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REPORT

DOCUMENTATION OF EXPERIENCES AND PRACTICES OF PROVIDING SUPPORT TO LOCAL ACTORS WITHIN THE AIDE ET ACTION INTERNATIONAL NETWORK

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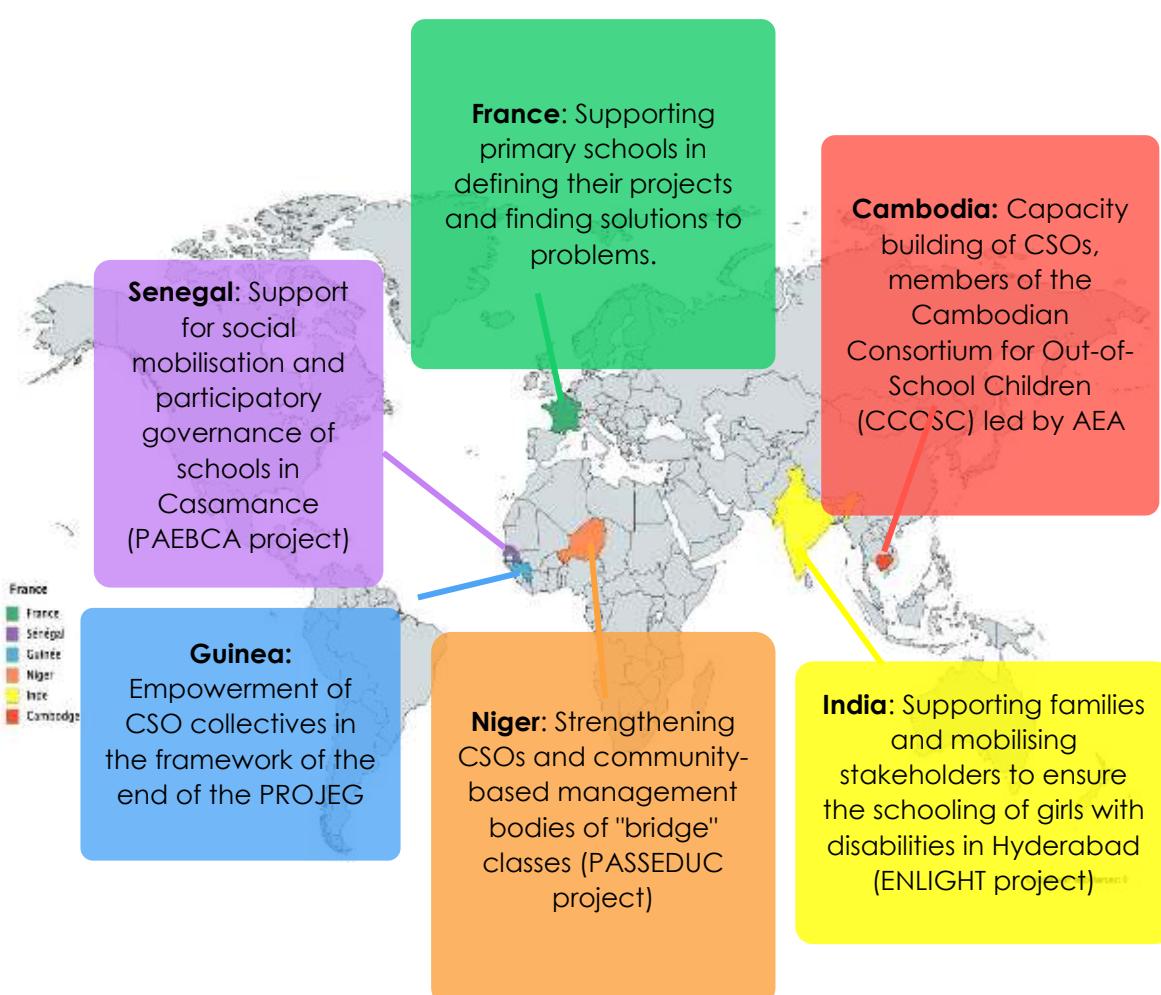
Executive summary

An association promoting development through education, Aide et Action (AEA) has been working since 1981 for access to quality education for all in 19 countries in Africa, Asia and Europe.

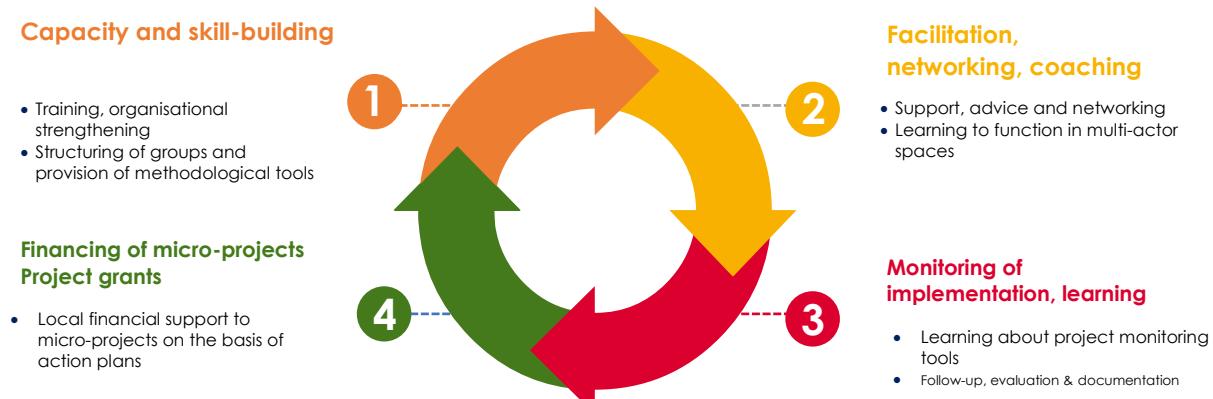
In 20 years, the approach that AEA uses to provide support to local actors, which is at the core of its principles, has never been the subject of a global documentation process. This first multi-country documentation initiative focused on different practices used to support local actors, which are at the heart of the association's identity and approaches in all its territories of intervention.

By documenting this approach, AEA wished to: (i) use it as a model of meaningful support practices and share them within the association, in view of knowledge management and capacity building; (ii) formalise its philosophy and its "trademark" in terms of support to local actors; and (iii) promote its experience and know-how vis-à-vis technical, financial and local partners.

The six experiences identified for the purposes of this documentation work are as follows:



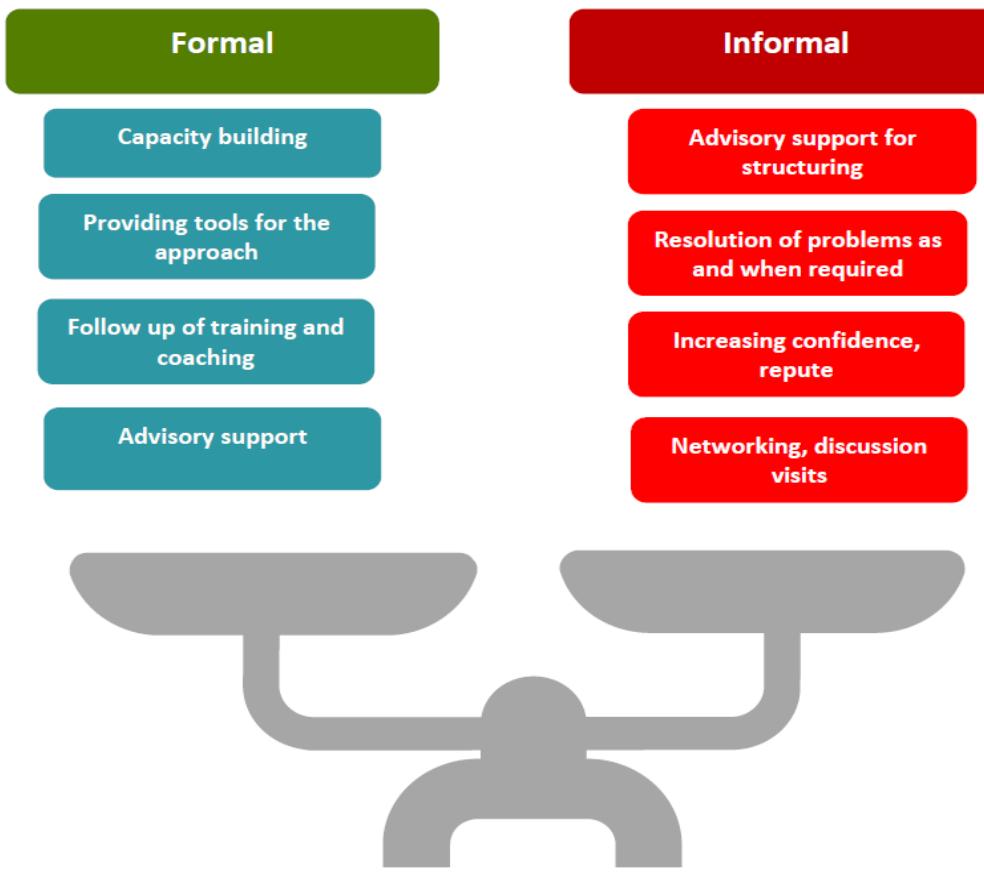
The **concept of providing support to local actors** refers to a process of capacity building, providing tools and technical support to local stakeholders with a view to their empowerment, for their autonomy. The aim is to give local stakeholders a greater freedom of choice and action. At the end of the process, the supported stakeholders change their position, moving from the status of support receivers to that of partners, with equal dignity and authority, and become involved in a new dynamic of co-decision and co-management of development projects.



The study carried out an analysis of the specificities and differences of the six experiences.

What is common to all the projects is: A long and well-established practice of community-based approaches, which make AEA a structure that starts at the grassroots' level, at field-level, from the stakeholders' needs and capacities, in order to promote education, whatever the projects, modes, targets and modalities of intervention. In most actions, the provision of support is rarely formalised as a project activity in its own right.

What differentiates the experiences and impacts the forms of support is: the degree of innovation, the duration of the intervention, the preexistence of territorial network and partners, the target groups for whom support is provided, and the share of formal and informal support. These differences, as well as the institutional context, human capital/skill profiles and the positioning of AEA teams, offer a very rich panel of experiences and practices.



There is a set of common elements in the **projects' support approaches**. The primary purpose of providing support is to build capacities. Long-term partnerships between AEA and CSOs, which are the most common form of support, eventually lead to a shift in the form of support, from formal to informal support and, concomitantly, a positioning of AEA more as a "resource partner" than as an organisation providing support. Monitoring is more focused on monitoring results than the capacities of local actors. It is carried out throughout the project implementation process. The non-renewal of partners raises the question of AEA's added value when the road travelled together is long. The more informal support grows, the more support activities focus on different forms of advisory support and networking.

Some **striking specificities** were noted. They open up prospects in terms of development mechanisms and change-oriented approaches. Capacity building systems based on the pooling and sharing of cross-cutting experiences, in a learning-by-doing approach favours the sustainability of learning networks and cross-cutting support based on the pooling of expertise. Change-oriented approaches and the monitoring of changes put the actors back at the heart of the process, rather than the results of the activities. The dynamics developed give new meaning to projects and promote quality support for stakeholders and their organisations, provided that these paths of change are monitored and self-assessed by the stakeholders.

The PROJEG project (Concerted Programme for Capacity Building of Civil Society and Youth Organisations) in Guinea is the only one that is formally dedicated to

providing support with the aim of empowering the entities or groups being supported, and to move towards their full autonomy. The lessons learned from the experimentation undertaken in the framework of the project show that support plays a crucial role in the sustainability of the support-receiving entities and groups, and that its quality depends on several factors. These include the political will to provide support, the clarification of roles within the AEA team, between project coordination and project implementation, as well as the commitment to ensure the accountability of support receivers for the results achieved.

There is also the need to ensure that actors themselves request support and clearly define the scope of the support they want, based on a diagnosis and a needs-assessment process using a reference framework. In addition, the relationship must be contractualised, the support plan must take concrete shape, along with its objectives, content, progression, stages, duration and respective responsibilities, and finally, a stance of empathy, respect, neutral observation and detachment from the results must be adopted.

Quality support depends on a number of favourable conditions.

The political will to make the provision of support a strong hallmark of activities calls for the definition of a framework and the mobilisation of adequate resources to provide quality support. Such a political will requires, first of all, getting to know each other, trusting each other and wanting to work together. There is also a need to encourage the actors to ask for support and to clearly define the scope of the support they want. The diagnosis and assessment of capacity building needs will help to establish a relevant support plan, with stages, including deadlines and a phased exit.

In order to contractualise the relationship, a support plan has to be drawn up, including its objectives, content, progression, stages, duration and respective responsibilities.

Roles will have to be clarified within the project coordination and implementation team; support and monitoring/assessment activities for the project and the goal of empowerment/autonomy have to be asserted at the support level.

The monitoring and self-assessment of the activities of both parties should also be carried out to assess the degree of progress achieved in order to readjust the support plan, if necessary.

The end of the support contract should be given concrete shape through a final self-assessment and a joint reflection on the new status of the relationship between the parties. The role to be assumed for disseminating the project and transmitting the capacities acquired should also be included in these reflections, over and above the sustainability of the skills acquired by those being supported.

All in all, AEA's support to local actors is mainly focused on capacity development. By placing the actors at the heart of the process, this often not very formalised support is based on the pooling and sharing of experiences. Its quality depends to a large

extent on a strong political will to provide support by giving those being supported responsibility for the results to be achieved.

The documentation work has highlighted a vast diversity of innovations and practices, which is linked to the high degree of decentralisation of AEA. This observation opens up the possibility of productive discussions and exchanges within AEA, focusing on the challenge of sharing knowledge and maintaining a dialogue between teams that had limited interaction until now.

AEA's innovations and best practices with regard to the support of local actors that have been identified and documented constitute a resource that can be used as an aid for the self-training of project managers and teams and as an input for the association's knowledge management platform. They will be supplemented by the documentation of other experiments and experiences (especially in the field of providing support to institutions, local authorities or groups of children/youth) to better reflect the diversity of AEA's expertise.

However, the provision of resources and tools alone cannot suffice to disseminate the innovations and experiences within AEA. Facilitation work will be necessary, in particular to create links between teams that do not know each other well, work in very diverse contexts and do not always share the same language. Several modalities could be envisaged for facilitating such interactions.

The tools developed in the framework of this documentation study can be used as a basis to set up support processes for project teams to experiment with new practices, formalise work tools based on their experience and improve the quality of AEA's projects.

The results ensuing from the documentation of the approaches used to support local actors are also a basis for pooling expertise and setting up networks for the exchange of experiences and practices, including moments of sharing and learning. Several modalities could be envisaged (organisation of experience-sharing seminars, creation of communities of practice, two-way exchange visits, etc.) in connection with the major activities in the framework of AEA's 2020-2024 strategic plan.

