

**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE**

**IN**

**SIDI YAHIA AL-GHARB, DOUAR CHANTI,**

**PROJECT EVALUATION:**

**A SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND – USAID PROGRAM**

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## **OVERVIEW**

In 2002, Search for Common Ground-Morocco (SCGM) began working in douar chanti, one of the poorest districts of Sidi Yahia al-Gharb (SYG). Originally conceived as a workshop-based on conflict resolution program which would build on a pre-existent USAID training program, the program evolved to meet other community needs. From December 2002 to September 2004, the community organizations of douar chanti, Search for Common Ground, local authorities, the *Association Nationale pour la Lutte Contre l'Habitat Insalubre* (ANHI, now OMRANE) and USAID collaborated on the building of a community center.

With the termination of the two-year project, SCGM and USAID commissioned this evaluation to measure the project success and to extract lessons for future endeavors, so that it might be a model for communities across Morocco.

This report begins with a discussion of the evaluation plan and methodology followed by a statement of the problems facing the target community and a review of the project history. An objective-based analysis contains the bulk of participant perceptions and includes recommendations specific to the SYG project. Finally, the lessons learned in the project are outlined. Though based on the particular experiences of SYG, these lessons are more broadly applicable and can be considered in the design of future projects.

## **EVALUATION PLAN**

This study evaluates the experience of Search for Common Ground–Morocco in SYG, specifically the best practices and lessons learned in the construction of the Community Resource Center (the Center) in douar chanti. In a broad sense, the study explores the relationships between social actors in the municipality of SYG and evaluates the attempts at partnership between these actors as facilitated by SCGM and in collaboration with local *amicales*, the municipality (*le commune*), representatives of the ministries (*les services extérieurs*), and other local authorities. The vehicle for the inter-sector partnership, and thus the focus of the analysis, is the construction of a Community Resource Center at douar chanti.

The outcomes of the project are compared to the objectives as set forth in the final project proposal. Because the project was designed to be a model for other community development programs, it is discussed with an eye to greater application in other Moroccan communities.

In respecting the objectives of full participation of all stakeholders, the beneficiaries played an important role in the design and the realization of the evaluation. Thus, an initial meeting with key actors introduced the evaluation as an open process, belonging to the population and to those who were instrumental in its completion. Furthermore, this initial meeting introduced the consultant (Nicole Bennett) to the actors to establish good relations with the community before the process began. At this stage, there was an opportunity for questions and suggestions by the interviewees; many of these proposals were then integrated into the evaluation plan and questionnaires.

The study was flexible and qualitative, which allows us to grasp the dynamic of the project and the evolution of the needs of the community—and the corresponding evolution of the project's objectives—throughout the course of the project.

*Evaluation objectives :*

- Understand the actors: Who are they? Individual characteristics: age, sex, level of education, employment/activities. Institutional characteristics : structure, mission, methodology, etc;
- Evaluate the knowledge of project details among the stakeholders: its partners, its mission, the division of tasks and responsibilities;
- Analyze the means of communication between the actors—how and how often? What are the barriers to honest communication?
- Follow the changes which have taken place since the beginning of the process, especially in the behaviors and attitudes of beneficiaries and partners (approach

to conflict, definition of participation) and in the concrete changes in the community;

- Understand the lines of civic activism in douar chanti and the progress toward good local governance since SCG-M's intervention—has the community dynamic of the douar changed? How so? What is the 'spillover effect' into other areas of action;
- Evaluate the methodology of the process that ended in the construction of the center, especially the choice of partners. Are there actors who were not included and why?
- Understand the attitude towards the actions taken and examine the public perceptions of the project: how do people identify the strengths and weaknesses of the project?
- Pull lessons from the project and its process that can be applicable in future douar chanti projects and elsewhere.

*Methodology:*

I conducted thirty semi-structured, qualitative, one-on-one interviews led by a common questionnaire. In-depth interviews were held individually (in the presence of a translator when necessary) and there were several group meetings during the evaluation process.

Interviews averaged an hour and half each and were generally conducted in two rounds (each interviewee represents approximately 3 hours of discussion time). The first round interviews consisted of introductions, open discussion about the evaluation, and questions related to the context of SYG and the project history. The second round addressed the project details, partner relations, observed changes and impacts, strengths and weaknesses, lessons learned and projections for the future. Occasionally, when scheduling did not permit two lengthy interviews, they were combined into one extended session or broken into three shorter sessions.

The partners in the study were chosen based on their participation in the project. This study does not seek to understand the effect of the project on the general population of douar chanti at SYG, but limits itself to the impacts on those who participated. The participative approach facilitated by SCGM constructed a network of diverse actors who are implicated in the design, realization and daily management of the Center. The choice of persons interviewed reflects that approach.

- Municipality: 1 group discussion with the entire municipal council; 6 interviews completed with municipal leaders;
- Amicales: 16 interviews completed with *amicale* leaders; walking tour of douar chanti on Saturday, June 19; 9 site visits; 3 group meetings;
- Trainers: 1 interview completed with representative of computer instructors;
- Search for Common Ground-Morocco: 4 interviews with SFCGM former management; weekly coordination and progress reports with interim director, Michael Contet;
- ANHI/OMRANE: 1 introductory meeting, 1 extended interview completed with OMRANE representative;
- USAID: 1 introductory meeting and 1 interview with USAID representative.

