

Summary of Findings of the Final Evaluation of the Project to Establish Action and legal Assistance Centres (ALACs) in Five African Countries (Cameroon, Madagascar, Mauritius, Niger, and Senegal)

Introduction

This summary presents the findings and results of the final evaluation report of the project to create Action and legal Assistance Centres in five francophone African countries.

This final Evaluation was conducted for Transparency International by MDF Training and Consultancy between June and September 2013. The report gathers information from various sources as well as from three field missions. It was updated with the views and recommendations gained through the exchange between the evaluation team and several TI-S staff members closely involved in providing support to ALACs in Africa and elsewhere.

The objective of this evaluation is “to provide an objective assessment of the achievements and results, of the weaknesses and of the strengths of the project, and an analysis of the performance, impact, relevance and sustainability of the ALACs’ interventions; to generate lessons learned and best practices on each of the expected results; to assess whether the results are relevant to the target groups and the current state of corruption in the five countries; and to provide clear future-oriented recommendations that can guide the TI Secretariat and the national coordinators for tailoring interventions and to develop future strategies for continuing the work of the ALAC. ”

A successful project, but with too ambitious objectives

The project has been successful, but from the analysis following the evaluation criteria, one must conclude that some changes it hoped for were not realistic to attain within such a short period of time.

Relevance

Corruption is a scourge in each of the countries. It affects vulnerable groups (especially in rural areas) but also persons with higher levels of wealth and education (businessmen and persons in urban centres).

The ALACs represent a unique response against corruption, answering a real and hard-felt need to react to corruption cases by filing complaints. The number of corruption cases that have been registered by ALACs is significant and represents an indicator showing the reality of this need. The ALACs have, over the years, received an increasing number of cases specifically about corruption incidents.

The problem of corruption and the lack of trustworthy and responsive institutions to file complaints affected the project's effectiveness in advocacy, but stress the importance of the ALAC.

It is clear that the ALACs meet a need felt by the entire population, although the different strategies developed by the ALACs have managed to reach these different groups more in some contexts than in others.

Corruption affects women differently. The figures disaggregated by gender of cases registered by the different ALAC present surprising variations, though the vast majority of complaints are filed by men. The relevance for women of the ALAC as a concept and a strategy, and therefore of the project to establish these ALAC is evident. Nevertheless the ALAC will need more time, and an appropriate strategy to reach out women more specifically.

Impact

A positive and lasting impact is likely to occur in all five countries, with differences per country, and taking into account specific conditions. One can consider the work done by the project as a first crucial step to fight corruption under extremely difficult circumstances. The focus on creating an access to good quality advice was a very good choice, but this step has taken longer than expected at the beginning of the project. In the management of the project this could have been anticipated earlier during the implementation, which would have helped to inform stakeholders and adjust certain aspects of the project.

There are, however, indicators related to three groups of actors (citizens, civil society and national institutions) that suggest that impact, in the sense of reducing corruption, will follow from this project.

- **Citizens:** the ALAC are clearly focusing in the first place on the citizens (the basic bottom-up ALAC concept and approach) by creating an accessible physical presence for citizens to issue their complaints, and by making the ALAC visible and by developing its capacities to receive and process complaints. In different countries different groups of citizens have been reached, although the predominant impression is that groups that are considered less vulnerable do file complaints more often. To get to the stage in which the citizens would themselves possess the required capacity to fight corruption, it would take far more work in greater depth and with better follow-up with the customers of the ALACs.
- **Civil society:** in the second part of the project duration, an effort was made to train other members of civil society, especially at community level. The first steps taken by these groups are essential and highlight the success of both access and visibility of the ALAC. However, in order to progress on this path, a specific strategy on the involvement of NGOs and more clarity on the role that they should play would be necessary. This would allow for that empowerment to encourage customers to contribute more effectively against corruption.
- **Local institutions:** the first formal and informal contacts have been established and the visibility of the ALAC and the quality of their work has certainly increased their credibility and legitimacy vis-à-vis the authorities, but the action of the ALAC has led to a genuine dialogue or to a structural cooperation with the authorities in only a few contexts. However, the basis for this cooperation is now present, and the first modest systemic changes have been identified.

