

# EVALUATION OF ENABEL'S RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

## MAIN LESSONS LEARNED

DECEMBER 2020



photo: Enabel

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**Enabel** is the development agency of the Belgian federal government and implements Belgium's international development policy in 14 partner countries<sup>1</sup>. Enabel also implements projects financed by other donors, including the European Commission.

**COTA** is a Belgian international solidarity organisation. Its mission is to support the actors of social change in their reflection and their actions for the benefit of development. COTA contributes to this by facilitating collective learning processes (collaborative work, multi-actor approach, etc.). To do so it carries out research, support, capitalisation and evaluation activities.



<sup>1</sup> Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Guinea, Mali, Morocco, Mozambique, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda and the Palestinian Territories.

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# ABBREVIATIONS

4

**ATI** : International Technical Assistant

**CoP** : Communities of Practice

**COVID-19** : SARS-CoV-2, or Coronavirus Disease

**DGD** : Directorate-General for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid

**DRC** : Democratic Republic of Congo

**EQUITE** : Together for an Inclusive and Transparent Quality of Care, oriented towards Gender Equality (Benin)

**EU** : European Union

**GIS** : Geographic Information System

**ICT** : Information and communication technologies

**Lux-Dev** : Luxembourg Development Agency

**PADP** : Provincial Development Support Programme (DRC)

**PARERBA** : Support Project for the Reduction of Rural Emigration in the Groundnut Basin (Senegal)

**PPE** : Personal protective equipment

**ResRep** : Resident Representative

**TFP** : Technical and financial partners

**WHO** : World Health Organization

# 1 INTRODUCTION

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) classified the COVID-19 epidemic as a pandemic, and called on governments to urgently put in place preventive measures to contain the spread of the virus. The containment measures put in place in countries around the world have severely restricted the movement of people and goods, both internationally and within countries. In Africa in particular, schools and markets have been closed in most countries. While these measures were primarily aimed at containing the spread of the virus, they have had adverse effects on education, the economy, food security, gender-based violence and the health sector.

In addition, in most partner countries the number of beds in intensive care units with ventilators and the availability of oxygen therapy is very limited. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is essential to reduce the risk of transmission of the virus between healthcare workers and patients, but its availability is also limited. Water and sanitation play a key role in reducing the risk of transmission of the virus, but in many countries access to clean water is a challenge.

It is in this context that Enabel, the Belgian development agency, has adapted its interventions, either to provide direct support to the health crisis caused by COVID-19, or to mitigate the impact of indirect effects.

The challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic have led to multiple adaptations of operating modalities, interventions and innovations. In this context, Enabel's internal evaluation department has initiated a real-time evaluation (covering the period from March to August 2020) of Enabel's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of this evaluation is to document the response in real time and understand HOW and WHY this response is taking place. The evaluation helps to understand the decision-making mechanisms during the crisis, gives an appreciation of Enabel's agility and capacity for innovation in times of crisis, and highlights what worked well and what needs improvement, what facilitated the response or, on the contrary, what constraints and challenges were encountered and how these were overcome.

This document presents the main lessons learned from the evaluation of Enabel's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is based on the overall analysis report of the evaluation as well as the case study reports (Niger, DRC and Benin).

# 2 ADAPTATION, FLEXIBILITY, AGILITY: SOME CONCEPTS

**Adaptation**<sup>2</sup> is defined as an alternative to approaches to solution of development problems that promote adherence to detailed plans in a linear and mechanical way. Adaptation deviates from initial plans.

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**Flexibility**<sup>3</sup> is the ability to adapt to particular circumstances.

**Agility**<sup>4</sup> is the ability to make decisions and adjustments in response to new information and changing circumstances.

As in the definitions above, most other definitions of agility or adaptive management use the following terms<sup>5</sup> :

**Structured process ...  
...for decision making and adjustment  
...in response to uncertainties**

## « In response to uncertainties »

Agile or adaptive management is relevant in complex and/or unpredictable situations where there are important changes in the objectives and modalities of intervention. It includes reinforced monitoring of the context and pays greater attention to the management of teams that find themselves confronted with unpredictable situations.

## « Decision-making and adjustment »

The aim of agile or adaptive management is to be able to make the right decision and adjust an intervention at the right time. Governance issues are therefore at the heart of all agile management: who makes adjustment decisions at what level and in which areas?

