

**FONDATION  
DE  
FRANCE**

**Funds for  
Participatory  
Expertise**

***"Solidarités Internationales" Programme***

**From participatory evaluation  
to funds for participatory expertise,  
the commitment by Fondation de France  
to enhance the competences  
of development organisations and experts in the South**

## **Summary**

Ever since they were launched, Fondation de France programmes linked to the development of countries in the South have relied on evaluation to support development projects to be financed, as well as to provide better steering and adjustment for the Fondation de France's own methods of intervention.

Between 1996 and 1998, the Fondation de France implemented the programme "Participatory evaluation, a tool for development". After evaluation of this programme, a new programme was implemented in 2001: "Funds for participatory expertise". Two major changes are behind this new development:

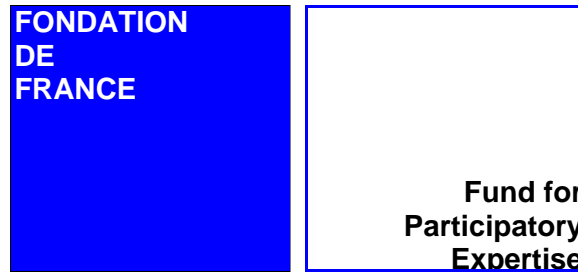
- a widening of the concept of evaluation to include expertise, more liable to assist small development organisations,
- an anchorage point in specific countries with a "national" coordinator developing the programme in his/her country.

While the "participatory" approach is a constant in such programmes – for the Fondation de France it is the *sine qua non* of an effective expertise and of free expression and empowerment for the beneficiaries – it remains difficult to assess and to put into operation as:

- It is expensive;
- It requires time;
- It presupposes a minimum of internal and external competences;
- It does not just happen on the day of evaluation or expertise;
- Similarly, if it is only thought of as a tool, the participatory approach loses its ability to become a democratic method for regulating the strategies of development organisations.

We shall be producing evidence on these difficulties in bringing the participatory aspect to life and on the mechanism that we have developed to encourage it.

Caroline Guillot-Marchi, consultant, January 2003



*“Solidarités Internationales”* Programme

**From participatory evaluation  
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Ever since they were launched, Fondation de France programmes linked to the development of countries in the South have relied on evaluation to support development projects to be financed, as well as to provide better steering and adjustment for the Fondation de France's own methods of intervention.

In 1993, the “*Solidarités Internationales*” programme brought together a group of consultants in evaluation to reflect on what should be the “art” of evaluation in the field of development and on the conditions needing to be implemented in order to attain optimal results to be put into operation in the projects and organisations concerned. This mobilisation resulted in the publication by the Fondation de France in September 1995 of a “Charter of evaluation in the context of development work”<sup>1</sup>. In its preamble, this charter states: “Evaluation is a tool that is still much unknown in the context of development actions. This lack of knowledge, which too often assimilates evaluation to a tool for controlling and sanctioning, is very harmful inasmuch as a properly thought out and conducted evaluation can play a positive and forward-moving role in the evolution of a development action. For that, it must fulfil a certain number of conditions and be covered by guarantees, one of the most important of which is **the involvement of all stakeholders in the whole process.**”

Since the beginning, the participatory approach has always been associated with the works on evaluation as a token of their quality. We will briefly retrace the history of the participatory “evaluation” or “expertise” programmes before turning to the participatory process – its advantages, its difficulties, its limits.

## **1. Participatory evaluation, a tool for development from 1996 to 1998**

In 1996, the “*Solidarités Internationales*” Committee launched the first of 3 calls for annual projects to promote a certain idea and a certain method of evaluation.

For that, the “*Solidarités Internationales*” Committee supported requests for an **evaluation** of a **participatory** nature, coming from an **NGO from the South, for development or backup**, and carried out by a **qualified and independent evaluation professional in the country or area concerned**, for a **development project** conducted by the ONG and/or for its **own operation**.

