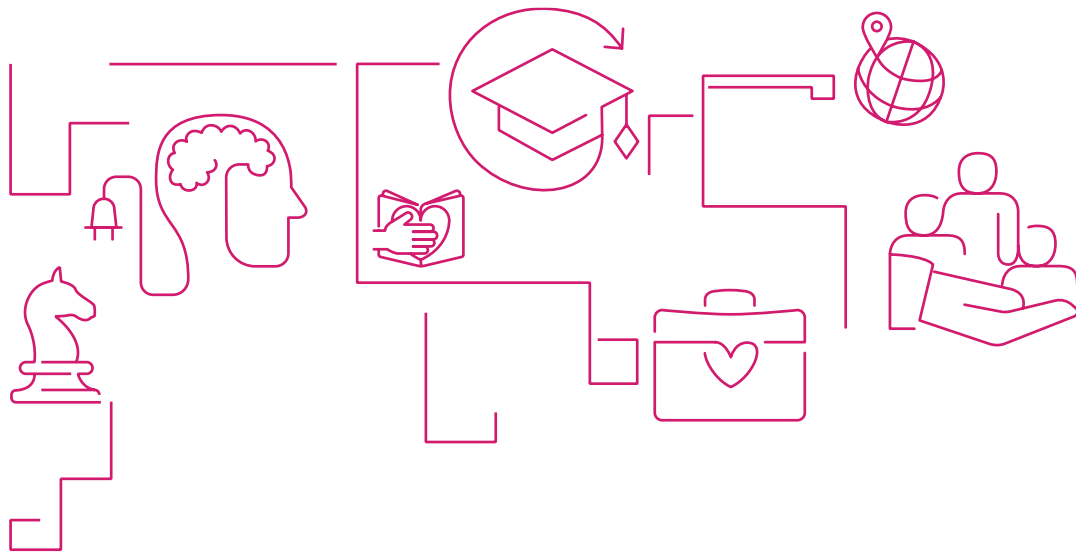




Voice Mid-Term Review

Final report, March 15th, 2019

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List of abbreviations

AB	Advisory Board
CBO	Community Based Organisation(s)
CD	Country Director (Oxfam)
CfP	Call for Proposals
CO	Country Office (Oxfam)
CSO	Civil Society Organisation(s)
DSO	Directie Sociale Ontwikkeling
CT	Country Teams (Voice)
D&D	Dialogue and Dissent
HR	Human Resource
IGEM	Indigenous Groups and Ethnic Minorities
INGO	International NGO
L&L	Linking & Learning
LGBTQI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex (sexual minorities) ¹
M&DG	Marginalised & Discriminated Groups
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MoFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (BuZa)
MTR	Mid-Term Review
NOW-Us	Nothing About Us Without Us
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ON	Oxfam Novib
OGB	Oxfam Great Britain
PEO	<i>Process Owner Consultation</i> (Proces Eigenaar Overleg)
PLWA	People Living With Albinism
PLWD	People Living With Disabilities
PLWH	People Living With HIV/Aids
RASCI	Responsible, Accountable, Support, Consult, Inform (job description)
RD	Regional Director (Hivos)
SC	Steering Committee
ToR	Terms of Reference
V-AMP	Voice Amplification Plan
VAT	Value Added Tax

¹ There is a variety of abbreviations between LGB and LGBTQI; in this report we mostly ignore the differences – even while recognising that not all LGBTQI projects cover the entire group, and that it is acceptable that some projects are more exclusive, for a specific sub-group.

Executive summary

The Voice programme is executed under a public service contract by a consortium of Oxfam Novib and Hivos within the Dialogue and Dissent policy framework of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) of the Netherlands. To strengthen its commitment to “leave no one behind”, the Netherlands MoFA designed the Voice programme with the overarching goal to empower and amplify the Voices of hard-to-reach marginalised and discriminated groups by providing resources (as a grant facility) and developing a global Linking and Learning infrastructure. The Voice programme has initially been set up for a five-year period from April 2016 to September 2021. The overall budget for programme-, management- and linking and learning is 50 million Euros.

In the service contract, this mid-term review (MTR) of the Voice programme was foreseen, which covers the period from its inception up to September 2018. The mid-term review aims to provide recommendations for the improvement of the last two years of the programme implementation, and provide inputs for a (possible) extension after 2021.

The main objectives of this mid-term review are:

- To assess the way inclusion of the most marginalised and discriminated groups has been addressed and how their participation has been guaranteed;
- To identify the effectiveness and innovativeness of the different methods and instruments used to reach and empower the most marginalised and discriminated groups;
- To define what the added value of the programme is, what positive elements of the programme should be continued and strengthened and what can be improved.
- Overall the mid-term review addresses the general question; “In what way does the programme succeed to reach the most marginalised and discriminated groups and to strengthen their capacity to raise their Voice?”

In line with the Terms of Reference (ToR), the MTR zooms in on five review components:

- A. Grant preparation and implementation
- B. Methods and instruments for outreach and empowerment
- C. Linking & Learning
- D. Communication
- E. Management and Governance

Each component consisted of several sub-question. In response, a mixed-method approach was developed that relied on desk study (portfolio analysis), survey, key informant interviews and country visits to three of the 10 programme countries: Kenya, Mali and Indonesia.

By October 2018, 190 grant applications had been approved out of almost 4000 applications that were submitted², covering all of the programmes five target groups³. This portfolio consists of 68 relatively small Empowerment projects focused on strengthening the lobby & advocacy capacity of the grantee, 57 larger Influencing project for more established organisations focused on influencing relevant power-holders, 51 Innovate & Learn projects and a smaller number of multi-country and Sudden Opportunity projects.

² According to Smartsheet data, 3932 applications were submitted up to the 31st of October 2018. The number of eligible applications remains unclear as this data is not always recorded.

³ People Living With Disabilities (PLWD); Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex (LGBTBQI) people; Women facing Exploitation, Abuse and/or Violence (WEAV); Indigenous Groups and Ethnic Minorities (IGEM); and Age-discriminated groups, notably the young and elderly.

Summarised Conclusions

From a review of this portfolio structured according to the mentioned five components the following is concluded;

Under grant preparation and implementation (A), three key issues are addressed. Firstly, **the extent to which the programme succeeded in reaching and mobilising the desired target groups**. Overall, the MTR assesses this positively given that the programme triggered an eligible demand that went well beyond its funding capabilities from applicants that for more than 90% are new to Oxfam / Hivos. At the same time, the number of applications varied widely from country to country. This is partly caused by contextual differences (incl. size, openness to civil society, level of development) but also by differences in programme performance in terms of: quality of context analysis, outreach efforts, guidance and application of selection criteria. Another observation in this regards is that a large proportion of approved applications originate from groups in the capital or other main urban centers. This doesn't make the first calls for proposals less successful, but means that there are likely to be many, more remote, groups that are yet to be reached and mobilised.

Secondly, concerning **the extent to which the 'right' projects have been designed under the programme**, the MTR conclusions are largely positive, though some critical observations are made. On the positive side, the programme is appreciated for its extensive efforts to facilitate the submission of applications, resulting in a balanced portfolio, whereby in particular the empowerment projects demonstrate a rich variety of small, meaningful and genuine ambitions by grantees that in majority directly represent the target group. Despite these efforts, the longer-term influencing ambitions of in particular the larger Influencing projects - *who to be influenced for what purpose* - remain relatively unclear. In addition, substantial differences are observed between countries in guiding and facilitating grant preparation. These differences largely evolve organically and often reflect well-intended adaptations to context but also lead to variations in the quality of design. Striking a right and deliberate balance between adaptation to optimise relevance, and uniformity to optimise consistency is therefore considered a point of attention.

Thirdly, the **extent to which projects have been successful in reaching their intended ambitions**. In particular the Empowerment projects demonstrate high levels of effectiveness at both output (capacity strengthened) and outcome (use of strengthened capacity) level. Similarly, the larger scale and more complex influencing projects demonstrate good progress in terms of empowerment, while the evidence of success in achieving the more difficult ambition of 'influencing others' is more modest and takes more time. A similar conclusion is drawn for the often even more complex multi-country projects. The Innovate & Learn projects appear to be quite successful, whereby in particular the 'learning facilitators (financed as I&L project)' demonstrate many signs of progress illustrating positive learning effects among grantees.

Under the component Methods and instruments (B) the MTR assesses **the Inclusiveness, Innovativeness and Effectiveness of Methods and Instruments used in reaching and empowering the target groups**. Here the MTR acknowledges that Voice has been successful in offering the space and freedom to apply and test many different approaches, even though they have not all been equally successful. In terms of Outreach methods for grant making, methods meant to enhance flexibility in application (i.e. allowing in local language, non-written formats) score high in terms of both innovativeness and inclusiveness, although these possibilities haven't been used as much as expected. The use of the website and radio messages appear to be less important sources of information for potential grantees, as networking proves to be the most effective method in reaching the current group of grantees which is less innovative and limits the 'inclusiveness' to those that are in the 'networks of Oxfam's and Hivos' networks (i.e. 2nd tier of contacts).

Finally, the write-shops and hands-on support (ping-pong process) are seen as successful methods to make the application process easier and more inclusive, but also more labour-intensive.

Many and diverse methods for L&L were encountered that in majority were deliberately designed and succeeded to enhance the inclusiveness of those efforts. In particular, open-space methods and creative methods like: theatre and poetry in workshops and meetings, are good examples of this that also proved to be effective in empowering groups to share their stories. Similarly diverse, often web-based, communication methods are seen to be used to enhance inclusiveness but the effectiveness of these is less obvious given that a significant part of the target groups are not (yet) in the habit of using these communication channels. Specifically at country-level, the deliberate use of inclusive facilitation and implementation methods is noteworthy, in addition to rather hands-on efforts to facilitate target group participation, including offering transportation and adapting time and place of activities.

Concerning the **success of Voice's Linking and Learning efforts (C)**, the MTR recognises that the prominence given to L&L has been instrumental for its results. The number and apparent effects of Voice's L&L efforts is significant, in particular at country-level, where we see results like: increased understanding and tolerance among grantees, active participation of grantees in sharing and exchanging experiences, linkages being created among grantees that sometimes resulted in actual cooperation or explicit intentions to do so. This is impressive knowing that taking time out for learning does not come naturally, hence requires constant stimulation. Important challenges related to L&L are 1) the availability of resources to follow-up on the success of initial activities and 2) the ability of the programme to recognise and make the rich learnings accessible more widely, especially when emerging as spontaneous yet deliberate improvisations.

In reviewing the **use and effectiveness of Voice's communication strategy (D)**, it appears that a formal communication plan – the Voice Amplification Plan (V-AMP) – was only finalised in 2018, hence it would be too early to assess its effects. Looking at communication efforts prior to this plan, initially these were understandably focused on outreach, and only as the programme progresses, increasing communication efforts to amplify the Voices of grantees / target groups can be seen. The use of web-based communication in this is understandable, but less effective for outreach than for amplifying purposes. Nevertheless, it is admirable to see Voice making the best out of a difficult situation, illustrated by the variety and richness of its communication materials, and the deliberate efforts that Voice makes to increase its capacity to reach and get through to each of its diverse target groups.

Under **Management and Governance (E)**, the MTR addresses first the **contractual arrangement and added value of the Voice programme vis-à-vis the regular Strategic Partnerships**. The MTR concludes that having a public service contract has some practical implications but in itself does not make a significant difference in terms of programme performance. This might have been different if a private sector entity, not sharing the mission of the programme as much as Oxfam and Hivos, would have won the contract, as a private company is not likely to have similar networks nor the much needed reputation of Oxfam/Hivos as trusted social rights activists. Programme performance under the current arrangement depends more on the quality of the working relationship and cooperation between MoFA and the contractor (Oxfam/Hivos).

The added value of the programme is not derived from its contractual status, nor because of its focus on marginalised and discriminated groups. Instead, **the added value of Voice lies in its demonstrated ability to give practical meaning to the notion “nothing about us, without us” by creating and managing an easily accessible grant funding mechanism**. Voice's added value is its ability to mobilise and work with hundreds of grantees that in majority directly represent Voice's target groups. This mechanism transforms

them from beneficiaries or even partners to ‘owners’ in charge of project management, be it of many small but meaningful projects. As such, the MTR sees the large number of grantees as blessing in disguise that forces Voice programme staff to focus on the bigger grant making and learning issues rather than getting involved in project implementation. This also means that the scope for further added value is limitless if Voice has the time, means and ability to reach the more remote target groups that without a doubt are out there.

In addition, the MTR reviewed the **adequacy of governance and management arrangements**. Current global governance arrangements appear to work well, with MoFA, the Advisory Board and Steering Committee expressing satisfaction. At country level there are more concerns about the way the current matrix structure (i.e. Voice programme staff reporting to country management and global Voice programme management) is working out with significant differences in country management engagement, contributing to differences in programme performance. Another managerial concern relates to the programme’s **Human Resource base**, with a wide-spread sentiment of being stretched, high staff turnover and part-time involvement affecting the efficiency and consistency of grant management. A final HR challenge relates to the ability to understand and identify with the diverse target groups of Voice. This is a sensitive issue but recognised by Voice programme management as point of attention.

Concerning **Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEAL)**, rather complex and time-consuming monitoring and reporting systems appear to be in place both at programme and project level. The focus of the MTR has been on the procedures and practices at project level that are still experienced as ‘heavy’, in particular by empowerment grantees, despite deliberate efforts by programme management to keep it light. This goes to a lesser extent for the financial management systems that are also demanding but in line with the need for financial accountability in a grant funding mechanism. Finally, the **financial allocation for grant management** (22.7% of total grant amount) directly translates in the number of Voice programme staff. As such, the MTR recognises that this is linked to the sentiment of being stretched, and unevenly distributed given the differences in portfolio size and efforts required for outreach per country. At the same time, the limited resources also forces Voice staff to keep a distance from grant implementation, which can actually contribute to the success of Voice as it strengthens ownership and avoids dependencies.

Summarised Recommendations

From the findings and conclusions, the MTR makes the following set of short- and longer-term recommendations.

Short-term recommendations

1. Strive for a deliberate, performance-based, balance between freedom and standardisation.

The MTR recognises that given contextual differences, a prescribed ‘one-size-fits-all’ grant making approach would not be appropriate. However, a more in-depth appreciative reflection on best internal practices linked to programme performance would help in finding a more informed performance-based balance between standardisation and freedom for country adaptations.

2. Develop a ‘next-generation’ outreach plan, informed by alternative best outreach practices.

The practice of working through Voice’s expanding network needs to continue, but more, and most likely different, efforts are needed to reach new more remote target groups. This challenge is not unique to Voice and there are other (private) institutions like: credit providers, mobile phone companies, experienced in

this. A new outreach plan for the 'next generation of projects, informed by an exploration of alternative best practices, is therefore recommended.

3. Improve articulation of outcomes of larger influencing projects based on an updated ToC

Providing more guidance in formulating outcome challenges, coupled with a few actor-based progress markers makes the progress of larger Influencing projects more manageable without having to resort to the artificial linearity of change of a log-frame. This can be helped by an updated overall actor-based Theory of Change that can serve as example for identifying progress markers and offers a framework for aggregating results and programmatic analysis.

4. Simplify and create more knowledge-oriented monitoring processes.

A thorough reflection of what Voice wants to know and why seems appropriate, whereby the learnings from these projects, often in the shape of spontaneous improvisations, are probably as meaningful as their results. Capturing those learnings and results by being alert to improvised action and directly asking for it, e.g. during a periodic skype call rather than through written reports, might work better and saves time.

5. Continue expanding Voice's communication capacity

Voice is already quite conscious of the need to continue to improve its ability to reach and get through to its diverse target groups with different languages, cultures and communication capabilities. Information and communication technology that facilitates this, continues to develop rapidly, and Voice is alert to that. This recommendation is meant to recognise and stimulate the continuation of Voice's efforts in this regard.

6. Combat negative effects staff turnover and fragmented positions.

It is important that Voice gains insight in the causes and effects of its staff turnover, so effective mitigating actions can be taken. It is furthermore good to see that in certain countries efforts are made to combine activities in more complete jobs and it is recommended to expand this practice as much as possible.

7. Reconfirm and operationalise Voice principles and approach, especially among new staff.

Especially given earlier mentioned staff turnover, it is important to clearly articulate and regularly communicate the core values and principles that guide the work of Voice among its staff, complemented by guidance in how these are to be put in practice whilst honing competencies to do so.

8. Revisit and diversify budgetary allocation for grant management per country.

The MTR recommends working with a more diversified budget allocation per country based on Voice's experiences and the emerging portfolio, whereby indicators like: portfolio size, population and developmental status can be used to determine a fair and transparent re-allocation of grant management budget.

Longer-term recommendations

Below a number of longer term recommendations are presented that are considered relevant in the assumption that the Voice Programme is extended beyond 2021. This does not mean that action on these recommendations can wait until after the current phase ends.

9. Start longer term thinking to sustain and expand the success of Voice

The success of Voice in empowerment, linking and learning, builds confidence and eagerness among grantees to do more. This will take time and money and Voice is probably the first place grantees will turn to for additional support. Voice, including MoFA, therefore needs to have and communicate answers about what it can and wants to offer in the longer run. A deliberate strategic thinking process to determine the

longer-term evolution of the Voice programme is recommended, ideally including other like-minded (donor) organisations.

10. Be mindful that the tender is not the key to success.

The success and added value of the Voice programme is caused by the like-mindedness, cooperation and reputation of the parties involved, coupled with the successful practice of direct representation of grantees and the resulting sense of ownership and outcome-orientation. Whatever future contracting modality is pursued, it is recommended that these keys to success be safeguarded in future programme phases.

11. Clarify the needs and commitments from Oxfam / Hivos in-country line-management.

It is recommended that based on best practices and experiences, country/regional directors are better informed about the needs of the programme and what exactly is expected from them in taking on this programme. In this way, the Voice programme manager and the country manager can make a more informed formal commitment towards each other that is then used to keep each other accountable.

12. Expand funding partners to test the limits of Voice.

If Voice has the time, means and ability to reach the more remote target groups, the scope for further added value of the programme is limitless. Nevertheless, there will be a limit in the amount and duration that MoFA can and will continue funding this programme. It is therefore recommended that MoFA together with Oxfam/Hivos start identifying and mobilising other funding partners to sustain and preferably expand the scale of operations of the Voice programme.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background and objective of the MTR

Voice is a programme executed by a consortium of Oxfam Novib and Hivos within the Dialogue and Dissent policy framework of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) of the Netherlands. To strengthen its commitment to “leave no one behind”, the Netherlands MoFA designed the Voice programme with the overarching goal to strengthen the capacity for lobby and advocacy of civil society organisations in low- and lower-middle-income countries in Africa and Asia. The Voice programme specifically aims to work with the most marginalised and discriminated groups by providing resources (as a grant facility) and developing a global Linking and Learning infrastructure⁴. In this way, the Voice programme aims to increase the (political) participation of these groups in mainstream development processes.

The execution of the Voice programme was awarded to Oxfam Novib and Hivos through an open EU tender process. The Voice programme has initially been set for a five-year period that started April 2016 and ends September 2021. The overall budget for programme-, management- and linking and learning is 50 million Euros.

According to the service contract, a mid-term review (MTR) of the Voice programme is foreseen. The mid-term review covers the period from the inception of the programme (in April 2016) up to September 2018. The mid-term review aims to provide recommendations for the improvement of the last two years of the programme implementation, as well as provide inputs for a (possible) extension after 2021.

The main objectives of this mid-term review are:

1. To assess the way inclusion of the most marginalised and discriminated groups has been addressed and how their participation has been guaranteed;
2. To identify the effectiveness and innovativeness of the different methods and instruments used to reach and empower the most marginalised and discriminated groups;
3. To come with recommendations on how to improve the programme, define what the added value of the programme is, what positive elements of the programme should be continued and strengthened and what can be improved.

Overall the MTR addresses the general question: **“In what way does the programme succeed to reach the most marginalised and discriminated groups and to strengthen their capacity to raise their Voice?”**

1.2 Structure of the MTR report

In chapter 2, basic facts and the core concepts that shape and guide the Voice programme are presented, followed by an overview of the methodological approach taken. Chapter 3 describes the findings of the MTR structured according to the five research components requested in the Terms of Reference (ToR): A. Grant making process (split up in Grant preparation and implementation), B. Methods and instruments; C. Linking and Learning; D. Communication and relations; and E. Management and governance) followed by

⁴ Voice Global Context Analysis, June 2017.

concluding statements per component. In chapter 4, the conclusions of the MTR are brought together as bases for the MTR recommendations.

