21. The "100% social link" commitment of Agence Française de Développement

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Social links are crucial for political stability and social resilience

"Social links", according to the Agence Française de Développement (AFD), can be personal, local (community-based) or national. These links are considered crucial for political stability and social resilience: when established with the consent of all individuals, they are the basis for everyday democracy from the ground up.

Social conflicts (over access to scarce resources, or personal or territorial inequalities), can erode social links and lead to political instability or even wars. Development co-operation also has an effect: any particular development project can either fuel or prevent, at least partially, this weakening of social links.

Mainstreaming the strengthening of social links into all projects

With a view to improving its impact on social links, and leaving no one behind, AFD has adopted a new global commitment named the "100% social link" (*100% lien social*). This commitment is in addition to the commitment of 100% compliance with the Paris Agreement.[1] According to this strategy, by the end of AFD's current strategic orientation plan in 2022, all projects should be compliant with the objective of strengthening, rather than weakening, social links.

In order to mainstream its "100% social link" approach, AFD is building upon its own experience. All AFD projects are already subject to a **sustainable development assessment** which embraces six dimensions, namely "sustainable growth and resilient economy", "gender equality", "sustainability of project impacts and governance frameworks", "conservation of biodiversity, management of environments and natural resources", "social well-being and reduction of imbalances" and "fight against climate change and its impacts". The AFD action plan for "100% social link" advocates using the "sustainable development assessment" in order to measure a project's capacity to strengthen social links.

The assessment should take place ex-ante, at mid-term, and ex-post, and during all the phases of project identification and approval. AFD will train project teams accordingly, and conduct a review of the project portfolio in order to identify best practices, learn from experiences and incorporate the approach into country and sectorial strategic plans.

The "100% social link" approach targets, in particular, projects that relate social inclusion to governance and democracy. However, it also involves addressing equality imbalances whenever they are related to project activities. In this respect, any project, be it in the field of infrastructure or rural development, must include objectives for building social links and reducing inequality.

Early identification of social dynamics, working with local actors and a flexible approach are key to success

Amongst the various success factors of the "100% social link" approach, the following are key:

- **Early identification of social dynamics**. AFD should rely more heavily on socio-anthropological pre-feasibility studies as these can shed light upon the social fabric and dynamics within which a project will operate, and anticipate potential changes introduced by development projects.

- **Working with local organisations** (be they local non-governmental organisations, co-operatives or grassroots organisations) is crucial for identifying potential conflicts or the dynamics of social cohesion. These organisations should be encouraged to contribute with projects or ideas on the overall strategy of any intervention. They should also be entitled to influence financing and project steering whenever possible.

- **Keeping flexibility all along the project cycle is necessary** in order to adapt the project framework to new and changing social environments.

- **Introducing social impact indicators in any logical framework**, no matter the sector or area of intervention, and collectively designing these indicators so that they fit the local context and its potential evolution must become compulsory.

- **Establishing the linkage between policy making on one side, and bottom up and grassroots initiatives, on the other**, during the early stages of project identification, and later during the evaluation phase, is also critical.

What next?

The AFD "100% social link" team will conduct workshops in order to design an operational policy and guidelines for its implementation. This will include a methodology for context analysis and a set of standard indicators to be adapted for each field project. The guidelines will also identify tools for community and policy maker involvement, drawn from previous experiences.

The AFD "100% social link" team will also design and conduct a training session, directed towards a target group of 30 individuals among key staff in the agency. The team will then replicate this session at various levels including, most importantly, at field level with AFD's local agencies.

Finally, the AFD "100% social link" team, together with field officers and staff of the evaluation and strategy department, will design a series of in-depth evaluations of feasibility studies, in particular for those contexts and projects that are particularly representative of AFD's core activities.

Notes

[1] The AFD committed that 100% of its projects would comply with the Paris Agreement (contribute to partners' Nationally Determined Contributions).

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