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<sup>1</sup>: Loïc Barbedette, Geneviève de Combrugghe, Marius Dia, Marie-Christine Guéneau, Caroline Guillot-Marchi, Bernard Lecomte, Marc Nieuwkerk. Fondation de France, September 1995.

Three objectives underpinned this programme:

- In order to be "useful" to the projects and structure, evaluation must correspond to their requirements, which presupposes that it is requested and defined by those directly concerned.
- In order to help in the "professionalization" and autonomy of parties involved in the development, evaluation procedures and tools must be internalized and mastered by the latter, which means that they are negotiated, drawn up, amended and accepted by the different stakeholders, headed up by those responsible for the action being evaluated in close collaboration with the evaluator they have chosen.
- In order to contribute to capacity-building, the aim was to show that recognised and legitimate professional competences existed in the South in the field of evaluation.

Over three years, the "Solidarités Internationales" Committee has supported 34 evaluations for a total cost of close to € 359,000 mainly in West Africa.

## 2. Evaluation of the programme for 1999

In 1999, after an invitation to tender, the evaluation of the "Participatory evaluation, a tool for development" programme was entrusted to Daniel Neu and Jean-Louis Viélajus from GRET. This evaluation was in particular based on the organisation of regional meetings in Réunion (May 99), Dakar (September 99) and Bamako (September 99) which brought together more than 60 people (representatives of NGOs with supported evaluation, their evaluators, evaluators from GRET and representatives of the Fondation de France).

The evaluation of the programme has made it possible to validate the relevance of starting assumptions by the Fondation de France and their implementation over the three years of experimentation.

The three elements making up this programme showed themselves to be equally important:

- an **external** evaluation, carried out by a qualified evaluator, chosen by the structure but independent of it,
- a **participatory** evaluation, where the different protagonists are involved in the different phases,
- and an **endogenous** evaluation, requested, defined and conducted by the NGO to meet its own objectives.

However, in the majority of non governmental frameworks concerned, the last of these elements appeared to be the most innovative. Some NGOs and some evaluators have not yet got over this. They thought it unbelievable that a donor financing an evaluation should pay no attention about the quality of actions being evaluated and be interested solely in the modalities and impact of this evaluation.

**Two criticisms** from evaluators have helped the Fondation de France to position itself better on the follow-up that it has decided to give to this first experimental programme.

- **This tool – evaluation – has shown itself to be too demanding to be "universal".** Indeed, it is only suited to NGOs that have already achieved a certain level of functionality and maturity. The weakest of them only make the most of it if they benefit from outside support in order to access it and internalize its conclusions. There are other tools – more flexible and less demanding – which sometimes help NGOs to move forward.
- **The other important criticism concerns the functional implementation of the Fondation de France's programme.** In this case, the programme was steered from Paris. While this method allowed economical and strict operation, it made it more difficult to understand the detail of local situations, to analyse the relevance of NGO needs, the choice of evaluators and the speed of exchanges...

The evaluation report and its summary have been widely circulated<sup>2</sup>. Thoughts and proposals in this evaluation were discussed and approved by the “*Solidarités Internationales*” Committee in November 1999.

### **3. A feasibility study to define the contours and modalities for implementing FEPs in 2000**

The “*Solidarités Internationales*” Committee decided to continue with studying and fine-tuning the contours of a new programme taking account of lessons and proposals from evaluation. A feasibility study for setting up Funds for Participatory Expertise in different countries or regions in the South has been entrusted to GRET<sup>3</sup>.

### **4. Funds for Participatory Expertise, 2001...**

When the “*Solidarités Internationales*” Committee met on 14 September 2000, it decided to create Funds for Participatory Expertise (FEPs), each for a term of 3 years.