2 Set-up and core concepts of the programme

2.1 Context of the programme

Next to the fact that the Voice programme falls within the Dutch MoFA's Dialogue and Dissent policy framework, the programme can also be placed in the wider context of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals where the United Nations pledge "that no one will be left behind (in the collective journey to end poverty and inequality)".

Moreover, another key contextual factor that adds to the relevance of the Voice programme is the **shift in civic space** (Box 1). In certain Voice target countries, the civic space is **obstructed** (i.e. Indonesia, Kenya, Philippines, Mali, Niger, Nigeria), **repressed** (i.e. Tanzania, Uganda, Cambodia) or **closed** (i.e. Laos)⁵ in particular concerning specific issues (e.g. human rights) or target groups (e.g. LGBTI). At the same time, governments and civil society in many countries have been increasingly active and tolerant towards issues / target groups like (e.g. climate change, people living with disabilities and age-discriminated groups).

Box 1 Diverse manifestations of shifting civic space.

In countries with **obstructed** civic space, civic space is only partially respected by the authorities. Although civil society organisations exist, the authorities frequently undermine them, for example, through the use of bureaucratic harassment. Although citizens can organise and assemble peacefully, they are also vulnerable to frequent use of violent tactics by law enforcement agencies. Independent media exist but remain threatened by ruling authorities.

In countries with **repressed** civic space, civic space is heavily constrained. Active citizens and civil society members critical of the ruling authorities face the risk of death, injury, harassment, intimidation, surveillance and imprisonment. Although some civil society organisations exist, their advocacy work is regularly impeded. The media is restricted and peaceful assemblies are regularly prevented or broken up, often through the use of violence by security forces.

In countries where civic space is **closed**, civil society organisations are by law and in practice not allowed as independent legal entities. Instead, they are established as government development partners, with media outlets heavily controlled and monitored by the government. As a result, dissent posts shared on media can be used as grounds for imprisonment.

The shift in civic space has direct implications for the role and positioning of discriminated and marginalised groups and the way the Voice programme can work with them. However, it is clear that civic space is not static and changes for better or for worse, at times opening up new opportunities for organisations to express their Voices more openly, while in other times making it more difficult to work openly. Monitoring of civic space, using a.o. CIVICUS monitoring, is therefore considered part and parcel of the Voice programme management.

⁵ Civicus Monitor (<https://monitor.civicus.org/>)

2.2 Voice target groups and countries

The most marginalised and discriminated groups in society are those that are excluded from participation in society, are mostly invisible and have little or no capacity to lobby or advocate for their interests or to have their Voices heard.

The consortium members Oxfam Novib (ON) and Hivos have supported more than 2750 Civil Society Organisations across the world to defend the rights of people facing poverty and injustice. They have learned that raising the Voices of the most marginalised is difficult and there are many barriers.

Based on the concepts of marginalisation and discrimination (as described in more detail in a following sub-section), Voice has identified **five target groups** that are considered most marginalised and discriminated as they are also most at risk in their freedom to organise and raise their Voices according to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association. These five target groups are:

1. People With Disabilities (PWD);
2. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex (LGBTQI) people;
3. Women facing Exploitation, Abuse and/or Violence (WEAV);
4. Indigenous Groups and Ethnic Minorities (IGEM); and
5. Age-discriminated vulnerable groups, notably the young and elderly.

The **ten low- and lower-middle income countries** in which Voice operates are: Mali, Kenya, Niger, Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos and Philippines.

2.3 Thematic areas and pathways of change

With the overall goal to help strengthen the influencing capacity of civil society organisations and representatives of the most marginalised and discriminated groups, Voice has identified **three specific thematic impact areas** on which it aims to support civil society organisations and representatives of these groups. Voice aims at:

1. improved access to (productive) resources (e.g., finance, land and water) and employment;
2. improved access to social services, health and education in particular; and
3. space for political participation.

To support improved access to resources, employment and social services, and space for political participation, Voice distinguishes **three pathways of change** that ultimately lead to this. The Voice programme aims to:

1. **Empower** – Support groups to create a safe space to meet, to create confidence, self-esteem, and build awareness and skills.
2. **Amplify** – Building broader civil society support for demands of these groups, including strengthening alliances and networks and media and communication work.
3. **Influence** – Use new insights and innovative, creative approaches including technology for evidence-based lobby and advocacy and influence policy, behaviour and practice.

Specifically, because of the difficulties and other social and cultural sensitivities prevalent in the country contexts, the Voice programme focuses on innovative, human-centred approaches to strengthen

influencing capacities and empowerment. Moreover, the Linking and Learning component of the Voice programme is aimed at encouraging the sharing of lessons learned and providing space for mutual learning and empowerment of the Voice target groups.

2.4 Type of grants

Related to its three pathways of change, Voice provides different types of grants. Through these different grants, Voice aims to support its overall goal. These grants are:

- **Empowerment grants (EM)** meant for (informal) groups or organisations to raise awareness, develop transformative leadership, build confidence and skills and work against stigmatisation of marginalised and discriminated groups. Empowerment grants are smaller grants with a minimum timeframe of 12 months and a maximum timeframe of 24 months. Informal groups can access funding by partnering with a formal 'host' organisation. Empowerment grants are available from €5,000 up to €25,000 on a rolling basis at national level.
- **Influencing grants (IF)** meant for organisations and networks to strengthen their lobby and advocacy capacities and amplify the Voices of marginalised and discriminated groups. Influencing grants have a minimum duration of 18 and a maximum duration of 36 months. Influencing grants that are country specific are available from €25,000 to €200,000 while a global multi-country call goes up to a maximum of €500,000.
- **Innovate and Learn grants (IL)** meant for groups and organisations to test and scale new approaches with a focus on human-centred innovations that are very context-specific. Innovate and Learn grants have a minimum duration of 12 and a maximum duration of 24 months, and are available from €5,000 to €200,000 through both a national and/or global call for proposals.
- **Sudden opportunity grant (SO)** meant for creating flexibility to undertake collective action to address specific unanticipated opportunities. This could be influencing policy or dealing with a threatened reduction of civic space. Grants responding to sudden opportunities are available on a rolling basis for a minimum duration of six and a maximum duration of twelve months. This grant type is primarily available at the national level with limited opportunities for global grants.

2.5 Core concepts and terminology of the programme

Several concepts are at the core of the Voice programme. Therefore, this sub-section elaborates the concepts that are underlying the vision and approach of the Voice programme. These core concepts have been presented in the tender for this MTR, and have been extended based on our deeper understanding of the concepts through interactions with the Voice programme team.

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)

Within the Voice programme, **three types of civil society organisation** are referred to. These are:

- **Umbrella organisations and thematic networks:** (inter)national associations, regional networks, diaspora organisations, thematic coordination bodies, alliances of organisations that combine their knowledge, ideas and strengths and work together to pursue a common goal.
- **Organisations formally constituted:** Legally registered organisations with approved statutes working mostly for the direct benefit of their constituencies or in service delivery on national, regional and/or international level, sometimes in collaboration with grassroots organisations.

- **Informal organisations (grassroots organisations and community-based organisations):** Informal groupings or ad hoc organisations, working in the immediate context with limited geographical or thematic dimension.

Marginalisation

Marginalisation often occurs as a result of a combination of different discriminated identities, including (but not limited to) ability, age, ethnicity, economic status, gender, geography, (physical and mental) health, language, marital status, race, religion, sexual orientation and/or social status. Marginalised groups (involuntary) fall out of the mainstream of productive activity, socio-reproductive activity and political and/or cultural power.

The core dimensions of marginalisation that overlap and reinforce each other are:

- **Social exclusion** – no Voice, no position, no friends, no self-respect.
- **Economic exclusion** – no job, no money, no future, no social or economic status, no right to speak.
- **Spatial exclusion** – cannot engage with society at large.
- **Political exclusion** – cannot vote, cannot participate politically, and cannot influence policy.
- **Gender-based exclusion** – limitations in economic, social and/or political opportunities based on gender.

Discrimination

Discrimination is defined as any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on gender, race, colour, or ethnic or national origin, religion, disability, sexual orientation, social class, age, marital status or family responsibilities, or as a result of any conditions or requirements that do not accord with the principles of fairness and natural justice.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality refers to the fact that marginalisation and/or discrimination can be exacerbated when belonging to two or more different target groups, e.g. there are additional challenges for women in the group of People Living With Disabilities (PLWD), and additional challenges for girls in the group of ‘Women’ facing exploitation, abuse and/or violence. In the Voice programme, the recognition of intersectionality is important, as it helps address ‘marginalisation within marginalised groups’ while avoiding a fragmented approach where the five target groups are ‘treated’ as separate and independent. In practice, the Voice programme therefore can be seen to gently “pushing” for an intersectional approach by its grantees, whereby the wider causes of marginalisation are identified and addressed.

Capacity strengthening for influencing

Capacity strengthening for influencing aims at empowerment and strengthening those capabilities needed for effective influencing. For influencing, a variety of instruments and strategies can be used to put or keep issues on political and corporate agendas with a view to tackle the structural causes of poverty and injustice and bring about sustainable policy change. Influencing can be linked to several themes, since groups lobby and advocate for a variety of objectives. Effective influencing is based on research, analysis and lessons learned (evidence-based) or on collective experiences (i.e. issue-based). What instruments, or combinations of instruments, are deployed – such as advice, advocacy, lobbying and activism – depends on the country-specific context, the current phase of change and/or policy processes, the balance of power, and the actors involved.

Inclusiveness

Inequality and marginalisation are closely interlinked. Marginalisation and barriers for full participation in society can result in situations in which the human and economic potential of groups of marginalised and

discriminated groups are not used to the fullest. These groups are excluded from political positions and their Voices are often not heard nor respected. Exclusion and marginalisation undermines social cohesion and increases the risk of conflicts, extremism and violence, for example when certain ethnic or cultural groups are not engaged in the policy- and decision-making of issues affecting their lives. The Voice programme therefore actively promotes *inclusiveness* of marginalised and discriminated groups at different levels and in different aspects of the programme, with the aim to overcome barriers that limit full participation in society, based on the core principle of inclusiveness “Nothing About Us Without Us” (NOW-Us). In practice, the Voice programme applies different measures to allow for participation of marginalised and discriminated target groups. For example, by offering sign language translation or taking into account the physical needs of PLWD.

Innovation

Inclusion of the most marginalised and discriminated groups has been part of development cooperation policies for many years, but has not been very successful. Specific measures that include flexibility to experiment and learn and the possibility to fail are necessary. Innovative approaches and instruments are needed. Therefore, Voice aims to create space for innovation and learning through the linking and learning process, but also by incorporating it into the different components of the grant facility, including the monitoring and evaluation system, the selection procedure, and the capacity strengthening methodologies. Reaching and empowering the most marginalised and discriminated groups effectively requires innovative, non-traditional and uncalibrated methods and instruments. In this MTR Innovation is defined as the deliberate application of a method or approach that is new to the context, though the distinction with improvisation is difficult as this refers to a practice that is different from what was planned, which can be new to the context in which it is applied. Innovation can comprise, among others, involving non-traditional actors, making use of new technologies, engaging in different partnerships, making use of new scientific knowledge. Research institutes can also play a role in supporting and facilitating an innovative, learning process.

Empowerment

Voice’s website describes *empowerment* as supporting groups to create a safe space, confidence, self-esteem, build awareness and skills to claim their rights. Hence Empowerment is a process by which people gain power over their own life and can take their own decisions. Power is described in terms of people’s individual and collective capacity to make strategic choices and the degree to which these choices have impact on their lives. It is important to recognise that other criteria such as sex, caste, ethnicity, affluence, family and age can have a major influence on individuals’ power, depending on the context. Therefore, character and the success of empowerment strategies are highly dependent on context. Through empowerment, these groups are able to participate more directly in decisions affecting their lives. Voice focuses on both individual and collective processes of empowerment.

Use of terminology

Based on the above core concepts, Voice has consciously chosen to apply certain definitions and avoid definitions that (indirectly) reinforce marginalisation or discrimination. Definitions that are avoided by the Voice programme include “beneficiaries” (instead of “target groups”, “grantees”, “stakeholders”, or “project participants”), “experts” (instead of “people specialised in...”, or “people with expertise in...”), “vulnerable” (instead of “marginalised”, or “discriminated”), and “field” (to refer to the programme target countries).

3 Methodological Approach

3.1 Introduction

The methodology used by MDF for this MTR is developed with the purpose to realise a learning-oriented review, to answer the evaluation questions under the 5 components (components A-E in the ToR):

- A. Grant preparation and implementation
- B. Methods and instruments for outreach empowering
- C. Linking & Learning
- D. Communication
- E. Management and Governance

We have used mixed methods, with a diverse set of data-collection methodologies (survey, Key Informant Interviews, portfolio analysis and a variety of other desk studies).

In Table 1, we present an overview of the approach, with, in the following sections, for each of the components the methodology used. It is the implementation of the methodology as proposed by MDF, in response to the ToR (of which a brief, in Annex 2).

Table 1 Overview methodological approach per component.

Component	Essentials of approach	Sub-questions / indicators	Methods
A-I. Grant preparation - Step 1. Effectiveness in mobilising the 'right' projects (i.e. fitting programme framework and objectives)	Assessed to what extent the programme is able to attract, mobilise and select the 'right' grant applications. This was combined with a review of the effectiveness of the communication strategy (component D)	- How did the programme go about reaching the desired target organisations / groups (content and process of outreach and communication)? - To what extent were applicants guided in shaping a truly inclusive application? - To what extent have the 'right' projects been selected in terms of inclusiveness?	Portfolio analysis – I - Comparative analysis of rejected and accepted proposals (desk study) Desk study
A-I Grant preparation - Step 2: Effectiveness to design truly inclusive projects	Assessed whether in design (i.e. from approved application to planning) projects are truly inclusive and tailored to the specific needs and requirements of the targeted groups.	- What groups were targeted and to what extent do they indeed represent the five types of vulnerable groups? - To what extent do projects include a systematic stakeholder analysis, explaining and justifying the choice of target group? - To what extent do projects include and respond to a deliberate needs assessment? - To what extent do projects demonstrate an innovative approach⁶ or deliberate adaptation to the specific situation of the target group (e.g., in timing, place,	Survey Portfolio analysis – II (desk study) Interviews with members of selection committees KII

⁶ Not new/innovative, but relevant is the tailoring of an approach to reduce specific thresholds of different target groups; e.g., events or training adapting schedules to seasonal calendars or daily routines, event length and venue adapted to mobility limitations, content (language) adapted.

Component	Essentials of approach	Sub-questions / indicators	Methods
		approach ...)? - To what extent do projects pay deliberate attention to inclusiveness in M&E plans? - To what extent and how has the grant manager facilitated the 'inclusiveness' of project design and plans?	
A-II. Grant implementation	Zoomed in on selected projects and assesses the (initial) effects of project implementation; distinguished between immediate project deliverables (outputs within the project sphere of control) and initial signs of progress among targeted groups (i.e. outcomes beyond the project sphere of control).	- To what extent are deliberate inclusiveness-oriented approaches put in practice (process review)? - To what extent are planned inclusiveness-related outputs delivered? - To what extent are there (early) signs of progress towards inclusiveness outcomes (i.e. signs of empowerment and increasing engagement beyond control of project)? - What are explanatory factors for those signs of progress and what has been the significance of the projects in this?	Desk study Phone interviews Survey (as mentioned earlier) In-country data collection
B. Are the right (innovative) methods, instruments being used in terms of inclusiveness and effectiveness to reach and mobilise the target group?	Inventory of methods/instruments used, rated and assessed: - Innovativeness (variety / tailoring of methods, use of IT, involvement of new partners, etc.) - Inclusiveness (nature and diversity of target groups reached, gender perspective, representativeness of people reached, nature of involvement (partner and/or beneficiary)) - Effectiveness (effect on quality of proposals and on confidence and skills targeted groups)		Desk study KII with L&L officer Observations during sharing events In-country data collection
C. How does MTR assess the Linking & Learning (L&L) processes being practised?	Inventory of currently practised L&L processes, assessed: - Linkage to M&E results - Quality of learning methodology (participation level, experiential, facilitation methods, information vs. knowledge) - Effect of L&L processes on programme and in creating cross-sectoral linkages - Assessment is differentiated for teams and target groups		KII Observations during sharing events Desk study In-country data collection
D. How does MTR assess the communication and relations (-strategy)?	Review of the formulation, operationalisation and application of the communication strategy, assessed strategy in terms of: - Recognition and tailoring to diverse target groups - Recognition and adaptation to reflect diversity, inclusiveness and gender perspective - Diversity in use of (innovative) communication means - Extent to which strategy is translated in plans, put in practice		Desk study Survey (mentioned earlier) KII In-country data collection

Component	Essentials of approach	Sub-questions / indicators	Methods
	• (insight in) effect in terms of reach (in numbers and diversity) • Use of insights in reach for learning and improvement		
E. How does MTR assess management & governance taking into account the different nature of the partnership?	Review of agreed managerial arrangements and inventory of perceived experiences (strengths and weaknesses) Effect on efficiency (perception study and possibly benchmark with regular Strategic Partnerships)		• Desk study • KII • In-country data collection

3.2 Grant preparation and implementation (A)

3.2.1 Grant preparation process (A-I)

The methodologies used for this component are:

Step 1:

- Portfolio analysis – I - Comparative analysis of rejected and accepted proposals** (desk study): The comparative analysis covered 280 appraisal records of both rejected and approved proposals.⁷ Generally, appraisal records consisted of scoring templates (and the reasoning for the scoring) for the project check and organisational check.⁸ The focus of the analysis was on how inclusiveness was weighed in the selection process. This was done by comparing the relative scoring of inclusiveness criteria⁹ to other quality criteria¹⁰ in both rejected and approved proposals. We did this by calculating the percentage of the maximum score received (by dividing the score given by the maximum score (for each category)). Subsequently, we compared the difference in average percentage between approved and rejected proposals..
- Desk study:** website, Voice overall context analysis and context analyses for several countries, Voice programme grant manual, some country-versions grant manuals, Calls for Proposals (CfP)

Step 2:

- Survey:** administered to grantees from all countries in English, French and Indonesian; 117 (out of 272; 43%) responded; the survey was primarily to gain insight in whether, how, and what kind of adaptations are made to project designs, perceptions on the pre-contract phase support; the survey questions (with a summary of the results) are presented in Annex 4.
- Portfolio analysis - II** (desk study): on a selection of about half of the projects: 65 approved proposals from all 10 countries (numbers in proportion to country budgets), in a selection balanced for grant types (EM, IL, IF, SO), human rights theme (access to services, control of productive resources, political

⁷ The records do not include proposals that never made it past the eligibility test.

⁸ It should be noted that appraisal records did not always present a full data overview. For example, 5 out of the 280 appraisal records only presented a scoring for the organisational check, but not for the project check; 37 appraisal records did not provide any scoring but did provide reasoning for the rejection of the proposal. Moreover, 55 projects only provided an overall project check score but no specific scoring on the different criteria.

⁹ We defined inclusivity criteria based on the scoring templates presented in the Voice grant manual. For inclusivity criteria in the project check we included the categories "Organisational Background/Team", "Needs analysis" and "Review of Objectives and Activities", whereas in the organisational check inclusivity criteria were identified as the "Governance and Integrity" category.

¹⁰ Under the project check, quality criteria included "Monitoring/Reporting", "Risk Mitigation", and "Budget Review". Under the organisational check, these criteria were "Procurement and Financial Management", "Program and Project Management", and "Human Resources".

participation) and 5 target groups; the focus of the analysis was on how the described target group(s) matched those of Voice, how the target group selection was justified, and how the project response matched the needs assessment.

5. **Interviews with members of selection committees** with a focus on the selection process, and pre-contract engagement between applicants and Voice teams.
6. **Key Informant Interviews (KII):** by phone, with grantees in 7 countries where no visits were made, L&L officer, 2 roving grant officers, Voice staff in 3 country offices, grantees.

