



FINAL REPORT ON:

The Vocational Education Center for Development Sikoum #22132 Merck Family Foundation (MFF)

Final Narrative Report November 2022-November 2023

Introduction

ASAFE, a Cameroonian non-profit established in 1989, is dedicated to fostering entrepreneurship among impoverished women, youth, and internally displaced persons (IDPs), particularly women and children. With over 30 years of experience, ASAFE leverages digital technologies and hands-on learning to combat poverty in rural and urban settings. Our mission has now extended to include IDPs, among whom 80% are women and children. Through entrepreneurship training and support, women and youth are empowered to establish businesses, break free from poverty, and provide for their families.

Project's Goal: This project targets impoverished women, youth, and IDPs, providing them with essential knowledge and skills to achieve self-sufficiency. The program aims to empower them to create their own businesses or become employable, offering a vital solution to their critical circumstances. The creation and implementation of the Vocational Education Center for Development was needed to achieve these goals.

Vision

Empower the underprivileged through the development of a Vocational Education Center for Development.

Mission

Our mission is to promote self-sufficient farming and sustainable livelihoods. We strive to break the cycle of poverty, offering seed funding and fostering community integration. Our dedication

to building self-reliance and economic independence through the creation and completion of a vocational training center drives progress towards these goals.

Project initiative

The Vocational Education Center for Development (Center) project is a comprehensive initiative that focuses on the empowerment and development of the Sikoum community and its neighboring villages. The funding received from MFF supports the building and development of the center.

The project started by touching 13 villages: Sikoum, Kendeck, Pitty-gore, Missole 2, Loungahe, Logbadjeck, Bessombe, Bonepoupa, Kopongo, Nkom, Bienkok, Somakek, and Routhnjoumam. The project initially engaged approximately 500 individuals, including local residents, government extension workers, and potential employers. Notably, the project extended its support to internally displaced persons (IDPs) residing within these villages, effectively integrating them into the community fabric. At the end of this year 800 individuals participated.

The Vocational Education Center for Development is built on a 3 hectares plot of land with a demonstration space that is equipping the underprivileged with skills - making them immediately employable. This Center has the ambition to become a reference center and serve the entire region and beyond.

The Center offers technical, entrepreneurial, and life skills training, enabling participants to start businesses or find employment. Some of the modules the center focuses on are: mobilizing for wealth creation, market research, production to market, technical training, life skills, funding, financing, networking, advocacy for self-employment, and more.

This multi-faceted project had wide-reaching benefits for the entire community. The key outcomes included:

Entrepreneurship Development: The project provided individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary to establish and manage their own agricultural related businesses, fostering a culture of entrepreneurship within the community.

Income-Generating Activities: Through various training programs and initiatives, the project enabled community members to engage in income-generating activities, ultimately leading to improved economic well-being for participating families and the community at large.

Revolving Loan Fund: Providing seed funding through a revolving loan fund to support participants in launching their own businesses.

Employable Workforce: By enhancing the employability of individuals through vocational training, the project contributed to a more skilled and adaptable workforce, which, in turn, boosted employment opportunities for the local population.

Integration of IDPs: The project is instrumental in integrating internally displaced persons into the host communities, providing them with access to skills development and livelihood opportunities, thus promoting social cohesion.

Improved Access to Potable Water: Recognizing the importance of clean water, the project also addressed water supply issues, ensuring that the community had access to safe and potable water sources, thereby improving overall health and well-being.

Vocational training with the Vocational Education Center for Development features:

- **Self-sufficiency:** The Center will have a drinking water borehole powered by a solar pump, two water towers with 10,000 L tanks, and solar panels for electricity.
- **Sustainability:** The Center is designed to operate continuously.
- **Facilities:** Housing for the manager, covered training areas, and separate toilets for males and females have been done and are at different building phases.
- **Outdoor demonstration area:** Includes space for poultry breeding, small ruminant breeding, beekeeping, and product processing.
- **Hands-on training:** Employers can use this area to provide practical skills training to participants.

In summary, the Vocational Education Center for Development project is a holistic endeavor that not only enriched the lives of its participants but also had a transformative impact on the entire community. It promoted self-reliance, economic growth, and social inclusion, fostering a brighter and more sustainable future for Sikoum and its surrounding villages.

Description for the need of action

Cameroon faces significant challenges with a Human Development Index ranking of 153 out of 189 and 25.3% of the population living in extreme poverty. Gender inequality is pronounced, with women and girls having limited access to education and labor market participation. Many people have become IDPs due to conflict and violence, which further strains resources.