The CCOSC consortium's capacity building mechanism as developed by AEA in Cambodia, based on peer-to-peer training spaces and on an supported learning process, is an example of knowledge management that could be adopted across-the-board (1) within AEA by the teams of the different countries and (2) in other AEA countries of intervention by CSOs and other actors supported by AEA across the same territory.

The innovations and best practices resulting from the documentation study should feed into AEA's communication programmes to make its brand name better known to the general public, technical and financial partners and the different stakeholders within the educational ecosystem in the organisation's countries of intervention.

Ways of doing things, results and impacts are all sources of arguments that can be used for advocacy, debate and influencing decision-makers.

1. Introduction

Aide et Action (AEA) is an association for development through education that has been working for access to quality education for all since 1981 in 19 countries in Africa, Asia and Europe. In 1998, AEA transformed its action paradigm from a model of direct intervention to a model of providing support to local actors, who are in charge of their own educational projects. In each of its countries of intervention, AEA therefore carries out projects to support actors of various kinds. This documentation project has mainly focused on small and local level actors (School Management Committees, school teams, parents' associations, CSOs or groups of CSOs, children's councils/parliaments or participatory bodies, etc.). The support provided to other types of actors (local authorities, institutions, etc.), which is practiced by AEA in some countries, is excluded from the scope of this study, although references may be made to it.

In 20 years, this approach, which is at the heart of AEA's principles, has never been the subject of a global documentation study. This first multi-country documentation initiative thus focuses on **practices of providing support to local actors**, which are the hallmark of the association's identity and approaches in all its territories of intervention.

Through this documentation project, AEA wishes to:

- 1 Identify and document meaningful support practices and share them within the association, in view of knowledge management and capacity building
- 2 Formalise its philosophy and its "trademark" in terms of support to local actors
- 3 Promote its experience and know-how vis-à-vis technical, financial and local partners.

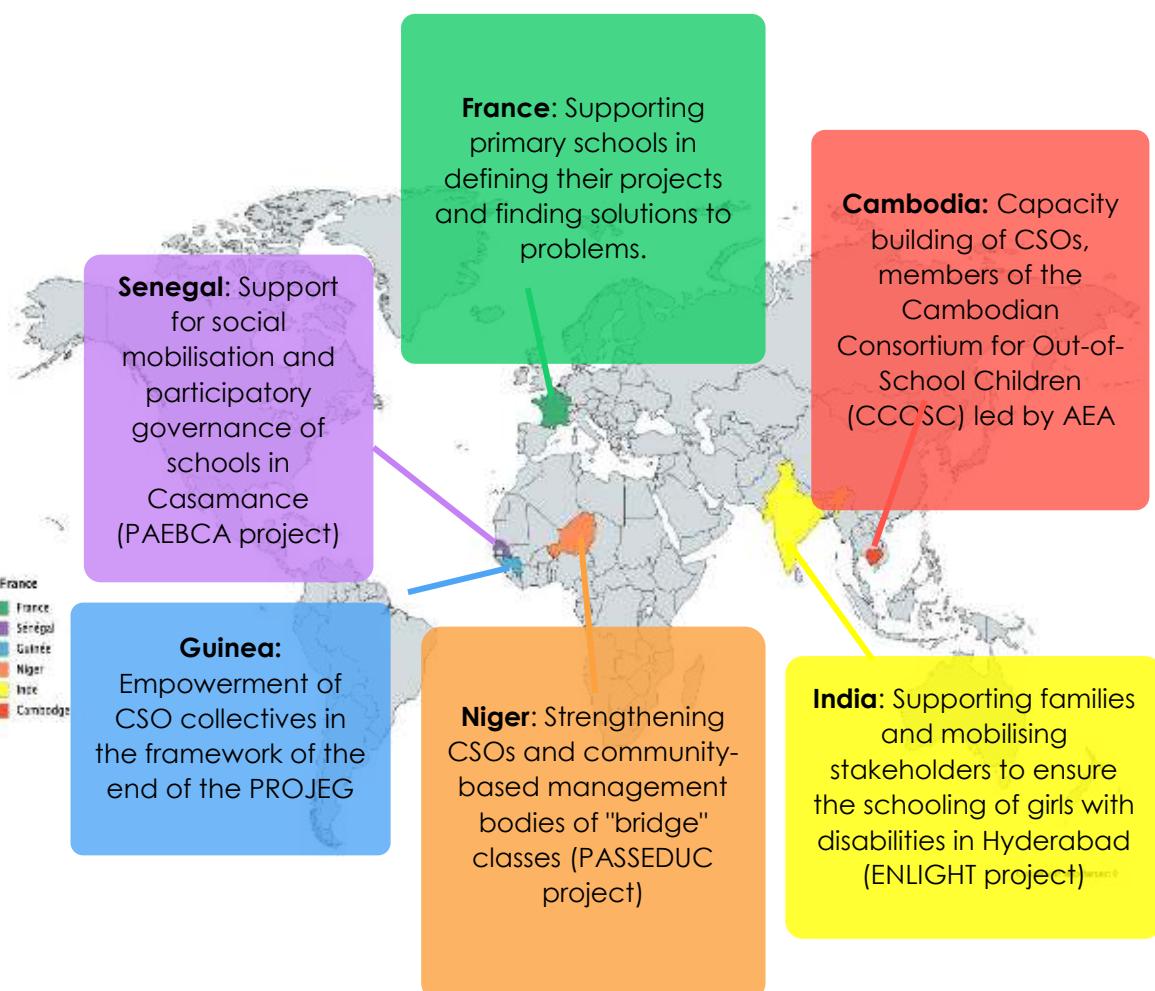
This is all the more important since AEA is engaged in a process of transformation, one of the challenges of which is to strengthen cross-cutting work between the various territories of intervention and ensure that there is more "in common" within the association.

The consultants' team therefore examined practices of providing support within the network, with a special focus on 6 targeted experiences. The terms of reference of the documentation study evolved over the course of the association's internal reorganisation and the reflections shared with AEA's Research, Evaluation and Learning Manager.

The participatory methods developed during the documentation process and the field visits to each of the experiments targeted by this study were extended to other countries and experiences. The Covid-19 pandemic slowed down the process and two collective documentation workshops in West Africa and South East Asia, initially planned for March and April 2020, could not be organised. The team of consultants had to work on the basis of written contributions from the teams and telephone interviews.

The six experiences that are the subject of this documentation study were selected on the basis of the following criteria:

- The representative **diversity** of AEA's areas of work, practices and actors
- **Representativeness:** Actions emblematic of AEA's values
- The **pedagogical value:** The opportunity and benefits of sharing them within the network
- The focus on the **capacity building** and empowerment of actors and groups of actors.
- The **duration of the experiments** (long or short term) and their degree of maturity and replicability.



Aide et Action's history

AEA's historical profile is punctuated by four main phases:

- The first is characterised by infrastructure construction activities and, a few years later, by the opening up of schools to communities.
- The second phase, known as "Regionalisation and school projects", called the charitable approaches used into question and moved towards a development-based approach.
- The third phase of internationalisation focused on decentralising the association, establishing autonomous legal entities and adopting a project-based approach.
- The last phase of organisational transformation and capitalising on experiences brings AEA's timeline to a close.

Phase 1 - 1988-1996: Building schools and opening up to communities

During this phase, AEA's interventions focused mainly on infrastructure construction activities and the provision of facilities to increase the rate of access to basic education. Hence, local actors remained mute beneficiaries, although they could have played a leading role in the development of the education sector. AEA also focused on its sponsored schools and the development of a strategy to open schools up to the communities, in order to encourage people to send their children to school.

Phase 2 - 1997-2004: Regionalisation and school projects

At a meeting held in Kara in 1997, local staff called the charitable and top-down approaches of field actions into question and asked AEA to engage in a development-oriented approach, based on an analysis of the actors' demands and needs in the areas of intervention.

The 1998 États-Généraux (AEA's practice of consulting stakeholders) initiated a process of withdrawal of expatriate programme managers, the training and empowerment of local managers and the start of regionalisation, with the creation of the Africa region in 2002.

Numerous approach-related changes were then initiated in the field, albeit disparately in the countries, depending on the degree of resistance to the new directions adopted and the departure of expatriate managers.

Autonomous "programmes" were set up in West Africa with a programme-oriented development approach and the establishment of the "Africa Direction" (management office) as an autonomous entity to manage programmes in Africa.

The start of the "school project" approach was the catalyst for changing the mode of intervention in West Africa. It also marked a new era in the context of the decentralisation of education.

During this period, all the countries carried out in-depth "country analyses" which made it possible to identify educational issues and prioritise areas of intervention. The

resulting action plans were developed with institutional and community partners. This period saw the association change its stance and made it possible to institute dynamics aimed at providing support to partners and communities.

Phase 3 - 2004-2019: Internationalisation

In 2004, AEA's second États-Généraux – held to reflect on the evolution of the association and its areas of intervention, the development of the political culture and greater resource mobilisation, as well as the strengthening of its associative life – marked the beginning of its internationalisation (decentralisation of the association and creation of autonomous legal entities).

In 2007, AEA shifted its modalities to a project-based mode in order to raise funds better in a context of decreasing resources and the expansion of the structure through its internationalisation.

This trend was less pronounced in Asia, particularly in India, which maintained, on the one hand, its capacity to raise funds for project development and, on the other hand, its capacity to allocate own funds to projects.

The 2009-2012 period saw the start of field operations in France and the import of support practices. This period was also marked by the emergence of flagship projects, in particular the support of school projects in the Val-d'Oise and the support of the city of Argenteuil in the development of its Local Educational Project.

Since 2013, AEA has been working on adapting its economic model to improve its capacity for action in the field, in the framework of a "experiment, highlight, deploy" approach so as to provide support to stakeholders who take the lead for their educational projects which are vectors of social change in their territories.

Phase 4 - 2019-2020: Organisational transformation and documentation projects

In 2019, the third Etats-Généraux focused on the transformation of the organisation, the return to a single organisation and the reaffirmation of its stance in terms of providing support. At the same time, AEA initiated a study to document the support provided to groups of actors towards their empowerment and autonomy within the framework of the Concerted Program for Capacity Building of Civil Society Organisations and Youth Organisations in Guinea (PROJEG, Programme Concerté de Renforcement des Capacités des Organisations de la Société Civile et de la Jeunesse Guinéenne).

During this period, AEA underwent a shift: (i) from local grassroots support to diversified support (CSOs, institutions, etc.); (ii) from very operational support to more strategic support (advocacy and influence); and (iii) from a direct approach (by field agents) to providing support to organisations that themselves support the actors in the field (associations, NGOs, etc.). This transition is marked by the implementation of flagship projects, such as the Programme for the Improvement and Diversification of Educational Options in West Africa (PADOE, Programme d'Amélioration et de Diversification de l'Offre Educative en Afrique de l'Ouest).

2. Concept of providing support to actors:

2.1. Definition based on local languages

From definitions, associated images and expressions of the verb "to support" ("accompagner" in French), in 8 of the local languages of the areas where AEA teams work, in Benin, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, France, Laos, Madagascar, Senegal and Vietnam, we were able to identify common points that make sense. The objective was not to come up with a common definition specific to AEA but, based on key words and evocations in local languages, to propose a meaning for a word that is widely used in the development vocabulary, by identifying the actions and values this concept conveys.

The idea of **walking together**, of going forward is present in most definitions, which includes the idea of a process of movement across space/time without necessarily limiting it. **The path and sharing remain central.**

The idea of a starting point, an **impetus** and help is found in many African definitions (taking me and putting me on the right path, helping me to go further, supporting me, leading me, guiding me).

The idea of a **common purpose** and an interdependent relationship is much more present in South-East Asian definitions, where the answer to the question "to do what" is included in the concept (travelling, working together to achieve a goal, mutual support of partners in the effort to achieve common goals, affirming interdependence and willingness to give up autonomy when necessary for the common good).

There is a cultural and semantic distinction in the connotations of the French term "accompagnement" (provision of support) between countries that use English (Asia) and those using French (Africa and Europe) as their working languages, which enriches the concept and also bears the imprint of cultural differences in the relationship to knowledge. The English translation adopted by AEA of the French term, "accompagnement", is "partner support".



In English-speaking countries, the very concept of support refers to the notion of partner and the notion of common goals. Contractual relations are based on the expertise of each party. Support is therefore more informal – it is provided as you move forward, through the very conception of the project, innovations, new tools and methods and AEA's expertise in education.

In Khmer, one of the meanings of support is "Pheaki Dai Kou" which translates as "to unite", "to support each other". As a pair that unites their individual strengths and potentialities to achieve the goal they have agreed on. If one side fails, so does the other. The idea of solidarity and mutual respect, of a common goal are included into most definitions of support in Asia.



In French-speaking countries, where the cultural relationship to knowledge is more top-down and unequal, support, through capacity building among other things, presupposes that those being supported have to learn and progress before becoming partners.

Support therefore refers to a process of capacity building, the development of tools and the provision of technical support for local stakeholders, with the aim of developing their autonomy.

2.2. Meaning and scope of support

It is important to revisit the issues raised by support in order to see how they make sense and what is "common" within AEA.

They have been analysed with the following governing principles in mind:

- The relationship and interactions between **the support-providers and the support-receivers**, initiated along the same trajectory and influencing each other. How does this relationship evolve? What is the content of the support provided along the way? What changes do both parties undergo and what is the impact in terms of social change for the target groups?
- The aim of the support provided in terms of the **actors' empowerment and autonomy** from the point of view of the support-providers and the support-receivers. This question brings us back to the issue of the sustainability of actions taken.
- The favourable conditions required for quality support (profession/posture, mode of operation of support activities).

Beyond the hows and methods of providing support to local actors, the study therefore focused on the meaning, the path and the duration.



3. Vision, mission, principles and values

AEA has a highly decentralised operational model with regional entities in Africa, South Asia, South East Asia and Europe. Projects are entirely conceived and driven at the level of each country or sub-region.

AEA is guided by a strong will to be part of positive change in the world through education. To this end, AEA has set itself:

3.1. A vision

"Aide et Action works for a world where dignity is assured for all, women, men and children, thanks to education – a lever for human development."¹

AEA has adopted an approach that places actors at the heart of change by encouraging schools to define their own vision. The Project for the Improvement of Basic Education in Casamance (PAEBCA, Projet d'Amélioration de l'Education de Base en Casamance) provided support to 70 schools in the Sédiou and Ziguinchor regions for the adoption of a Change-oriented approach (COA) in their planning. This involved thinking about and discussing complex issues (hygiene, citizenship, the fight against child marriage and school violence) in the post-conflict context of Casamance. This approach, which differs from traditional planning approach (logical framework), is carried out in 5 stages:

1. A context analysis: Determining key actors, stumbling blocks and levers in the environment and the way these actors operate
2. Defining a vision: What will the actors have contributed to in the next 5 to 10 years?
3. Tracing the paths of change: The challenges to be taken up, the steps to be taken on the paths leading to [the resolution of] each of these challenges
4. Defining activities and strategies to support change
5. Organising monitoring-evaluation: How should progress on the paths of change be monitored and what lessons can be learned for our project?

