MIDTERM REVIEW
VOICE FOR CHANGE PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMME

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Midterm Review process

The Voice for Change Partnership programme (V4CP) is a global programme that is implemented by 51 Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in six countries with the support of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Embassies of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and SNV. After two years (2016 – 2017) of implementation, SNV, IFPRI and their partner organisations decided to organise a Midterm Review (MTR) of the programme in order to deepen insights into the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of the programme and distil major learnings both at strategic and operational levels that can be applied to the remaining part of the programme implementation. The review was carried out by a team of three external consultants from Context, international cooperation (Utrecht, the Netherlands) and ACE Europe (Mechelen, Belgium).

The MTR process went through different stages (inception, primary data collection, analysis, sense-making, reporting and debriefing). The data collection was organised as an inductive, collaborative action research process which provided ample space for different stakeholders (especially the members of the MTR review team and representatives of CSOs) to fine-tune the Terms of Reference for this review, which were originally designed by the SNV office in The Hague. During the primary data collection process, the emphasis was on qualitative data. Different data collection methodologies and tools were used, including creative self-assessment workshops and sense-making cum debriefing workshops at country case study level, and a sense-making cum debriefing workshop with representatives of IFPRI and SNV at global level.

The ToR for this assignment were clear and manageable in view of the time framework and budget. The review was well planned, so that there was sufficient scope to prepare for the primary data collection. The members of the review team, in consultation with the local V4CP Project Managers and the team in The Hague, contracted qualified national consultants who participated in the primary data collection at country case study level.

The collaboration with all the major stakeholders (SNV, IFPRI and CSOs) was professional; all of them demonstrated a high level of ownership and commitment with respect to the MTR which among others was manifested in an active and transparent participation during the various stages of the review process. Many interesting and important learnings were distilled (and given follow-up) during the review process itself, so that an organic link with organisational learning could be established.

2. Conclusions about relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of the V4CP programme

a. Relevance

The V4CP programme is based on a relevant and robust design in terms of the combination of Capacity Development Support, working with evidence and practical application in advocacy plans. The evidence-based approach is appreciated by all stakeholders involved. At operational level the nexus context analysis, formulation of tailor-made Theories of Change and advocacy plans, (which are revisited annually) forms an excellent basis for programme implementation. IFPRI's and SNV's technical support roles in this process are relevant and appreciated by CSOs. There is a high degree of ownership of the programme among all stakeholders (CSOs, SNV and IFPRI). Admittedly, it is inherent to the design of the programme that IFPRI can and will not have as much direct interaction with CSOs as SNV. The latter should thus take on (and where needed, strengthen) its role and function of interface between IFPRI and CSOs.

The CDS which is provided is relevant and appreciated, but more attention needs to be paid to specific topics including: financial and institutional sustainability of CSOs; advocacy competencies (including

understanding the political economy of decision making); competencies to manage research and engage with researchers; competencies to establish evidence needed; business performance management and measurement; institutional development of the CSOs in general. Moreover, the CDS approach needs to be diversified in view of the diverse nature of the participating CSOs as well as of the diversity in actual advocacy trajectories and approaches in different programme countries and domains.

In general terms the V4CP programme has managed to find a proper balance between harmonisation of approaches, systems and procedures (e.g. Theory of Change) and contextualisation with the possible exception of the programme's M&E system (see further on).

b.   Efficiency

The organisation and implementation of the programme centres around thematic working groups, in which the dynamics are positive with a clear division of tasks and responsibilities. A strong characteristic and key outcome of the programme is the emerging partnership and collaboration among CSOs and the establishment of links with larger coalitions of CSOs that engage in joint advocacy and policy influencing. This has the potential to become a powerful and successful approach. While the relationship between SNV and CSOs is congenial and content-wise mutually supportive, there are areas where modalities could be improved (M&E; consultation and decision making on general programme matters).

While the respective roles of SNV and IFPRI were well specified in the global programme design, (in the early stages of the programme) the translation into practice was not always clear to the CSOs, may not have been well understood by them and/or was not clarified sufficiently to CSOs. This was mainly an issue of expectations by CSOs not entirely matching the roles specified in the V4CP programme design. These challenges are being addressed with support of global stakeholders at SNV and IFPRI. As far as the relevance of evidence provided by IFPRI is concerned, many CSOs indicated that IFPRI could not always deliver on contextualised data. The programme's design (and budget) did not foresee or allow for substantial engagement (by IFPRI) in primary data collection which indeed might have been the answer to the challenge of availability of localised data. Nevertheless, in some cases (such as in Indonesia) IFPRI and CSOs implemented (or are planning) survey work for primary data collection. Other challenges in the collaboration between IFPRI, SNV and CSOs relate to working with local research institutes; co-creation with CSOs; use of local knowledge; organisational arrangements. In short: working with a preferred research provider (i.e. IFPRI) in FNS and resilience appears to have pros and cons.

