42 frequently asked questions on INTERNATIONAL DECENTRALIZED COOPERATION

Featuring a special section on German-Cameroonian municipal partnerships
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Section I) – Introduction to this brochure
1. **What is the context of the present brochure?**

Due to the decentralization process in Cameroon, the municipalities (cities, councils and other municipal bodies, cf. question 13) are challenged with new tasks that require corresponding competences and resources. It is against this backdrop that Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) has established its Decentralization and Local Development Support Program (PADDL) as a pillar of the German Cooperation in Cameroon. United Councils and Cities of Cameroon (UCCC), the association representing all Cameroonian municipalities, shares the goal of supporting the decentralization process by strengthening municipal competences. Its member municipalities as well as its divisions on the departmental and regional level make UCCC an important partner organization regarding the multi-level-approach that PADDL and its regional offices (antennas) stand for.

**Terminology**

This brochure uses *municipality* (synonyms: municipal body and local authority) as a generic term that comprises the categories city, city district, council and council union. The term *council* applies – according to context – either to the deliberating organ of a municipality or a category of smaller municipalities.

2. **What is the motivation behind this brochure?**

PADDL und UCCC agree that direct cooperation between foreign and Cameroonian municipalities complements the existing collaboration between the PADDL antennas and UCCC members. As a first manifestation of this concept, a delegation of Cameroonian mayors and UCCC-representatives embarked on a study tour to Germany in July 2014 that proved a useful platform for exchanges with their German counterparts. The establishment and consolidation of such inter-municipal relationships provides an opportunity for the Cameroonian municipalities to continue the development process initialized by PADDL even after the termination of this program at the end of 2015.

Moreover, UCCC states among its members a great interest in partnerships with their counterparts abroad, notably in Germany. The present brochure aims at harnessing this potential by providing basic information on how to initiate such partnerships. For German local authorities interested in decentralized cooperation, a complementary text titled “Cameroon as a target country for municipal development cooperation” (translation) has been edited to direct their attention to Cameroon. Once published, it will also be made available via UCCC’s center of resources.
3. **Who should read the brochure?**

Everyone who is interested in the subject indicated in the title should read it. For establishing and maintaining relationships with foreign municipalities is a task that requires not only the involvement and the support of the mayor, the council and the administration of the concerned municipality. Vital municipal partnerships come to life through an active participation of organizations and individual members of the civil society on both sides. Another success factor is the implication of local businesses and the soliciting of support made available by external institutions. All the above mentioned stakeholders (cf. questions 14, 21) form the target group of the present brochure. This includes any individual citizen who sees a specific potential in his or her own municipality and seeks to promote a corresponding concept. Even members of the Cameroonian diaspora may find inspiration on how to establish relationships from abroad to their home council (see also “Cameroon as a target country for municipal development cooperation”, question 2).

4. **What is the concept of the brochure?**

The present brochure is conceived as an introduction to the potentials and to the practical aspects of direct cooperation between municipalities across state borders. It invites you to reflect on your own expectations toward collaboration with a municipality abroad, taking into account the development potentials arising from the individual situation of the municipality you represent or live in. At the same time, this brochure includes the perspective of the potential partners abroad and proposes to consider their specific working conditions. Taking the time for these reflections will considerably increase your chances of finding a suitable partner abroad and designing a partnership of mutual benefit.

5. **What is the brochure’s scope?**

The legal framework governing decentralized cooperation leaves a wide margin for creativity in shaping cross-border municipal partnerships. Accordingly, a great variety in terms of form and content of cooperation has been developed in practice. This brochure aims at indicating the options available and the criteria for the establishment of a made-to-measure concept. However, it provides no detailed step-by-step instruction on how to design and implement a municipal partnership, as this might limit the readers’ imagination and distract from the need to analyze the specific conditions of the individual municipality concerned.

Essentially, the concept described under question 4 favors the establishment of relationships to local authorities all over the world. Only **Section IV** is dedicated to this
brochure`'s focus on decentralized cooperation between Cameroonian and German municipalities.

6. **Why does the brochure focus on Cameroonian-German partnerships?**

   The short answer is that this brochure is published as a Cameroonian-German co-production of GIZ and UCCC. Moreover, Cameroonian municipalities already maintain relationships with counterparts in several European countries. But despite a multitude of well-established German-Cameroonian relationships *(cf. question 40)*, some of which reach down to the local level and even involve municipal institutions such as schools, German municipalities have hardly begun to parlay existing contacts into formal partnerships with their counterparts in Cameroon.

   From the perspective of Cameroonian municipalities struggling with local development in a decentralization context, the longstanding tradition of municipal autonomy in Germany *(cf. questions 33, 34)* represents a chance to benefit from a transfer of the pertinent competences. The manifest commitment of German municipalities to international development cooperation *(cf. question 36)* as well as the Cameroonian municipalities` special interest in Germany are additional reasons to exploit the potential represented by German-Cameroonian municipal cooperation.

7. **What additional information and support are available?**

   UCCC and FEICOM, supported by PADDL, have already published the “Practical guide on inter-municipal cooperation and solidarity in Cameroon” that focuses on domestic inter-municipal activities, but also contains instruction on the formalization of an international partnership. The present brochure expands on the subject of international decentralized cooperation with a focus on Germany; it is thus conceived as a complementary publication to the aforementioned practical guide. The latter as well as other sources of additional information are listed in this brochure`s **annex**. For individual counseling on a twinning project, the authority supervising your municipality is an important contact *(cf. question 9)*.
Section II) – Basic information on international municipal partnerships
8. **What does the term “decentralized cooperation” stand for?**

In Cameroon, according to article 2 of Decree No. 2011/1110/PM of 26 April laying down the procedures for decentralized cooperation, the latter “shall mean any partnership relationship between two (2) or several regional and local authorities or their groupings, with the view to achieving common goals. Decentralized cooperation may take place between Cameroonian regional and local authorities or their groupings on the one hand or among the latter and foreign regional and local authorities, on the other hand.”