3.2. A mission

"The Association is a development organisation whose aim is to advance the cause of "Education For All", primarily basic education, for all vulnerable populations whose fundamental right to quality education is jeopardised or not met, in order to enable them to choose their future freely. The Association acts wherever it considers it necessary and feasible, including in crisis and emergency situations and with migrating populations."

¹ For a more in-depth analysis on this point, see: Compendium of practical information sheets: Case study: A path that teaches a lesson. Elements illustrating AEA's trademark based on experiences in Senegal.

3.3. Principles and values

Its commitment and actions are based, above all, on the values of:

Respect: AEA respects the educational choice of parents for their children. This is evidenced by its support to non-formal education in the Diourbel region of Senegal with the support of the Daaras² through the construction of shelters for Koranic teachings and the provision of books and mats for the marabouts³.

AEA has also supported associative schools in Thiaroye, Senegal⁴. AEA's support to these schools, which are of a third kind, i.e. schools that are neither formal nor non-formal, such as street corner schools, has:

- Improved school results from less than 20% to 55% for the Elementary School Leaving Certificate and 45% for entry to the sixth grade
- Enabled the recognition of these schools by government authorities (education inspectorates and local authorities)
- Improved the quality of teaching and learning through teachers' training, the provision of textbooks and school furniture (benches, teacher/principal's desk).

Equity: AEA also promotes the values of equity and inclusion in its interventions, as evidenced by this example of support to ethnic minorities in Cambodia: "With adequate language support, the drop-out rate of ethnic minorities has decreased and ethnic minority children can both complete their education along with their Khmer peers and, as educated youth, participate in and contribute to national development".⁵

Solidarity: The School Supplies Sales Project (PVFS, Projet de Vente des Fournitures Scolaires) had been implemented in all the schools in which AEA intervenes in Senegal. It provided support for the schooling of thousands of students to enable them to have school supplies on time and teachers to start classes without delay.

"The lack of school supplies is a factor in failure and dropping-out. The exorbitant cost of these materials made it impossible for parents of poor students to obtain them. This project ensured the availability of school supplies in the schools benefiting from the NGO's interventions, in the most isolated areas and at an affordable cost for all. As a result, they were easily available to all pupils. Thanks to the establishment of school supply outlets, pupils with poor parents had access to teaching and learning." **Abdoulaye Samb, PAEBCA project team member, Senegal**

² Koranic schools

³ Summary Study 2004/EA Aide et Action/Senegal/Basic Education 10 years/alternative models /2012

⁴ A community school is a school that stems from a local initiative, created by a neighbourhood association. Its vocation is to take charge of the education of those children who did not have access to formal schooling or who left it very early.

⁵ The Cambodian Consortium for Out of School Children (CCOSC), "Multilingual Education (MLE)". Page 2, Point 4. Results of the implementation. Paragraph 2. Lines 10-15

Autonomy of implementation and accountability: Through its projects, AEA has instilled a value of integrity in those receiving support. For example, the Project for the Improvement of Basic Education in Casamance (PAEBCA, Projet d'Amélioration de l'Education de Base en Casamance) financed the action plans of 140 schools and educational institutions and supported the organisation of assessments and accountability. These moments of sharing enabled the schools' management and participation bodies (MPBs) to report on the management of the funds allocated to them, and teachers to present reports on school results. This created a climate of trust between parents and teachers, and between the MPB members and their constituencies. The key principles of accountability and the associated collective decision-making were embraced by all to ensure that they worked well. In the implementation of the PAEBCA project, each of the project's beneficiary schools developed and implemented its action plan autonomously, while AEA provided methodological support and resources.

3.4. And key principles:

- **Shared responsibility**

In its initial years of intervention in Senegal, AEA, as a "school builder", was already ensuring that schools were themselves responsible for their management. Parents had to contribute materially for the construction (gravel, water, site supervision, etc.), a necessary condition for the start of the works financed by the NGO.

The Education Project in the Dakar Suburbs (PEBD, Projet Éducation dans les Banlieues de Dakar) made parents responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of school infrastructure. The empowerment of parents is much more sustained in the PAEBCA project, where the community bears full responsibility for the community monitoring of construction work and maintenance of school infrastructure and equipment.

In Vietnam, "parents are more involved in the school's educational activities. Thanks to project activities, parental participation has been strengthened. Parents participate as pedagogical assistants to support multilingual education, contribute to the development of the school (school construction, school gardening, construction of indigenous cultural houses), and provide funds, firewood and rice while preparing clothes, books and notebooks for the children at the request of the school".⁶

- **Solidarity with vulnerable groups**

Public awareness is raised through a variety of means, including educational sponsorship and by acting on several economic (poverty alleviation) and social factors (combating child labour, violence against children) that have an impact on education.

⁶ Promoting Ethnic Parents' Engagement in Pre-school and Primary School activities in Tam Duong District, Lai Chau province (Project: VIE018 (2016-2018)), Column 3. The changes this has produced, Paragraph 4, Lines 17-22.

Damnok Toek (DT, which means a drop of water in Khmer) is a Cambodian organisation working with vulnerable children and their families. Since 1999, DT has been running various projects with the support of AEA that directly assist vulnerable children and their families, including two non-formal education programmes that provide opportunities for children working in the streets to access education and reduce the risk of illegal migration. One of DT's effective approaches is to provide a means of transport (a large truck) to take children to and from school at no extra cost to their families to ensure their safety.⁷

- **Inclusion**

AEA has embraced an affirmative action (positive discrimination) approach to support children:

- With disabilities:

"In Cambodia, reports from District Training and Monitoring Teams (DTMTs) indicate that 90% of teachers who have received training on inclusive education have implemented appropriate pedagogical tools to promote the quality teaching and a child-friendly environment. They particularly noted that they demonstrated good classroom management for children with disabilities and improved lesson plans so that they became more effective".⁸

Adaptations such as ramps, specially adapted latrines for access and privacy between girls and boys, and accessible and appropriate playground equipment make a difference for children with disabilities attending school.⁹

- At risk of dropping out:

In Senegal, the community-based academic support initiated in the PAEBCA project is a factor of inclusion, insofar as children with learning difficulties living in a context of poverty follow a normal school curriculum.

- Facing difficulties with the language of instruction because they are from ethnic minorities:

In north-eastern Cambodia, schools are often difficult to access for poor ethnic minority families in rural areas, and learning the language of instruction is difficult for these children. Multilingual education offers children the opportunity to begin school in their mother tongue, which then serves as a bridge to learning the national

⁷ The Cambodian Consortium for Out of School Children (CCOSC), "School Infrastructure improved to enable access to all OSCs". Page 5, Point 6. Case Studies. Paragraph 1. Lines 2-22

⁸ The Cambodian Consortium for Out of School Children (CCOSC), "School supervision and monitoring DTMT". Page 3, Point 4. Results of the interventions. Paragraph 3. Lines 43-54

⁹ The Cambodian Consortium for Out of School Children (CCOSC), "Special and inclusive education". Page 1, Point 2. Implementation Process. Paragraph 2. Lines 5-12

language¹⁰ and access to education in formal schools and/or non-formal educational institutions¹¹.

● Exemplarity and rigour

AEA strives to put its principles and values into practice in the way it conducts projects and what it transmits to actors.

An exemplary posture, a credo: Sharing and openness

Mr. Ibrahim Diedhiou has been the principal of the Seydou Kane school in Ziguinchor for 2 years. Before that he was a teacher in a school where the headmaster inspired him with his sense of commitment and charisma. We never felt that the headmaster took a decision all by himself.

Mr. Diedhou relies on a collaborative approach with the teaching team and the SMC. "With the team, we work together, we think together and no one is excluded from the search for solutions." He emphasises the importance of setting an example and considers that **he is as accountable as everyone else**. Thus, for his coordination mission, he monitors the deadlines for the implementation of all aspects of action plans and questions the actors about their commitments. He does not set himself any deadlines to set an example.

He also wants the whole neighbourhood to be informed and consulted on school life. He has involved all the various bodies in the neighbourhood (imam, clergy, women's association, etc.), which are represented on the management committee. In this way, decisions are collegial and everyone is informed. According to Mr. Diédhiou, "This openness and circulation of information with a view to making decisions is one of the keys to the community's involvement in the life of the school."

AEA is an NGO that goes out and stays in the field as close as possible to the communities.

Key takeaway

What binds AEA together is a common culture and a common ethic in the way it works and supports local actors around the world.

The conviction that education changes the world, solidarity with the most marginalized, respect for dignity, equity, and its other principles are strong values that mark its identity.

Principles of action: Making local actors responsible for educational issues and participation in decisions that concern them, offering quality education to all.

¹⁰ The Cambodian Consortium for Out of School Children (CCOSC), "Multilingual Education (MLE)". Page 1, Point 1. Introduction. Paragraph 1. Lines 1-10

¹¹ The Cambodian Consortium for Out of School Children (CCOSC), "Multilingual Education (MLE)". Page 1, Point 2. Implementation Process. Paragraph 2. Lines 5-6

What about the path for support-providers and support-receivers?

To start with, AEA coopts its partners ensuring that they espouse the same values and principles. This has an impact on the relationship between those providing support and those receiving it, and it seals the relationship from the start. Although the social mission's significance is not explicitly stated, it is implicit in all AEA's actions.

Testimony

"We work for children and we believe that without education we cannot change the world and achieve development. If you are not completely convinced of this, you can't work with AEA. If many came but didn't stay on, it is because they were not convinced, like we are.

Abdoulaye Samb, PAEBCA project team member, Senegal

4. Analysing the specificities and common features of the 6 experiences

Depending on the context, the main points of differentiation in the projects, which determine their approach rationale, are between:

4.1. Innovation and Replication

● Innovation

Innovation is understood as "**a process that adds value or provides a solution to a problem in a new way**".¹² To be innovative, a product, an idea or an approach must first and foremost be new in the context in which it is applied, providing a novel answer to a development issue.

Two flagship projects stand out because of their ambition to innovate and their inclusion in an action-research approach. In both cases, the innovations lie in the projects' managerial approach:

The Concerted Programme for Capacity Building of Guinean Civil Society and Youth Organisations (PROJEG), Programme concerté de Renforcement des capacités des Organisations de la société civile et de la Jeunesse Guinéennes) in Guinea which, after 10 years of supporting civil society groups, has dedicated the last phase of the project (2016-2019) to the empowerment of these groups.

- The PROJEG project falls under the innovation category of an "Internal and autonomous process implemented by a group, a community or a structure to reform its organisation mode". Support here is mainly focused on the link between the support-providers and support-receivers, and on the change of "profession/job" and stance of the person providing support. A joint change dynamic is therefore established.

The Cambodian Consortium for Out-of-School Children (CCOSC)¹³ project developed in Cambodia brought together 19 organisations between 2014 and 2017 because of their expertise in acting on all components of out-of-school children across the country.

- The CCOSC falls under the innovation category of a "New type of partnership developed between groups/communities and external actors/stakeholders in several institutional, economic or social fields to improve their living conditions". In this project, the support provided focuses on creating a synergy in expertise and the development of collective capacities.

¹² Definition of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

¹³ See tool, information sheet on "Consortium building around a cause in Cambodia".

● Replication

AEA has built its reputation on its capacity to be a driving force for innovations that have often spread and entered public education policies such as basic community schools, school management committees or school governments in West Africa. AEA has also produced many methodological guides¹⁴ that facilitate implementation by local actors, whether they are from communities or CSOs. In addition, project managers have a proven expertise in these approaches, which they replicate and adapt to new contexts.

In these highly tool-based approaches, implemented in several types of organisations, technological and practical innovations have been developed. For example, over the past five years, Change-oriented approaches (COA) have been adopted in France and in several West African countries. They have changed the support process by **putting actors and not activities at its heart**. Projects are now part of an approach aimed at ensuring the sustainability of social change. They have gradually modified the meaning and vision of support for AEA.

4.2. Duration of interventions on the field and functioning by project or programme

A second aspect is the support framework that differentiates the approaches applied.

● Duration of interventions on the ground

If the action is part of the framework of a project that is largely financed by the same donor, the duration is a decisive factor. In the first phase of 3 to 4 years, the support is reinforced and formal, and focuses on the development of organisational capacities and the tools required to apply the approach.

However, many projects are extended 2 or 3 times and support practices are also extended throughout these phases, without any great variation in the objectives, partners and targets of the support. In fact, results-based management leads projects not to take risks and to continue with the same partners rather than opting for new civil society organisations, of which there are, however, an increasingly large number. In some cases, the programme focus changes, but partnerships remain the same, without much openness to other CSOs.

For example, the Programme for the Improvement and Diversification of Educational Offer (PADOE, Programme d'Amélioration et de Diversification de l'Offre Educative), an ambitious sub-regional programme in West Africa, has lasted more than ten years, with three phases, within the framework of a programme agreement between AEA and the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, aimed at improving and diversifying educational options in West Africa through the development of local management and the steering capacities of education systems, along with the

¹⁴ See bibliography at the end of the report.

promotion of alternative education models to take care of those excluded from the formal system. This programme remains a flagship programme in terms of innovation and the transformation of public policies. The relationship between support-providers and receivers has remained stable: it has enabled a real transfer of skills to all groups of actors and real ownership of the approaches, to the extent that other NGOs/CSOs are claiming ownership of the conception of these innovations. AEA's added value may even be called into question in the new programmes where AEA continues to work with the same partners, for two reasons:

1. The NGOs/CSOs have seen their reputation grow thanks to their participation in PADOE, with other donors seeking them out, supporting them and building their capacities, if only by opening up the way to other rationales and ways of doing things. For instance, in Benin, the NGO, EEB, has internalised PADOE's approaches and promoted them by submitting projects in response to other calls for projects in the field of education in its areas of intervention; it has obtained funding from the Swiss co-operation agency for school projects in its areas of intervention.
2. Monitoring the progress and changes within the supported NGO, which requires at least a diagnosis of the NGO's skills and new needs in each new phase for it to become autonomous and take over from AEA in the field, as well as a blurring of the respective roles.

However, we could also say that if some of the small CSOs that AEA has supported end up enjoying a good command over the educational processes initiated by AEA, it is a great success in terms of support and empowerment. However, in this case, AEA's initial role, especially in terms of conception and support to actors, becomes invisible and generates frustration in those providing support.

In Dioula (Burkina Faso), there is an expression that refers to "walking with a hyena" or "endless support".

This refers to times when it is difficult to leave each other, for example, with women who never finish chatting or children who never finish playing when they come home from school. It's a matter of toing-and-froing: I'll take you back and then you bring me back? In these cases, a third person intervenes to put an end to this "endless support", before the hyena – who is greedy and patient – jumps on its prey.

