



## VOICE Advisory Board Meeting, October 28, 2021

### Zoom Online Meeting / FINAL MINUTES

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#### *Advisory Board (AB)*

1. Nidhi Goyal (NG), Founder & Director, Rising Flame, India
2. Rinaldi Ridwan (RR), Co-founder and Vice-Chair, Indonesian Adolescent Health Association, Indonesia
3. Christine Kandie (CHK), Founder and Director, Endorois Indigenous Women Empowerment Network Kenya
4. Bart Romijn (BR), Executive Director, Partos, Netherlands
5. Caroline K (CAK), Executive Director, Initiative Sankofa d’Afrique de l’Ouest, (ISDAO), Ghana
6. Dumiso Gatsha , Founder, Success Capital Organization, Botswana

#### *In attendance*

1. Ishita Dutta (ID), Programme Manager, Voice
2. Inez Hackenberg (IH), Linking and Learning Coordinator, Voice
3. Clemens Wennekes (CW), Finance Coordinator, Voice
4. Arisa Junio (AJ), Project Officer, Voice

The meeting was convened by Caroline at 11:00 CET and ended at 15:00 CET.

#### **1. Getting to know each other and selection of a chair for the meeting**

ID facilitated the introduction of all participants by asking them to share about their journey to the world of Voice- what brings them here, what stops did they make along the way and where they are now. After a round of introductions, the first agenda item regarding the selection of a Chair for the AB itself and for the meeting was discussed. Pending detailed discussions on the selection of a new Chair for the AB, CAK was nominated as a Chair for the meeting.

#### **2. Role of Advisory Board and Discussion on Procedural Issues**

CAK invited ID and the Voice team to start by sharing the initial ideas from the team on the role of the advisory board.

- ID mentioned the different strategic areas of Voice (i.e., grant-making, Linking, Learning and Amplification, Finance, Monitoring and Evaluation) and asked all AB members for their guidance. A proposal from the Voice team is to tap into the experience and expertise of each AB members as a sounding board on a specific Voice strategic area to make sure Voice work would be more participatory and inclusive.
- Another issue is on modes and frequencies of communication and meetings for the AB. The idea is proposed for AB members can participate in events organised within Voice countries (i.e., Indonesia and Kenya) or in either regional or sub-regional activities.
- There are also several substantive/ strategic areas that the Voice team is currently working on that would benefit from the AB members inputs. These are balancing the concerns around staff fatigue and being adaptive to working in the pandemic era. Another key area requiring advice is strategic communications. We want to better connect to the networks of the AB members and understand which discussions Voice can contribute to



and how we can further raise the profile of our grantee partners and rightsholders. The last area is the future of Voice. Presentation is prepared on how Voice team sees the programme post-2024. AB Members' guidance on this specific topic is also much appreciated.

AB members gave comments and raised questions based on the 3 questions raised.

- CAK mentioned that these questions are really important and also require a lot of time for discussion, beyond possibly what is available today. As the AB needs to review and provide feedback on the Voice Annual Plan and the Budget as a key agenda item for this meeting, it would be good to utilize an online facilitation tool like Jamboard to list out the issues already shared and the responses that come. A [jamboard](#) was created for AB Members to brainstorm on their ideas.
- NG mentioned that Jamboard is inaccessible for her and asked that CAK or ID input the comments and feedbacks she shares on to the board. She also recommended that there be some prioritisation of the issues raised in order to use the time available effectively. For example, a key issue is the effective engagement of Voice with grantee partners as well as functioning of the Voice teams.
- DG posed a question in response to the initial interventions. On visibility, what kind of visibility counts and matters? How does visibility translate to Voice's theory of change and to the strengthening, scaling and linking of grantee partners? And on the context of influencing and advocacy and building strategic partnerships to contribute to resource mobilisation for Voice post-2024.
- BR commented on the agenda, there is a quite a big time slot allocated on the budget. Would be great to prioritise more on strategic issues and discuss the financial issues that come up in relation to that. Do not think we need to devote a whole lot of time to the annual budget. It would be good for the AB to identify a couple of strategic issues that can be on the agenda of the AB throughout. Propose two issues: 1) functioning of the Voice team in the current context, and 2) positioning of Voice post 2024.
- CHK asked on how we can strengthen reaching out to RHGs. As much as we have had progress, she believes there are still groups that are not included in the discussion. Good to analyse how Voice works and really understand the diversities and realities of the groups left behind and whether everyone is really part of the discussions.
- CAK added that upon reading the Annual Plan, she was wondering how the AB intersects with the Annual Plan. What is the connection of AB as a sounding board on Voice work? There might be a few questions that we ask of ourselves as we review the annual plan, e.g., like CHK asked how do we ensure inclusion of the RHGs in the activities that are upcoming. So, as we go through the Annual Plan, we can try to bridge the questions that have been raised by the Voice team and the questions that are coming up from the AB and see how these reconcile in the work Voice has planned for 2022.