## « Structured process »

Agility does not mean doing what you want: on the contrary, it requires even stronger structuring than a more classic management modality. This structuring must in particular make it possible to anticipate risks and strengthen capacity to adapt to unpredictable events.

<sup>2</sup> Adapting Aid: lessons from six case studies, Mercy Corps/IRC, June 2016.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/flexibilit%C3%A9/34138>

<sup>4</sup> «Agility» or «Adaptive management»: implementing solidarity actions in complex situations, Michael Carrier, Groupe URD, April 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

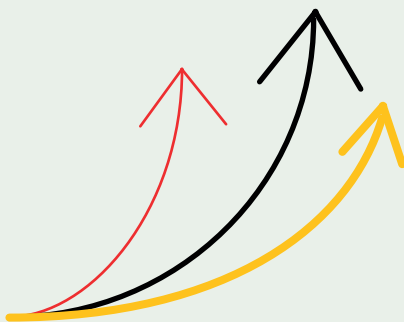
# 3 MAIN LESSONS LEARNED

## A. APPROACH ADAPTED TO THE RAPIDLY CHANGING CONTEXT



**RELEVANCE OF LONG-TERM PROGRAMMING:** Long-term programming (particularly in health systems strengthening and food security) supports relevant adaptations in a crisis context.

The type of programme implemented by Enabel can work and evolve along a continuum from a crisis situation to resilience building and «post-COVID-19» thinking. As these programmes are primarily aimed at building the resilience of health or food systems over the long term and generally work within a fairly flexible results framework, they have been agile in the face of a health emergency. They are sufficiently flexible to respond to changing contexts, and teams have a thorough understanding of the relationships between all stakeholders and the functioning of the systems as a whole. These programmes usually have material and human resources that are readily available in the field and not just at the central level.



### EXAMPLE

In DRC, the adaptation strategy was to finance activities that simultaneously strengthen the health system (within the national response plan) and are linked to the initial objectives of the project. In concrete terms, the choice of relevant activities was made rapidly: (1) PPE<sup>6</sup> in the first few days (essential to limit contagion in the intervention teams); (2) computer/tablet support to ensure follow-up of cases and contacts; (3) off-road ambulances with resuscitation equipment (monitors, oxygen); (4) delivery of medicines and oxygen equipment (oximeters) in a few days. In addition to these «health emergency» type activities, there are also activities that are more in line with the strengthening of the health system: capacity building for services (upgrading the capacity of health staff, rehabilitation of buildings/isolation sites) and support in terms of medical consumables and equipment (donation via the national drug supply system). In addition, Enabel, in the provinces (within the Health Zones), has teams active in the field and therefore rapidly available for the response.

<sup>6</sup>Personal protective equipment.



**ADAPTATIONS ABOVE ALL TO ENSURE CONTINUITY:** Enabel's response to COVID-19 has mainly involved adaptations of existing interventions to ensure their continuity. The most vulnerable people were able to benefit from COVID-19 support when they were targeted in the initial interventions.

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People working in the informal sector, although heavily impacted by the COVID-19 crisis, have not been the direct beneficiaries of Enabel's response. The target populations remained the same as those identified in the initial interventions. In practice, when minor adaptations are made to ongoing interventions with the aim of ensuring the continuity of the project, the groups of beneficiaries cannot be easily modified - a change in target groups requires more significant adaptations and the approval of donors. As a result, the groups that would be most affected by the crisis may not be taken into account in the response.

However, it should be emphasised that Enabel's responses within the framework of programmes combining food security and support for farmers and herders as the direct beneficiaries of the interventions have made it possible to help the poorest households.



### EXAMPLE

In Senegal, in order to support the State in its programme for economic and social resilience in the face of the coronavirus epidemic, Enabel adapted the European Union-funded project to support the reduction of rural emigration in the groundnut basin (PARERBA project). Enabel bought 620 tons of onions from producers in 18 partner communes and distributed them to the most vulnerable households. The aim of this action is to both enable producers who are particularly affected by restrictions on movement to sell their harvest, and to redistribute this production to vulnerable households with the support of the administrative authorities.