Souroukou Blasirali



Walking with a hyena

This issue has been raised in different ways by several long-standing partners:

- Either the issue of AEA's added value is raised by some CSOs who consider themselves partners and who, if there is still a requirement for support, would like it to focus on any final needs they may have, in order to be recognised as full partners (capacity-building in terms of monitoring/evaluation, advocacy, development of their own economic model, etc.).
- Or it is not even raised, as is the case in India, where support is considered more as a pooling of expertise and where AEA's role is more informal, in the conceptualisation of the project, its monitoring and so on, if required, as the project progresses. In both cases, the projects are funded by AEA, which also assumes coordination and monitoring functions.

● **Project or programme**

The framework also plays a decisive role because the project's time span is often not compatible with the time it takes to bring about change and raises the issue of the autonomy of a territory to manage its projects autonomously for quality education for all.

The typical example is India, which operates large "umbrella" programmes with a differentiated territory-wise approach. The same approach has worked for a long time in AEA on all continents, but the requirements of donors for targeted projects and the reduction of AEA's own funds have resulted in a project-based approach. The programme approach, which is no longer in force in Africa, but is still common in India, facilitates a holistic, local development approach, with education as the entry point and, as time goes by, addresses a certain number of related territorial development issues that hinder children's schooling (development of community schools, isolation, travel to school, lack of resources for parents, etc.).

"The priority activities in most of the school projects we have developed are: the implementation of an income-generating activity to finance the school, raising parents' awareness about the schooling of girls, raising parents' awareness about the monitoring and attendance of students, retraining teachers, providing textbooks, guides and teaching materials.

Through the implementation of this experience, I am proud to be an Aide et Action employee because I witnessed the progress made in all the schools. I still remember the cereal bank of Gao Harodo, which contributed a lot to the school's development".

Mahamadou BORI, PASS EDUC Project Manager and former zone coordinator of Filingué, Niger

The project or programme based approach and the time available therefore also influence the strategies and modalities for working with communities, and the sustainability of changes.

- **Strategies for working with communities: Entry point through schools or community development?**

To ensure the sustainability of its projects, in the Enlight project, AEA India favours a community-based approach rather than a school-based one.

"In India we enter through the community because the project will last only 5 to 10 years. So this is how we ensure sustainability, by generating lasting changes in the community. For example: changing the way the community looks at children with disabilities so that they are better accepted, facilitating knowledge of administrative procedures, providing basic skills to children, improving the health of children and reducing the impact of their disability on their daily life, etc. These are the results that will remain.

Sajeev P. Balan, Programme Development Officer South Asia.

In Senegal, in the PAEBCA project, or in Niger in the Pass Educ project, it is the school that is used as the entry point into the community, which leads to the community getting involved in school projects in order to manage a given aspect or to improve the retention of children in school and the monitoring of children's education.

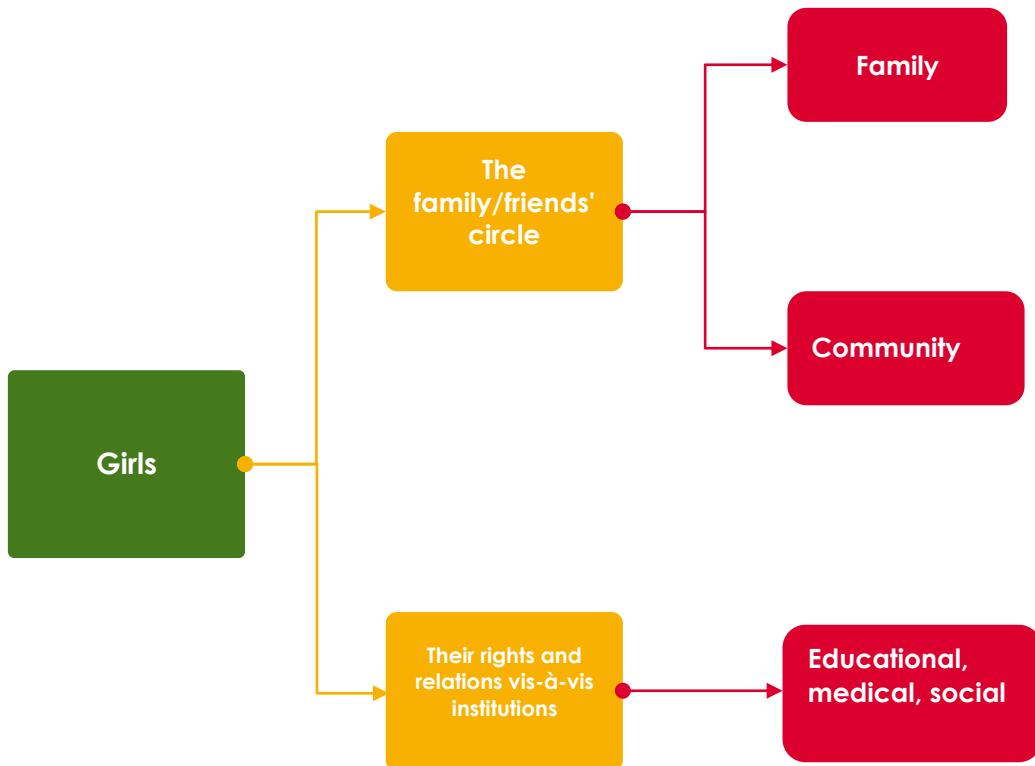
4.3. Different target groups

The support provided differs according to the target group.

- **Social and personalised support for final beneficiaries**

An example of a holistic and personalised approach: In India, the Enlight project aims to provide access to quality education for vulnerable girls in 9 cities with different target groups: girls with disabilities, living in shantytowns, from families affected by HIV, etc.

The intervention is carried out either directly by AEA or with a partner. AEA's added value is acknowledged, because of its expertise on education issues and its role as a programme leader/donor. It is well-rooted in the local associative network, along with longstanding partners with complementary expertise (rural development, gender, disability, etc.). The support provided is based on the child's needs.



In order to promote the sustainability of the actions and guarantee a community environment favourable to their inclusion, awareness-raising activities and support groups for children and parents are organised, to bring about a lasting change in the community's mindset.

- **Support for collectives, organisations, etc.**

Support can be of two different types:

Support for an organisation (a school, as in France or Senegal, or an association, as in Niger): In the first case, the focus is on building the actors' capacities as such and much more on supporting them in defining their strategy, organisation and operations.

Support for a group (a group of CSOs in Guinea, a consortium of NGOs in Cambodia, a diversity of educational actors in a given territory in the Educational Coherence project in the Val-d'Oise region of France): In this case, the emphasis is more on the multi-actor approach and the creation of links – setting up networks.

The boundary between the two modalities is not always clear, as the support provided to a group of actors and the individual support of certain actors who are members of the group can be combined (formally or informally), as is the case of the CCOSC in Cambodia.

4.4. Direct or third-party support (delegation)

For many years AEA has directly steered the dynamics of actors in the field. The wave of getting people "to do it themselves" and the size of projects led AEA to rely on local CSOs and given them support in intervening directly with the beneficiaries. The support links vary according to these parameters and the coordination work burden, as well as the donor's function.

"The image of donor that has been projected on AEA due to the perception that actors have of its support model, formerly of the "welfare state" type, has sometimes blurred its image and status as an international CSO which, like local CSOs, has the same stakes in terms of mobilising resources for its social mission and in terms of its positioning in relation to financial institutions or partners. Today, this has led AEA to involve local CSOs in setting up projects and in resource mobilisation.

For example, in the framework of PassEduc in Niger, local CSOs have played an active part in the project's development – from collecting basic data to preparing the budget and its allocation. Today in PassEduc, the local NGOs, ONEN and RECAC, are the project's implementing partners and not service providers. This is the result of "empowering" and horizontal support, where the more complex role of supra-donor and support provider is less noticeable."

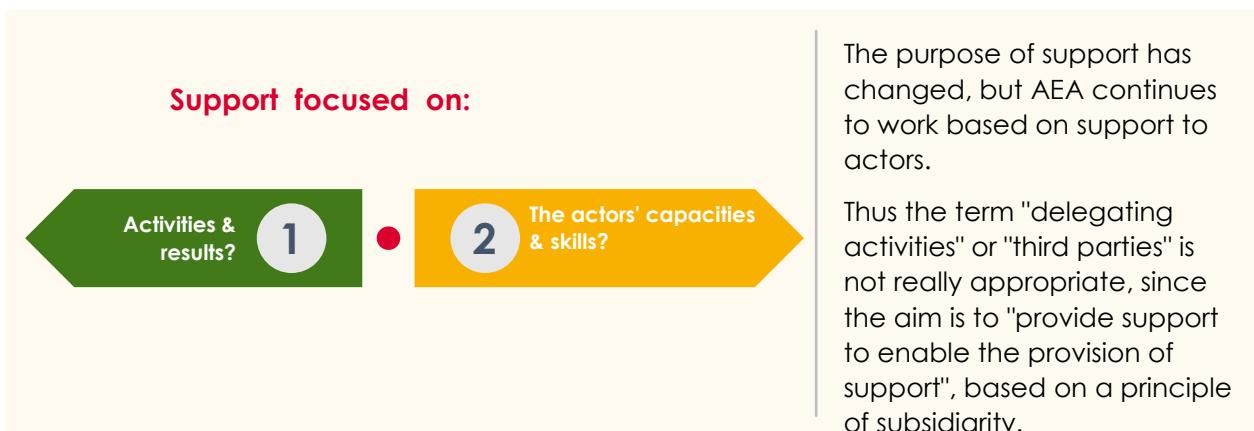
Charlemagne Bio, Project Monitoring & Evaluation Manager in the Sahel territory.

In addition, decentralisation and the emergence of a committed civil society have multiplied the number of interlocutors and their diversity.

"Little by little, we have moved away from the "do it with them" approach to the "make them do it" approach and a culture of development: for example, in the 1990s, the South Madagascar zone had 100 employees, including field agents housed in the communities. Currently, we are just 3 employees for the whole of Madagascar. We entrust the local partners to do social mobilisation and project management, and we organise capacity building on a case-by-case basis." **Jocelyne Rakotondrazafy, Mission Development Manager, Madagascar-Indian Ocean**

Diversification of partnering actors and their organisation methods:
"Earlier, we worked mainly with School Management Committees; now we work with a wide variety of actors, including civil society organisations, organised in platforms or groups, institutions, local authorities, and so on."
Jocelyne Rakotondrazafy, Mission Development Manager, Madagascar-Indian Ocean

The purpose of support has therefore changed:



The purpose of support has changed, but AEA continues to work based on support to actors.

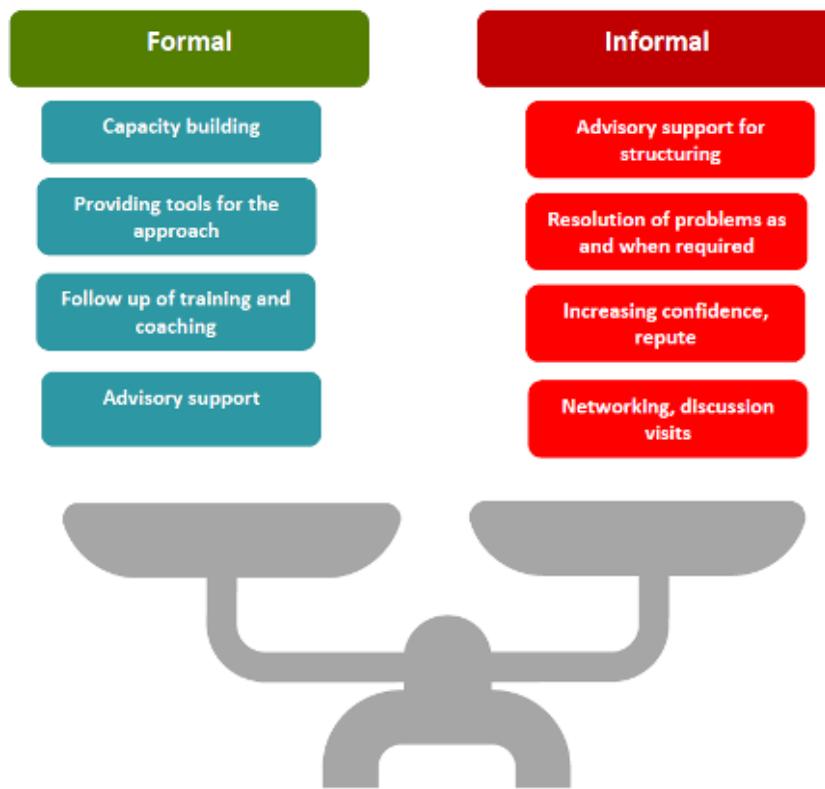
Thus the term "delegating activities" or "third parties" is not really appropriate, since the aim is to "provide support to enable the provision of support", based on a principle of subsidiarity.

"**Delegating**" support implies no longer providing support to schools or communities and handing over this function to a CSO. Our work then becomes "providing support to enable support", i.e. we support and strengthen CSOs (which become our primary targets) to carry out their mission and support actors as the latter wish and according to their own objectives (and not according to a format and ToRs predefined by us). The expression "delegate" is misleading, because it supposes that we stop providing support, when in fact we are rather in a broader perspective where we are distancing ourselves and changing the purpose of our support: no longer schools or communities, but CSOs or local authorities (based on a principle of subsidiarity). We then largely stop defining the contents of the action to be carried out by the CSOs receiving our support, vis-à-vis the communities/schools involved. It is this change that PROJEG has made and that has allowed it to avoid falling into a functioning where it "delegates" a role, and to guarantee the quality of the support. However, this presents two risks: losing direct contact with the field, and losing our added value by being reduced to no more than "doubling up as a financer".

Mathieu Cros, Research, Evaluation and Learning Manager, AEA

4.5. Formal and/or informal support relations

The descriptions of support approaches encourage us to differentiate between formal, "visible" and explicit support, which implies accountability, but also everything that is informal, beyond what is stipulated, where the quality of interpersonal relations is often at stake. AEA employees estimate that 50% of support is provided informally.



An informal relationship develops in a personalised, often interpersonal bond of trust, where advisory support is defined more as coaching, which, beyond project implementation, makes it possible to:

- Respond quickly to partners' questions, often in support of the development of their activities, but also of their organisations, especially since being an AEA partner buttresses their reputation and accelerates their development.
- Support the practical application of the knowledge acquired during the training sessions.
- Build confidence in individual and collective capacities.
- Open up address books and expand the network of informal partners.
- Organise convivial and festive events or activities (school competitions, etc.).

The relationship with time plays a key role in informal support. It develops along the way, in line with the questions raised and outside of the institutional and structured project meetings. Some actors speak of an "out-line" which implies availability and spontaneity in the support relationship.