Supporting documentation included: the project history from Search for Common Ground, comprising the grant proposal, the annual work-plan and regular reports to USAID, attendance records to meetings and SFCG trainings; the USAID report: "*Formation au profit des membres des amicales du douar chanti à Sidi Yahia al-Gharb, Rapport du synthèse.*" Février, 2001.

*Recipients of the Final Report:*

All the actors will receive a *rapport de synthèse* of the findings and the results will be discussed in a meeting which assembles representatives of each institution.

Additionally, SFCG Morocco and SFCG Washington will receive an extended report for

internal use and financial partners (USAID) will receive a final report, corresponding to the required end-of-project evaluation.

### **STATEMENT OF PROBLEM**

More than four million Moroccans live without basic social services or infrastructure in shanty-towns, or *bidonvilles*. These tin-built neighborhoods are a breeding ground for a host of social problems, including public health issues, illiteracy, social discontent, crime, child labor, and an underground economy. The problems plaguing these communities hinder democratic development in Morocco and exacerbate social tensions. With scarce resources and a highly mobile population, communities become polarized and frustration can quickly devolve into violence.

Despite high level commitments from the Moroccan government to eliminate *bidonvilles*, most residents have yet to see significant changes on the ground. Community programs and municipal initiatives are necessary to support local development.

An incomplete response to the situation increases discontent and worsens the lot of the lowest classes. Instead, an integrated approach to poverty alleviation should focus on the creation of economic opportunities and the reinforcement of community ties. The goal should be good governance and democracy-building at the local level, in which the people, the local authorities, the state agencies and civil society are stakeholders in the development process. As full and equal partners, they can negotiate solutions to the adjustment problems arising from the development process. These networks and conflict resolution techniques can then translate into competencies in dealing with other social problems faced by the community.

With these goals in mind, a number of local stakeholders partied with government agencies and international interests to launch a pilot project in SYG whose long-term goal was the improvement of living standards in the district of douar chanti using community-based, social responsible practices.

*Primary beneficiaries:* In a large sense, the project was designed to benefit all the residents of douar chanti and the local authorities with which they work. More specifically, the activities targeted the existing community-based organizations,

amicales and to civically engage the youth between the ages 16-25 and the women of douar chanti.

## **PROJECT HISTORY**

Although this evaluation focuses on the period of SCGM's intervention (September 2002 to September 2004), it is useful to see the building of the Center in its historical and social context to understand the evolution of the project and the perceptions of the stakeholders.

In October, 2000 USAID became involved in SYG in association with ANHI, a parastatal holding company involved in urban development. The urban renewal of douar chanti had been conceived as a pilot project in 1989. However, after a series of broken election promises, a change in strategy and the completion of three streets as a "*quartier pilote*", there was widespread confusion about payment and the next steps of the renewal.<sup>1</sup>

Faced with the difficulty of communicating with a large and diverse population, ANHI and local authorities, including elected officials, encouraged the creation of community-based organizations, or *amicales*. These local organizations were to act as social accompaniers; in other words, a point of contact between the local authorities and the population during the reconstruction process. The amicales were arranged by neighborhood, each district drawn along electoral lines and numbered accordingly. This fact would shape the political nature of the amicales and contribute to later tensions, especially during local and parliamentary elections. Each district wrote a similar set of statutes which provided for a regularly elected President and Executive Council, which would be the core of "active members." Other residents would participate as subscribers, with each family paying yearly dues. The *amicales* were registered with the *caid* and were considered "associations" under the *dahir* of 1958.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In the earliest stages of the *douar chanti* project, *recasement* was the chosen strategy, meaning that the community would be razed to the ground and the residents would buy into a government-subsidized apartment project. However, the strategy was soon reformulated and *restucturation*, or on-site reconstruction was advanced. To gain support for this idea, ANHI launched a pilot project. Three streets were connected to sanitation, water and electricity and paved roads were placed between them. Following this, the residents were given the option of buying their property and building legally. However, many thought that the reconstruction process would be free and a series of broken election promises left residents angry and disillusioned.

<sup>2</sup> The 1958 *dahir* defines an association as, « Une convention par laquelle deux ou plusieurs personnes mettent en commun de façon permanente leurs connaissances ou leurs activités dans un but autre que de

USAID conducted a series of capacity-building workshops to support the nascent civil society of SYG. The workshops targeted 40 local leaders and focused on participatory development strategies, brainstorming, informational and technical lectures, as well as visits to successful development projects.

The USAID workshops were well-received, eliciting high praise from many of the participants when asked to comment on them during the evaluation interviews. In particular, a number of *amicale* leaders said that it was the first time they had had direct contact with local authorities, especially representatives of government agencies. They found these contacts very useful and felt validated that they were treated as equals. However, the workshops were only the first step to building community leaders.

SCGM entered SYG on the advice of USAID, having been asked to reformulate the proposal for an earlier community development project which was planned for Casablanca, where they would have been working with JET, a private corporation that builds low-income housing. In fall of 2002, USAID approved an unsolicited proposal for SCGM to work in partnership with ANHI to launch a youth-oriented community development project.