### **3. Presentation of Annual Plan 2022**

ID thanked everyone for the comments. The Voice team prepared a presentation on the Annual Plan 2022 with key highlights. The team can reinforce the questions raised for AB strategic inputs as they present the annual plan and also accept BR's suggestion on the finance. CAK proposed for a five-minute break before diving into the Annual Plan presentation, and raised a point for AB members to also think through the lens of the questions asked. Are there specific areas that the AB members can provide more guidance and expertise on?



CAK prepared a summary of questions raised so far to inform the discussion on the annual plan:

- On strategic communication- how does Voice communicate most effectively so that we reach the communities we want to reach?
- On visibility- what kind of visibility do we envision and to what ends? Is it visibility for influencing, for advocacy, etc.?
- On the role of the AB- what is the role of the AB in the future positioning of Voice?
- On inclusion- how do we continue to reach those most marginalized within the RHGs that Voice focuses on, particularly those facing multiple forms of discrimination?
- On reach- how is the work of Voice being seen nationally, regionally and globally?
- On opportunities for AB to be involved in national, sub-regional and regional activities organised by Voice.

DG raised the issue of the frequent use of the word 'visibility' in the space and whether it is ableist. NG stated that in the context of rightsholders and civil society the use of the words vision, visibility, etc., is not ableist. DG and NG reiterated the importance of creating safe and inclusive spaces and constantly questioning assumptions about presumed safety of spaces we are in.

The PPT presentation of the Annual Plan and Budget can be accessed through this [link](#). The Annual Plan and Budget 2022 were presented, and the floor was opened to AB members for some questions and clarification:

- CAK asked regarding the calls to be launched in 2022, and that all grant money has to be spent by the end of 2023. So, we are basically talking about two years. Will most grant-making decisions happen in 2022?
  - CW responded that if we stay on track with approving the 17 million out of 25 million planned for grant allocation in 2021, we would have made decisions on 70% of the grant making allocation. Therefore, for 2022 the remaining 30% will be decided on and allocated. For some grant types, e.g., influencing grants, most allocations have already been made. There might be some more allocations for empowerment grants and innovate & learn grants.
- NG asked about the grant-making cycle for 2022 and whether most of the decisions regarding grant making allocations will be made in early 2022. She also asked about the breakdown of allocations by grant types.
  - CW clarified that the IF grants has been planned, but the other IF grant types are on-process. 40% of money goes to IF, 15% goes to EM grants. In terms of contracts, the EM contracts comprised half of the total number of grants given.
- NG added a question whether the Voice team is experiencing problems in achieving the 15% target for EM grantees? Are there any contingency plans in achieving the 15% target, especially in relation to the challenges presented by COVID-19? Has there been a risk assessment done for the current annual plan? Is any support required from the AB in evaluating and mitigating potential risks?
  - CW mentioned that the team is in constant discussion with countries in approving grants. The previous 18 months has been difficult for countries in implementing their projects. Voice team is focusing on how to tackle this, and ensure that the project would still continue while being aware of the COVID pandemic. Answers that are coming back are positive from countries.
  - ID added that on the grant making side, the project closure is a process that the team struggled with in 2021. Year 2021 was heavy for the team, alongside the COVID pandemic restricting people's movement. The Voice team is anticipating



new approvals to go smoothly in 2022 as the pressure of the closure will be off. Additionally, the coordination team has utilized multi-country grant making in the past when country teams have found it difficult to make grants. We will utilize these types of methods in 2022 too if required.