The time devoted to formal or informal support activities shows the predominant place of capacity development, followed by personalised support and advice, and the development of networks between stakeholders.

Obviously, the dividing line between the two types of support is not clear-cut, so what may be formal in one case is considered informal in another and vice-versa.

For example, regarding issues related to:

- Networking: In Cambodia or Guinea or France, this is a very formal role AEA plays, but it is rather informal in India or the rest of Southeast Asia.
- Capacity building: This is formal in Niger/Senegal, for example, but much more informal in India, where it is not always explicitly planned for in projects.

4.6. Providing support to organisations: Bilateral, personalised or cross-cutting relationships by promoting collaborative peer-to-peer discussions

AEA is renowned for its participatory social mobilisation methods and for its multi-actor approaches in all its interventions.

In many projects, whether the targets are collectives, School Management Committees or any other target group, support and follow-up are part of bilateral and personalised relationships. Annual inter-entity discussions are organised on assessment and evaluation issues, but, apart from the CCOSC¹⁵ in Cambodia, AEA favours personalised monitoring and support relationships rather than inter-group or collective support, which generates mutual assistance and networking.

Networked operations

Bilateral personalised support relationship



A&AI

¹⁵See Practical Information Sheet 2: Peer-to-peer training system engineering

Examples

In the Pass Educ project in Niger, AEA's role is to play the conductor of the orchestra and harmonise the various partners on the issue of instituting bridging classes to reintegrate out of school children into the formal system. AEA therefore coordinates RECAC's work, which manages social mobilisation and family monitoring, along with ONEN's, which manages bridging class teachers and their training, School Management Committees, which manage bridging classes, etc.; and forums for steering/discussions/coordination between all these structures are also available.

Within the PROJEG framework in Guinea, inter-group discussions are organised.

However, the only project that has developed a formalised support strategy based on sharing the direct expertise of Consortium members and the development of network capacities is CCOSC in Cambodia, which relies on transversality to ensure the sustainability of the achievements by inter-group discussions and collaborative approaches.

Key takeaway

What is common to all the projects: A long and well-established practice of community-based approaches, which, whatever the projects, modes, targets and modalities of intervention, makes AEA an organisation that starts at the grassroot level, in the field, with groups of actors and their needs and capacities, in order to promote education. In most actions, it is only rarely that the provision of support is formalised as a project activity in its own right.

What differentiates experiences and impacts the forms of support: The various forms of support are often intertwined and depend closely on the local institutional and socio-cultural contexts, and AEA's development in each country. However, a number of criteria make it possible to specify these.

Innovation/Replication	<p>2 projects stand out for their design in terms of managerial and new project innovations:</p> <p>The PROJEG in Guinea, which focused on providing support to collectives (groups) to ensure their empowerment and autonomy and on upgrading the profession of providers of support services.</p> <p>The CCOSC in Cambodia, which has structured itself as a consortium based on the expertise of its members in order to address the issue of out of school children in the country.</p> <p>The other projects are based on well-established and approaches over which the association has a good command, along with the contribution of more technical and methodological innovations. However, COAs (change-oriented approaches) are introducing a new paradigm in the quality of the support provided to actors, since they put the actors rather than the activities at the heart of projects and are based on the rationale of bringing about social change.</p>
Project/Programme	<p>Entry through ambitious long-term programmes promotes a holistic approach to all the problems to be solved for ensuring access to education. In this case, partners specialising in other fields (gender, disability, local development, income generating activites, etc.) are often sought. In the project-mode approach, the process is more targeted and focused on education, with a limited duration, and is renewed in phases.</p>
Target groups	<p>If the project's target group is a category of children, such as in the Enlight project in India, a holistic approach is used, covering children and including their entire environment and institutions.</p> <p>The educational ecosystem approach is the most common, and the more ambitious a project is, the more it reaches out to a large number of actors with multiple activities, the more intense coordinating and monitoring activities are likely to be, and the results are likely to take precedence over local support.</p>
Diagnosis of problems/skills/actors	<p>If a project's entry point is through the diagnosis of the educational ecosystem, it focuses more on problem solving by stimulating actor-based dynamics. Other ways have also been developed, where the entry point is through:</p> <p>The pooling of expertise and mapping of skills for the CCOSC project</p> <p>An empowerment/autonomy reference frame for PROJEG</p> <p>The development of a vision and changes in COAs</p>

Results/actors	Support that stems from a diagnosis of ecosystem related issues focuses more on the project's results. In such cases, where actors are at the heart of the support provided, activities focus on their skill development and the enhancement of their potential of bringing about social change and transformation.
Delegated or third-party vs. direct operations	After years of "working with" communities, AEA has moved to the phase of "getting them to do it". It has changed its "role" from facilitating local dynamics to supporting local organisations and CSOs/NGOs, who are empowered to facilitate these dynamics. The purpose behind providing support has therefore changed. In many cases, AEA supports the development of the skills of intermediary structures and it no longer directly supports community dynamics. Multi-actor approaches, which are one of its areas of excellence, operate on the subsidiarity principle. However, there is a risk of confusion between roles, the loss of visibility and of proximity to communities.
Formal/informal	Informality accounts for about half of the support processes. The longer the support lasts, the more informal the process becomes. Initially focused on capacity building activities, it evolves towards proximity support and advisory activities, more in response to the target organisations' development needs than to project objectives. Not much has been said about informality, and yet, it has to do with the quality of support.
Pooling of experience/bilateral relationship	AEA tends to favour a bilateral approach, organisation by organisation, in its support relationships. The consortium organisation in Cambodia leans more towards support focusing on peer-to-peer learning.

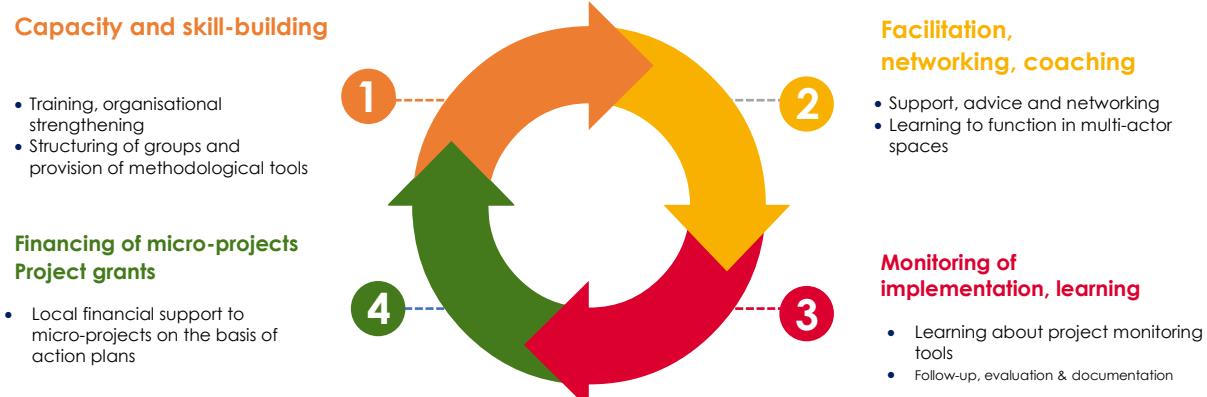
5. Approaches for providing support

The diagnostic phase

In all cases, the diagnosis involves stakeholders and partners. Actors-based versus issues-based approaches lead to very different support rationales and methods. Four main modalities are at work:

Typology of diagnosis	Approach	Inferred support modalities
An analysis of the existing educational ecosystem	Starts with the problems, with objectives to achieve the project results	The conception of solutions is jointly constructed, with support focused on the implementation of activities and on the project's results.
A approach aimed at bringing about changes in the educational ecosystem	Starts with the shared vision of the stakeholders, outlines priority paths for bringing about the changes needed to achieve this vision.	Support focuses on actors and on the monitoring of changes, as well as on the transformation of the educational ecosystem.
An approach centred on the actors' expertise in order to cover a cause holistically	Starts with skills mapping to respond to the global nature of the problem.	Support focuses on results and the pooling and sharing of experiences.
An approach based on the actors' skills	Starts with a reference framework of the desired degree of empowerment/autonomy of the actors and positions them accordingly. Contractualises the relationship on the basis of needs for support.	Support centered on the actors becoming empowered/autonomous with a view to transforming support provider/receiver pairing.

Formal support service functions have been grouped into 4 main types of activities:



5.1. Capacity building

Capacity building, including the provision of tools and resources for action, accounts for more than 50% of support activities, whether formal or informal. Some CSOs with whom AEA works have been partners for more than 10 years, so issues such as content, diagnosis of needs, ways of training project beneficiaries have been at the basis of the reflection process.

Typology of training actions:

- **Technical training**

Most of the projects develop fairly technical training courses, which are:

Specific to the project's tools: Training on school regulations, management rules and procedures, tools and procedures used by the project, based on procedural manuals and methodological guides

For example, in France:

In order to facilitate discussions between groups of children and young people from different territories in France and Africa, but also between teachers and facilitators, AEA has developed a collaborative web platform that enables schools to discuss and cross-reference issues specific to each territory (sustainable development, intercultural, citizenship and solidarity related issues, for instance). Training on the use of the web platform was imparted to the teachers and educational facilitators in charge of coordinating the discussions between the different schools.

General: On institutional and organisational capacity building, communication and advocacy for CSOs, organisations such as school councils.

In Senegal, school management bodies and the role of the communes are highly structured. Each school has to set up a management committee, and technical and more generic training courses complement each other to go beyond strictly project related needs and build the capacities of the actors sustainably.

Personally, Aide et Action's training has changed my life. With 17 dependents and my security guard's salary, I learned to anticipate and plan my expenses. Earlier, around the end of every month, finding the resources to buy the missing bag of rice used to become very difficult. Now I can manage my expenses and plan purchases, thanks to AEA's training on how to manage the school's management committee, which I chair. **Sadia Sissoko, Seydou Kane School Management Committee President, Senegal**

- **Training on innovations and new tools**

After experimenting with new approaches, methods and tools, these are then disseminated widely through action-training. The teams test it out too and, if necessary, they are provided support in implementation (co-facilitation of the initial work sessions, close monitoring, collective feedback on experiences, etc.).

Examples

A tool: In India, the government has developed a Child Competences Assessment (CCA) tool. The assessment is carried out when children join school. COMMITMENTS, Aide et Action's partner, has adapted it to better identify the needs of girls with disabilities, who are provided support within the project framework.

Using this as a basis, AEA proposed to define an individualised Education Adaptation Plan, aimed at defining the objectives for the child's educational progress, taking into account his/her disability. The plan is shared with all those who contribute to the achievement of these objectives: teachers in the formal school, the head of the after-school Child Support Centre set up by the project, and the parents; this plan is then used to monitor the child's progress.

This initiative has been welcomed by COMMITMENTS as part of AEA's trademark: "AEA has brought elements of educational expertise to the Enlight project: for example, the "individual education plans" for children".

An approach: In France and West Africa, AEA has introduced Change-oriented Approaches (COAs).

This approach, focused on actors and not on activities, has undoubtedly transformed the way organisations are supported and how they develop a common long-term vision and prioritise the changes to be made in order to realise it.

- **Training for new positions**

When projects recruit new profiles, tailor-made training courses for the job are designed and developed.

Examples

In Senegal, with co-financing from the communes, the PAEBCA project developed positions for community relay. After their recruitment, these individuals were trained to carry out project activities. Their professionalisation stood guarantee for the project's sustainability, since the communes have understood the ensuing advantages and, within the limits of their means, will ensure the sustainability of these relays.

"We were trained in the functioning of community management bodies for schools, administrative and financial management, social communication and change-oriented approaches, and we were given the necessary training materials and also certificates endorsing our experience".

A community relay for the PAEBCA project

In Cambodia, one of the CSO members of the CCOSC, Youth Star, developed volunteer community-based positions. Recruited from universities for a renewable one-year period, an immersion phase in the field and then training through practice in schools, provided by their predecessors, enabled them to carry out their pedagogical and social communication work in the communities.

Portrait: Un Panha, Youth Star volunteer



Panha is a 21-year-old girl who has just graduated as an agricultural engineer.

She chose to do a year of volunteering with Youth Star because she loves the company of children and wanted to gain experience to find a job.

Youth Star came to the university to present volunteering opportunities, and then to make sure that young people were motivated, Youth Star took them on a tour of village communities.

For the past 3 months, Panha has been living in the Youth Leaders' house in the heart of the community in Kampong Thom province.

She has been trained on her tasks, in terms of pedagogy and observes the teacher carefully when she is in the classroom. As for facilitating Youth Clubs, the volunteer who preceded her had shown her how to proceed. Youth Star does a follow-up regularly and provides support in her mission. So she feels comfortable in her work.

"What motivates me is to see the change in the children. They are motivated, go to school regularly and like it. The parents have also understood the importance of school.

At my level, what has changed is that I can share and express my feelings, as I was too reserved earlier. I feel useful now and I have learnt to pay attention to others. I know that when I go to look for work at the end of my voluntary work, I will find it easier because I have self-confidence and communicate easily now."

● Learning from examples:

For years, AEA has been promoting active play-based pedagogical methods, cultural early-learning activities where the child is at the heart of the learning process. These methods – initially designed for children with disabilities or underachievers at school or demotivated pupils – are gradually gaining ground among traditional teachers. These alternative methods, as well as school management systems that work with the community but also with school

governments and pupil-managed organisations, are leading to significant changes in teaching methods. The teachers' curiosity is aroused, especially as the opportunity to teach differently is demonstrated by example, particularly in the inclusive approaches to education promoted by AEA.

Example

In Pass Educ in Niger, the methods used in bridging classes for the reschooling of children and their reintegration into the formal system have gained momentum, thanks to an inclusive approach, which consists of setting up bridging classes within the premises of primary schools.

Testimony: "*What motivates me the most is the way of teaching, which is not the same as in the formal school. They don't have the same teaching qualities; in two years these children can express themselves better than the others and in one year they have reached the third-grade level. Little by little, we adapt our methods to get better results and to make the children more motivated and self-confident.*"

A bridging class teacher

● Peer-to-peer training

The support relationships within AEA are more frequently bilateral and hardly ever implemented institutionally, focusing on the exchange of experiences and collaborative and networked practices. Meeting spaces are dedicated far more to project monitoring than to the exchange of experiences.

However, the CCOSC project in Cambodia has engineered its capacity building system on peer support.¹⁶

In Laos, Village Education Development Committees (VEDCs) are the formal system for implementing a community management approach in schools. This system is supported by the Ministry of Education and Sports in order to involve the authorities of each village in engaging in community mobilisation to improve the quality of education. In one project, AEA worked with 29 villages in Vientiane and Oudomxay provinces.

"When we conduct training, we invite VEDC members from many villages from the same district and nearby. This gives them the opportunity to share their experiences, exchange information, and learn the advantages and disadvantages of school management from VEDC members from other villages in order to enhance their vision and the quality of their school in their School Development Plan."

