VOICE Advisory Board Meeting, February 8, 2019
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Hague / 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 , Chair
Ms. Josephine Kulea (JK), President, Samburu Girls Foundation, Kenya
Ms Will Janssen (WJ). Director, Open Society, Hivos on behalf of Edwin Huizing (EH), Director, Hivos, Netherlands
Mr. Ton Meijers (TM), Director Programs and Campaigns, Oxfam Novib, Netherlands
Ms. Nidhi Goyal (NG), Trainer and Researcher: disability rights and gender justice, India

In attendance
Marinke van Riet (MR), Programme Manager, Voice
Arisa Junio (JR), Support Officer, Voice
Cat Essoyan (CE), Manager Governance & Financial Flows, Oxfam Novib, Steering Committee Voice (*left after lunch*)
Nadine Bergmann (NB), Consultant, MDF (*left before lunch*)
Elise Pinners (EP), Consultant, MDF(*left before lunch*)

Apologies
Edwin Huizing (EH), Director, Hivos, Netherlands

The meeting was convened by Bart Romijn, Chair Advisory Board, at 09:30 and ended at 14:15 on 8 February 2019.

1. Opening and welcome
   BR opened the meeting. He asked for updates from AB members, especially to NG, who wasn't present the last meeting and CE and WJ about the MTR validation workshop in Nairobi. Afterwards, there was a roll call for each of the attendees to introduce themselves to the MDF team – the mid-term review (MTR) consultant firm hired for Voice.

2. Update since October
   Marinke gave the update to the Advisory Board (AB) members. She raised the following points:
   - For grant management, on track but underexpenditure on especially Empowerment (EM) grant still pose challenge. We are still waiting for final response from MOFA and Tax authorities on using the liberated VAT for additional 50% of a Finance Officer.
   - On Communications, Voice was featured as a case study in the OECD flagship report to Leave No One Behind.
     - For the Inclusion Innovation Indaba, the focus revolved around: coming to voice, which highlights the empowerment process of the ultimate programme participants and how they come to voice. The Indaba focused on the following Voice target groups: people living with mental and intellectual disabilities, senior citizens and people living with albinism. The Indaba took place in Nairobi, Kenya.

- The first Knowledge Exchange on Indigenous Women Rising was also held in the Philippines during the same week as the AB meeting.

- World Press Photo Exhbition organised by the Dutch Embassy in Tanzania, Voice, and Resources of Open Minds Programme of Hivos East Africa
  - Voice launched an EM Call for Proposal (CfP) in Tanzania to support young, amateur, and aspiring photographers to capture inclusion and diversity.
  - The three finalist presented their photographs for a public and jury award.
  - The organised debate delved into the question, "what can photos do in a shrinking civic space?"
  - The winner will receive a grant from Voice to work with the Voice grantees in Tanzania to feature their work.
- BR asked for updates on the plan if the Ministry has already given comments.
  - MVR mentioned that there has been no response yet but only an acknowledgment. This is not unlike last year where we had to wait 10 months before an official approval letter although there had been a verbal go-ahead.
- BR also gave updates on the Innovation Festival organised annually by Partos. After the success of the previous festival, especially with the NOW-Us! Award, Partos decided to change it to the Inclusion Festival.

3. <u>MTR: findings and recommendations</u>
   Elise Pinners from MDF led the presentation of their MTR findings and recommendations session. The findings are divided per categories identified by MDF. Their findings include the following:
   - On Category 1: Grant making process which looks at: context analysis (used in developing current CfPs), outreach to disseminate the CfP, supporting applicants with proposal writing, eligibility screening, selection and further support, and agreement creation.
     - Allowing for a more inclusive grant-facility (using videos for applications, flexibility and simplified requirements to attract small and more grassroots organisations)
     - Selection of target groups are well-balanced, and also pushes for intersectionality
     - 49/117 respondents explicitly mentioned in an online survey on their positive support they received from the Voice team, while 3 explicitly gave negative feedback
     - Voice applicants do not apply the context analysis in the proposals they are submitting to Voice. Is this needed?
     - Key question: is Voice allowing for flexibility or striving for uniformity in procedures?
     - Grant frameworks create artificial distinction between EM and Influencing (IF) grants.
     - Paradox regarding stronger consortia and IF grantees getting more support compared to smaller EM grant having less support from the Voice team
     - Limited resources and capacity leads which delimits in outreach activities and proposal designing
   - Questions from the AB members, along with the answers, included the following:
     - AD mentioned some contradictions on MDF's findings.
       - Applicants are satisfied, but they also mentioned that they also need support. MDF should clarify what type of support they really need.

