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Evaluation of 5 Luxembourg NGOs active in Burkina Faso

Frères des Hommes (FDH)

Executive summary

Nathalie Close and Benoît Cambier
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Findings, judgements et recommendations expressed in this document reflect the evaluators' points of view and not necessarily the ones of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Executive summary

The objective of this evaluation is to check the NGO Frères des Hommes' (FDH) capacity to implement the development projects efficiently and effectively, and ensure the long-term impact of these projects in terms of poverty alleviation.

The evaluation was done by analyzing the partner relationship between FDH and its counterparts in the beneficiary countries. The analysis of the NGO was made according to the 3 circles model, which represents the entity as 3 interrelated circles: the BEING circle, the DOING circle and the RELATING circle¹.

Regarding the BEING circle

Created in 1974, the NGO Frères des Hommes Luxembourg is the last of the four structures (together with FDH France, Belgium and Italy) that were founded under the impulse and spirit of Armand Marquiset, whose wish was to help the underprivileged following a trip to India in 1965.

Opting first for a collaborative approach, the FDH family later shifted towards a partnership-based approach in the 80's, focusing on the relationship of trust which had been built over the long-term. The commitment became more "political" in the sense that the FDH family supports its partners who are, themselves, working on developing alternatives to the actual situation of the final beneficiaries.

During this period, FDH Luxembourg broke away from the other branches little by little, preferring to gain more operational self-sufficiency. However, they remain in very good contact and continue to collaborate with the Italian and Belgian offices. The association received the official authorization to operate as an NGO from the Luxembourg Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs (MAEE) in 1979. They signed their first framework agreement in 2002.

FDH has developed working relations with many actors: besides its connections with its Belgian and Italian counterparts, it also collaborates with different NGOs and associations in the North in the context of awareness-raising and development education activities. These also include schools or even lobbying platforms. Regarding the development projects in the South, the NGO works mainly with local farmer groups/unions, as well as with local institutions (associations, training centers, NGOs).

The strategy adopts an excessively "multi-varied" approach in its implementation (the 2012-2014 framework agreement covers 12 projects with 11 different partners in 8 countries over 2 continents). This diversification is contradictory to FDH's statement that one of the main factors of bad development aid is the absence of integrated sustainable development. Therefore, the NGO is landed with many small projects and a double negative result: the annihilation of potential leverage effects between the actions and the conspicuous increase of the workload linked to their management. The new 2015-2017 framework agreement represents a first step towards redefining the projects (10 projects with 10 different partners in 6 countries over 2 continents). However, this redefining must be pursued.

The analysis also shed some light on a lack of global coherence between the chosen themes: the education development activities in Luxembourg on the one hand, and the Southern projects on the other. The absence of this strategic guideline has an impact on FDH's visibility, thus creating confusion amongst the public regarding the NGO's positioning. This confusion is further accentuated by the possible interpretations linked to the NGO's denomination – *Frères des hommes* – which, among other things, conveys a religious image, whereas the organization is independent of any religious attachment.

¹ Source : International NGO training and research center (INTRAC)

Regarding its structure and governance, FDH had a difficult transition from a 100% volunteer-based NGO to a professional organization with paid staff. The organizational and governance models have not been adequately adapted over the years, resulting in a double leveled governance in the sense that part of the Board of Directors is both strategic and executive. As a result, the issue of a counter-power in management related decision making is raised (members agree with one another).

The NGO faced an unprecedented institutional crisis in terms of governance. Part of this can be explained by the mutual misunderstandings between the permanent staff and the long-term volunteers (mainly the board of directors).

The whole board of directors resigned at the end of 2014. It is thus the role of the new board, set up in January 2015, to take up the new challenges and ensure the sustainability of the NGO for the years to come. Amongst the items that must be reviewed, the evaluation team identified the following:

- Reinstatement of a coordination officer within the permanent office so as to, on the one hand, allow the board to concentrate on the tasks that are usually attributed to them, and on the other hand, ensure a better cohesion and global vision between the different activities undertaken by the permanent office. This person would also be in charge of the administrative tasks and HR management on an operational level.
- Implement a governance manual, within which the roles and responsibilities of each one would be clearly defined and transparent (including the coordinator as an intermediary between the board and the permanent office). The manual must also cover the question of the participation of permanent staff on board meetings.
- The precise and distinct definition of the nature of both a member of the association and a donor. This exercise will be a good opportunity to redefine the composition of the general assembly in a transparent manner.
- Regarding HR management, they need 1) to improve or adapt the existing job descriptions, 2) to establish regular staff appraisals so as to implement a framework for dialogue, 3) to define a recruitment policy and a salary grid, and to 4) strengthen the volunteer scheme to ensure optimal integration into the projects.
- The update of the statutes according to the different decisions that have been made, most importantly regarding the general strategy (the NGO's social objective) but also, and foremost, those that have been made on governance.

Regarding financial aspects, the NGO has been running a deficit for several years. Its fundraising is sporadic and uncertain, and its funding has often been salvaged by "life-saving" donations. Nonetheless, FDH has a sufficiently strong financial base to ensure the 20/80 ratio of the next framework agreement. It recently and unsuccessfully tried to boost its fundraising by hiring an expert. Although a fundraising plan has been defined at this stage, it presents many weaknesses in the manner in which it was drawn up. As well as being limited to general points and omitting identified targets, there is a clear lack of coherence with the message that FDH communicates regarding its strategy. The latter also needs to be clarified. The NGO will thus have to do things in the correct order before starting on real fundraising efforts. Indeed, FDH will need to define its vision, the message it wants to convey, define an appropriate communication strategy, define targets, etc.

