

# EVALUATION OF THE LUXEMBOURG NGO DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT

Executive Summary

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**Prepared for**

Le Ministère des Affaires  
étrangères et européennes  
(MAEE)

**13 April 2023**



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# LE GROUPE CONSEIL BAASTEL

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Context

The Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs (MAEE) works closely with non-governmental development organisations (NGDOs) by jointly funding development cooperation projects as well as initiatives to raise awareness and educate people about development. As part of this collaboration, the MAEE requested an external and independent evaluation of the NGDO Unity Foundation (UF).

- Unity Foundation

The NGO UF was created in 1980 and recognized by the MAEE in 1991. Its objective is to promote a culture of peace and unity, to improve the status of women, and to strengthen the capacities of local communities with a view to the autonomy of beneficiaries, mainly through education and training.

The collaboration between MAEE and UF has resulted in more than fifty projects followed by a first development framework agreement (2018-2021). Through this framework agreement, UF aimed to build the capacity of youth and adults in seven countries to improve the socio-economic conditions of marginalized communities in rural and peri-urban areas. It focused on training and development of individual capacities as well as capitalization of experiences and good practices mainly in education and training related to agricultural production, food insecurity and health issues.

A second framework agreement (2022-2026) continues to build the capacity of rural and peri-urban communities in six countries, namely Cambodia, Central African Republic, Colombia, Malawi, Uganda, and Zambia. It is articulated around five Results: 1) Awareness raising, 2) Training and capacity building, 3) Community engagement in social action, 4) Institutional capacity, 5) Capitalization of community school experiences. Its implementation is ensured by local partners, present in each country of intervention, and community members.

The interventions are articulated around three lines of action: (i) community schools: to provide intellectual and moral education to children (ii) the "Preparation for Social Action" (P.S.A.) program: focused on the development of intellectual and moral capacities of youth and adults to contribute to the well-being of their communities (iii) training centres: to promote the dissemination of learning to local organisations active in the field of community schools in Africa.

- Purpose of the evaluation

*Main Objective:* To provide information to MAEE on the use of public funds to support sustainable, quality projects aimed at reducing poverty. The evaluation focused on organisational performance, including the effectiveness of interventions, organisational structure, and management capacity. It aimed to establish a benchmark for the integration of cross-cutting themes such as gender equality, environmental protection, and respect for human rights. OECD/DAC criteria, such as coherence, effectiveness, impact and sustainability, are used to assess the value of interventions.

The recommendations proposed by the evaluation should enable UF and its local partners to optimize their potential for implementing the 2022-2026 framework agreement. The evaluation process also provided a space for exchange and a learning opportunity that will allow UF and its local partners to improve their understanding and practice of development cooperation, while supporting the mission of poverty reduction.

- Evaluation benchmark

### Intervention logic

The evaluation took place from December 2022 to April 2023. It covered all six countries of intervention; however, field data collection was conducted in five countries: Cambodia, Colombia, Malawi, Central African Republic, and Zambia. The approach was described as a hybrid, covering both framework agreements. As such, it is not a summative evaluation of the previous framework agreement or a baseline study of the current framework agreement.

The approach focused on assessing the coherence of the action of UF and its local partners by analysing the theory of change of the current framework agreement and analysing the effectiveness of its management. The effectiveness of the results took into account the accumulation of the interventions carried out so far by seeking to identify the most significant changes that seem to emerge from the opinion of a sample of intervention communities.

A "mixed-methods" approach was used. It included a literature review, semi-structured interviews, focus groups and direct observation. Approximately 400 people were interviewed, representing a variety of stakeholder profiles involved in the activities of local partners. The data collection concluded with "on-the-spot" feedback workshops in each country to share with the UF team and each local partner the trends that were observed.

### Ethical considerations

The evaluation methodology takes into account important ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity of participants, representativeness, and non-exposure of subjects to undue risk. Participation of interviewees was voluntary. These practices are essential to ensure the validity and reliability of the evaluation results and to protect the rights and welfare of the individuals involved.

### Evaluation Questions

The main reference questions for the evaluation are detailed in the evaluation matrix in the annex to the report. They are based on the criteria: coherence, management effectiveness, results effectiveness, cross-cutting themes, impact and sustainability.

- Main findings

Below are the final findings organised by evaluation criteria:

### Coherence

Finding 1: The objectives and approach of the framework agreement interventions are aligned with UF's strategy, with Luxembourg's general strategies and international reference frameworks, and with the development and sectoral strategies of the beneficiary countries. On this last point, the approach of local partners varies. Some maintain closer relations with institutional partners who can themselves attest to the contribution of local partners to their national strategies. For other partners, this alignment is implicit. Formalizing relationships with institutional partners seems to facilitate recognition (e.g., certification) of the work done.