It was observed that the global team is effectively serving the country-based teams and their partners. The working relationship between the Global Team and the V4CP country teams is generally congenial and the division of labour is clear. The participation of SNV global staff in and their contribution to biannual capacity development workshops are well appreciated. The review team believes that the nature of some functions of the global team is not such that these functions necessarily have to be fulfilled at global level. Possibly, some of their functions could as well be decentralised to country level. This choice is not just a matter of cost-effectiveness but also of making use of available (local) resources and expertise. Moreover, it would also have a strategic dimension as it brings learning nearer to the praxis and facilitates alignment and integration with other SNV programmes.

A rigorous, comprehensive harmonised M&E framework was developed at global level and was subsequently contextualised at country level. CSOs appreciate the result-orientation of the programme. Generally, CSOs find the M&E system (too) ambitious, complex and biased towards back donor compliance.

The question whether V4CP offers an effective and efficient way to strengthen CSO capacity to develop and implement advocacy is difficult to answer. The overall impression is that the programme is well-organised and efficient. Drivers of efficiency include the long-term return of Capacity Development

Support, multi-year commitments with partner CSOs, use of the specialist and vast research capacity of IFPRI and harmonised strategies in advocacy. Nevertheless, a number of areas were identified where programme partners may explore further if efficiency gains could be realised. A possible approach is to develop and adopt a 'Theory of Efficiency'.

c.   Effectiveness of the V4CP programme

The identification and selection of the CSOs that are participating in the programme has been done with rigour in line with the main purpose of programme (strengthening capacities of local CSOs). There is a trade-off in terms of effectiveness of the advocacy plans as possibly more advocacy results (though possibly less capacity development results) could have been achieved in a shorter timeframe if SNV had decided to work with stronger, more capacitated CSOs from the start of the programme.

The CDS offered, is highly appreciated by CSOs as evidenced by increased competencies, collective capabilities and to a lesser degree organisational- and institutional development. The combination of different CDS methodologies is appreciated and effective. It might be necessary to have a look at the contents of the CDS trajectories (see relevance), to define leadership as an organisational- and not individual function, and to diversify the contents.

The awareness of the role and function of evidence in policy advocacy has been enhanced among CSOs. So far evidence has mainly been used as a tool to define a problem and/or raise awareness but not so much as a concrete input for advocacy plans. Apart from collaboration with IFPRI (FNS), there is also collaboration with local research institutes, consultants and government institutes. In most cases, adequate links have been established with media for information sharing.

It is too early to assess the performance with regard to advocacy, but proxy indicators (from various sources) indicate that the (policy) advocacy plans of CSOs have good potential to contribute to policy change. CSOs have gained national recognition, and creation and strengthening of networks has started. On the other hand, there is in the day to day implementation of the programme too little collaboration with corporate sector entities and with (other) unusual suspects as allies in civil society.

The involvement of Dutch Embassies varies from country to country but is generally (with the exception of Kenya and Honduras) limited, but growing. This limited ownership and commitment relates to the original design of the programme (as formulated in 'The Hague'), limited staff capacities and other priorities of the Embassies. However, the Embassies are more and more alert to look for the complementarity of the programme with their bilateral programmes and networks. The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs is to some degree involved at strategic level; not at operational level.

The global advocacy plans are work in progress. The interface between local, regional and national level at one end and global plans at the other is not yet clear; plans seem ambitious in terms of evidence and in scope and goals of policy advocacy. The question may be asked whether the evidence is robust enough? Does SNV possess the necessary advocacy competencies, social capital and infrastructure? Can this function be cost-effective? Where and how may advocacy become political lobby (with related complexities for SNV)?

3.   Major lessons learned: what works well and can be sustained?

There are a number of important issues that have contributed to the success of the programme and which stakeholders in the programme may wish to sustain. The most important ones can be summarised as follows.

a. *Design*: the V4CP is based on a robust, well thought-out and relevant design: adequate interface between CDS, evidence and advocacy plans; and the programme approach is methodologically sound (regular attention for context analysis, Theories of Change and advocacy plans).

b. *Contextualisation*: despite the initial generic design of programme components, proper contextualisation in implementation at country level was enabled and took place (with the exception of the M&E system).

c. *Programme methodologies*: in the implementation of the V4CP programme adequate (but not always sufficient) state-of-the-art programme methodologies (such as context analysis, ToC, Outcome Harvesting) are used.

d. *CDS*: an effective strategy is followed to invest in CDS trajectories for the CSOs with long-term returns.

e. *Staff competencies*: The V4CP programme is professionally implemented by the V4CP SNV staff members at country and global team, by IFPRI staff members and management and staff of CSOs.

f. *Complementarity*: There exists a high degree of complementarity among the major programme partners (CSOs, SNV, IFPRI)

g. *Ownership*: there exists a high level of commitment and ownership among CSOs, SNV V4CP staff and IFPRI staff to make the programme a success.

h. *Efficiency*: the programme is well-organised and -managed at different echelons. Recurrent internal reflections take place to fine-tune and when needed, adapt implementation strategies.

i. *Finance*: the availability of grant funding from a strategic partner and donor (the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, DGIS) is an important enabler.