The partnership between *amicales* and SCGM was orchestrated by USAID. The *amicales* expected a partnership with a construction-oriented company and these expectations led to confusion at the introductory meeting. When asked about the first meeting with SCGM, many *amicale* leaders remembered their disappointment and confusion at these first stages of project formulation. One *amicale* leader's statement reflected the responses of many:

"In the first meeting with the NGO [SCGM], we were frustrated. We had always heard that an international organization could help. In our meeting, we had our file all ready for infrastructure projects...but the NGO [SCGM] didn't really respond to our demands which were for water, etc.

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*partager des bénéfices » (article premier)...une association peut avoir certaines activités et intérêts à but lucratif, mais ces activités et intérêts ne peuvent constituer la motivation principale des individus qui deviennent membres de l'association. Une association n'est pas autorisée à partager tout gain pécuniaire ou matériel entre ses membres, mais peut utiliser ces bénéfices afin de survivre ou d'étendre ses activités en tant qu'association. »* It modified in 1973 to restrict associative rights, notably by increasing the regulations and length of the bureaucratic process and by allowing the government to dissolve any association not deemed appropriate. In July 2002, it was again modified to simplify the bureaucratic process and relax funding regulations with the goal of reducing local governmental abuse of the process.



USAID had a workshop or us saying they were ready to give us training; we didn't want training, we wanted things. But then, the training was good.

We were really frustrated with [SCGM] when it didn't work for us—they didn't respond to our basic needs—so we tried to find a way to work with them. Then we started a whole process of talking—what can an NGO like this do for us? We finally had the idea to do computer training and they welcomed the idea.”

Through a series of meetings with the *amicales*, ANHI/OMRANE, and the municipality, SCGM decided to target their workshops to continue capacity building, as well as to start a program on conflict resolution and on building relationships between community leaders through participatory projects. As a response to demands for more concrete projects, the computer training workshops were launched.

Similarly, some of the authorities interviewed cited early confusion with the exact nature of SCGM's work. The beneficiaries having no experience with conflict resolution workshops, they were not sure about the concrete benefits it would bring. The initial frustration seems to have been the result of basic miscommunication about the purposes of the meeting and from the way that the project was initiated—from the advice of an external donor rather than from the requests of the population.

Importantly, all of the interviewees expressed their surprise and eventual satisfaction with SCGM's projects, especially the conflict resolution training sessions. Once the workshops and project-based training began, participants overcame their skepticism and were uniformly impressed with the results. SCGM and USAID were flexible in their project formulation and were able to adapt to the wishes of the community leaders, within the limits of their capacities.

The activities organized by SCGM can be roughly divided into two periods of action: from November 2002 to December 2003, when early activities took place in the SYG's *Dar Shebab* (House of Youth) and from December 2003 to August 2004, when resources were concentrated on the building and launching of a Community Resource Center in *doaur chanti*. During the transition between these two periods there was a lull in community activities as the project stabilized and its participants dealt with elections, disagreement, and relocation issues.

**Early Activities, November 2002 – December 2003:** A launch project had an environmental theme and centered on creating an “*espace vert*” (public garden) in the community and organizing an artistic and writing competition among school

children of *douar chanti*. This project served to unite local stakeholders in an initial exercise of civic action and to inform the community of the ongoing efforts of the *amicales*. The Environmental Day project was often mentioned as an example of the early successes of the project.

Additionally, SCGM and the *amicales* arranged a workshop on micro credit and project management, inviting Zakoura, a Moroccan micro-credit association, to give a series of sessions to 35 women.

During this period, SCGM and the *amicales* organized a computer training facility which was housed in the Sidi Yahia's *Dar Shebab* (House of Youth), in partnership with the local delegation of the Ministry of Youth and Recreation. The computers and their maintenance were provided by SCGM/USAID. The *amicales* played a major role in the organization of the training, the recruitment of the computer trainers and the recruitment of beneficiaries. A series of criterion were established that favored youth (18-35) already possessing their high school *baccalaureate*, representing a comparatively well-educated beneficiary group. SCGM arranged for the donation of software and training sessions for the trainers through Microsoft North Africa and provided a symbolic payment of 20 *dirhams*/hour for the computer trainers. In an initial session, 60 people were trained in computer skills, representing hundreds of hours of instruction. An official graduation ceremony for the beneficiaries took place in the presence of the *Walli* and the *Pasha*, reflecting high-level encouragement of the project.

Although all stakeholders were kept abreast of the developments of the project, the *amicales* and SCGM took the lead on day-to-day activities. In particular, the municipality had little involvement at this stage. Many noted that the then-President of the municipality was uncooperative and did not place much importance on the activities of the *amicales*. However, the municipal council approved the projects as necessary and did little to block the efforts of the other participants.

#### *Results:*<sup>3</sup>

- 60 people trained in computer skills;

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<sup>3</sup> According the December 2003 project report submitted to USAID by Search for Common Ground Morocco.

- 22 stakeholders and committee members trained in communication and problem solving skills;
- 24 youth activists trained in communication, leadership and conflict resolution;
- 35 women recipients of micro credits and trained micro project management; MAD 100,000 granted to SYG women.
- 4 computer trainees with enhanced training and computer technology skills.

***Transitional Period:*** A tumultuous period in the project's development was the result of both project-related problems and upheaval in the political environment of SYG, which affected the stakeholders, particularly the municipal council and the amicales. Additionally, the planning of the Community Resource Center diverted most of the resources and energy of the partners toward the achievement of that goal.