In other countries such as Germany, *inter-municipal cooperation* is a similarly generic term, applied especially to domestic relations between municipalities and their institutions. In the context of international relationships, *decentralized cooperation* as a more specific term usually refers to projects that transcend state borders and involve local or regional authorities at least on one side. In this sense, the term component de-centralized implies that international relations lie essentially within the competence of the respective *central* governments, but can be partially delegated to regional or local authorities (cf. questions 9, 36). The component co-operation implies that all partners contribute and that the interaction is to their mutual benefit (cf. questions 10, 11).

“Vital development cooperation should comprise all levels – from the encounters of national governments all the way down to those of individual citizens. Between these two poles, cities and villages assume an essential role due to their proximity to the population. Numerous municipal partnerships bear a colorful and diverse testimony to this.”

Dr. Andreas Kalk, Resident Director of GIZ’s Regional Office in Yaoundé, Cameroon

9. **What are the legal provisions governing international municipal partnerships in Cameroon?**

While any municipal partnership involving a Cameroonian local authority falls under the above cited (question 8) legal definition of decentralized cooperation, only municipalities belonging to the same division or region can form a council union. Municipalities that engage in a partnership with a counterpart in another region or even another state are thus exempt of the formal requirements for council unions. This means notably that they are endowed with neither the legal personality nor the administrative or financial autonomy provided for council unions. The responsibility for international twinning projects is consequently shared by the administration of both partners.
In chapter IV, the above cited (question 8) Decree No. 2011/1110/PM lays down special provisions for cooperation between Cameroonian and foreign regional and local councils. The validity of their partnership agreements notably requires the **approval by the competent supervising authority** according to Art. 30 – 33. This formal provision serves to ensure compliance with the material requirements according to Art. 26 – 29. Essentially, the **content of international municipal partnerships is limited to the powers devolved to local authorities** in order to provide consistency with state policy. The *Practical guide on inter-municipal cooperation and solidarity in Cameroon* (cf. question 7, annex) provides more detailed information on the legal framework for decentralized cooperation in Cameroon and includes the text of the applicable laws.

10. **What else is characteristic of international municipal partnerships?**

The global landscape of cross-border cooperation between local authorities is as diverse as the partners that engage in it. There are no universally binding definitions, but common labels as partnership, twinning, mentorship, friendship and project cooperation indicate the variety of relationships. Despite of this diversity, some common principles can be identified. In this respect, Art. 11 of Decree No. 2011/1110/PM of 26 April (cf. question 8), which cites **equality, solidarity, reciprocity and continuity of the legal personality of the parties as governing principles** of decentralized cooperation, can be considered as the manifestation of a consensus within the international municipal partnership movement.
11. **What characterizes municipal development cooperation?**

Partnerships between local authorities belonging to industrialized and developing countries respectively are commonly referred to as municipal development cooperation. The economic disparities within such development partnerships notwithstanding, all the above cited governing principles of decentralized cooperation apply. Notably the concepts of equality and reciprocity imply that, all things considered, the **giving and the receiving elements of the relationship be evenly distributed among both partners.** A partnership that consists essentially of a European municipality transferring benefits to its African partner has its merits, but does not qualify as development cooperation in a strict sense.

As a Cameroonian municipality you are thus well advised to analyze your potential for active contributions to cooperation before engaging in the search for a partner – if only to increase your attractiveness and the corresponding chances of success (cf. questions 27, 28, 40). It is likewise in the interest of Cameroonian municipalities that funds, goods and services provided by an industrialized partner be put to sustainable use. To this end, an **emphasis should be placed on the transfer of competences and investment in autonomous development** by way of education, creation of jobs and generation of revenue. This notion of avoiding permanent dependence on external support is summed up by the adage: “The receiving hand is always the lower one.”

12. **What are the general working conditions for municipal development cooperation?**

> “Many of the partnerships on which Decentralized Cooperation is based originated in the twinning process. The Commission proposes that the EU supports more extensive exploitation of these development partnerships (twinning), to enhance the exchange of experience and build closer and more long-term partnerships for development.”


Luckily for Cameroonian municipalities wishing to embrace the opportunities inherent in decentralized cooperation, this concept has been well established by municipal frontrunners worldwide. Moreover, their joint efforts in favor of sustainable development are internationally recognized and endorsed as complementing the cooperation between state governments. **Public and non-government development organizations increasingly appreciate the high efficiency and the proximity of decentralized cooperation to its target group, the local citizens.**
In 2003, the Cotonou Agreement established the concept of local governments as complementary actors eligible for direct aid within the development cooperation between the European Union (EU) and the African Continent. In 2008, an official communication of the EU commission confirmed local and regional authorities as important partners of EU development policy. A recent milestone was the Rio+20 Summit held by the United Nations (UN) in 2012. Its final declaration explicitly recognizes municipal partnerships’ contribution to sustainable development. Today’s favorable environment for decentralized cooperation is defined by technical and financial support programs that encourage local authorities to share and exchange their resources within national and international partnerships (cf. question 24).

“We recognize that partnerships among cities and communities play an important role in promoting sustainable development. In this regard we stress the need to strengthen existing cooperation mechanisms and platforms, partnership arrangements and other implementation tools…”

Art. 137 of “The Future we want” (outcome document of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development Rio+20, adopted by the general assembly on 27 July 2012)

13. **Who are the potential parties of a municipal partnership?**

A classical municipal partnership is made up of two different local authorities that pursue common objectives, but partnerships composed of more than two municipalities have been established in practice. The borderlines between the respective concepts of multilateral partnerships, networks and full-fledged associations are blurred.

Cities and councils are often cited as the two categories of municipalities in Cameroon that are endowed with their own legal personality and can thus engage in the formal exterior relations that constitute decentralized cooperation. But there are other municipal bodies that can play a role in decentralized cooperation or even find a counterpart in a foreign country (cf. notably the categories of German municipal bodies, question 35):

- **Council unions:** These associations bear their own legal capacity, enabling them in principle to entertain relations to other municipal authorities – if this is within the range of responsibilities devolved to them by their founding municipalities, whose interests are safeguarded via representation in the union’s deliberating organs. Another option is to involve council unions as technical partners in decentralized cooperation projects of its member municipalities.