Providing access to a remedy for citizens and giving them confidence is clearly a critical first step towards positioning them as a serious, credible and legitimate actor, with whom institutions can engage in a constructive dialogue. This dialogue can then, in turn, lead to series of training activities targeting both civil society actors and State institutions.

It should be noted that, technically speaking, the impact, as described in the project

proposal, is very difficult to measure. On one hand, “sustainable development” seems too

remote from the controllable reality of the project (the impact will be noticeable only in the longer term) and on the other hand, the empowerment of the three actors is part of the direct work of the project and could in fact be considered as a specific objective (or as an output). In order to measure the impact and to determine the contribution of the ALAC concept to a sustainable impact, one should reconsider the formulation of the overall objective. This could be done at the level of the Secretariat and applied at the global level.

Effectiveness

Empowerment: The project has been extremely effective in fostering the first two stages of empowerment (consciousness and access). The process of articulation is difficult to measure, due to several factors: not all cases were cases of corruption. The follow-up could not be done for all cases. The customer did not request for it. No detailed strategy was applied for working on articulation. There were time constraints due to the high number of cases;

The lack of monitoring and specific strategy to work on the articulation should have been addressed during the project. A new database was set up to improve the follow-up of cases, but in practice the database has not yet directly led to more positive results.

In this sense, the emphasis on the development of systems rather than on individuals and their responsibilities can be seen as a less successful strategic choice on the part of the secretariat. A more thorough debate on the reasons and the way to undertake follow-up could have had positive results, and would have allowed at the same time to clarify the basic concept of ALAC for applying it locally.

A movement leading to action by citizens, encouraged by the ALAC, was seen in some cases. Especially where the monitoring of cases was successful, the ALAC were able to motivate customers to share their stories. In a few cases the actions undertaken went beyond this level.

Rare were the cases in which the clients themselves have participated in advocacy activities;

The way in which empowerment was described in the project (looking at the indicators and outputs) made it very difficult from the beginning for the ALAC to translate the concept into practice for the project. If the steps of empowerment had been described in the outputs and/or the indicators, the concept would have become clearer and it would have been easier to discuss the possibilities, limitations of empowerment and to develop specific contextual indicators.

For women, different strategies must be developed. In terms of visibility and especially for access, there are very good examples showing the use of various strategies that have permitted to reach out to more women (although it is not clear whether the strategy was developed in this purpose). In particular the use of mobile ALAC has been extremely important.

Advocacy: There is now certainly more willingness to combat corruption of the authorities, but hardly more capacity to do so. The will is mainly inspired by the presence of the ALAC themselves (one of the main reasons for continuing this project). The ALAC is now hard to ignore. However the will could be affirmed more explicitly by establishing a structured dialogue or lasting relationships between the ALAC and the authorities. This is the case in only a few examples in the five countries.

Moreover, such long-term relationships would be a better basis for capacity-building activities (or mutual empowerment).

- A more structural relationship could be established through the discussion and follow-up of cases and more generic advocacy actions. Except for isolated cases, the advocacy of ALAC and CN has not been developed enough to become truly effective.
- One should note that the objective related to advocacy was extremely ambitious and it was not realistic to expect many tangible results in the specific contexts in such a short time.
- As a general conclusion, the project has been effective, considering the context and the circumstances under which the ALAC had to be implemented. However, if only the logical framework would serve as a reference, the project could not achieve all the objectives or all outputs. They were simply worded in too ambitious or too generic terms.

Efficiency

A simple calculation of the relationship between money spent and results is unrealistic and irrelevant. There is no objective measure to indicate whether the beginning of a culture change generated by a project on a topic such as corruption should not exceed a certain cost. There is no evidence that the money was mismanaged (except for incident in Cameroun at the beginning of the project).

With only limited financial and human resources, significant results have been achieved. Nevertheless, there are two points on which the project could have been more efficient: Project management and the construction of strategic partnerships.