Finding 2: The interventions and lines of action of the program supported by UF present a potential of complementarity in a perspective of integrated development within the communities. Moreover, the communities claim to be consulted and confirm that the proposed interventions are relevant in the search for solutions to meet their priority needs. However, the thinking behind the intervention model seems incomplete. Thus, the analysis shows the need to clarify the approach and especially to specify the tangible changes that the communities can expect not only from a social and moral perspective, but also from an economic one.

Finding 3: Inclusion and coordination with other development partners active or not in UF's areas of intervention beyond government authorities seems to be a challenge for local partners, while all the communities consulted believe that collaboration with other organisations is important and crucial to complement the work done by UF, to gain autonomy, and to achieve the desired results in the targeted areas.

#### Management effectiveness

Finding 4: UF's internal management system is in line with the responsibility of managing a framework agreement. Since the first framework agreement, UF has developed detailed procedures to ensure proper monitoring of local partners' financial management. It periodically updates its internal procedures. The level of detail and precision of its management and technical and financial monitoring system with its partners meets the requirements of the MAEE. In a perspective of continuous improvement, it would be appropriate to integrate qualitative measurement indicators into the monitoring system.

Finding 5: The operating structure of local partners is composed of several levels, from the organisation's headquarters to the communities. This organisational model requires a solid communication plan, stability of human resources and, above all, an ironclad capacity building system. In this regard, local partners and resource persons emphasise the openness, flexibility, and quality of support received by UF. However, they request an increased presence of UF in the field and are eager to consolidate and develop their skills.

Finding 6: The financial and human resources available to UF are generally considered adequate to carry out the activities planned in the framework agreement. This is evidenced by the timetable for the implementation of the various activities and the use of the budget of the second framework agreement, which are generally respected by all local partners. On the other hand, the mobility of human resources, particularly at the community level, and financial resources that are sometimes considered insufficient, can weaken the process of consolidating activities, particularly in the agricultural and community education fields.

#### Effectiveness of results

Finding 7: Among the most significant results, it is quite clear from the discussions that there is (i) a strong interest in education, with parents recognizing more the importance of education and being more supportive of educating their children (ii) the establishment of constructive attitudes within communities and among youth attributable to interventions related to morality or spirituality (iii) the acquisition of useful knowledge, mainly in agriculture and education, thanks to the P.S.A program.

Finding 8: The constructive community dynamic is without question the most frequently mentioned determining factor that has favoured the achievement of the observed changes. In addition, the teaching of spiritual and moral values, education or, more generally, the acquisition of knowledge, as well as the expertise and openness of local partners.

Finding 9: The concerns expressed by respondents from the various countries of intervention are fairly consistent (i) the lack of resources (e.g., infrastructure, material, human, financial, etc.) compromises the sustainability of community schools; community mobilization and commitment are not enough (ii) young people, families and communities are looking for social AND economic integration, a need that the P.S.A program has identified, (iii) The frame of reference of UF and its partners must clarify the intentions and messages regarding the teaching of moral and spiritual values.

#### Cross-cutting themes

Finding 10: The level of knowledge of respondents concerning cross-cutting themes appeared to be embryonic. These themes tend to be perceived as theoretical concepts that are not well understood. An effort to popularize them would undoubtedly be good in order to valorise the achievements of the programs, in particular with regard to gender equality and environmental concerns.

#### Impact

Finding 11: Some signs of commitment, such as the awareness of the intervention communities on the importance of education, community mobilisation, better adapted agricultural practices that contribute to

greater food security, etc., may constitute potential sources of impetus from the perspective of sustainability of the action of local partners. However, at this point in time, the key changes are more observable for the participants in the programs and activities, while the stages of progression of the communities' development could be clarified.

### Sustainability

Finding 12: With one voice, the intervention communities emphasise and congratulate the knowledge acquired through the intervention of UF and its local partners. However, none of them say they are sufficiently equipped to take over and continue the development of their members in an autonomous and thoughtful manner. It requires continuity in terms of capacity building and support.

Finding 13: The intervention model of UF and its partners is based on founding elements of sustainability including long-term commitment and anchoring initiatives in the heart of communities. The ownership strategy, which should contribute to the empowerment of communities, could be clarified and, to achieve this, it would be wise to better define the number of communities of intervention.

- **Conclusions**

The objectives pursued within the framework of the agreement established between UF and the MAEE propose relevant responses to the issues identified in order to equip the communities and make them more autonomous in the decision-making and actions surrounding their development.

The components of the UF model fall along a continuum of capacity building for key community members and have the potential to be complementary. The thinking behind the model would benefit from further development to better express the phases of development expected by the communities supported. The monitoring system has proven to be effective in clearly demonstrating the evolution and status of financial and administrative considerations, and would benefit from including more qualitative indicators to measure changes in order to accurately and objectively reflect the progress observed among the target populations, in particular youth, including girls and women, and within the intervention communities.