3.2.2 Grant implementation (A-II)

The methodologies used for this component are:

1. **Desk study:** primarily project plans, budgets and progress reports (and reporting requirements), zooming in on 28 projects, including the 19 projects featuring in the in-country data collection (Table 2)
2. **Phone interviews** with grantees in each of the seven countries not visited
3. **Survey** (mentioned earlier): questions on Voice support during implementation.
4. In-country data collection (5-6 days per country, to Indonesia, Kenya, Mali), focusing on harvesting (early) outcomes, and getting insight in the significance of the project's contribution from grantees and target groups:
 - **Key Informant Interviews** with Voice country staff, RNE and external thematic experts
 - **Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions** with grantees and project target groups, focussing on (early) outcomes, and significance of the project's contributions. The projects visited are:

Table 2 Grantee organisations visited in Indonesia, Kenya and Mali

Country	Grantee organisations visited	People met
Indonesia	Atmajaya University + consortium IRE + consortium members (Yogya) PPSW YAPESDI Pamflet YASANTI (Yogya) Engage Media (Yogya)	Project teams and project target groups External resource persons (e.g. SEJUK) Hivos Country Director and PDM Voice country team Voice regional roving grant manager OXFAM Head of Programmes Netherlands Embassy
Kenya	HIAS INEND TICAH Carolina for Kibera Samburu Women Trust Leave no Woman Behind	Project teams and project target groups: HIAS Kelly Himatiu Project Manager, 6 beneficiaries (5 Uganda, 1 from Tanzania), UNHCR (for HIAS) Beth Waruiru TICAH Susanne Thompson (& Nairobi team) & >100 beneficiaries in Mombasa (community) Teams from INEND, Caroline for Kibera, and Leave no Woman Behind Voice L&L officer Nyambura Gatthumbi, PO Sheila Mulli, Africa grants officer Ruth Kimani Hivos Country Director Mendi Njongjo NL Embassy Naisola Likimanir

Country	Grantee organisations visited	People met
Mali	Agoratoire (meeting in The Hague) AMPA (The Hague, and Bamako) GRADEM (Bamako, Sikasso) SORO (Bamako, Sikasso) AJCAD (Bamako, Sikasso) FEMATH (Bamako)	Project teams and project target groups AJCAD External resource persons (e.g. journalists) Oxfam-GB Country Director Diawary Bouaré Voice country manager Ramata Coulibaly Netherlands Embassy: Mamadou Ba, Mariam Nomobo

3.3 Methods for reaching out and empowering (B)

The methodologies used for this component are:

1. **Desk study:** website, project plans and reports
2. **Key Informant Interview** with the L&L coordinator
3. **Observations during sharing events** related to the AB meeting in Bamako (15-16 October 2018) and in Nairobi prior to the sense making (23 January 2019)
4. **In-country data collection** (mentioned earlier):
 - **Key Informant Interviews** with Voice country staff, RNE and external thematic experts
 - **Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions** with grantees and project target groups (see Table 1).

3.4 Linking & Learning (C)

The methodologies used for this component are:

1. **Key Informant Interview** with the L&L officer
2. **Observations during sharing events** related to the AB meeting in Bamako (15-16 October 2018) and in Nairobi prior to the sense making (23 January 2019)
3. **Desk study:** special I&L project documents for the L&L country programme
4. **In-country data collection** (mentioned earlier):
 - **Key Informant Interviews** with Voice country staff, RNE and external thematic experts
 - **Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions** with grantees and project target groups (see Table 1).

3.5 Communication (D)

The methodologies used for this component are:

1. **Desk study:** website and other communication means and materials, and the recently developed communication strategy named Voice Amplification Plan (V-AMP)
2. **Survey** (mentioned earlier): questions on Voice communication during implementation
3. **Key Informant Interviews** with members of the coordination team (incl. the L&L coordinator and Programme Manager)
4. **In-country data collection** (mentioned earlier):
 - **Key Informant Interviews** with Voice country staff (for communication)
 - **Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions** with grantees and project target groups (see Table 1).

3.6 Management & governance (E)

The methodologies used for this component are:

1. **Desk study:** programme documents, context analysis, organigrams (programme- and country level), descriptions of tasks and functions of Advisory Board (AB), Steering Committee (SC) and Coordination Team (CT)
2. **Key Informant Interviews** with 1 member of the AB, both members of the SC, 6 members of the CT
3. **In-country data collection** (mentioned earlier):
 - **Key Informant Interviews** with Voice country staff (programme officer, L&L/M&E person)
 - **Key Informant Interviews** with Voice officers in the countries, Embassy contact person for Voice, Oxfam or Hivos country / regional managers.

3.7 Sense making sessions

Participatory sense making was an important part of this MTR process. The sense making has a learning purpose both for Voice and for the MTR team; it is to internalise and enrich the initial results of the review process. Both sense making sessions followed these main steps:

- **Clarify, validate and complete** initial findings
- **Making sense:** what does this mean? What can be the conclusion(s) on i) performance; ii) lessons learned; iii) good practice => What are the key Questions for the future?
- Discussing and **design answers to key questions** (recommendations) that are relevant and useful: things to keep, things to change.

Two main sense making sessions were organised and prior to these, reports and presentations of findings were shared. In Mali there was a brief sense making meeting at the end of the country visit; participants included grantees (those visited) and the Oxfam Great Britain (OGB) Country Director.

The first sense making session, on 22nd of November, was a 2-hour webinar, calling from Oxfam The Hague. It covered the findings from the portfolio analysis and the survey, so the focus was on component A-1: grant preparation. Participants of the webinar included the Voice Coordination Team, the Steering Committee (a total of 8 participants in the Hague), the two regional roving Grants Officers and a good number of Voice country staff (programme and finance officers, staff for L&L, M&E, admin) from nearly all Voice countries (a total of 14 participants online) and 3 from the MTR team (MDF).

The second sense making session was a 2-day event in Nairobi on the 24th and 25th of January, where much more time was spent on validating findings and developing actionable recommendations (i.e. designing what changes to carry out, by who, in the shorter- and longer-term). Participants included senior representatives of Oxfam and Hivos from six Voice countries in Africa (seven people in total), one from Asia, four representatives from the Voice coordination team, the two SC members, and two representatives from MoFA (a total of 16 participants, and 3 MTR team).

The results from the sense making sessions, together with comments on this draft report, provide the final input to this MTR report. Results from these sessions are presented in annexes 5 and 6.

Following the sense making, findings, conclusions and recommendations were discussed in the Advisory Board on the 8th of February 2019. The participants were six from the Advisory Board, the two Steering Committee members, the Voice Programme Manager, and the support officer of the coordination committee.

3.8 Limitations of this MTR

The selection of projects to be visited had some practical limitations because of distance (in all 3 countries), security (in Kenya and Mali), and the need to see more progressed projects that started before 31/12/2017¹¹.

The Kenya visit initially was to be aligned with a ‘workshop for the Country Directors of Oxfam and Regional Directors of Hivos’ (source: ToR), but had to be rescheduled and took place in parallel to the Quality Audit; this posed some challenges in terms of coordination (planning travel and project visits with a larger team) and project selection.

¹¹ In the ToR the Kenya visit was to be “aligned with a workshop for the Country Directors Oxfam and Regional Directors of Hivos”, but in reality the consultant was asked to combine the project visits with the Quality Audit.

4 Findings

4.1 Grant preparation and implementation (A)

The chapter presents findings on relevance and effectiveness of the programme, answering evaluation questions separating the grant-preparation (A-I) and grant implementation processes (A-II).

4.1.1 Grant preparation process (A-I)

In reviewing grant preparation (A-I), two main questions are addressed:

- i. **To what extent have the ‘right’ projects been mobilised? In other words, to what extent has the programme reached and mobilised the desired target organisations/groups to prepare inclusive projects?**
- ii. **To what extent are projects designed ‘right’, in a relevant, truly inclusive way? In other words, to what extent has the process of project design by applicants, guided by different tools such as context analysis, grant manuals, application forms, resulted in clear and logical project proposals that are relevant to the specific needs and requirements of the targeted groups?**

To arrive at an answer on the above questions, firstly, the grant application process is mapped out, to clearly identify and understand the role of the Grant manager in mobilising applicants and ensuring a sound portfolio of projects is selected in line with the programme’s objectives. In doing so, the following process steps have been identified:

1. Context analysis and formulation of Calls for Proposals (CfP)

At the start of the programme, a country-specific context analysis has been commissioned in each of the programme countries. This analysis serves four purposes:

- understand the situation of the most marginalised and/or discriminated groups in the country and the key barriers and issues they are confronted with, including understanding of the legal framework;
- inform the formulation of Calls for Proposals (CfP) so that these can be tailored to the specifics of each programme country;
- help applicants design their projects by providing insights in the specific challenges the programme aims to address through its grant projects; and
- guide the selection of the applications, in particular in assessing relevance of proposals in light of context.

The context analysis was initiated with one global ToR stipulating that in all ten countries all five Voice target groups be analysed. In some countries the ToR was adapted, while the level of involvement of Voice staff in doing the context analysis varied from country to country. The results of the context analysis have been synthesised in the “Exploring Voices” report, which points out a number of limitations related to time and financial constraints, accessibility, (geographical, security), cultural and language barriers, political repression and the availability of reliable secondary data.

Nevertheless, country-specific context analyses were available to inform the formulation of the CfPs and also summaries of the context analysis are posted on the Voice country website as background information for potential grantees.

2. Outreach to disseminate CfP and attract interest in the Voice funding facility from targeted groups

The full information of the CfP is communicated via the website, on the radio (also in local languages), through existing networks of Oxfam, Hivos and the embassies, and through a wide variety of other networks in contact with Oxfam or Hivos. Outreach experiences are documented in Voice event reports (June meet 2017, Indaba Jan. 2018), in blogs and vlogs, and in the Annual report 2017, to enable sharing and learning for future calls.

Different CfPs were published for the four different types of grants (i.e. empowerment, influencing, innovate and learn, and sudden opportunity).

3. Proposal design, including supporting applicants with project proposal writing

To facilitate and guide proposal design, an application template was made available tailored to the type of project (e.g. a simpler version used for empowerment grants than for the other grants or non-written proposals (i.e. videos) were permitted to make the application process easier). Applications typically required information on target group needs, target group involvement in the development of the proposal, and on the governance or membership of the grantee organisation.

In addition to providing application templates, special efforts were made to explain the application process to applicants, including seminars or 'proposal clinics' reportedly taking place in Mali, Tanzania, Philippines, Laos, and Cambodia, field visits used to create opportunity for outreach to support proposal writers, and responding to questions of applicants via phone, email, and Skype. In particular for the larger Influencing projects this guidance also included suggestions for consortium building to link informal groups to more established organisations (e.g. YAPESDI in Indonesia) or to stimulate complementarity to enhance learning (e.g. inclusion of research partner to document results) and/or intersectionality (e.g. linking a women's rights group with PLWD group in the Inclusive Village Governance project led by IRE).

4. Screening of applications

Applications go through three rounds of screening that are 'prescribed and guided' by a Voice grant manual, adapted at country-level to the local context to increase applicability. This manual covers a.o. the selection criteria, and scoring system for the ranking of applications.

The first screening concerns an eligibility test meant to check whether the application / grantees meets the threshold criteria to be considered for funding, which include issues like: registration and direct representativeness of target group.

Eligible applications are then submitted to a second screening which concerns the scoring based on a number of pre-set criteria related to:

1. Project success analysis (intervention logic, risk analysis, value-for-money)
2. Target Group Representation
3. Innovation and scalability
4. Responsiveness to needs or opportunities
5. Organisational background including link / representativeness of target group, (see also annex 3 for details selection / scoring criteria)

After this second screening, scored projects are shortlisted and shortlisted are presented to a selection panel made up of at least one senior representative from country management and one senior representative at coordination level. Based on the scoring and qualitative comments given by the scoring team during the second screening, the selection panel decides which projects are taken forward. Conditionally approved projects are then given the time to revise process. This process is also referred to as a 'ping-pong' process where the proposal goes up and down a few times before the final proposal and

budget is approved. During this process, Voice programme staffs provide suggestions and feedback to help the applicant refine its proposal. This happened in particular for the larger influencing projects during the first rounds of applications¹², where Voice programme staff appreciated the essence of the proposal but felt a bit of guidance was needed to bring the proposal up to 'standard'.

5. Contracting

Applications that get a go-ahead from the selection panel enter the ping-pong process parallel to the contracting process. During the contracting process, an organisational assessment is carried out where due diligence is done, including donor checks as well as the assessment of the organisation's capacities.

Exceptionally, this can still lead to exclusion. The Oxfam country or Hivos regional management is involved at this stage as they will sign grant agreements on behalf of the MoFA for all country-level grants. Multi-country grants are signed by the global programme manager.

During this process, often efforts continue to further refine projects, but mostly on operational matters like the monitoring plan and the budget (in particular empowerment projects are expected to adapt to the grants' budgetary format at this stage).

Table 3 presents the details on the portfolio of approved projects.

Table 3 Portfolio of approved projects by October 2018.

	Project type						Theme				Target group			
	EM	IL	IF	SO	?	total	Political	Resources	Services	IGEM	LGTBQI	PLWD	WAEV	Y/E
Cambodia	8	4	3	0		15	51%	8%	40%	7%	16%	12%	39%	26%
Indonesia	14	5	9	0	3	31	36%	28%	36%	16%	7%	18%	24%	35%
Kenya	6	2	7	2	1	18	18%	20%	62%	20%	25%	21%	15%	20%
Laos	9	6	3	0		18	14%	23%	64%	18%	7%	37%	18%	20%
Mali	3	8	4	0		15	27%	38%	35%	2%	0%	49%	23%	26%
Niger	6	1	2	0		9	8%	65%	27%	8%	0%	14%	42%	36%
Nigeria	6	2	4	0		12	25%	15%	60%	11%	0%	29%	44%	15%
Philippines	4	8	7	2		21	40%	18%	43%	34%	16%	4%	15%	32%
Tanzania	5	3	5	0	3	16	11%	18%	71%	17%	22%	26%	19%	16%
Uganda	7	4	7	1		19	21%	38%	41%	7%	0%	13%	55%	25%
Multi-country	0	8	6	1	1	16	51%	24%	24%	36%	30%	6%	13%	15%
Total/av.	68	51	57	4	10	190	27%	27%	46%	16%	11%	21%	28%	24%

From the review of the grant preparation the following observations can be made in terms of what is going well and what would be issues of concern (Table 4).

¹²As there was time for this in the absence of an already on-going portfolio that needs attention.

Table 4 Review of the grant preparation process in terms of what is going well and issues of concern.

Things working well	Issues of concern
Concerning context analysis and CfP	
Complete set of country context analysis accessible in summarised form on Voice website, and as such available to inform the shaping of CfPs and the screening process.	Comprehensive but rather complex ToR that is contracted out to different degrees, resulted in varying quality of context analysis per country (incl. differences in analytical depth, coverage and definitions of target groups)
CfPs are informed by the context analysis and experiences are documented and shared to improve future rounds of CfPs (e.g. increase focus on under-represented groups)	Despite website access, only few applicants appear to be aware of, or claim to have used, the context analysis in the development of their proposal. This affects the usefulness of the country context analysis.
Separate CfPs are issued for different types of grants, making grants accessible to a wider variety of applicants.	Somewhat confusing distinction in name between empowerment and influencing grants, as both type of grants include both elements, while distinction is meant to refer to different scales.
Outreach / dissemination of CfP	
Outreach through existing networks works well with large majority of applicants reached through contacts.	Web-based dissemination of context analysis and CfPs appears to be less effective in reaching new applicants.
In most programme countries, outreach efforts resulted in a significant number (more than 90%) of 'new' grantees ¹³ , which confirms the need and interest for the programme.	Applicants concentrated around capital or larger urban hubs, illustrating that target groups in more remote areas remain difficult to reach.
(Guidance in) Proposal Design	
Application template is tailored to different types of grants and considered 'reasonable' by existing grantees.	Outcome level results of influencing projects remains often not clear (who to be influenced towards what change) in project design (to be clarified during inception).
Different non-written 'types' of applications possible to further facilitate submission of applications	Despite positive remarks on support received, there is a clear demand for more support (which is likely to become even more as the portfolio grows and time for guiding applications reduces)
Voice programme staff display more substantial efforts to stimulate and facilitate submission of proposals, going beyond what is usual in conventional grant programmes.	The fewer and larger Influencing projects developed by more established applicants claim to receive more support than the smaller more inexperienced applicants for empowerment projects.
49 out of 117 survey respondents are explicitly positive about Voice support in proposal design	
Screening and selection of projects	
Inclusiveness related criteria carry more weight, as the scoring on inclusiveness related criteria of approved projects is higher than e.g. capacity related criteria (see annex 3 for a detailed analysis of approved versus rejected projects).	CfP, application form and appraisal / scoring forms not aligned making the applications process less efficient.
Country-level adaptations of grant manual helps increase applicability and allows room to stimulate cooperation between potential grantees to comply with registration	Country-level adaptations of grant manual leads to inconsistent application of selection criteria (e.g. in Niger, direct representation of target group waived in case of too

¹³ Out of the 202 approved projects, only 16 grantees explicitly indicated that they had partnered with Oxfam or Hivos before. Also, 110 grantees explicitly indicated that they had not partnered with either Oxfam or Hivos before (data from Smartsheet).

criteria or for the sake of learning and / or intersectionality.	few applications).
Current screening practices have resulted in a good balance of target groups in the approved portfolio of projects with only LGBTQI projects as outlier caused by relative sensitivity in reaching this group (see figure 1 below).	A relatively high percentage of applications focusing on age-discriminated groups is rejected (see figure 1 below). There is no specific reason found for this relatively high percentage. Proposals from age-discriminated groups were often rejected based on the relatively low scoring of proposal quality indicators (e.g., formulation of objectives)

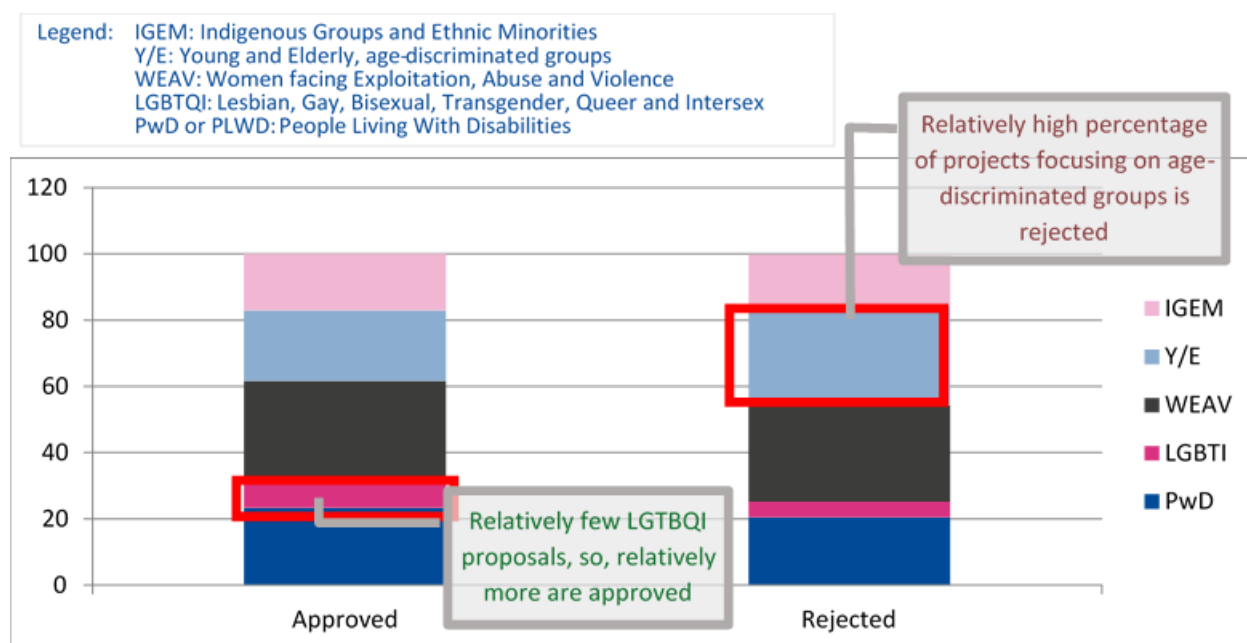


Figure 1 Representation of target groups in accepted and rejected grants.

Figure 1 demonstrates the relatively balanced composition of the approved project portfolio in terms of Voice's five target groups. The relatively low number of LGBTQI proposal is directly related to the extent of marginalisation faced by this particular target group, making it more difficult to reach and motivate them to come forward with a proposal. The relatively high percentage of projects of Y/E groups being rejected cannot be explained directly. Proposals from age-discriminated groups were often rejected based on the relatively low scoring of proposal quality indicators (e.g., formulation of objectives). However, we did not find a specific cause underlying the relatively low quality of proposals.

