

MARCH 2013

SENCAB INCREASES INDUSTRIAL POTENTIAL OF RURAL POOR THROUGH COLLABORATION WITH TRADITIONAL AUTHORITIES

Sophia Akushie Wittmann

Since 2011, the Sustainable Enterprise and Capacity Building Initiative (SENCAB) has been engaging with traditional authorities to support the building of capacities for farmer and trader groups at the community level. The goal of its component capacity-building programme is to support organisational capacities in occupational groups through collaboration with traditional authority. The mission has been to improve the performance of enterprise groups at the community level. Together with the Centre for Indigenous Knowledge and Organisational Development (CIKOD), SENCAB is involved in developing a community-based approach in the Western region of Ghana – with a pilot programme in Akutuase – to identify the organisational structures around which enterprise groups operate and the resources needed to achieve targets set for individual business expansion. To this end, three entrepreneurial groupings – each with a membership of 15 – have gone through organisational development processes to identify possible support for targets, which will help to increase their economic capacities and identify challenges that hinder achievement of these goals.

One important outcome has been the deepening cooperation of traditional and key opinion leaders with key community personalities involved in farming and trading activities. This partnership has allowed for increased collaboration with formal service organizations, donor organizations and local government representation in accessing resources supporting the development of their economic engagements.

Group advocacy-building sessions within the community have supported the growth of collaboration with district occupational groups in enhancing their capacity for advocacy. This has also allowed them to influence policies supporting industrial development within the community. Focus group discussion sessions held in the traditional council – with local government representation to deliberate on issues such as power supply to the community – have proven proactive in drawing the attention of district representation to

Community needs. This is particularly useful for enterprise engagements dependent on power supply.

In addition, SENCAB is bringing together entrepreneurs to provide a learning platform for shared experiences and to support less successful peers. This has served to increase the knowledge base of economic actors within the community. One trader narrated in group discussions “the organisation of these sessions by SENCAB has proved informative for me where shared experiences of my peers who have joined the credit union in the next town, Agona, were narrated and credit terms explained”.

As a result, a section of traders and farmers within the community are now working in the formed groups to identify strategies to be adopted in meeting their challenges.

Occupational groups are also identifying the inculcation of formal structural procedures such as the precise sharing of roles and formation of rules by group leadership. This is expected to result in a more efficient approach to link up with the district in terms of the acquisition of resources.

In supporting the sustenance of these groups, vital cultural elements, such as norms adhered to and trust relationships amongst peers, were further identified to be cultivated through the use of the Community Organizational Development (COD) approach. This process enables the working groups to structure themselves according to their indigenous forms, thus supporting the use of existing cultural elements, which bear positively on increasing membership strength. Through the group identification process and focus discussions with traditional leaders, sensitive issues within the community, such as access to land for small-scale farmers and trading-space for women trading on small scale, could be openly addressed.

In the identification of technical support needed by fruit farmers within the community – particularly orange fruit – SENCAB has initiated collaboration for technical assistance. By seeking support for the acquisition of machinery for the processing of fruit within the community, SENCAB aims to promote sustainable and increased income for small-scale fruit farmers.

For palm fruit farmers, the Palm Kernel Processing and Group Proceeds Distribution Initiative – one of the gender-based occupational groups formed by SENCAB – aims to support the adequate cultivation, processing and trading of the fruit as well as its processed form. To this end, SENCAB is initiating engagements towards the provision of technical support for the group. This encourages facility sharing and empowers the group members economically through the distribution of proceeds accrued collectively.

The community chief – supported by members of the traditional council – is playing a strong supportive role in engaging small-scale entrepreneurs within the community to form occupational groups by demanding extension of resources from the district assembly to the community. SENCAB has held a series of focus sessions to provide information to groups in building their capacities, enabling them to advocate and lobby with both district assembly representation and service organizations in promoting their interests at the community level.

Along with the previously mentioned groups, SENCAB utilizes the COD approach to further engage community members to organize themselves. This is accomplished by making use of existing traditional practices and structures to aid in the mobilization of existing community resources, such as the use of the *nnoboa*¹ system, particularly useful for farmers cultivating on smallest scales with meager resources to hire labour. This has been noted as being instrumental by traditional representation. As mentioned in a working session “we have advised the traders and farmers in this community to organize themselves into groups depending on what they produce and sell”.

In its youth and enterprise development component, SENCAB is in the process of creating a resource base to support skills development through the exchange of skilled personnel – supporting the educational curricula on a voluntary basis – for short periods. Additionally, SENCAB is in the process of initiating specific skills training for the formed occupational groups as a pilot phase, which will be spread across the community for other small scale entrepreneurs engaged in similar economic activities.

Philomena Nimo, a key cocoa farmer and leader of the cocoa traders group, added “I am organizing the group to meet on a monthly basis on the first Sunday of each month where group members can conveniently take time off their

Schedules to meet in the chief’s house, where we tabulate the challenges we face in preparation to present them to the traditional council to be further addressed by the district assembly”.

This depicts the potential of such groups through their capacity to draw the attention of traditional leaders towards better backing of their interests at the district level. These respondent views illustrate the prospects of the results to be accrued in supporting occupational group cohesion and their effective collaboration with indigenous representation at the community level. Here, the effects of improving livelihoods are portrayed in the inclusion of the marginalized through collective processes.

Development at the micro-level economically remains one of the greatest hurdles Ghana is faced with, whilst decentralization processes continue to develop to ensure effective distribution of resources. In supporting these processes, SENCAB’s aim is to research and identify challenges experienced communally by local economic actors and to assist in the process of strategizing – with support of indigenous representation – to strengthen the capacities of such actors in their engagements towards district representation and resource seeking.

¹ *Nnoboa*- a traditional system of shared labour