UF and its local partners have been generally productive. Timetables are, on the whole, respected and results can be observed in (i) education, where the importance of educating children is increasingly recognized (ii) community dynamics, where the impact of adopting moral and spiritual values is emphasised (iii) development of basic skills, particularly in agriculture and teaching. Although they may appear marginal, some contributions are also perceptible with regard to cross-cutting themes. The latter should be more systematically taken into account in the near future, which implies a training and support effort involving all actors, including the financial partner, the MAEE.

The work of UF and its partners is based on principles of sustainability, including long-term commitment and working at the heart of communities. However, the strategy for empowering communities to make decisions about their development needs to be clarified.

Finally, considering that UF and its local partners invest primarily in capacity building, a major challenge faced by many communities is access to additional resources to meet critical needs for the sustainability of flagship initiatives such as infrastructure for community schools, access to plots and certain inputs for agricultural activities, start-up of income generating activities, etc. Therefore, a reflection on partnership options that complement the work done by UF and its local partners seems essential.

- Recommendations

Based on the findings and analysis, the following key recommendations emerge. The level of priority can be established by UF and its partners. They are presented in chronological order with reference to the findings.

UF should:

- Encourage local partners to explicitly align their interventions with national policy documents and to value their contribution to the relevant authorities in order to establish or consolidate a constructive and structuring dialogue. The dialogue should be developed with a view to official recognition of the work of local partners and lead, for example, to the certification of teachers, the certification of young graduates of the P.S.A program, and the formalization of community schools to enable them to access support when possible (school materials or supplies, etc.) (*Finding 1*)
- Promote regular consultation with relevant institutions so that the educational programs offered to children and youth can lead to recognition by the authorities. This implies:
  - Teacher certificates or diplomas
  - Certificates or diplomas of young graduates of the P.S.A program
  - This also includes formalizing community schools to access supports where possible (e.g., school materials or supplies, etc.) (*Findings 1, 9*)
- Deepen its reflection on its intervention model in order to be able to demonstrate the sequence of expected social, moral and economic changes thanks to the action of its local partners. In doing so, it will be able to clarify the messages surrounding the presentation or introduction of its programs to the communities, it will be able to place the different interventions in a more integrated perspective of community development, and it will be better able to perceive its limits (e.g. resources, expertise). (*Findings 2, 9, 12*)
- Accompanying the development of communities by stimulating their commitment and participation is a strength to be valued. That said, UF and its local partners, aware of their limitations (e.g., infrastructures, economic activities), should explore potential partnerships to be considered in order to carry out and consolidate the work carried out by and for the communities. (*Findings 2, 3, 6, 9, 12*)
- In the interest of continuous improvement and in order to value all of the work done by local partners, UF should incorporate qualitative measurement indicators into its monitoring system to assess changes resulting from capacity building and skills acquisition as well as progress toward community empowerment. (*Findings 4, 11*)
- In a perspective of equity, continuous improvement and taking into account the interest expressed by the majority of local partners, UF could seek to: (i) systematise exchange spaces between partners (ii) regularly identify the main capacity building needs of partners (iii) proactively identify themes or areas of interest to partners taking into account the proposed interventions, and share the latest studies of interest, lessons learned, mitigation measures for certain important issues, etc. (*Finding 5*)
- In the same vein, in order to consolidate the local partners' intervention model, which is anchored in the communities themselves, UF, in collaboration with its local partners, could seek to model its strategy of support and capacity building for its grassroots resource persons and encourage the sharing of lessons learned between partners, but also between communities. (*Findings 5, 12*)
- With regard to sustainability and in connection with the previous recommendation dealing with the theory of change, UF would benefit from clarifying the steps to which it intends to contribute from the perspective of communities that are better equipped and more autonomous in their development, and from providing itself with progress indicators. It would be wise to limit the number of intervention communities in order to consolidate and demonstrate the relevance of its approach as objectively as possible (*Finding 13*).
- Taking into account the MAEE's desire to see UF take cross-cutting themes into account systematically in the implementation of its activities, UF should plan to develop, where appropriate, its own expertise in this area with a view to enhancing the relevant achievements of its current programs and offering support to its local partners. (*Finding 10*)

Recommendations suggested primarily by youth interviewees:

- As an engagement strategy for youth, it may be worthwhile to provide recreational and sports facilities in communities or identify funding partners to do so.
- In order to consolidate a dynamic of sharing and exchange between community stakeholders such as tutors, a safe space could be offered to young people so that they can exchange among themselves, on their own initiative, not exclusively at the request of local partners.

To the MAEE:

- Given the number of national and international policy documents and frameworks to which NGOs must refer, it might be wise to identify priority documents that have real added value so that organizations such as UF are not subjected to "gymnastics" in trying to "check off" all the boxes when formulating their technical proposal.
- Given the MAEE's desire to see its partners, such as UF, take cross-cutting themes into account systematically in the implementation of their framework agreement, it would be wise to provide training to promote an understanding of the issues, the expected requirements and the concrete application of monitoring tools.





# Baastel

30 Years Promoting  
Sustainable Development

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