- **The first FEP was opened in Mali (Bamako) in February 2001.** In May 2001, the first annual call for requests of participatory expertise was launched in French and the local lingua franca. Out of almost 90 requests received, 19 were upheld for a total financial amount of EUR 198,000 (FRF 1,300,000) in November of the same year. While these expertises were starting, the second call for requests was circulated in January 2002 and 100 requests reached Bamako. In 2002, 24 expertises were upheld for a total of EUR 154,000.
- **The second FEP, established in Madagascar (Antananarivo) since August 2001, concerned, in addition to Madagascar, Comoros, Réunion, Mauritius, Mayotte and the Seychelles.** The first call for requests of expertise was launched in Réunion in December 2001 in French and Malagasy. Almost 90 requests were received in April 2002. 19 expertises were upheld for a total of EUR 147,300.
- **The third – and last – FEP was opened in Morocco (Rabat) in September 2002.** The coordinator was recruited in July 2002, the FEP branch has been operational since September, the first call for requests has been circulated since December 2002.

Financial investment by the Fondation de France amounts to around EUR 230,000 per FEP and per annum, including running costs.

#### **4.1. The objectives of FEPs**

In brief, an FEP has two objectives:

- helping to reinforce structures and parties involved in the development,
- facilitating the emergence of a validated local offer of expertise.

In this way, "Funds for participatory expertise" finance the access of non governmental organisations, associations and local authorities in the South to a good quality expertise, in line with their needs, allowing them to increase their capacities, their autonomy and the degree of participation from populations.

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<sup>2</sup> Final evaluation report of an intervention strategy from the Fondation de France's “*Solidarités Internationales*” programme. Participatory evaluation, a tool for development, 1996 – 1998. Daniel Neu, Jean-Louis Viélaus, GRET, January 2000. The document is available on request from the “*Solidarités Internationales*” programme.

<sup>3</sup>: Facilitating the access of civil society organisations in the South to participatory expertise. Progress report, Daniel Neu, Jean-Louis Viélaus, GRET, November 2000. This progress report is based on the following "local" feasibility and positioning studies: Mali, Sonia Le Bay, Gabriel Coulibaly, May 2000; Burkina Faso, GREFCO, July 2000; Senegal, Abdou Fall, August 2000; Algeria, Touiza, September 2000; Morocco, Philippe Staatsen, September 2000; Indian Ocean (Madagascar, Comoros, Mauritius, Réunion, Seychelles), Ralison Andriamandranto, Julien Rakotoarimanana, AVANA IREDEC, October 2000.

**More precisely, the FEP wishes to support:**

- **expertises,**  
*This involves a base-line study combined with a diagnosis leading to recommendations for improvement.*
- **which are requested and defined by associations, NGOs or local government authorities,**  
*In particular, in the context of an increasing involvement of local government authorities in local development, this means encouraging expertises which rely on collaboration between the parties targeted who are permanently involved in the process of economic and social development at the service of populations.*
- **participatory,**  
*i.e. involving all the different members of the requesting structure at the different stages of the expertise process.  
One-off expertise assignments supported by the FEP will have to show, in their design, implementation and internalization (in terms of results as well as methods) a real intention to include parties involved in development as well as populations.*
- **and carried out by an independent expert, in the same country or possibly from a neighbouring country, recognised for his/her competences and experience,**  
*This means, in parallel, developing the competences of local expertise, as well as improving the expertise offer which is more equipped to meet the needs of donors than those of NGOs, associations or local government authorities.*
- **in order to contribute to better structuring and autonomy for associations, NGOs or local government, or to facilitate their local cooperation.**  
*Expertises must make it possible – based on a base-line study, a diagnosis of the situation and operational recommendations – to actually improve the running of the structures. So this does not mean financing the structure to carry out its normal assignments, to do what it has to do, but rather to function better with the help of an outside and critical eye.*

**4.2. The criteria by which requests submitted to the FEP are assessed**

As a general rule, whatever the programme, the Fondation de France makes sure that projects submitted to it for financing comply with a certain number of values and criteria. To take only the criteria specific to the FEP, let us mention:

- **The relevance of the request for expertise** in relation to the situation and needs of the association, the NGO or the local government authority. This means assessing whether the request is in line with the nature of the need or difficulty. It also means determining whether the request is based on a need perceived by the structure at the time of a particular phase in its development or when a difficulty is encountered or whether it involves a feasibility request.
- **The intention to involve the requesting structure(s) in carrying out the expertise and the structure's capacity to incorporate the process and results of the expertise in order to make the necessary changes.** Such involvement in the expertise process and the incorporation of results for conducting changes will be analysed by means of a certain number of elements: Has the methodology of the proposed expertise procedure been thought out beforehand? Is it flexible enough to be adapted to future changes? Is it relevant in relation to the field of intervention, to beneficiaries and to objectives? What parties does it involve? Is attentive listening and the involvement of "beneficiaries" in implementing the projected action planned in and how? What is the approach envisaged for monitoring, feedback and internalization of results? Are the steps and bodies necessary for conducting changes planned in?

- **The suitability of the proposed expert's technical and teaching competences** in relation to the request for participatory expertise **and his/her independence in relation to structures making the request.** The national expert must of course in the first place possess the knowledge and know-how relating to the nature of the request: financial management, institutional or strategic analysis, human resources, organisation, communication, etc... He must also be able to involve his "customers" in the procedure so that they can internalize and share the diagnosis and to pass on the know-how essential to conducting changes. **The use of participatory methods will be a pledge on this capacity.** Lastly, the expert must be in a situation allowing him independence in his procedures and results. For example, it is difficult to envisage that an employee of an NGO federation or a support NGO should be able to carry out an expertise in the context of the FEP for a structure that also belongs to the federation or is backed by the support NGO.
- **The nature of the requested expertise** which must permit the structural development of organisations making the requests: strategic, institutional, organisational analyses, audits or evaluations, in management and finance, in communication, in human resources management, etc...

#### 4.3. An operational system

- **A call for requests of expertise** is – each year for 3 years – most widely circulated among the NGOs, associations and local government authorities in each area where an FEP is established.
- **A "national" coordinator** – established in an FEP branch – is put in charge of coordinating each of the FEPs. He adapts the FEP to the national or regional context concerned, coordinates and federates a Steering Committee around the FEP, encourages the emergence of requests, identifies local consultants, considers requests in line with announced criteria, capitalises on experience.
- **An FEP branch**, the coordinator's logistics base which he manages in liaison with a French ISO developing its activities in the country concerned.
- **A voluntary Steering Committee**, made up of resource persons from the countries concerned and representatives of the Fondation de France, is assigned to examine the expertise requests presented by the coordinator.
- **A Patronage Committee**: less formal than the Steering Committee, the Patronage Committee will be made up of representatives of the State, of NGO federations or groups, of associations, of community groups, of local governments and of donors with an interest in the process. A review of the FEP's action will be proposed and debated under the Patronage Committee and paths for perpetuating the FEP will be envisaged. To date, no Patronage Committee has been formed since the Fondation de France still has to suggest concrete elements for review and reflection on procedures that will have been financed in the context of the FEPs.

### 5. A few points at issue about the "participatory" approach

Adopting a pragmatic approach, the FEP has not taken on preconceived rigid definitions, preferring to analyse situations case by case in order to progressively build a "doctrine".

We have drawn a few lessons on the participatory approach from the evaluation of the "Participatory evaluation, a tool for development" programme carried out in 1999.

Participatory evaluations are often a great opportunity for discussion. The debates generated by evaluation – from drawing up the terms of reference through to feedbacks – are "machines for consensus" and thus work to reinforce direct democracy. In a certain fashion, the presence of an evaluator creates a new space for discussion and helps to renew

"internal" debate. The time of feedbacks, during huge meetings that take place over several days and bring together a high number of people who are physically distant from each other, is a major event in the structure's life. Seen in this way by the protagonists, these meetings enable the renewal of reflection, expression and change.

