

Evaluation of 3 NGOs cofunded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Evaluation of the NGO « LES AMIS DU TIBET »

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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1 FACTSHEET

Context of the evaluation	Co-funding agreement for several development cooperation projects in India and Nepal
Objectives of the co-funded projects	1) Provide infrastructures within the Tibetan Children’s Villages (India) . 2) Renovate infrastructures in the Shechen Clinic (Nepal)
Planned budget (total for the projects being evaluated)	€ 1.367 millions Note : this amount includes the planned budget for the 2011-002 (€ 323 826) project, which has yet to be executed.
Estimated completed budget (total for the projects being evaluated)	€ 0,771 million Note : this amount does not take into account the expenses made in the context of the 2010-003 project (final amount not disclosed), initial budget of € 288 633.
Recommendations	<p>On the organisational and structural level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continue working on the structuring of the organisation - Adopt a strategic plan over 3 or 4 years <p>Regarding the activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Take into account the specific recommendations regarding the current projects - Cease all building activities and seek new potential partnerships instead of all infrastructure projects
Conclusions	<i>Les Amis du Tibet</i> (LAT) is a well-established organisation in Luxembourg, noted for its advocacy work for Tibet. However, its infrastructure projects suffer from a large number of weaknesses, thus questioning the organisation’s ability to correctly implement these activities.

2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs requested the evaluation of three co-funding contracts that have been signed with the following NGOs “Les Amis du Tibet”, “Niños de la Tierra” and “Unity Foundation”.

The terms of reference are as follow: carry out an accounting and financial audit, carry out an organisational and structural audit, evaluate the strategic and operational approach and undertake an evaluation on a sample of projects co-funded by the Ministry.

This document presents the evaluation results of Les Amis du Tibet.

Field missions for Les Amis du Tibet took place in India and Nepal. These evaluations are based on documentary reviews, interviews with the projects’ main actors and surveys of beneficiaries.

Founded in 1995 in Luxembourg, the LAT develops awareness-raising activities and advocacy work for the Tibetan cause through political and cultural activities. Since 2002, the organisation has been setting up development cooperation projects in India in collaboration with the Tibetan government in exile and the Tibetan Children’s Villages (TCVs). In 2006, it extended its areas of intervention to Nepal and Tibet.

Amis du Tibet’s activities are organised around three main pillars¹:

- **Political activities** include awareness-raising on the situation in Tibet for officials, the media and the public; the fulfilment of several different activities (letters, articles, petitions, demonstrations, informational stands, “flags in the municipality” operations, etc. as well as networking with other organisations in Luxembourg and abroad).
- **Cultural activities:** organising shows and conferences
- **Humanitarian and development activities:** support Tibetan communities in India, Nepal and Tibet by setting up development cooperation projects.

Accounting and financial audit

Our examination was carried out according to the International Standard on Related services (ISRS 4400) applicable to engagements to perform agreed-upon procedures regarding financial information. It should be noted that these procedures specifically exclude the examination of LAT’s partners’ accounts that carry out the projects abroad.

The association is not directly involved in the projects funded abroad. The organisation resorts to local partners to whom it transfers the entirety of the funds without any prior contract signed with these partners. The supporting documents of the local partners’ expenses are not available in Luxembourg. We noticed several contraventions (to the statutes and the law of 21 April 1928), as well as several improvements that should be made regarding internal control.

Following the audit of LAT’s Luxembourgish accounts, we believe that, subject to the fact that some elements are not registered as a product or liability since the organisation adopted a cash-flow accounting, these Luxembourgish accounts represent a fair view of the assets, financial situation and of the results of LAT.

This testimony excludes any opinion regarding the accounts of the foreign partners with whom the institution works.

¹ Source : Documentation provided by Les Amis du Tibet

Organisational and structural audit

Although they have been active for several years, *Les Amis du Tibet* only recently (2010) started the process aiming at a greater professionalization of their institution.

