



VOICE Advisory Board Meeting, October 15, 2018

Badala Hotel meeting room, Bamako / FINAL MINUTES

Advisory Board (AB)

Ms. Anke van Dam (AD), (Retired) Strategic Policy Advisor, Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Mr. Bart Romijn (BR), Director, Partos, Netherlands

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

Marinka Wijngaard (MW), Policy Officer, Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Marinke van Riet (MR), Programme Manager, Voice

Inez Hackenberg (IH), Linking and Learning Coordinator, Voice

Catherine Essoyan (CE), Manager Governance & Financial Flows, Oxfam Novib, Steering Committee Voice

Ramata Coulibaly (RC), Project Coordinator Voice, Oxfam Mali

Hadiza Amadou (HA), Program Officer Voice, Oxfam Niger

Partial attendance

Diawary Bouare (DB), Country Director, Oxfam Mali

Mahamadou Diouara (MD), local Consultant MDF, Mali

Apologies

Ms. Nidhi Goyal (NG), Trainer and Researcher: disability rights and gender justice, India

Background

The fifth meeting of the Voice Advisory Board is its first official international meeting to take place in a Voice focus country in Mali, Bamako. The country was selected due to its diverse and interesting portfolio of grantees as well as the fact that in Mali October is solidarity month and the third week is dedicated to People with Disabilities. The Advisory Board meeting took place on the first day of the visit which was followed by numerous activities organised by and with grantees such as the Voice Bazar, developing a manifesto for inclusion, the opening of the Handi-Festival, the Mr and Ms Albino contest and a Linking and Learning day. We scheduled a feedback session on the visit on Wednesday afternoon; this is also attached to this document.

The meeting opened at 9:00 AM and ended at 13.00 PM on October 15th, 2018.

1. Opening and welcome

The chair BR opened the meeting. Minutes from the previous meeting has already been adopted by Email; no further comments were offered.



2. Introduction to and the context in Mali

According to the Country Director DB inequality and exclusion are on the rise in Mali and hence Voice is of critical importance. Voice's way of working is also positively disruptive to the classical way of implementing development programmes. For Oxfam in Mali Voice enables the office to reach out and work with different constituencies. Oxfam in Mali has three programmatic pillars: (1) Governance, peace and civic participation, (2) Community resilience including humanitarian aid and (3) Essential services. Cross-cutting themes are gender justice and the influencing approach. Voice should ideally be transversal touching upon elements of all three programmes.

The AB was also given a security briefing on the do's and don'ts in the post-election fragile context.

Voice in Mali currently works with three target groups: Women at risk of exploitation, abuse and/or violence, People with Disabilities and Age-discriminated vulnerable groups such as youth and elderly. Even though an informal discussion was planned for later in the week with the LGBTI community, thus far this has not been a priority group for Voice in Mali. The LGBTI community is prone to violence and aggression and is extremely marginalised.

PWDs make up between 10% and 15% of the population and women form the majority (51%). There is high unemployment (especially among youth), school drop-outs (especially due to girl brides) and gender-based violence including but not limited to Female Genital Cutting (FGC).

Thus far in Mali there have been 10 Calls for Proposals divided over two Influencing Calls resulting in 4 grantees, 3 Empowerment Calls resulting in 6 grantees, 3 Innovate and Learn Calls resulting in 5 grantees and 2 Sudden Opportunity Calls resulting in one grantee. Overall they have received over 300 proposals. Civic space thus far has not been a major issue but that is because especially the influencing grantees know how to navigate the space.

AD and TM asked about how to ensure good quality proposals which is the biggest challenge for Voice in Mali. Despite the large number of proposals, Voice had to tweak its outreach by organising weekly Open Door session allowing especially smaller groups to ask questions, discuss ideas and get support on how to develop a good proposal. After all the idea is guiding.

Lastly the programme was explained for the week in Mali (programme attached), explaining that it had mainly been organised by the grantees themselves as part of the Solidarity month; the beginning of the week was anchored around these activities while later in the week it was more in-depth learning and engagement through individual visits and Linking and Learning activity.



3. The Mid-Term Review by MDF

As Voice is mid-way through its life cycle, a Mid-Term Review has been launched to take place between October 2018 and January 2019. Initially scheduled for March 2019 it was brought forward to explore issues related to structure, under-expenditures, a potential extension of the programme and possible additional funding.

From four expressions of interest received MDF was selected because of its innovative approach, experience with grant making and work with the relevant target groups, Admittedly MDF has less experience with inclusion so this offers a good learning experience for them. The local consultant for MDF MD joined the AB meeting.

MW gave some further background to the contract with MDF which was just signed early October and the meetings both the Ministry as well as the Global Coordination Team already had. The MTR will have three exploration areas: is Voice on its way to reaching the original objectives? How inclusive is the programme in its approach? How efficient is the programme in reaching the right target groups in terms of its outreach and grantmaking.

