



Community Monitoring and Advocacy Groups

A HANDBOOK FOR ACTION





Each Community Monitoring and Advocacy Group (CMAG) documents and campaigns around the development priorities of its local community, in order to get them provided e.g. repairing a road, building a new school, or waste removal.

This handbook is a guide for current and future CMAG members. It explains what CMAGs are, how they work, and how they can ensure their community's development priorities are campaigned for in the long-term.

Stakeholder Democracy Network (SDN) has produced this handbook and supported CMAGs in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria since 2015.

- What is a CMAG?
- Who can be in a CMAG
- Development priorities
- CMAGs in action
- CMAG quality checklist
- Setting up a new CMAG

Members of Kpite CMAG, Tai LGA, 2019

What is a CMAG?

A CMAG is a group of people who meet together regularly in their community to support that community's priorities for development. This could be anything that benefits a large amount of people in the community. CMAG members find out what the priorities for development are by getting the community to meet together where anyone can suggest what they think is needed, then everyone can vote on which of these development needs they think should be the priorities (see finding out development priorities of your community). After this, CMAG members meet with politicians, duty-bearers, and other people relevant to the issue, to explain the development priorities of their community and encourage them to meet these priorities.

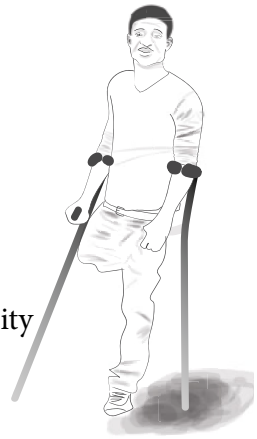
CMAG members also regularly report to community members and local leadership on any action politicians or duty-bearers have taken so communities understand the work that will be happening in their area. The CMAG can also help communities to communicate with the people responsible for local infrastructure, for example by organising town hall meetings.

SDN has supported CMAGs in Rivers State and Bayelsa State. These CMAGs have worked on development priorities relating to local health, education, and transport infrastructure needs.

Who can be in a CMAG?

A CMAG is composed of around 12 people. Any community member can be in the CMAG but it is good to have a variety of members and include people from:

- Community leaders and elders, such as the Council of Chiefs
- The Community Development Committee
- Youth groups
- Women's groups
- People with disabilities



CMAG members should have adequate literacy skills and an interest in serving the community.

There is unlikely to be any form of remuneration. The purpose and reward of being part of a CMAG is the potential social and economic development of their community. All members of the CMAG have equal rights, and are expected to put in as much effort as they can, express their concerns, and represent the interest of their community rather than their own interests, or of a small group of people. CMAG members are first selected by community leaders, in discussion with the wider community (note: CMAGs are not a parallel leadership structure in the community, and don't have rival authority).



How can your CMAG identify and act on the development priorities of your community?

After a CMAG is created, its members are trained by SDN to hold community-wide meetings to identify the community's priorities for development. It is important that all members of their community have a voice—particularly those that may be less often heard, and have greater needs such as women and young, poor, and people with disabilities. Community members are more capable than anyone else to identify their own priorities for development. Therefore, CMAGs need to ask their community members what their priorities for development are, and represent these to relevant politicians and officials. CMAGs should not try to think what is best for their community and represent that instead as they might be wrong, and they are unlikely to get the support of their community.

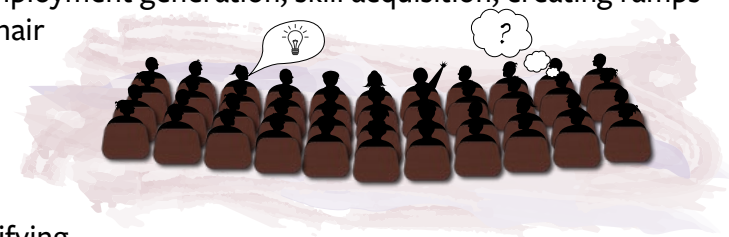
SN	ISSUE	MEN	WOMEN	TOTAL	RANK
1	Crime of Vandalism	3	-	3	6th
2	Lack of Proper waste management	4	9	13	5th
3	Lack of shore embarkment	26	1	27	3rd
4	Lack of Power	75	47	122	2nd
5	Air pollution	13	6	19	4th
6	Unemployment	54	77	131	1st

Community meetings to identify their priorities for development:

1. CMAG members arrange a meeting open to everyone in the community, and advertises the location, date, and time of the meeting widely—especially amongst women, young people, and people with disabilities.