The project-related conflict started with a paralyzing disagreement between the Dar Shebab and SCGM. Although the first round of computer training classes took place at the Dar Shebab without any serious problems, during the second round there was a disagreement regarding the ownership of the computers. The director of the Dar Shebab insisted that at the completion of the project, the computers would be turned over to the Ministry of Youth and Recreation whereas SCGM (and USAID) maintained ownership by the project itself. Eventually, training was suspended and the computers were locked in the county authority until a new location could be found.

From this need, the plan to construct a community resource center in douar chanti was concretized. The computer courses were suspended for nearly 5 months, from December 2003 until the opening of the new center, in May, 2004. This created a particularly difficult situation for the trainers and for the students, whose courses were suspended mid-session. Upon their resumption, in May 2004, many of the students did not return to regular classes.

Additionally, the municipal elections of September, 2003 disrupted the continuity of the project. With elections highly politicized and often very contentious, SCGM was advised by other authorities to keep a low profile during the election period in order

to maintain the appearance (and the reality) of neutrality. Aside from one or two disturbing incidents, interviewees did not cite major new problems during the local elections. However, hostilities that had developed during the 2002 parliamentary elections resurfaced and the continuing problem of the political involvement of the *amicales* was re-explored. As one amicale leader stated, "The times of the elections were times of vengeance."

Amidst election promises of completing the long overdue reconstruction process of *douar chanti*, wide-spread accusations of vote-buying, corruption, and even an isolated incident of violence, the amicales became deeply embroiled in local political battles. Although this did not directly affect the project's activities, it negatively impacted the relations between the amicales and the population, as well as the relationships between the amicales and the local municipal council, which will be discussed in greater depth below.

#### ***Community Resource Center, December 2003 – August 2004.***

The idea to build the Center was born of necessity. Faced with the need for a computer training location and with the calls from *amicales* for a headquarters, ANHI/OMRANE, SCGM, USAID, the municipal council and the *amicales* embarked on the project of building and running a center in *douar chanti*.

From the planning processes in December to the opening of the Center in May, there was a flurry of activity and meetings devoted to hammering out architectural plans and contracts and to navigating bureaucratic mazes. In the project conception stage, ANHI and SCGM led the project, facilitating the choice of site, the approval of plans, and the actual construction of the building. The project was fast-tracked so that the opening would coincide with the visit to Morocco of USAID Administrator, Andrew S. Natsios, in May.

During this period, the participants remember a high level of cooperation and communication. Driven by deadline, internal problems and disagreements about the tasks and management of the center were swept aside and the partners enjoyed a trust-building period of action and collaboration. The opening of the Center in May, 2004 was cited by interviewees as a proud day for the entire community. The attention of high-level Moroccan and American officials contributed to this sentiment, but the concrete achievement of a project was the most important source of

satisfaction. The community center represented a promise fulfilled and a Good realized. As such, it legitimized the *amicales*, ANHI/OMRANE, and the municipal council, who shared credit in the community and in the press.

Once the construction deadline had passed, the details which had been overlooked and the conflicts which had been suppressed began to surface. Furthermore, as a successful project for a politically important community, the resource center became a prize for the stakeholders as much as a symbol of their cooperation. Nevertheless, computer classes resumed, with attendance gradually increasing, and conflict resolution and capacity-building workshops for *amicale* leaders continued.

*Results:*

- Continuation of computer training courses
- Continuation of *amicale* training, focusing on communication, problem solving skills and NGO capacity-building (project design, management and evaluation).
- Construction of community resource center in *douar chanti*.

**OBJECTIVE-BASED ANALYSIS**

The final SCGM project proposal stated, "*The overarching goal is to form a cadre of community facilitators/leaders capable of mobilizing constituencies and undertaking social problems.*" The indicators outlined included:

"the formation of a group of facilitators, the activities that they have been undertaking, the establishment of the center, the number of participating females, the progress towards fulfilling the center's proposed activities, and the number of youth involved and active in the community's life."

These indicators are very important and will be used, but in order to fully evaluate the goal it is also important to look at the level of communication between the stakeholders in the community, the management and functioning of the center, the ways in which the community leaders represent their constituencies, and the sustainability of the project.

A number of objectives were detailed by SCGM which contribute to the realization of the over-arching goal. This analysis will be organized according to those objectives, paying particular attention to those that deal with developing the strength of SYG's civil society and community leadership.

*Objective 1: "Empower the youth, including boys and girls, to effect positive change in their communities."*

The early activities of the project focused on youth development. In particular, the Environmental Day and the youth conflict resolution seminars were designed to empower the community's young people. Additionally, the computer training courses have largely targeted students. Certainly, in terms of the number of youth involved, the objective has been met. It can be assumed that the program succeeded in engaging a portion of douar chanti's youth, but the lasting effects of the program will hinge on their continuation and the ability of the Community Resource Center to maintain its connection with this population. The goal of youth programs is the creation of a next generation of leaders; therefore the long-term effects of these activities on the community are difficult to judge at this early stage.

*Objective 2: "Build structure for civic culture"; and "build the community's capacity to reach out and advocate for its rights."*

A culture of civic activism is difficult to quantify, but communication skills, leadership buy-in to the project and community engagement in the Center are three key indicators of the health of civic culture in SYG.

