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## Evaluation of 5 Luxembourg NGOs active in Burkina Faso

**Fondation Dr. Elvire Engel (FEE)**

*Executive summary*

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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 Fondation Dr Elvire Engel's (FEE) 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 FEE and its counterparts in Burkina Faso. 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 circle<sup>1</sup>.

### Regarding the BEING circle

FEE was created in 2004 under the impulse of Dr Elvire Engel. The objective of the NGO was to support and promote projects relating to the health and education of women and children in Burkina Faso.

The foundation's mission statement is classically described in its statutes. Rather unusually, it also includes a list of projects to be implemented. This can be explained by the fact the foundation was constituted shortly before Dr Engel's death and therefore the statutes represent, to a certain extent, her final wishes. In order to restore to each document its original aim, we suggest that the statutes be reviewed, and thus to remove any mention of the projects. At the same time, we recommend that the foundation should start a strategic reflection which would then be formalized into a mid-term strategic plan.

By the very nature of the foundation, the NGO's governance structure is limited to a board of directors, entirely composed of volunteers, the majority of whom had a friendly relationship with the founder. The responsibilities are distributed amongst the board members according to their skills and availability. All decisions are made collectively and consensually, and each member is accountable for his activities.

The board members' personal skills and their critical views have ensured a good management of the different projects funded up to now, and have compensated for a lack of expertise in terms of development cooperation. This "amateurism", as the foundation calls it, is an impediment to a potential professionalization, which could be useful to better frame the projects, and even necessary should the NGO wish to develop its practices. This professionalization can be done in different ways, including internal capacity-building through trainings and/or the recruitment of a project manager.

Although it is discreet, the NGO is nonetheless well settled into several Luxembourgish networks and associations, allowing it to secure enough funding every year to maintain its financial soundness, which is based on different bequests. This is positive news, yet it is likely to be temporary as it is intrinsically linked to the board members. In order to expand the initial circle of each one's acquaintances (including those of Dr Engel) it would be a wise option to draw up a fundraising plan.

In parallel, the foundation's external communication is quite restricted, as it favors word-of-mouth and does not have any actual promotional material. True to its values, the NGO conveys in its message a strong culture of "direct flow towards the South", in total transparency towards its donors.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. [www.sahel.lu/valeurs](http://www.sahel.lu/valeurs)

Should the NGO make the decision to diversify its sources of funding, it would also be suitable to think of drawing up a communications strategy and a combined action plan, with a view to developing an “image” associated with the foundation, its philosophy or even its activities, to target the external public.

### Regarding the DOING circle

FEE's activities in both its sectors of intervention (health and education/ vocational training) are in line with the Luxembourg cooperation's priorities and strategies, as well as with the international agreements. The transversal “environmental” theme is taken into consideration through the Tondtenga project and its promotion of recycling/composting, sanitation and organic agriculture. The gender issue is directly taken into account in the foundation's very mission. Similarly, governance and participatory development aspects are taken into account in the sense that the NGO, through its main partner, emphasizes autonomous individual empowerment, where the partners are masters of their own development.

During the identification phase for new projects, FEE uses its common sense to analyze actual needs. The project formulation remains approximate, sometimes missing a causal connection between the activities undertaken, the specific objectives and the general objective. This imprecise presentation of the logical framework is compensated by the fact that the theoretical contribution of the project document is superseded by the tangible and daily commitment of FEE's main partner, the Association Managé Nooma pour la Protection des Orphelins (AMPO). AMPO does not consider this document as a roadmap to be followed, but rather more as a necessary written formalization of its activities. Although this formulation does not seem to be essential for AMPO to implement the projects, a good formulation remains nonetheless important as it raises the fundamental questions of *why* and *for whom*. It thus questions the relevance of an activity compared to a need, the identification of which is the result of an actual analysis rather than empirical evidence. Finally, an improved formulation would allow FEE and its partner to have a system of monitoring the progress of activities and of measuring the achievement of results. Lastly, the formulation document is the first step in a much larger process of continual learning and capitalization of knowledge.

At the initial level, the follow-up and monitoring of projects is done by the local partners, who then regularly report on the development of the activities and the budgetary execution rate. In the absence of formalized procedures, FEE uses the general conditions which govern the contractual relations between the MAEE and the NGOs, as well as the collaboration agreement, as a reference framework to ensure a good management of its projects. Field visits are programmed with regularity and take place with or without the donors, thereby complementing the monitoring process.

It is recommended that the NGO implement a risk management strategy, in addition to increasing the frequency of its field visits. This will give them the possibility to better understand the realities of the field and the challenges to be met. These recommendations can be applied both to the projects during the project cycle phases, and to the different stages of the partnership relationship.

