Mid-Term Review (MTR) of the NIMD Strategic Partnership Dialogue and Dissent Programme
Executive Summary

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The Netherlands Institute for Multi-Party Democracy (NIMD), together with the Association of European Parliamentarians with Africa (AWEPA) entered into the Strategic Partnership for Dialogue and Dissent (SPDD) with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) for the period 2016-2020 with the programme: "Conducive Environment for Effective Policy Influencing: the Role of Political Parties and Parliaments". The programme aims at contributing to a conducive environment in which political and civic actors can effectively influence political processes to advocate for inclusive and equitable social change.

Purpose of the Mid-Term Review (MTR) is to provide insight into the design and initial implementation of interventions and the achievement of intermediate results as inputs for programmatic learning and steering in the remainder of the programme period.

The MTR assesses programme performance in all its 14 countries and international activities in terms of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and quality of partnerships. In addition to an extensive desk study of programme related documents and external publications, interviews were held with SP programme staff and external stakeholders in the Netherlands and in programme countries. To add depth, during country visits contribution case studies in Georgia and Guatemala (Central American Region) took place, besides a process-review of the initial years of the programme in Ethiopia and participation in a PEA exercise in Kenya. To get more robust conclusion at the programme level, the MTR team subjected its findings to a participatory validation and sense-making process with NIMD staff in The Hague and through a webinar with in-country programme staff.

The subsequent MTR conclusions can be summarised as follows:

Concerning relevance and quality of overall programme design, the MTR positively assesses the conceptual logic of the programme, including the adoption of a Party-Parliament Nexus approach. The programme targets the niche of influencing political actors (parties and parliamentarians) in becoming more receptive to inputs from civic actors in the policy process and does so by addressing both systemic and human factors. The logic of programme interventions is furthermore explicitly articulated in both - overall and country-specific ToCs. At the same time, however, the programme is overly ambitious given that it sets out to work on a multitude of factors, largely beyond its control. Programme ToCs could be strengthened by the scope that distinguishes between variables internal and external to the programme (including assumptions) that are within or outside its capacity to influence. Also, the absence of clearly defined and checked preconditions questions the likelihood of a successful programme performance. Programme management has already begun to address to tackle this by increasingly pushing for more systematic Political Economy Analysis.

The operationalisation of the conceptual logic, both in terms of formulating a clear and manageable Results Framework and action planning at a country level is challenging as well. The three programme dimensions: Systems, Actors, and Culture are valid, but are too highly interrelated to be used as a framework for making operational plans. This leads to the formulation of overlapping results at the levels of outcome and intermediate outcome, with a large gap between them. Further, the risk of inadequate insight into programme progress is created by placing the focus on measuring intermediate outcomes with indicators related to completed activities, while outcomes are too far away to confidently show a remarkable change related to the programme's contribution. This risk is recognised by the SP programme management, who have started with initiatives to address this (including, among others, multi-country Outcome Harvesting exercises).

Concerning **effectiveness,** the MTR distinguishes achieved intermediate outcomes from early signs of progress towards outcomes. Following desk study of the SP progress reports, it appears that effectiveness at intermediate outcome level is *reasonable* to *good*, especially in quantitative terms, although quite some variation can be observed between countries. These variations are explained by a multitude of factors, largely referred to as external, which makes the SP vulnerable to criticism (when all factors are presented as if they were within the influence of the programme, the programme can also be held responsible for the (lack of) change). Another point of concern relates to the effectiveness in qualitative terms, as reported programme results often miss the information needed to judge their true value (e.g. which parties took part in the dialogue and at what level).

The MTR distinguished achievement of intended intermediate outcomes from early signs of progress towards outcomes. The latter is scarcely described upon, conditioning programmatic steering and learning to be based on information about outputs and common sense. This is a missed opportunity as the MTR, as well as the OH exercises, collected numerous 'early signs of progress' beyond the sphere of control of the programme. This is encouraging as it illustrates that the SP has had largely positive effects in the majority of cases, even though most of these effects were not explicitly targeted or foreseen. Indeed, three contribution cases demonstrated the SP having made a significant and unique contribution to the studied outcomes. Explanatory factors of these contributions mainly relate to the strong contextual knowledge, commitment and network of NIMD and its local partners resulting in initiating/supporting specific interventions through the right channels at the right time using the right resource people.

MTR assessed programme performance towards the programme's three crosscutting goals: (1) Gender Equality, (2) Lobby & Advocacy (L&A) for an enabling environment and (3) Capacity Development for L&A. MTR finds clear gender-equality related results (such as empowered women groups, work with women's caucuses, lobbying for gender quota), in particular in countries where gender was mainstreamed with specific targets into the core of the programme rather than treated as additional work-stream. The other two crosscutting goals are regarded more as 'processes' resulting in intermediate goals through which programme outcomes are to be achieved. Efforts and progress in both processes can be observed with different levels of success in all countries. The progress with country partners and civic actors is most evident, given that they are more easily accessed by and interested in the programme. At the same time, the two process-related cross-cutting goals encompass many different issues and target groups, making these goals more like 'menus of options' to choose from rather than concrete objectives in itself. This 'freedom' fits the complex nature of the programme but risks fragmentation and presumes the right choices being made irrespective of implementation capacity.