*Communication:* One of the best measures of civic culture and of a community's ability to advance its rights is the level of communication between the stakeholders. The *amicale* members noted a substantial change in their ability to communicate with other community leaders and the members particularly valued the contacts established with local authorities. Many talked about the great personal growth they had achieved through the project and were very enthusiastic about what they had gained personally and professionally, particularly with regard to self-confidence and communication skills:

“Personally, I have improved in so many domains, because of the training and in dealing with important people and seeing how they deal with us. We learn how to communicate ideas to the administration and how to make another party help you achieve your goals and not just for me, for all the regular and serious attendees.”

With a few exceptions, the *amicale* leaders demonstrated consensus decision-making and collaborative planning, working together even on small projects such as the design of the Center’s garden. Their constant contact and long-standing connections ensure regular meetings and open dialogue. Additionally, there was an impressive, open line of communication between the *amicale* leaders, the local representative of ANHI/OMRANE and Search for Common Ground - Morocco. However, the communication patterns rarely extended to include other local municipal leaders, particularly those on the municipal council. During the course of the evaluation, the *amicale* leaders did have contact with the president of the council, though these interactions were limited and not always positive.

*Leadership Buy-In:* The success of this project depended on a significant commitment from all stakeholders, particularly those who would be involved in the day to day activities of the Center. SCGM and ANHI/OMRANE did a remarkable job of involving very high level authorities, particularly the *Walli* and the *Pasha* who played both a symbolic and substantive role in the encouragement of the *amicales*. These authorities were particularly helpful during disagreements between stakeholders because they were able to offer protection to the less powerful *amicales* against the more influential municipal council. However, they also served as a referee at times and a way for the stakeholders to avoid direct confrontation and discussion. At certain points of dispute the first reaction of interviewees was to circumvent the municipal council and to appeal directly the *Walli* or the *Pasha* instead of attempting to resolve problems among themselves.

Representatives USAID and especially from ANHI/OMRANE took an intense interest in the project and acted as trouble-shooters and daily problem-solvers. The ANHI/OMRANE representative weighed in on day-to-day problems and provided important bureaucratic support, though the financial contributions of ANHI/OMRANE were limited to incidentals.

One major area of concern in the first part of the project was the deficit of involvement of the municipal council. From the early days of the project, the municipal council was not engaged in its development.

The lack of early participation by the municipal council was partially due to a lack of cooperation by the former president and the disruption caused by the September 2003 elections. Although one engineer was involved in the earliest stages of the USAID seminars, members of the municipal council did not regularly respond to invitations to SCGM's conflict resolution seminars or project meetings throughout the duration of the project. As one participant who attended the seminar remarked:

"If [municipal leaders] had participated in the training, things could have been better, but whenever they receive an invitation, they send whoever, just to say 'we are here,' but they have never been serious. If there were important members who attended, they would benefit and inform the others and be impressed by the results."

When asked why they did not participate, municipal interviewees implied that the seminars were geared toward *amicale* leaders who lacked a formal education and that municipal leaders did not need them. As one interviewee stated: "[I did not participate in the workshops because] I have the capacity to learn elsewhere. It's better to give the space to someone who does not have that opportunity." From this and other comments, it is clear that municipal leaders either did not fully understand the nature of conflict resolution training or were not convinced of its utility in their own work.

The election of a new President coincided with a need for greater involvement on the part of the Council. By September, the plans for the Center were well underway and council approval was needed to facilitate the construction process. The municipal council did not play a major role in project design or in the building process, but once the center was functional, the council took responsibility for a variety of tasks and financial obligations. In fact, much of the long-term financial burden will fall on the municipal council.

Municipal leaders expressed dissatisfaction with the idea of the Center. Some of the interviewees felt that the project, though a positive addition to the community, was "anachronistic." They saw it as an example of the misappropriation of resources and



of confused priorities, because it was built before douar chanti was fully equipped with basic sanitation and water services. They did not believe ANHI/OMRANE had fulfilled its obligation nor did they feel that ANHI/OMRANE intended to fulfill these commitments. A number of interviewees on both the municipal council and within the *amicales* saw the Center as a poor alternative to concrete development—they saw it as a substitution for development instead of a complement to an ongoing process. In short, interviewees did not trust that there was long term development plan which would be fulfilled. Nevertheless, even naysayers recognized the benefits that the Center could bring to the beneficiaries. Despite questions about the conception of the project, municipal leaders understood that the Center was a *fait accompli* that predated their terms. They expressed a willingness to support its operation.

Due in part to the concurrence of the project and electoral changes, there was a gap between the levels of input by municipal leaders in the project design and the comparatively heavy responsibility of the council in the Center's operation. Once these duties had to be fulfilled, there was political division within the council which may have contributed to bureaucratic torpor, ambiguity about the council's role, and unaccomplished tasks.

*Community Involvement.* The community is lynchpin of the SYG project. Although this evaluation focused on measuring the impacts on project participants—local stakeholders comprising the *amicales*, SCGM, the municipal council and ANHI/OMRANE—the relationship between these participants and the population is indicative of its success.

In order to build the civic culture of douar chanti, SCGM concentrated on building the capacity of the *amicales*. Their ability to organize activities which respond to local needs will be the primary way the Center reaches the greater population of douar chanti. In interviews, leaders demonstrated enthusiasm for future projects. At the time of this evaluation, the Center's activities were limited to the computer training but the *amicales* were in the planning stages for a community-wide open house, a second environmental day, literacy courses and a weaving project. These projects emphasized strengthening the connection between the *amicales* and other elements of SYG's civil society and advancing the development of the local community. If

realized, these activities would positively benefit the community but it is too early to evaluate their impact.