### POINTS TO WATCH OUT FOR

In times of crisis, to meet the needs of the most vulnerable who are not the original target groups, it is necessary to consider new interventions or major adaptations, for example an additional project outcome allowing for a broadening of the target/beneficiary groups. This would ensure greater relevance to needs.



**VIGILANCE FOR VULNERABLE GROUPS:** While it seems appropriate to align with national response plans, it is essential to do so critically and to further analyse the effects on beneficiaries of interventions.

Most sexual and reproductive health interventions have been partially redirected to respond to the emergency health situation related to COVID-19. However, good practices and guidance shared since the beginning of the crisis highlight the need to preserve essential health services, such as family planning. The risk of increased gender-based violence also exists in times of crisis, so access to services must not be affected. Care must therefore be taken to strike the right balance between alignment with national response plans and international recommendations, whilst taking particular care that adaption of programmes does not disadvantage the groups most vulnerable to the crisis.



#### EXAMPLE

In Benin, the EQUITE project (financed by AFD) which operates in the sexual and reproductive health (SRH) sector has been significantly adapted with creation of an additional component dedicated entirely to the COVID-19 response. This new component is supported by a substantial budget<sup>7</sup>: on the one hand via an additional budget and on the other hand via budget reallocations. Priority was given to activities in support of the national response plan (laboratory capacity building, acquisition of PPE, acquisition of consumables and laboratory equipment, work to upgrade

the sites for the management of COVID-19 cases, etc.). With the exception of community mobilisation activities which were implemented in the project's intervention zone (Collines Department), the other activities of the response did not directly concern the main beneficiaries of the project in connection with SRH. In Benin, SRH themes such as family planning were not included in the national response plan.

To cover potential problems of inclusivity in general, in some countries Enabel has proposed actions to guarantee access to information for all, without discrimination (eg adapting communication channels via community radio stations, translating into different local languages). This inclusivity dimension is essential in the response to such an emergency context («leave no one behind»).



#### POINTS TO WATCH OUT FOR

Formulation of new interventions or adaptation of interventions have not been subject to gender analysis. Gender markers have not been defined. In order to promote the inclusion and gender dimension, it is important to strengthen the skills of intervention managers to assess needs in terms of gender and broader human rights.

<sup>7</sup> 2.830.000€ (1.830.000€ as Top-up and 1.000.000€ as budget allocation).

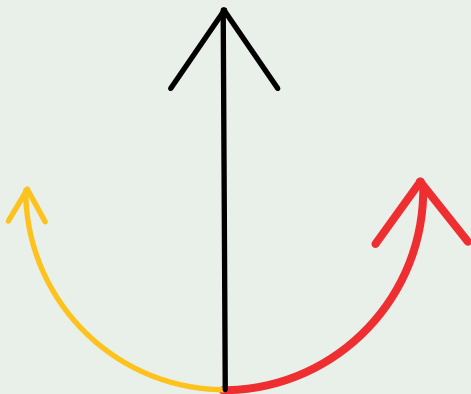
## B. TRUSTED PARTNERSHIPS/INSTITUTIONAL ANCHORING



**DOUBLE ANCHORING:** Very close collaboration with central and decentralised institutional partners was essential to ensure rapid implementation of the response to direct needs. In such moments of stress and uncertainty, trust is the key to moving forward.

Enabel's working approach of «dual anchoring» within the country's institutions ensures immediate availability of field staff at central and decentralised levels, and capacity to monitor changing needs of partner countries, guide the response and strengthen socio-economic resilience over time.

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### EXAMPLE

In DRC and Niger, integration of Enabel's health intervention technical teams within the Ministry of Health facilitates rapid internal decision-making to readjust activities in line with the national response plan. In these two countries the good dynamics existing between Belgian governmental cooperation and its national, regional and local partners, and in particular the special relationship between Enabel and the Ministry of Public Health, have clearly supported the response. The presence of active teams in the field at decentralised level who were rapidly available for the response was a factor in its success. For example in Niger, in the framework of the new intervention co-financed by the EU and Lux-Dev (Team Europe Niger) project teams in the Health Districts (Dosso, Maradi and Zinder), could easily work with the Directors of the targeted hospitals and the managers of the resuscitation services to identify their needs/inventories and to quickly find the most sustainable solutions (for example, the choice of tropicalized equipment in small quantities where there is HR to use them, rather than acquiring many respirators in the absence of enough HR to operate them).