- **Other forms of inter-municipal cooperation:** Cameroonian groupings of municipalities can entertain relations with foreign counterparts or be joined by a foreign municipality.
- **City districts**: Within their range of competences, city districts can co-operate with foreign counterparts or initiate a partnership of the city they belong to.

- **Regions**: These decentralized units cannot yet be considered fully operative, but why not ask your competent senator for a contribution to your municipality’s twinning project?

Non-municipal third parties, especially institutions from the development cooperation sector, may support one partner or the entire partnership (usually for a limited period of time) to achieve certain goals that are shared by all parties (cf. questions 22, 24).

**14. Who are the active players within municipal partnerships?**

In theory, the organ charged with representing a municipality in its external relations is the mayor or an appointed member of the municipal administration. Nonetheless, any mayor or his/her representative alone would be overcharged with the task of sustainably breathing life into a twinning project. Partnerships live through the active engagement of members of the council and the municipal administration. This engagement often goes far beyond working hours and job descriptions. It includes personal contacts with individuals in the partnering municipality.

Therefore, local partners that are not members of the municipal administration or council can typically be found on both sides of a dynamic inter-municipal partnership. Notably enterprises and organizations of the civil society that are committed to integrating the local population can play an important role. While the central management and supervision of an inter-municipal partnership usually rests with the mayor or high level administration, executive and organizational responsibilities may also be delegated to a specialized unit of the municipal administration or even outsourced to an association that is dedicated to this task (cf. questions 16, 23).
Section III) Planning and implementing an international municipal partnership
15. Where do we start?

Establishing a municipal partnership is like a mathematical equation – at some point, you will have to eliminate the first variable. Basically, you can either identify a project topic and then find an appropriate partner – or go the other way around. A third option is to depart from the conditions provided by a third party, notably a donor program. Consequently, three basic starting points can be distinguished:

- **Content of decentralized cooperation:** Starting out by identifying the population’s needs and your municipality’s development potential (cf. question 17) is a standard procedure. It provides you with a solid base for the subsequent search for a partner and for common objectives (cf. questions 17, 27, 28).

- **Existing relations:** An analysis of the potential participants’ external relations is another possible first step: Do individuals, organizations of the civil society, enterprises or even municipal institutions entertain relations to their counterparts in other municipalities? If you identify such links, this might facilitate the establishment of relations on the municipal level. The next step would be to determine common goals with your potential partner (cf. question 17).

- **Donor program:** If your starting point is the support made available by a third party (cf. question 24), the choice of both the partner and the content has to comply with the requirements of the donor (which are not necessarily your municipality’s top priorities). As a rule of thumb, this option is most appropriate for project cooperation (cf. question 22).

16. How do we organize the establishment of a municipal partnership?

In terms of organization, some general recommendations are valid regardless of your starting point:

- **Responsibilities:** Clearly defining the executive and organizational responsibilities for the establishment of a partnership is a vital success factor. The mayor can assign functions to a specialized administrative unit and/or institute a committee that represents the civil society (cf. questions 20, 23).

- **Participation:** Establishing a municipal partnership, especially defining its content and choosing a partner, provides an opportunity to involve the population in the development of their community (cf. questions 18 – 21).

- **Monitoring:** On a technical level, it is advisable to provide for a management plan detailing for each task the respective person in charge, deadline, budget and other provisions. Since the content of a partnership is subject to negotiation, it can be useful to draft separate planning tools for the phase leading up to the identification of a partner and for the subsequent implementation of a partnership, respectively (cf. question 29).
17. **How do we identify the fields of work for our partnership?**

A common interest or challenge presents a strong unifying factor for any partnership. Just think of your private friendships or business relations: You engage on what binds you together. Consequently, defining concrete fields of work with specific goals is an effective way to fill a municipal partnership with life and comply with the term *cooperation* which means *working together*.

**The subjects of your shared work can be chosen from the whole range of municipal activities and responsibilities.** Accordingly, the content of decentralized cooperation found in practice is as varied as the municipalities that engage in it. A limiting factor you should keep in mind is the legal framework, notably concerning the powers devolved to local authorities (cf. question 9). Another is the perspective of the concerned population – since inter-municipal partnerships are essentially supposed to attend to the citizens’ needs, a popular feedback is useful in the process of defining the content of cooperation (cf. question 20).

An essential criterion is the perspective of your partner who should have a shared interest in the envisioned field of cooperation. Shaping a partnership by defining its objectives is actually the first common challenge for the prospective partners. Pinning down the fields of work implies a very individual case-by-case decision that balances offer and demand on both sides in order to generate mutual benefit. To this end, it helps to ask yourself two basic questions before entering the negotiations with your prospective partner:

- How can my municipality profit from the partnership?
- How can we actively contribute to our partner’s benefit?

In search of a common ground for cooperation, both parties should be prepared to reassess their expectations on the basis of the other side’s proposals. It helps to keep in mind that establishing a trustful relationship to a municipal counterpart belonging to a different world region and culture is justified as an end in itself. For it is a rewarding experience that serves the people involved as a source of inspiration to the benefit of municipal policy and administration on both sides.

18. **What is the role of the civil society?**

The pivotal role of the population represented by the cooperating municipalities has already been stressed on several occasions in this brochure. The following are the more prominent among the factors that define this role:
The municipal population is the constituency that imparts the democratic legitimation for a municipality’s external relations.

The people’s needs and expectations define the mandate to negotiate the content of a partnership.

Active citizens who volunteer to contribute their know-how and labor to the implementation of a partnership are invaluable as they complement the means available to the administration.

Correspondingly, decentralized cooperation provides an opportunity to solicit the participation of the people in the development of their community.

An active civil society is an asset that increases your appeal as a potential partner in decentralized cooperation (cf. questions 27, 28, 40).

The municipalities’ proximity to the population is the justification for international support of decentralized cooperation (cf. question 12).

Last, but most importantly: Partnerships live by the people involved – the more people engage, the more life you have in your partnership. Just think of family gatherings: With all your loved ones attending, you have more fun than when only three people show up.

19. When is the right time to involve the civil society?

It can hardly be too early for a municipality to ask its constituency to participate in the implementation of a decentralized cooperation project. In fact many municipal partnerships have started through the initiative of local organizations or individuals that have been entertaining relations to counterparts abroad and at some point succeeded in involving the administration of their respective municipalities.