Performance in international L&A is still in its early stages as most entities through which these efforts are to be channelled are recently identified and established as part of the programme. It is too early to pass full judgement on this aspect of the programme. However, a positive sign is a successful contribution, through EPD, to the establishment of an EU funding window for working on the political dimension of international development. Efforts to put the intended learning agenda in practice led to improved insights in important knowledge areas: P-P-Nexus, shrinking democratic space and PEA, while in particular news insights related to PEA can be seen to be translated in action.

Concerning efficiency, the MTR assessed: (1) the adequacy of key processes, (2) cost-consciousness and (3) budget delivery. Clearly, the programmatic PME process is a widely shared cause for concern, as there are worked out detailed procedures and templates, which however do not provide the insights in programme performance needed for steering and learning purposes. Other critical key processes relate to annual planning and partnership management, which are seen to be left to the discretion of relevant programme staff, resulting in inconsistencies and some frustration.

Cost-consciousness is currently acknowledged and treated as a joint NIMD/implementing partner responsibility and, in general, it is seen as being taken seriously. The nature of the partnership requires working with selected partners that sometimes require funding fully their operations in the (expensive) political centres of the country. This makes overall costs relatively high, while it does not necessarily reflect a lack of cost-consciousness. Remarkable differences in cost structures, found among countries, can largely be explained by market situations, while NIMD's finance department is seen to make efforts to standardise and address these differences to the extent possible. In terms of budget delivery, the programme underperformed in 2016 and performed on target in 2017, though this required re-allocation of funding. Also, variations between countries are significant. This is closely related to implementation progress, which in turn depends on contextual factors as well as management and implementation capacity.

Concerning the quality of partnership with the MFA, embassies, implementing partners at country level and international partners were assessed. The partnership with the Department of Stability and Humanitarian Aid (DSH) of MFA can be qualified as challenging, asking for extra efforts, which is explained by the history of DSH's involvement and the limited insight in meaningful results and analysis of progress towards outcomes, which are needed for more strategic discussions. At the same time, both DSH and NIMD are willing to make the partnership work beyond contractual agreements. The quality of partnerships with embassies at the country level ranges from very good to more distant (in the latter case generating a more critical and sceptical attitude at the embassy) and largely depends on the quality of country level reporting and the visibility and perceived quality of the SP partner at a country level. In addition, AWEPA's exit has clearly complicated the generated relationships and cooperation in several programme countries in Africa.

The quality of partnerships with Implementing Partners at the country level is equally varied. On one end, there are partnerships marked by a mutually reinforcing relationship, having a dialogue on content as equal partners. These concern mostly (former) NIMD country offices that have a long history of cooperation. On the other end, there are partnerships in which discussion seem to be more about resources and control, a signal for a struggle to find the right balance between independence and inter-dependence. These concern mostly the platforms where responsibility and control over content and resources are in different hands. The 'newer' partnerships, including international partnerships with EPD and GPMD, seem to take a shape of 'contractor - subcontractor', gradually attempting to evolve towards a more mature partnership.

These conclusions led to the formulation of the following recommendations, whereby the first three are closely related to adaptations in overall programme design and management:

(i)   **Convert the S-A-C model into an actor-based Theory of Change**

The current SPDD programme ToC is organised around the System-Actor-Culture (S-A-C) model. This model is a useful conceptual framework depicting dimensions targeted by the SP. However, S-A-C is overly interrelated to be used well for planning.