Three intertwined issues need addressing:

1. **Employable Skills:** Women and youth require skills for employment and self-sufficiency.
2. **Lack of Education and Funds:** Many lack education and resources to start businesses.
3. **IDP Integration:** Recent IDPs need integration into their host communities.

The Vocational Education Center for Development project aims to:

- Promote local well-being and sustainable community development.
- Provide training in technical, managerial, and life skills for income-generating activities and employability.
- Offer a revolving loan fund to support new businesses.

- Foster partnerships with government extension workers and employers.
- Ensure self-sufficiency through solar-powered infrastructure.
- Facilitate hands-on training in poultry and small ruminant breeding, beekeeping, and product processing.
- Support participants and employers for successful outcomes.

Research will be ongoing to share lessons learned and make the project scalable and replicable.

Project Milestones

A. Construction of Buildings

The construction of three buildings on the farm marked a significant achievement. Two wooden structures now serve as accommodation for workers - the Director and 2 extension workers, equipment storage, and housing for animals.



Additionally, construction of the cement building is underway but has faced delays due to both human and environmental factors. While the engineer and contractor have been unable to complete the work as initially planned, they have assured us that the cement building will be finished by January 2024. Unfavorable weather conditions, particularly the heavy continuous rainy season, have contributed to the construction delay. Once completed, this new building will greatly improve training capacity, crop storage, and agricultural product processing capabilities. These structures represent crucial additions to the Vocational Education Center farm's infrastructure, enhancing its overall operational efficiency.

B. Socio Environmental survey

Socio Environmental survey of the 13 villages of Dibamba participating in the project took place at the beginning. 13 Villages namely: Kendeck, Pitty-gore, Missole 2, Sikoum, Loungahe, Logbadjeck, Bessombe, Bonepoupa, Kopongo, Bienkok, Somakek. Routhnjouma and Nkom were surveyed. The objective of the survey was to know the population, the geographical situation, the different activities carried out in the localities, the crops produced in the area and mode and medium of transportation, etc. This participatory/ beneficiary survey was conducted in order to have baseline knowledge of the participants and the area.

C. Stakeholders Meetings



Meetings were held with stakeholders at the Dibamba City Council: Chiefs of villages, religious leaders, youth associations, women associations, mayors, and the Ministry of Agriculture came together to be informed on the project objectives and to find collaborative projects, such as financial inclusion, creation of wealth in rural areas, self-employment, and poverty reduction to name a few.

D. Animal husbandry and crop cultivation

The farm has successfully established animal husbandry practices, including the raising of livestock. This includes goats, poultry, and small livestock.



Animal welfare and ecological considerations have been prioritized in these practices. Also crop cultivation on the farm has begun, in a perspective of agro-ecology with a variety of crops, such as maize, beans, vegetables, and fruits, being grown. The farm adheres to agro-ecological principles, which prioritize sustainability, soil health, and biodiversity.

E. Trainings

So far the Center has had 10 training sessions designed and dispensed bimonthly on topics, such as: life skills to survive after Covid 19; building entrepreneurial skills: from idea to success, building life skills for success, to name a few. The sessions were well received.



F. Deployment of Income generating activities in villages, enterprises, and self employment

Meetings with each village were held in order to:

- Have agreements signed. Collaborative efforts were made to establish agreements with individuals within the groups, fostering a sense of partnership and commitment.
- Make training module selection. Discussions were conducted to decide on the training modules that would be universally taught across all villages, ensuring a standardized and effective learning experience.
- Prepare the field and plan resource reception. Deliberations took place on how each village would prepare their farming fields and receive resources, whether in kind or cash, to facilitate the implementation of the training.

The consistency in the format of these meetings in each village played a crucial role in streamlining the process. Key steps included:

- Project operational account: the preparation of a project operational account was undertaken, ensuring transparency and effective financial management.
- Activity selection: the best-suited income-generating activities were identified through collaborative decision-making, tailoring the initiatives to the unique needs and strengths of each village.
- Implementation plan design: an implementation plan was meticulously designed, providing a roadmap for the seamless execution of the chosen activities.
- Resource disbursement: Resources were disbursed as per the established agreements and plans, empowering each village to kickstart their income-generating projects.

Your support has been instrumental in bringing about positive change, and we are excited to witness the tangible results of our collective efforts.