Vithanya Noonan, Country Director, AEA Laos

¹⁶See Practical Information Sheet 2: Peer-to-peer training system engineering

5.2. Advisory support and networking

Advisory support and monitoring account for more than a third of support activities. AEA's teams offer this service formally during monitoring missions with regard to the management of activities and the project's management, as well as in their capacity as education experts who, due to their considerable knowledge of the field, are a resource for encouraging CSOs to open up to other experiences.

"AEA has played a very important role in the development of our education programmes because it brings us a lot of ideas (e.g. it has helped us develop an electronic library, accelerated classes, school enrolment campaigns and better classroom organisation). As its employees have visited many schools, they see what works and advise us when they visit us for follow-ups." **A team member from Damnok Teuk, Cambodia**

However, a large share of these services is devoted to informal support for the structure and its development, as soon as a relationship of trust is established. The growth of structures due to the reputation acquired through participation in projects funded by technical and financial partners from the North, involvement in national education policies and their territorial representations call for long-term and localised support. Remote support works in most projects. Peer support and peer counselling (Facebook groups, Whatsapp) has developed in Cambodia due to the collaborative approach developed.

Networking is done either through organised meetings or on an informal basis.

AEA's long experience in the field, as well as its cross-cutting monitoring and support activities give it the opportunity to bring actors together who, at a given moment, raise the same questions as other groups. The "resource person" role is part of the informal support.

In the CCOSC project in Cambodia, the function of putting people in contact with each other is systematised through field visits and learning groups based on a given category of out-of-school children (street children, children with disabilities, migrants, etc.). Visits to the areas where actions are being carried out by one of the consortium members are followed by a working and discussion seminar related to the subject of the visit.

The Consortium's "migrant children" component is led by Friends International. "We share similar situation concerning migration in the different places the partners come from. We gain experience, try to document the best practices we have. We share and train people. We mobilise the concerned countries' governments – it is a way of raising their awareness to better support migrants." **A member of the "migrant children" component.**

AEA also supports networking with institutional partners at all levels, especially to promote "small CSOs" and organise advocacy.

"Participation in the Consortium gives member NGOs, especially the smaller ones, opportunities to join regional networks or attend some international workshops on the issue of migrant children in Thailand." **A member of the "migrant children" component**

5.3. Financial support

● Micro-projects

Beyond project financing, AEA sets up budgets to finance micro-projects in a very operational manner.

Very often, in the implementation of action plans, it is minor material constraints that hinder their achievement. AEA is close enough to schools and communities to be able to go beyond major works (construction or renovation of schools, motorbike supplies to community centres, etc.) to modestly finance the daily needs of schools, such as cleaning materials, buckets and bins to improve hygiene, or squares to facilitate learning during tutoring.

Testimony: "In Senegal, in science we do more theory than practice. But last year, thanks to AEA, we were able to go to the science and technology block to be able to use the equipment. We would not have been able to move these classes without AEA. This enabled the students to be more motivated in science subjects." **Teacher in charge of the Science Club at the CEM Bloc Village secondary school**

Some teams go further, since it is the communities themselves that allocate the funds and monitor and evaluate the micro-projects funded.

In 2003-05, the Madagascar Centre team established a flexible fund called "Tahiry Tosika" available to actors in the neighbourhoods of the capital, Tana. The aim was to involve neighbourhood actors both in the jury of the small project funding committee and in project monitoring and evaluation. Everyone played the game! **Jocelyne Rakotondrazafy, Mission Development Manager, Madagascar-Indian Ocean**

Supporting these micro-projects is an opportunity for pedagogical work, providing support for the project approach, organisation, monitoring, from implementation to management, including reporting to communities and the Management Committee.

5.4. Monitoring, evaluation, documentation

- **Pedagogical monitoring**

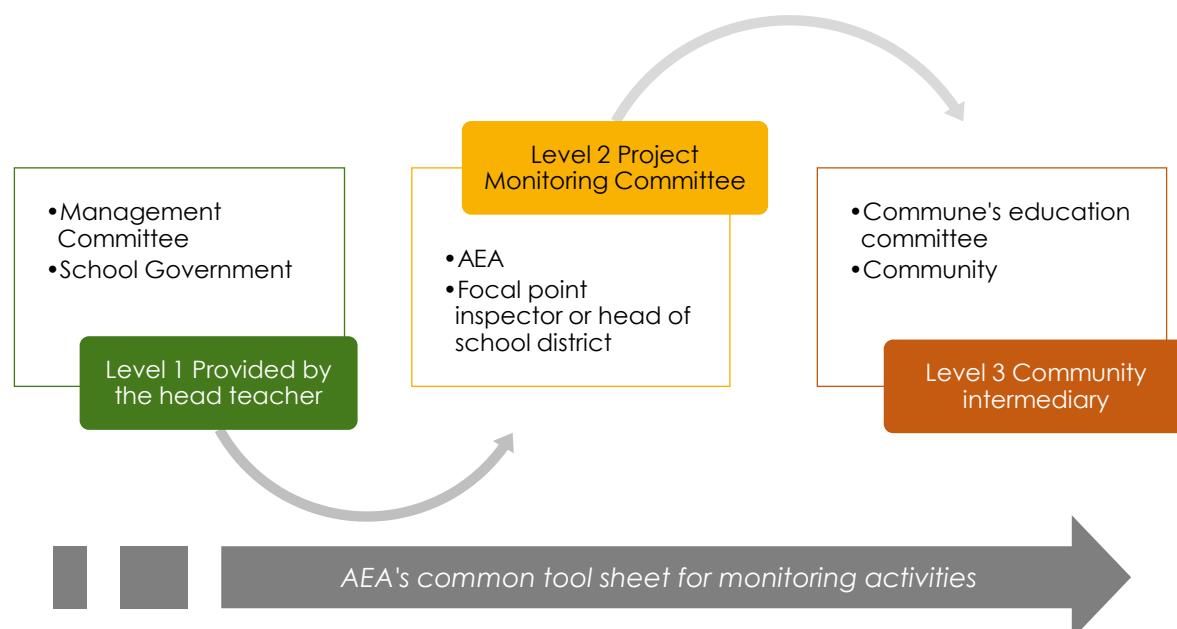
In several projects, monitoring is designed at several levels with an opportunity for educational partners to play their role of inspection and pedagogical monitoring of the teachers, in particular to support the children benefiting from the project. Training and financial support is provided to the inspectors in charge of this work. These are the "spin-off vehicles" for the alternative pedagogies promoted by AEA and its partners.

Testimony: Within the framework of the project on "Improving the quality of early childhood care and education for ethnic minorities and disadvantaged children" in Vietnam, Ms. Thuy (Deputy Head of the Bureau of Education and Training (BOET) in Tam Duong District) participated in the experimentation of an active pedagogy method. This gave her the confidence to provide support to other teachers. Thanks to the project's financial, logistical and training support, she shared, "The project has brought the school, children and myself so many practical things. I acquired management skills and professional knowledge. I learned how to develop lessons that are attractive to the children and how to support teachers more effectively".

Ms. Han, Deputy Head of Nung Nang Nursery School

- **Monitoring of activities and accountability in a multi-stakeholder approach**

Within the framework of the PAEBCA project in Senegal, monitoring is carried out at 3 levels:



"At the end of the year, the School Management Committee (CGE - Comité de gestion de l'école) presents its assessment and the progress made in its activities during the school year (technical execution and financial report) and the school headmaster presents the pedagogical report (admissions, failures and repetitions). This is part of the reporting process. The reports are submitted for criticism by the actors, and the parents of the pupils are present. "It's an important moment because it encompasses everything and gives parents confidence. Because many of the management problems, which are a source of conflict, were linked to the financial management of these committees. So the PAEBCA project pushed for accountability through the organisation of a general assembly."

Abdoulaye Sambe, PAEBCA project team member, Senegal

● **Monitoring the quality of activities**

In Cambodia, within the framework of the CCOSC project, the activities are monitored through a self-assessment process centred on the quality of the actions implemented for each component:

"During the quarterly working groups, if we have a gap between the activities planned and achieved, the working group can identify it and we work to close the gap. If we worked alone, we would not see the gap because we would not learn from others. For example, earlier, we didn't have good classroom administration – we learned from others and we improved. Through this process, we can reflect, learn and improve." "**Street children**" working group member.

● **Empowerment and skills monitoring**

Whatever the project, formal monitoring focuses on the activities and the results to be achieved. Little space is left for monitoring the development of individual and collective skills. In the case of support that is provided by delegating it to partners, who are accountable to the beneficiaries, the subject of support is nevertheless the partner structure, although the responsibility for the results is shared.

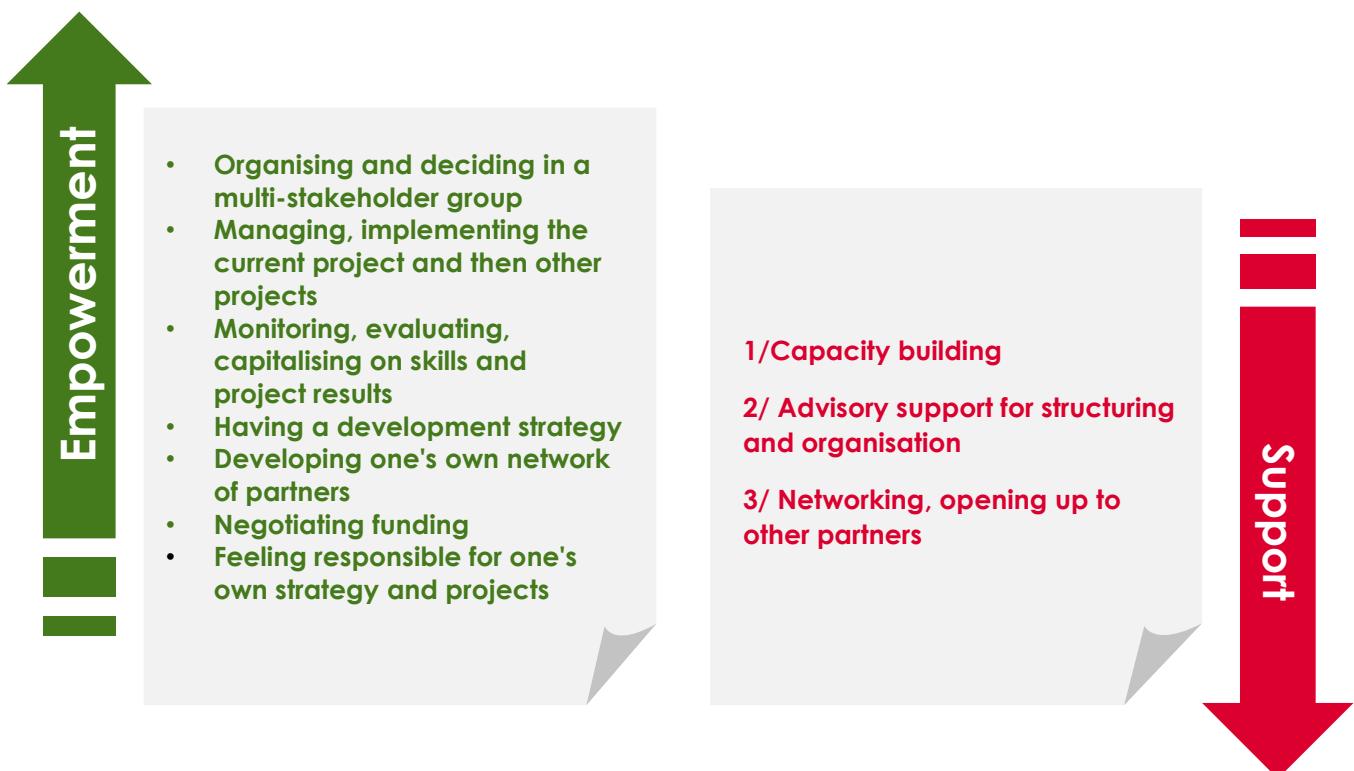
Approaches centred on results and accountability towards donors, as well as the longstanding nature of partnerships with the same actors, have for years favoured the monitoring of activities and results to the detriment of that of the support relationship between the actors.

The support provided in addition to project monitoring, which aims at developing individual and collective skills, is above all informal, in an approach with very few tools, explained through some essential but fairly invisible individual and collective coaching, on which the quality of support often depends.

In Guinea, PROJEG has opened the way to the formalisation of such follow-up by providing tools for its support approach, leading to the autonomy of groups, on the basis of a reference framework and the contractualisation of the support.¹⁷ Establishing a reference framework and formalising the support activities open the way to monitoring the actors' degree of empowerment.

Providing support in an initial phase of collaboration calls for substantial investment in capacity building and close monitoring until the local actors master the approach proposed by AEA. The more experience local actors gain, the more their needs evolve. In the case of CSOs/NGOs, their requests for support inevitably shift towards organisational and internal structure related problems, and in terms of the support providers, there is a greater shift from being a trainer/facilitator to being a coach and resource person, but also a witness or an observer of the progress achieved, but in a more informal setting.

Thus, the more local actors become autonomous, taking the reference framework for empowerment developed by the PROJEG project as an example, the more support should taper-off and reinvent itself, as long as milestones are set with clear stages to be achieved and a review of the following questions: up to where, up to when, what content, to go where? And this should be done by calling on other external expertise, if necessary.



¹⁷ See Practical Information Sheets 3 (Reference framework for structuring collectives under the PROJEG project) and 4 (Formalisation of the support provider/receiver relationship).

"My experience with regard to providing support has convinced me of the relevance of a trial and error approach. And that is what I do. Nothing can be taken for granted. The support is provided changes as you work with those receiving the support, with the perspective of empowerment. From the outset, we reach an agreement with the support receivers on their objective and how they intend to achieve it. As the support process progresses, the relationship evolves and the very strong reinforcement provided at the beginning lessens after a few years."

Jocelyne Rakotondrazafy, Mission Development Manager, Madagascar-Indian Ocean

● Monitoring changes

Providing support for monitoring and evaluation can enable stakeholders to rethink the way they operate. This is particularly the case for monitoring changes with Change Oriented Approaches (COAs).

In France, in the framework of the SOLIDE project (2015-2018), AEA supported the association Cool'eurs du Monde in its citizenship education activities in primary schools. The implementation of a change-oriented monitoring and assessment system led Cool'eurs du Monde to rethink its way of working within schools. Initially, it used to define the changes it wanted to see in children through citizenship education (awareness raising, development of citizenship practices, etc.) on its own, carried out independent activities during extracurricular time, and tried to convince teachers to help it monitor changes. Thanks to the perspective provided by the COAs, it subsequently changed its practices and defined a theory of change along with the school's teaching staff. The theory of change then developed for the school gave meaning not only to the actions carried out by Cool'eurs du Monde, but also to all the other activities implemented by the teaching staff. Hence, the school adopted a more global perspective and the coherence and complementarity of the different activities were improved.¹⁸

"We realised that the COAs should be at the service of the school, the teachers and the issues they faced. This awareness led us to assume that teachers must be fully involved. It is important to allow them to be fully involved so that they remain actors of their own vision." **Clémence Lartigue, Cool'eurs du Monde.**

4/ Monitoring changes for those receiving support? And for those providing support?