Up to now, the activities have been carried out by volunteers. As the volume of activities has significantly increased in the last few years, the organisation felt the need to recruit one permanent member of staff (January 2010). These structural changes brought along new challenges and reinforced the need for organisational changes, i.e. redistribute roles and responsibilities, create and formalise the institution's strategy. This new organisation redefined the rules within the organisation: the managers must delegate responsibilities and start sharing the decision-making authority.

Regarding organisational arrangements, the evaluation mission made the following observations:

- **Many responsibilities for very few people:** The limited financial and human resources means that the tasks are concentrated on few people, who are distributed on every level of the organisation, and all have a significant workload. This situation leads to a concentration of knowledge and power on a small number of people, which could be dangerous for the organisation if a risk management strategy is not implemented.
- **The governance bodies' roles and responsibilities are not sufficiently differentiated:** Having the same people present within several different governance bodies means roles and responsibilities are not properly segregated, and this probably results in the duplication of tasks (e.g.: the topics discussed within the Management Committee are discussed again during the Board meeting).
Changing the organisation chart created a lot of confusion in the LAT's offices, because the process had not been completed and finalised. As a result of this, there are many internal tensions, and an overwhelming feeling of time loss and inefficiency.
- **The effective powers are concentrated on few people:** Despite a more formal organisation of the working groups and the creation of a Management Committee, all the decisions for the institution are taken by the Board of Directors, among which only very few people dispose of all the relevant information necessary to decision-making.
- **A significant rotation of resources over the last two years:** The NGO's project (support the Tibetan cause) attracts many resources within the organisation. However, the organisation has difficulty maintaining these resources on the long-term. The increase in the volume of activities, the new presidency, the important workload and poorly structured organisation are all factors that can explain the increase in internal conflicts and the high number of resignations (since the General Assembly on the 1st of March 2011, 6 people have resigned).
- **A lack of organisational structure:** To this day, the organisation does not have any document which formalises its strategic guidelines (e.g.: strategic plan, business plan and/or annual action plan) nor does it have any formal tools to present their implementation modalities (chart, code of conduct, operating handbook, etc.)
LAT has however signed up to some charts and codes of conduct set up by external organisations.

Evaluation of the strategic and operational approach

During our mission, we noted a paradox within the organisation: whereas a systematic physical control has been set up for all activities taking place in Luxembourg, there is a full transfer of control when it

comes to the partners. Setting up an internal control system would be a way of managing risks and relax the pressure that has been put on the human resources. Indeed, the pressure is high in terms of time, but also in terms of human relations, that are mainly conducted in a climate of distrust.

The organisation's objective is to support the Tibetan cause in Luxembourg, but also the Tibetan people both in Tibet, and in neighbouring countries where they have gone to seek exile (India and Nepal). The choice of partnerships is the result of networking, or simply the development of relationships that existed before LAT was created.

Human relationships prevail over contractual relationships. No collaboration contracts have been signed with the partners. The formalisation of contracts with Southern partners is limited to the transposition of the Luxembourgish government's minimal requirements in terms of co-funding. Sharing and committing to common values is the basis of the partnership, which is mostly based on mutual trust.

In this respect, shared Buddhist values are not unrelated to the creation and establishment of a feeling of trust. However, there seems to be some confusion between relationships based on trust and professional relationships. The value placed on relationships with Southern partners is very highly esteemed and therefore results in a bias in the judgement LAT bears on its partners: without a critically informed vision, these judgements tend always to be based on positive preconceptions and hypotheses that are not always put to the test.

In addition to the funding granted by the Ministry, LAT is supported by partners in the North, who became aware of the NGO's activities through their newsletter and their federative public events. On an international level, LAT is a member of several networks that support the Tibetan cause.

External communication represents more than a simple promotion tool for the association; it is one of its core activities in its advocacy work for the Tibetan cause. In this respect, a "Communication/awareness-raising" group was created. Internal communication within the organisation is mainly done orally and on an informal basis.

Field assessment in India and Nepal

In India and Nepal, project identification is made either by the local partner, and then submitted to LAT for discussion, or the needs are discussed directly with LAT during their field visits.

