



VOICE Advisory Board Meeting, October 3, 2017, Hivos Executive Board Room, The Hague / MINUTES

Advisory Board (AB)

Ms. Anke van Dam (AD), Strategic Policy Advisor, Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Mr. Bart Romijn (BR), Director, Partos, Netherlands
Ms. Nidhi Goyal (NG), Trainer and Researcher: disability rights and gender justice, India
Ms. Josephine Kulea (JK), President, Samburu Girls Foundation, Kenya
Mr. Edwin Huizing (EH), Director, Hivos, Netherlands
Mr. Ton Meijers (TM), Director Programs and Campaigns, Oxfam Novib, Netherlands

In attendance

Marinke van Riet (MR), Programme Manager, Voice
Ruth Kimani (RK), Roving Regional Grants Officer Africa, Voice
Janine Spoelstra (JS), Support Officer, Voice (minute taker)
Will Janssen (WJ), Director Open Society Programme Hivos, (partial attendance)
Cat Essoyan (CE), Manager Governance & Financial Flows, Oxfam Novib (partial attendance)
Clemens Wennekes (CW), Finance Coordinator, Voice (partial attendance)
Inez Hackenberg (IH), Linking and Learning Coordinator, Voice (partial attendance)

The meeting opened at 9:10AM and ended at 12.20PM on October 3rd, 2017.

1. Opening and welcome

Before opening the meeting, MR welcomed the attendees, especially Ton Meijers, Director Programs and Campaigns at Oxfam Novib and new member of the Voice Advisory Board, Ruth Kimani who has started this week as the new Roving Regional Grants Officer for Africa and Janine Spoelstra, the new Support Officer for Voice. A Roving Regional Grants Officer for Asia will be recruited at a later stage after a failed internal recruitment.

This was followed by an introductory round and a look back at last night's Voice soiree 'Voiree' which was held at the Humanity House in The Hague. The participants were very enthusiastic about this event which was meant to give a snapshot of the work of Voice and served its purpose. NG suggested to next time check on accessibility of the building for people with disabilities (PWDs), be mindful of inclusiveness so PWDs can watch video's, add more time for questions and include a gallery walk to showcase pictures to make it more interactive. A suggestion was made to organise an event abroad instead of The Netherlands next time.

The chair BR opened the meeting.

2. Update since last meeting: what has happened?

As the Voiree already gave a snapshot of the grantees, MR presented mainly the operational side, especially on grant management and numbers. So far, Voice has launched 46 Calls for Proposals (2 on global, 44 on national level): 11 for Influencing Grants, 12 for Empowerment



Grants, 15 for Innovative and Learn grants and 8 for Sudden Opportunity Grants. Over 2.000 proposals have been received which indicates an enormous interest and thus far 60 grantees were selected. Currently an intern has been recruited to check all proposals to see if we've missed out on innovative ideas due to eligibility and prescreening. Feedback will be given to organisations that had sent in proposals but were rejected so they are given the opportunity to improve and apply again in future.

The 60 selected grantees are showcased on the Voice website www.voice.global/grantee-overview. An overview of the grantees breakdown was given. So far, only 1 sudden opportunity grant has been given in Kenya as a result of a successful legal case on land rights in the African Court on Human and Peoples Rights for the Ogiek people.

A Smartsheet online application system is being used for submitting proposals. From this ICT at Oxfam Novib is testing PowerBI, allowing us to visualise and analyse applications so that we can track performance on for example target groups and impact themes. PowerBI is still a work in progress, but will be very useful as an analytical tool to help inform future calls for proposals and it will also form a part of the quarterly management information. This system gives a very good overview. Approved versus rejected applications are also shown to allow you to assess the success rate. NG remarks that videos could be included to send with application forms which is indeed allowed. Overall Voice is doing very well on most target groups except for LGBTI. This may be a result of the crackdown in quite a few focus countries on LGBTI and the annual plan suggests some solutions. Quality audits at national level will be done in time for the next external audit and in time for the next Annual Report. Five of these quality audits will take place in the coming months which are in the form of a peer review.

A Voice whistleblowing policy will be ready before the annual plan 2018 kicks in.

3. Discussing the Annual Plan 2018

AD gave a general remark on the Annual Plan; the Advisory board does not approve but advises. This will be changed in the text accordingly.

BR continued with the review of the Annual Plan per paragraph, highlighting the key issues for discussion.

