

Connecting CSOs to the Bank for direct advocacy

For more than five years, no one at the African Development Bank (AfDB) was willing to speak with Lumiere Synergie pour le Developpement (LSD) about Sendou, a coal power plant which was co-financed by the AfDB in Senegal. The plant was planned in a key fishing area, the village of Bagny, and as planned would generate many potential negative consequences on the environment, especially marine ecosystems, as well as the community of women fish processors who would be displaced by the plant. Additionally, the land where the plant is located belonged to the communities, yet the government expropriated it and sold it to private companies. All of this was done without proper notice, consultation, and compensation, and was inconsistent and noncompliant with the AfDB's social and environmental policies. LSD's attempts to support the community's opposition to the project were met with disinterested silence, until BIC intervened.

When the project was first approved in 2010, LSD contacted AfDB's branch in Dakar, and nobody wanted to listen. LSD then shared its findings with the bank management in Tunis (the bank headquarters at that time); no one reacted. Over the next several years, LSD sent a great many emails to AfDB in hopes of a meeting, with no luck, and in 2016, with BIC's advice, filed a formal complaint about the project. After lobbying around this complaint — LSD at the national level, BIC at the international level — BIC set up a meeting between LSD and the U.S. Executive Director (ED) from the U.S. Treasury on the board of AfDB in 2018. At the end of that meeting, the US Treasury sent an email to the bank management requesting they meet with LSD and spoke about Sendou. The next day, the project manager in Dakar reached out to LSD, saying their office was open and LSD could come at any time. This was the first time since the project began that LSD would be able to speak directly with the AfDB. After the initial meeting, LSD continued to meet with both the AfDB management and the US ED, through BIC's support by making the connection via email. Today, however, LSD can lobby the US ED (and other players) without BIC's support. This advocacy around the Sendou plant resulted in operations halting in 2019.

BIC's intervention — by leveraging its vast existing relationships with institutions to make connections between LSD and different members of AfDB — not only earned LSD an opportunity to meet once about a single project, but also helped vest power in LSD so that it could continue to advocate on behalf of communities without needing BIC as an intermediary. AfDB, which before had regarded LSD as an unimportant, small voice, has been forced to care about and listen to what LSD, and the communities it represents, have to say.