
Overall Evaluation Report

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Final Evaluation of the Voice for Change Partnership Programme SNV and IFPRI



Executive summary

This report presents the findings of the final evaluation of the Voice for Change Partnership Programme, which was carried out between September 2019 – August 2020. In accordance with the Terms of Reference (TOR), the purpose of the evaluation was to understand the programme's effectiveness in achieving key outcomes, its contribution to observed changes and the effectiveness and efficiency of the programme's partnership approach. The findings will be used for accountability to Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other stakeholders, and promote organisational learning to improve SNV Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV) and International Food Policy Research Institute's (IFPRI) management and operations in evidence based advocacy.

The 'Voice for Change Partnership' programme (V4CP) was one of 25 Strategic Partnerships supported under the 'Dialogue & Dissent' Policy framework (D&D) from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), with the aim of creating strategic partnerships to strengthen southern civil society organisations (CSO) capacity for 'lobbying and advocacy' (L&A). SNV led V4CP, in close collaboration with IFPRI and received funding from the Dutch Directorate-General for International Cooperation (DGIS). The programme tackled four themes – food and nutrition security (FNS), resilience, renewable energy (RE), and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), and also attempted to address gender equity and climate change mitigation.

The purpose of V4CP was to provide capacity development support to CSOs, specifically in their lobbying and advocacy work, and to train them in the use of evidence for that end. Furthermore, it hoped to also foster collaboration among relevant stakeholders, influence agenda-setting and hold the government and private sector accountable for their promises and actions. The programme started in 2016, and supported 50 CSOs in 6 target countries; Kenya, Rwanda, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Honduras and Indonesia. The CSOs were selected through an open and competitive process.

The evaluation made use of a range of methods to gather and analyse the information on which to base the findings:

- Three detailed country studies (Indonesia, Rwanda and Kenya) which covered the four programme sectors of FNS, WASH, Renewable energy and Resilience.
- A review of the programme Theory of Change (ToC) relevance and logic, against validated outcomes, and an assessment of the contribution of V4CP towards these outcomes.
- A validation process that included workshops, key informant interviews (KIIs) and report feedback.

The evaluation was affected by Covid-19, which prevented a number of field visits (particularly in Indonesia) and face-to-face meetings, and resulted in online workshops. Despite these limitations, the evaluation was completed as per the TOR.

CSO Capacity Support: V4CP has focused on supporting partner CSOs to develop capacity in leadership, advocacy, thematic knowledge, and increase organisational sustainability. The evaluation found evidence that significant capacity improvement has taken place, and that it is regarded by CSOs as the most important component of the programme. Overall, the evaluation concludes that V4CP has been largely effective in developing capacity, both through planned

training and coaching activities and through the CSOs association with IFPRI and SNV. Some partner CSOs have now successfully gained additional donor funding as a result of their reputation being improved.

Based on the country studies and review of V4CP documents, the evaluation confirms the trend reported by V4CP of CSO partners showing an increased capacity from baseline in 2016 to 2019. The country studies found that 95% of partners in Indonesia, and 75% of partners in Rwanda showed a significant increase in capacity against baseline across all four components (leadership, advocacy, thematic knowledge and organisational strengthening). In Kenya, 86% of partner CSOs were found to have improved scores from baseline.

Collaboration: The evaluation finds that V4CP has increased the range and effectiveness of collaboration between partner CSOs and other relevant actors and stakeholders, in pursuit of their L&A objectives. This included collaboration with government, the media and other (non-V4CP) CSOs. The collaboration between V4CP partner CSOs, and with Government (at various levels), were the two most often cited relationships that have been positively influenced through the course of the programme. The degree to which V4CP was able to foster collaboration with private sector actors was, however, limited.

