

ASA 2022 - Final Report by Ina Jung

ACTION LAB FOR DEVELOPMENT (ACTLAB)



Projektnr. 0320 – „Bildungsprogramme zu Gender Diversity unterstützen“
„Integration into the Labour Market – Gender Equality and Social Entrepreneurship“

Action Lab for Development, Douala, Cameroon

01 August – 30 October 2022

Zusammenfassung:

Das Projekt „Integration into the Labour Market – Gender Equality and Social Entrepreneurship“ fand von August bis Oktober 2022 in Douala, Kamerun statt. Die Partnerinstitution „Action Lab for Development“ hat ihren Sitz in Bamenda, Kamerun und fokussiert sich auf Bildung im Bereich Social Entrepreneurship, um jungen Menschen den Eintritt in den Arbeitsmarkt zu erleichtern und ermöglichen. Aufgrund politischer Konflikte in der anglophonen Region Kameruns wurde ein Großteil der Organisation in die wirtschaftliche Hauptstadt Kameruns, Douala, umgesiedelt, wo auch das Projekt stattfand.

Die Aufgaben der ASA-Teilnehmenden beinhalteten die Konzeption und Durchführung eines ersten Gender Projekts im Umfeld der Organisation. Dafür erstellten sie Fragebögen, führten 25 Interviews, werteten diese aus und fassten die Ergebnisse in einem Bericht zusammen

Introduction

The project “Integration into the Labour Market – Gender Equality and Social Entrepreneurship” especially intrigued me due to my background in entrepreneurship and interest in gender issues. It primarily focused on the sustainable development goal 5 – “gender equality” as well as SDG 10 “reduced inequalities” and was the first gender project to be implemented at the partner organisation Action Lab for Development.

Main Part

Action Lab for Development (ACTLAB) is an open initiative to promote and defend technical, vocational education and trainings, knowledge hubs and provides tools, training, technical support, new entrepreneurial business ideas and universal access to research and education. It aims to support local initiatives oriented to creative innovation and entrepreneurship; facilitate knowledge-sharing between entrepreneurs, institutions, and other partners; to mentor young entrepreneurs on skills and techniques that can grant a clearer view of social/business environment and to finally promote skills-based volunteering in youth and universal access to research and education.

The majority of ACTLAB members are members of the Wimbun community. Thus, while ACTLAB is officially based in Bamenda, Cameroon, the project took place in Douala, Cameroon due to political circumstances i.e., the war in the anglophone region of Cameroon. Therefore, the infrastructure of the organisation was spread throughout the country and office space was not available in Douala. We as ASA participants were able to work from home with the CEO and project coordinator also living within the neighbourhood so that communication was guaranteed.

This ASA gender project was the first gender project to be implemented in the organisation. Our aim was therefore to collect data, evaluate gender-specific challenges of the Wimbun community (who largely comprised the target group of the partner organisation) and finally build the foundation for a sustainable gender focus at Action Lab for Development. We aimed to analyse and evaluate the gender-specific challenges that occur for the members of ACTLAB. Taking into consideration ACTLAB’s mission, we focused on the gender-specific challenges of entering the labour market as well as considering the overarching gender-perspective of the community. In the process of conducting interviews, we collected gender disaggregated data

that may be used by ACTLAB for future projects as well as fundraising. This project provides data on the community of the organisation as well as information on gender equality in development that can build the foundation of a sustainable gender focus of ACTLAB. Lastly, the project aimed to start conversations around gender in the organisation and its community.

At the start, after introductions to the community and initial organisational difficulties due to German institutions, we started the project by defining interview guidelines in accordance with SDG5 “gender equality”, taking into consideration its targets. However, shortly after starting the interview process, the project came to a halt for three weeks due to a COVID-infection of one of the participants, which posed a considerable setback and time constraint on the project. Still, we were able to conduct 25 interviews in the following weeks.

The CEO and project coordinator enabled us to conduct the interviews by defining the target group for this project, introducing us to the community and accompanying us to the places of interview. In the following, the interviews needed to be transcribed. We experienced difficulties for the transcriptions because we were lacking the correct software. As we had 25 interviews which were between 20 and 75 minutes long, buying software would have been much too expensive and cost-free software was not sufficient for our purpose. Finally, we decided to transcribe the most important statements of the interviews by hand, which took a considerable amount of time and effort.