**Recommendation:** A community-run needs assessment of *douar chanti*. Even a resuscitation of regular, informal *douar*-wide meetings about proposed social and cultural projects might increase the *amicales* ability to target the needs of the population.

A critical dimension of community engagement in SYG is the level of internal democracy in the *amicales*. The *amicales* were designed to encourage intense local participation, building upon pre-existing democratic decision-making practices in the community. For example, regular *douar*-wide meetings took place in the first years of the *amicales* existence. However, as the pace of reconstruction slowed, so did the meetings. By July 2004, when the interviews took place, few could remember the date of the last community meeting. Each of the amicale leaders insisted upon their close connection with the population:

“We are in the constant communication with the population...We know everything about our community...Even if we don’t sign reports or have minutes from meetings, we represent the people.”

This connection is genuine. The *amicales* represent the best organized connection with the people of *douar chanti* and understand their role as “a link between the population and the government and other partners.” However, it is not a connection that is always properly employed and it should not be taken for granted.

One area of particular concern is the declining number of active *amicale* members. The statutes of each organization call for a complete executive board and regular elections and meetings. However, each of the *amicales* has only 2 - 5 active members, only one or two of which are involved in the Center’s activities.

Most disturbingly, a number of the *amicales* have executive councils whose terms have expired. Organizational elections are long overdue and these *amicales* are in violation of their statutes. The members (or subscribers) of the *amicales* are comprised of people who live in each electoral district, so regular elections are both a legal obligation and an opportunity to promote local-level democracy.

**Recommendation:** *Amicale* elections should be immediately organized, concurrent with a membership drive to increase the number of active participants. The statutes must thereafter be more rigorously respected.

Although *amicale* leaders insisted that the loose structures of the organizations do not impact their performance, there was evidence of an information gap between the community and the *amicales*. At first, the population was not well informed about the purpose of the Community Resource Center nor was it clear to many who had organized the project. One *amicale* leader's response to the question, "What did the population think about the Center?" was illustrative:

"[The people] thought that the center belonged to the police. In the beginning there were rumors—that this would be a commissariat because there was nothing to inform the people, no official inauguration or breaking ground, they just suddenly brought the materials and started building.

When asked why there was not a meeting of the *douar* to discuss the Center, the interviewee replied: "We were afraid that the people would have a bad reaction to the building of the center. We knew that they would be indifferent and say, 'Why build a center when we don't have streets?'"

Another interviewee explained that they had waited until the inauguration to tell the population about the Center because the *amicales* wanted to differentiate themselves from other authorities by giving the population something concrete instead of more empty promises.

Whatever the justification for the information gap, it is clear that it contributed to confusion among the population and stakeholders about the purpose of the Center. The rumors around the center decreased the *amicales* legitimacy in the eyes of the municipal leaders who cited them as evidence that the *amicales* had lost their connection with their constituents. Some of the *amicale* leaders noted their difficulties in gaining the trust of the population and the municipal leaders which is likely exacerbated by situations like this.

**Recommendation:** Greater participation of the population in planning of future projects. If the population is to feel ownership over the Center, it should be engaged in the decision-making process around its construction and, at the very least, be kept well-informed of those decisions and the project's progress. Transparency is critical in this highly polarized environment.

*Creating a civic structure:* The *amicales* have made significant progress in managing projects and in establishing of community connections. However, they have just started down the path of creating a permanent civic structure. *The amicales are not yet self-sustaining.* As of July, 2004, they were still entirely dependent on SCGM/USAID, which posed one of the greatest dangers to the project's sustainability. None of the stakeholders had a plan for maintaining the project after the funding had terminated. Although the Center could be self-sustaining soon, SCGM was still actively trouble-shooting and paying for certain daily incidentals as well as paying the computer trainers. When asked about the greatest threat posed to the project, many of the respondents replied: "The loss of [SCGM] in August."

**Recommendation:** USAID and SCGM should either collaborate on extending the mandate of the current project or should aid the *amicales* in finding another primary partner. Additionally, other donors must be found to diversify the funding sources of the *amicales* and to develop incoming generating activities which will protect them from future disruption and give them a greater level of independence.

The highly politicized nature of the *amicales* was a fissure in the civic structure of Sidi Yahia al-Garb. Although non-partisanship is not a defining characteristic of a strong civil society, the civic structure should be independent from the government. This independence can be put in jeopardy if the party supported by civil society enters power or if the associations are seen as politically biased. At their establishment, the *amicales* of douar chanti were handicapped by the fact that they were organized along electoral lines and by their early connection with certain powerful elected officials. This alignment with local politics—combined with the inchoate nature of local democracy in Morocco—created an unstable situation in which the *amicales* were bound to the electoral cycle. Every election proves a profoundly destabilizing event, both suspending civic activities and engendering conflict.

Nearly all those interviewed spoke of the elections as a time of hostility and corruption. Many *amicale* members aligned themselves with political candidates, which divided the members amongst themselves and further reduced their credibility, both in the eyes of population and in the eyes of those who were eventually elected to the municipal council. The mistrust that is left over from the election period continues to taint the relationships between community stakeholders.