Management and coordination:

TM remarked that the numbers of billable days made available for country (Oxfam) and regional (Hivos) directors are limited and inquired if this could lead to problems. MR explained that concerns have indeed been expressed. It could be a risk because now CD's are investing their own time and if other priorities come up Voice quality could be affected. Besides this, another issue which was highlighted in the Plan is that the title of Programme Officer appears to be too junior for the role and responsibilities that come with the job. In some countries they have changed this (Indonesia, Nigeria, Mali, Cambodia, Philippines) The question arose if this should be recommended by the AB. The AB mentioned that 'Project Manager' could be used instead of

Programme Officer, but this would have budgetary implications and ideally should be applied to all countries in order to be consistent. The AB recommended that further analysis should be done.

Leadership, quality and Responsibilities

EH asked who the point of entry for the whistleblower policy will be. MR responded that for all national grantees it will be the Programme Manager while for the Global grantees it is the Steering Committee. TM inquired if only the Finance Coordinator will be doing the quality audit. MR explained that this year a quality audit will be done in five countries by the Finance Coordinator, the Linking & Learning Coordinator and/or the Programme Manager, accompanied by a local Programme or Finance officer from a neighbouring country. This is feasible. For next year, quality audits in all countries will be planned. TM will share a methodology from an ON quality review because it's important to include content as well instead of only auditing on finance and compliance. A peer review is a different type, it's not a system check. MR explained that in terms of Voice process it means from outreach to selection to abiding by the monitoring process. It concerns implementation from A to Z.

Planning and timeframe

A suggestion was made for the Advisory Board to meet twice a year which was endorsed by all. One meeting could be held in The Netherlands and one in the Voice focus countries, aligned to a national linking and learning event. This would bring the programme come to live. MR informed the AB that in January 2018 the first Learning Indaba will be organised in The Netherlands because of the global remit. MR mentioned the budget will be adjusted accordingly.

Outreach

With reference to the question on how different marginalised and discriminated groups can be most effectively reached, EH asked how silos can be broken and how target groups can support each other. Stakeholders from different backgrounds should work together. RK shared that in East Africa the challenge is bringing together the different coalitions for a bigger unifying cause. As a good example in Indonesia, Voice participated in the Age of Wonderland where she invited an existing grantee (youth group) to talk to elderly participants. Grantees should become outreach champions.

Overview of countries

A discussion on civic space followed. Voice is about making voices heard. In some countries like Laos civic space is completely closed according to the Civicus Monitor which makes it necessary to adjust the programme. Shrinking of civic space should be addressed not only within Voice but broader. A more coordinated approach is needed to make a united front. Voice encountered some risks with national contracting, especially for LGBTI grantees. The AB supported the idea of regional empowerment grants as a risk mitigation. BR informed the AB that a Civicus meeting will be held to look at new creative 'modus of operandi'. This will be interesting to follow.



Grant allocation

A question regarding repeating of grantees was posed; should Voice build upon existing grantees by having repeat grantees? NG remarked that a one-time one-year grant does not work and eventually will impact quality. Grantees need more time and trust in them to perform. TM questioned if Voice wants to move more to organisational support or project support. AD mentioned this is not the case.

EH informed what the exit strategy for these organisations is. This should be discussed and MR suggested an Innovate and Learn Call for Proposals to help us develop this. MR explained that a graduation model is built into the grants but perhaps we should introduce a two-stage empowerment grant process but always with a link and learning between the projects. TM suggested that clear criteria for 'successful' grantees should be described and well managed. But overall the AB mentioned that Voice is also about building a movement and re-granting should be possible.

As to changing the global/local level ratio, the AB stated that this is both a technical and a strategic issue and questioned if this implies more than a shift on the financial ratio. MR explained that global means multi-country but not necessarily INGOs as we make a deliberate effort to grant to the 'unusual suspects'. AB doesn't have objections against 75-25% ration in favour of national grants on the condition that even the majority of global grants should be spent in developing countries.

Linking and learning

While the Linking and learning strategy is clear with a bottom-up approach, the AB was asked for guidance on the online knowledge sharing facility, having in mind that a separate facility will not work and digital security is a challenge. BR suggested to contact the Association of Progressive Communications based in South Africa which is a well based organisation working on linking and learning. MR emphasised that digital security is an issue. The AB agreed that this is quite an effort to think of all the implications and factor and you may want to hire a consultant to help you work through the options (but not built the facility).

