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Official development assistance and food security

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The response strategy in France

With more than 800 million people in the world still facing food insecurity, especially in the countries of the South, official development assistance (ODA) has a key role to play in ending hunger. From this perspective, donors need to define a framework for action to structure their discussions with aid recipient countries and to inform national policy debates in order to identify opportunities for experimentation. After being relatively “eclipsed”, food security issues are back on the agenda in spring 2016: East Africa, and more specifically Ethiopia, is once again facing a

major food crisis caused by adverse weather conditions. Beyond emergency food aid, to which France contributes actively through its support for the World Food Programme (WFP), how can or should French ODA contribute to action on food insecurity, in East Africa and elsewhere? In order to answer this question, France needs to renew its strategy for food security and nutrition in 2016. This will then need to be translated into a sectoral intervention framework (SIF) by the Agence Française de Développement (AFD - French Development Agency), the main French operator for official development assistance. The current SIF, adopted in 2013, expires this year and will need to be renewed. This framework produced two developments. In terms of form, it clarified the agency's approach, encouraging greater accountability. In terms of substance, it particularly highlighted the importance of family farming, agroecology and ecologically intensive agriculture, which other donors did not demonstrate as clearly.

In order to contribute to discussions on the renewal of this SIF, the Coordination Sud agriculture and food commission organised a workshop on 11 May with the main French stakeholders, including IDDRI. While bringing together French operators seems necessary in order to outline a shared political vision, it is important to remember that ODA is also built *with and for* the countries of the South. This post aims to provide some insights into the **role the SIF can and must play in the negotiations between these countries and France, and into its drafting process**. The goal of this sidestep is particularly to ensure the relations between donors and recipient countries are once more central to discussions on ODA, in line with the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness adopted 11 years ago. This declaration holds that if the countries of the South are better able to solicit donors based on policies they have defined themselves, then aid stands a better chance of being effective.

In this context, the role of the SIF is not to hold donors strictly and individually accountable for the content of the projects they finance in the South (beyond the environmental and social safeguard clauses that form the fundamental standard-setting framework for ODA). This would in fact imply challenging the sovereignty of the recipient countries. However, the SIF makes a real contribution, both to the drafting processes for AFD assistance programmes and to the content of these programmes in terms of food security.

An SIF has an important *structural dimension*, especially for discussions between AFD and its partners, in particular in the upstream phases of projects, when the legitimacy and priority or, on the contrary, the impossibility of funding different modes of action are being reviewed. Its effectiveness and influence then depend on its take-up by AFD officials and on their capacity to use it in discussions with their peers. They also depend on the drafting and revision processes during which the content of the SIF is defined. If these processes are inclusive in terms of stakeholders, as is the case within AFD, they will be more likely to produce discussions on different perspectives and approaches, and the resulting SIF will thus be more robust, legitimate and easier to use. The SIF can also play a role in *mobilisation*, if it is used not within AFD, but by stakeholders in the recipient countries. It can and must then be mobilised by civil society organisations in these countries in their discussions with their governments, which were able, at least in the past, to “hide” behind their relations with their donors to justify the decisions made: “the donor made me do it”, or “I didn’t succeed in obtaining this”. As such, the SIF can help to inform national policy debates in aid recipient countries. This kind of strategic approach may be seen by some as illegitimate, since it is akin to interference; we, on the other hand, see it as an important tool for change in national public policy frameworks in order to encourage testing of new modes of action. This could, for example, involve integrating nutrition as a key area of action, and not just as a secondary priority after agricultural development. From this viewpoint,

although donors cannot be held fully accountable for the content of the projects countries ask them to finance, they should nevertheless be obliged to ensure these projects are defined through processes that are as inclusive as possible, with the participation of local civil society organisations. These two functions of an SIF – as a structural framework and a tool for mobilisation – play a specific role in terms of food security, in particular in two key areas.

1. In terms of agricultural development, France is making original proposals capable of producing a paradigm shift whose importance is increasingly recognised (*Sécurité alimentaire en Afrique subsaharienne : faut-il une rupture dans le modèle agricole ? Policy Briefs N°04/2012, IDDRI*)^[1]. Although these proposals are neglected by most other donors, they are proving to be close to some parts of civil society and certain farmers' organisations, in both the North and the South: family farming, agroecology and ecologically intensive agriculture. In a context in which many countries of the South have based their agricultural development on agribusiness and the green revolution, convincing them to change direction or at least to launch experiments is a major challenge in many respects. Meeting this challenge requires a conceptual and action framework that is sufficiently structured to enable debate (see the structural role of the SIF), but also calls for *political* support (see the mobilising role of the SIF).
2. Similarly, the issue of nutrition is currently tackled mainly from an “agri-centric” approach, both in the current version of the AFD's SIF and in public policies in the recipient countries. The drafting process for the next SIF could be the opportunity for AFD to gather the proposals of stakeholders with recognised competence in this field. Making it available to stakeholders in recipient countries would also be an interesting way of stimulating national discussions on possible ways of integrating nutritional issues into food security policies.

^[1] See also « *Fin de la faim : comment assurer la transition agricole et alimentaire ?* », *Working Papers* N°04/2014, IDDRI, and “*Changing agricultural models in the post-2015 development agenda: implications for official development assistance (ODA)*”, *Policy Briefs* N°08/2014. IDDRI.
