INNOVATION DAYS – Experience Grid

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Note: this experience has been documented in details in this report (French only): https://drive.google.com/file/d/1WyF_bxp7SOlztmZoF9RIfC7NNJjd9bba/view?usp=sharing

1. Name of the innovation	Ensuring sustainability by accompanying local CSOs towards autonomy

2. Context and issues

Six years before the end of PROJEG (2008-2020), on question was raised: the sustainability of partner-CSO's interventions in the long term after the withdrawal of Aide et Action. The aim of this program was to strengthen the capacities of civil society organizations in their role as partners of public authorities and actors in the elaboration and monitoring of public policies and the defense of human rights.
CSOs had to continue to play their role and address these issues beyond the programme and the end of AFD's funding. This is how the strategy of accompanying these CSOs towards autonomy came about.

3. Type of innovation (tick the relevant box)

Technological or practical innovation (tool, practice, technique, etc.)	
Institutional, organizational or methodological innovation (regarding processes, organizational models, relationships between stakeholders, project management, etc.)	X
Political innovations (new policy measures, regulations, rules, etc.)	

4. Description of the innovation

What did the experiment consist of?

Discovery and knowledge: Once the decision was made to work on accompanying the project's CSO partners towards autonomy, one of the first steps was to discover and provide the project team with knowledge about the concepts of 'autonomy' and 'accompaniment'. The aim was for the project team to understand the implementation principles and requirements of these concepts, and to question the gap between current working methods and the approach of accompaniment towards autonomy. One of the key elements was the formalisation of knowledge on the different levels of development and autonomy of CSOs (emergence, maturation, etc.) in order to develop an analysis grid. Awareness-raising and sharing of these concepts was also carried out with the CSOs that were to participate in the process.

Reorganisation of the team: Accompanying towards autonomy meant readapting the PROJEG team by supporting the team members to reposition themselves no longer as "coordinators" but as "accompaniers" (adaptation of the job description, bringing the team to revisit their posture, their tools and work practices). For the team members, it was a question of moving from mobilisation, leadership and decision-making towards accompanying CSOs.

At the CSO level: It was first necessary to ensure the voluntary commitment of CSOs to the process. Then to bring the CSOs (who were the objects of the accompaniment towards autonomy), to understand, co-construct and validate the processes (criteria for choosing the CSOs to be supported, contractual tools such as conventions and framework agreements) and methods of accompaniment (identify their needs in terms of capacity building, support plans, etc.).

At the level of the project's environment: The process and approaches for accompanying towards autonomy were shared with all the actors and partners in the territories, in order to demonstrate

transparency and to establish the credibility of the process.

The accompaniment process itself: the process consisted of 7 steps:
1. Definition and validation of the principle and approach to accompaniment
2. Definition of criteria to characterize and measure CSO's degree of autonomy
3. Selection of CSOs to be accompanied
4. Accompanying CSOs in defining their vision, and in defining the strengthening/capacity-building needs to achieve that vision
5. Arbitration of strengthening needs and negotiation of accompaniement
6. Implementation of accompaniement/autonomisation plans
7. Assessment/evaluation of the accompaniement

How is it innovative?

At the organizational/methodological level:
- By repositioning the project team members as coaches/accompaniers/advisors and no longer as decision-makers;
- By separating the accompaniment function from the evaluation-control function within the project team;
- By the acquisition of new skills and the recognition of these skills that has enhanced the valuing and recognition of the professionalism of the project team;
- By defining/visualising the different stages in CSO's progression toward autonomy, and the competences to be acquired at each stage (identification of 3 degrees of autonomy with related competences: Emerging, Intermediate and Mature);
- By the real autonomy of CSOs vis-à-vis the donor-partner (= AEA), and by the recognition of the right to make mistakes;
- By a greater demand for democracy within CSOs, with the potential conflicts that it brings.

At the level of the process: a learning-by-doing, inclusive and transparent process

5. Results/changes

For CSOs:
- The ability to self-determine by making decisions and arbitrating between choices
- The ability to define their own strategies, operating rules, and develop the competence to implement them
- Freedom and responsibility in implementing one's choices and in being accountable

For AEA:
- Ensure that the actions we initiate continue with or without the presence of AEA
- Acceptance of the change of status/posture of the project team, and a broadening of their skills

6. Elements to capitalise/document

Attention points:
- This process is a real "political" choice, it changes the project implementation system and it has repercussions on the positioning of human resources. It is therefore important that it be validated upstream and, if possible, from the very begining of the project.
- In terms of accompanying CSOs, it is important to support them in building their vision so that it can be operationalised: this vision must be specific, time-bound, measurable and assessable (create performance indicators to check the relevance and coherence of activities, and see how CSOs/collectives are progressing towards autonomy and moving from the emerging stage to the intermediate stage and finally to maturity).
- Such a process takes several years to complete (at least 3-4 years).

7 Who to contact for more information

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