Influence on agenda setting: The evaluation finds that V4CP successfully increased the level of interaction between partner CSOs and key stakeholders, which provided the opportunity for them to bring their L&A messages to the attention of key decision makers. The focus on capacity support led to partner CSOs developing an increased reputation and strengthened evidence based advocacy. While the degree to which partner CSOs were able to influence policy processes and service provision varied by theme and context, overall the evaluation finds V4CP to have achieved significant positive changes in this area.

Policy changes: V4CP partners have focused their L&A activities at a range of levels. Based on the survey responses, 72.5% of respondents said their V4CP related L&A activities were focused at district level, 70% at national level, 55% at community level, 45% at province level and 17.5% at international level. The evaluation shows that, as an indicator of increased capacity to carry out effective L&A, this reflects the strength of the V4CP capacity support programme. The evaluation validated examples of partner CSOs having succeeded in influencing change to policy and practice.

Assessment of support activities: The programme support activities respond to the overall V4CP objectives and, increasingly over the course of the programme, to local contexts and requirements. V4CP was able to make a rapid start using a predetermined capacity development package. Initially, this focussed on organisational leadership and process issues, such as understanding ToC and the planning, monitoring, evaluation and learning (PMEL) system. Although, the partner CSOs have expressed appreciation for these, the initial capacity support package was not based on a genuine organisation by organisation needs assessment process. It could be argued that a longer inception might have allowed a closer and earlier adjustment of capacity development to local needs. As noted in both the mid-term review (MTR) and the final evaluation findings, the support package became increasingly flexible as the programme progressed. However, the uneven development of the capacity support did mean that some areas were not incorporated or considered until later in the programme. One critical area that partner CSOs frequently raised was that of resource mobilisation for organisational sustainability. While the evaluation has identified lessons and areas

of weakness in the capacity support provided by V4CP, it should be noted that overall, partner CSOs were very positive about the capacity support.

Partnership approach: The V4CP model was new to SNV, IFPRI and to many of the partner CSOs, and possibly MOFA and its embassies in that it aimed to develop more effective advocacy capacity in existing organisations and their interventions, and create the conditions for collaboration and partnership between CSOs and sector actors through engagement and participation in fora, task forces and other platforms, without creating a standalone project structure. Governments from local to national level were often appreciative of the involvement of partner CSOs, although the evaluation cannot describe them as true ‘partnerships’ at this stage of the programme. The evaluation concludes that many of the V4CP initiatives have become an integral part of the ongoing activities of the partner CSOs, and are likely to continue, to some extent, after the programme has finished.

The evaluation confirms that SNV country teams have developed an excellent relationship with partner CSOs, to the extent that the majority perceive SNV as a ‘partner’, ‘advisor’ or ‘peer’ rather than as a donor. The evaluation found that building relationships between the partner CSOs was a key success of the programme. The inter-CSO relationships have yielded benefits from peer-to-peer learning, as well as coherent and coordinated work on shared objectives. There are also significant examples of successful relationships being fostered between CSOs and government, particularly at the local level, although this evaluation is not able to conclude whether these are likely to be strong and sustainable partnerships. Engaging with local government, and occasionally national bodies, were a key objective of the programme and to this extent, are a positive indication that the change pathways outlined in the ToC are valid. The evaluation found examples of positive collaboration between V4CP and Dutch Embassy staff, but on the whole this relationship had not developed as a true partnership, in the way originally envisaged by the D&D Framework. SNV and MOFA have maintained a good relationship at The Hague level, and SNV and IFPRI have coordinated well between The Hague and Washington.

Based on the findings of the evaluation, there were some successful examples of V4CP fostering relationships with other CSOs. For example; in Rwanda and Kenya, where partner CSOs have established a working relationship with local CSOs based in the districts being targeted by their V4CP activities. However, collaboration between partner CSOs and non-V4CP CSOs were very limited. The original design and budgetary focus of the programme was to the named CSO partners, so although many of these developed working relationships with local/regional CSOs, this had not been allowed for in the original programme hence budgets and capacity support were incidental not a part of the programme resource allocation. There may have been engagement with other coalitions but we were unable to evidence them in this review.