From the municipal perspective, many opportunities to involve the civil society in an appropriate way arise during the process of planning and implementing a partnership:

- Defining the municipality’s expectations toward a twinning project,
- Developing a search profile for a partner,
- Choosing a partner and negotiating the content of cooperation,
- Implementing a partnership and sustainably filling it with life,
- Managing and coordinating the tasks involved.
20. **How can the civil society be involved?**

The establishment of a municipal partnership provides the mayor and the council with an opportunity to obtain direct feedback from their constituency. For example, the entire population can be encouraged to present ideas concerning content and potential partners for decentralized cooperation. Assemblies to which all citizens are invited may provide an occasion to discuss the options at hand or even cast formal ballots.

To increase participation, it is advisable to highlight the specific advantages for each group of stakeholders (**cf. question 21**). While individual citizens may appreciate a chance to widen their horizon, acquire language and intercultural skills, private enterprises may hope for the commercial advantages represented by new marketing options.

An administrative committee comprising representatives of local organizations, businesses and any stakeholders that might contribute to the process, can be charged with the task of elaborating more detailed concepts on the base of popular hearings. Such an ad-hoc working group can later prove useful as the basis for the institutionalization of a municipal partnership (**cf. question 23**).

21. **Who are our local stakeholders?**

An individual answer to this question requires an analysis of the concerned municipality’s specific potential. Categories you should keep in mind are:

- **Civil society organizations:** Traditionally, institutions of the educational, cultural and the sports sector as well as religious congregations play important roles in rendering municipal partnerships attractive and lively by organizing displays, presentations and exchanges with their counterparts abroad.

- **Traditional chiefs:** As an integral part of Cameroonian culture with an exotic charm to most non-African municipalities, your chiefdom is an asset and a stakeholder.

- **Private sector:** Local enterprises may contribute as donors, technical assistants or participants in commercial exchanges.
Diaspora: Cameroonian Diaspora that have returned to their home country are particularly valuable as ambassadors for both sides and as facilitators of intercultural exchange.

Youth: Addressing children and young adults is essential for sustainable partnerships that have a natural interest in raising tomorrow’s volunteers for decentralized cooperation.

Generally speaking, a **transparent and inclusive approach serves to ensure that all members of the municipal population feel invited to participate** – regardless of gender, tribe or social status. By the way, your foreign partner will be curious to get to know your municipality’s character which is composed by all members of society.

**22. What are the scope and life span of a municipal partnership?**

The partners of traditional twinning projects usually operate on agreements that provide neither a time limit nor restrictions in the choice of projects and activities. The advantage of this approach is that both partners can take the time to build a trustful and lasting relationship that is rooted in civil society.

On the other hand, project cooperation – short or medium-term inter-municipal activity with clearly defined results and deadlines for a certain field of work – is becoming more and more popular internationally. It represents a more flexible instrument of decentralized cooperation that can be customized to respond to specific municipal needs and to the support requirements of third parties. Such ad-hoc partnerships are facilitated by the fact that decentralized cooperation does not require institutionalization in the form of an inter-municipal management body (cf. question 9). However, deadlines and the focus on one field of work impede the development of a consolidated partnership that is open to all members of the local population.

The advantages of both approaches can be combined by integrating project cooperation as an activity within a consolidated partnership. Conversely, many “eternal” partnerships have their origin in forms of cooperation that are more limited in terms of both content and time span. So even if you aim at a durable, consolidated relationship in the long run, **starting out with a limited project is a proven way to overcome reservations** of a potential partner who may wish to get to know your municipality before committing to a full-flung partnership. At the same time, you can establish a base for the forecast if your own expectations toward a partnership will be met. By the way, a test phase is likely to increase the participants’ motivation on both sides.
If you are planning to implement a durable partnership, an administrative unit that is dedicated to this task is recommendable, if not legally binding. Essentially, institutionalization makes your partnership more independent from the contributions of individuals that may be here today and gone tomorrow.

While the central management and supervision of an inter-municipal partnership should rest with the mayor or high level administration to assert municipal accountability and control, executive and organizational responsibilities may also be delegated. Basically, you can choose between the options of concentrating these responsibilities within the municipal administration or outsourcing them to a specialized institution like an association that is composed by members of the civil society and accountable to the municipal administration (cf. question 20).

If more than one administrative entity is involved, clearly defined responsibilities are mandatory; the same holds true for individual responsibilities within one unit.

23. **Does a municipal partnership require institutionalization?**

If you are planning to implement a durable partnership, an administrative unit that is dedicated to this task is recommendable, if not legally binding. Essentially, institutionalization makes your partnership more independent from the contributions of individuals that may be here today and gone tomorrow.

While the central management and supervision of an inter-municipal partnership should rest with the mayor or high level administration to assert municipal accountability and control, executive and organizational responsibilities may also be delegated. Basically, you can choose between the options of concentrating these responsibilities within the municipal administration or outsourcing them to a specialized institution like an association that is composed by members of the civil society and accountable to the municipal administration (cf. question 20).

If more than one administrative entity is involved, clearly defined responsibilities are mandatory; the same holds true for individual responsibilities within one unit.

24. **What kind of support is available by third parties?**

The favorable environment for decentralized cooperation (cf. question 12) means that external support is on offer, notably by organizations of the development cooperation. The pertinent aid programs are usually dedicated to specific fields of work and made available for a limited period of time. Besides surpassing the scope of the present brochure, detailing the support options would thus yield a rather limited benefit.

The range of financial and technical aid on offer is also subject to constant change according to “fashion cycles” – while water management may be all the rage today, renewable energy might be tomorrow’s big thing. You should therefore resist the temptation to contort your long-term partnership to accommodate the requirements for limited support.
In the long run, adhering to the concept you and your partner have developed on the base of an analysis of your mutual needs will pay off.

But it is safe to say that researching useful contributions by third parties is worth the effort for both partners. Besides the national and international, government and non-government development organizations and institutions as the usual suspects, private enterprises can play useful roles both as sponsors or technical partners for decentralized cooperation projects (cf. question 21).