4. Suggestions for the future of the V4CP programme

The suggestions of the MTR team for the coming years (2018 – 2020) of programme implementation of the V4CP programme can succinctly be summarised as follows:
- *Positioning of the V4CP programme and sharpening the focus*: It is suggested that both at strategic and operational level, the V4CP programme is positioned more within the (hybrid) space that exists in-between state, market and civil society. This will facilitate and foster further collaboration with the corporate sector and alignment with the Aid & Trade discourse. In such a process the focus of the programme needs to be sharpened.
- *Alignment with other SNV programmes:* In order to contribute to organisational sustainability, is suggested to pro-actively explore how alignment and integration with other project and programmes of SNV can be further enhanced.
- *(Financial) sustainability of CSOs and the programme:* In order to strengthen the advocacy function of the participating CSOs in the longer run, it is suggested to pay more (and somewhat differently) attention to the financial sustainability of the CSOs even though this may not have been part of the original programme design (but was a widely expressed need by a majority of CSOs that the review team met).
- *Access, use, generation and dissemination of evidence:* These are complexities related to the contribution of IFPRI which need to be addressed by IFPRI and SNV. SNV would also need to look into its role and function as a broker between research institutes such as IFPRI and the CSOs. It could be considered to carry out a detailed effectivity analysis about contribution of different stakeholders (notably SNV and IFPRI) to the programme (as part of a Theory of Efficiency).
- *Further development of the focus of advocacy plans:* Relevance and feasibility of advocacy plans could be improved by formulating a clearer focus in terms of content and having a more distinct targeting. To that end, the context analyses and stakeholder mappings need to be further fine-tuned and be based on a political economy analysis. It may be worthwhile to (re-)consider the level of ambition and expected value addition of the global advocacy plans.
- *Approach to Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning:* It is suggested to revisit the M&E design and facilitate a much more pro-active and involvement of CSOs in the redesign and actual implementation of the MEL framework and shift the dynamics from an extractive transactional

process to a more engaging process. Furthermore, there is scope for further enhancement of peer-to-peer monitoring and learning.

- *V4CP team at the SNV office in The Hague:* It could be considered to assess whether the present centralisation of some of the V4CP programme functions at global level is the optimal arrangement in terms of efficiency and effectiveness? Some functions that are now being performed by the global team might possibly be decentralised and performed by staff members of SNV country offices. This would bring learning nearer to praxis and facilitates alignment and integration with other SNV programmes).

- *Theory of Efficiency:* It is suggested to strengthen the organisational capacity (of SNV) to assess and improve its efficiency and effectiveness in programme implementation by adopting and developing and implementing a 'Theory of Efficiency' approach. The purpose thereby is to assess and gradually improve procedures and mechanisms with a view to optimise efficiency and to integrate these changes in decision-making processes and M&E. Such a process will possibly allow V4CP programme management (and its partner organisations) to better capture the drivers for improved efficiency and effectiveness and eventually also allow them to actually establish and monitor these parameters by use of established methodologies.

- *Partnership dimension of the programme:* There are opportunities for SNV country offices, the SNV team in The Hague and the CSOs to work more trust-based (as opposed to control-based) and as one V4CP team. It may be considered to start experimenting with out-of-the-box, innovative approaches of joint governance of the V4CP programme both at country and overall programme level. A process could be organised to facilitate and strengthen the involvement of CSOs in organisational- and strategic decision making of the V4CP programme (including finance).

5.   Major limitations of the study

It is widely acknowledged that the outcomes of interventions of advocacy are difficult to measure because these outcomes emerge from an interactive, iterative and complex process with long timeframes to realise results, rather than through short-term more linear (direct cause-effect) processes. The V4CP programme is in its third year of implementation and the outcomes of policy influencing strategies are not yet very tangible.

As per the design of this MTR representatives of CSOs that participate in this programme (especially from the three country case study countries) have participated actively in the review process and formed a valuable source of information. However, representatives of these organisations have not been provided the possibility to provide feedback towards the earlier version of this review report.