Based on the above observations, a number of important future challenges for the programme were identified, related to the various steps in the grant preparation process. These include:

- similar to other MoFA funded Strategic Partnerships, how to keep the context analysis up to date, reliably reflecting shifts in civic space and public opinion vis-à-vis the five target groups, especially in light of the limits in capacity to spend time and energy on this.
- how to reach also the more remotely located target groups, beyond those in the networks of Oxfam and Hivos' existing partner networks.
- how to balance the need / demand for more support in project preparation of new applicants (in particular from the less experienced smaller ones) with the decreasing time available this given the growing portfolio of on-going projects demanding attention as well.

Reviewing the above findings in light of the initial questions, the following can be concluded;

Are the right applicants / projects mobilised?

The programme is indeed reaching and mobilising the desired grantee and/or target group organisations, and many 'new' grantees have been found, mostly through Oxfam and Hivos' own networks and that of a variety of other (theme or target-group-specific, national and international) networks. It remains a challenge however to reach the less connected, emerging and/or more remote groups/organisations that are, which will require different, more innovative, approaches.

Are the right projects designed and selected?

In general, the Voice programme offers functional templates and personal support to guide the detailed design of applications, even though there is a demand for more support, especially from the smaller inexperienced applicants. This presents a clear challenge for future calls, especially when even more remote and less experienced groups are being reached. Applications are screened and selected with prominent use of inclusiveness criteria fitting the nature of the programme, be it with limited systematic use of context analysis, while screening processes are not uniform across countries. Overall, this has resulted in a unique and balanced portfolio of approved projects in terms of the five groups targeted by the programme. In particular, in design the empowerment projects demonstrate a variety of straightforward small yet meaningful interventions that are in majority are 'owned' by a dedicated group that didn't have access to the financial and moral that is provided through the Voice programme.

At the same time, the search for the right balance between uniformity and flexibility in grant preparation procedures continues, while the design of ambitions to 'influence' others (power-holders) requires more attention.

4.1.2 Grant implementation (A-II)

In reviewing grant implementation, the main question addressed is: **"To what extent have the approved projects been successful in reaching their empowerment, influencing and/or learning & innovation ambitions?"**

In addressing this question, the MTR has focused on identifying signs of progress towards outcomes (i.e. signs of empowerment and increasing engagement, reflecting effects on the grantee or related actors beyond the control of project). Besides, the MTR explored explanatory factors for those signs of progress to determine the significance of the projects in realising the observed effects /signs. In addition, output related findings are added, which illustrate that in general empowerment project have delivered closely according to plan, while the planned delivery in influencing projects has been more challenging (delays and more time needed to demonstrate influencing results). The programme's own M&E reporting system already provides a comprehensive coverage of these outputs, which is therefore not repeated in this report.

Findings related to 'signs of progress' of the different types of projects are reflected below. These findings are primarily based on key informant interviews conducted during the visits to Indonesia, Kenya, and Mali, complemented by limited distant interviews with the other programme countries. In the case of Influencing projects, also findings from the programme's on-going outcome harvesting efforts have been included.

Empowerment projects

These are set out to raise awareness, develop transformative leadership, build confidence and skills of target (informal) groups/organisations to work against stigmatisation, marginalisation and discrimination. Seeking early signs of progress beyond project outputs, MTR interviews and country visits reveal a large and

diverse number of signs of progress in the target group's empowerment results, while output level results of these projects tend to go mostly as planned, as is seen in all three countries.

Mapping and assessing outcome-level change related to these relatively small-scale but rather straightforward projects has revealed a wealth of signs of progress, often related to increased confidence and outspokenness. As can be seen from the table below, many examples of such signs can be found ranging from children living with disabilities expressing themselves due to the innovative method used by AMPA in Mali, to people living with HIV/AIDS speaking about their needs in Laos (Box 2) or women porters feeling confident to demand better working conditions from market owners.

Box 2 People living with HIV/AIDS speaking up.

After being trained by the project, a woman who had never shared her HIV/AIDS story with other people, was able to open up about her parents passing away after her birth, her facing endless stigma at school and the workplace, and about her efforts to escape from people. She was able to share her story not only within the HIV/AIDS community, but also with her village, and regained a friend who abandoned her due to the stigma.

Other early signs of change in Empowerment projects indicate progress in increased inclusiveness within the target groups, increased faith in the future making them daring-to-dream, the production and use of advocacy materials and so on. For each country, a number of such signs were found, as summarised in more detail in Table 5, though the MTR recognises that this certainly is not an exhaustive list of the progress made.

Table 5 Empowerment grants: early signs of progress.

Country	Project / lead partner	Early signs of progress	Remarks
Indonesia	Yasanti, (women porters)	- Increased outspokenness/ confidence to use negotiation skills, also at home - Advocacy materials (posters, letters) - Successful dialogue with market owners => meeting space - Change in leadership - Saving groups to reduce dependence on external money lenders	Target groups developed taste for more, awaiting input from the Voice team on what is possible
	Pamflet (deaf youth)	- Project completed in time - Website created, vlogs produced and uploaded on website - Confidence to participate in road show visiting schools - Assist other grantees in producing AV promotional materials.	Complication of sign language not allowed in one school
	PPSW (elderly)	- More elderly participated than foreseen - Inspired others to consider needs of elderly (e.g. lift in Posyandi) - Increased savings and access to credit	Works through cadres (selected members demonstrating interests = change agents)
	Yapesdi (youth with Down syndrome)	- Children more confident and open in expressing themselves - Increased participation in art / sports activities	Problematic partnership that was abandoned and Yapesdi proceeding alone

Country	Project / lead partner	Early signs of progress	Remarks
Kenya	For the visit ¹⁴ it was a challenge to identify grants mature enough for evaluation. INEND was identified and visited, but there were no activities implemented as they had just started.		
Mali	Project 'Raising awareness on albinism in Mali'/Association for PLWA (AMPA) ¹⁵	Successfully influenced the Ministry of internal security that agreed and established focal points in the police force, to prevent and persecute perpetrators.	Main success factor is a selection of grantees that represent the target group and have working experience on the topic
	Project 'Voices of kids with a difference' (mentally disabled children)/ Agoratoire	- Children with disabilities express themselves by using an innovative method - This sign of success inspired several other organisations	An innovative method of Agoratoire is essential in bringing the change
Laos	Project "Empowering the hidden Voices of women and minorities living with HIV/AIDS"/Association of People Living with HIV/AIDS (APL+)	- 12 young PLWH, selected by the whole community in 4 provinces, have become trainers and organised focus groups (so far 3) to encourage other PLWH to raise their Voice - People living with HIV/AIDS speak about their issues and feel better since they are able to meet. They even requested whether they could meet more often - The community members have become friendlier towards the organisation APL+, welcoming when they visit the community	- The project is unable to facilitate for more meetings that are requested by the HIV/AIDS community - Previously, people living with HIV/AIDS didn't like to attend the group meetings, but this has changed after the project because the project has created a safe space for them to share ideas, side effects, or life stories with each other.
Niger	Project "Re-integration of out-of-school girls in Torodi and Kollo/GIE-EMPRISE ¹⁶ Started in June 2018	No outcomes yet Outputs: Some market assessment done (not in-depth), training is on-going and the budget on equipment is spent	- Target group young girls, reached via the Ministry of Training & Professional Education (after a 4-month training on food processing provided by it, trainees, lacking equipment, had not started) - The initial budget was approx. €11,000, Voice proposed to double it to purchase more equipment - First project report: just 1/2 of 39 participants are under 18 years old while half are <i>more</i> than 30 years. The report, however, consistently refers to "girls", "prone to early marriage"

The above early signs of progress are in most cases closely related to the intervention, whereby the intervention is confirmed to have made a significant contribution in realising this change. Obviously, the

¹⁴ To be combined with the Quality Audit, as explained in 2.1)

¹⁵ Association Malienne pour la Protection de l'Albinos

¹⁶ Groupement d'Interet Economique pour l'Emergence et Prosperite des initiatives Socio-Economiques

level of success of projects partially depends on external factors beyond the project's control (e.g. a more or less resistant target audience), but the relative success of a large proportion of the empowerment projects can certainly be explained by a range of factors that are controlled or strongly influenced by the grantees. This includes the following:

- the experience of grantees with working on the topic,
- their knowledge of and access to the target group and
- their ability to mobilise, involve and truly represent the target group.

Besides, the small scale and tangible nature of empowerment projects makes that the focus is on local and straightforward results that can be used immediately to pursue higher-level goals. For instance, a training is not limited to knowledge and skills building but used as an opportunity to get help in developing advocacy materials (e.g. developing posters, writing letters) that can be put to immediate use for influencing after the training (i.e. outside the scope of the project itself).

The importance of direct representativeness is supported by the observation that Empowerment projects where the target group is more on the 'receiving end' rather than being an active player (i.e. not directly represented in the grantee organisation) were found to be relatively slow. This was for instance the case in countries like Niger, where only a few proposals were received hence the requirement of applicant/grantee being from the target groups themselves was waived.

Despite the relative success of the on-going portfolio of empowerment projects, also some issues for consideration came to the surface. This concerned a strongly expressed desire for more personal contact / accompaniment during implementation (instead of the rather distant e-mail and phone correspondence). On one side, this may reflect a culture where personal contact is seen to be more important than distant communication, while it also calls for the Voice programme to be more of a partner than a funder. This combined with the fact that both Oxfam and Hivos have a DNA that is closer to being a 'partner' than a 'funder' not surprisingly leads to a constant dilemma among Voice staff about how to use their time.

Another important issue for consideration is the 'follow-up' question. A successful Empowerment project through which the target group has gained confidence and maybe even made quick wins (e.g. acceptance in community, improved working conditions) creates a 'taste for more'. Hence the question "what's next" to advocate for bigger / more important wins is raised, immediately followed by the question "what can we expect from Voice in this next challenge"? Obviously, in itself these questions are important signs of progress but an answer of Voice to these questions is clearly expected. For example, are there resources for follow-up, can grantees qualify for subsequent, larger grants, will Voice link them to other networks or (funding) partners, and what is the future relationship that Oxfam/Hivos aspire with these grantees (continued partner, ex-grantee, or ...)?

Influencing projects

These aim at strengthening the influencing, lobby and/or advocacy capacities of targeted organisations and networks, amplifying the Voices of marginalised and discriminated groups to influence others that have the potential 'power' to improve their situation. These lobby and advocacy efforts to influence others can be evidence-based (i.e. based on research findings about the occurrence and effects of discrimination and marginalisation), or issue-based and linked to the direct experience of discriminated and marginalised groups. Influencing projects often include a combination of these approaches, especially where research organisations (working evidence-based) join a consortium with a group that directly represents the Voice target group (working issue-based).

Apart from the scale and complexity of their ambitions, the essence of the intervention logic of empowerment and influencing projects appears to be similar (first empower towards strengthened capacity to influence, then use this capacity to be more influential) but the nature of results at which success is being measured is different. Empowerment projects are successful when the grantee is demonstrably empowered (output-level) and subsequent influencing results are beyond the direct scope of the project (outcome-level), while in Influencing projects these results are still considered within the scope of the project (i.e. output-level).

Keeping this distinction in mind while seeking early signs of progress beyond project outputs, the MTR identified a substantial 'harvest' of evidence demonstrating significant 'empowerment' progress but more modest progress in terms of 'influencing others' for which more time is reportedly needed. Positive examples here range from the changing views inside the Cambodia Older People Alliance (COPA) on discriminating women or people living with disabilities to indigenous and elderly people speaking out about their own safety concerns within their community. Moreover, there are signs of change in the communities themselves, such as the reported decrease of harassment and increase of acceptance of LGBTQI people in Nairobi. In Table 6 below, a more comprehensive overview of signs of progress of influencing projects is presented, again recognising that this list is not exhaustive.

Table 6 Influencing grants: early signs of progress.

Country	Project / lead partner	Early signs of progress	Remarks
Indonesia	Yes I Can Project	- 90% participants completed reflection training - More outspoken/open, dare to dream - Increased tolerance among three target groups - Host university community more tolerant / sensitive to target groups - Initial collaboration with private sector for traineeships (street children) - Less stereotypical choices of transgender (e.g. shop instead of beauty parlour) - Recognition by ILO	- "Influencing" efforts depend on particular individuals with right contacts/status from lead agency - Progress in 'influencing others' takes more time - Deliberate approach not to change target group but accept and make best of who you are. - Complementary partnership close to and directly representing three target groups with University giving credibility to project.
	Inclusive villages (marginalised groups at village level)	- Multiple changes in particular in two central Java villages (village government cooperates, long term vision formulated, village assets transferred to community, marginalised groups better organised=> village committees increasingly include women and youth, deliberate pro-poor resource allocation in village development budget.	- Complementary partnership but project activities divided geographically (i.e. not using complementary qualities) - Villages in central Java most accessible to partners => most progress, village in Sulawesi least accessible => least progress

Country	Project / lead partner	Early signs of progress	Remarks
Cambodia	"Voicing marginalised and older people needs and concerns through Cambodia Older Persons Alliance (COPA)"/HelpAge Cambodia	- The Cambodia Older People Alliance (COPA) was established to represent older people in government discussions. - COPA members have started to think beyond their own community. They discuss the cases with a broader scope and interact with the government better. - The government has started to see the importance of the COPA. - Internally, the network has promoted inclusiveness and worked on raising awareness /changing the view on marginalised target groups, especially discriminating women or people living with disabilities.	- HelpAge Cambodia has been working with older people (and bringing them together) for a longer period but saw the need to establish a network that could voice the needs of the elderly at the national level. - The change is from the situation when COPA discussing issues too narrow for the national government. As a result, the government would not listen to their needs. - Discrimination might still happen for other groups (e.g. LGBTQI), but HelpAge Cambodia is supporting COPA to more open, e.g., by inviting speakers from certain target groups to speak about their needs and challenges.
Kenya	"Safe Spaces for LGBTQI Refugees in Nairobi"/HIAS Refugee Trust of Kenya	- LGBTQI people demonstrate economic empowerment - LGBTQI people are more accepted in the community, less harassment	- Results achieved through protection, health promotion, access to public services, and talks with police
	Bringing In the Voices of Elders"/Trust for Indigenous Culture and Health (TICAH)	- Indigenous groups and elderly speak out in the community about their safety	- Main success factor is a selection of grantees that represent the target group and know the area very well
	Project "Usawa Dada"/Samburu Women Trust (SWT)	- Girls are educated in school holiday camps and monitored thereafter. This appears to improve their self-esteem, confidence and appetite for leadership - There are claims that FGM is reduced and schooling improved - A change in culture is seen, on areas relevant to girls' empowerment	- Achieved with an inclusive approach: engaging teachers, traditional leaders, police, country administration, etc. - This project connects to other SWC activities with the Indigenous Women Council seeking amplification of the Voices of women - Joint meetings with the chief have been effective in getting practical solutions.
	Project "Funzo: Education for Teenage Mums"/Carolina for Kibera (CFK)	Over 76 girls got back to school and stay in school	- Has an equally inclusive approach for young mothers in Kibera slum - Voice team organised the capacity building sessions (L&L)
Malawi	Project "Improving access to agricultural technology for	Women got access to more land	- The community-level influencing appears effective

Country	Project / lead partner	Early signs of progress	Remarks
	vulnerable groups”/ Sustainable Opportunity for Rural Organisations (SORO)		- For PLWD the effect is not yet
	Project “Upholding Rights and Status of young “house girls” in Bamako and beyond”/GRADEM	- The domestic workers (not all girls, also adult women) received training - National lobby on-going for legal labour contracts tailored to domestic work - In rural areas, advocacy to improve school enrolment and retention is taking place (allegedly effective, but no data on this) - Cooperatives for parents to earn for school fees seem are generally a success.	- Training for domestic workers to enable alternative livelihoods did not necessarily improve their position within the household - An indicator for empowerment used by the grantee is the signing of a labour contract, whereas several domestic worker women desire to preserve (and have the protective benefit of) a more ‘family-like’ relation – with fears that a formal contract could also draw them into formal disputes. - There is poor data collection on an exodus of youth, yet this seems relatively easy to do as data on primary school enrolment, retention and completion, and number of youth born as well as how many remain in the country is available
Multi-country	“Leave No Woman Behind” (LNWB) ¹⁷ / Ghana Federation of Disability Organisations (GFD)	- Some more basic empowerment work gets done	- The organisations agreed on activities, but not on the budget, there is still discussion on whether the amounts allocated are realistic for the planned activities and thus planned work on national level advocacy is not taking place

As indicated, signs of progress of ‘influencing others’ are more modest, which is not surprising given that more external factors and interests come in play. Nevertheless, also here the contribution of projects to observed changes is significant, as they are often the only explicit intervention at play. In other words, without the project little attention for the issue at stake would be there, hence projects can be credited for meaningful influencing results like: increased acceptance of trans-gender people at a university or village governments paying more attention to PLWD in planning and budgeting, be it still at modest scale.

Also here a number of success factors could be identified, besides the success factors already mentioned under the empowerment projects that are of similar relevance here. Such additional conditions for success include:

¹⁷ Started in April 2018, now is working with Polycom and SDGs Forum in Kenya

- proximity / accessibility of the target audience to be influenced. Clearly actors that are physically closer and more accessible can be worked on more intensely with a higher likeliness of actual change.
- time and cooperation of leading figures that have the right contacts/status to access targeted people / organisations (this is in particular challenging as the project is often something they are involved in on the side, i.e. not their sole or primary activity).
- the use of inclusive approach at community level (i.e. actively including activities that engage community members, teachers, traditional leaders, police, and local administration).
- Complementary partners in consortia, able to tackle intersectionality and combining an evidence- and issue-based approach.

Linked to these ‘conditions for success’ are a number of issues for consideration;

- Having complementary qualities in a consortium does not automatically mean the optimal utilisation of these qualities. Recognition and operationalisation of these qualities in project planning needs to receive dedicated attention (e.g. avoiding a geographic distribution of work that may be practical, but does not fit the quality of partners who don’t represent different regions but different target groups).
- Voice has started Outcome harvesting efforts, requesting grantees to report on the occurrence, significance and contribution of outcome-level change. These efforts are laudable but time-consuming for the grantee, making it unlikely that this highly relevant overview of outcome-level progress gets comprehensively reported.

Typically, multi-country influencing projects demonstrate a lesser degrees of progress. The set-up of these projects is more complex hence they require time to get agreement between different parties on issues related to mutual understanding, cooperation and/or budget issues.

Innovate and Learn projects

These are for groups and organisations to test and scale-up new approaches with a focus on human-centred innovations that are very context specific. The portfolio analysis-II shows that in terms of numbers, I&L grant projects outnumber the Influencing grant projects; especially so in multi-country grants. Assessing the project documentation of 19 of these projects, it is found that most I&L projects focus on developing, adapting and/or wider adaptation of (innovative) methods for communication, varying from photography and film making, to special apps, e-knowledge, mHealth, and deaf sign language. Most I&L projects are on the pragmatic side (adapting, promoting an existing tool), other projects are on the research side but not all of them are equally strong in terms of context/needs analysis and/or describing the expected outcomes.

Signs of progress found relate to target group representatives feeling a sense of belonging (Box 3).

Box 3 Feeling a sense of belonging.

After a hesitation to participate in project activities and joining different conventions, a mother of a child with albinism feels that she is not alone in the community in Uganda. The district leadership is also more aware of the needs of PLWA, and more than that, they translated their awareness into a pledge and action to support PLWA with a small amount to fund projects. The work is going on to introduce a law to support PLWA in schools and communities (e.g. let them skip the queue in the sun).

Another set of signs indicating an area of change similar to the one in Empowerment and Influencing projects is about increased ownership and inclusion in the project by the target group like in the case of the project “Ondoilo: the voices of Maasai in family planning” led by the Kilimanjaro Clinical Research Institute. As expected, Innovate and learn projects bring about improved and / or exchanged skills and knowledge. E.g. several organisations participating in the project “Data4Change – East Africa” led by the Small Media

Foundation and Defend Defenders, have benefitted from the Ugandan partner who ran their campaign “See the Invisible” with better quality graphic design.

A special category of Innovate & Learn projects are the ones through which a national Learning Facilitator is selected to increase L&L activities at country level for which otherwise no separate budget would be available (e.g. Engage Media in Indonesia). These projects successfully create opportunities for grantees to interact, create connections and exchange through the design of electronic platforms or learning events. In particular, face-to-face learning events appear to be most effective in increasing mutual understanding / tolerance among grantees, creating meaningful connections and in generating lessons to be learned. This success is demonstrated in several occasions where grantees indeed are working together (e.g. one using another to produce audio-visuals) or have concrete plans for doing so (e.g. the successful experience with inclusive village governance of one partner, used by another partner in another region). In the Table 7 below a more elaborate, yet non-exhaustive overview of signs of progress in selected projects is presented.