3

2. In this meeting, any community members can identify unmet development needs they think their community has. This might include failures in service delivery. These needs and services could be roads, quality healthcare services, pipe-borne water, condition of schools, employment generation, skill acquisition, creating ramps for wheelchair users, electricity etc.



3. After identifying the unmet development needs, community members then rank these development needs in order of priority. This is done through a voting process by everyone at the meeting (ask SDN for specific guidance on how to record votes). After voting on all the unmet development needs suggested, they are ranked from highest to lowest priority based on the number of votes each got. Just like in elections, it shouldn't be possible for anyone else in the meeting to see what each person is voting for, or for a CMAG member to be able to change the votes before counting. The results are relayed to everyone at the meeting immediately.
4. It is important that CMAG members do not make promises or raise expectations that they will be successful in getting these priorities for development provided by duty-bearers or politicians. It can be a challenging task, and success cannot be guaranteed.
5. CMAG members inform everyone at the meeting how, and when, they will update everyone on any progress they make in getting the priorities for development provided by duty-bearers or politicians.
6. After answering any questions from anyone at the meeting, the meeting is closed.

4

Next steps...



The whole process is written transparently in a physical document (called a charter) that includes, step by step, how development needs were first identified, listing what they all were, and how many votes each scored. It also includes a description of risks to the campaign not working, and how to reduce those risks, listing who can help with the campaign, and who should be targeted, and finally, an ‘advocacy plan’ (see point 9). Anyone in the community should be allowed to look at this charter at any time.

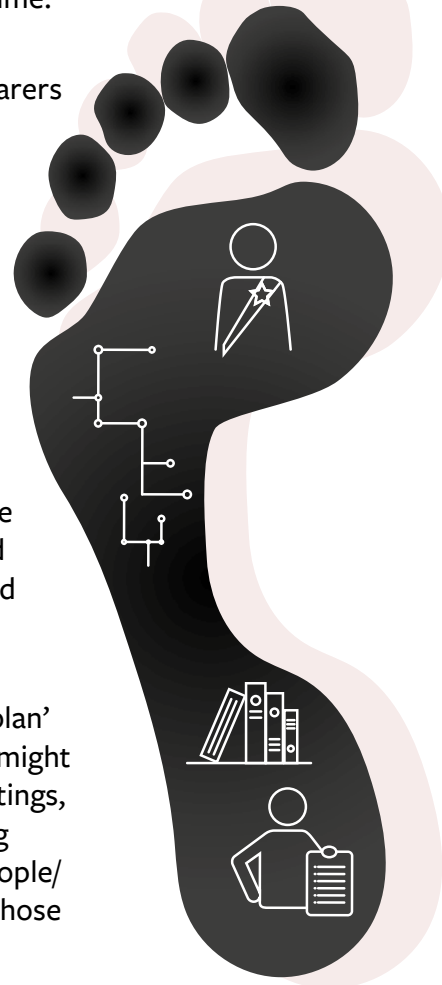


CMAG members then identify duty bearers and politicians who are responsible for providing the services identified as priorities for development in the community meeting. CMAG members might also discuss if they should contact government ministries, departments, or agencies, private sector organisations (e.g. oil companies), the media, government representatives of the community, or well-connected individuals that can use their influence to ensure the identified needs are acted on by duty bearers and politicians.



CMAG members create an ‘advocacy plan’ documenting what they will do which might include: issuing letters proposing meetings, visiting people responsible for meeting the priorities for development—or people/organisations that can help influence those

5



people, organising a peaceful protest, requesting airtime from the media to gather public support etc. Anything that will be done and when it will be done by should also be included in the advocacy plan.



With the advocacy plan in motion, members should look at their approach regularly and see if they think it is working. If it isn’t, CMAG members should change tactics to make the duty bearers and politicians responsive to the priorities for development in their community.