Contribution of IFPRI: The majority of the outcomes achieved by V4CP in the FNS and resilience sectors would not have been realised without IFPRI involvement as a partner in the consortium. Their experience and reputation brought credibility to the partner CSOs and the advocacy positions they vouched for. IFPRI does not have a physical presence in many of the V4CP country programmes (Kenya being one exception), so support was largely remote. The logistical complications that this created has highlighted some important learning on how to foster an effective research-advocacy relationship, and has implications on creating value for money. It is important to balance the need for a credible knowledge broker, with the need for research and support that is responsive to a dynamic and fast changing advocacy environment. The evaluation confirms that IFPRI inputs were,

on the whole, very well received by partner CSOs with a few exceptions (e.g. experience from Burkina Faso early in the V4CP process). The lack of clarity about IFPRI's role at country level, and unrealistic expectations of them from some SNV country staff and partner CSOs, did lead to initial difficulties. IFPRI are to be commended for the way in which they responded to this learning, especially after the MTR. The evaluation found that collaboration between IFPRI and partner CSOs shifted significantly to become more focused on local needs. There are still some unmet needs among partner CSOs, who reported during KIIs and through the survey that they wanted more guidance on research methods and data analysis.

Synergies: The evaluation found limited evidence of synergy between V4CP, Embassy funded programmes and SNV country programmes. While there have been a few examples described in the full report on the whole, the opportunities have not been as fully utilised as had been expected in the programme design.

Gender and inclusion: Gender was not introduced into the programme until 2018, through the commissioning of a review of Gender in the V4CP in Africa, which resonated through the whole programme internationally. The evaluation, and partner CSOs, acknowledge that this was a considerable missed opportunity to incorporate a gender and inclusion perspective into policies and regulations (e.g. WASH regulations in Indonesia, and gender disparities in the FNS space). The V4CP PMEL process does not provide disaggregated data, but through KIIs, the evaluation finds that the programme has made some progress to increase the voice and participation of women and people with disability, and to integrate gender and social inclusion into the work of the partner CSOs. Many of these were focused on these issues before V4CP started. However, the delay in incorporating these issues as a focus of the programme has meant the programme has not achieved its full potential.

Capacity Support vs. Policy Change: The duality of V4CP objectives; for capacity support and policy change, has influenced both the nature of the support and activities carried out through the programme, and the PMEL data collected and reported on. The V4CP PMEL has been strongly influenced by the Theory of Change approach that has focused attention on achieving measurable policy changes within the sectors and the stages to achieve these. SNV and IFPRI provided strong technical advisory support to the programme, while V4CP contracted out some of the capacity support activities. The support offered was initially very generic, it was found to have become more flexible and responsive over the course of the programme, but has not entirely responded to partner CSOs' needs (e.g. request for additional training on data analysis) or considered all elements of organisational capacity development (e.g. resource mobilisation). Additionally, measuring the impact of training and support on partner CSOs' capacity has been less well documented, relying largely on self-reported Capacity Assessment process, despite this being the main focus of Dialogue and Dissent. Programme managers did rely on success in policy changes as proxy indicators of capacity improvements. The evaluation shows some tension between what could be characterised as an organisational development approach to enhance the capacity of CSOs, and an approach more focussed on the specifics of policy change and outcomes. This tension can be linked back to the sponsors in MOFA with some of the technical departments looking for policy outcomes, whilst

the initiating department (Social Development Department (DSO)) was concerned that D&D would contribute to overall civil society strengthening.¹