Because the *amicales* were established to serve the very specific role of mediator between ANHI/OMRANE and the population, their members have felt limited in their activities and proposed the creation of a new “association” which would unite the organizations. If established, this unified association would transcend electoral districts and may help to reduce the division during the election cycle, although the members will also have to be certain to remain inclusive and to avoid using the creation of a new association as an excuse to exclude and further divide the civil society leaders in SYG.

**Recommendation:** Establish an association, unifying the amicales under a clear developmental mission. This will help to focus the amicales, will raise their stature in community and in relation other stakeholders, and may help reduce political tension. Additionally, members must act with more discretion and achieve a better balance between personal political feelings and civic responsibility

*Objective: Promote education and nonviolent conflict resolution*

The capacity building workshops, the computer courses and the conflict resolution courses contributed to the lives of the participants and, if used widely, could engender better community relations in douar chanti. Although interviewees cited one isolated instance of violence associated with local elections, disputes were not solved by violence in douar chanti.

*Objective: Improve interpersonal, interfamily and inter-communal relations*

Although interpersonal relationships are difficult to quantify, interviewee responses to questions about their perceptions of other stakeholders echoed the tone of inter-

communal relations. As of July, the relationships remained mixed, with improvements noted in many areas. Mistrust remained, however, between the municipal council and ANHI/OMRANE and the council and the *amicales*.

One interviewee cited the poor municipal/community relations as the critical difference between the project at SYG and more successful community development projects elsewhere in Morocco. His comment reveals the lack of confidence among stakeholders:

“[Unlike another project in which the municipal council was very supportive, SYG was different]. Even in 1999, the municipality did not want the *amicales* to be formed. Since then, none of the presidents have wanted them to succeed. It is politicized, for them, the *amicales* are a problem. They have never really tried to fix the problem of the slums...they are interested only in political calculations.”

Similarly, *amicale* leaders expressed their suspicion of the municipality and its intentions with regard to the Center:

They see the center as a place that can strengthen the people who will oppose them and threaten their careers... The municipality was reluctant to help us because of political reasons. They could have helped us if they wanted to.

A number of *amicale* leaders also expressed their fears that certain members of the municipal council were going to forcibly take over the Center, turning it into a municipal sphere instead of an associational sphere once SCGM left the scene. For some this was the greatest obstacle facing the project. Certain interviewees even claimed that they had been intimidated by municipal leaders and told that once SCGM left, the Center would belong to the municipality.

In a similar vein, suspicion was rampant between ANHI/OMRANE and the municipal council. Communication between these partners was described as a “cold silence,” although there were indications that it was beginning to thaw in the last days of this evaluation, when *douar*-wide reconstruction negotiations were reconvened.

It was hoped that the entire SYG project and the construction of the Center in particular would act as a trust-building exercise. However, close contact and shared responsibilities do not always engender confidence. The physical construction of the Center built the credibility of the stakeholders with the community and with each

other, however, the relationships deteriorated during the final stages of construction and the early stages of the Center's operation. Mistrust among stakeholders contributed to miscommunications and delayed the progress toward strong community relations.

A foundational ambiguity about the ownership and the purpose of the Center was an unstable bedrock for its operation and for the completion of the project. When asked basic questions about the purpose of the Center and about whom it is meant to serve, interviewees gave widely divergent responses. Although all mentioned the importance of community activities, some thought of it as a headquarters for the *amicales*, others as a meeting space for the community and the municipal council, others as a center for the activities or as a simple classroom for computer training.

There was disparity—among both the *amicale* leaders and between all the stakeholders—about who can use the center. Members of the commune saw it as open to all residents of SYG, while donors expected it to target only the residents douar chanti; the *amicale* leaders were mixed in their responses, with some welcoming other residents and other associations to use the Center as a headquarters and others hoping to encourage connections with other associations, but allowing only activities that were available exclusively to douar chanti residents. It became clear that there was very little open communication between stakeholders on these issues nor is there widespread acknowledgment of the quiet disagreements.

This uncertainty is exemplified in the contract that governs the management and ownership. One of the issues is immediately evident: the *amicales* are not signatories on the contract. The negotiations surrounding the contract, though facilitated by SCGM, were essentially between ANHI/OMRANE and the municipal council, despite the fact that the *amicales* bear considerable responsibility in the maintenance and daily operation of the Center. Search for Common Ground is assumed by all parties to be the representative of the *amicales*, yet there was no provision for Search for Common Ground's inevitable departure at the completion of the project. From a legal standpoint, this could be the single greatest threat to the project if SCGM does not renew its presence in SYG in the fall of 2004.

**Recommendation:** An addendum to the contract should add the *amicales* or the association they form as signatories.

The contract was also vague about fundamental questions, including legal ownership of the Center and the organizational structure of the Center's management. For example, the *commune* assumed that they would have the power to name a director of the Center and envisioned a structure similar to that of the governmental-run *Dar Shebab* (House of Youth) or *Dar Tuqufah* (House of Culture). If implemented, this management structure would significantly change the nature of the Center, moving it from a non-governmental, associational sphere, to a governmentally-controlled community center. The *amicales*, however, assumed that they would have the power to name one of their own as director, but run the Center in collaboration or through a new association created for that purpose. In either case, the details of salary, responsibilities and hierarchy were not settled.

