

# cooperation

Because Ambassadeur is a pilot project that has a limited timeframe and was launched quickly, the parties involved very early on faced a variety of implementation problems (e.g. organizational framework, activity planning and evaluation). Yet, through everyone adhering to the project's objective and orientation, these efforts at adjustment to achieve the intended results led to the cooperation and partnership between HRDC and the CFDCs.

## Management

In the first phase of the project, coordination gave rise to a number of irritants. HRDC supervision was considered too strict and its ties with the "Ambassadors" too bossy; this made the CFDC managements uncomfortable. Occasionally CFDC managers felt left out of the loop. At the same time, the CFDCs noticed a lack of clarity in the documentation provided by HRDC.

To remedy this situation, as mentioned earlier, a steering committee was formed in September 2000. Its purpose was precisely to establish a **modus vivendi** between the realities facing the CFDCs and HRDC's obligations, as well as a **modus operandi** for aligning the project's objectives with the evaluation of results. The committee provided overall project coordination while leaving the technical details related to carrying out activities to be ironed out by the network of information officers, and the main strategic orientation of the project to the network of directors. But since the project was then at the end of its second year, according to some people financing soon became the main topic of discussion at these meetings.

## Financial Dimension

The rules governing budget control were considered too restrictive by the CFDCs. To collect the subsidy, each CFDC signed a contract with HRDC that established ties between the funding and the attainment of objectives. In the first phase, the subsidy covered total expenditures; in the second, it was only enough for part of the costs and involved red tape and more meticulous verification of the eligibility of all expenses. The requirements, both in terms of financial justification and multiple activity reports, were considered burdensome and some felt they exceeded those of CED for a bigger budget. Note that around the same time the Minister responsible for HRDC in Ottawa had to account to Parliament for the breakdown and management of certain grants. This difference in the way departments managed budgets, while understood by the CFDCs, was an irritant for some of their managements. Yet the gap appears to have narrowed because the latest agreements between CED and CFDCs call for accountability with quantitative and qualitative objectives.

Also, all the financial uncertainty caused by the delays in awarding the subsidy and the declining amounts spawned discontent. Yet the CFDCs appreciated HRDC's efforts to arrange financing for the project. The money was essential for carrying it out and supporting the resources in the community.

## Relational Dimension

On the whole, relations were considered good. Yet some CFDCs very often felt they were not involved in a partnership but rather a relationship between principal and agent, and in the position of a subcontractor. The problems of annual financing and management lay at the root of this situation along with the one-shot nature of the project.

For HRDC, it was the first attempt at cooperation with CFDCs since the transfer of responsibility for them to CED. It was part of a subsidized project with its own rules of accountability. It was a pilot project to which HRDC wanted to apply rigorous control.

There was no adaptation phase to speak of as all the partners felt rushed to implement the project. The partners adjusted to each other as they went along. For the CFDCs, the misunderstanding of their mission and expertise in the field were cited as factors that influenced the relationship of trust. Yet for HRDC the important thing was to remain focused on the project's objectives, to reach citizens to inform them and better equip them for decisionmaking while establishing a win-win relationship with the CFDCs from which each partner, and especially the public, stood to gain.

All the parties agree that, to carry out the Ambassadeur project, the CFDCs were the right partners: they are close to the grassroots and familiar with their community. A view expressed by one HRDC representative and shared by many was that this first attempt at cooperation between HRDC and CFDCs "proves that we can create ties between agencies" and paves the way for other projects.

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