**ESSENTIAL ROLE OF REPRESENTATIONS AND TEAM COMMITMENT:** Good relations between donors and development agencies at country level (representations) are essential to facilitate an agile response.

During the COVID-19 crisis Enabel was sought by other donors as well as the Belgian government, more so than in non-crisis times (64% of the overall response budget comes from these other donors). According to the respondents, the Belgian Development Agency is appreciated in particular thanks to its longstanding double anchorage with institutional partners and at decentralised levels.

Generally speaking, Belgium's position as a key player in the coordination of technical and financial partners (TFPs) at the level of the Ministry of Health facilitated the response.



#### EXAMPLE

In Niger, the Technical Cooperation Expert at the Embassy who works as coordinator of the TFPs in the health sector at the level of the Ministry of Public Health facilitated the response, in particular with identification of the new intervention co-financed by the EU and Lux-Dev (Team Europe Niger).

A strong OneTeam<sup>8</sup> Belgium had a positive impact on the coherence and coordination of the response and enhanced visibility of Belgium.

<sup>8</sup> The Enabel representation and the Belgian Embassy operate in the partner country as one team and speak with one voice.



#### EXAMPLE

Also in Niger, the Embassy played a facilitating role in bringing Enabel into contact with the Belgian Defence forces; equipment<sup>9</sup> was transported via several military flights (already planned within the framework of the Defence). This synergy between actors has enabled the rapid supply of equipment to deal with the health crisis at a lower cost for Enabel.

The quality of coordination between actors (inter-TFP, State) in the framework of the response depends on several factors: (1) a solid TFP partnership framework pre-existing before the crisis with leadership and coordination; (2) a quality national response plan supported by these TFPs; (3) TFPs that remain in place during the crisis. Indeed, particularly with regard to this last element, a key factor that has influenced coordination between actors seems to have been the presence of technical and financial partner staff. In countries where most of the staff of other development organisations were repatriated to their countries of origin, coordination has not been optimal. It was important for the partner countries to see that certain actors were still in place and in this context it was a positive message from Belgian development cooperation: all of Enabel's representatives and key staff remained in the partner countries during the first wave of the pandemic.

<sup>9</sup> Cotton fleece (mask fabric filter), Decathlon masks, PCR swabs, etc.

## C. INNOVATIONS IN THE FACE OF THE CRISIS



**RELEVANT BUT LIMITED INNOVATIONS:** Relevant innovations have been implemented as part of the response but remain limited because : (i) the emergency does not leave much time to test new ideas, it is easier to start from what we know and apply it to other contexts without specifically seeking to innovate and risking failure; (ii) not enough capitalisation is available on good practices already implemented in the face of a crisis; (iii) the legal framework limits innovations in terms of partnerships or contractualisation, for example with private structures.

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Digitalisation tools have been used either for the overall functioning of the organisation, such as the widespread use of Teams for training, workshops or simple meetings. They have also been used directly in interventions, for example hackathon, digital toolbox, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in education, basic digitalisation of hospitals with the on-line publication of patient files, setting up an application to avoid stock shortages in vaccines, etc.

Digitalisation is booming but the environment in which Enabel operates is a low-resource environment. Enabel's teams have studied how to create a digital ecosystem within interventions whose target groups are highly vulnerable in socio-economic terms, such as students in vocational education. For these target groups, it is not possible to institutionalise distance learning until the digital ecosystem of the training institute is strengthened.



### EXAMPLE

In Uganda, a distance education strategy entitled « Sandbox » has been piloted in the country's 5 National Teachers' Colleges with a view to drawing lessons for the entire education sector at the national level. This innovative model provides a testing environment for educational technologies (EdTech) and makes full use of the potential of teachers to respond to the current crisis in education by introducing various ICT tools and practices that facilitate and improve distance education.



### EXAMPLE

In the DRC Enabel has developed a partnership with the NGO Bibliothèque Sans Frontières (Library Without Borders) to access digital teaching modules, notably from the Khan Academy<sup>10</sup>. The NGO offers both online and offline access to information, with content that can be updated as soon as the Internet connection is up and running. The Enabel teams are also testing SD microchips for smartphones that contain the curriculum for teachers. It is planned to distribute them to 5000 teachers who have Android phones.

