales* and gradually expanded, at the request of the community, to offering computer training, largely for the youth. Collaborative projects, such as creating a public garden, involved the *amicales* and local residents and gave the *amicales* a concrete opportunity to work successfully together. After the first year of the project, most of the attention shifted to facilitating the planning and construction of a Community Resource Center.

Objectives of the project:

- Empower the youth to effect positive change in their communities
- Build the community's capacity to reach out and advocate for its rights
- Promote education and nonviolent conflict resolution
- Improve interpersonal, interfamily and inter-communal relations

The evaluation was conducted by Nicole Bennett, Fulbright Scholar, during May and June of 2004. SCGM and USAID commissioned the evaluation to measure the project success and to extract lessons for future endeavors.

### Evaluation Scope

In a broad sense, the evaluation explores the relationships between social actors in the municipality of SYG and considers the attempts at partnership between these actors as facilitated by SCGM and in collaboration with local *amicales*, the municipality (*le commune*), representatives of the ministries (*les services extérieurs*), and other local authorities.

More specifically, the evaluation focuses on two main aspects: a) the participants of the project, particularly the development of the *amicales*, and b) the effects of the Community Center – both the process of construction and the use of the building – on the various stakeholders.

## Evaluation Methodology

The participants for the evaluation were chosen based on their involvement in the project and included:

- Municipal council
- Amicales
- Trainers
- SCGM staff
- ANHI/OMRANE representative
- USAID representative

The evaluation consisted of thirty semi-structured, qualitative, one-on-one interviews led by a common questionnaire. In-depth interviews were held individually (in the presence of a translator when necessary) and there were several group meetings during the evaluation process. Interviews averaged an hour and half each and were generally conducted in two rounds (each interviewee represents approximately 3 hours of discussion time). The first round of interviews consisted of introductions, open discussion about the evaluation, and questions related to the context of SYG and the project history. The second round addressed the project details, partner relations, observed changes and impacts, strengths and weaknesses, lessons learned and projections for the future.

## Key Findings

### Development of the *amicales*

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In order to build the civic culture of douar chanti, SCGM concentrated on building the capacity of the *amicales*. Their ability to organize activities that respond to local needs is a critical part of how the Center will reach the greater population of douar chanti.

The evaluation revealed some positive changes in the development of the *amicales*, particularly in their communication and interaction:

- *amicale* members noted a substantial change in their ability to communicate with other community leaders
- *amicale* members particularly valued the contacts established with local authorities.
- an open line of communication was established between the *amicale* leaders, the local representative of ANHI/OMRANE, and SCGM
- *amicale* leaders demonstrated consensus decision-making and collaborative planning, working together even on small projects such as the design of the Center's garden.

## Recommendations

- Conduct a community-run needs assessment of *douar chanti* to increase the *amicales* ability to target the needs of the population.
- Organize *amicale* elections, concurrent with a membership drive to increase the number of active participants.
- Diversify the funding sources of the *amicales* and develop incoming generating activities.
- Establish an association, unifying the *amicales* under a clear developmental mission.
- Add the *amicales* or the association they form as signatories to the contract.

## Role of the Community Resource Center

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The purpose and role of the Center is a continuing area of uncertainty within the community. USAID and SFCGM had a clear vision of the way the Center fit into the overall development scheme; they saw it as both a first step in stakeholder relationship building and as a vital organizational tool for the community. Members of both the *amicales* and the council tended to see the Center as anachronistic or separate from the overall development project. It was anomalous rather than part of a process.

There are differing ideas about the purpose of the Center and about whom it is meant to serve. Although participants mentioned the importance of community activities, some thought of the Center as a headquarters for the *amicales*; others as a meeting space for the community and the municipal council; others as a center for the activities or as a simple classroom for computer training. There was disagreement about whether only the residents of the *douar chanti* could use the Center or if it was available to the broader community as well. There was very little open communication between stakeholders on these issues. Instead of acting as a trust building exercise, the early operation of the Center served to erode the confidence that had been built during the construction process.

A number of participants spoke of the Center as if it were a gift to the *amicales*—a reward from ANHI/OMRANE for their support during the years of reconstruction negotiations. This perception could severely damage the credibility of all the stakeholders and the activities that are eventually held there. As yet, it is not being employed overtly as a political tool, but stakeholders should be aware of the risk.

## Recommendations

- Increase participation of the population in planning of future projects.
- Focus the Center's early activities toward the population.

## Lessons Learned

A project whose goal is institution building and the establishment of relationships must have a long-term commitment from all involved and should conclude with a gradual exit by the supporting organizations/donors.

The notion of partnership must be clearly defined from the beginning of the project. Although all the stakeholders will inevitably have different strengths and weaknesses and have different levels of influence in the community, it must be clear that all parties are equal and valuable within the context of the project.

Full records, meeting minutes and budget information should be copied, and distributed to all stakeholders. Whenever possible these files should be open to the community. Transparency must be prioritized.

In situations in which community organizations are created with external assistance, they should be as closely rooted in the community as possible, maintained through community meetings and led by local leaders.

If a project is to be adaptable, it must balance the needs of flexibility with those of clear project management and goal setting. Most vitally, questions of ownership and responsibilities need to be absolutely clear to ensure the sustainability of the project after the foreign partners have departed.

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*Source: This document is a summary of, and taken directly from “Search for Common Ground: Perceptions of Mediation & ADR II Evaluation.” A copy of this document can be acquired at <http://www.sfcg.org/sfcg/evaluations/morocco.html>, or by contacting Nick Oatley, Director Institutional Learning at Search for Common Ground at [noatley@sfcg.org](mailto:noatley@sfcg.org)*

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