Generally speaking, while attention is paid to the indicators of change for those receiving support, it is less so for those providing the support. And that is one of the

¹⁸ For more information, see in French: <https://f3e.asso.fr/wp-content/uploads/Fiche-1-AOC-adapter-les-AOC-pour-rendre-une-equipe-enseignante-actrice-du-changement.pdf>

challenges today for AEA's change monitoring systems: while stimulating and monitoring the changes taking place among the actors receiving support, how can the support providers also monitor the changes they themselves experience as a result of their actions vis-à-vis the actors being supported? Why not work towards another way of structuring the project results' framework in such a way that when an indicator of change for those being supported is provided, a similar indicator is also defined for those providing the support? If we think in terms of a couple who are in a reciprocal relationship, the question of contributions to AEA is a relevant one.

The transition to making the local actors do the work instead of doing it for them has been a turning point in AEA's support practices for both the institution and professionals:

- **For AEA as an institution**

Gains	Losses
To position itself at a level of action corresponding to the association's size and scope, in order to make room for small local associations.	Connection to the field, close to communities, which may hinder the capacity for innovation.
Having a broader scope of action that can enable the association to position itself as an interlocutor with public authorities/advocates.	Visibility in the eyes of communities, no longer being recognised as the initiator of innovations and approaches that would now be taken up by others.
Major innovations, which have become part of official education policies and have thus been perpetuated.	

- **For AEA's staff**

Direct intervention	Operation by delegating to third parties
<p>The support process taught us to follow the pace of those being supported and adapt the methods of support.</p> <p>The support process has taught us to get to know those receiving the support and even to establish friendly relations with them.</p>	<p>Reflecting on subsidiarity and the right place to take action; giving up deciding on everything and trusting the actors to carry out the diagnoses, define the projects, etc. (a new conception of what empowerment/strengthening/autonomy is); playing a role vis-à-vis CSOs as an integral part of the mission – even more crucial than the role to be played with regard to the communities; working to bring out and clarify what CSOs want from AEA, to better position itself and know what will be AEA's added value.</p>

**Key
takeaway**

What is common to all the projects:

Capacity development is the main and most explicit support function. The long-term partnerships between AEA and CSOs, which are the most common form, lead to a shift in support methods from the formal to the informal. AEA's positioning then becomes one of a "resource partner" rather than a support provider. The more the share of informal practices grows in the long term, the more support activities focus on different forms of support, advice and networking.

Monitoring differs, depending on the type of project and approach:

- Monitoring that focuses more on following-up on activities and results than on monitoring the capacities of local actors. In this case, the logical framework serves as a reference for monitoring.
- If the monitoring focuses on the actors, tools already exist for the initial diagnosis and would be used as a basis for the contractualisation of the relationship and can be used to monitor the skills of local actors (PROJEG's reference framework on empowerment/autonomy, skill-mapping of each CCOSC member, vision, paths of change and monitoring of changes in the COAs).

What is specific and opens up prospects:

Capacity development mechanisms based on the pooling and sharing of cross-cutting experiences in a **learning-by-doing** approach that enhances the sustainability of learning networks and cross-cutting support based on the pooling of expertise.

Change-oriented approaches and the monitoring of changes put **actors back at the heart of the process**, rather than the results of activities being at their core. The dynamics developed give new meaning to projects and promote quality support for stakeholders and their organisations, provided that these paths to change are monitored and self-assessed by the stakeholders.

6. Posture and profession of providing support

The PROJEG project has taught us that supporting actors calls for the definition and adoption by the support provider of a bilateral or multilateral, formal or informal posture vis-à-vis those being supported. This posture calls for the transition from a relationship of authority to a partnership based on agreements and consensus, resulting from negotiations. It also implies detachment from the focus on the results, in order to entrust those being supported with the responsibility for the results achieved. The support provider must transfer responsibility to those being supported and provide them with the necessary space to take the initiative and assume a joint responsibility.

"New relationships with other civil society organisations have been developed, especially in the framework of a survey on environmental issues that was carried out outside the PROJEG framework. **N'tansou Sano, Director of the NGO, CEGUIFED, Guinea**

6.1. Empowerment of actors: The PROJEG case

In Senegal, in Wolof, Gongué means "to accompany", the image alongside being associated with it; it means to escort a visitor along a stretch of road, then to let him or her continue on his or her own, independently.



Through the PROJEG experience, we can find the key elements of autonomy/empowerment:

- 1. Willingness to change:** Autonomy presupposes the realisation of the need to be willing to change, with the changes being made by the actors themselves, even if favourable conditions – notably the political environment – may be necessary.
- 2. Leadership and responsibilities:** Those being supported must be responsible for defining their own objectives, arbitrating between the possible choices, but also characterising the changes expected, and taking the decisions and accepting the risks involved in the implementation strategy, from the perspective of autonomy/empowerment.

3. **Managing one's own activities:** When those being supported carry out their own educational project, they learn from their activities and experience and, at the same time, build their capacity for action and accountability.

6.2. Conditions for supporting change

In order to support the change in AEA's positioning and strategy during the PROJEG, external capacity building resources were required to support the project team. In the case of this project, it was the support provider/recipient pairing that was being transformed and external support was imperative to buttress the change in paradigm.

Framework agreements to strengthen empowerment (commitments based on principles and values) and partnership agreements to implement the capacity building plan of each group supported by PROJEG were signed between AEA and the collectives.

When do the actors enter the process?

In 2015, after 8 years of existence, an external assessment underlined the need to rethink PROJEG's implementation mechanism in order to prepare to disengage from it and ensure the sustainability of the dynamics developed.

In order to anticipate its disengagement and ensure the sustainability of the programme's achievements, PROJEG changed its intervention modalities and positioned itself as a support provider for groups of actors with a view to their empowerment and autonomy.

Which actors to support?



In French, there is a gastronomic expression. In a restaurant, you choose a main course and its "accompaniment". It is up to you to choose vegetables, chips or pasta, according to what you think will go best with the main (meat, fish). In the case of projects, using the same analogy as the main course, what will be used as an accompaniment will be chosen according to the territory of intervention, reliability, expertise, motivation, commitment and needs.

- Specify the target to be supported¹⁹: To specify the target to be supported, PROJEG's Executive Secretariat identified the main characteristics of empowerment of a collective, organised on the basis of 3 progressive levels of structuring. This process led to a reference framework for structuring the collectives.
- Appreciating the level of maturity: To define a support approach for empowerment, PROJEG considered that it was necessary to first understand the concerned actors' initial maturity level before characterising the expected empowerment status and determining the nature of the support to be provided.

6.3. Contractualisation/formalisation of the relationship between the support provider/receiver-Expert/Coordinator, setting the framework

According to the PROJEG experience, the arbitration and negotiation process between the Executive Secretariat and those receiving support was conducted in four stages:

1

Compiling the capacity-building needs identified by the 12 collectives in order to identify certain common needs that could be pooled together.

2

Arbitration concerning external reinforcements while bearing the relevance of actions in mind in terms of the group's vision and the reference framework on structuring the groups, and based on the project's budget and human resources.

3

Organisation of workshops with each collective in order to negotiate the external reinforcement required and to support the collective in its arbitration and prioritisation of the actions it should undertake internally.

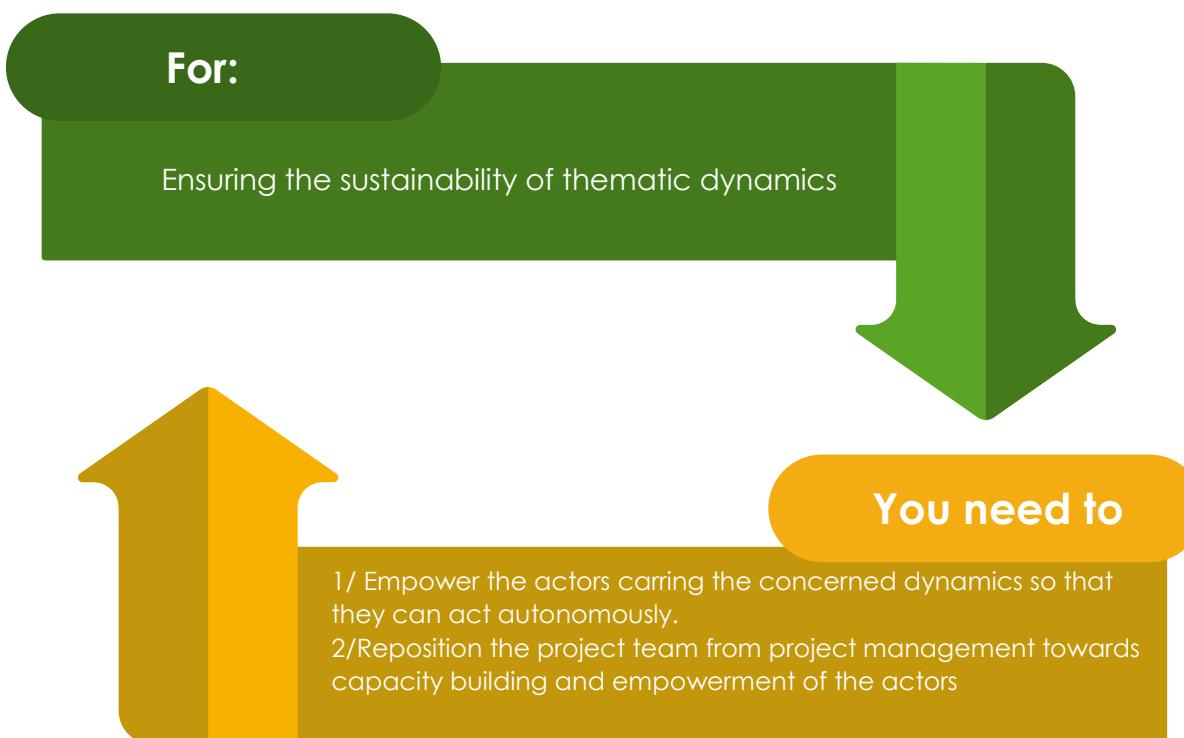
4

Contractualisation of internal and external reinforcements with each of the collectives through framework agreements.

¹⁹ See Practical Information Sheets 3 (Reference framework for structuring collectives) and 4 (PROJEG: Formalisation of the support provider/receiver relationship).

6.4. What responsibilities does the support provider leave up to those receiving the support? Which responsibilities does the support provider take on?

In the perspective of providing support for empowering actors, PROJEG has taught us that the project team must reposition itself by devoting itself less to technical support and monitoring of activities and more to supporting the actors in order to strengthen their capacity to work together and increase their chances of ensuring the sustainability of the dynamics developed after the support-provider's withdrawal from the project. It must define a strategy for sustainability and take responsibility for it.



- **Question concerning the support-provider's profession: How can it be characterised? What is the reference framework regarding the skills required? Who does the job: the project manager, a facilitator, others?**
 - **Characterisation of a support-provider's profession**

"When you are a coordinator, you want the actors to achieve predefined results. But now, as a support-provider, you want to give the actors support so that they can reach wherever they want to go." **Djenè Madé Fofana, Regional Support-Provider for Guinea's forested region, AEA Guinea**

Hence, Ms Fofana emphasised the aim of empowering actors while clarifying the need to be familiar with the actor's initial situation and describing the kind of empowerment/autonomy expected.

- **Competence reference framework for support-providers**

Support aimed at empowering actors according to their requests and while respecting their own objectives can be translated into different types of corresponding support, such as:

- Provision of expertise and knowledge
- Contextualised support and advice
- Coaching of individuals and teams
- Facilitation of processes
- Establishing relationships and networking of actors
- Mediation between actors.

PROJEG has also taught us that support must be adapted to developments in the process and to the capacity-building level of the supported actor:

- In the initial phase, the support consists in supporting the actors in **developing their vision**, defining their objectives, needs and requests regarding building various skills, then in negotiating the support with partners or third parties.
- At the fully operational stage, support for change must focus on **steering development actions** and capacity building, depending on the needs stemming from the interventions.
- At the end of the process, support must focus on methodological support for **performance assessment**, to be drawn and learned from experience.

- **Who does this job: a project manager or facilitator?**

PROJEG's experience allows us to make a better distinction between the functions of a project manager and a support provider. This clarification is relevant for all AEA's projects where the functions of coordination, support, facilitation and monitoring tend to be mixed-up, or at least to be closely intertwined, especially when activities are delegated to others.

Project coordinators

"The coordinator is a project planner and controller: How is the action going to be carried out, how is everyone going to play their role? He or she is responsible for meeting deadlines, handling disputes, communication and relationships in order to move the project forward. **He acts on the project and not the actor.**"

Support providers

"Support providers play an advisory role, **coaching the actors** to get them where they want to go, at their own pace, handling their limitations and difficulties themselves. It is a question of trusting them, then making them understand that **they are the actors of their own change**. Support providers act on the actors and on what can enable them to move forward."

- **The time needed to provide support:**

Supporting actors during the process of defining their objectives, thinking about their activities and implementing them themselves, at their own pace, takes much more time than simply taking the lead and making the decisions and conducting activities. However, the actors' pace does not always follow the same rhythm as that of the project.



**Key
takeaway**

PROJEG in Guinea is the only project formally dedicated to providing support with the aim of empowering and autonomising the groups being supported. Its experimentation has served as a basis for the drafting of this section.

Support plays a crucial role for the sustainability of the groups being supported. The quality of support depends on:

- The political will to provide support
- The clarification of roles within the AEA team between support and project management functions
- The commitment to make the people being supported accountable for the results achieved
- The need to generate a demand for support from the stakeholders and to clearly define the scope of the support, based on a diagnosis and a needs assessment, using a reference framework
- Contractualisation of the relationship: giving physical shape to the support plan, along with its objectives, content, progress, stages, duration and respective responsibilities.
- Adopting a posture of empathy, respect, neutral observation and detachment from the final results.

7. AEA's trademark

Through the question of AEA's identity and trademark, common values can be identified, which have been complied with since AEA's creation, and which can be found regardless of the diversity of the projects targeted by this documentation exercise.

The points of view of those being supported and the support providers complement each other and are in line with AEA's values and principles. Whatever the identity, the repute each country office has built in its own context, AEA's trademark remains a common point.

Focusing solely on the relationship of support would have been restrictive and frustrating for local actors. We are therefore providing their point of view and their prioritised analyses, based on the question of what differentiates AEA's actions from those of other partners.