Our observations did not show any evidence that AT is monitoring the technical aspects of the project during its preparatory phase; their partners are fully entrusted with the activity. The preparation of the project thus depends solely on the local partner's choices and decisions. All the buildings that were visited are made out of concrete despite the fact that the use of natural materials would have been more economical and environment-friendly. Moreover, it would have had a positive educational impact.

Globally, project preparations in India were not detailed enough. The plans provided to the evaluators were very brief, and raised the question on how a structure could be correctly built on the basis of such vague indications. There were no electrical or plumbing plans.

In certain cases, the evaluators were given no evidence proving that the structural calculations had been done, and in other cases, the calculations that were provided were insufficient or incorrect. No evidence was found indicating that research had been made prior to the start of the construction on topics such as local material, climate conditions or the beneficiaries' needs.

Once the work begins, the supervision of the construction site is fully transferred to LAT's partners. At no point does the organisation subject its partners to an ex-ante assessment to evaluate their capacity

to take over a building site of this sort. During its field visits, LAT's limits its control to checking that the building actually exists, its general appearance and collecting the partners and beneficiaries' thoughts and feelings. No technical expert is appealed by LAT.

The supervision of the work thus entirely depends on LAT's partners and their capacities to organise it properly. In this respect, the difference in the quality of Indian and Nepalese buildings is a direct consequence of two different methods of supervision.

The projects in Nepal were completed according to very good standards, exceeding the country's average standards. In addition to having a very competent site supervisor, who is efficient at every level of the construction cycle, Karuna Shechen uses a simple strategy: one does not obtain good quality work and materials at the lowest cost.

In India, every building that was evaluated either showed functional design errors or construction faults.

Conclusions and recommendations

Les Amis du Tibet is a well-established organisation in Luxembourg, it benefits from the support of several institutions and individuals who are very involved in their activities. In this respect, the organisation is very dynamic and conducts a large number of activities to support its objective: the defence of the Tibetan cause.

LAT is an evolving organisation that is currently having a growth crisis. In order to make this transition, the organisation must re-think its organisational structure, as well as its work and communication flows. This is the only way to relieve the tensions that have recently emerged within the NGO. However, this growth crisis can solely not be considered from an organisational point of view. The questions regarding LAT's strategic choices will also have to be raised.

In India and Nepal, LAT shows a real desire to help the Tibetan minorities; however, the control mechanisms used in the various stages of the projects are insufficient. Whether the results are good or bad depends on how LAT's Southern partners implemented the projects. LAT's presence does not influence the course of things.

The methodological tools are neither mastered nor fully understood: during the needs identification stage, LAT does not systematically enquire whether other possibilities exist; the wording of the logical framework is not precise (more actions results than development ones); there are many weaknesses in the implementation of projects (there is no systematic process to organise and control the implementation); the evaluation of the projects is non-existent (there is some confusion between an evaluation work (as a stage of the project cycle) and ex-post financial analyses or the President's annual visits, when she goes to "see" the projects.)

The relationship with the partners is not formalised, it is based on a mutual trust taken to an extreme, which prevents any form of objective criticism.

The financial and legal aspects are in line with the operational standards of NGOs.

On an organisational level, we recommend that the organisation completes its restructuring initiatives, which it had begun in collaboration with an independent consultant. In terms of activities, it seems that LAT's strengths lie in its capacity to organise advocacy and events in favour of the Tibetan cause, and collaborate with other networks and associations to defend human rights. We recommend that LAT re-directs its overall action strategy based on these strengths.

Regarding the projects, we recommend that every construction activity be stopped immediately since the organisation does not have the sufficient resources and expertise to manage the risks linked to such projects.

The evaluation team recommends that LAT should seek new potential partnerships instead of any infrastructure projects: Les Amis du Tibet counts many teachers amongst its members. It seems suitable to see how LAT could provide an educational support to the TCV, perhaps in the form of a in-service training for teachers (on the subjects taught, on how to teach or even on the English language, which is used in the classes).

For the general and specific recommendations regarding the current projects, please see chapter 3.6.3, and the individual evaluations of the projects.