Table 7 Innovate and Learn grants: early signs of progress.

Country	Project / lead partner	Early signs of progress	Remarks
Mali	Project “From Shadow to Light”/ AJCAD ¹⁸ (Youth Association for Active Citizenship and Democracy)	Trained photographers (prepared) to document positive images of people with disabilities; this is to be used in external events	Specific media products/ photographs that convey non-discrimination to people with disabilities could not be found yet
Indonesia	Annual Linking & Learning event of Indonesian grantees/ EngageMedia	- Increased understanding and tolerance among different grantees representing different groups - Linkages between partners, E-platform - Inspiration and lessons get exchanged	- More (bilateral) face-to-face learning opportunities needed (electronic platforms less successful) - Harvest of Lessons is richer than what gets documented - No resources for follow-up. Role of L&L facilitator in follow-up uncertain

¹⁸ Association des Jeunes pour la Citoyenneté Active et la Démocratie (AJCAD)

Country	Project / lead partner	Early signs of progress	Remarks
Tanzania	Project “Ondoilo: The voices of the Maasai in family planning”/the Kilimanjaro Clinical Research Institute (KCRI)	- The target group - Maasai community is included in the project design, e.g. by two men and two women from the Maasai village being selected to complement the research team at KCRI. The Maasai team is bridging the KCRI research team to the Maasai village and is providing translation as well as insights into the needs of the community - Maasai community members took part in co-developing the proposal - During a seminar that was held for proposal writing, Maasai with no prior knowledge of contraceptives got very interested in the hormonal injection for birth control	- The project was stuck for a while and therefore little can be said about outcomes. There are several issues/unforeseen barriers that hampered project implementation, among them a delay in ethical clearance, approved by the local review board, but not yet by the national review board. - It remains unclear whether the information about birth control prompted Maasai to go to the clinic, and actually changed their behaviour regarding family planning
Uganda	Project “Spatial Mapping & Profiling of PLWA in Uganda”/Albino Umbrella	- Although PLWA were initially hesitant to participate in the research (as they were scared), they have increasingly increased their interest - PLWA got a sense of belonging through different conventions, the target group feels that they can be together - Leaders in the districts become more aware of PLWA needs. They have pledged and started providing their support e.g. small funding for projects. They are setting-up by-laws that support PLWA in schools and communities (e.g., not queuing in the sun)	- The project aims to collect data about PLWA in one region in Uganda to inform policymaking. The project has only started recently, and data has been collected, but the report with recommendations has not been produced yet

Country	Project / lead partner	Early signs of progress	Remarks
Multi-country	The project “Data4Change – East Africa”/the Small Media Foundation and Defend Defenders	- During the Data4Change event (in Kampala in 2017), several human rights organisations and designers developed a campaign that was handed over to the participating organisations at the end of the event - The event participants spoke openly (and comfortably) about their identities. - Several organisations applied acquired skills in data collection, communication and online advocacy. One Ugandan organisation has run their campaign “See the Invisible” with better quality graphic design - Organisations do storytelling, and people are faster to reach out for help - One participant founded her own organisation on ICT and human rights - Several participants with a creative profile such as freelance designers got jobs at the Data for Africa and two stayed on for a while working via a fellowship at Data4Change	

When looking at success factors that explain these signs of progress, it is clear that the deliberate attention for learning and innovation as one of the programme’s key results areas is paying off. The introduction of a special category, elevates I&L to being part of the primary process of the programme rather than a support process as is the case in more conventional interventions.

Other success factors include:

- Being utility focused by moving beyond exchange of experience to action-learning (i.e. workshops rather than training that offer space for the direct application of new insights).
- Deliberately designed learning events emphasising commonalities (*we all deal with marginalised groups*) whilst avoiding fragmentation (*you represent one group, I represent another*).
- Make learning & linking personal by creating opportunities for face-to-face interaction.

At the same time a number of issues for further consideration emerged including:

- The extent to which these learnings and innovations are however captured and documented for broader use and the resource availability to follow-up on intentions for further cooperation deserve further attention. This is in particular the case for rather spontaneous efforts that are more seen as ‘improvisation’ than ‘innovation’ but do carry substantial innovative value (e.g. a person in a wheelchair given a stage to talk about her life, decides to place her wheelchair in front of and not behind the assigned desk, demonstrating her self-confidence and adding strength to her presentation).
- Clarity on available resources for follow-up on learning efforts beyond learning events.
- The limited effectiveness of electronic platforms for sharing and learning as many grantees are not in the habit of using such platforms, hence this kind of exchange needs constant encouragement and risks to be ‘forced’.

In summary; Concerning the effective implementation of grant projects it can be concluded that ample evidence could be found of progress towards meaningful results (outcomes) for all the three main types of grants. In particular, Empowerment projects demonstrate high effectiveness in delivering both output and outcome level results. This is less obvious when comparing intended with actual results of Influencing projects, but this is partly due to the fact that these projects are designed with higher-level ‘influencing’ results that are more dependent on external factors and simply take more time. However also in Influencing projects many signs of progress concerning empowerment results are found that form the basis for the more difficult influencing results. The nature of the ambitions of I&L projects is different but also here substantial signs of progress can be found, demonstrating that the deliberate attention for learning & innovation is paying off.

Each type of project has its own separate success factors, but there are a number key factors of success that apply to all, which include:

1. true representation of target groups in implementation (also critical in multi-country projects),
2. being outcome-oriented (i.e. in design and planning already thinking of what is supposed to happen following an initial phase of capacity development / empowerment).

4.2 Methods & instruments for outreach and empowering (B)

Particularly during country visits, efforts were made to identify which methods and instruments were applied to reach the target group in both the Voice programme as a whole as well as in the individual projects. This section describes the variety of methods and instruments that were used to reach, mobilise, and empower target groups. Subsequently, it describes the extent to which these methods and instruments can be considered inclusive, innovative and effective.

4.2.1 Methods and instruments at programme level

Firstly, a special mention goes out to the vision and design of the Voice programme. As a whole, the Voice programme in itself is an approach to reach, mobilise and empower marginalised groups. Providing grants to organisations that support or directly represent marginalised groups that are normally not reached by conventional development programmes is one of the strong features of the programme. This feature can be considered innovative and contributing to inclusiveness, as commonly marginalised groups would only be perceived as beneficiaries rather than the key stakeholder in the implementation of a project.

Moreover, the explicit focus on Linking and Learning within the Voice programme can be considered to be another strong, innovative feature as it aims to bring together individuals and organisations that would normally not interact on a frequent and equal basis.

More specifically, within the specific components of the Voice programme, efforts have been made by the Voice team to adapt methods and instruments to reach the Voice target groups and involve Voice grantees in the programme. In this sub-section, we distinguish **(1)** the grant making process, **(2)** the Linking and Learning, and **(3)** the overall communication towards the Voice target groups and Voice grantees, and discuss the methods and instruments used for outreach, mobilisation and empowerment accordingly.

During the **grant making process**, deliberate methods are used to reach out and mobilise Voice target groups. Through its website, existing networks, and radio announcements, Voice reaches out to its target groups and aims to attract potential applicants. The Voice website is accessible in both English and French, although not all pages on the website are translated in both languages. Similarly, the Calls for Proposals (CfPs) published on the Voice website are translated in either English or French (for the francophone

countries), as well as in certain cases in local languages. This indicates that efforts have been made to make the (communication about) CfPs more accessible, although limitations in accessibility still remain for those target groups not acquainted with the English or French language in case the CfP is not available in local language.

In the field visits in Indonesia, Kenya, and Mali, all grantees interviewed indicated that they found out about the Voice programme through their existing networks. Therefore, it remains questionable to which extent the Voice website is effective in reaching those target groups that are not linked to existing networks and, possibly, in more remote areas with limited or no access to the internet.

Although the Voice website is only available in English and French, the Voice programme does provide applicants the opportunity to submit a proposal in their local language, as well as in audio or video instead of written format. Moreover, during the grant application, the Voice programme organises “write-shops” to support applicants to develop a (more innovative) proposal. Also, the Voice programme allows existing Empowerment grantees to do the reporting by audio or video. In these ways, the Voice programme aims to promote mobilisation of target groups by providing opportunities to those target groups that would normally not apply for a grant due to language barriers, or limited writing and reporting capacity. Despite these efforts that promote inclusion, there are limits to its effectiveness. For example, although actively promoted by the programme, the number of existing grantees reporting through audio or video remains limited.

Similarly, during **Linking and Learning**, a variety of specific methods and instruments is applied to facilitate the process. (Note: Linking and Learning is elaborated in more detail in Section 3.3.) Through Linking and Learning, Voice aims to create a space where people can meet, share and learn from each other. To facilitate sharing and learning among individuals that would normally not meet and interact, Voice organised multiple Linking and Learning activities (e.g., annual Indaba) in a so-called Open Space format. Examples of how this format was applied in practice include the Accountability Lab, and the unconference. Since this format allows for increased openness and flexibility in participation, Voice has been able to create a safe space where grantees are empowered to share (personal) stories.

The specific methods used to share stories during Linking and Learning activities include theatre, poetry, and stand-up comedy. These methods allow grantees who possibly find it a challenge to speak out, to express themselves in a different way thereby contributing to their empowerment. Moreover, next to practical methods and instruments such as the (innovative) meeting formats and ways of sharing, Voice has taken a strategic approach in terms of focusing empowerment on the right to be who you are rather than who you need to be.

In the overall **communication** of the Voice programme, Voice applies different methods and instruments to reach out, mobilise, and empower (potential) grantees, as well as engage other key stakeholders. In strategic terms, Voice has determined specific terminology to identify their target groups and prevent derogatory terms. For example, Voice uses “marginalised” groups rather than “discriminated” groups, and refers to “target groups” instead of “beneficiaries”. The Voice website amplifies the work of grantees through blogs and vlogs. Moreover, next to conventional communication tools such as radio, the Voice team also engages target groups through social media, and other online tools such as WhatsApp. Since not all Voice target groups have access to internet and/or social media, it remains questionable to which extent these (innovative) approaches are effective in reaching more remote target groups and target groups that are not yet known to Voice. Nevertheless, the Voice staff is very well aware of this limitation.

4.2.2 Methods and instruments at project level

At the project level, a breadth of methods and instruments are applied by the grantees to reach out, mobilise and empower their own community or the target group they are representing. Many of these methods and instruments are specifically tailored to their users and/or the context in which they are applied.

In **Indonesia**, a wide range of tailored / contextualised methods and tools are used to reach the wider target group population. This includes traditional singers and dancers to raise awareness, arranging transport to less mobile people to bring them together but also to collect for instance street children to ensure their continued participation in project activities. In learning events, deliberate efforts were made to determine (local) terminology to refer to different groups, while also an approach of ‘indirect advocacy’ could be found (i.e. not isolating a special target groups but referring to more basic norms and values that apply to all => *e.g. don’t bully classmates versus don’t harass gay people*). Another remarkable approach / method found in empowering sex workers and street children was the deliberate focus on ‘rights to be who you are, instead of who you need to be’.

In **Kenya**, one grantee uses social media and focal persons to advertise their programme and reach their target group. Focal persons are persons from the same target group and were selected based on their sexual identity and nationality. In this project, the focal points are LGBTQI refugees who know their community and can connect to them (via WhatsApp, or in person) relatively easy. Although not necessarily innovative, the approach of using focal persons has proven to be effective in reaching the target groups. Moreover, to empower their target group, HIAS also organises protection and advocacy meetings. The approach in these meetings is focusing on the issues of the target group. Prior to the meeting, issues are listed by the target group and ranked based on their importance. Besides, the grantee proved to be effective in the use of social media, safely connecting people through personal networks (e.g. with Whatsapp), to help with, for example, protection, jobs, and health.

Another grantee in Kenya uses community meetings to stimulate dialogue around sensitive cultural issues (e.g., use of traditional medicine, witchcraft, and the role of girls in society). Also, they organise community theatre focusing on talent, traditional music, and cultural attires. This was perceived positively by the youth involved and created space for discussion.

In **Mali**, a variety of approaches to promote empowerment of target groups (and their influencing work) has been applied. Similarly to a project in Kenya, one grantee applies the use of focal people/protection monitors for People Living With Albinism (PLWA) in collaboration with local police and the Ministry of Internal Security. Also, the project takes an approach involving mothers from PLWA. In this way, the project has established allies that are known and advocate within the community. Moreover, one project established rural cooperatives aimed at raising funds for children’s school fees, empowering parents through income-earning, to keep children in school. In several instances different forms of art were used to help People Living With Disabilities (PLWD) to express themselves, in their communities and in the media. This included photography, theatre, dance, and slam (i.e. improvised poetry). Lastly, a grantee used mobile messaging services to reach out to their rural target groups; those that were reached considered it effective, however, there is a limit to which extent the target groups could be reached due to limits in mobile network and ownership of mobile phones (particularly among women).

Moreover, in **Laos**, a grantee is working on a book that captures the stories of the target group of the project (i.e. People living with HIV/AIDS). Although not published yet, it is perceived as a creative way of sharing inspiring stories. Also, APL+ reaches out to the target community using various types of social media, such as Facebook and a YouTube livestream. In **Uganda**, an Innovate and Learn grantee used Global

Position System (GPS) to collect data about the location of PLWA. Lastly, in one of the **multi-country** grants (Data4Change), human rights organisations were supported in using data visualisation methods to communicate their results to the wider public. As mentioned earlier, outputs of this project were websites that could be used by the organisations to spread their work and empower their target groups and raise awareness among a larger audience. However, since the extent to which these websites are used varies, it is difficult to determine the effectiveness of the use of this innovative and creative approach.

4.2.3 Inclusiveness, innovativeness and effectiveness of methods and instruments

In Table 8, we provide an overview of the methods and instruments used by the Voice programme as a whole as well as on project level and/or by individual grantees. Besides, this table reflects the extent to which the MTR considers these methods and instruments inclusive, innovative/creative, and effective. It has to be stressed that assessing the extent of innovativeness / creativeness brings along some challenges as the context of the Voice programme is complex. Therefore, (1) innovative/creative practices do not always arise deliberately but rather as a result of efforts to improvise/adapt the programme or project approaches to a specific complication; and (2) the definition of innovation/creativity differs per (country or project) context, as it relates to the deliberate application of methods and approaches that are new to a context (hence may be more conventional in a different context).

4.2.4 Summary

Overall, it is clear that a wide variety of approaches is being used both at Voice programme and project level. Many of these approaches facilitate inclusiveness, and can be considered innovative and creative considering the context in which they are applied. At the same time, it should be taken into account that, the extent to which this innovativeness and creativeness arises deliberately, varies. Furthermore, considering the approaches at project level, it should be taken into account that it is not straightforward to what extent the use of these approaches is caused by the Voice programme or by the innovativeness of the grantees themselves.

Generally, the approaches prove to be effective in reaching and mobilising target groups not only in terms of applying for proposals, but also in terms of participating in projects. Nevertheless, all of these approaches have their limits regarding the extent to which they are effective in reaching new, yet-unknown target groups. Whereas at project level we see that considerable context-specific efforts are made to promote outreach, mobilisation and empowerment of target groups, at programme level we see that the more innovative/creative approaches (e.g., application in local language, reporting through audio and video) applied to attract new, yet-unknown target groups are (yet) less effective than hoped for. As mentioned before, this is reflected in the fact that most of the grantees indicated that they heard from the Voice programme through their network.

Ultimately, to benefit from the outreach, mobilisation and empowerment methods and approaches that arise at programme and project level, increased documentation and sharing of lessons learned and best practices is needed whilst remaining sensitive to the context. In this way, the Voice programme as a whole can learn from its grantees and vice versa, and Voice grantees can learn from each other.

Table 8 Methods and instruments used at programme level and grant project level - whether inclusive, innovative/creative, and effective. (+) Yes, in most/all ways; (+/-) Yes, but only in some ways; (-) No; (?) Unknown or not yet able to determine

METHOD/ INSTRUMENT		INCLUSIVE	EXPLANATION	INNOVATIVE /CREATIVE	EXPLANATION	EFFECTIVE	EXPLANATION: EFFECT ON OUTREACH OR EMPOWERMENT
PROGRAMME LEVEL							
Grant making process	Use of bi-lingual website and CfPs	+/-	Offering a website and CfPs in two languages already allows for a larger audience to access. However, many languages of target countries not covered.	-	Bi-lingual websites are quite commonly used.	+/-	It does provide accessibility for a larger audience although the extent to which grantees visit the website varies. Most of the grantees found the Voice programme through networks.
	Use of radio	+/-	Possibility to reach out to more remote areas (where there is accessibility to phones and/or internet)	-	Not innovative as outreach through radio is a traditional method; creative when considering this to bridge the gap of internet connectivity.	?	Unknown to which extent this contributed to increased outreach.
	Use of existing networks	?	Although Voice reached out through different networks aside from the Oxfam and Hivos network, it is unclear to which extent the programme was able to reach the most marginalised groups.	-	Not innovative or creative as this is a straightforward method to reach out and mobilise target groups.	+	Majority of grantees indicated that they heard about the Voice programme through their network.
	Application in local language	+	Allows local target group organisations to apply for a grant without having the burden of costs for translation.	+	Rather innovative in terms of the context as this is often not allowed in grant applications.	+/-	Applicants have made use of the possibility, but the extent to which this opportunity is used is less than expected.
	Application and reporting in audio and video format	+	Allowing applicants and grantees with limited writing and reporting capacity to apply for a grant.	+	Innovative and creative as this is usually not allowed in programmes.	-	Actively promoted by Voice, but limited use of opportunity.
	Write-shops	+	Providing support to those target groups that might not have had the capacity to write an application on themselves.	+	Creative way of addressing and overcoming the gap in writing capacity.	?	Unknown to which extent this has contributed to mobilisation of target groups that would have otherwise not applied.

METHOD/ INSTRUMENT		INCLUSIVE	EXPLANATION	INNOVATIVE / CREATIVE	EXPLANATION	EFFECTIVE	EXPLANATION: EFFECT ON OUTREACH OR EMPOWERMENT
Linking and Learning	Open-space workshops	+	Allowing workshop participants to come up with the content of the workshop.	+	Innovative way of organising workshops compared to workshops with a set agenda.	+	Effective in providing a safe space for sharing and, hence, empowering target groups to share their stories and find common ground.
	Methods for sharing (e.g., theatre, poetry)	+	Allowing different target groups to express themselves.	+	Innovative and creative methods that are commonly not used in meetings or workshops.	+	Effective in providing alternative methods for sharing stories and finding common ground.
	Empowerment approach (i.e. rights to be who you are instead of who you need to be)	+	In itself, the approach is inclusive as it promotes acceptance of the target groups for who they are.	+/-	In theory, this is not a new approach, but it is not always used in the development context.	?	Unknown to which extent this approach has led to more empowered target groups as this is difficult to measure. Nevertheless, there are considerable signs of empowerment.
Communication	Use of terminology	+	In itself, the use of non-derogatory terms supports more inclusive language.	-	Not innovative or creative.	?	Difficult to determine to which extent the use of inclusive terminology has led to increased outreach, mobilisation or empowerment in practice.
	Use of blogs and vlogs	+/-	Allowing different ways of communicating messages and thereby (possibly) reaching a larger audience through text or audiovisual materials. However, it can be questioned to which Voice target groups relate to blogs and vlogs and can access those via the website.	+	Innovative to use blogs and vlogs to amplify the work of grantees and thereby reach out to a larger target audience.	?	Unknown to which extent the use of blogs and vlogs has been effective in reaching or mobilising target groups better.
	Use of social media and other online communication tools (e.g., WhatsApp)	+/-	Allowing for different ways of communicating messages and thereby (possibly) reaching a larger audience. However, it can be questioned to which extent Voice target groups make use of social media.	-	Relatively straightforward way for outreach.	?	Unknown to which extent the use of social media has been effective in reaching or mobilising target groups better.