- The difference between EM and IF grants. AD thinks that there's continuity between the two grant types and there's no confusion or contradiction. EM grants are for groups who do not have voices yet or young organisations. The purpose of the grant is to give them voice to speak out. While IF grantees have already their agency to speak but needs more stable support in speaking out. She questioned MDF's definition and framing of inclusiveness and empowerment.
- NB answered AD's question on support. She disclosed that occurring answers from the survey are on budget discussions, MEAL, etc.
- EP gave examples on the differentiation between EM and IF grants. She used AMPA as her case. AMPA is a Mali EM grantee. The organisation is established and it already reached a certain level of empowerment, yet they are still under the EM grant but is doing good efforts in influencing. She added that some organisations are applying for IF grants because it offers a bigger grant compared to EM grant.
- CE confused on why MDF mentioned this since EM and IF are defined and differentiated. BR asked on what would the change be in merging the two grant types. Elise suggested to look at the content rather than organisation and see that there are proposals that are applying but targeting for a bigger grant budget.
- WJ gave a general comment to MDF that they should be careful by the way they phrase and use words in their report and presentation.
- BR mentioned that it is important as further consideration that some groups lack technical support and are bound by bureaucratic processes.
- AD raised that MDF mentioned the issue of flexibility and unified procedures. The fact that procedures are flexible is actually a strong point of Voice. EP answered by saying that the number of projects received, as well as the various Voice manuals, creates misunderstanding from the grantees' side. TM wondered if this 'flexibility causes less efficiency as MDF mentioned.
- MVR reiterated the purpose of the context analysis as a screenshot on the current situation in Voice countries, but that this changes often and substantially. This is not static; new things can come in. Voice also does grant portfolio analysis, as well as looking at emerging trends from proposals received.
- NG seconded the idea that grassroots applicants felt supported, though she wants clarification on the breakout question on the level of support. Speaking on behalf of grassroots organisations, she said that grassroots organisations need simplified type of support. The more grassroots organisations are, the limited the capacities and resources they have, thus it is a given thing that they would need more support from the funder.
- In response, EP mentioned that Voice staff feels stretched because of too much workload. There are a lot of variables and too much demands towards the Voice staff themselves.
- With regard to MDF's issue raised on "paradox: stronger consortia and IF grants get more support, smaller EM grants less support", CE asked whether MDF is talking about per grant, or in general particularly on support received by IF and EM grantees. BR questioned the usage of paradox in the statement. He doesn't see any paradox from this. He further questioned on how Voice can create mechanisms in targeting EM groups in scaling up. Phrasing is crucial. MVR answered that it depends on the risk assessment. For IF grants for EUR 200,000, Voice employs another level of mitigation and monitoring as opposed to EM grants with lower grant amount. The Voice Finance staff would specifically focus on bigger grants.
- CE said that intersectionality and complementarity are not different. These two terms are complex.

