

Leadership and change

An experiment in learning in West Africa

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Based on two pilot leadership development programmes in Mali and Niger, the authors believe that the combination of training workshops and on-the-job coaching can be effective in encouraging leaders to learn and to change.

'Leadership and change' is a one-year programme offered by SNV Netherlands Development Organisation for the leaders of intermediate-level organisations in West Africa. In 2005 SNV organised two pilot programmes in Mali and Niger, each of which brought together 12 leaders from different sectors of society, including civil society groups, local authorities and national associations. Over the year, the participants received on-the-job coaching, interspersed with three training workshops, each lasting four days.

Workshop 1: Personal leadership

During the first workshop the leaders learned to recognise and assess their own style of leadership. Such a personalised approach was new for most of the participants. They realised that it was up to them, each at their own level, to effect change.

'The course made me aware of my own leadership style, which is rather domineering. As a result, I learned to have more confidence in my colleagues and have started delegating jobs to them. The results have been amazing. My colleagues are much better motivated, and I go home at 6 pm with the job done.' Mayor of Commune I, Bamako, Mali

Workshop 2: Leadership and organisational change

The second workshop focused on how to guide an organisation so that it has a meaningful impact on the development of society. The aim was to build the participants' confidence in themselves,

their organisations and their projects. They discussed the inertia that can result from slavishly following models, the role of value systems, and the importance of setting clear goals and a strategy based on a shared vision.

?Thanks to the support of the group, I persisted in trying to find funding to put my plans into action. I used to lose heart whenever money was short, but this time I succeeded in finding a backer.?? Head of regional office, Ministry of Social Development, Maradi, Niger

Workshop 3: Team leadership

The third workshop dealt with communications between leaders, team members and co-workers. Using role-plays, the participants were able to act out some of the difficult situations leaders experience in real life.

?Now I can see that once I have delegated a job to someone I have to follow it up, otherwise there may be unwelcome surprises.?? Executive Secretary, Association of Municipal Governments, Mali

On-the-job coaching



The experiences with the on-the-job coaching, provided by SNV advisers, were mixed. The coaches had not been involved in the workshops, and communications between them and the facilitators, some of them working 500 kilometres apart, were difficult to organise. The dynamics between individual coaches and participants also varied considerably.

Nevertheless, the programme has changed the way SNV advisers perceive their role in organisational capacity development, and coaching of leaders is increasingly becoming standard practice. In 2006, SNV plans to survey the leaders to get an idea of the changes they have made, and to assess other effects of the pilot programmes.

Exploring opportunities

Bringing together the leaders of civil society groups, local authorities and other organisations to share and to learn appears to have been beneficial in several ways. The civil society leaders and local councillors, for example, realised that they share many of the same concerns and face similar challenges. As a result, they now have a more positive opinion of each other, and some are exploring opportunities for collaboration.

?I now have a better understanding of the concerns of the director responsible for promoting NGOs at the Ministry, and now we are able to collaborate.?? Chairman, Network for Environment and Sustainable Development, Niger

The differences between the leaders in terms of age, education, experience and culture, which might initially have been a problem for the dynamics within the group, instead helped to ensure that the programme was a mutually enriching experience for all participants.

Based on the success of the pilot phase, SNV's leadership and change programme will soon be available in Benin, Cameroon, Burkina Faso, Guinea Bissau, Mali and Niger.

Links

[SNV Niger.](#)

[SNV Mali.](#)

Further reading

[R.I. Rotberg \(2003\) The roots of Africa's leadership deficit, Compass: A Journal of Leadership, I: 28-32.](#)

R.I. Rotberg (2002) Learning through Projects: Solving for African Governance, Leadership, and Corruption.
[World Peace Foundation.](#)

D. Zigarmi et al. (2004) The Leader Within: Learning Enough about Yourself to Lead Others. FT/Prentice Hall.

S. Diarra et al. (2004) Decentralisation in Mali: Putting Policy into Practice. Decentralisation and local government series, KIT Bulletin 358.
[KIT/SNV/CEDELO.](#)