METHOD/ INSTRUMENT		INCLUSIVE	EXPLANATION	INNOVATIVE / CREATIVE	EXPLANATION	EFFECTIVE	EXPLANATION: EFFECT ON OUTREACH OR EMPOWERMENT
PROJECT LEVEL							
Indonesia	Focus on rights of who you are, not who you should be.	+	Avoids normative stigma that it is not good to be different, making those that are different feel less resistant.	+/-	Possibly not innovative in an international context, but certainly new in rather conservative society.	+	Demonstrated effectiveness of 90% of participants (transgender, street children and sex workers) completing training programme.
	Learning based on commonalities	+	The focus is establishing common ground before exchange and learning takes place. In this way everybody first get connected.	+/-	Focusing on common ground is not new but most likely innovative in the context of this programme	+	Effective in creating a conducive sharing and learning atmosphere.
	Indirect advocacy efforts	+	Inclusive as it does not single out sensitive target groups in public communication.	+	Typical to Indonesian context. Direct advocacy also referred to in context analysis as risk.	+/-	Approach sounds plausible, but no evidence was found that clearly demonstrate the effect of this approach (yet)
	Hands on mobilisation of target group	+	Grantees know where to find the people they represent and know how to activate them to take part in project activities.	+/-	Methods are hands-on (going around and collect them) but new to context of an international cooperation project.	+	Target group representativeness know how, when and where to approach 'their' people, mobilising them in a way that outsiders won't be able to do.
	Use of web-based methods for reaching out and sharing	-	New marginalised / discriminated groups are relatively unaccustomed to web-based communication.	+	New to context and some of the more progressive projects make ample use of it to communicate existence and results (reach unclear).	-	Given that the target groups most in need of empowerment are less accustomed to these communication and sharing methods, effect is low.
Kenya	Use of social media and focal persons/ protection monitors	+	Contact through focal persons allows for increased outreach to/contact with the community that is normally hard to reach.	+/-	Although the use of focal persons is not innovative, the combination with social media can be considered innovative.	+	Very effective as it allows to connect to target groups who already have their own contacts and social support groups. Since they are connected through social media (e.g., WhatsApp groups) it is easier to circulate information that is necessary for their survival and other needs (e.g., jobs).
	Target group-based protection and	+	All participants of the meeting can raise issues to be discussed during the meeting.	+/-	Innovative in the context as meeting topics are influenced by the needs of	+	Effective in addressing the needs of the target groups and thereby mobilising them.

METHOD/ INSTRUMENT		INCLUSIVE	EXPLANATION	INNOVATIVE /CREATIVE	EXPLANATION	EFFECTIVE	EXPLANATION: EFFECT ON OUTREACH OR EMPOWERMENT
	advocacy meetings				target groups.		
	Community meetings and theatre	+	The community was left free to manage the meeting and the whole community was allowed to participate, discuss and find solutions suitable for them. There was participation of youth although more girls than boys participated.	+	Innovative and creative ways of raising sensitive issues and putting them up for discussion aligned with the context. Approach is focused on opening space for discussion without imposing solutions.	+	The approach helped to build connections among the community and elicit solutions arising from the community.
Mali	Focal persons/ protection monitors	+	Contact through focal persons allows for increased outreach to/contact with the community that is normally hard to reach.	-	Not necessarily innovative or creative as it is quite a straightforward approach.	+	Very effective as it allows to connect to target groups who already have their own contacts and social support groups.
	Establishment of rural cooperatives	+/-	Not necessarily	+	Innovative where the cooperative is for parents-only and – as reported – revenues primarily for school fees	+	Yes, according to the target group/parents (project reports do not (yet) report on scholarisation and exodus)
	Establishment of school clubs	+	Clubs for(all) girls, and for boys. In this way the children themselves are engaged in the project.	+/-	School clubs on itself are not innovative, but using performance art during these school clubs is.	+	When sustainable, school clubs empower children, to convince their parents to take and keep the children in school.
	Use of art (e.g., photography, theatre, slam)	+	Allowing and promoting target groups to express themselves in a different way.	+	Some art forms such slam were not yet known in Mali. Other art forms were known, but not applied before in the context of the target groups.	+	Target groups gained confidence to express themselves and when used in media it helped to change the common views of PLWD.
	Mobile messaging services	+/-	Offers possibility to reach target groups in rural areas. However, not all people (especially women) own a mobile phone and there are limits to the network.	+	Innovative as messaging services were new in the targeted area.	+/-	Because of limits in terms of inclusivity, there was only a limited and temporary effect. However, it did increase the awareness about women's land rights.
Laos	Development of storybook	+	Amplifies the voices of those (of the HIV/AIDS community) who would normally be less able or willing to speak out publicly.	+	Creative way of documenting and sharing stories.	?	Not yet developed.

METHOD/ INSTRUMENT		INCLUSIVE	EXPLANATION	INNOVATIVE / CREATIVE	EXPLANATION	EFFECTIVE	EXPLANATION: EFFECT ON OUTREACH OR EMPOWERMENT
	Use of social media (e.g., Facebook and YouTube live)	?	Although social media allows for increased outreach, it is unknown to which extent this is a suitable way of reaching out to the full HIV/AIDS community.	+/-	Relatively common ways to reach out, but considered more innovative for the specific target group.	?	Unknown to which extent the target group was reached.
Uganda	Use of GPS and focal persons	+	Through the way of how data collection with GPS was applied (using focal persons), the project managed to include data about yet-unknown PLWA.	+	Innovative way of collecting data.	+	Effective in documenting the location of people and, thereby, allowing for easier outreach in the future.
Multi-country	Data visualisation and building media campaign	+/-	Organisations selected for data visualisation needed to have some kind of data available. Therefore, the extent to which this method promoted inclusivity is limited. On the other hand, the term “existing data” was treated rather flexibly and the project looked at what they could work with.	+	Innovative and creative way of presenting data.	+/-	In certain cases, the media campaign (e.g., website) has been used by the participants of the project. However, in other cases this use was limited.

4.3 Linking and Learning (C)

Linking and Learning (L&L) is a key element of the Voice programme. The vision behind the Linking and Learning process of Voice is to create a space where people can meet, share, and learn from each other. The Voice philosophy behind Linking and Learning is not to label people, but rather finding common understanding and common ground among target groups. The focus is on rights for “who you are” rather than “who you need to be”. In this way, the Voice Linking and Learning process aims to create a space where people who would not meet or interact naturally, can do so, whereas the Linking and Learning process aims to stimulate grantees to tell their story.

This section presents how the Linking and Learning (L&L) process within the Voice programme is shaped, the outcomes of this process, and which issues need further consideration in the light of improving the Linking and Learning process for the benefit of the whole Voice programme.

4.3.1 Levels of Linking and Learning

The prominence of Linking & Learning in the Voice programme, with L&L elevated to being one of the key-results areas is remarkably higher than in conventional programmes, where the learning results are expected to be the product of Monitoring & Evaluation efforts that support the primary process of programme delivery. Considering L&L as part of the key results makes that more than usual attention is paid to this, which clearly has its effects as described further below.

Within the Voice programme, Linking and Learning is taking place at four levels:

1. **Global** – Different Linking and Learning activities are carried out at a global level with the goal to bring together grantees from different countries and different target groups to share and discuss their issues.
2. **Country** – The focus of Linking and Learning lies at country level. Per country, one “special” Innovate & Learn grantee functions as learning facilitator to bring together Linking and Learning from projects at country level.
3. **Project** – Linking and Learning taking place within one project, for example target groups learning from each other, reaching out to new groups, linking to wider networks, and by working in a consortium with different partners).
4. **Internally** – Internal Linking and Learning takes place among Oxfam and Hivos staff as they learn from each other. Generally, within Voice there is constant learning and reflection that leads to adaptation of the programme.

The first two levels of Linking and Learning (i.e. global and national) will be discussed in more detail in the following sub-sections.

Linking and Learning at global level

At Voice programme level, there is one full-time Linking and Learning coordinator in the Hague, and part-time Linking and Learning positions (i.e. 0.3 FTE) in country teams. Considering the limited staff capacity and budget, the country level set-up is important. Therefore, the focus of the Linking and Learning process lies at country level (see next sub-section).

Despite the fact that the focus of Linking and Learning lies at country level, the Voice programme supports and facilitates different activities at global or multi-country level. Some of these activities are done through global or multi-country Innovate and Learn initiatives, such as the Partos NOW-Us! Awards. Next to that, the Voice programme facilitates Linking and Learning by directly bringing together

grantees from different countries to address learning questions that arise globally. The ways in which this is done include:

- Global learning events
- Knowledge exchange events
- Quarterly calls with global grantees
- Monthly e-meetings with Linking and Learning officers (and the I&L facilitator that implement Voice L&L)

Global learning events called “Indabas” have the objective to create visibility at a global level, and bringing together and building on findings arising from country level grantees. The first Indaba brought together the global and multi-country Innovate and Learn grantees in a ‘un-conference’ that was partially open to public. By applying innovative methods such as the un-conference, Voice aims to create a safe space for sharing issues among grantees from different target groups. In Box 4 a more detailed description of the latest Indaba is provided to illustrate this.

Knowledge exchange events dive deeper into learning questions. The first knowledge exchange event was organised in the Philippines in February 2019 focusing on indigenous women rising in leadership roles exploring their increased persistence (compared to indigenous men) and broader agenda in influencing activities.

Quarterly calls with multi-country grantees. During the calls, the multi-country grantees share experiences and challenges. Experiences are shared on working as a network and across countries.

Monthly e-meetings where Linking and Learning country officers and the Linking and Learning facilitators work as a community of practice. The experiences are subsequently shared during the kick-off and annual learning events at country level.

Box 4 Sharing stories at the annual Indaba.

A large audience gathers at the Azure Hotel in Nairobi for the public part of the 2019 Indaba. Next to visitors, the crowd consists of grantees from specific Voice target groups. This Indaba addresses four topics specifically: (1) parents of children with disabilities, (2) People Living with Albinism, (3) mental health, and (4) senior citizens. In the last two days, Voice staff and grantees that were invited for this Indaba discussed topics that matter to them in different Open Space workshop formats. They prepared short presentations that address the issues they deal with. In funny or touching ways, through theatre plays and poems, both Voice staff and grantees share their personal connection with the topics discussed.



Linking and Learning at country level

The majority of Linking and Learning within Voice takes place at country level. At country level, the Voice programme aims to stimulate cross-sectoral learning within and between different grantees and countries. This is done by bringing Voice grantees together and supporting them in different areas. The Voice programme brings grantees together to share knowledge and common issues through creating online and/or offline platforms (e.g., learning events, workshops). The consideration for having both online and offline platforms arose through consultations among Voice grantees (some grantees preferring online- and others offline platforms because of lack of access to internet). This is facilitated by country-level learning facilitators that in most countries are funded as I&L projects with the explicit purpose to stimulate cross-grantee learning. These special L&L-purpose I&L projects differ from the 'regular' Innovate & Learn projects that focus on working with specific target groups.

Activities and agendas for Linking and Learning are decided with or by the different projects (i.e. bottom-up) based on their needs. In this way, the Voice programme does not only support Voice grantees by bringing them together (at country- or regional level), but also by building their capacities in specific areas. For example, in **Kenya** the focus is on research (with simple data collection tools) and the use of data for decision-making, video making for storytelling, and improving advocacy skills. In East Africa regional focus is on how to influence in the context of a shrinking civic space, and an online platform for sharing (for Kenya and Tanzania). In **Indonesia**, a learning camp was organised where grantees were given and took the opportunity to share and exchange on topics prioritised by themselves, under the overall facilitation of country-level learning facilitator.

Generally, the Linking and Learning process at the country level consists of a kick-off event, followed by national or regional annual learning events. Similarly to the global learning events, these learning events aim to bring grantees together in order to explore common issues and potentially discover opportunities for future collaboration.

4.3.2 Outcomes of Linking and Learning

Although it is too soon to conclude how the Linking and Learning processes specifically contribute to the impact of the Voice programme, some valuable and inspiring progress can be observed as a result of the overall Linking and Learning. In **general**, as a result of the Linking and Learning processes, we see increased mutual understanding and acceptance among grantees from different groups. Next to the fact that mutual understanding was promoted through the Linking and Learning process, the process also allowed grantees to rethink inclusivity and become more inclusive in their practices. Also, mainly within their organisation, grantees have become more willing to share successes and failures. Furthermore, the Linking and Learning process has allowed grantees to learn about common agendas among different organisations, and to think about possible collaboration.

At **country level**, we can identify different examples that further illustrate the outcomes of Linking and Learning, and how the learning from Linking and Learning activities has been applied at project level and within grantee organisations. In **Kenya**, grantees who met each other during a Linking and Learning event and were interested in learning from each other have found ways (e.g., WhatsApp groups) to reach out to each other. For example, TICAH exchanges information with Samburu Women Trust and is planning to visit their project in 2019. The two grantees are planning project exchanges to learn about talking about cultural issues. Regarding becoming more inclusive, one grantee in Kenya who did not work with PLWD directly organised a meeting including sign language translation. In **Mali**, PLWD and

PLWD – organised separately – were brought together to find common interests regarding policy advocacy at community and national level. Besides, grantees themselves decided to have monthly face-to-face meetings. In **Indonesia**, we saw the “Yes I can” project having developed a promotional video with the help of another grantee. In addition, a project focusing on inclusive governance in East-Nusa Tenggara started exchanging experiences with another grantee working on the same topic on Java and Sulawesi, though funds to take this further by means of mutual visits were lacking. Moreover, in **the Philippines** grantees considered a possible collaboration in which LGBTQI, disability and parenting groups would collaborate on how parents react to their LGBTQI or disabled children.

4.3.3 Issues for further consideration

Whereas promising examples are found that clearly illustrate the added value of the Linking and Learning process, several issues for further considerations were identified as well. These issues are (1) limited resources and capacity within the Voice programme, in particular to follow-up on linking results, (2) the level of involvement of grantees, and (3) the alignment of the monitoring and evaluation process with the Linking and Learning process.

Limited resources and capacity

As will be discussed in more detail in Section 3.5, despite the prominence of L&L as key results area, there are felt to be limited resources and capacity within the Voice programme to support this, a.o. triggered by the success of initial L&L efforts. This finding is supported by the survey where 17 out of 117 grantees indicated that the Voice programme should improve or provide more support in linking initiatives (cross-sectoral) in order to promote collaboration and learning among grantees, as well as with other (international) organisations outside of the Voice programme. The limited resources and capacity available makes that follow-up on initial L&L results is difficult and explains the fact that documentation of Linking and Learning methodologies (e.g., unconference) and best practices has only started recently, leaving earlier learnings undocumented.

Level of (direct) involvement of grantees

The extent to which grantees are involved in the process varies as they do not always see the added value of Linking and Learning as their natural focus is more on action than reflection. Moreover, in several countries, certain Voice target groups (e.g., LGBTQI groups) cannot be openly present at Linking and Learning activities as these groups are still stigmatised. In the case of LGBTQI groups, this is sometimes overcome by making them participate under the target group of women facing exploitation, abuse and violence. Moreover, since not all Voice grantees directly represent the target group, the target group is exposed less to Linking and Learning efforts and might only benefit indirectly from it.

Alignment of Monitoring and Evaluation and Linking and Learning

Ideally, the monitoring and evaluation process (M&E) captures the outcomes of the Voice programme at programme and project level and feeds into the Linking and Learning process by highlighting areas of attention and vice-versa. However, despite the fact that the M&E officer and Linking and Learning officer in The Hague work closely together, up to now, the link between M&E and Linking and Learning has been rather limited. In practice, this means that the M&E framework which captures the outcomes at programme and project level till recently did not provide input for the Linking and Learning activities. At present, efforts are on-going by the Voice programme to pull both processes together through developing a reporting format for Linking and Learning that is aligned with the M&E framework.

4.3.4 Summary

The Linking and Learning process is a key element of the Voice programme and takes place at global, country and project level, as well as internally. The focus of the process lies at the country level thereby allowing context-specific approaches that fit the needs of the grantees. The overall process is considered beneficial and inspiring as it brings together grantees from different target groups allowing them to interact with each other and find common ground. In order to create a safe space in which grantees from different target groups feel comfortable to share their issues, the Voice programme has applied the vision of not labelling people and advocating for rights for “who you are” rather than “who you need to be”. In more practical terms, the Voice programme managed to create this safe space by applying creative and innovative methods (as discussed earlier), such as the un-conference.

As a result, the Linking and Learning process contributed to increased mutual understanding among grantees from different target groups, promoted the application of inclusive approaches by grantees, and supported opportunities for collaboration among grantees. Altogether, this has supported cross-sectoral learning. Although the perception of the Linking and Learning process is generally positive, grantees indicate that they would value increased support in Linking and Learning. Moreover, because of different reasons, the level of involvement of grantees in the global- and country-level Linking and Learning activities varies. Another challenge for the Voice programme is to align the M&E process with the Linking and Learning and promote synergy between these two processes by addressing issues that are captured by the M&E process in the Linking and Learning process and vice-versa. Nevertheless, recently, steps have been taken to pull these two processes together more tightly.

4.4 Communication (D)

At the inception of the Voice programme, staff positions foreseen for communication included one position (0.5 FTE) in The Hague, and positions (0.1 FTE) in the country offices. The position in The Hague was increased to a full-time position (i.e. 1.0 FTE) after one year, but ultimately it was decided to decentralise Voice's communication activities to a communication's hub in Nairobi, Kenya. As a result, communication strategies that were initially applied at programme and country level arose more "organically" based on common sense and experiences from other programmes without explicit plans or targets in place. Only recently, Voice has developed a formal communication strategy called the Voice Amplification strategy (V-AMP).

This section presents the findings on Voice's communication strategy both considering the strategies that arose more "organically" at the start of the programme, and the more recently developed formal communication strategy. The focus hereby is mostly on the Voice website.

4.4.1 Strategies prior to the Voice Amplification Plan (V-AMP)

Before the launch of Voice's formal communication strategy, the Voice programme did considerable efforts to represent Voice as a grant facility, influence public perceptions of its target groups by providing more background information (e.g. the history of People Living with Albinism), as well as communicate the work of grantees to a wider audience.

Next to the communication through the Voice website, Voice presented itself as a grant facility through press releases and presentations, and communication clinics for (potential) applicants, whilst reaching out by mail to the existing networks of Oxfam, Hivos and embassies. Also, through its website, Voice reported on its activities, such as the minutes of Advisory Board meetings. Altogether Voice can be seen to have reached quite a large group of potential grantees, though most of them are in the relative vicinity of existing networks. Reaching more remote target groups has remained a challenge requiring alternative communication channels and more investments in terms of time and human resources.

Moreover, to amplify the work of Voice grantees, Voice has posted blogs, vlogs, and podcasts on its website to (in the case of the podcasts literally) make the Voices of its target groups heard. Grantees perceive the Voice staff clear and responsive in their communication, though there are incidents reported of gaps in communication that were often related to staff turnover or leave. Another observation, in particular by empowerment grantees, relates to the fact that communication happens largely web-based or through mail, and more communication through personal contact would be welcomed. The MTR understands this, but realises that available resources clearly put limits to the extent personal contact is possible, which at times may also not fit the role of a fund manager.

4.4.2 Voice Amplification Plan (V-AMP)

The more recently developed V-AMP aims "to amplify and connect the unheard Voices of the marginalised target groups it is focusing on". The plan draws on the strength and support from other elements within the Voice programme, such as the reporting, Linking and Learning process, and specific funded initiatives.

The objectives of the strategy are to:

1. Amplify the work of Voice grantees by documenting impressive stories of change and sharing them through strategic forums and institutions to bring about inclusivity within Voice target groups;
2. Influence social change where possible by changing knowledge attitudes and practices on issues affecting the five target groups;
3. Effectively represent Voice as a grant facility and provide excellent feedback through all our online media channels; and
4. Effectively engage with Voice stakeholders: grantees, Oxfam Novib, Hivos and the MoFA to amplify Voice grantees through the already existing frameworks.

According to the V-AMP document, Voice aims to achieve these objectives through creating much attention on the specific target groups in order to bring about focus and inclusion of these target groups on country and global level agendas. How this communication strategy has been applied up to now, will be discussed in the sub-sections below by further elaborating how the different objectives have taken shape in practice.

Amplifying the work of grantees

To amplify the work of Voice grantees, Voice uses different online media channels to communicate messages. These online media channels are the website, a Facebook and Twitter page, and YouTube channel. The work of Voice grantees is portrayed on these media channels in the form of innovative communication methods (e.g., blogs, vlogs, and podcasts). The use of different communication methods also increases the accessibility of the grantee work as it, for example, allows (semi-)illiterate people to watch videos or listen to a podcast. Next to that, Voice promoted accessibility through providing some of the content of the grantees in both English and French. However, these materials do not take a prominent role on the landing page of the Voice website.

Influencing social change

To influence social change, Voice has elaborated the communication strategy in which Voice target groups and themes are specifically described (as sub-target groups and sub-themes). Besides, the communication strategy defines the key message, audience, and the channels to be used, per sub-target group. Moreover, as discussed earlier, Voice presents more (background) information about its target groups to change public perceptions. For example, in **Mali**, Voice featured albino fashion models on social media to challenge the status quo. It is not clear to which extent the Voice communication strategy contributed to influencing social change, which would require deliberate and complex monitoring efforts.