Regarding actual evaluations, the foundation has up to now favored internal analysis exercises, carried out together with the partner, rather than seeking external and independent evaluations. It has recently provisioned a specific budget for the evaluation of its larger projects.

### Regarding the analysis of the RELATING circle

The foundation is historically linked to one major partner, AMPO, to whom 85% of the foundation's funding is dedicated. The NGO also has projects with two municipalities in

Burkina Faso. Only the analysis of the partnership relationship between FEE and AMPO, illustrated by the visit of a sample of projects, was taken into consideration in the context of this evaluation.

The choice of AMPO was the result of a sentimental choice, based on a budding friendship, and a mutual positive recognition and appreciation, rather than on an in-depth analysis of one another's capacities.

The relationship is considered by both parties to be privileged, balanced, and based on dialogue and the search for consensus. Both institutions share similar objectives and collaborate in a spirit of mutual trust which was built over time, notably based on the emotional bond between their respective founders. Nonetheless, this situation could present a potential risk linked to an excess of trust which would impede either party from questioning certain assumptions or from applying criticism in order to ensure that the partnership relationship is carried out with the same rigor as a non-affectionate professional relationship.

It is thus necessary for FEE and AMPO to work on the professionalization of their relationship through its formalization : ~~In other words,~~ the setting up of a contract of collaboration, presenting the roles and responsibilities of each party, ~~the~~ systematic resort to the external evaluation of projects, ~~the~~ formulation of projects so that the project documents constitute an actual reference document, based on an analysis and a participatory and contradictory debate, and no longer a compulsory listing of undertaken activities.

Without questioning the close and cordial bond between the two parties, this relationship is only understood as a "partnership" in respect of its financial aspects, in an organized flow from the North to the South. AMPO is completely autonomous in the execution of its projects and does not expect any technical or management support from FEE.

It is difficult to assess the future of this relationship, as the association is currently going through a defining moment in its development which, if badly negotiated, could eventually undermine its sustainability. Indeed, despite the fact that the institution is solid and recognized, it is currently facing a double challenge.

On the one hand, the organization rests upon its founder and president's commitment whose personality, charisma and engagement over the years have been the driving force which helped reach today's exceptional results. However, these same reasons are the primary risk factors in the transition of AMPO's operational direction to a new person. The success of this transition is mainly due to Katrin Rohde's successful withdrawal and to the depersonalization of AMPO's image.

Parallel to this is the fact that AMPO's organic growth through the success of its different projects (including Tondtenga), was not accompanied by an institutional strengthening. It is currently necessary for the association to take the time to define, with the support of its donors – including FEE - a roadmap for the coming years, putting an emphasis on the consolidation of gains.

## Conclusions and future leads

Created ten years ago under the impulse of Dr Elvire Engel, FEE is now a small NGO, entirely dedicated to the respect of its founder's last wishes. Inspired by her philosophy and values, the foundation's main objective is to facilitate the development of autonomy for the poorest women and children, while ensuring not to disconnect them from their reality.

Well established in Luxembourg, the NGO is instructing itself on how to improve its understanding of this reality, and how to better grasp it during its field visits and its exchanges with its partners, in order to gain in experience, and also in credibility and

efficiency. Entirely volunteer-based, its members' personal and professional skills, as well as their critical view, compensates for its lack of experience in terms of development cooperation.

Up to now, the foundation has managed its projects with due diligence. However, it is currently at a defining moment of its history, and the question of professionalization is naturally starting to arise: must FEE continue doing what it is currently doing and thus remain in its actual structure, or must it make one more step towards professionalization? Although the answer remains theirs, the decision must only be made following the development of a vision and a mid-term strategy.

This strategy must take into consideration several dimensions such as the promotion of its identity, the internal structure of the foundation, its sources of funding, and the choice of its partners.

This final dimension is an important point for FEE for the conduct of its future activities. The foundation's privileged relationship with AMPO, its main partner, was built on a friendship, and allowed the partner to be completely autonomous on an organizational and operational level. Although the NGO remains prudent and attentive when monitoring the projects funded, it would gain by establishing and formalizing regular evaluations of its projects and partnerships, particularly by assessing strengths and weaknesses in terms of capacity.

Achieving impact at the level of the beneficiary populations is an important aspect of the projects. However, we can note that the reinforcing of local structures, including those of partners, remains crucial, as this contributes directly to the success of the activities undertaken, and indirectly to the autonomous development of the local populations.

In conclusion, FEE is a pragmatic and caring NGO which knows how to remain rational in its analysis and daily management. Drawing on a good critical sense, the foundation gained in experience through the various projects it has carried out up to now. Nonetheless, it is slowly entering a critical stage of its existence, where the challenge will be to know which road to take: either to stabilize itself under its current configuration, or to evolve. Although the first option is comfortable, for the second option it must give itself the means to match its ambition.