25. **How do we finance our municipal partnership?**

A solid budget is a crucial element in the implementation of a partnership. Wherever they come from, **balancing your funds with the expected costs within a formal budget is mandatory** to obtain a solid planning base for your inter-municipal activities. Potential sources of revenue include:

- **Donor programs**: Notably development organizations provide external funds (cf. question 24), but they will usually oblige you to contribute from the municipal budget to prove your determination.

- **Private sector**: Local or national businesses might contribute as sponsors, but will expect revenue of some kind.

- **Volunteers**: Members of the local society who contribute their labor or other assets can also relieve the municipal budget.

- **Municipal partner**: In order to comply with the principle of mutuality (cf. question 10), you should not rely too heavily on your counterpart.

- **Inter-municipal projects**: Ideally, your cooperation generates revenue that can be reinvested.

26. **How important is the human factor?**

The human factor is the key to your partnership! All well-functioning partnerships between local authorities are founded on trustful personal relations between the people involved. Establishing such favorable relations will thus significantly enhance your chances of parlaying initial inter-municipal contacts into a consolidated partnership. Keep in mind that this might take some time and build on what you already have: A sports team in touch with another one? A mayor you met during a conference or on vacation? A citizen from your municipality who lives temporarily or permanently abroad?

Obviously, the ability to communicate in a common language without the intermediation of an interpreter is an asset in this challenge. Luckily, interactive communication over long distances is nowadays facilitated by technical innovations like video conferences, but **direct personal contact still has its own merits**. Delegations from one municipal
partner visiting the other will thus remain an integral part of decentralized cooperation for a while. These can be complemented by exchange programs implemented by schools, universities, businesses or other institutions that engage students, interns, trainees, experts etc. as ambassadors of their home municipality abroad.

Regarding intercultural differences, beware that your partners might have ideas, expectations or prejudices, you are not aware of. Try to avoid assuming too much and jumping to conclusions too fast. The same word might have a different connotation in another country, so it is better to ask a question too many than losing a partner because of a question not asked. As a general rule, keep an open mind and put yourself into the position of your counterparts, especially when they visit for the first time. A supporting program will complement your formal negotiations and enable you to get to know each other even better. It is not only legitimate but recommendable to enrich your working relationship with fringe events such as cultural displays, field trips, sports events and other ways of simply having fun together.

27. How to find an international partner municipality?

Once you have elaborated a presentable concept for decentralized cooperation, you can embark on the search for a partner. Basically, there are four options that can be combined freely:

- **Expanding existing relations:** Identify international contacts established by local institutions and individuals; determine their potential for inter-municipal activities;
- **Cold calling:** Select potential partners according to your search criteria and try to convince them of your cooperation concept;
- **Passive search:** Evaluate the requests published by foreign municipalities;
- **Active search:** Publicize your own partnership proposition.

Especially if you wish to pursue one of the last two options mentioned above, the municipalities’ national associations in your target region are useful partners. They are likely to publicize your proposal and/or point you to the competent institutions that specialize in match-making. Online tools that allow you to submit an application as well as evaluate the propositions of potential partners can also be very useful. For example, both the EU and the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) have established such tools to assist your search for a partner on the European continent (cf. the annex for addresses).
28. **How do we present our partnership proposition?**

The metaphor of a marriage has been strained to describe municipal partnerships by many. On the same token, presenting a proposition for decentralized cooperation can be likened to positioning yourself as a prospective spouse. In both situations, you want to highlight what you have to offer, especially your active contributions to a partnership – but **beware that exaggerations will sooner or later catch up with you**. Being realistic as a prospective municipal partner implies that you do not embellish your situation or omit any pertinent challenges.

Condensing your proposal into a one-page document (exposé) will provide you with a useful tool in the search for a partner (cf. question 27) – besides obliging yourself to reflect on information and makes the target group curious to find out more about your municipality. Do not forget to include your contact details and prepare more elaborate information for those who inquire. To this end, a clearly structured and updated website that gives a comprehensive introduction to your municipality is a valuable tool. If your municipality does not already have its own homepage, now is the time to design one that attends to your target group.

29. **Do we have to document or formalize our municipal partnership?**

The legal requirement to obtain approval of an international partnership from the competent authorities (cf. question 9) implies the drafting of a written partnership agreement as the subject of formal validation. The *Practical guide on inter-council cooperation and solidarity in Cameroon* (cf. question 7) contains detailed instructions on the formalization and validation process. It is worth noting though, that **documenting the terms you have negotiated with your partner is recommendable** even regardless of formal obligations. Misunderstandings and misperceptions can be avoided by transparently defining types of activities, the respective objectives and the dates by which certain results are expected. As opposed to the agreements documenting the terms of project cooperation, those establishing a long-term municipal partnership are typically more abstract. In this case it helps to defer more concrete and binding provisions to medium-term planning documents. In any case appropriate **indicators will enable you to occasionally or continuously monitor each activity**. Defining intervals and criteria for the recurrent evaluation of the whole twinning project is just as recommendable. This evaluation will also provide a regular occasion to reassess the activities, objectives and criteria in order to make sure you are all committed to the same priorities.
30. What are the 10 most important success factors for a vital and durable municipal partnership?

- **Preparation**: Taking inventory of your municipality’s development potentials enables you to deduce expectations toward a twinning project;

- **Equality**: Respecting this governing principle favors mutual benefit;

- **Participation**: Involving the civil society relieves the administration and assures the partnership’s orientation to the people’s needs;

- **Youth**: Schools are the key to the civil society and to the next generation of decentralized cooperation volunteers;

- **Support**: Researching aid offers is worth the effort, but do not contort your concept to accommodate the requirements of third parties;

- **Budgeting**: A solid budget is an indispensable planning base;

- **Formalization**: A written partnership agreement and planning documents will render the objectives transparent for all participants;

- **Institutionalization**: Concentrating the administrative duties and clearly defining responsibilities favors accountability and continuity;

- **Monitoring**: Suitable indicators serve as a base for evaluation and reassessment;

- **People**: Trustful personal relationships make the participants feel at home in the partnership.
Section IV) – German municipalities as twinning partners
31. **What geographic features characterize Germany?**

A quality Germany has in common with Cameroon is the great variety it offers within the borders of its state territory in many respects. Heading north from the slopes of the Alpine Mountains you will come across the hilly landscapes that cover most of Germany and give way to the northern and eastern plains that for their part finally border on the North and the Baltic Sea. The temperate climate provides for hot summers and cold winters in the continental east of the country, while the influence of the Atlantic Ocean slightly moderates the seasonal differences in the west.