<sup>10</sup> Khan Academy is a non-profit association founded in 2008 by Salman Khan. On the principle of «providing high quality education to everyone, everywhere» (<https://www.khanacademy.org>).

The crisis has allowed Enabel to try other approaches to support producers in access to markets and thus increase their resilience, sometimes without additional money and without changing the objectives of the interventions, simply by listening and being attentive to the dynamics of resilience and by being able to accompany these approaches in the field.

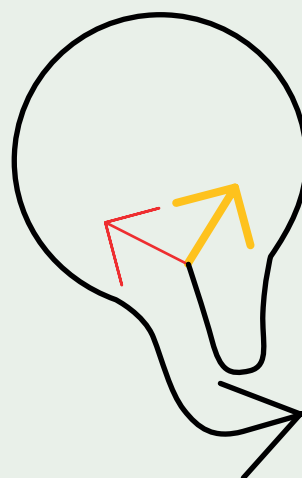
Enabel has also been able to demonstrate its ability to create synergies between the different sectors in order to propose concerted adaptations to the crisis and identify joint or complementary actions that are mutually reinforcing.



### EXAMPLE

In Benin, the project teams held discussions with processing companies to find out if they were experiencing cash flow problems. A financing plan was then co-constructed and Enabel accompanied the companies to banks and microfinance institutions to obtain a bridging loan. Seven pineapple agro-processing companies were thus able to continue their activities with the result that all the producers of these companies were paid, the processing plants continued to operate, and the companies honoured their orders and maintained their expected cash flow.

In Morocco, marketing channels have been blocked because of COVID-19. Date producers have had to adapt and find alternatives. Among these, 60 members of approved professional organisations participated remotely in 30 awareness sessions on e-commerce, organised by Enabel and its partners. 10 organisations have already taken steps to get into e-commerce and will be supported in developing their digital marketing strategy. Professional organisations are now interested in online sales because by diversifying marketing channels farmers are less vulnerable to the vagaries of the market.



### EXAMPLE

In DRC, masks and hand washing devices were produced by students in technical schools supported by Enabel. This strategy has a threefold advantage; firstly the pupils benefit from the necessary protection, secondly production within the schools' workshops is a continuation of the vocational training activity, and finally the masks are available for the state and other donors to acquire locally.

Also in the DRC, as part of the implementation of local chlorine production systems for supply networks, Enabel supported additional production for health centres close to these networks.

## D. FLEXIBILITY IN PROCEDURES



**SIMPLE PROCESSES - QUICK RESPONSE:** the simpler the processes, the quicker the response, provided both are accompanied by clear communication.

Procedures and measures for a crisis context already existed within Enabel. Minor adaptations made it possible to reactivate them quickly and to strengthen their use (e.g. digitisation of administrative and financial procedures, direct assignment procedure to meet urgent staff needs, shorter procedure for public procurement, teleworking and use of Teams).

For each procurement request it is necessary to examine whether the conditions of extreme urgency are actually met. On the basis of our various interviews, this simplification of procedures facilitates a faster response.

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### EXAMPLE

At the level of public procurement, simplified emergency procedures have been activated and improved in the context of COVID-19. Specifically, frameworks for negotiated emergency procedures were simplified (before, these were not flexible enough to allow rapid action). For urgent and emergency purchases in the context of the COVID-19 health crisis (e.g. supply of surgical and FFP2 masks, hydro-alcoholic gels, medical respirators, etc.), the contracting authority can use the negotiated procedure without prior publication. This procedure is faster and more flexible in its implementation than an open procedure. However, as it is an exceptional procedure and limits competition (since the contracting authority itself chooses the economic operators with whom it will negotiate), it has to be strictly controlled.

The approach taken has been to ensure that each country office adapts to its own context. This has proved to be effective. Nevertheless, even the simplest process should be clear to everyone. The communication and coordination role of headquarters in ensuring a consistent understanding of the instructions in all countries is also very important.



### EXAMPLE

In some countries, according to our interviews, instructions from headquarters to determine which procurement is a matter of «urgency» have not been sufficiently clear or properly understood. This could have an impact on the implementation of the remaining public procurement contracts (a longer procedure than initially foreseen).



**ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT, ONLY IF FLEXIBILITY ALLOWS IT:** Donor Strategy guidance notes for the COVID-19 pandemic should include both indications of the need for adaptations in the medium term, and adjustments to procedures for greater flexibility.

As part of the response to COVID-19, the DGD allowed Enabel to make budget reallocations to adapt its ongoing interventions. The budget limits<sup>11</sup> imposed by DGD in this framework mainly concern short-term adaptations (in particular actions such as emergency health response) and also constitute a safeguard to ensure that interventions do not diverge too much from their initially expected results. For medium-term adaptations, the guidance provided in the COVID-19 Pandemic Strategy Notes is not always compatible with existing procedures and there may be a need for adaptations in the country strategy.

In line with the flexibility offered by other donors (e.g. the framework of AFD's EQUITE project in Benin has a rider for budget reallocation which allows the addition of a specific result on COVID-19), it would be relevant to find a mechanism that allows for the modification/addition of a result in an emergency or other context that requires it (in particular for medium term adaptations).

In crisis-prone contexts, it would make sense to build into portfolio formulation the possibility that a portion of the budget reserve could be allocated to response in the event and changing context of a crisis.

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### EXAMPLE

In Benin, it proved necessary to adapt the country strategy to the changing context related to COVID-19. In the agricultural pillar of the country portfolio, it was proposed to add a rice sector to the pineapple sector (pineapple being essentially an export product), to ensure greater resilience and food security for the local market. Although justified by the COVID-19 context and validated by stakeholders in Benin (including the Belgian Embassy), it took several months of discussion to adapt the country strategy and redirect €3-4 million to the rice sector. The adaptation of the country strategy in Benin demonstrated the length and cumbersomeness of the process, which is unsuited to changes in context requiring rapid adaptations of intervention.



### REMARK

Due to the expectation of a change of government, it was impossible for Belgian cooperation to make any new commitments. Consequently, the response to COVID-19 was made within the framework of the existing support programme and according to the established rules. It should be noted however that in the current situation more than 30 million euros of Belgian bilateral cooperation have been remobilised to respond to the changing contexts of partner countries' cooperation programmes. These budgets cover other programme adaptations which are also justified beyond the COVID-19 crisis. The COVID-19 crisis will have helped accelerate a process that had already been underway for several months.

<sup>11</sup> Up to 1% of the current programme/portfolio can be included for the COVID-19 response (0.5% for DRC, Burundi and Rwanda); maximum 15% reallocation between relevant interventions.

## E. AGILITY, COHESION AND DYNAMISM OF THE TEAMS



**INTERNAL AGILITY:** agile management of operating methods has enabled Enabel to maintain close-knit and motivated teams, despite the distances between headquarters and the field and the uncertainty of the pandemic's evolution.

Enabel's teams, both at headquarters and country level, have been fully engaged in the response to COVID-19. This mobilization was manifested through the establishment of crisis units, contingency plans, teleworking, the use of Teams, the establishment of Communities of Practice, the reformulation of activities following budget reallocations, and the formulation of new interventions.

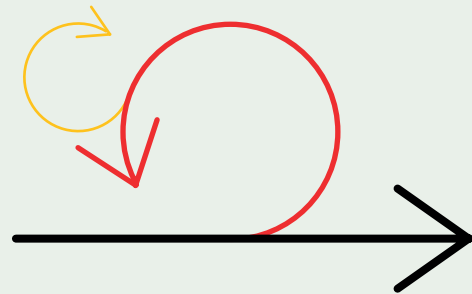
Culture, team spirit and leadership are key elements in an agile response to a crisis situation. In the majority of countries, this has resulted in the rapid establishment of a crisis unit within the Enabel Representation, with the main objective of supporting the country in response management.

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### EXAMPLE

In Niger, formulation of the new intervention in the health sector, co-financed by the EU and Lux-Dev was carried out in record time (about 2 weeks), thanks to maximum mobilisation of headquarters and the field and collaboration via Teams.



### POINTS TO WATCH OUT FOR

In a change of context similar to that of the COVID-19 crisis, in which Enabel has to respond not only by formulating major readjustments within very short deadlines but also by launching and implementing a large number of public contracts, it is important to secure human resources (pre-identify, make available and provide compensation for the extra work provided), both at headquarters and at country level. Indeed, these remain at the heart of the intervention implementation mechanism. Without them, the effectiveness of the response is uncertain.