Reflection on the Theory of Change: The evaluation found the ToC to be a valid way to explain the ambition of the programme. At the country programme level, ToC development sometimes took a significant amount of time. It was a new approach for many of the partner CSOs, and the early stages of the programme were taken up with understanding it. Overall, partner CSOs were appreciative of the ToC approach as it facilitated a focused L&A approach, and at the same time flexible programme implementation that responded to emerging needs, arising opportunities and changing situations. Overall, the evaluation concludes that the programme ToC did not resolve the duality between capacity enhancement and policy change objectives (the evaluation feels two separate ToCs would help here), it has successfully framed the programme ambition in such a way that its expression at the country programme level has not been overly constrained. While the ToC development process has been top-down (the programme ToC came before the country ToCs), the country level ToCs are still relevant to the context and issues within the sector there and they have been developed (and reviewed) in collaboration with partner CSOs. The evaluation has found sufficient evidence to conclude that the change pathways and assumptions contained within the programme ToC are valid, although the inherent duality often led to some blurring of aims and ways to achieve them at the country programme level.

Relevance: Overall, the evaluation finds that V4CP activities are relevant to the country context, given the need to improve civic space in all programme countries, as well as the focus on a series of important sectors (FNS, renewable energy, resilience (climate change in particular) and WASH). The programme also met the demands from partner CSOs to upgrade their skills and enter new dialogues with government and, to a lesser extent the private sector.

The evaluation finds that the choice of sectors (FNS, WASH, RE and Resilience) were relevant, and deliberately broad so that they could more easily be contextualised to the situation and needs of the programme countries. The country programmes were most effective when they focused on existing government priorities, The V4CP is also relevant to the CSOs role of working at the interface between state, citizens and market.

Effectiveness: The evaluation has verified and validated V4CP outcomes regarding the increased capacity, collaboration and changes in policy across the three study countries. Target outcomes involving the private sector have been more challenging to evidence. Overall, the evaluation concludes that V4CP has been implemented effectively, and there are good examples of this, including; the work on budget tracking and monitoring, which was very well received by Government and partner CSOs in Kenya, Rwanda and Indonesia. The development of standards for clean cooking in Kenya is also a good example. In Indonesia, partner CSOs had considerable success in engaging with District government on stunting reduction and tackling the problem of open defecation.

¹ “Civil Society Aid as a Balancing Act – Navigating Between Managerial and Social Transformative Principles” Dr. Jelmer Kamstra, Development in Practice Issue 30-6 (September 2020)

Sustainability: V4CP has achieved better than expected organisational sustainability among many of the partner CSOs, providing the activities continue to be aligned with the organisations' vision and mission, their ability to secure funding to continue the work, and whether they can retain staff with capacity in these areas. For example, partner CSO KIIs in Rwanda indicate that they are not anticipating losing any staff as a result of the end of the programme, despite the likelihood that no further funding will be available through V4CP. The degree to which the changes in capacity shown by partner CSOs is likely to continue beyond the end of the programme and sustained in the long-term, however, will be influenced by external factors (civic space) and their ability to maintain themselves financially and with credibility. Some partner CSOs reported that the strategy and business plans they have developed, along with increased profile, are helping them attract new funding. The evaluation is not able to comment on whether the technical initiatives and activities will continue within all of the sectoral initiatives once V4CP finishes at the end of 2020. Where there is a greater degree of uncertainty is among smaller partner CSOs, particularly where V4CP represented a significant proportion of their total annual budget for the organisation. The evaluation found that many partner CSOs were unsettled by the uncertainty of funds, as a result of the annual budget agreements. It resulted in them being unable to offer job security, which for some CSOs led to staff leaving. While the evaluation acknowledges that SNV was very clear that V4CP was not intended to fund posts, but to support activities, the stability of funding and retention of internal capacity are components of successful organisational sustainability.