Forest, the potential natural vegetation on almost the entire surface of the country, today covers less than a third of it. The 357,167.94 square kilometers of German soil (Cameroon: ca. 475 000 km²) are comparatively heavily if not evenly populated by 80.767 million people (Dec. 2013). The national territory is composed of many regions, each featuring their own history and cultural identity.

Germany’s economy, the fourth biggest in the world, owes three quarters of its performance to the service sector. It is closely linked with the EU, the world’s biggest internal market, but German automobile, mechanical, electronic engineering and the chemical industry are competitive worldwide.

Judging by the number of active players and spectators, football is Germany’s most popular sport. The national team has won the world cup for the fourth time in 2014 – but it did not manage to beat Cameroon in a preceding test match 😊.
32. How can the German mentality be described?

First of all, Germany´s population is no uniform group, but just another example of the variety the country has to offer. Even though tribal or ethnic borderlines are less defined than in Cameroon, the populations of the many regions, sub-regions and even municipalities between the North Sea and the Alps all profess their own characteristic cultural identity – comprising mind set, dialect, food, music, traditional clothing etc. – which is supposed to set them apart from the inhabitants of their surroundings.

At the same time, people tend to attribute certain character traits – typically less flattering – to their neighbors. This divisive factor, that can also be found in international relations, as well as the danger of solidifying clichés are valid reasons for abstaining from the presumptuous endeavor of defining a common mentality for all of the 80 Million individuals living in Germany. For example, the well-known Lederhosen (short-legged leather trousers) are not typical of Germany, but only common in Bavaria.

To exercise your intercultural competence, you may still indulge in the investigation if certain character traits associated with the Germans – such as accuracy, thoroughness and uncompromising straightforwardness – apply to the individuals you meet. But be prepared for surprises– Germans (as well as Cameroonians 😁) might not live up to their cliché.

33. How is the German state organized?

A unifying factor in all Germany´s diversity is its constitution (Grundgesetz) that came into force in 1949 and provides for the objective of equal conditions of living in the entire state. It also delegates extensive administrative and legislative powers to the federal states known as (Bundes-)Länder, whose number was raised from 11 to 16 in the course of the German Reunification after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1990.
Within the state’s federal structure, the legislation concerning the municipalities as well as their supervision or any other municipal affairs fall into the competence of the Länder. This approach results in significant disparities concerning the competences, other legal provisions and general working conditions of municipalities belonging to different federal states.

An essential guarantee of municipal autonomy is provided for not only in each federal state’s constitution but also in the Grundgesetz itself. Given this guarantee and the federal structure, one might describe Germany as a decentralized state. But quite contrary to Cameroon, where decentralization is a comparably novel and continuing process, municipal autonomy in Germany is the product of a historical evolution over the course of many centuries. The respective functions (cf. question 34) were either assigned to the municipalities by Karl Freiherr vom Stein, initiator of the Prussian municipal reform of 1808, or have even been considered as the cities’ responsibilities since the Middle Ages. German decentralization is thus not a process but rather a condition that is hardly questioned and widely accepted as a given fact.

34. What are the framework conditions of municipal administration in Germany?

Germany’s consolidated state organization notwithstanding, readjustments within the separation of competences between the state levels become necessary once in a while. As new challenges arise, some of them have to be tackled by the municipal level. A contributing factor is the supranational body of the EU that has been endowed with its proper legislative powers by its member states. As a result, German municipalities often find themselves at the end of the chain of command where they have to execute the legislation handed down to them from the EU via the central state and the federal state they belong to.

In principle, the Länder are constitutionally obliged to provide for the funds necessary to execute the tasks they delegate to the municipalities – but in practice, this principle is an issue of constant debate. The sources of municipal revenue essentially fall into the same categories as in Cameroon. The most effective way for a municipality to influence the income side of its budget is to attract private enterprises as tax payers.

Demographical, economic and political factors result in great disparities between rich and heavily indebted municipalities. These differences are slightly alleviated by a system of vertical (state support) and horizontal (inter-municipal) financial equalization. A common challenge of all municipalities is the combination of escalating social costs and a declining birth rate.
To sum up: German municipalities have an autonomy guaranteed by the constitution, a multitude of mandates and more often than not financial constraints.

35. What kinds of municipal bodies exist in Germany?

Not all federal states have shown the same determination in forming bigger and more efficient local authorities by unifying neighboring villages. Today, there are 11,197 German municipalities. The two ends of the size scale are represented by Gröde, an island in the North Sea inhabited by 11 people and Berlin, the German Capital with its population of 3.4 million, respectively.

The bigger cities are composed of city districts that are for their part proper municipal bodies, some of which even take part in decentralized cooperation. Some big cities, if not necessarily the biggest ones, are city states with the double status of a municipality and a Bundesland (Bremen, Hamburg and Berlin).

(Kreise) districts are a category of municipal bodies to which certain competences of its members (villages and smaller cities) are delegated for the sake of efficiency. It is worth noting that Kreise are eligible and active as twinning partners. Bigger cities that can cope with the whole range of municipal competences do not belong to any district.

Finally, kommunale (Zweck-) Verbände (municipal associations) – comparable to Cameroonian council unions – need to be mentioned as potential partners for decentralized cooperation. They are proper municipal bodies and their expertise in the tasks they specialize in (management of water, waste, energy, social services etc.) makes them attractive twinning partners.
To sum up: **Compared to Cameroon, the landscape of municipal bodies in Germany is less uniform and the average size of the municipalities is smaller both in terms of surface and population.**

36. **Are local authorities in Germany committed to decentralized cooperation?**

The modern twinning movement in Germany began after the end of the Second World War when municipalities established “diplomatic” relations with their counterparts in neighboring countries for the sake of reconciliation and European integration. To date, by far the most international twinning projects in Germany are inner-European ones (6092 all together).