7.1. From the viewpoint of those being supported:

- 1. AEA's long history in the educational sphere is recognized and makes AEA a specialist in education in all its dimensions.**

"At COMMITMENTS, our entry point is the issue of disability – an area in which we have a great deal of experience. What AEA has brought us is a better knowledge of educational issues related to disability – we now see the lack of education as a form of disability in addition to the others. And **we have become aware of the advantages and importance of education**: an educated girl with a disability can fight for her rights." **COMMITMENTS, CSO partner of AEA in India**

- 2. AEA has based its reputation on its community-based approaches, its proximity to the field and, therefore, its operational efficiency.**

"The secret of social mobilisation: AEA manages to mobilise people – it doesn't invite people to join, it uses local mechanisms, influential people and opinion leaders. But what I know is that community ownership is the aspect about which AEA has taught us a great deal." **Siaka Goudiaby, Inspector, Ziguinchor Academy, Senegal**

- 3. Its ability to experiment, using multi-actor approaches, also including institutional actors.**

"AEA has been the body that led the State to adopt certain orientations: basic community schools were initiated by AEA, AEA has also been part of the organisations that have promoted the development of School Management Committees with the idea that schools should be managed by their communities, school projects and school governments as well, although other NGOs have also played a role (Plan, etc.)." **RECAC, CSO partner of AEA in Niger**

4. The way AEA organises and supports actors through their participation in decision-making and action.

- In the conception of projects: Except in the case of PROJEG where the actors are the authors of their own projects and actions, AEA plays a strong role in conceiving projects and designing them, but it involves its partners in their ownership, final design and implementation. Hence, in India and Asia, partners are implementation partners.
- In problem solving and decisions concerning actions: Through its field analyses, AEA knows how to support actors so that they feel responsible and accountable for their decisions.

The solution is not proposed by AEA, it is supported by AEA.

An example: In the framework of decentralisation, the Senegalese government decided to set up Local Education and Training Commissions (CLEF – Commissions Locales Education et Formation). Few communes have done so. AEA gave us an understanding of what a CLEF is and its usefulness, and from there, the solution emerged by itself. Earlier, the CLEF only existed theoretically. After AEA came along, a proper CLEF was established. All this came after AEA's pre-project study aimed at finding out whether such bodies existed and were operational. The State issued decrees, at its own will, to set up these bodies, but that's all. AEA provided support to turn the CLEFs into a reality. **AEA starts with our needs, our difficulties and our problems to move towards a solution.**

Our work with AEA is a model of success, because **no initiative is taken by AEA without consultations**. Everything is done together, and when that is done, we are proud to carry out the action".

Seydou Sane, Deputy Mayor, Ziguinchor

"They don't impose anything on the school. They come and see what we are doing and they give us their support." **President of a School Management Committee, Senegal.**

5. Its proximity during the support and follow-up process.

"AEA's approach is to start with people's concerns, list them, then the people decide on their own priorities and we then say that we can do this, we can't do that or that would be useless. Not all partners have this kind of courage.

AEA provides support at close quarters. They come regularly, months don't go by without us seeing them – it is proximity support that they provide. With the others, it is periodic, depending on the year. They have a physical presence to discuss things/explain how they would like a programme to be implemented. The people who come are from our area, speak the area's language, so communication is easy." **Chairman of a School Management Committee, Senegal**

7.2. From the support provider's viewpoint:

6. Project and programme design stemming from and in consultation with the field.

Because of its history (strong decentralisation of the organisation and of the design/steering of operations, fully local staff, local managers from the field), AEA remains innovative in the projects it develops.

"One of our strengths is project design. The partners also participate in developing the concept – there is a dimension of consultation/participation in the project design. This is also how partners expand their knowledge of the communities and take ownership of the project. AEA has its non-negotiable principles and we seek partners who have some experience with the target group, and together, we search for what would be the best strategy." **Sajeev P. Balan, Programme Development Manager, South Asia**

"Many high-level NGOs are very well structured; when they apply for USAID funding, the programme design teams are in Washington, D.C., the teams at the local level provide information rather than the design as such. Therein lies the difference in terms of ownership, or the sustainability of actions. With AEA, the design comes **from the field**. That is what makes us completely different – the way we design projects from as close to the field as possible."

Samphors Vorn, Country Director, AEA Cambodia

7. A Social Mission, a commitment to the cause of children's education.

"We work for children and we believe that without education, we cannot change the world and achieve development. If we don't have a certain conviction, we can't work at AEA. While many people may have come and did not stay on, it is because they were not convinced like us." **Abdoulaye Samb, member of the PAEBCA project team, Senegal**

8. A well-established multi-stakeholder and participatory approach

With regard to how schools function, one of AEA's specificities – an innovation – is that through school governments, pupils are included in its participatory and multi-actor approaches. Mobilising and involving all the actors and organisations concerned is at the heart of AEA's activities.

"When we speak of AEA, we think about work outside school. The other organisations mainly support students who are already in school, but AEA focuses on how to reach all the children, the community and the partners.

We are not here to tell them that we are the only ones who can do it – our entire posture is to say that we are here to go along with them, to do it together." **Oumar Niang, Manager of PAEBCA project, Senegal**

9. A historic partnership with stakeholders in the education system.

Whatever the project or country, AEA works at the heart of education policies at all levels with educational actors in the field, academic inspectorates and the ministries concerned by its actions. AEA experiments and innovates in the field, builds the capacities of managers and conducts advocacy actions, to the extent that some of its experiments have been incorporated into common law policies.

Examples

Within the framework of the implementation of the Project for the Improvement of Basic Education in Casamance (PAEBCA, Projet d'Amélioration de l'Education de Base en Casamance) in Senegal, the project management is an example of shared decision-making.

At the national level, **the overall steering is done by a National Orientation Committee (NOC)**, chaired by a representative of the Minister of National Education (MEN). The NOC's mandate is to:

- Ensure an overall monitoring of the project to guarantee the respect of the project guidelines;
- Validate the annual programming documents and the implementation reports prepared by the national project coordination;
- Organise documenting the results (national workshop-assessment);
- Organise the evaluation of the project (mid-term internal evaluation and final external evaluation).

At the regional level, a regional steering committee (CPR, Comité de pilotage régional) is set up in each Academy Inspectorate (IA, inspection d'académie). The CPR meets every six months to monitor the project's implementation and prepare the implementation reports and annual planning.

In Laos, in order to promote ownership and sustainability, the project on "Improving inclusion, quality of education and school environment in pre-primary and primary schools" brings together the Village Education Development Committee (VEDC), comprising school headmasters and teachers, students as well as parents and communities, to address issues that hinder the learning outcomes of ethnic minority and marginalised children, while building on close relations with the Ministry of Education and Sports at the national level, as well as with the Provincial Education and Sports Department and the District Education and Sports Office.

Lessons learnt from this cross-cutting documentation

A wide variety of approaches and ways of doing things stemming from the field

1/ Starting from the field with communities is one of AEA's trademarks. In 30 years, this principle, anchored in all its projects, has given it its renown. It is linked to AEA's highly decentralised organisational set-up, characterised in particular by the design and management of projects at the local level. This has led to diverse paths being taken in each country of intervention, marked by their specific contexts, the expertise of the teams and, therefore, a diversity of strategies, methods and innovations in terms of specialisation covering diverse themes.

This tree-shaped structuring of development is certainly another key aspect of AEA's trademark, resting on its roots and a strong common trunk. This wealth of experience and innovations would gain much from being shared in a future knowledge management system, more to improve quality than to standardise practices and experiences.



The long road travelled with the same partners leads to a change in positioning, a shift towards informality and the loss of AEA's visibility

2/ Hence, multiple forms of support are offered and remain somewhat informal and implicit. In many cases, working together over a long period of time has led many CSOs in the field to become reliable AEA partners, operating on the basis of delegating certain responsibilities to third parties, with AEA positioned as just one more donor among others. As a result, AEA is changing its profession, focussing on coordination and losing its visibility and support-related skills. Evidence of this can be seen in countries such as India, where the issue of providing partners support is no longer raised or very little, and where AEA works on an informal basis and is therefore less visible. This long-term work and the rising strength of small local CSOs raises the question of the future stages of support and a more structural strengthening of these CSOs towards autonomy, if we want to produce long-lasting social changes.

3/ The initial questions raised at the beginning of this report – "providing support to go where, up to where, until when and for what purpose?" – are still faced by AEA. If providing support is one of the levers of its action, then conditions favourable for quality support should be a prerequisite for any multi-actor action, in the framework of a contractual relationship, with regular monitoring and readjustments, as a sub-project within the project. Some experiences, such as the PROJEG experience, pave the way and could be the subject of experimental action-research work on the

issues of sustainability/empowerment/disengagement, with a panel of voluntary projects, before a wider spin-off.

4/ However, support may be viewed more simply – as "going together" (with the community), in which case the questions of "where? until when? and with whom?" would not be central issues. But this conception of support raises the question of sustainability and a greater spread of practices. Certainly, along the way, the actors enhance their skills for the sustainability of the actions, but at what point do those being supported become support-providers in their turn, empowered and autonomous, in order to spread these skills and move ahead together with other groups of actors? Who supports whom? And at what point does the relationship get reversed?



In Puular, the Peule people's language, providing support – or its French equivalent, "accompanying" – means "going together". This definition has the merit of being simple, of not indicating an objective, duration or limit. It just means getting together to go, to share one's steps.

By using the term "together", this meaning includes the notion of a path, but also the pleasure of going together.

Does placing actors at the heart of a project provide a guarantee of quality and sustainable social change?

5/ On the one hand, the operational teams have to juggle and reconcile the management of the project in order to achieve the expected results and, on the other hand, they have to provide support to the actors whose needs and temporality do not always match the project's. In some cases, support would benefit from being described as an objective in itself and formalised as an integral part of the action, along with its objectives, activities, resources and monitoring processes, as a sub-project within the project. This area of work would give support to actors and capacity-building a noble meaning, along with giving visibility to what AEA has always been doing. In addition, the adoption of Change Oriented Approaches (COAs) tested and mastered in France and in Africa, is a powerful lever for change, placing actors at the heart of project management and revisiting support practices towards sustainable social change.

Innovation and leadership capacities

6/ The risk of operating only by delegating activities to third parties (with project design and funding based on AEA's reputation) can lead to a loss of visibility for AEA and even tarnish its image. As one of the major education specialists, AEA should be able to continue to innovate and to be at the forefront of designing solutions. In order to do so, keeping one foot directly in the field and having operational teams with seasoned skills is a guarantee of the quality of its actions.

Follow-up of changes for those being supported? And for the support provider?

7/ Generally speaking, while attention is paid to change indicators for those being supported – who are aware of it – the same is less so for the support providers. And that is one of the challenges today for change monitoring systems within AEA: while stimulating and monitoring changes among the actors being supported, how can the support providers also monitor the changes that they themselves undergo because of their actions vis-à-vis those to whom they are providing support? Why not work towards a different way of structuring the framework of project results or, when faced with a change indicator for those being supported, why not define a change indicator for the support providers as well?

8/Conditions that promote quality support

To provide quality support, the conditions required are as follows:

The political will to make support a strong pillar of activities and to establish the framework and the means to provide quality support.

First of all, getting to know each other, trusting each other and wanting to work together.

Generating a demand for support from the actors and clearly defining the scope of the support. Based on a diagnosis and an assessment of capacity building needs, establishing a support plan with different stages, including deadlines and a phased withdrawal.

Contractualising the relationship: Preparing a concrete support plan, with its objectives, content, progress, stages, duration and respective responsibilities.

Clarifying the roles within AEA team, between project coordination and implementation, support activities and project monitoring and evaluation, along with a focus on support for empowerment and autonomy.

Monitoring and self-assessment of the activities of both parties and the progress made in order to readjust the support plan whenever required: support is always iterative, depending on the changes brought about in the actors, and enough room should be made to experiment and readjust as you go along.

Adopting a posture in which empathy, respect, neutral observation and detachment from results are essential. Knowing how to entrust the responsibility for achieving the desired results to those being supported, giving them the necessary space to take the initiative, and joint accountability. Moving from the role of a coordinator to that of an expert who places those being supported at the heart of the support process.

Giving concrete shape to the end of the support contract through a final self-assessment that includes the path travelled together, the achievements of the support recipients and the support provider, and through a joint reflection on the new status of the relationship between the two parties. Apart from the sustainability of the skills acquired by those supported and the support provider, also including the role to be played in disseminating the project and transmitting the skills acquired.

Recommendations

This documentation highlighted a vast diversity of innovations and practices, linked to the high degree of decentralisation of AEA's programmes. This observation opens the doors to the possibility of extensive discussions and exchanges of experience within AEA, bearing in mind the issue of internal knowledge exchange and dialogue between teams that have had very few exchanges of experience until now.

AEA's identified and documented innovations and best practices on the support provided to local actors constitute a resource that can be used as a medium for the self-training of project managers and teams and as an input into the association's knowledge management platform. They must be added to by the documentation of other experiences (notably in the field of support to institutions, local authorities or groups of children/youth) to better reflect the diversity of AEA's expertise.

However, the provision of resources and tools alone cannot suffice if the objective is to disseminate innovations and experiences within AEA. Facilitation work will be necessary, in particular to create links between teams that do not know each other well, work in very diverse contexts, and do not always share the same language. Several facilitation modalities could be envisaged.

The tools developed in the framework of this documentation exercise can be used as a basis to set up support processes for project teams to experiment with new practices, formalise work tools based on different experiences and improve the quality of AEA's projects.

The results of the documentation on the support provided to local actors are also a basis for pooling the association's in-house expertise and setting up networks for the exchange of experiences and practices, including spaces and times for sharing and learning. Several modalities may be envisaged (organisation of seminars on the

exchange of experiences and practices, creation of communities of practice, two-way visits to exchange experiences and practices, etc.) in connection with the major in-house projects within the 2020-2024 Strategic Plan framework.

The CCOSC consortium's capacity building mechanism led by AEA in Cambodia – based on peer-to-peer training spaces and on a learning process for which support is provided – is an example of knowledge management that could be adopted and spread more widely (1) within AEA, between the teams of the different countries, and (2) in other countries in which AEA works, between CSOs and other actors to which AEA provides support within the same territory.

The innovations and best practices resulting from this documentation study should be used as an input for AEA's communication programmes in order to make its brand name better known to the general public, technical and financial partners, and the different stakeholders of the educational ecosystem in the organisation's countries of intervention.

The ways of doing things, results and impacts are all sources that can be used for preparing arguments for advocacy and debates, and for influencing decision-makers.

All in all, AEA's support to local actors is mainly focused on developing capacities. Placing the actors at the heart of the process, this support, often not very formalised, is based on the pooling and sharing of cross-cutting experiences. Its quality depends largely on a strong political will to provide support by placing the responsibility for the results to be achieved on the shoulders of those being supported.

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