TM remarked that the Annual Plan is very concisely written and it's nice to have the questions for the Advisory Board pointed out. Next year we'll get more into action so hopefully next time even more content will be added to the plan.

Communication

Even though the website and presence on social media has shown steady progress and looks good, the AB agreed that more shiny moments are needed in the coming years also in light of the mid-term review. The Partos Innovation Festival will be an opportunity for such a shining moment. MR informed the AB that increasing visibility is on the agenda. The AB recommended that the Annual Plan also reflects the unique visitors to the website per month.



4. Annual Budget

CW presented the Operational Budget 2018-2021 and gave a summary of proposed changes including the possible VAT 'benefits' and possible use of this. Now that the grant officer's role has been decentralised and split in two (Africa and Asia); extra travel budget is needed. The total travel budget per officer is EUR 20.000 (approximately 10 trips per year per person).

For the monitoring of grantees by Voice country teams, an average of 2 visits a year per grantee is calculated for two people. Quality audits will be held, which involves checking on 10 countries. An annual planning and reflection workshop is now introduced rather than every other year, including an extra 1 or 2 days. The budget for the Global Conference Linking & Learning has increased to Euro 100.000 a year (from Euro 60.000). It will be a 3-day process on content, culminating in a 1-day public event.

Voice does not have a budget for representation and visibility although it's important to be at certain events, also for grantees. The AB recommended adding this to the budget pending on the VAT discussion.

As for the VAT it is not yet clear what the amount is, as the key challenge lies in the notion that the benefit needs to be exclusively in developing countries. It could be anywhere between 0 and 2,6 million Euros. Possible options for its re-allocation an extra 0,5 fte for country teams and the compensation for the Hivos error on the initial budget for under-budgeted hours. The AB agrees that priority should be given to the compensation. Voice has made two budgets for two VAT scenarios which have been shared with the Advisory Board and will also submit both to the Ministry for approval.

Grant distribution; in 2016 only 8 global grantees were approved for a total of Euro 1,1 million. Thus far in 2017 approvals with an amount of more than Euro 5 million have been contracted and it is estimated that the remainder of 2017 will lead to Euro 10 million in commitments. As for the amount in each grant type itself there are lower amounts on average per grant so there will be a higher number of grantees overall. This means the workload has increased for the coordination team but even more importantly for the country teams. This is a result of having more work than anticipated, aiming for ambitious results and working in countries with high risk for corruption and restricted civic space.

5. Visioning exercise; what do we want Voice to look like in 2021?

The purpose of the exercise was to get ideas from the AB on what Voice should look like in 2021, what do we leave behind when the programme stops and what physical products, such as a caravan of exhibitions, a film, a documentary, a photo exhibition, integrating Voice into the online storytelling tool like Humans of New York are just some ideas. It's important to know what end message Voice would like to give because this requires pro-activeness and planning. The planning should start as soon as possible. The AB agreed that the key lies in developing a partnership strategy so that we can engage and link to increase the weight of Voice. Engaging media is very important. It's also important to think of the role Voice could play to gain back



some of the lost credibility of civil society in some countries. The AB recommended that the annual plan includes the development of a partnership strategy.

The following suggestions were made:

- Human interest stories need to be brought out. This should not be restricted to just the involved countries. Festivals are prominent spaces for showcasing and so are photo exhibitions, online platforms etc.
- External parties are important. A distinction between the Netherlands and the countries should be made.
- Voice could think of showcasing human interest stories using existing media programmes (like Floortje Dessing's television show).
- The Civicus World Assembly -held every other year- could also be used.
- Organise an annual Voice day on the 1st of September (day of the initial launch), linking with embassies, continuing beyond 2021 and keep it growing.
- One unified force with grantees in the lead.
- Building of a common agenda with other platforms. Influence broader international agenda. Voice could provide the framework.
- Thinking how Voice can be exported to other regions.
- Exploring strategic opportunities with other organisations, including Love Matters.
- Try to get a timeslot at the Ambassadors Conference organised by Dutch MoFA in January.

MR will start a co-creation document on Box so that people can add their thoughts in a continuous matter.

6. Closing and next meeting

The next AB meeting will be held in the margins of 17-19 January 2018 in The Netherlands, linked to the Global Learning Indaba.

The meeting was closed at 12.20 on October 3rd, 2017.