

JUNE 2024

## STUDY VISIT TO CAMEROON: FOR A'ESS - SOCIAL AND SOLIDARITY ECONOMY AFRICAN FORUM



*This article was written by Fabiana Pompermaier and Gianluca Pastorelli (Diesis Network)*

During the first **FOR A'ESS - Social and solidarity Economy African Forum** – which took place in **Yaoundé, Cameroon**, from the 28-30th May 2024, we had the opportunity to present the **GREASE project**, which aims at fostering green social entrepreneurship (SE) in rural areas, ensuring women empowerment and sustainable inclusion in the labour market and a fair and sustainable twin transition in across Europe, Western Balkans and Central African regions.

The event was moderated by Diesis Network, coordinator of the project, and it was the opportunity to present its objectives, activities and long-term vision together with local partners **FORESCAM**, Afroleadership and PFAC. The discussion was animated by the long standing experience of Didier Etienne Atangana, president of FORESCAM, in providing capacity building and training on SSE especially in rural areas and Mr. Koume Honoré, mayor of the municipality of Doumaintang, who shared his engagement and support for the development of the RELESS network in Cameroon.

We were also joined by Mr. El Allassane Baguia, Project Manager and Development Finance Specialist, in charge of our Support to Private Sector initiative at the UNDP, who shared the organisation's vision and support to rural women, especially the opportunities and actions undertaken to promote green social entrepreneurship as a driver for sustainable change in rural areas.

The event was a valuable moment to **exchange with participants and hear about the untapped potential of SSE**, learn about local good practices and create connections that will shape the project's activities in the upcoming months.

It is not by chance that GREASE approach is very much aligned with the "African model" proposed and launched during this milestone conference. While in other "developed" continents, the social and solidarity economy is "perceived as an economy of transformation or repair, for the African continent, it is the innovation of a more human construction". Moreover, **the African Union has just published its ten-year strategy (2023-2033)** together with an implementation plan for the SSE.



JUNE 2024

STUDY VISIT TO CAMEROON: FOR A'ESS - SOCIAL AND SOLIDARITY ECONOMY AFRICAN FORUM

This one proposes a comprehensive and coordinated policy framework for actions aimed at legitimising, supporting and developing the social and solidarity economy (SSE) in the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and in the Member States. It seemed for the Forum organizers “**urgent, necessary and timely to create a forum for exchanges and concrete actions with a view to promoting a social construction economy for the transformation of territories and the well-being of their inhabitants.**”



## GREASE Study Visit

From the 3rd-6th of June 2024, we joined our partners **ARNO, Afroleadership, FORESSCAM and PFAC** in Cameroon to participate in the GREASE project study visit.

The **GREASE project** aims at **fostering green social entrepreneurship (SE) in rural areas**, ensuring women empowerment and sustainable inclusion in the labour market and a fair and sustainable twin transition. It creates an international share of knowledge consisting in a capacity building programme co-created by partners combining the experiences of the Western Balkans, Europe and Cameroon.

The study visit was a fundamental moment for partners to better get to know each other and gather enriching insights from the partners' field activities and networks within the local communities. The RELESS system, promoted by our partners PFAC and FORESSCAM, provides an infrastructure to the SSE ecosystem in Cameroon, facilitating and driving its development, communication across national, regional and municipal levels and effectively creating a network of SSE in the country.

We had the opportunity to **visit two rural communities** who are driving with their remarkable engagement the consolidation of the RELESS system in Cameroon: the **municipalities of Doumaintang and Olangina**.

The municipality of Doumaintang is located in the East region of Cameroon. We had the chance to visit the cooperatives created to support the livelihood of rural women, who are actively engaged in sectors such as: **agrifood, education, healthcare and technical support**.



JUNE 2024

## STUDY VISIT TO CAMEROON: FOR A'ESS - SOCIAL AND SOLIDARITY ECONOMY AFRICAN FORUM

The municipality of Olangina is located in the South region. There, we also visited the success stories of **cooperatives who are part of the local RELESS**, the impressive **makabo and pineapple plantations**, together with the growing pisciculture system, which will be enlarged in the coming years. During the events in the two RELESS, we were able to exchange with the local community about the expectations about the project's activities, the challenges and skills required to support their social entrepreneurial journey. These insights will help us shape the capacity building programme and subsequent cycles of events we will hold in these rural communities in the framework of the GREASE project.

These two days were important to have the opportunity to meet and get to know the mayors and witness their engagement in the local communities and how their leadership, supported by the awareness raising done by PFAC and FORESSCAM, is contributing to the consolidation of the Social and solidarity economy movement in Cameroon.

On the 6th of June, we were welcomed by Mr. Achille Bassilekin, Minister of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, Social Economy and Handicrafts. The GREASE delegation had the possibility to present to the Minister and the SSE team the long-term vision of the project, the standing experience and processes initiated by the local partners with Cameroonian municipalities and local communities, and how the GREASE project will support the **development of the SSE ecosystem and female green entrepreneurship in rural areas**. We perceive this inaugural meeting as an important stepping stone in ensuring that the project activities will have a valuable and sustainable impact.

Overall, we are grateful for this opportunity to exchange with our partners, learn about the good practices and expand our awareness on the SEE ecosystem in Cameroon. *We look forward to continuing the cooperation with our partners and create the GREASE capacity building programme from this awareness, complementing it with our European perspective and ARNO's Western Balkans experience.*