External Political Influences: The evaluation found that V4CP was easier to implement in contexts where there was at least a benign government. Of more note, the evaluation findings show that partner CSOs were able to exert greatest influence on local government (District and County). That is not to diminish the outcomes that were achieved at the national level, particularly in Rwanda, where a large enough group of partner CSOs worked collaboratively on a single issue and demonstrated that they could collectively exert influence at the national level. Where possible other V4CP partners were undoubtedly able to build partnerships or working arrangements across different institutions with an aim at gaining influence through a strength in numbers

The evaluation also found a clear link between programme achievements and selection of sector issues that aligned most closely with government priorities. In Rwanda, for example, while the civil society environment is challenging, V4CP chose to coalesce around nutrition, which is a key priority for the Government. As a result, they are likely to have been far more open to engaging with competent partner CSOs who could help them achieve nutrition based activities and policies. The timing of V4CP in Rwanda also fitted with an increasing emphasis on deepening citizen centred planning. In Kenya there was a view that some sectors, such as renewable energy and WASH were more amenable to advocacy (able to deliver 'quick wins', thus presenting "lower hanging fruits"), compared to others such as food safety and consumer lobbies (in the dairy and horticulture sectors) which were considered quite "sensitive".

So, while it is true that working with local governments has been most successful for V4CP, without policy direction from the central government, partner CSOs would have found limited traction. As the political context is such that political leaders account to their fellow leaders (and not to citizens), it mattered that V4CP adopted a two pronged approach of influencing national level policy agendas and working with Districts to translate the policies into specific action plans. Also, the choice of less controversial issues (as opposed to more contentious issues, like human rights) also meant that, on the whole, national governments did not feel that they were being substantially challenged through V4CP.

It could be argued that V4CP was conflict avoiding, which should not be a surprise given the technical basis of the organisations expertise. On the whole the technical areas, and their selection in each country, tended to be in line with government policies. In other words; SNV were working with, not against the grain.²

Efficiency: A detailed review of efficiency was not included in the original TOR, and so it was beyond the scope of the evaluation to carry out a cost-benefit analysis or output to outcome review of programme spending. Instead, looking in more general terms at the allocation of budget across the programme, the evaluation team has identified one area of concern. Almost a third of the budget was allocated to IFPRI (29%) for advice that only covered two of the four V4CP focus sectors. While this advisory input was much appreciated by the partner CSOs, and has made a significant contribution to the successes seen in the FNS and Resilience activities, it was a very large financial commitment. In light of ability of the WASH and RE sectors to source more cost effective advice and research partners from among national organisations and consultants, the evaluation concludes that, were there to have been a second phase of V4CP, it would have recommended that the distribution of budget was reviewed.

A further major proportion of the funding (41%) went to the SNV field offices, compared to funding received by the partner CSOs. It has not been possible to assess the efficiency of this, as clearly a good proportion of the budget will have been absorbed by the capacity support activities on behalf of the partner CSOs. The evaluation questions whether partner CSOs would have agreed to this allocation, if they were aware of the relative costs and priorities, although they were involved in the annual planning and budgeting of activities they had an incomplete view of overall budgets. Dialogue & Dissent represented almost 5 years guaranteed funding, but SNV planned and authorised funding to partner CSOs on an annual basis. The V4CP review and planning system, linked to the ToCs, was very productive and on the whole, the partner CSOs were very positive about its flexibility and peer-to-peer learning value

Overall the evaluation found that V4CP achieved a great deal in all of the countries. The evidence has been drawn primarily from three detailed country studies, along with a survey of all CSOs and SNV offices across the programme. The evaluation adopted a learning approach throughout. At the time of the assignment, it was understood that a second phase of the programme was likely, and that the evaluation findings would contribute towards a revision of the future programme. Any criticisms, where they exist, are therefore written in the spirit of learning. A list of key learning points is included at the end of this report along with some specific recommendations.

The following **recommendations** have been developed

1. Revise and extend the inception period for similar programmes as in reality it takes quite a long time to get this type of programme off the ground, especially when introducing new approaches and engaging with multiple stakeholders. It was clear that even within MOFA, buy-in had not been secured among all the various Embassies. There is also likely some tension within the Ministry in The Hague, between the approaches adopted by the civil society and technical departments. One

² "Working with the grain: integrating governance and growth." Brian Levy, OUP 2014, this study much quoted by the World Bank and official donors such as DFID, explains the concept of working with government policies rather than against them and by doing so improving governance and implementation of policies.

option would be to extend inception funding for a period of say 1 year, followed by a review before approving continuation.