If, in the context of a programme, financed evaluations developed well in line with a participatory approach and produced positive effects (expression by beneficiaries, collective reflections, participation in decision-making, etc...), because the process is so demanding, it is necessary to surround it with a certain number of conditions.

- **The participatory approach is expensive:** In order to develop participatory procedures, we must accept that the people concerned meet each other, discuss conclusions and take time for decision-making. For this, the Fondation de France has often "introduced a participatory touch" in the budgets proposed for negotiating terms of reference, for enquiries in the field and above all for feedbacks. According to NGOs that have had this support, this participatory touch has helped them to communicate better with partners in the field and made it easier to take into consideration the opinion of the beneficiaries of projects.
- **It requires time:** The most ambitious participatory procedures have taken place in an alternation of times for action and times for "maturing": training, data collection, debates, synthesis, feedback, etc... While the participatory approach can be of help in drawing up collective judgements (and not be limited to "processing opinions"), it is a process that requires time and a pace suited to the recipients. This relative "slowness" must be accepted and encouraged from the start so that what is said can become sustainable movement.
- **It presupposes a minimum of internal and external competences:** Internal discussions linked to the definition of terms of reference and negotiation of the evaluator's methodological memorandum, assume that those involved from the NGO have knowledge of both evaluation and participatory procedures. Otherwise, the evaluator may become too "powerful" in this essential phase. The evaluator must also have training and real expertise in the participatory approach. Being able to encourage people to speak and then listening to them is not necessarily part of the competences of any evaluator.
- **It does not just happen on the day of evaluation:** projects or programmes that have not been constructed within the framework of a participatory method cannot suddenly ask about the "judgement" of the beneficiaries.
- **Similarly, if it is only thought of as a tool, the participatory approach loses its ability to become a democratic method for regulating the strategies of NGOs:** Approaching base groups on a participatory mode is not necessarily a tool for self-promotion of populations. The method is not enough in itself to encourage the emergence of representative organisations that can assume a certain number of "political" functions. By tying the participatory approach to a method or tool, one reduces the ability of base groups to truly weigh on the strategic choices that concern them.

Just like the "Participatory evaluation, a tool for development" programme, one-off expertise assignments supported by the FEP must demonstrate – in their design, implementation and internalization – a real intention to incorporate those in charge of development and the populations. Emphasis is therefore placed on the participatory nature of the expertise process. The issue for the FEP is less participation in itself than "getting people to participate". The participatory approach – as a means – has a two-fold advantage for the FEP:

- it is the *sine qua non* of an effective expertise in terms of internalizing both results and methods,
- it allows the creation of conditions for the commitment, free expression and empowerment of beneficiaries.

Although one can use the request dossiers to identify what an expertise is or is not in the context of the FEP; it is still difficult to identify on paper what is designed to be really participatory.

In fact, the participatory aspect is not built in stone, but is experimented and measured by the commitment of beneficiaries. The only way to identify a participatory approach is to act pragmatically by seeing how the expertise work procedure is going to develop at all the important stages.

Thus, in October 2001, when examining requests for expertise the Steering Committee of the FEP in Mali considered that the best way to check that the process was truly participatory was to ensure the presence of a third party during discussion and negotiation of the terms of reference, the methodology and the timetable.

**The first stage of the analysis of the participatory aspect by the Steering Committee is documentary:** terms of reference defined by the requesting party, methodological memorandum produced by the expert and budget. However, although this stage is important (reading a budget can allow one to see whether or not time has been set aside for collective and feedback meetings, etc...), it is not sufficient since today "everybody uses participatory methods".