But as early as 1964 the first German-African partnership was formalized between Cologne and Tunis, followed by Würzburg – Mwanza/Tanzania (since 1966) and Hannover – Blantyre/Malawi (since 1969). In recent years, partnerships between German municipalities and their counterparts in developing countries have multiplied and the tally of German municipal development partnerships on the African continent has risen to 93.

According to a recent survey, the average German municipality is member of about two and a half partnerships. A clear correlation can be stated between the number of partnerships and the size of the population, ranging from under 1 in the category of less than 10.000 inhabitants up to more than 7 in the over-100.000-class. The city of Cologne stands out with its national record of 24 partnerships. As a rule of thumb, **German municipalities are experienced inter-municipal partners on the one hand, but already running at high capacity on the other.**

37. **What are the working conditions for municipal development cooperation in Germany?**

Quite similar to Cameroon, constitutional law in Germany leaves a margin for international decentralized cooperation as long as the municipalities engaged in it act within their competences. The *Länder* even trust their municipalities to comply with this requirement without a formal validation process. **Partnerships with local authorities in less developed countries are particularly appreciated and actively supported** by the federal states and the central government, as decentralized cooperation complements the state’s international policy (cf. question 12). From a budgetary point of view, it has to be stressed though, that decentralized cooperation does not belong to the catalogue of mandatory municipal tasks. As a voluntary exercise, any twinning project consequently requires justification by some kind of revenue in favor of the domestic citizens. So keep in mind that **German municipalities are not only entitled but even obliged to look for their own benefit** in twinning projects. At the same time, twinning activities demand a fair amount of personal idealism – even high municipal representatives are usually obliged to work free overtime and pay a substantial part of their travel expenses out of their own pocket.
38. What is the German municipalities’ general attitude toward twinning projects in Africa?

To prevent disappointment, it has to be stated clearly: Most German municipalities are not searching for a Cameroonian partner. Basically, this is the result of a (non-representative) survey that was recently held among German municipal representatives by the PADDL-UCCC cooperation. **Twinning is a feel-good-issue that German mayors are likely to pursue if it promises success** in terms of appreciation by their own constituency (cf. question 36).

Therefore, German municipalities that do not already feel fully utilized with their existing partnerships (cf. question 35) and a plethora of other challenges (cf. question 33), still show an overwhelming preference (84 %) for new partners in neighboring European countries that they feel closer to in many ways. You should also be aware that the German perception of Africa is heavily influenced by fiction movies and the media’s focus on problems and crisis afflicting the continent; *Ebola* and *Boko Haram* are recent buzz words.

But this brochure would not have been published if there was neither hope nor potential for German-Cameroonian twinning projects. The statistics gleaned from a recent scientific study show that about a quarter of the German municipalities plan (9 %) or at least do not exclude (14,8 %) a new partnership. 3,5 % of these would consider Africa as a target world region. Moreover, German practitioners of municipal development cooperation are reasonably open-minded; for example they will be aware that Africa is not a single state and that the continent has a lot more to offer than bush drums, military coups and big game safari 😁.

39. What makes German municipalities attractive as partners?

If you have a special interest in Germany as a target country for decentralized cooperation, you should be able to substantiate your motivation for this. Are you interested in German-style administration, business-contacts, cultural exchange, linking back your diaspora or tourism cooperation? What specific advantages could a partnership with a German council offer you?

As a general rule, most of the tasks that have been formally deferred to the municipal level in the course of the Cameroonian decentralization process correspond with duties that constitute the core of municipal autonomy according to the German interpretation (cf. questions 33, 34). Combine this obvious potential for the transfer of competences with the German municipalities’ propensity to decentralized cooperation.
40. **What makes our municipality attractive for a German partner?**

In fact, this question is your starting point and **control criterion in the process of initiating a Cameroonian-German twinning project**. Something you can try to build on is the common history of Germany and its former colony Cameroon as the main part of “Deutsch-Westafrika”. But again, to prevent disappointment, be aware that for the average German, Colonialism is but a side note buried deep in the nation’s long and turbulent history. Quite contrary to this, the German Colonization is an integral part of Cameroon’s historical heritage, manifestations of which can still be seen and experienced all over the country. You may consider this as an opportunity to modestly familiarize the Germans with their own history in Africa.

Moreover, on the base of the common history, **manifold German-Cameroonian political, economic and cultural relations have been established** in the course of more than a century, many of which involve the local level or even municipal institutions such as schools. Such occasions of exchange between the civil societies of both countries lend themselves as nuclei of municipal partnerships. Another general asset is the strong Cameroonian diaspora in Germany whose members – including those who have returned to their home country – can serve as facilitators of inter-municipal exchange.

In terms of communication options, English is a mandatory foreign language at all German schools and French is the second or even first foreign language for many. But still German-speaking representatives of your municipality will be an impressive manifestation of your interest in the country.

Germans love to travel and are proud of their own numerous cultural and natural tourist attractions. So Cameroon’s beauty and cultural heritage might make for an interesting base of a partnership. Germany has a very well-established and well-functioning system of sustainable forest management and a tradition in timber production and wood-processing. Municipalities with forests and/or wood industry could be interesting for German local authorities with the same background.

This list of examples is far from exhaustive, but the point is: In the variety both Cameroon and Germany offer, there are many points of common interest. **Starting from your own assets and needs will help you to seek partners on the German side.**
41. **How do we position our municipality as an attractive partner?**

Having read questions 27 and 28, you will find ways of highlighting in your partnership proposition the above mentioned (question 40) factors that generally favor German-Cameroonian cooperation. In doing so, concentrate on the factors that are pertinent to your individual municipality and, even more important, those you can influence.

Section III) features the pertinent success factors; showing that you considered them in shaping your concept will increase your allure as a partner. Especially relying on an active civil society is a major asset and finding ways of yet better involving the citizens in the development of the community – a hot topic for German municipalities – even lends itself as material content of a partnership. In this case learning to write and pronounce the term Bürgerbeteiligung (involvement of the citizens ☺) will prove helpful.