Here are some highlights of the ongoing projects:

- Diversified income-generating activities: ten income-generating activities, including poultry, horticulture, and cuniculture, have been carefully chosen to align with the existing market demands in Douala.
- Innovative cockchafer cultivation: thirty self-employed individuals have received training on the cultivation of cockchafers. Remarkably, each trainee is committed to producing 5 kg of cockchafers, with the first harvest expected after just a month. Anticipation is high as they prepare to bring 150 kg of cockchafers to the market, valued at 15 euros per kg during the upcoming holiday season.
- Vegetable production for supermarkets: forty-five women and men are actively engaged in vegetable production for three prominent supermarkets in Douala, namely Santa Lucia, Fortitude, and Boom Market. This initiative not only benefits the producers but also contributes to the local supply chain.
- Expanding community participation: the enthusiasm is contagious, and more individuals are clearing lands to join the group of producers. Witnessing the positive impact on the income of participants has sparked great interest, with new villages expressing their eagerness to join our initiatives.
- Innovative protein food supplement business: two individuals have embraced the business of breeding flies, providing a protein-rich food supplement for chickens and ducks in the community. This innovative approach not only contributes to sustainable farming practices but also enhances the nutritional quality of local poultry.

G. A revolving loan fund

The seven thousand euros of revolving funds have served for direct lending to outstanding and trustworthy entrepreneurs, and the remainder is serving to support in-kind lending. A total amount of approximately six thousand euros has been given out as loans as part of the revolving loan fund.

H. Contract signed with government

A contract was signed with the Ministry of Agriculture office to support some technical training. We have written to the government, businesses, and other NGOs to seek partnership and collaboration opportunities.

Impact and Testimonies

1. An IDP finds solace in the ASAFE Sustaining Growth Initiative

ASAFE with the Vocational Education Center for Development of Sikoum went to Dibamba, a Rural Council in the Sanaga Maritime Division of the Littoral Region of Cameroon in June 2023 to provide training in assorted income-generating activities, including how to write a business plan. The event had over 40 participants, the majority of which were women.

The training was in preparation for the ASAFE flagship Sustaining Growth Initiative, which is part of the Center project, and the event further served to find suitable candidates to carry out income-generating activities within the framework of the enterprise that was to be launched in the area.

Participants showed a lot of enthusiasm during the training and three internally displaced persons (IDPs) from the North and South West regions carried the day as one presented the best business plan. His name is Romaric N.

It happened that the winner, Romaric, had earlier been invited by ASAFE to carry out some masonry work at their headquarters in Douala. In buying materials for the site, Romaric discovered that there were lots of goods in the vicinity that needed to be transported from one area to the other. For Romaric, the best way to render this service was to own a tri-cycle truck. This served as the subject for Romaric's business exercise plan. His performance earned him plaudits and a sponsorship through a loan.



ASAFE, through the Vocational Education Center for Development, offered a loan of 2000 euros to Romaric to buy the tricycle with a reimbursement installment of 15 euros a day. However, Romaric says that he raises, from his daily activities of transporting cargo, an average of 23 euros or more and plans to complete repaying the loan within 8 months. That activity has also



enabled him to send some remittances to his aged parents in Wum in the North West of Cameroon to help them with their expenses. He has claimed that he will achieve reimbursement in a shorter time and then join other trainees in the Sustaining Growth initiative (part of the project) at Dibamba dubbed Ujek Mejek. Romaric intends to engage in chicken or duck rearing.

“I am grateful to ASAFE, Vocational Education Center for Development, for giving me this

opportunity to prove that I can work and produce. If I am given more opportunities, I think I can do more because the situation that I left back home is very bad and I hope to return better armed to change the social situation of my people trapped in the war,” Romaric said.

2. A course in creativity inspires Georges to create a bakery

Training can oftentimes lead people to uncover their potential in varied domains, especially when such training is centered around creativity, as ASAFE, with the Vocational Education Center for Development, does with each training session.

It has been a rule at ASAFE that before the start of any training, a lesson on creativity must be delivered. It so happened that during one of these lessons, Georges got fired up and noticed that in his locality, there was no bakery and people needed bread. He asked to be trained in

baking. He was sent on a one month training at an artisan bakery in the outskirts of town.