Therefore, maintain the dimensions of the model, but make it actor-centred. This means that the three dimensions are not regarded as three interrelated concepts at the same level, rather a sequential logic is assumed whereby System and Culture change is pursued through Actors (see Figure 0-1).
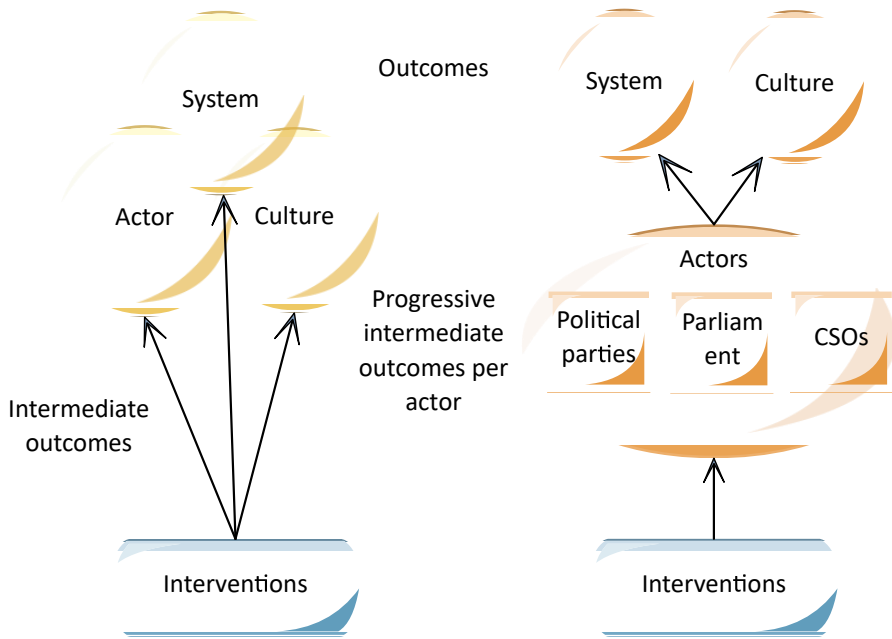
The basic logic here is that all changes pursued in the political landscape, be it increased capacities, changes in rules and regulations, or adapted norms and values, will have to take place through actors. For each actor a set of progressive changes can be articulated and monitored through a more complexity-aware method like Outcome Mapping (OM) or Outcome Harvesting (OH), and thus more suitable for the programme.

(ii)   **Adapt ToC logic to facilitate planning and enable monitoring of meaningful progress**

Use an actor-centred Theory of Change (ToC) to facilitate planning and monitoring, as is allows for a more concrete and distinct intervention strategy to be defined for influencing each of the targeted actors. Outline results in terms of actor's behaviour, starting from the current situation and ending with the desired ultimate behaviour, deemed necessary to realise the desired system and culture changes.

This requires elaborating a detailed ToC per actor and using it to formulate progressive intermediate outcomes that include expected "short-term results" captured by early signs of progress.

(iii)   **Pursue more realistic scoping of the programme based on systematic analysis**

Continue the current trend towards more systematic PEAs/context analysis integrating insights from literature and own experience. Such analytical processes have to result in clear decisions about the SP's positioning, actors to target and a clear delineation of the SP's sphere of control. The later can serve as a basis for identification, check and monitoring of external (i.e. beyond SP's sphere of control) preconditions and assumptions.

In addition to the above, the MTR provides the following recommendations at a more operational level:

(iv) **Add qualitative dimensions to outputs**

Add a qualitative aspect to results monitoring and reporting at output level (i.e. the direct results following from an intervention). Given the nature of these results, quick wins can be made by adding factual information to current quantitative results information about who attends (e.g. which parties, what level of representation or what kind of participants) and how this relates to the ideal/desired participation.

(v) **Practice the four dimensions of effective support**

Extract four important dimensions for effective support from the SP's practices that, combined, are instrumental in optimising the success of specific interventions. These relate to (1) the right issue/problem being addressed by using (2) the right channel/entity at (3) the right time (i.e. allowing immediate use of the support) by mobilising (4) the right expertise. These dimensions were derived from the best practices of the SP. SP's best practices showed to deserve specific attention, so that learning from these examples can be turned into more common practice.

(vi) **Truly treat Gender Equality as a cross-cutting issue (as different from L&A and CD)**

Adopt integrating Gender Equality into the core of the programme's intervention logic as a common practice, since it has proven to be an instrumental factor that leads to more demonstrable progress.

(vii) **Partner strategy – situational funding relationship (link to maturity)**

Continue with the efforts towards a more deliberate partner strategy. Such a strategy should include a clear vision of what kind of partnership the SP aims for whilst recognising that partnership development is a matter of growth.

(viii) **Introduce ToT element where the logic allows for easy scale up**

Work through a Training of Trainers approach, especially in the context of the Democracy Schools, to reach a larger number of trainees at relatively low costs with more flexibility in terms of timing and place. This will increase the chance that training impacts performance and leads to actual (behavioural) changes.

(ix) **Capture country experience for global advocacy**

Given the pioneering nature of this programme, intensify efforts to capture country-level experiences (similar to the on-going OH exercise) not only for the sake of accountability and steering but also for deliberate learning.

(x) **International L&A**

Strengthen the SP's international L&A by developing a dedicated ToC/intervention logic, acknowledging that the creation of a 'platform/entity' through which international L&A can be channelled is one of the first steps in this conceptual logic.

(xi) **From learning agenda to action learning.**

The positive practice of converting new PEA insights into action deserves to be replicated in other knowledge areas, besides that the PEA experiences are likely to be relevant for all SPs and worthy of sharing more broadly.