* Project management, regarding the ALAC themselves, their links with TI national chapters and with the Secretariat;

- At the TI- S the project has suffered from a lack of clarity and of structure largely due to the redesign of the staff team supporting the work in the five countries;
- At the ALAC, the ability to manage teams was lacking and caused weaknesses in communication, and of the follow-up of the activities;
- At the level of the national chapters, the project management has, in some countries, not been able to establish good relations between the ALAC on one hand and the NC on the other. The ineffective role of the steering committees in some countries illustrates this difficulty.

* Partnerships with NGOs / Lawyers: these partnerships could have made the legal advices more effective, especially for cases that were not directly related to corruption.

Sustainability

It is not realistic to believe that this project will continue without substantial external support. The capacity-building activity for improving the ALAC's fundraising came late in

the project and, even if such an effort would have been done at the beginning of the project, there is great doubt that it would have led to more financial viability of the project.

Without funding and without a capacity building programme to improve the management of the ALAC, it will also be difficult to ensure institutional sustainability. It is clear that the continuation of the ALAC, while highly recommended, will depend on external funding, likely to be secured with the support of TI- S. The ALAC themselves can guarantee a minimum survival, but without external funding, these centres will not be consolidated to reach their full potential.

Lessons and Recommendations

An approach bended by different realities

The evaluation showed that the newly created ALAC have embraced the ALAC approach, but all also adapted it to different contexts and developed features deviating from the originally planned approach.

The five ALAC analysed developed in their initial phase very distinct features one from another. The evaluation shows that a number of contextual factors have combined with different strategic choices made at the level of the Secretariat but also by national sections or within the ALAC themselves.

The project results encourage to continue the work of the ALAC and to consolidate their positions and capacities.

The evaluation and the discussions also invites to to look into more detail at the approach followed in the establishment and operationalisation of these ALAC in general to make them fit more appropriately to the context of each country. A number of areas of attention and recommendations were identified that would allow these ALACs, and possibly new ALAC (to be launched in a near future) to become more effective instruments of change in the combat against corruption.

Lessons learned

The main lessons learned retained after the exchange and learning event organised to discuss the report and its findings (Berlin, October 24th, 2013) are the following:

Management of the relations between national sections, the ALAC and the clients.

- Better management of expectations on the role of ALAC. Visibility activities should create a clear idea of what to expect from an ALAC.
- It is better to build lasting relationships with a smaller number of clients and communities, rather than a high number of superficial contacts. A good follow-up of the cases could contribute to this improvement, but also a strategy using mobile ALACS returning periodically to the same places.
- The different stages of empowerment (Awareness, Access, Articulation, Action) would require further attention as to encourage clients to become more pro-active.

The operational unit established to generate and register complaints entails costs that seem disproportionate to the number of cases related to corruption. There may be other (additional) ways of ensuring that cases of corruption are reported to the ALAC.

- Other activities of national sections, if the NC is involved in other projects. Research work, new contacts or visits can identify cases or clients and put them in contact with the ALAC.
- Another approach is to establish cooperation relationships with other NGOs providing legal assistance, to ask them to refer cases of corruption to ALAC.

Regarding the data generated by the ALAC,

Several challenges have been identified:

- The database is not used in a consistent or regular way. There are technical challenges but also a lack of clarity about the benefits for the ALAC making use of it.
- Even if the data are collected and recorded effectively, one must remain cautious about their interpretation: the complaints do not always faithfully reflect the corruption as it exists in the country. The data may over-represent certain groups or issues (following decisions on, for example, where to establish ALAC, or visibility actions of ALAC). Complaints should not be the sole source of information for the planning of strategies and actions of NC.
- The ALAC data should be used by the NC as a whole, being a source of information among others that allows for decisions to define the NC strategies, advocacy campaigns, awareness campaigns and the messages to communicate.

Partnerships with institutions remain superficial (mutual recognition, and ad hoc exchanges) and does not contribute enough to an ongoing dialogue and cooperation for the resolution of complaints.