After successfully completing the training, Georges envisioned the scope of his project. He became enthusiastic about the jobs that his project was going to

create as well as the number of persons that will henceforth have bread, a rare foodstuff in his village. Georges applied and obtained a loan from ASAFE with the Vocational Center for Development of Sikoum. He then built a small bakery that produces 500 loaves per day and has noticed that demand is greater than supply. This means that he needs a bigger bakery and that he requires a bigger investment loan. First, though, Georges wants to reimburse the initial loan so as to be in a position to obtain a bigger loan. This will enable him to build a bakery whose production will match market demand. The fact that he is repaying his early loan in rapid installments provides a lot of prospects for Georges' larger project.

When contacted, Georges expressed gratitude to ASAFE for walking him around the creativity process that inspired him.

3.Great dreams of IDP son of a deceased foreman

Elvis G. is the son of a former foreman of a great agro-industrial company in the South West region of Cameroon. His father was killed during the current separatist war in the North West and South West regions of the country. This pushed him into running away from the region and seeking refuge in the nearby Littoral region. There, he settled in a village in the Dibamba Rural council called Loungahé, located in the Sanaga Maritime Division. Loungahe is some 45 kilometers from the city of Douala. Elvis G. lives in a farmhouse and engages in food crop farming for subsistence. The hospitality of the people of Loungahé is legendary. Elvis G. has not disbursed a franc to acquire the land that he is using for his subsistence farming.



In June of this year, ASAFE went to the area to arrange for the implementation of the Sustaining Growth Initiative (part of this project) within the Council area. Elvis G. was among those who attended the meetings and participated in the training workshops. At the end of the training that he attended with success, Elvis applied for a loan from ASAFE to start a farm to grow passion fruit trees. Not only did Elvis G. ask for a loan to set up a farm, but he is ambitious and is looking to put in place a passion fruit tree nursery that will generate bigger farming activities.



According to him, large-scale production will provide enough supply to sustain a soft drink production plant that will create added value from the fruit. “This means that the village will be industrialized and many people in the area will be employed in the factory,” Elvis quipped. He is not the only optimist as the Mayor of the Dibamba Rural Council is forecasting a massive improvement in council revenue should the manufacturing plant project see light. Elvis’s longtime dream is to produce a beverage that will be as popular as any known American product. “My hope and prayers are that ASAFE can help me achieve this goal because the land in Loungahé and its surroundings is very fertile for fruit farming,” Elvis G. said, beaming with enthusiasm.

Loungahé is a small village of 1000 inhabitants covering vast acres of forest land. A small soft drink manufacturing plant can provide jobs for a minimum of 50 people, thus ensuring a multiplier effect that will uplift the economic status of the village.

4.How Koloko moved from housemaid to agro farming

Miss Koloko ran away from the war of secession in the North West and South West of Cameroon in 2021. She left her home in Batibo village, North West Cameroon for Douala and stayed with friends since she had no close relatives to take her in.

While in Douala, Koloko, who has but basic education, took the job of housemaid. The salary of a housemaid is not encouraging; moreover, Koloko’s boss did not pay her regularly. Originating from a rural area where the main economic activity was farming, Koloko thought of looking for



a place to carry out farming activities in Douala. Her search for farmland landed her at Sikoum village in the Council area of Dibamba.

She moved to Sikoum village some 45 kilometers outside of Douala. While there, the inhabitants offered her work on people’s land for a pay.

That initially helped her to obtain a better compensation than the meager salary that she received as a housemaid.

When ASAFE launched the Sustaining Growth project and training with the Vocational Education Center for Development, code-named Ujek Mejek in Dibamba, ASAFE's President, Gisele Yitamben caught up with Koloko. During their discussion, Koloko told ASAFE's President that she was interested in the Ujek Mejek initiative. They asked her to proceed with passion fruit farming. ASAFE advised Koloko to look for land with trees since the passion fruit tree creeps and bears around the stems of other trees. Koloko sought and obtained a piece of land with overgrown palm trees whose stems will serve as breeders for the passion fruit trees. ASAFE provided her with 100 seedlings that she planted. The plants will mature and start bearing fruits within 8 months. The mature plants produce fruits twice a year and have a production life span of 4 years. One stem can produce 100 fruits per harvest.

On seeing Koloko's enthusiasm, a young man of Sikoum has also decided to grow a nursery of passion fruit plants and ASAFE has decided to provide seedlings.

The overall objective is to have 25 to 50 passion fruit tree farmers in the area and a steady supply to the local urban market. There is also the prospect of setting up a juice production factory, to transform the raw materials, in the area.