Effectively representing Voice

Next to the fact that the Voice website is used to amplify the work of grantees, Voice uses its website to represent itself as a grant facility. Voice does this, for example, by presenting its Calls for Proposals on the website and elaborating on the different types of grants. The website is accessible and considered quite attractive by grantees. The accessibility of the website is enhanced by Voice by providing the parts about Voice as a grant facility in English and French.

Effectively engaging with Voice stakeholders

Next to the fact that Voice engages with its grantees to amplify their work, Voice also aims to bring together its grantees with other stakeholders to amplify grantees through already existing frameworks. This is done, for example, by presenting the programme publicly as part of the OECD Development Cooperation Report¹⁹. In this way, the Voice programme aims to create more publicity about the

¹⁹ <https://twitter.com/minbz/status/1072513309277126658?s=21>

(unique) nature of the programme and attract potential donors, ultimately, to raise resources and capacity for its (future) grantees.

4.4.3 Issues for further consideration

With the recently developed V-AMP, the Voice programme has defined its ambitions in four specific communication objectives. Related to three out of four of the specific objectives of the V-AMP (i.e. (1) amplifying grantees work, (2) effectively representing Voice, and (3) effectively engaging with Voice stakeholders), issues for further consideration are identified.

Amplifying grantees work

Although the Voice programme has done considerable efforts to communicate the work of grantees to a wider audience by applying different (innovative) methods, the extent to which this has been possible is limited due to the limited capacity and resources foreseen for communication. The resources and capacity available for communication do not align with Voice's ambition and the richness of the communication materials (e.g., blogs, vlogs, podcasts) they aim to produce. Also, regarding the amplification of the work of grantees, the Voice team is facing challenges that relate to the civic space of certain target countries. As publicly mentioning the link of local organisations to Oxfam or Hivos in countries with limited civic space, might inflict safety issues on the Voice grantees, Voice is sometimes limited in the extent to which they can amplify the work of their grantees.

Effectively representing Voice

The extent to which Voice effectively represent itself as a grant facility is hampered by the difficulties the Voice programme is facing in terms of reaching out and mobilising its target groups. As discussed earlier, the extent to which Voice target groups have access to internet forms a barrier for the effectiveness of the Voice website. Moreover, regarding the Voice website, it is questioned to which extent the website provides enough information for potential grantees to (1) understand the difference between the grant types (other than budget limits) and (2) understand the most important Voice terminology (Box 5). Consequently, it remains questionable to which extent Voice is effectively able to represent itself as a grant facility thereby attracting the most marginalised groups.

Box 5 Understanding empowerment.

At the level of project implementation, key terms such as “empowerment” and “inclusiveness” are not always well understood by the grantees. For example, in Voice “empowerment” is understood as “with a focus on yourself” (i.e. building capacity as individual or group of peers) as opposed to “influencing”, which requires “working with others”. However, in some proposals empowerment is translated into economic empowerment with a tendency to pursue goals of more conventional development projects (e.g., capacity to process food or provide better quality services) without the intention to change power relations that maintain marginalisation.

Effectively engaging with Voice stakeholders

Also, in more general terms, it can be questioned whether communication via the internet (e.g., website or e-mail) fits the nature of the majority of Voice grantees. It is found that especially grantees from more remote, less organised and informal groups are rarely visiting the Voice website and are less used to web-based communication (skype, e-mail). Besides, communication is complicated by the very nature of Voice's target groups (ethnic minorities, PLWD, elderly), resulting in language barriers and the need to adapt to people with audio and/or visual limitations. At the same time, the fact that time and resources are limited, makes that web-based communication is essential, which then clearly limits the extent to which Voice can actively engage with its grantees.

4.4.4 Summary

Although a formal communication strategy – the Voice Amplification strategy (V-AMP) – has only been developed recently, Voice has applied a range of communication strategies since the inception of the programme. Initially, these strategies mainly focused on presenting Voice as a grant facility in order to attract (potential) grantees. However, as the programme progressed, Voice has started to put more emphasis on amplifying the work of its grantees and (thereby) influencing social change. The Voice programme does this mainly through its website and social media channels by presenting various types of communication products, such as blogs, vlogs, and podcasts. In this way, the Voice programme makes – as also indicated in its strategy – unheard Voices heard. So extensive and deliberate communication efforts can be seen to be made, which for practical reasons has to happen primarily web-based.

At the same, it is clear that the Voice programme faces multiple challenges in really reaching and getting through to its more remote and less-organised target groups by using web-based tools (e.g., website, Facebook, Twitter) as these tools do not always fit the nature and / or capabilities of the target groups. Capacity constraints furthermore put limits to the extent Voice can spend time and resources to amplify its grantees' work, influence social change, effectively represent itself as a grant facility, and effectively engage with its stakeholders. Nevertheless, it is admirable to see Voice making the best out of a difficult situation as can be seen by the variety and richness of communication materials that Voice has produced, and the considerations it has taken into account to make its communication more accessible.

4.5 Management and Governance (E)

This section primarily looks at the management and governance aspects, whereby the following evaluation questions will be addressed:

- i. **How does the Voice programme, being a public service contract, compare to other Strategic Partnerships under the Dialogue and Dissent subsidy framework?**
- ii. **To what extent is the Voice programme of added value?**
- iii. **How do the programme's governance and managerial arrangements affect programme performance?**

4.5.1 Voice programme as public service contract.

Given that the Voice programme is commissioned under an EU tender procedure makes that Oxfam/Hivos had to compete with other potential service providers. This has been different from the Strategic Partnership in the sense that the objectives of the programme were pre-set by MoFA and there was only one contract to compete for instead of the 25 Strategic Partnerships that could propose their own ambitions. Besides, the nature of competition differed as also private sector organisations were allowed to compete, whereby track-record in grant-management and ability to reach marginalised groups have been an important selection criteria. Ultimately the Oxfam/Hivos consortium was selected, which reflects a partnership of two organisations that also are part of various Strategic Partnership. As such, the tender process resulted in the selection of a type of contractor that is similar to the consortia behind other Strategic Partnerships, which, as became clear during the country-visits, has been a good choice (Box 6).

Box 6 The selection of Oxfam/Hivos fund managers.

The programme seeks to support marginalised, often informal, target groups that are not easily reached. The combined network and reputation of Oxfam and Hivos has clearly helped in this. First because both organisations have established contacts with a wide range of local civil society organisations through which a large number of new grantees could be identified and attracted. Second, but not less important, being recognised civil society organisations, Oxfam and Hivos are seen as like-minded and therefore regarded with less suspicion when calling marginalised and discriminated groups to come forward with proposals for support. This is particular important for target groups like: sex workers, street children, PLWD and LGBTQI, that prefer to keep a low profile. On the other side however, this like-mindedness also brings to the surface the challenge of finding the right balance between being development partner (i.e. working together in partnership) and fund manager (i.e. with clear accountability from one to the other).

The main difference in the set-up of this partnership is that the MoFA is formally not a partner cooperating in the programme, but the commissioner / client supervising the implementation of the programme according to a public service contract.

In other words, the MoFA holds a different role vis-à-vis the programme, which has a number of practical and procedural implications. Firstly, it means that the MoFA directs the overall goals and ambitions of the programme, while in the case of Strategic Partnerships these are proposed to the MoFA by the applying partnerships. This means that Oxfam/Hivos have to abide by and deliver on the directions set by the MoFA, hence have less freedom in re-orienting the overall purpose of the programme. At the same time, the purpose of Voice appears to be well aligned with the missions of

Oxfam and Hivos, making that the nature of the programme will not come across as ‘unusual’, nor will it stand out strange from their other interventions.

To the contrary, at country level, the Voice programme is often embedded in a broader programmatic unit of the Oxfam / Hivos country office. This does have a practical downside however, as many staff members in country offices work part-time on Voice and combine their work for Voice with other programmes. This makes it difficult to discern their Voice efforts from other work, which in turn makes it difficult to assess if their specific time-allocation for Voice (0.1 – 0.5 FTE) is reasonable and used according to contractual agreements.

A related difference is the fact that the MoFA is formally not a member of the partnership (but a contractor to which the partnership has to report) and as such is not a member of the Steering Group. This means that on paper the formal governance structure is different, but in practice it appears that the cooperation dynamics are quite similar to those of the Strategic Partnership, with MoFA representatives taking an active interest and thinking along about the strategic direction of the programme. This cooperative attitude was also demonstrated in the way MoFA oversees and participated at key moments in this MTR. At country level, embassies also appear to deal with the Voice programme in similar ways as they do with the other Strategic Partnerships, although significant differences between countries are reported, sometimes attributed to personalities, sometimes to the number of partnerships active in a country.

A more procedural difference is the fact that a public service contract is subject to regular EU procurement procedures, which reduces flexibility in the use of funds. Typical examples are that country managers need to be accredited to sign grants on behalf of the MoFA, and budget revisions may be subject to other approval mechanisms, but the MTR has not come across situations where this resulted in significant difficulties or delays in programme implementation. It is however realised, that the cooperative attitude of MoFA, in particular DSO, as described above, is an important factor in this.

Another difference relates to the fact that the implementing partners (i.e. grantees) are still unknown at the outset of the programme, while the Strategic Partnerships largely work with already established in-country partners. This leads to some complications in the shaping and implementation of financial accountability and reporting systems, as this needs to be re-established with each new grantee coming in. This difference however relates to the fact that Voice is set-up as a “fund” instead of a “programme”, even though Voice has many features that are similar to other strategic partnerships (e.g. context analysis, theory of change, results oriented M&E system).

A last remarkable difference with other Strategic Partnerships is the earlier described prominence of the L&L component as key results area. This difference however has more to do with the nature of the programme (targeting unconventional target groups through unconventional partners) than with the fact that this is a public service contract.

4.5.2 Added value of the Voice programme.

As illustrated above, the fact that Voice is commissioned as public service contract in itself does not appear to add value to the Dialogue and Dissent programme that could not be added by a regular Strategic Partnerships. Illustrative for this is the fact that MoFA dubs the ON/Hivos Voice relation as the “26th partner²⁰”.

²⁰ Reference to 25 partnerships made within Dialogue and Dissent policy framework

Nevertheless, it is clear that the Voice programme adds a value to the development of civil society that is unique and different from most Strategic Partnerships and other more conventional development programmes. This uniqueness does not lie so much in targeting of marginalised and discriminated groups, as many development programmes aim to support these groups whilst pursue inclusive development approaches.

Instead the unique added value of Voice lies in the demonstration of its deliberate efforts to give practical meaning to “nothing about us, without us” through an easily accessible grant funding mechanism. Voice’s apparent efforts and success in mobilising grantees that directly represent its target groups, transforming them from beneficiaries into project managers and implementers, be it on small scale and focusing on very specific local needs, represents the true added value of the Voice programme. This added value is amplified by the programme’s deliberate L&L efforts, which are instrumental in building confidence among grantees that they have valuable experiences that are worth sharing with others.

Voice’s added value is most strongly visible in the Empowerment projects, where the direct representativeness and autonomy of the grantee is most obvious. As such, to some extent it is a blessing in disguise that time constraints limit the guidance of grantees during implementation, as it forces the grantees to take charge over their project matters, increasing sense of ownership and reducing dependencies, which they do quite successfully.

In light of this, the scope for further added value appears limitless if Voice finds ways to effectively identify and engage with target groups that are more remote and difficult to reach.

4.5.3 Governance and managerial arrangements.

When reviewing the governance and managerial arrangements, the MTR assessed the strengths and weaknesses of the steering structure (task distribution and (perceived) quality of cooperation), Human Resources management, Monitoring and reporting process and Financial allocations for grant management.

Steering Structure

The Voice programme is steered and managed at global and country level. Figure 2 illustrates the global steering structure, including the Advisory Board and the MoFA, who don’t carry direct responsibility for programme management.

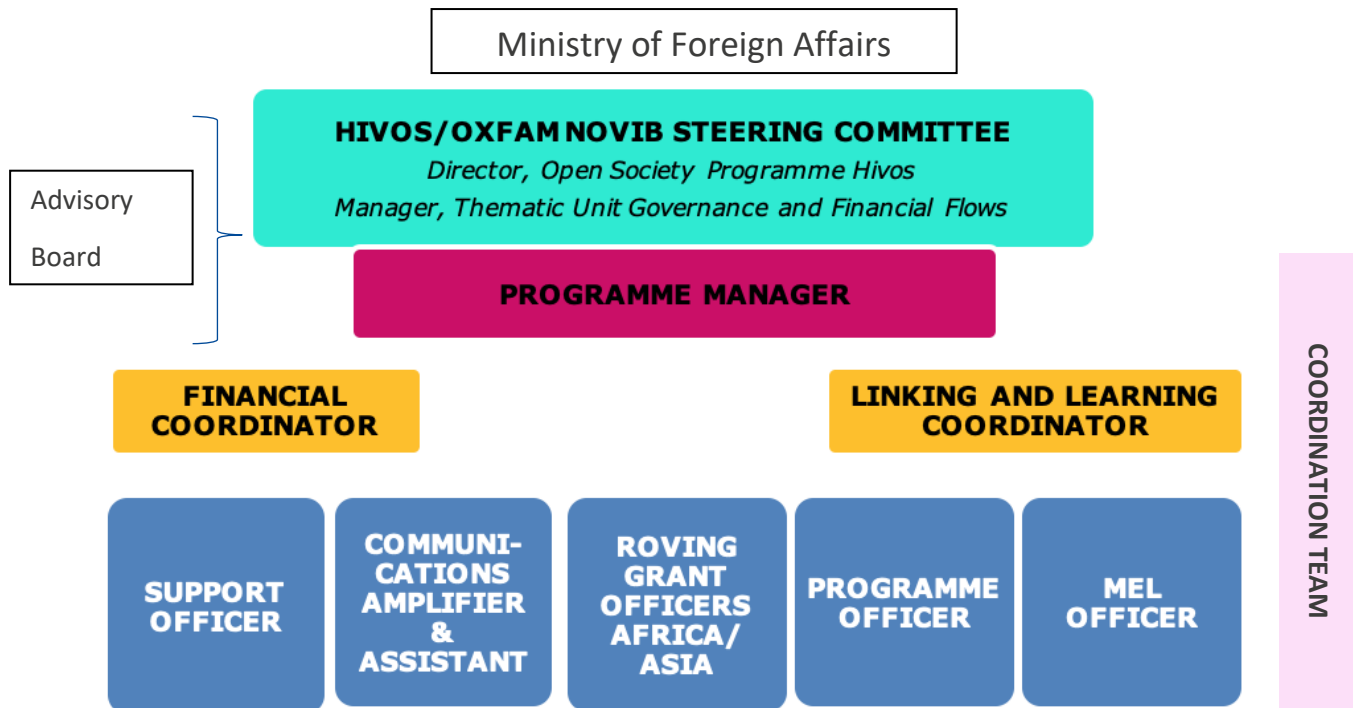


Figure 2 Voice global steering structure. Note: “Manager, Thematic Unit Governance and Financial Flows” is positioned at ON.

Box 7 Roles of the Advisory Board and Steering Committee.

The **Advisory Board (AB)** meets annually and advises the programme management on strategic issues and endorses annual plans and budgets. The AB is to guard Voice principles and mission, and contribute to Voice long-term financial sustainability. MoFA and ON/Hivos together select and appoint AB members: one MoFA representative (currently ex-staff of MoFA), one representative from ON and one from Hivos, two representatives from civil society (from CSO or from target groups from low-and/or lower-middle income countries), and one representative from the branch organisation Partos. The Programme Manager is ex-officio in the AB. AB costs are on Voice’s budget.

The **Steering Committee (SC)** has two representatives, one each from ON and Hivos, meets every two months. The SC is responsible for overseeing achievements related to the overall strategic goal, its alignment with the MoFA public service contract and respective ON and Hivos strategies and quality standards, supervision of the programme manager, approval of reports, and recruitment. The SC works on a consensus basis using the approved annual plan and budget by the AB as overall framework.

The interviewed representatives of MoFA, AB and SC are satisfied with the current set-up, whereby they express appreciation about the openness, joint strategic thinking, and short communication lines. At the same time, both MoFA and Voice Programme management value the inputs from the AB, whereby AB meetings are seen as good learning opportunities, especially as it brings in a perspective from programme countries as well.

The programme manager is tasked with the overall day-to-day management of the programme in close collaboration with the financial and L&L coordinator. They regularly interact with the global coordination team that is partially decentralised to facilitate closer interaction with the Voice country teams that are organised as illustrated below.



Figure 3 General structure of the Voice country teams. Note: the Linking & Learning/MEL officer is often fulfilled by two separate positions.

At country level, Oxfam shares programme steering with Hivos, whereby only one of them is in the lead in each country. This arrangement illustrates the distribution of specific managerial responsibilities (finance, M&E and communication), but also includes the complexity of a matrix-management structure, whereby Voice country staff report to both their country manager as well as to the global Voice programme management (Figure 3). At the same time, the leading country office is accountable for Voice's contractual obligations but also towards its respective ON, Oxfam International/OGB and Hivos offices. As a result, Voice country teams report significant differences in **line management practices** ranging from country management being actively involved and supportive to being distant and relatively disconnected. In addition, risk-aversion of country managers is mentioned as important management feature that differs from country to country. This affects the willingness to approve and sign grant agreements with new inexperienced organisations, and the willingness to cooperate with socially controversial groups or in areas that are explicitly excluded from government permissions (MoUs).

Different managerial practices coupled with substantial contextual differences are important explanatory factors for the large variations in portfolios between countries, irrespective of whether they are led by Oxfam or Hivos.

Human Resources Management

Almost without exception, Voice country staff express the sentiment of being stretched too thin to adequately support grant preparation and implementation. The allocation of human resources is part of the public service contract based on Oxfam/Hivos bid to manage the Voice programme. This creates the impression that support needs and with that the capacity requirements at country level have been underestimated. This is partially explained by the fact that many (potential) grantees have little experience in grant / project management, hence programme staff is faced with constant requests to (re-)explain rules for expenditures, tax compliance and reporting requirements. At the same time, Voice programme staff (want to) behave more like partners than funders, and as such are likely to be more accommodative in responding to requests for support than what is really needed. Typical in this regard

are empowerment grantees clearly expressing the need for more support, while they prove to be quite successful in delivering on their projects without this additional support.

Another clear HR concern relates to the high turnover of staff and competing priorities of the part-time Voice staff, which affect the quality and intensity of support. In particular the latter concern is increasingly being recognised as can be seen by efforts to reduce the allocation of fractured staff time, e.g. by combining different roles in one full time position. A related comment from grantees in some countries relates to fluctuating responsiveness, which is said to drop in cases of staff turn-over but also when individual staff take extensive leave and duties are not taken over by other team members. This can be explained by the small size and part-time engagement of the teams and illustrates the need for more team-work in terms of filling gaps when needed.

The programme values their staff and recognises staff competence as a key factor for sound programme performance. And although programme staff may feel stretched, the survey and interviews show that in majority the grantees are positive about the support received in the grant-making process.

A particular HR concern relates to the understanding of and identification with the diverse target group, in particular LGBTQI people in countries where the social stigma of this group is particularly strong. Obviously, one may expect Voice staff to set the example in terms of tolerance and understanding, but given that many staff don't necessarily have a history working with these groups, it is not realistic to assume that this automatically will be the case. This is recognised by the Voice programme management as something that needs rapid careful attention and sensitisation but also as something that can't be solved overnight by simply replacing people or their views.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEAL)

Prevailing monitoring and reporting system are perceived as rather complicated and time-consuming. To accommodate information needs of all three partners, reporting templates change often and end up being rather complex and diverse. This is an obvious cause for concern as it will affect the quality of monitoring and reporting and through that make it difficult to ensure results-oriented learning and steering.

Programme level – at this level the necessary systems are in place: Box filing system, smart sheets, PowerBi, etc.), and it is functional at *management level*, providing data e.g. on project eligibility and selection, choice of target groups, project types. This is a noteworthy achievement as dedicated grant-making and reporting systems and experiences were quite limited, in particular at country level.

Country level - There are monitoring visits, and project milestone reports, that mostly provide information on activities and outputs; the link to the log-frame in the proposals is not always clear. The reports include some open-ended questions on L&L. Feedback on the reports sometimes shows that Voice staff is concerned on seeing little coverage of outcomes in the reports. A Voice indicators sourcebook document was put together last year, for Voice users to understand what and how to monitor and evaluate through the results framework: <https://Oxfam.box.com/v/indicators-sourcebook>. Reporting by video is also permitted.