Overall, we interviewed 25 people, 13 women and 12 men, with an average age of 39 years. Results are shared and described in a gender binary as all interviewees identified as either female or male and described their opinion on gender in a binary. 18 out of 25 participants are married and 16 have children with an average of 3.5 children per interviewee. The results are a summary of the interviewees responses and are divided into four sections: education and work, family life, gender traditions, and intersectional topics.

Education and work

Interviewees reported that gender disparities affect job opportunities and job security starting as early as in school. While women could theoretically go into any field, their options are limited in practice due to consideration of responsibilities within the family and restrictions based on education. Their jobs are associated with lower pay and less job security. Professions

perceived for men tend to include higher paying jobs that require more formal education, e.g. teacher, governmental jobs, police officers, directors and managers. In comparison to women, most men have the opportunity to receive more power, higher pay, and more job security due to their profession. It is considered ok for both parents to work but the main responsibility for supporting the family financially lies with the man while the woman has a supporting role. While some see no problems in women attaining positions of power, others see women as incapable and lacking personal attributes for positions of power. To them, the only way a woman could have power is through the help of a man or a network.

Family life

The main responsibility and mental load of household chores and taking care of the children lies with the women, though due to changes in societal expectations, men are starting to support their wives with these tasks. Helping sick relatives is seen as a family responsibility. While men contribute money the women might help with doing care work.

Considering gender time gap and mental load, we take two important findings regarding work and family life from these interviews:

1. Women are increasingly joining the workforce
2. Women are culturally expected to be the natural caretaker of the children and household chores

This leads to a double load on a woman. She has to take care of and manage the home on top of working her job. This ties in directly to target 4 of SDG 5 "gender equality": Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work and Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life

Gender traditions

Religion has a strong influence on the views on gender equality. While some churches teach gender equality, respect for the husband remains one of the most important values and a woman has a supporting role to her husband.

Culture: A woman is defined by her role as a mother, housewife, and community member first. Gender roles are defining the possibilities or excluding women from participating in society. Men are seen as a provider, head of the family, and leader first. The main responsibility of the men lies in providing finances for the family, being part of secret societies and doing work that isn't suitable for women.

School and other organisations: On the one hand, some schools promote gender equality by aiming to treat girls and boys the same and empowering girls, on the other hand, there are still prevalent stereotypes concerning the importance of women's care work and marriage, including their respectful behaviour towards men, over their education. Boys learn from early childhood that their role in society is a providing role for the family. They are still favoured for school education in rural areas and should behave in an honourable way.

Intersectional Topics

Gender and sexuality outside the binary: There is little knowledge on the gender binary due to other gender expressions being taboo. People do not differentiate between sex and gender. Hermaphrodites are the most commonly named occurrence and linked to experience of violence. Queer relationships are legally and by tradition rejected by society. Therefore queer people might fear violence. Furthermore, their sexual preference is explained with a greed for money.

DisAbility: DisAbility is seen as a problem due to societal barriers. People with disability have difficulty finding a job because they need accessibility, support systems or are seen as not able to do the job.

Displacement: Internally displaced anglophones experience marginalisation. Women and children in the crisis region are especially vulnerable and experience negative impacts on education and job opportunities.

Finally, we found that 73,3% of interviewees show a positive attitude towards gender equality.

Based on the findings of this project, we proposed two project ideas “Gender Project: Gender and Labour Market - Women and Entrepreneurship” and “Disability and Displacement” (due to the displacement the community faced because of the anglophone crisis).

Due to the time constraint as a result of a COVID infection, we were unable to meet our goal of addressing fundraising for future gender projects and setting up a gender focus at the organisation. While we did define a follow up action plan surrounding an intersectional gender focus, the implementation is currently on hold because of lack of funding and lack of fundraising during the project.

Conclusion

During this project, I have gained valuable experiences and knowledge. On a professional level, it was my first time devising a project within the international development context and taught me a lot about dealing with difficulties and unforeseeable events during a project and project management overall. I have gained experience and knowledge in defining interview guidelines, conducting interviews, and evaluating the results according to the Mayring method.

Thanks to the intersectional knowledge that my tandem partner brought to the project, I have gained knowledge regarding gender issues and have been sensitised to intersectional topic such as disability. Overall, through this project I have been able to deepen my understanding of gender issues and work surrounding gender equality thanks to the conversations we have had with members of the organisation and during interviews as well as due to readings I have done to support the project during my time in Cameroon.

All of this has inspired me to think about these topics more during my everyday life and be more outspoken about them.