Regarding the DOING circle

In keeping with its strategy, FDH adopts a multi-sectorial approach to its projects. Nonetheless, the NGO concentrates its efforts on rural development and food sovereignty and security. These sectors are in line with the Luxembourgish cooperation's priorities and strategies. In the context of this evaluation, the projects co-funded by FDH and

implemented by their Burkinabe partners are also in line with the country's national and sectorial priorities. These partners work in regular collaboration with the different ministries.

Transversal themes such as gender and participatory development are integrated into FDH's mission and are inherent to the different projects lead by the NGO. Regarding the environmental theme, it is included into several of their activities, from lobbying against GMOs to the implementation of traditional seed greenhouses. Nonetheless, this analysis has demonstrated a lack of pertinence and/or allocated resources for several of these activities, thus making them unrealistic compared to the set objectives.

Although FDH is familiar with the principles of project cycle management, the same cannot be said for some of its partners. Admittedly, the principles are known, but the tools are badly and rarely used. Moreover, the local partner's bi-annual reporting to FDH is of varying quality, and still too dependent on the local partners' levels of expertise. Although the trainings provided by the NGO to the local partners in this regard constitute a first step in terms of capacity-building, all parties would highly benefit from a harmonized reporting framework.

In general, the project identification phase is left to the partners who carry out a partnership needs assessment with the final beneficiaries. The formulation is then carried out in collaboration with the local partners. They also ensure the execution of the project, under FDH's remote supervision.

FDH has benefitted from the different evaluations which have taken place, both at institutional level and with relation to its projects and partnerships. With this in mind, the NGO developed internal tools which ensure a better capitalization on its partners' institutional and operational progress. However, it would also benefit from setting up a formalized and experienced risk management system: this would help them to avoid getting lost in technical projects that go beyond their expertise.

Regarding the relating circle

FDH's partnerships are based on common ideals and objectives as well as reciprocity in the relationship. Besides this reciprocity, the NGO also refers to collaboration, exchange and transparency. The partnership is set in the long-term and aims mostly at strengthening civil society, with no subordinate relationship to any political or religious spheres. In accordance with the terms of reference of this evaluation, we focused on the NGO's partnership with the Dakupa association. However, the results of the analysis can be generalized to the majority of its partners, following verification with the NGO.

FDH acts primarily as a funder who also provides advice and support in terms of management and project monitoring. The technical aspects (sectorial expertise) are under the responsibility of the partner, who disposes of a total independence as regards the implementation of the projects.

Historically speaking, the choice of partners is the result of discussions between FDH Luxembourg and the other FDH organizations located in Europe. There has never been a detailed analysis of the partners' capacities. Partnerships are rather the result of perceptions which were built on the feedback given to them by their sister organizations, as well as basic evaluation of the partner on the field (this included discussions with the partner, visits to projects and evaluation of their impact, exchanges with the beneficiaries, etc.). Moreover, the partners do not really negotiate their partnership. They automatically trust FDH based on its relationship with its sister organizations, and on their values and philosophy.

The partnership relationship is formalized through a memorandum of understanding signed between FDH and its partner. This document, which holds the same weight as a contract, describes the roles and responsibilities of both parties, the funding plan and the calendar of activities relating to the project. It also includes some rules on monitoring, and financial and

operational management. The distribution of roles in the project cycle management is well balanced between both parties. Nonetheless, the contract includes very little regarding the level of obligations of the parties, and there is a significant difference between what is written and the reality in terms of roles and responsibilities. This can be seen with FDH's contribution to an improved autonomy and implementation of Dakupa, the monitoring of its activities, and even its exchanges with its local partners on potential orientations for the future. An update of the memorandum of understanding to include these points would mean that the decision-making power that actually exists within FDH be formally matched with the appropriate responsibilities.

Dakupa is a sustainable association and it is financially independent from FDH. The historical collaboration between Dakupa and the NGO is deemed to be good and balanced. It encompasses transparent dialogue, a good reciprocity and fruitful exchanges. Although it reflects mutual trust and respect, Dakupa's freedom results paradoxically in distortions of which FDH is not fully aware. The method which is applied to its institutional support to Dakupa (i.e. a fixed percentage of the total amount of the project) does not take into account the salary costs on the field and thus does not allow for a decent salary to be paid to the local project officers.

FDH is seeking the autonomy of its partners. Capacity-building is seen by FDH as a tool to help its partners grow and develop expertise. Although it has already organized a certain number of trainings for Dakupa in this respect, its approach remains incomplete compared to what can still be done. This is especially true in the sense that the final beneficiaries (groups of farmers) remain the local partner's associative base. There is thus a double benefit in supporting Dakupa in the best possible manner in order to ensure that this structure can serve its members' best interest whilst developing its autonomy.

Conclusions and future leads

FDH is an experienced NGO that has always been guided by the commitment to an ideal which was transposed onto its governance and its partner and project management.

The year 2015 will be a turning point for the NGO's new governing body. In order to ensure FDH's institutional sustainability and the survival of its philosophy and values, it will be necessary to consider and correct the structural and management problems which have led the NGO to its recent institutional crisis. Only then will it be able in a position to improve the management of both projects and partners. Otherwise, FDH will be unable to avoid reflecting on the best possible exit strategy from each of its current projects.