In any case, **indicate what contributions to the partnership you envision**, even if they are not all material ones. In this regard it seems worth noting that a German municipality that takes a Cameroonian partner into consideration will expect an experience that a French, British or Polish municipality could not offer. It is thus legitimate and will be helpful to judiciously play the exotic card. And remember that common interests are at the base of any partnership.

By the way, **the first thing most Germans associate with Cameroon is football**. From a twinning point of view, amateur matches offer the advantage of integrating the human factor (**cf. question 26**) by bringing people together in a relaxed atmosphere.

"The shared passion for Football overcomes all political and cultural borders. Moreover, German-Cameroonian municipal partnerships can build on the lively and diverse landscape of football associations that can be found in both countries."

Volker Finke, German coach of the Cameroonian Football team
42. **How do we find a suitable German partner municipality?**

Basically, all the options described under [*question 27*](#) apply to the search for a partner in Germany. Institutions to turn to for help are notably the national headquarters of the associations representing the German municipalities (*cf. question 35*). In Germany, there are three of them:

- Association of German Cities (*Deutscher Städtetag, DST*),
- Association of German Cities and Municipalities (*Deutscher Städte- und Gemeindebund, DStGB*),
- Association of German Districts (*Deutscher Landkreistag, DLT*).

A state-owned institution that supports German municipalities’ development cooperation projects is the *Service Agency Communities in One World (Servicestelle Kommunen in der Einen Welt, SKEW)*. It also offers counseling for potential foreign partner municipalities.

Finally, both the EU and the German delegation of *Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)* offer match-making assistance and provide useful online-tools on their decentralized cooperation portals.

You can find contact details of all the above mentioned institutions via their respective websites (*cf. annex*).

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**Good luck!**
Annex

An example from real life

The German-Cameroonian municipal partnership between Schopfheim (Baden-Württemberg) and Dikome (Southwest Region) was formalized in the year 2000, but its roots can be traced back to a station that protestant missionaries established in Dikome in the late 19th century. To date, the protestant parishes in both municipalities are active members in the network of organizations and individuals that fill the municipal partnership with life.

The city of Schopfheim has outsourced the management of the partnership to a specialized association composed of members of the civil society. Its main activity is a project that unifies both municipalities and even outdates their partnership: The import of raw coffee from Dikome for processing and marketing in Schopfheim. Other projects involve schools and vocational training, water management and support for autonomous development, especially by way of microfinance schemes, in Dikome.

The partnership association in Schopfheim relies mostly on volunteers’ work and has mastered its first generational transition to which the membership of local schools in the partnership network has contributed.

“The manifest differences between our two countries serve to reveal the respective deficits in our municipalities.”

Christof Nitz, mayor of the city of Schopfheim
## Sources of additional information

### 1. Literature

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<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Specifications</th>
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<tr>
<td>Municipal development cooperation in Germany, 2011</td>
<td>brochure (81 p.), download at the homepage (English Version) of <em>Deutscher Städtetag</em> (<em>Association of German Cities</em>), <a href="http://www.staedtetag.de/englisch/">http://www.staedtetag.de/englisch/</a></td>
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<td>Local development policy in Germany – Study on the commitment of German cities, municipalities and rural districts to development policy, 2009</td>
<td>download of the English summary (11 p.) at the homepage (English version) of the German <em>Service Agency Communities in One World</em> (<em>Servicestelle Kommunen in der Einen Welt</em> – SKEW), <a href="http://www.service-eine-welt.de/en/">www.service-eine-welt.de/en/</a> (“latest publications”)</td>
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<td>50 Municipal Climate Partnerships by 2015 – Documentation of the Pilot Phase, 2013</td>
<td>9 German cities and their African partners participated in the pilot phase of this ongoing project; download of the documentation (124 p.) at the homepage (English version) of the German <em>Service Agency Communities in One World</em> (<em>Servicestelle Kommunen in der Einen Welt</em> – SKEW), <a href="http://www.service-eine-welt.de/en/">www.service-eine-welt.de/en/</a> (“latest publications”)</td>
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### 2. Websites

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<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.rgre.de">www.rgre.de</a></td>
<td>homepage of the German delegation of the <em>Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)</em> that assists with twinning (&quot;Partnerschaftsarbeite&quot;), municipal development cooperation (&quot;Kommunale Entwicklungszusammenarbeit&quot;) and partnership match-making (&quot;Kontakt&quot;)</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.lra4dev.cor.europa.eu/portal/EN">www.lra4dev.cor.europa.eu/portal/EN</a></td>
<td>the EU’s portal (English version) on decentralized cooperation; cf. notably the partnership exchange („Bourse”)</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.platforma-dev.eu">www.platforma-dev.eu</a></td>
<td>European Portal on municipal development cooperation (English version: “EN”)</td>
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<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.service-eine-welt.de/en">www.service-eine-welt.de/en</a></td>
<td>portal (English version) of the German <em>Service Agency Communities in One World (Servicestelle Kommunen in der Einen Welt – SKEW)</em> with extensive information on municipal development cooperation in Germany</td>
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<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.staedtetag.de/englisch">www.staedtetag.de/englisch</a></td>
<td>homepage (English version) of <em>Deutscher Städtetag</em> (Association of German Cities)</td>
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<td>website (in German) of the association that manages the German city of Schopfheim’s partnership with Dikome (Southwest Region, Cameroon)</td>
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<td>homepage (German and French versions available) of the <em>Goethe-Institut Kamerun</em></td>
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Abbreviations

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>CEMR</td>
<td>Council of European Municipalities and Regions</td>
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<td>DLT</td>
<td>Deutscher Landkreistag (Association of German Districts)</td>
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<td>DStGB</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<td>FEICOM</td>
<td>Fonds Spécial d’Equipement et d’Intervention Intercommunale</td>
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<tr>
<td>GIZ</td>
<td>Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit</td>
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<tr>
<td>PADDL</td>
<td>Programme d’Appui à la Décentralisation et au Développement (Decentralization and Local Development Support Program)</td>
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<td>SKEW</td>
<td>Servicestelle Kommunen in der Einen Welt (Service Agency Communities in One World)</td>
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<td>UCCC</td>
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