Countries to be visited by MDF are Mali, Indonesia and Kenya although other focus countries will be covered through surveys, webinars, interviews and desk study. A sensemaking workshop will be organised in January with the CDs of Oxfam and the Regional Directors of Hivos to discuss / validate the findings and recommendations. The local consultant added that he will only be with the AB on selected days during the week to assess the effectiveness of the AB for Voice.

MW explained further what is expected for the MTR in terms of document review, grantee visits, interviews with organisations not selected in Kenya, Mali and Indonesia. At the end, there will be a final presentation to all parties; the overall ownership of the document will be with MOFA.

The AB recommended that the review focuses on the accountability, structure and governance principles and looks into and documents the granting and learning process rather than primarily on the preliminary results. The findings will obviously be shared with the AB.

Action point: MW to share the ToR, MDF proposal and approach with the AB

4. Progress report 2018

MR presented a Powerpoint to highlight progress thus far in 2018. The main progress has been on the grants allocation with now having 190 grantees and Euro 20.3 million allocated. 2018 has definitely been our peak year in terms of granting (95 Calls for Proposals launched) and we need to continue this trend in 2019. MR reminded the AB that Voice is not able to contract beyond 31st of December 2020.



The decentralisation trend is continuing with the Communications Hub set up in Nairobi. From an initial start of 7.2 FTE in The Hague we now have 10 FTE mushroomed over the Netherlands, Kenya and Manila.

TM asked whether and how the Calls for Proposals have become more targeted and MR gave the example of Tanzania where the impact theme of Fostering Space for political participation was heavily underrepresented. Hence the team in Tanzania developed the current Calls all around this impact theme, also in light of future elections in 2021.

The trend with emerging sub-groups is continuing; these include People with Mental and Intellectual Disabilities, Domestic Workers, People with Albinism. This offers good opportunities for Linking and Learning across Voice.

The main challenge remains the low level of Empowerment grantees (72 versus target of 196) and Sudden Opportunity grantees. EH suggested for the Sudden Opportunity a different set up of contracting a local organisation that could manage the very small Sudden Opportunities for Voice to avoid some of the bureaucracy. JK suggested to highlight on the website that Sudden Opportunities don't have to be so big (they go up to Euro 200,000).

Some other interesting trends are emerging from the Learning Indaba such as more visual notetakers and the concept of Coming to or finding your voice beautifully articulated by Positive Vibes.

Other elements such as Communications, Outcome Harvesting, MIS report, Linking and Learning are on track.

Action point: In the future, MR to share the report presentation one week ahead with all other documents to allow for more engagement by the AB.

5. Annual Plan and Budget 2019

MR presented the draft Annual Plan and Budget 2019 offering two key objectives:

- To intensify efforts to complete the grant fund focusing on Empowerment and Sudden Opportunities
- To advance on further amplification of the voices of the grantees.

As part of the first objective there was a discussion on how to increase the number of Empowerment grants and Sudden Opportunity grants. In addition to the suggestions made above by JK and EH there was also a suggestion to be more flexible between the various grant types and hence reduce the number of empowerment grants somewhat, while still aiming to increase in this area. MR said that this flexibility existed within the contract and Staatscourant but at the same time Voice is about reaching unusual groups and empowerment grants are one of the key tools to do so.



The condition is that we need more capacity at country level to be able to support empowerment grantees and the AB agreed on this. It was noted by the AB that Empowerment grants are core to Voice's central mission: enabling the most marginalised groups to be heard.

Without venturing into a detailed VAT discussion again, the AB stood by its recommendation made in prior meetings to allocate the liberated VAT to getting a fulltime Finance officer at country level. TM suggested more concentrated efforts to meet the target groups by the Voice country team and MR explained that this was indeed the plan as part of the outreach approach. The AB also discussed the potential of exiting a country in order to concentrate efforts but recognised that would get us into problems with the initial tender. Plus there was a recommendation for the MDF team to look at the labour intensiveness of each grant type to get a better picture of what is needed.

There was also a discussion on exploring joint Calls for Proposals such as with other programmes within Hivos and Oxfam as well as external partners. TM felt more reflection is needed about this direction linking it to the longer-term vision and ambition of Voice. EH on the other hand felt that working together to reach economies of scale and impact is a good direction to follow.

TM had a general comment on the Annual Plan and Budget. He felt the AP lacked the energy and attention to results that was prevalent in the Annual Report and hence recommended that the plan to come up with some SMART key objectives for each section both qualitative as well as quantitative. This will allow for measuring progress over time against this plan. In addition, he noted that the budget is difficult to read and MR suggested to add a budget narrative although also explained that this was the template provided by the Ministry. TM also questioned the budget for AB meetings which had increased to Euro 45,000 (from Euro 5,000) over the year although other AB members didn't see a major problem with this. JK strongly supported the practice of having one AB per year in one of the Voice countries as it gives AB members a good sense of the on the ground dynamics of the program. MR committed to looking at total costs of this AB meeting to then re-assess the budget line.

