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ORGANISATIONAL EVALUATION OF THE NGO Athénée-Action humanitaire - A-AH

In 2022, the Directorate for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Affairs, Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs commissioned an organisational evaluation of 11 NGOs benefiting from public funding. Among these was A-AH. 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.

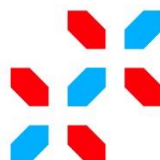
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Between November 2022 and April 2023, Artemis carried out the organisational evaluation of 11 Luxembourgish development NGOs on behalf of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs – Directorate for Development Cooperation (MAEE-DCD). These NGOs included A-AH. 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 annex, the main comments received from the NGO and details of the way they 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 are 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.

The NGO A-AH was set up in 2006 by a group of people close to the Lycée Athénée (teachers, students, former students and former teachers, parents of students) and it received its first MAEE approval as an NGO in 2007. Its establishment was part of a logical process of development cooperation driven by the teachers of the Lycée, which started in 1998 with the monitoring of humanitarian interventions in South Africa (WARMTH project). The Lycée has also been a member of the network of UNESCO Associated Schools since 2003 and its teaching project is inspired by values of solidarity and openness to the world, a seedbed for commitment to development cooperation, through A-AH's activities.

Although it is very close to the Lycée (it is described on the Lycée's website as a "daughter" organisation), the NGO has its own identity and an independent status. The ties between the Lycée's educational project and A-AH's development cooperation projects are solid. The projects developed by the NGO in South Africa, Cape Verde and Greece help raise the awareness of the students/teenagers of the Lycée and feed the school's educational project as a whole, with concrete examples of cooperation activities; in return, dedicated optional and elective courses provide the development projects with a consistent framework for analysis and reflection that is open towards local partners. They also benefit from a dynamic fundraising and support base organised around the school community. It is an approach in which the two parts (education and cooperation) stimulate and gain from each other.

The NGO's General Assembly has 63 paid-up members and its Board of Directors is made up of 14 people, all of whom are volunteers. The Executive Committee, made up of four administrators, meets once a month to monitor the progress of activities as closely as possible. Lastly, the NGO has three project monitoring groups (one per country of intervention), which monitor the cooperation projects and manage the teaching aspect, and an organising committee which is responsible for fundraising events and more general awareness-raising among students. The NGO's governance framework is therefore highly diversified and participatory.

Its mission is to "support development aid projects in the fields of education and vocational training and at social and cultural levels". The NGO's strategy is described in a detailed document that was updated in 2022. It very clearly links the NGO's development cooperation objectives to the Lycée's educational objectives. This makes it a unique model in the world of NGOs in Luxembourg and a powerful tool for raising awareness about the country's development cooperation among the school community and beyond.

The NGO A-AH is in sound financial health based on recurring surpluses for the past five financial years. It generated between 180,000 and 200,000 euros of income each year in 2019, 2020 and 2021. This income comes from various sources: donations from individuals, municipalities and associations, revenue from events and special fundraising operations, and government grants. The NGO is therefore well able to contribute its own funds to projects co-financed by the MAEE and has a self-financing capacity that can be used as a reserve.

The NGO's cooperation projects in developing countries are deployed in South Africa and Cape Verde. The NGO's activities in South Africa are focused in the Cape region and in the field of biodiversity protection, and it cooperates with a local technical partner that is specialised in awareness raising and training on this issue. In Cape Verde, the NGO supports local schools by providing infrastructure support, financing meals for students and training for teachers. The NGO has built relationships of trust with local partners in these two countries that are necessary to ensure the safety of Luxembourg students visiting the projects on site as part of the educational project. This constraint makes it more complicated and difficult to implement exit strategies with partners.

The approach developed around the Lycée-NGO relationship is on the borderline between development and education/awareness; the use of "development project" co-financing from the MAEE meets the needs of the NGO which employs its best efforts to meet the requirements linked to this financing framework. However, this framework is not optimal, because qualifying A-AH's interventions solely in terms of development cooperation activities does not reflect the significant awareness-raising work that is developed jointly by the school and the NGO with young people in Luxembourg and in the two target countries. In Luxembourg, this awareness-raising has two leveraging effects which are key to increasing the population's support for the government's cooperation objectives: an amplifying effect which goes from the Lycée to the whole of the school community and a delayed effect because today's informed teenagers are tomorrow's adults.

The Athénée is in a pioneering position to implement a new Ministry of National Education and Youth (MENJ) project with the aim of developing the framework for higher education, particularly section G in Year 10, to deal with issues such as sustainable development in the academic curriculum. A new course, to be called "Section R – Politics and Sustainable Development", will be added to the range of courses offered by the Lycée. This new "sustainable development" course will include a "development cooperation" component of 2 hours per week which will be part of the class timetable. This will definitely open up new opportunities for the Lycée-NGO duo in the future.

In the general context described above, the evaluators have put forward 21 recommendations covering general matters and issues to do with the NGO's internal organisation, strategic approach, finances and projects.

In general, they recommend better documentation of the NGO's experiences in the field, especially those related to the educational project. This will provide a basis for further reflection on the impact of introducing the new "sustainable development" section R at the Lycée and will determine whether any adjustments need to be made to the NGO's interventions. The reflection process could be extended to the MAEE and the MENJ for a more detailed discussion on raising public awareness in Luxembourg about sustainable development and development cooperation as well as on the contribution that could be made by the Lycée. To this end, a follow-up of former students involved in section G could provide an insight into their involvement or not in socially responsible activities.

With regard to internal organisation, the NGO was recommended to formalise and leverage the exchanges between the project monitoring groups, which currently operate too independently of each other. A new way needs to be found to address issues relating to the availability and recruitment of volunteers involved in the management of the NGO that would allow for more limited – and therefore more attainable – commitments. The NGO also needs to develop its external communications by renovating its website and making greater use of social media.

In terms of strategy, efforts are required to integrate the key issues and cross-cutting themes of Luxembourg's development cooperation so that they are taken into account more systematically and rationally. Opportunities that could open up other public funding windows for the NGO's activities, particularly those relating to awareness-raising and training also need to be analysed. There would certainly

be a lot to be gained from increasing the NGO's presence in the existing frameworks for coordination and exchanges between Luxembourg NGOs.

As regards finances, the NGO should move from having a cash-based accounting system with several bank accounts to a system of financial management based on a profit and loss account and a balance sheet of assets and liabilities. This would provide the NGO with a more coherent set of management tools.

Finally, with regard to the NGO's cooperation projects, it is recommended to review the agreements established with local partners so as to consolidate the roles and responsibilities of each one, to integrate more clearly the cross-cutting themes of Luxembourg's cooperation and to include concrete information on the envisaged exit strategies.