- AD suggested that MDF should better define major concepts such as effectiveness, project progress. Have clear definition of concepts used in the report so the AB members will understand what MDF meant with their findings.
- Bart added that MDF should have some sort of Theory of Change (ToC). The terms should be more articulated.
- On Category 3: Methods for reaching out and empowering, MDF noted the following:
  - Grant applications available in local languages, as well as creative means in reaching out target groups (e.g., theatre, poetry, social media). On project level, Voice uses social media to reach out to more target group-led groups. Question remains on how effective and innovative these methods are. These methods fit the context, as well as the outreach. MDF also defined effectiveness as how successful Voice has reached target groups. They also noted that innovation is context-based and does not emerge intentionally.
  - BR commented on the limited documentation on best practices on local contexts, as this would take too much time, whereas the Linking and Learning (L&L) aspect of Voice is found quite useful. Documentation never works on the local context, but is integrated in the L&L for communication. This recycles information and can be used in learning, networking, communication, and knowledge exchange purposes.
  - In terms of L&L levels identified by MDF (global, national, project, and internally), MVR said that every grantee on the project level is also having L&L across organisations and beyond their networks. She further asked MDF that for EM grantees, how much more outreach does Voice still need to do? For instance, AMPA has already 300 members. There should be differentiation on the outreach of projects and grantees.
- On Category 4: Communication & relations, MDF commended that Voice is using two languages on the website and the amplification of communications with the decentralised Global Coordination Team. They also noted as issue to be considered is the implication of shrinking civic space in external communications.
  - Bart questioned MDF if they have analysed the new communications strategy. What is MDF's assessment on the Comms Strategy? Not yet done as it is too early.
- On Category 5: Management and governance. The strengths and weaknesses of the Voice management, including governance and relations to MoFA.
  - On Management, MDF mentioned on the elaborated the Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) system in place in Voice countries and coordination team. Outcome harvesting generated good stories, and structure and line managements are in place.
  - MVR clarified that the Global Coordination Team (GCT) has no direct line management to the country officers.
  - Challenges include: insufficient staff capacity due to insufficient resources, staff turn-over, part-time staff and its implication to the whole Voice process, complex line management, and variable country management engagement. Voice reporting is complex and time-consuming.
  - On Governance (AB, MoFA, Hivos and Oxfam management), Voice AB offers a safe space to discuss issues arising from project implementation. Voice's partnership with the Dialogue and Dissent (D&D) has influenced learning opportunities such as the MOFA LandL days.
  - MDF concluded that the conceptual thinking gets dispersed based on varying context. There are notable disadvantages on the current contracting modus.

- o The current 22.7% for grant management is not enough to cover human resource requirements. There is also a need to ensure quality for the whole grant-making process and stages. The L&L deserves to have more effort given.
  - o TM questioned the meaning of the 22.7%. He asked what needs to be improved? Is it also important to understand what the opportunity is?
  - o MVR reiterated that Voice cannot fund unregistered organisations. During the grantees' approval process both Oxfam and Hivos are strongly influencing on the approvals since they also apply internal procedures and protocols on country level.
  - o WJ proposed two levels of recommendations: 1) short-term and 2) long-term (if extension will be granted), and possibility to negotiate. MDF should frame the recommendations based on the abovementioned levels.
- - On Recommendations: Advisory Board at the country level.
  - o TM asked MDF on what they meant with "adapt Voice ToC". Is the ToC not good enough?
  - o MVR suggested that the current ToC is a merge of both Oxfam and Hivos and more a Theory of Action ... It is a good moment to reflect on the current ToC which Voice has already been doing. The current one doesn't stand on our way on what Voice has been working on.
  - o BR was unsure if this has huge implications on their recommendation. The ToC has certain assumptions and needs to be reflected upon.
  - o WJ suggested that there should be a specific evaluation on the ToC, or dedicate a part of the MTR specifically on the ToC.
  - o TM can't connect the link on the assumptions generated by MDF on the ToC, just vague assumptions generated. This was not evident in the presentation.
  - o BR commented on Voice's uniqueness through its success factors, innovativeness, capacities of developing networks, and external support from countries are crucial to help in empowerment.
  - o NG questioned MDF if they conducted staff analysis and diversity of the Voice staff. She added that in reaching out to groups, not necessarily existing networks, the country level AB can reach out to these groups. Though CE answered that currently, Voice has its agile Community of Stakeholders existing in countries.
  - o TM mentioned that the recommendations do not target structural challenges. He posed the question, "how do we translate the steering of the programme to the Voice programme structure?"
  - o MVR furthered this question by mentioning the heaviness of existing structures and these are not really helpful. How do we involve the Voice target groups in the selection process? Do we want to be participatory in our grantmaking? NG commented that participatory involvement sounds interesting, but groups are not really working on certain contexts. Some people may not have intersectional contexts and if done thematic-wise, politics would be involved. It is important to think through the participatory involvement of groups. JK asked how do we get applicants and grantees' voices from their feedback. Is it possible to include on the website an online feedback section to the Programme and people's views on Voice's processes. She also suggested to have a mechanism in engaging other stakeholders within the environment in reaching out.
  - o BR questioned MDF if they looked at issues of partnership. CE mentioned Voice is exploring partnerships with other groups and synergies. MVR said that Voice liaise with champions for each target group to liaise on key questions and outreach. TM questioned on how we invest resources. These have to be put into context. He added that we need to be cautious on the resources. Should the budget be