- For each country specifically, the role and effectiveness of anti-corruption institutions should be analysed to know what type of partnership would be possible. Where these institutions are highly politicized, or have only limited resources or mandate, efforts to establish a working relationship may remain limited.
- Partnerships with these institutions work best when the partnership is managed by the NC and not by the ALAC. This confirms other lessons that suggest that the NC should remain the entity responsible for advocacy and managing the partnerships.

Reaching out to marginalized groups, especially women, remains a challenge shared by most of the ALAC. This challenge must be addressed if the ALAC want to meet their promises.

- There is a need to develop gender-sensitive approaches within the ALAC.
- Opportunities of the fieldwork of other projects could be used (some services, local governance, youth surveys, gender) to reach out to marginalized groups and identify their needs in terms of legal assistance.
- Repeated visits to some locations identified could ensure a better follow-up of the complaints and get closer to those people who do not have access (who often lack the means to visit the office of ALAC)
- The idea of being able to choose some cases that illustrate some structural problems of corruption or that may have a stronger impact must be preserved (this means combining the strategic interests with the priority attention to marginalized groups).

Additional recommendations included:

- Better risk management, and the inclusion of measures for improved knowledge management.
- Some changes must be made to address gaps in staff skills. But the ALAC must also seek to preserve their knowledge and institutional memory. A better selection of initial staff, better job descriptions and measures to improve the human resources could be envisaged.

- Visibility actions should provide clear information about the products and services of the ALAC.
- The cooperation links already established with women's organizations could be used better. Where these links do not exist, a strategy must be developed that is adapted to the specific context. This strategy must be part of an overall approach to gender determined at the NC level.
- The basic principle should remain that ALAC must remain open and accessible to all persons affected by corruption.
- The ALAC need to build on the opportunities that present themselves to reinforce certain groups (peer groups). The links should be made between NC and specific groups, which may be oriented towards the ALAC for the follow-up of some specific cases.
- TI must reflect strategically on the groups to empower and on how best to achieve it.
- The institutional basis of NC should not be solely based on the ALAC. NC have a role to play in all relationships with other institutions.
- Partnerships provide access to other resources. The choices to form partnerships must root in a clear strategic thinking. The risk of certain choices must be assessed in advance.
- The ALAC can take different forms (there are many possible ways to establish and operate an ALAC and its staff – variations may depend on the country, the availability of resources etc. ...)
- The quality of the services is to be preferred to more quantitative results.

Finally, in looking into the role of the secretariat of IT in supporting the work of the National Chapters and the ALAC, a few more ideas and recommendations were made:

- 1 – To suggest and help organizing similar training sessions for national chapters to help them reflect on the lessons and strategically rethink how they can best provide their legal assistance services and empower their clients.
- 2 – To helping the chapters to exchange and share their various assistance activities and empowerment (eg "mobile ALAC ", radio on legal issues, advice to individuals, etc.) within their broad institutional framework for more synergy with other projects. Advocacy campaigns should be fully integrated in the work of national chapters.
- 3 – To restructure the system of ALAC monitoring and evaluation for the Africa region, as to identify goals and more realistic results, be be more clear about the responsibility of the national section and of the ALAC.
- 4 – To work together with national sections, as to further the qualitative improvement in the work of the ALAC: fewer cases not related to corruption, better follow-up, more meaningful results, and strategic litigation.
- 5 – To organize horizontal learning between the chapters and the ALAC in the region and in the world
- 6 – To provide opportunities for capacity building not only for lawyers, but also on other aspects in chapters when necessary (eg advocacy, public campaigns, etc.)
- 7 – To secure funding for a transition period in those chapters where the work of ALAC is not yet sure to be continued.
- 8 – To review how the ALAC data are managed at the country level and how they are used by the national chapter, to jointly assess the needs and benefits of the database.

Conclusion

This summary intends to provide a general idea of the main findings about the project. Many learning points on specific aspects are described in more detail, but in French, in the information gathered in the report. Discussions about the report and/or the findings of the evaluations may be a way to establish more firmly the bases for the cooperation between TI-S, national chapters and the ALACs in the upcoming period.