**The presence of a third party when defining the expertise or at any other phase of the work undertaken:** The Steering Committee has proposed that the coordinator or a member of the Steering Committee may be present at least during the phase of negotiating the terms of reference between the expert and the requesting party or at any other time. This presence is mentioned in the letter of undertaking from the Fondation de France, together with the possibility of a right to observe the expertise process at any moment. The presence of a third party during such negotiation takes on two other advantages: it allows the free formulation of questions or relevant paths of analysis by the expert which might not have been envisaged by the requesting party; it also makes it possible to assess that the expert has correctly understood the request.

**Monitoring the internalization of recommendations:** When the first call for requests of expertise was launched, the Steering Committee of the Indian Ocean FEP proposed in December 2001 that, contractually, one or two days should be planned with consultants 6 months after the end of the expertise to observe the status of internalization of such recommendations by the requesting parties. A review report would be sent to the beneficiary of the expertise as well as to the FEP.

It is still too early to assess the contribution of FEPs to the structuring and professionalization of development organisations and experts and the role of the participatory approach. The first expertises financed in Mali at the end of 2001 have only just been completed.

We are trying to be pragmatic in our approach while at the same time developing our reflection thanks to the contributions provided by coordinators, members of Steering Committees and our contacts (organisations, experts, donors, cooperation agents).

The Fondation de France is looking for the sustainability and development of FEPs. A system to evaluate such initiatives will be implemented by associating the donors and different bodies involved in development with an interest in the process. Towards the end of the experimental period (before the end of the 3 years planned for each FEP), an independent evaluation will be commissioned by the Fondation de France. It will be

integrated in the continual process of capitalization and will give rise to an important feedback.

### **FEP contact information**

**FEP MALI:** **Chairman of the Steering Committee: Michèle Leclerc-Olive**  
**Coordinator:** **Seydou Tangara**  
Korofina Sud - Point d'appui Franco-Suisse  
Rue 96 – Porte 797  
BP 2386 – Bamako – Mali  
Tél.: (223) 224 44 60 ou (223) 224 60 13 ou (223) 224 94 85  
Fax: (223) 224 61 19  
Email: [FEPmali@afribone.net.ml](mailto:FEPmali@afribone.net.ml)

**FEP INDIAN OCEAN:** **Chairman of the Steering Committee: Jean-Paul Vigier**  
**Coordinator:** **Julie Razafindrasata**  
IVG 204 Immeuble SANTA lot II – 1<sup>er</sup> étage gauche – Antanimena  
BP: 7597 – Antananarivo 101 – Madagascar  
Tel.: (261) 20 22 238 98 or (261) 20 22 239 07 or (261) 33 11 411 58  
Fax: (261) 20 22 239 07  
Email: [fep-oi@wanadoo.mg](mailto:fep-oi@wanadoo.mg)

**FEP MOROCCO:** **Chairman of the Steering Committee: Patrice Blanc**  
**Coordinator:** **Hamid Elkam**  
C/O Oxfam Québec  
6 A, rue Esshoul – Aviation – Rabat – Morocco  
Tel: (212) 037 75 95 58 – Tel / Fax/ Rep: (212) 037 65 74 06  
Email: [fepmaroc@wanadoopro.ma](mailto:fepmaroc@wanadoopro.ma)

This programme is conducted under the responsibility of:

**Jean-Claude Fages,**  
**head of the “Solidarités Internationales” programme**  
Fondation de France - 40 avenue Hoche – 75008 Paris – France  
Tel: 33 (0)1 44 21 31 67 – fax: 33 (0)1 44 21 31 54  
Email: [international@fdf.org](mailto:international@fdf.org)

FEPs are coordinated by:

**Caroline Guillot-Marchi, consultant,**  
5, avenue du Maréchal Juin – 92100 Boulogne - France  
Tel: 33 (0)1 14 22 05 29 - Fax: 33 (0)1 46 04 03 06  
Email: [cgm.terra@wanadoo.fr](mailto:cgm.terra@wanadoo.fr)