Voice programme management has recognised the need for simpler and more efficient reporting system, and steps towards that are being considered, including the stronger linking of M&E with L&L efforts.

Outcome Harvesting – A first round kicked off late 2017 / early 2018 and the results of a first harvesting cycle was available to the MTR. In Kenya, Tanzania and Indonesia a range of outcome stories were compiled, substantiated and assessed in terms of relevance and programme contribution. All in all a

quite conscientious process was followed, which led to some meaningful insight but that was also experienced as (too) time-consuming. As a result, document outcome harvests are largely limited to one or two changes per project, which only do partial justice to the outcome achievements of the project.

Financial allocation for grant management

Grant management has a dedicated budget of 22.7% of the total grant amount²¹. On the one hand, this seems reasonable when compared with overhead costs in other strategic partnerships – typically between 20 and 25%. This budget is largely used to finance Voice programme staff at global and country, which as mentioned before appears to be underestimated given the requirements of a programme like Voice. Different from conventional development programmes, the Voice programme has many more (new) implementing partners (grantees) that are more challenging to reach and work with. The effects of this are particularly felt in two situations;

- A. in countries with 20+ grantees**, facing large numbers of applications and on-going projects. In these cases the larger Influencing applications received most support. This is explained by i) the programme started with this grant type, ii) these tend to be the more complicated proposals, and iii) they are the larger budgets so it makes sense in terms of risk management. As a result the support for empowerment applications, as well as support during project implementation remains limited.
- B. in countries where the response to CfP is relatively low**, such as Laos, Cambodia and Niger. In these countries, it is not only a challenge to find the right groups, but also to provide the (human) resources to support grant preparation in a way that project proposals (and grantee organisations) reach acceptable standards. This makes the grant-making work in these countries time-consuming (i.e. relatively, many HR resources go into managing few, often not so strong projects).

²¹ Grants €35.0 million; L&L €3.6 million; Programme management €8.8 million (of which 90.7% for grants, 9.3% for L&L); VAT €2.6 million; total €50.0 million. Proportionally, €7.98 million is used for €35 million grants: 22.7%.

Some budget adjustment followed an agreement with Dutch tax authorities, allowing part of the costs of 0% VAT-rate.

5 Conclusions and recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

Below the MTR conclusions are presented, structured according to the five review components;

5.1.1 Grant preparation and implementation (A)

Concerning **the extent to which the programme reached and mobilised the desired target groups** to submit relevant projects, the MTR is positive. Through its extensive outreach efforts, till October 2018 the Voice programme has mobilised almost 4000 applications from applicants which for about 90% were new to Oxfam / Hivos. These applications largely came from direct representatives of the programme's target groups, being one of the eligibility criteria, with significant proportions of four of the five targets groups (only LGBTQI representing less than 10% of the eligible applications explained by the high sensitivity of working with this group).

About 40% of the eligible applications could be selected for funding²², illustrating that the programme triggered a demand relevant to its objectives that went beyond its funding capabilities. This demonstrates Voice's success in reaching and mobilising its target groups during its first rounds of Calls for Proposals.

At the same time, the number of applications varied widely from country to country, making that in some countries eligibility criteria had to be lowered. This difference in performance in mobilising eligible applications, can largely be attributed to contextual differences (incl. size, openness to civil society, level of development), which obviously make it easier in one country than another. Nevertheless, there is a need for further reflection on this difference, as it is unlikely that in countries like: Niger and Lao PDR, the needs for empowerment of Voice's target groups would be significantly less than in countries like Indonesia or Uganda.

In addition, it is observed that project applicants in majority are mobilised through the existing networks of Oxfam and Hivos and other existing networks with a large proportion originating from groups in the capital or other main urban centres. It is therefore concluded that the first calls for proposals have certainly been successful, but that there are most likely many, more remote, groups that are yet to be reached and mobilised.

Concerning **the extent to which the 'right' projects have been designed**, the MTR conclusions are largely positive, though some critical observations can be made. On the positive side, the programme has made extensive efforts to facilitate the submission of applications (easy templates, accepting proposals in different languages, offering space for small and larger proposals, providing well-appreciated hands-on support and feedback, prioritising inclusiveness criteria, writing workshops and so on). This has resulted in a relevant portfolio of projects that cover all five target groups, whereby in particular the empowerment project demonstrate a rich variety of small, meaningful and genuine ambitions

²² Based on the portfolio analysis of approved and rejected proposals.

At the same time, it has to be acknowledged, that despite these extensive efforts, including country-specific context analysis and hands-on guidance, the longer-term influencing ambitions of in particular the larger Influencing projects remain relatively unclear. Given the complexity of influencing work, it makes sense to maintain a reasonable level of flexibility in the planning of activities, but the projects intentions in terms of *who to be influenced for what purpose* could be made more clear. In addition, substantial differences are observed between countries in guiding and facilitating grant preparation. These differences largely evolve organically and often reflect well-intended adaptations to context but also lead to variations in the quality of design. Striking a right and deliberate balance between adaptation to optimise relevance, and uniformity to optimise consistency is therefore considered a point of attention.

Concerning the **extent to which projects have been successful in reaching their intended ambitions**, in particular the Empowerment projects provide ample evidence demonstrating high levels of effectiveness at both output (capacity strengthened) and outcome (use of strengthened capacity) level. Similarly the larger scale and more complex influencing projects demonstrate good progress in terms of empowerment, while the evidence of success in 'influencing others' is more modest. Understandably these results are more difficult (less control) and take more time, which is also apparent for the often even more complex multi-country projects demonstrating relatively little progress to date. The I&L projects on their turn appear to be quite successful, whereby in particular the 'learning facilitation' projects demonstrate many signs of progress illustrating the positive effects of linking grantees for the sake of sharing and learning from and with each other.

5.1.2 Methods & instruments for outreach and empowering (B)

Concerning **the Inclusiveness, Innovativeness and Effectiveness of Methods and Instruments used in reaching and empowering the target groups**, the MTR distinguishes between those used at programme and at project level. However, first the MTR acknowledges that Voice has been successful in offering the space and freedom to apply and test many different approaches. Obviously not all have been equally successful, but trying is needed to find that out.

Considering Outreach methods for grant making, it becomes clear that offering flexibility in application (i.e. allowing in local language, non-written formats) score high both in terms of innovativeness (unusual for grant schemes) and inclusiveness. At the same time, it appears that so far these possibilities haven't been use much, which leaves the effectiveness question open. The use of the website and radio messages do not appear to be important sources of information for potential grantees, even though they need to use the website for their applications. By far the most effective method in reaching the current group of grantees has been networking, which is obviously less innovative and limits the 'inclusiveness' to those that are in the networks of Oxfam's and Hivos' networks (2nd tier of networks). This implies that to reach more and more remote target groups, new, more innovative methods may be needed for future rounds. Finally, the write-shops and hands-on support (ping-pong process) prove to be successful methods to make the application process easier and thereby more inclusive (i.e. lowering threshold to take part) and, most likely also more effective in attracting more and better applications.

Similarly many and diverse methods for L&L at programme level were encountered that in majority were deliberately designed, and succeeded to enhance the inclusiveness of those efforts. In particular, open-space methods and using creative methods like: theatre and poetry in workshops and meetings, are good examples of this that also proved to be effective in empowering groups to share their stories. Similarly diverse, often web-based, communication methods are seen to be used to enhance

inclusiveness but the effectiveness of these is less obvious given that a significant part of the target groups are not (yet) in the habit of using these communication channels, while the effect of these efforts isn't easily measured.

Considering L&L methods and instruments used at project level, the MTR encountered a wealth of methods that were not necessarily innovative, but certainly effective in mobilising the target group in taking part in the project's activities (i.e. enhancing the inclusiveness of projects). This includes the deliberate use of inclusive facilitation and implementation methods, stressing commonalities and clearly respecting people for who they are. In addition, rather hands-on efforts were found to facilitate target group participation, including offering transportation, adapt timing, place and duration of activities, and so on.

5.1.3 Linking and Learning (C)

Concerning the **success of Voice's Linking and Learning (L&L) efforts**, the MTR recognises that the prominence given to L&L as key results area in programme design and grant management has been instrumental for its results. The number of visible L&L efforts is significant, whereby deliberate efforts are made to enhance the inclusiveness of such efforts (see above). Also early effects of these efforts are apparent, particularly at country level, where we see results like: increased understanding and tolerance among grantees, active participation of grantees in sharing and exchanging experiences, linkages being created among grantees that sometimes resulted in actual cooperation or explicit intentions to do so. This is impressive knowing that time and money for deliberate reflection and learning is always limited and this is not different for Voice's target groups. They already have a hard time facing and dealing with marginalisation and discrimination, so taking time out for learning does not come naturally, hence requires constant stimulation.

Other challenges faced in terms of L&L relate to; 1) the availability of resources to follow-up on the success of initial activities (i.e. putting learning and linking results in practice takes time and money) and 2) the ability of the programme to recognise and make the rich learnings accessible more widely, in particular since many 'innovative' practices emerge as spontaneous yet deliberate improvisations that easily are lost. A final conclusion here relates to the need to better link M&E and L&L processes without losing the bottom-up identification and prioritisation of learning needs, but this is already recognised by programme management.

5.1.4 Communication (D)

Concerning the **use and effectiveness of Voice's communication strategy**, it appears that a formal communication strategy – the Voice Amplification strategy (V-AMP) – was only finalised and agreed in 2018, hence it would be too early to assess its effects. Looking at communication efforts prior to this strategy, initially these were understandably focused on outreach, and only as the programme progresses, increasing efforts can be seen to use communication as a tool to amplify the Voices of grantees / target groups.

Given the current day and age, and available resources, it is understandable that much of the communication is web-based, which, as described earlier, has had its limits in terms of outreach to target groups. These channels are likely to be more effective in amplifying the Voice of grantees, as this communication targets a different audience that is more likely to be used to web-based communication. However, it is too early to measure this effect, which in itself would be a rather complex undertaking.

Nevertheless, it is admirable to see Voice making the best out of a difficult situation as can be seen by the variety and richness of communication materials that Voice has produced, and the deliberate considerations that Voice can be seen to make to increase its capacity to reach and get through to each of its diverse target groups.

5.1.5 Management and Governance (E)

Concerning the **contractual arrangement and the added value of the Voice programme vis-à-vis other Strategic Partnerships**, the MTR concludes that having a public service contract has some practical implications but in itself doesn't make a significant difference in terms of programme performance. This might have been different if a private sector entity, not sharing the mission of the programme as much as Oxfam and Hivos, would have won the contract. A private company is not likely to have similar networks nor the reputation of Oxfam/Hivos as trusted social rights activists, which clearly helped in mobilising applications. Programme performance under the current arrangement depends more on the quality of the working relationship and cooperation between MoFA and the contractor (Oxfam/Hivos) than the contractual status, and in practice this relation / cooperation doesn't appear to be fundamentally different from other strategic partnerships.

The added value of the programme is then also not derived from its contractual status, neither is it because of its focus on marginalised and discriminated groups. Instead, **the added value of Voice lies in its demonstrated ability to give practical meaning to the notion “nothing about us, without us” by creating and managing an easily accessible grant funding mechanism.** Voice's added value is its ability to mobilise and work with hundreds of grantees that in majority directly represent its target groups. This mechanism transforms them from beneficiaries or even partners to 'owners' in charge of project management, be it of many small, diverse, but also simple and straightforward meaningful projects. As such, the MTR sees the large number of grantees as blessing in disguise that forces Voice programme staff to focus on the bigger grant making and learning issues rather than getting involved in project implementation (even if grantees would want that), which may affect their sense of ownership and strengthen a feeling of dependence. This also means that the scope for further added value is limitless if Voice has the time, means and ability to reach the more remote target groups that without a doubt are out there.

Concerning **adequacy of governance and management arrangements** it is observed that current governance arrangements with the Ministry, Advisory Board and Steering Committee as sparring partners works well, as all parties express satisfaction with the current arrangements. At country level there are more concerns about the way the current matrix management arrangements (i.e. Voice programme staff reporting to country management and global Voice programme management) is working out. Different contexts, personalities and management styles –being the cause and effect of different staff competencies - result in different levels of engagement, which contribute to differences in programme performance.

Another managerial concern relates to the programme's **Human Resource base**, which express a sentiment of being stretched and is characterised by significant staff turnover. This, combined with part-time involvement of, affects the efficiency and consistency of grant management practices, which in majority are still rated positive by the grantees. A final HR challenge relates to the ability to find and keep country staff that are able to understand and identify with the diverse target groups of Voice. This is a sensitive issue but recognised by Voice programme management as point of attention.

Concerning **Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEAL)**, rather complex and time-consuming monitoring and reporting systems appear to be in place both at programme and project level. The focus of the MTR has been on the procedures and practices at project level that have quite a comprehensive coverage of finance, activities, outputs and outcome harvesting, but is experienced by grantees as ‘heavy’, despite deliberate efforts to keep it light in particular for empowerment grants. This goes to a lesser extent for the financial management systems that are also demanding but more fitting the need for financial accountability in a grant funding mechanism.

Finally concerning the **financial allocation for grant management** (22.7% of total grant amount). As this directly translates in the number of Voice Staff, it is recognised that this is linked to the sentiment of being stretched, and unevenly distributed given the differences in portfolio size and efforts required for outreach per country. At the same time, as mentioned earlier, the limited resources also forces Voice staff to keep a distance from grant implementation. The realisation that, when doing grant preparation well, keeping away from implementation can actually contribute to the success of Voice, may help staff feeling more content with what they can do, than feeling stretched about what they cannot.

5.2 Recommendations

In response to the findings and conclusions of the MTR, and taking into account the results of the sense-making workshop, the MTR recommends the following set of short-term and longer-term recommendations.

5.2.1 Short-term recommendations

1. Strive for a deliberate, performance based, balance between freedom and standardisation.

Programme performance in terms of size and quality of portfolio differs from country to country, partially due to external contextual factors, but also partially due to internal factors like: quality of context analysis, adaptations in procedures and criteria, different practices in guiding applicants, involvement of country managers and competencies of Voice staff. The MTR recognises that given contextual differences, a prescribed ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach would not be appropriate. However, a more in-depth appreciative reflection of best internal practices linked to programme performance would help in finding a more informed performance-based balance between standardisation and freedom for country adaptations in grant management practices.

2. Develop a ‘next-generation’ outreach plan, informed by alternative best practices, to reach more remote target groups.

Notwithstanding the success of the first rounds of proposals, the challenge of reaching more remote target groups remains. Obviously, the practice of working through Voice’s expanding network needs to continue, but more (and likely innovative) efforts are needed to reach non-urban remote target groups in particular in large countries like Indonesia and Nigeria. The challenge of reaching more remote groups is not unique to Voice, and something that other (private) institutions like: credit providers, mobile phone companies, etc. have experience with (e.g. financial institutes working with mobile loan applications uploaded by agents working on commission basis). Some of these practices might work for Voice as well. Therefore, a new outreach plan for the ‘next generation of more remote projects, informed by an exploration of alternative best practices, is recommended.

3. Improve articulation of outcome ambitions of larger influencing projects based on an updated ToC.

Influencing projects have more difficulties in articulating the outcome level change they are pursuing, which however is crucial to determine and steer the progress and success of these interventions. Providing more guidance in formulating outcome challenges, coupled with a few actor-based progress markers makes these interventions more manageable without having to resort to the artificial linearity of change of a log-frame. At global level, this can be helped by an updated overall actor-based Theory of Change that can serve as example for identifying progress markers and offers a framework for aggregating results and programmatic analysis.

4. Simplify and create more knowledge-oriented monitoring processes.

A lot of what is happening in many projects doesn't get captured, while (written) reporting is considered too time-consuming, especially for the smaller empowerment projects that have less experience in this. A thorough reflection of what Voice wants to know and why seems appropriate, whereby the learnings from these projects, often in the shape of spontaneous improvisations, are probably at least as meaningful as their results. Capturing those learnings and results by being alert to improvised action and directly asking for it in during a (quarterly or 6-monthly) Skype call might work better. Results and learnings captured during such a call can then be summarised in a fitting monitoring template, which is likely to be more effective and less time-consuming than the current practice of change and outcome-harvest reports that have to be written, read and synthesised by different people.

5. Continue expanding Voice's communication capacity

Voice is already quite conscious of the need to continue to improve its ability to reach and get through to its diverse target groups with different languages, cultures and communication capabilities. Information and communication technology that facilitates this continues to develop rapidly (improved google translate in an increasing number of messages, new tools to make information accessible to people with a visual or hearing impairment, new apps opening new ways to communicate through mobile phones, and so on). This recommendation is therefore meant to recognise and stimulate Voice on-going efforts in this regard.

6. Combat negative effects staff turnover and fragmented positions.

Turnover of staff affects the quality and consistency of Voice performance. Much of this turnover probably can't be avoided, but it is important that Voice gains insight in the causes and effects of this turnover, so effective mitigating actions can be taken. The occurrence of part-time allocation of staff also plays a factor in this, hence it is good to see that in certain countries efforts are made to combine activities in more complete jobs to reduce having many 0.1 / 0.3 Voice employees and it is recommended to apply this more widely.

7. Reconfirm and operationalise Voice principles and approach, especially among new staff.

The purpose of Voice is to empower and amplify the Voice of groups that are marginalised and discriminated in a society that Voice staff themselves are part of as well. Especially given earlier mentioned staff turnover, it is important to clearly articulate and regularly communicate the core values and principles that guide the work of Voice among its staff, complemented by guidance in how these are to be put in practice and building on competencies to do so. This includes values related to tolerance and respect, but also principles that relate to the more distant role needed from the fund manager.

8. Revisit and diversify budgetary allocation for grant management per country.

It is clear that the size and complexity of each country differs and logically the same applies to the portfolio of Voice projects in each country. This justifies a more diversified budget allocation per country based on Voice's experiences and the emerging portfolio, whereby indicators like: portfolio size, population and developmental status can be used to determine a fair and transparent re-allocation of grant management budget.

5.2.2 Longer-term recommendations

Below a number of longer term recommendations are presented that are relevant in the assumption that the Voice Programme would be extended beyond its current phase. The main reason for calling them 'longer-term' is that their effects will take time and therefore become more meaningful over time. It does not mean that action on these recommendations can wait till after the current programme phase. To the contrary, immediate preparatory action on these recommendations is required.

9. Start longer term thinking to sustain and expand the success of Voice

Voice demonstrates success in terms of empowerment, linking and learning, and as result builds confidence and eagerness among grantees to do more. This can be by putting learnings in practice, by advocating for more ambitious change or by being heard at higher levels. All these ambitions take time and money, and given positive experiences, Voice is one and possibly the first place grantees will look at. Voice, including MoFA, therefore needs to have and communicate answers about what it can and wants to offer in the longer run. Does it see its role completed after the first grant? Does It want to get involved in movement building or more as broker linking grantees to other existing movements? Does it envisage grantees of empowerment projects 'graduating' to larger influencing projects? In other words, a deliberate strategic thinking process to determine the longer-term evolution of the Voice programme is recommended, ideally including other like-minded (donor) organisations.

10. Be mindful that the tender is not the key to success.

The success and added value of the Voice programme is not caused by its contractual status. It has more to do with the like-mindedness, cooperation and reputation of the parties involved in this contract, coupled with the successful practice of realising direct representation in grantees and the resulting sense of ownership and outcome-orientation. Whatever future contracting modality is pursued, it is recommended that these key success factors are safeguarded in future programme phases.

11. Clarify the needs and commitments from Oxfam / Hivos in-country line managers.

It is clear that country managers have a lot of influence on how Voice programme staff and with that the Voice programme is performing. At the same time it is clear that the Voice programme is not the only, and also not the easiest, intervention falling under their responsibility. It is therefore recommended that based on best practices and experiences, country managers are better informed about the needs of the programme and what exactly is expected from them in taking on this programme. In this way, the Voice programme manager and the country manager can make a more informed commitment towards each other in terms of efforts and resources to be provided. This informed commitment is then formally agreed and used to keep each other accountable.

12. Expand funding partners to test the limits of Voice.

If Voice has the time, means and ability to reach the more remote target groups, the scope for further added value of the programme is limitless. Nevertheless, there will be a limit in the amount and

duration that MoFA can and will continue funding this programme. It is therefore recommended that MoFA together with Oxfam/Hivos start identifying and mobilising other funding partners, possibly including social impact investors, to be able to sustain and preferably expand the scale of operations of the Voice programme.