6

CMAGs in action

In the past, CMAGs have used a range of tactics to raise awareness of their communities' priorities for development. This is often the first step in getting those needs met by duty bearers and politicians who might not be aware of them. Awareness raising tactics included:

- Presenting a community's priorities for development on radio talk shows, for example by taking part in discussions with local officials and the media.
- Writing letters to politicians and following up with visits to their offices.
- Publishing evidence of broken or incomplete infrastructure, for example on social media.
- Organising meetings and engagements involving community leaders.



CMAGs have contributed to the following priorities for development being met:





- The reconstruction of buildings at the Government Secondary School, Ogu.
- The reconstruction of the Kpite road with drainage system, rehabilitation of internal roads, and provision of a solar-panel water tank in Nonwa community.
- The reconstruction of a major road in Biseni.
- The provision of desks and chairs at the Mater Dei High School in Imiringi.


To find out more about how CMAGs have successfully created change in their communities, visit <https://cutt.ly/cmagation>


CMAG quality checklist—is yours A+?


CMAG members are expected to serve in the interest of their community.


This means:

-  Showing commitment: CMAG members commit their time and effort to the work of the CMAG. This kind of community campaigning requires determination.
-  Being accountable: CMAG members ensure a high standard of integrity in their action. For example, as part of their work members may have to take and keep accurate records if funds have been donated to the CMAG. It is important to be transparent about how funds are spent, and they should only be spent to fund action directly related to getting their community's priorities for development met. This should be in prior agreement with all members of the CMAG.
-  Communicating: As a CMAG, it is important to hold regular meetings to evaluate progress that has been made, discuss what may need to work differently, and agree on clear goals. CMAG members should work together to agree their objectives for each year, draw up a plan for how to achieve them, and regularly discuss if it is working, for example every three months. Progress should be communicated outside of the CMAG to their community and local leaders as well.
-  Documenting progress: Keep a record of work done to monitor progress. CMAG members should keep records on their actions that can be compared to other people's records to show what has been successful, and encourage others to take part. Someone in the CMAG should be made responsible to take notes during meetings or visits (this doesn't need to be the same person each time).

-  Being proactive: If progress is not being made on a priority for development, CMAGs may decide to look at the charter again and campaign on the next most popular priority for development—clearly communicating this, and the reason for it, to their community and local leaders.

-  Being diplomatic and building networks: Results can often depend on networking opportunities. CMAG members should use contacts that community members may have with government officials to secure meetings. When they do so, they should always be respectful and diplomatic. Working together is the best way to achieve change.

-  Working together: CMAG members must always work as a team to ensure that they achieve their goals. Responsibilities should be shared among members so that no one is tasked with too much work, and these responsibilities should take into account members' capacity e.g. a woman, young person, or person with disabilities may have different constraints but offer valuable contributions to the CMAG in other ways. Meeting locations and times should be accessible by all members of the CMAG e.g. a time that works around child-care responsibilities.

-  Passing on skills: CMAGs must ensure they pass on their skills and experience to new or replacement members, so that new training isn't constantly required as this may be expensive or hard to get. This also includes handing over relationships. For example, if you leave a CMAG, you should make sure to introduce new or existing members to officials you have previously had contact with. This will help your CMAG to continue its work and progress with these officials.



Setting up a new CMAG

1. An audience is first sought with the community leadership. Until now, this audience has been sought by SDN.
2. The idea of starting a group to engage on local issues, identified by members of the community, is presented and discussed.
3. If the community leadership wishes to go ahead, they later meet and select the initial community members to form the CMAG.

SDN's recommendation is that CMAG members should have adequate literacy skills, an interest in serving the community, and represent marginalised groups in the community such as women, young people, and people with disabilities. New CMAG members should reach out to SDN to see if training is available, or they can seek alternative training on communication and advocacy.



Future work

SDN will continue to directly support CMAG activity where it has the resources to do so. We welcome inquiries from others working on related community development issues.

Please contact us using info@stakeholderdemocracy.org.

About SDN

SDN supports those affected by the extractives industry and weak governance. We work with communities and engage with governments, companies and other stakeholders to ensure the promotion and protection of human rights, including the right to a healthy environment. Our work currently focuses on the Niger Delta.

SDN has supported CMAGs in a number of areas of the Niger Delta since 2015 as part of a project aiming to support members of local communities to have a say in how their needs are addressed by government and others.



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