### EXAMPLE

In the DRC, a small health expertise unit has been set up to manage the adaptation of specific interventions to the emergency health response. Part of the health programme staff has been mobilised to make up this unit and support technical/logistical/administrative aspects of the response. This expertise specifically adapted to the crisis, coupled with dual leadership (Resident Representative and Health Programme Coordinator) who were involved on a full-time basis for four months, enabled Enabel and its partners to respond rapidly and appropriately.



**LEARNING ORGANISATION:** providing spaces for reflection/learning for stakeholders involved in the response strategy. In general, thanks to the response, the «learning organisation» component of Enabel has been strengthened by the dynamics of the Communities of Practice.

The dynamics of the Communities of Practice/CoPs (in particular the Health CoP and the Private Sector/Socio-Economic Resilience CoP), with a strong involvement of different stakeholders such as Resident Representatives, project teams and headquarters staff, have enabled the different countries to share their experiences. Countries found inspiration for the response, co-creating solutions that might not have been considered individually at the scale of the intervention. In addition, these communities of practice allowed for better synergy between headquarters, the field and the different departments of Enabel.

the Saint-Joseph hospital in Kinshasa (financed by the EU), several meetings were held each week between the small health expertise crisis unit in DRC and the health CoP. Discussions focused in particular on the relevance of this or that equipment (e.g. give priority to anaesthesia machines or oxygenators? ). Experts from the health CoP notably helped the crisis unit in Kinshasa in the categorisation of oxygen concentrators.

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### EXAMPLE

The CoP, initiated by the Health Unit of the Sectoral and Thematic Expertise Department (EST), played a crucial role in the response. The aim of this CoP was to facilitate communication between experts at headquarters in Brussels and the field by collecting initiatives and experiences from the field, posting relevant information from reference organisations, such as UN organisations, and sharing good practice and scientific evidence. For example, in DRC, in the framework of the adaptations of interventions in the health sector as well as in the framework of the formulation of the new support intervention to strengthen



### POINTS TO WATCH OUT FOR

Since June 2020, these CoPs have been on the wane; publications are becoming rarer and weekly webinars no longer take place. The question of the sustainability of this means of communication arises. From our interviews, it also emerged that these CoPs can be exclusive, in the sense that it is necessary to apply to the CoP administrator to become a member. Some of Enabel's stakeholders perceived the multiplication of CoPs as an excessive duplication of effort, which has caused them to lose quality and interest. Closer coordination between a smaller number of CoPs would seem preferable to increase efficiency.

## 4 IN CONCLUSION

On the basis of the responses and initiatives reviewed and the dialogue with Technical and Financial Partners, Enabel stands out as one of the last cooperation agencies which remained present on the ground during the first wave of COVID-19, rapidly providing material and human resources. This has helped to strengthen the visibility/credibility of Belgian development cooperation through its response to the crisis.

It should be noted that the response is still ongoing and that other actions continue to be implemented after August 2020 (i.e. beyond the period covered by this evaluation), particularly for socio-economic resilience.

In the partner countries of Belgian governmental cooperation, the COVID-19 pandemic has rapidly evolved from a health emergency to an economic crisis. Enabel has been able to keep pace with the changing needs of the countries and quickly orient its response towards socio-economic resilience. For example, the two new EU-funded COVID-19 interventions currently being formulated<sup>12</sup> aim to strengthen the resilience of education systems. The Enabel representation in Senegal is negotiating use of part of the bilateral portfolio reserve to adapt its private sector/sustainable entrepreneurship intervention (ARCF-Sine Saloum) to support the national post-COVID economic recovery plan.

<sup>12</sup>These are the intervention «EU digital solutions to strengthen the resilience of education and health systems to COVID-19 in the Eastern, Southern Africa and Indian Ocean Region» (co-funded by the EU and the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development), covering DRC, Rwanda and Burundi; and the EU-funded intervention «Digitalisation against COVID-19» in Senegal.



photo: Enabel

Enabel is redirecting its projects in Guinea towards actions in response to Covid-19.



photo: Enabel

Travel companion for entrepreneurs in Guinea.



photo: Enabel

Distribution of food products to disadvantaged households in Senegal



**Author:** Stéphane Vancutsem

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