- IH added that the constant change on the effects of COVID in the countries where Voice works with. On Linking and Learning, it's different to do events online. Creating events online would not guarantee full inclusion and safe space to participants. Thus, she added a question on how inclusive can we make these online spaces? And what are your experiences on that aspect?
- NG sought clarity on the risk section of the Annual Plan and whether the Voice team could include a more realistic risk management plan.
- DG addressed the issue of lessons learned and monitoring & evaluation. M&E results do not automatically reflect on the work of grantee partners. In the spirit of cross-pollinations- thematic and cross-regional, how are lessons exchanged. Can the AB assist in this? What does it look like practically to ensure that the lessons learned, from grant making to organizing events, are not limited to M&E reports but also become part of organizational culture. Creating spaces for reflection is critical. The AB members can help in this process of learning and unlearning. At least regionally there are so many spaces being created and engagements being had, from which examples can be drawn on in terms of creating safe and inclusive spaces.
- BR stated that since Voice is a public tender from the Dutch MFA, there are 3 possibilities for the period after 2024- 1) Voice is continued and we identify how to work together to get it continued, 2) it is discontinued/ ended and the legacy of this work transferred to other projects, and 3) in relation to the budget, we think of a set of strategic partners who join us in continuing this work. The question related to the budget is whether there is a potential to include costs to prepare and develop the strategic partnerships necessary to continue Voice.
  - CW responded the external evaluation budgeted for 2022 can be utilized for future planning. The visibility/ strategic communications budget lines can also be used for working on future partnerships.
- RR clarified within the structure of the funding transfer, what happens if partners can't absorb or spend the planned budget? How flexible is it for Voice to reprogram projects?
  - CW responded that Voice is enormously flexible to the new realities. In phase, Voice issued 400 contracts and also had to make 150 contract amendments to address grantee partners changed context. Voice also realized that this is a continuous process, with COVID still in-place. There's also a plan to reach out to grantees on a six-monthly basis. Conversation-based reporting has also been introduced. There is slow progress on project closure. We have the very hard deadline of finalizing all projects by end of 2023. This is an attention point at our end and constantly raised with the Ministry as well.
- CAK asked about the Hewlett funding and the model of different partnerships to implement the work of Voice. There is also mention of other different strategic partnerships such as DGF in Uganda. What is the model? How do you envision expanding on it? What are the implications of such partnerships on the work being done from a rightsholder perspective? Second question, is on grant-making commitments have been made. There is not a lot of scope to try out new things



both in terms of resources and window of time. How do we draw from the learning? How is the grantee perception survey (GPS) report impacting the learning and strategy of Voice's work already? Third question is on shrinking and closed civic space and its relation to risk assessment. Communities are criminalized, marginalized, and invisibilised – how does the analysis around closing civic space impact some of the thinking around programmatic work and grantmaking strategies?

- ID responded that the partnership with TAI through the funding from the Hewlett Foundation is a successful example of gathering basket funding for Voice. The other partnerships mentioned in the plan are currently in the works due to different conversations started by the country teams or coordination teams at various points. In 2022, we have to do all the things we want to do on grant making. We have a very small window of opportunity to be strategic about things we need to do that have a bearing on Voice's positioning post 2024. On responding to the recommendations of the GPS report, country teams are already starting to implement measures to respond to the GPS results in their work. More institutional changes such as developing our own capacity on mindful communications or systematizing communications with the grantee partners will be worked on in 2022. On shrinking civic space, Voice team would like to think more with the AB on this.
- CW added that a number of contracts are still being signed. So, we can do a lot in terms of number of contracts maybe not in the volume of grant size.
- IH added on the Linking and Learning side that Voice since the start has a reflective way of working. We have been making adaptations on grant making and reporting along the way due to the action-reflection cycle embedded into our work. There is also an opportunity in terms of Voice post 2024. We can use this time period to mature our thinking on certain issues that may only be able to be implemented post 2024. On new strategic partnerships, there is a question about who the partnerships are for. Example in the context of the partnership with TAI, the question is who is learning most from this collaboration. We need to constantly evaluate how the partnerships are taking up our time and what is the space being created for rightsholders. On the civic space, Voice has done 3 context analyses to date. This is a reflection on how the RHGs are experiencing based on the current events, and country. There are these moments where Voice created ways on how to be more aware of the current civic space situation of countries and reflect on how we can adapt our ways of working to the changed context.
- NG commented on the question who would benefit from the strategic partnerships. Some considerations can be around long-term capacity building of the Voice team and how this relates to the next phase of Voice. Strategic partnerships or strategic learning spaces may not impact rightsholders or partners immediately. So, it is a tricky balance to achieve between the learning for the team and the programme and impact for rightsholders.
- IH took over for a quick discussion on the annual planning for the Linking and Learning, Amplification, and Monitoring and Evaluation strategies.





