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ORGANISATIONAL EVALUATION OF THE NGO AMITIÉ AM SAND AMIZERO (AAA)

In 2022, the Directorate for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Affairs, Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs commissioned an organisational evaluation of 11 NGOs. Among these was AAA. The evaluation was carried out by “Artemis Information management s.a”. A summary of the main results is given below.

The analysis made and the recommendations expressed in this document represent the views of the evaluators and do not necessarily reflect those of the Ministry or of the NGO.

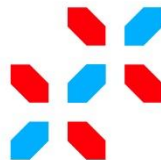
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Between November 2022 and April 2023, Artemis carried out the organisational evaluation of 11 Luxembourgish development NGOs on behalf of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs – Directorate for Development Cooperation (MAEE-DCD). Among these NGOs was “Amitié Am Sand Amizero (AAA)”. The MAEE and the NGOs concerned were informed in advance of the methodology to be used during the evaluation, which included in particular a self-diagnosis workshop as a framework for an exchange between the evaluators and the NGO on the preliminary conclusions of the work, and a meeting to present the provisional report to the MAEE. The final report presents the analyses carried out by the team of evaluators, together with their conclusions and recommendations. It also provides, in the annex, the main comments received from the NGO and details of the way these were handled by the evaluators. The end of the year period during which the evaluation was carried out is a busy time for the teachers who comprise the main volunteers involved in running the NGO. However, they showed great willingness to be involved, which allowed the analytical work to be carried out efficiently.

AAA was set up in 2007 on the initiative of a group composed mainly of teachers at the Am Sand school located in the town of Niederanven. AAA was first approved by the MAEE as a development NGO in 2015. The approval was renewed by the MAEE in February 2023. AAA’s cooperation activities are focused in Rwanda, more specifically in the district of Ruhango, and extend towards its local partners that are also schools. The first partner of AAA’s activities in Rwanda, the Amizero school, is an important benchmark for the identity of the NGO, which has kept the reference to “Amizero”, which means “Hope” in Kinyarwanda, in its name. The “peer-to-peer” relationship between the Am Sand school and other primary schools in Rwanda enables AAA to provide its local partners with relevant support through its projects, aimed above all at improving the quality of and access to education, especially for children from the most disadvantaged families.

The NGO only works with volunteers. The Committee, currently made up of 6 people, has a central role in the strategic direction and the running of the NGO. It meets once a month. The functioning of the Committee follows a very consensual, democratic dynamic. The General Meeting brings together 25 to 30 members, depending on the year. The NGO is therefore run by a very small number of people, whose availability is limited because most of them still work. AAA is having problems engaging new volunteers to obtain support that goes beyond the occasional “helping hand”.

Operating costs are kept to a minimum through the use of volunteers and the logistical support of the Am Sand school and the Municipality of Niederanven, which makes the NGO very efficient. AAA’s financial health is sound: the intervention budgets for the past two years were around 120,000 euros and the NGO’s reserves amount to just over 130,000 euros. Apart from co-financing from the MAEE, the NGO can count on regular subsidies from the municipality of Niederanven and on donations from a loyal donor base.

The NGO’s projects in the field make use of the local cooperation structures that exist around each partner school in Rwanda and which include representatives from the schools’ administrations, parents and teachers. It is these management committees that monitor the implementation of interventions, which ensures their ownership. The NGO has contracted a local coordinator to liaise between the NGO and the various beneficiaries on site; it works closely with the Management Committees of each school benefiting from AAA support. The projects generally have two complementary components: work on reception infrastructure (renovations or new classes) and support for the education system (canteen, scholarships, support and teaching materials).

Three long-standing members are still on the Committee in 2023 (half of the members), 16 years after the NGO was set up. They hold positions of responsibility (chair, secretary, treasurer). Five of the 6 members of the current Committee are teachers from Am Sand School. Lastly, the Committee members have an average age of 62. This presents a triple risk for the future of the NGO: firstly, the slowing down of a team that has been staunchly and tirelessly involved since the NGO’s inception, then the lack of diversity in

viewpoints and skills, and lastly the difficulty of getting new members despite the efforts undertaken. These are the major challenges the Committee faces to ensure the continued existence of the NGO and its work.

Against this backdrop, the evaluation put forward a series of 20 recommendations covering the general running of the NGO, its internal organisation, its strategic approach, its finances and its projects.

Generally, the NGO is recommended to be more open to exchange and discussion with other Luxembourg NGOs. It has an interesting model that closely links its cooperation activities with the educational project of the Am Sand primary school, on the one hand, and on the other hand with the municipality of Niederanven's ambitions in terms of developing bonds of solidarity with the District of Ruhango. There are also experiences to share on getting new volunteers on board. The NGO has to better document its results for such an exchange to be useful.

It needs to provide lasting solutions for the renewal of the Committee, its openness to viewpoints and skills other than those of the founding teacher members, which are rather entrenched, while trying to remove the constraints generated by a lack of availability and time. This should be facilitated by a description of the Committee's roles, functions and tasks, on the one hand, and by better communication to external entities on the NGO's missions and results.

While the foundations of the NGO's strategy are shared by its Committee members, they have not yet been formalised; this would make it easier to extend the discussion beyond the restricted circle of the members of the Committee and those close to the Committee. This would also facilitate access to other viewpoints, especially those of development cooperation professionals.

Regarding financial matters, the recommendations essentially concern the form and readability of the accounts and budgets. Balance sheet information (e.g. profit/loss carried forward, statements of accounts at the beginning and end of the fiscal year) must be clearly separated from information pertaining to an operating account (income/expenditure), by drawing up an annual income statement (balance of incoming and outgoing flows during the period) and a balance sheet presenting the assets and liabilities (a snapshot of the financial situation at the end of the period).

Lastly, with regard to the projects implemented by the NGO, it is recommended to strengthen the monitoring and evaluation system by formally integrating into it elements to enable monitoring of the progress made in the cross-cutting themes underpinning the Luxembourg development cooperation. AAA could also further promote and support direct relationships between the pupils of Am Sand and those of partner schools in Rwanda. Finally, the experience of school management committees in Rwanda should be clearly documented as it is exemplary and could be promoted in other contexts.