Challenges

The implementation of the project has faced some challenges delaying its completion:

- The incorporation of the land took longer than expected.
- Our bank credited our account almost 2 months after the MFF sent the funds.
- Unpredictable weather patterns and climate change posed challenges to crop cultivation, animal husbandry, and building construction. However, all the buildings will be completed by the end of January.
- Efficient resource management, including water and energy, required ongoing attention. At the inception, we thought boreholes and solar panels would help for the delivery of electricity and water supply. But upon the on site discovery of three sources of water, the engineer developed an alternative strategy to access electricity. The engineer is going to redirect the water sources into one area and build a dyke to hold all the water. Then a passage will be created for the water, as if he was building a hydro-electric dam. That will generate a current downstream that

can be exploited at the Center. Unfortunately, this has increased the cost of construction expenses greatly as these costs were not in the budget. ASAFE will need to find further funding to realize this sustainable production of electricity and water for the Center.

- The cost of construction for certain items doubled, increasing the cost of the buildings to be more than 10% over budget. This means that ASAFE again needs to find funds to finish completion of the buildings at the Center.
- The trainings are working well and we have more projects than available funds. Many new villages would like to join in the project and many people are on a waitlist to attend trainings. However, this again needs new funding.
- The revolving loan fund has been completely depleted, and we are also looking for funds to replenish and expand it in order to fund new projects.
- Finally, finding suitable and reliable markets for agricultural products and establishing distribution channels proved to be challenging at the beginning but is now bearing results.

Financial Overview

Financial Report: Use of Funds The Merck Family Foundation's generous donation of €87,061.22, combined with the contribution of 3 hectares of land for the Center by Dr Esmerada Yitamben, played a pivotal role in realizing the Vocational Education Center for Development project. Here is a breakdown of how the funds were utilized:

1. Construction of the Vocational Education Center: €65,000
 - The largest portion of the funds (approximately 74.7%) was allocated to the construction of the Center. This included the development of infrastructure such as two wooden buildings, a cement/concrete building, water supply through a borehole with a solar pump, two 10,000L water towers, and sanitation facilities. However, due to increased costs and a change in design, these funds were insufficient and only provided enough to build the buildings. To supply water and electricity will require additional funds.
 - Funds were allocated to establish and maintain animal husbandry operations on the farm. This included the purchase of livestock, animal care supplies, and the construction of animal housing facilities. These are ongoing expenses.
 - A significant portion of the funds was dedicated to crop cultivation activities. This included the purchase of seeds, organic fertilizers, and pesticides, and farming equipment. These are ongoing expenses.
2. Training Programs: €13,000
 - Funds amounting to approximately 14.9% were allocated to the development and implementation of training programs. This covered the cost of materials, equipment, and salaries for trainers. New trainings will require new funding.
3. Revolving Loan Fund: €7,000
 - A portion of the funds (around 8%) was set aside to establish the revolving loan fund, which provides seed funding to participants wishing to start their own

businesses upon completing the training programs. ASAFE would like to expand this fund to enable more people to participate.

4. Miscellaneous Expenses: €2,061.22
 - o Approximately 2.4% of the funds were used for various miscellaneous expenses, including administrative costs, transportation, and unforeseen project-related expenditures.

The budget went over by 10% during the construction of the buildings. ASAFE is hoping that with the help of the Merck Family Foundation, we will be able to continue the seamless, unperturbed construction of the buildings.

Conclusion

The effective utilization of funds has been instrumental in realizing the Center's vision to empower impoverished women, youth, and internally displaced persons (IDPs). These initiatives focus on critical areas such as skills development, sustainable agriculture, and community empowerment, contributing significantly to the socio-economic well-being of communities.

Since the project's inception in November 2022, ASAFE, with the generous support of the Merck Family Foundation, has made remarkable strides toward achieving the Center's goals. The positive impact on local agricultural sectors and income-generating activities is evident, thanks to the collective efforts of our dedicated team and partners.

As we reflect on the progress made in just one year, we acknowledge that sustained support is crucial for the continued success of the Center. While businesses and entrepreneurs are establishing themselves, there is an ongoing need for further funding to expand our reach and assist more individuals in lifting themselves out of poverty.

We are hopeful that the Merck Family Foundation will consider providing additional support. Your continued partnership will enable us to amplify the positive change we are making in the lives of those we serve and contribute to the broader goals of promoting ecological farming practices in the region.

Thank you once again for your unwavering commitment to our shared mission. We look forward to the possibility of continuing this impactful journey together.