#### 4. **Voice post-2024**

IH led the discussion by referencing the options shared earlier on by BR regarding the 3 options for the future of Voice. She stated that Voice is a public tender. The initial contract stated that if the Mid Term Review had a favourable outcome, it would be extended for 3 more years. The limitations of the legal framework under the public tender define what Voice can or cannot do. For example, Voice cannot directly work with informal organizations even though this is desired by the MFA because of the scope of the tender. The public tender also provides a lot of openness to what Voice can do in terms of which rightsholders groups to work with, how to work with them, learn and adapt. The bottom line is that Voice cannot do anything that fundamentally goes against what is defined in the public tender. The biggest limitation has been that the extension phase is not a 'new phase', therefore major changes could not be allowed to be made.

The other critical factor in relation to the future of Voice is that it is implemented by a consortium of Oxfam Novib and Hivos. This has led to cross-fertilisation of ideas and experiences across teams, countries and the two organisations. There are also reasons for complexity due to this structure. Even though both organisations are working to shift power and do things differently, a lot remains to be done in the context of administrative requirements. The intention for change is costing the Voice team a lot of time.

We have seen enormous ownership develop within the Voice team but ultimately, we are contracted employees. Although there is a lot of desire within the Voice team to work more autonomously, we as staff members may not have a lot of power in terms of defining the future. In this context our question is how can the AB take ownership of the discussion and engage with Oxfam, Hivos and the MFA on how Voice could best position itself and exert its influence, not becoming a competition to local structures and organization. But really capitalising on this intention of grants, i.e., money and linking & learning to those most left behind. We have a practical agenda on how Voice can best function after 2024- what would be the best structure? There is also a political agenda- how do we shift power without holding on to power as Voice itself? Voice works almost like a pilot project. Generally, pilots are followed by an impetus to scale projects up. Unfortunately, this often doesn't leave time for reflection and learning and without adequate funds or time. The question is also how we can take Voice forward with the same time, attention and resources and not as a scale-out programme. There is also the question of maintaining trust with the national/ local entities that may form in this new iteration and donors.

#### Responses from the AB

- BR: for me an entry point on the involvement of Voice is that there have been organic developments. It's important to sketch the idea situation on how Voice should look like. The strategic thinking should be sketched out based on what is currently happening. In relation to partnerships specifically this is quite important. He approached strategic partnership question from 4 angles, which are interrelated: 1) what is the ideal partnership in representing the RHGs? 2) what will be the ideal partners in terms of reaching out and reaching in delivery? 3) what would be the ideal kind of partner, in terms of funding? And, 4) on shifting or sharing power or joint ownership, what would be the best partners in that respect? There might be more and interrelated questions. It would be good to