Finally BR suggested that he sit down with MR to tease out strategic issues from the AP in preparation for future AB meetings and he proposed having a discussion in the next AB meeting on the partnership approach.

Action points:

- **MR to re-work AP incorporating key SMART objectives for each section and budget narrative**
- **Prior to AB meetings, BR and MR sit together to prepare agenda and key questions**
- **At the next AB meeting include an item on partnership and communications approach**
- **Next AB meeting reserve more time**



6. NOW-Us! Award

The NOthing about Us Without Us! Award is an award facilitated by Partos the Spindle and Voice to celebrate inclusion as part of the Annual Innovation Festival organised by Partos the Spindle.

Organised for the first time, we received 320 applications, from which 10 initiatives were shortlisted to come to the Netherlands for a week to be coached, learn new approaches and pitch their initiatives. Butterfly Works facilitated a human-centred learning approach allowing for individual learning trajectories.

The winners will receive an empowerment grant of respectively Euro 25 000, Euro 15000 and Euro 10 000 to implement their project. In general the award was really appreciated and having the ten finalists at the Innovation Festival already changed the dynamics; from all awards offered by Partos the Spindle this award was also most easily understood.

7. AOB

There was a discussion on whether the AB meetings should be held outside of the Netherlands considering its cost implications. This was also addressed in the feedback session (attached to this document) and the majority of the responses were positive although costs need to be considered and closely monitored.

8. Closing and next meeting

The next meeting of the Advisory Board will be held in the 1st quarter of 2019. This meeting will be most likely aligned to the Global Learning Indaba planned for early 2019 in Kenya.

9. Feedback session on visit to Mali

On Wednesday afternoon October 17 the AB met to debrief on the experiences of the visit thus far. Most members TM, EH, JK and CE were leaving that day while AD, BR and MW were staying on for the full week.

BR: wonderful visit to really see Voice in action. It would be good to reflect however on what we can do to support the groups in understanding the influence they may have. Most of the lobby and advocacy approaches grantees shared in the session on the inclusion manifesto were quite conventional. Also would like to see how we can amplify the voices of the grantees more to the regional and international level.

AD concurred with this and really encouraged the Voice programme to reflect on the influencing approaches. She observed that while on the Tuesday morning the approaches were very conventional the way the manifesto was presented and signed by the Minister of Solidarity and Humanitarian Action showed a high level of creativity.



She recommends more of these. AD also felt that sometimes it was still the organisations talking on people's behalf rather than people from groups themselves.

MW acknowledged and appreciated the preparation that went into the visit and that according to her it went flawlessly. It was very much Voice. One recommendation for her is that people and organisations need to stay true to themselves and build any influencing approaches from their own strength and direct sphere of influence.

CE concurred with the level of preparation and execution. Perhaps due to the nature of the week there was a lot of activities and ceremonies and hence less time to go into a deeper discussion on challenges with individual grantees. MR explained that this was indeed the case and that the optional programme for Thursday and Friday were set aside for those discussions. EH concurred with CE on more informal discussions. To CE the Tuesday morning was a bit chaotic and the assignment wasn't clear for the Linking and Learning Facilitator Accountability Lab. Still amazed what came out of it and that this was signed by the Minister.

TM appreciated the preparations and thought the visit was well organised. He actually appreciated the activity on Tuesday morning as it was more in line with the reality of Mali. Again he was amazed what came out of it. Overall he feels with Voice, Oxfam is definitely reaching different groups; the bigger question -which he also discussed with the CD of Oxfam- is what we can do to support the groups longer-term and how to link them with other programmes within Oxfam.

For JK the visit showed precisely why the AB meetings need to take place in the Voice focus countries. She learned a lot from the various groups and especially appreciated the interaction between grantees and Voice country team. For her the big question is what will happen to Voice and the groups on a long-term basis.

For EH this visit felt like coming home and he was deeply moved by especially the visit to the youth with mental disabilities. He recommended the visit to be a bit more balanced between ceremonies and more informal discussions.

For HA this has been an amazing experience showing the potential of Voice in the Niger context.

RC thanked everyone for their inputs and support. On behalf of the grantees she expressed a thank you as they sincerely appreciated the interaction.

MR thanked everyone and especially RC for the preparations as it has been a lot of hard work that paid off in the end. She linked some of the recommendations that came up during the session on developing a manifesto and advocating for new laws to the exercise on updating the context analysis where the recommendation was to not fund projects that proposed influencing for new laws but rather implementation of existing laws.