At the time of the interviews, conflict disrupted relations between the stakeholders. Without a stable contract that had been approved by all the parties, it was easier for some to renege on the agreement. For example, at the time of the interviews the *commune* had not provided the guard or the cleaning and maintenance, as promised. *Amicale* leaders had taken the tasks upon themselves, with one leader performing all the cleaning and maintenance and others rotating on guard duty each night. When a municipal leader was asked to explain why the tasks were not completed, the ambiguity of the contract along with bureaucratic torpor and undercurrents of conflict within the council were cited. As a result of this relatively small violation of the agreement, trust was broken early in the project and the stakeholders were more suspicious of one another and doubted the future of the Center. Instead of acting as a trust building exercise, the early operation of the Center served to erode the confidence that had been built during the construction process.

Though the ambiguous contract exacerbated divisions, it was not the cause of these conflicts. The limitations of the contract were merely reflections of ambiguities regarding the nature of project. The stakeholders articulated different developmental roles for the Center. It is important to note that all spoke generally about the improvement of living conditions in SYG and the importance of finishing the reconstruction project and this represents an alignment of interests and state goals



which is critical to the project's success. However, each stakeholder saw the Center as playing a different role in that process. Many of those interviewed—in both the council and the *amicales*—did not see the relationship between the community resource center and the overall project of reconstruction in douar chanti. Particularly, members of the municipal council and the *amicales* said that the Center “did not meet the real needs of the population.”

When asked to elaborate, some interviewees explained that they supported the Community Center and thought the activities were important, but that the real work of development is the work of reconstruction, or the elimination of the shantytown. The real needs of the population, they explained, were “sanitation, roads and electricity.” USAID and SFCGM had a clear vision of the way the Center fit into the development scheme; they saw it as both a first step in stakeholder relationship building and as a vital organizational tool for the community. Members of both the *amicales* and the council tended to see the Center as anachronistic or separate from the overall development project. It was anomalous rather than part of a process.

A number of interviewees, in several categories, also spoke of the Center as if it were a gift to the *amicales*—a reward from ANHI/OMRANE for their support during the years of reconstruction negotiations. This perception, especially if it has spread to the community as some intimated it had, could severely damage the credibility of all the stakeholders and the activities that are eventually held there. If the Center is seen as serving the *amicales* instead of the population, it will be stymied in that role. In this way, the Center is at risk of becoming a symbol of political and social power instead of an organic part of community life. Because the Center was still new at the time of the interviews, it was still in the process of forming its identity in relation to the community. As yet, it is not being employed overtly as a political tool, but stakeholders should be aware of the risk.

**Recommendation:** The Center should gear many of its early activities toward the population. The population should see a real and concrete benefit from the Center—and should participate in a substantial manner—as soon as possible.

## Lessons Learned

- A project whose goal is institution building and the establishment of relationships must have a long-term commitment from all involved and should conclude with a gradual exit by the supporting organizations/donors. A clear exit strategy must be outlined, made available to all stakeholders and followed. Furthermore, if a project is not entirely self-sustaining by the time of its fruition, there must be *multiple*, alternate sources of funding available if a community-based organizations are to form a strong foundation for the fledgling civil society.
- The notion of partnership must be clearly defined from the beginning of the project. Although all the stakeholders will inevitable have different strengths and weaknesses and have different levels of influence in the community, it must be clear that all parties are equal and valuable within the context of the project. The particular benefits and assets of each stakeholder should be highlighted and valued openly. Every stakeholder should see itself (and the other participants) as full partners. As new sites are chosen for upcoming projects, the willingness of all stakeholders to participate fully should be a key criterion.
- Full records, meeting minutes and budget information should be copied, and distributed to all stakeholders. Whenever possible these files should be open to the community. Transparency must be prioritized. This will enable trust-building among stakeholders and within the community, encourage accountable behavior, promote engaged citizenship and debate and aid in the resolution of disputes.
- In situations in which community organizations are created with external assistance, they should be as closely rooted in the community as possible, maintained through community meetings and led by local leaders. Furthermore, it cannot be taken for granted that community-based organizations represent the population. The population must remain a part of the decision-making process and the project design. It is not just a question

of convincing to accept what has already been decided, but of designing the process with the input of the population.

- If a project is to be adaptable, it must balance the needs of flexibility with those of clear project management and goal setting. Most vitally, questions of ownership and responsibilities need to be absolutely clear to ensure the sustainability of the project after the foreign partners have departed.

### **Conclusion**

Although the evaluative interviews revealed certain significant shortfalls in the design, management and implementation of the project, their gravity is largely attributable to the atmosphere of mistrust and hostility that reigns in Sidi Yahia al-Gharb. It is also a testament to the foundational strength of the project that, given these weaknesses, it has still achieved most of its objectives. The issues identified by the stakeholders and reported in this evaluation, however, must be urgently addressed. If confidence in the project erodes below current levels, it may be impossible for the Center to attain its full potential. Nevertheless, there is a real, nascent civil society in Sidi Yahia al-Gharb and with greater attention to detail and by identifying and rectifying some of the problems the Community Resource Center can serve as a source social cohesion and an agent of community development. Although the *amicales* have begun the long process of establishing a civil society in SYG, the stewardship of SCGM (or a similar external agent) is still needed to secure the viability of the Center.