sources? balance between control and … reallocated on human resources? Or grants? There should be

- o MVR questions if Voice is doing well on impact and efficiency, particularly considering the number of countries Voice is working in. CE mentioned that this can reduce complexity, but this poses a threat in losing intersectionality.
- o WJ said that there's a method to calculate efficiency of the FOs and POs to do their designated roles. There should be evidence on how to gauge 'under-capacity' or too much workload on staff.

Overall Action Point: the Voice AB should be able to comment on the final report and where appropriate work on a management response with Hivos and Oxfam to respond to it.

4. <u>Communications Plan</u>

The Communications Plan presented by MVR was the first solid draft developed by the Communications Hub. The Plan mainly focused on amplification of the existing grantees as well as telling the Voice story itself.

Comments from the AB members were as follows:

- AD mentioned the plan is internally focused. But every actor is a crucial factor; how can they play a role in Voice? She suggested to look at external actors such as the MoFA, OECD, Embassies, and their participation in Voice. Voice is a good selling product to the public, as well as a model (i.e., to the Ministry) and this applies to both Oxfam and Hivos too.
- TM commented that the Comms plan is product-focused. There should also be engagement strategies included; for example, inviting ambassadors to Voice events. He also mentioned that the Comms plan should be seen as a workplan for the Comms Hub.
- WJ delved on Voice's engagement positioning, and comms is one strategy. She also commented on Voice's products, particularly the newsletter and website. Voice has been building on these products.
- NG said that organisations tend to neglect comms. She is proposing to have effective communications. These two products (e.g. website and newsletter) are the fundamental ones. Comms should not only budget these two. She questioned everyone if we are understanding the different comms strategies, and what people are using, and are these beneficial? She would like to push on creating change on people and direct interaction with organisations (i.e., as responsiveness on Twitter). She also questioned who does and tells the story? Will this create more impact to the people?

MVR asked the AB members if the Comms Plan should be broader by turning it into Comms and Engagement plan?

- WJ answered that comms can be a product. Other mechanisms/partnerships on what Voice can do.
- BRt doesn't see the comms strategy as an isolated strategy: it is connected to networking, learning, and engaging. He suggested to use non-communication strategies. He also mentioned that the objectives are too output-oriented. When do we know if something works? He also relates it to the uniqueness of the Programme. It should be highlighted and would like to utilise. These elements should be at the core of the Comms Strategy. In addition, he can't see the means to prioritise. He raised the risk of having limited resources and to reflect on prioritisation. It is important to prioritise the 'return of investment'.

5. <u>Follow-up on next meeting</u>

- Proposal for the next AB meeting between August and November 2019 pending on Voice events.

- Another learning Indaba will be in October/November 2019. The Innovation Festival, now renamed as Inclusion Festival, will happen on 11 October 2019. These are both good options to align an AB meeting to.
- There should be an email latest next month on upcoming AB meeting to block calendars and schedules of members.

BR thanked everyone for sharing everyone's valuable time for the meeting.