- think about what is the ideal situation, beyond what is happening now. He volunteered to work with Voice on strategically thinking about the future of Voice.
- NG acknowledged the importance of the questions raised by IH around autonomy, expansion, being rights-centric and scalability. There are tensions between these different points that need to be balanced. To find the balance and right approach we can consider the 4 questions proposed by BR and assess what models already exist that have balanced these concerns and get inspiration from them. We can start with an envisioning exercise of where we want to see Voice go and this can happen at different levels, team, AB, and other stakeholders. We can reach out to other models such as the Equality Fund that started out as the Match International Women's Fund. They have now merged with Global Affairs Canada now but they have 9 other funding partners. A big chunk of their funding continues to come from the government but they also have private and other funders. That is an interesting model to consider. When thinking about being autonomous, working in a multi-country context, and reaching out to grassroot groups, it would also be important to engage with an actor like the Women's Fund Asia. The Voice team needs to think through the role of the AB in the process as the AB members have different expertise areas and does not have a formal governance structure or formation like a board. She stated that she has been engaging in many discussions with global funders grappling with similar questions, such as on participatory grant making with Frida. So, what we are really looking at is an envisioning and research exercise that the team needs to think through.
  - NG further stated that in addition to the procedural question on the election of the Chair, there needs to be a detailed discussion on the role of the AB. What processes can the AB support, how hands on should the support be? She would be interested in developing what the AB can do in this new phase which is sort of like a 'go beyond the usual' phase.
  - RR shared observations about Dutch funding mechanisms that he has interacted with. These are for an average duration of 3 – 5 years, tenders are published and Dutch organisations collaborate and apply for the tender. When the Dutch organizations receive funding, they form similar alliances with groups at the country level. Sometimes the funding ends but the alliances remain. When new funding comes, new alliances are created. This also creates redundancies in the national context. How can we be bottom-up in our approach- this needs much more discussion and clarification? The discussion on decolonisation of aid is everywhere and the efforts of the Voice team to put this into practice is really appreciated. However, we need much more time to discuss what does decolonisation in the context of Voice look like. How do we balance the concerns between our values and being pragmatic?
  - DG's comments were made around the issue of shifting power. It is as simple as Voice ceasing to exist. Putting a timeline to it and working towards it. Ceasing to exist is not because Voice runs out of funding but because of intentional and concerted efforts of Voice to support local and national partners to mobilize resources autonomously and with agency. This is what shifting power looks like in the context of resourcing. Voice plays the role of an intermediary in the hierarchy of power structures. Wherever there is hierarchy, there will be exclusion. Marinke led by example by resigning and demonstrated what shifting power looks like. Not sure if other stakeholders would be open to having this conversation.



- ID said DG’s perspective is not an easy one to reconcile because we really like what we are doing. However, it is really appreciated as it ties up with everything said by the other AB members of envisioning the end goal. It is a hard question to work through but it helps us get to that situation where distribution of resources can be just and equitable.
- CHK asked how can we innovate around policy change in the context of shifting power. How do we address the historical marginalization of certain communities. Maybe we can work closely with grantee partners on finding solutions that help change the situation of historical marginalisation and discrimination.
- CAK wrapped up the discussion by highlighting that there are very big questions around the future vision of Voice- how do we work ourselves out of a job, and also the question of what do we do now and how can the AB support the Voice teams in 2022 and 2023. These are not necessarily two separate things. Reflecting on the AB’s TOR and what is practically possible, what is the frequency and type of engagement that the AB would like to have. What mode of communications do we use in-between meetings to continue engagement with the Voice team? What are the ways in which we want to work together and on what, in the time ahead? There is also a need to create a space around the questions raised by IH.
  - BR recommended that regardless of the number of meetings (2 or 3) in a year, conversations could be continued on email. A follow-up meeting on the future of Voice pretty soon would also be important. BR also suggested that as a way of starting discussions among AB members, each member could put 2-3 priority topics around which discussions could be had.
  - CAK also suggested use of online collaboration tools such as Slack or GoogleGroups. RR suggested use of WhatsApp or email for collaboration. ID stated that the Voice team can help set up the mode of communication also consult with NG on what is an accessible tool.

## 5. **Next Steps and Closing**

- CAK reiterated BR's recommendation to all AB members to indicate their areas of interest and form small groups on specific topics, e.g., future of Voice, addressing self-care and burnout, participatory grant making etc. We can map out the focus areas from this and how the AB can work on each of these areas, including modes of continuing the communication started today.
- ID mentioned that the Ministry has indicated that they want to meet the new AB Members probably in February 2022. The discussion on Voice post-2024 can also be discussed around this meeting.
- CAK proposed that a Doodle poll be shared to find time for the next meeting and also asked for a shared workspace to be created where the AB members can save and access documents, as well as store relevant files. It was suggested to create a Box folder for the Voice AB.

### **Overall Action Point:**

- AB members should indicate which area of interest do they want to focus on by email.
- In responding to the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ request, the AB members will meet with the Ministry in-person first quarter of 2022. The date will be decided by email.
- All AB members will be consulted on which platform is most accessible for document and file archiving.