2. During an extended inception, agreements need to be made about roles and responsibilities of partners, the level and focus of any capacity support (see also Recommendation 2), the choice of partners, agreed policies on gender, internal negotiations with other parts of SNV, other INGOs and local Embassies for improved synergy, etc.
3. Be clearer about the aims of similar programmes, especially where the priority lies. In the case of V4CP, it was with the capacity development to do L&A, but making progress in the sectors in terms of policy engagement and change often became paramount. The two are not mutually exclusive but sometimes during KIIS, it was evident that capacity support in non-technical areas was given less priority in favour of the sectoral issues. This is more likely to happen where engaging in real time L&A is used as a means of capacity development. One solution is to separate out policy change from capacity development, as two separate ToCs, and create distinct activity plans around the two. It is noteworthy that resource mobilization and analysis of research data were not included in the capacity development plans for V4CP, although they were clearly a priority for partner CSOs.
4. Following on from Recommendation 2, a greater emphasis on monitoring the quality and nature of capacity development support should be included in any future programme. The support would need to be explicitly contextualised for the different countries and sectors, but should also stress the quality of delivery. Additionally, the evaluation team concur that the current programmes emphasis on learning from the ongoing programme about what works, was very important. However, a more reflexive and participatory process of needs assessments and accompanying indicators of success should be adopted, rather than the current, and quite limited, self-reporting by senior staff.
5. Greater transparency on resource allocation, and allow partners to have a say in the way in which resources are allocated not just within their own sectoral country plan (or at least to be clearer how they were allocated).
6. Review funding allocation processes. V4CP was almost 5 years guaranteed funding, but SNV planned and authorised funding to partners annually. The review and planning system was very productive, but many CSOs found the uncertainty of an annually reviewed funding agreement unsettling, and it impacted on staff retention. This is particularly relevant for smaller CSOs, and those that are more financially dependent on the funding stream (i.e. where it represents more than 30-50% of their total annual budget, for example). Recommendation 6 Look to create greater value from future programmes by building on, or linking to, existing relationships and sectoral engagement. At one level, the sectors chosen by SNV were areas where they had a track record, but synergies were not very evident. In some cases, (e.g. WASH in Kenya and Indonesia) there was a clear link between an earlier programme / the adviser and V4CP, but elsewhere this link was absent (e.g. Rwanda Hortinvest). Similarly, in Rwanda, the Dutch Embassy was supporting a large nutrition programme through UNICEF but V4CP activities made minimal links to this, even at an informal level.
7. Create strong links with local research groups (possibly with an external senior research mentor such as IFPRI), and a coherent approach to the production of evidence, shared with partners and disseminated to other stakeholders clearly linked to advocacy messages. Local participatory research is likely to get more traction with local authorities if proven to be credible and objectively carried out (e.g. WASH survey in Kenya). It also helps to develop relationships and capacity. This

was also the case in Indonesia, where joint research with a local government agency led to their ownership in the research findings, recommendations and commitment to follow up action.

8. Improved co-production of evidence and advocacy/policy objectives by engaging with CSO partners at an earlier stage, for example; in choosing sectors in which to work, engaging communities at an earlier stage in identification of issues and exploring these with local researchers. Explore issues through participatory research. The evaluation team concur that the programme was relevant, but the issues were primarily chosen because they fitted SNVs portfolio rather than being able to argue that they were necessarily at the top of the list of issues in all the communities. Thus, as such it could be argued that this was an “expert” led programme, not one led by civil society. There will be both positives and negatives from this choice of approach.
9. SNV should learn from V4CP and develop an organisational approach to “partnership”, and the formal procedures for different types of partnership.
10. Any future programme should start with a gender and social inclusion analysis, goals and PMEL system.