Management Response

Final evaluation Voice for Change Partnership Programme (2016-2020)

The Voice for Change Partnership (V4CP) is implemented in a strategic partnership of SNV, IFPRI, 51 civil society organisations (CSOs), and DGIS and the embassies. By increasing the capacities of the CSOs to advocate for an enabling environment, V4CP contributes to embedding the interests of low-income and marginalised communities into the policies and practices of government and businesses.

V4CP has been addressing four themes: Food & Nutrition Security (FNS), Renewable Energy (RE), Resilience, and Water, Sanitation & Hygiene (WASH), and is implemented in Burkina Faso, Ghana, Honduras, Indonesia, Kenya and Rwanda. The V4CP programme is funded by DGIS. It started in January 2016 and will end by December 2020.

INTRAC (www.intrac.org) conducted the final evaluation of the V4CP programme. The evaluation covered the period from the start of the programme until the end of 2019 and aimed at assessing the programme's effectiveness in achieving key outcomes, the factors that contributed to these achievements, as well as the effectiveness and efficiency of the programme's partnership model. The evaluation considered the whole programme, with detailed country case studies carried out in Rwanda, Kenya and Indonesia. The evaluation made use of both quantitative and qualitative methods. It adopted the principles of contribution analysis and outcome mapping, complemented by key informant interviews, focus group discussions, validation workshops, a programme wide survey of partner CSOs, along with a review of programme documentation.

Overall, SNV and IFPRI are pleased with the evaluation's findings and recommendations.

The evaluation arrived at the following main findings:

- V4CP activities have been 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. The programme also met the demands from partner CSOs to upgrade their skills and enter new dialogues with government and private sector.
- The programme has significantly strengthened the capacity of partner CSOs in the four targeted capacity areas (leadership, advocacy, thematic knowledge and organisational sustainability). The capacity development support, in its broadest sense, was the most valued element of the programme by the CSOs. The evaluation assessed that the capacity support package in the initial phase of the V4CP programme was not based on a true organizational needs assessment, but over the course of the programme it increasingly was.
- V4CP has achieved better than expected organisational sustainability among many of the partner CSOs, as a result of the changes in their capacities and their increased profiles. Sustainability is less certain among smaller partner CSOs, particularly where V4CP funding represented a significant proportion of the total annual budget for the organisation.
- The programme was highly effective in influencing governments' agendas, fostering collaboration between CSOs and government and in changing governments' policies and practices. The programme was less successful in changing private sector's policies and practices.
- The programme has fostered good relationships between SNV, CSOs, IFPRI and DGIS. SNV country teams have developed excellent relationships with partner CSOs. The evaluation also

found the programme has fostered strong inter-CSO relationships which yielded benefits from peer-to-peer learning, as well as coherent and coordinated work on shared objectives. CSOs were also able to build strong relationships with governments, particularly at the local level. The relationship between IFPRI and both partner CSOs and SNV country offices started with some challenges, but these were resolved as the programme progressed. Though some positive examples of collaboration between V4CP and Dutch Embassy staff were found, overall, this relationship had not developed as a true partnership in the way originally envisaged. Examples of well-established working relationships with non-partner CSOs were also found in the countries, with the critical note that these relationships were not part of the original programme design.

- Factors that contributed to the effective influencing and policy and practice change include the programme's ability to learn and adapt as needed, the capacity development support to the CSOs, the provision of solid and relevant evidence to back up the policy improvements, the recognition and buy-in CSOs gained by governments and other stakeholders, the building of strong relationships

We agree with the above findings of the Evaluation. Below, we respond on conclusions that we feel require further contextualization or follow up.

Capacity development vs policy change objectives
The evaluation observed a duality between the programme's capacity development and policy change objectives. The evaluators raised two specific concerns:
1. The CD programme was quite narrowly defined focusing on strengthening the capacity of the CSOs on L&A, while perhaps more attention could have been paid to the overall development of the organisations.
2. Policy change objectives may have taken precedence over capacity development objectives at least with some at SNV and MoFA.

Ad 1. The overall objective of V4CP was to strengthen the voice of civil society in sector policy development and implementation. The capacity development approach was structured accordingly, with a strong focus on strengthening the evidence-based advocacy skills of the CSOs. This is, however, not to say that no attention was paid to general organisational development. This was addressed by V4CP mainly through a coaching programme. Deliberately OD coaches from outside SNV have been contracted to ensure that the coaching was not affected by contractual relations between SNV and the CSOs. The coaching trajectory has been mutually agreed by the CSO and the coach.

Ad b. This concern stems from the observation by the evaluators that "the longer-term focus of the Theory of Change approach has been for CSOs to influence and achieve measurable policy changes within the sectors and the stages to achieve these". The focus of V4CP has however been on building the capacity of the CSOs to achieve these outcomes, and the intermediate outcomes (e.g. improved collaboration, improved influence) are a measure of the capacity of the CSOs to do so. As the capacity of the CSOs increased over time, the attention has shifted towards accompanying the CSOs in making progress towards the long-term advocacy outcomes. Therefore, we don't agree with the evaluators that the capacity development support for lobby and advocacy was considered of secondary importance to making progress in the sectors in terms of policy engagement and change. Rather the progress made on policy engagement reflects the increase in capacity development of the CSOs (see also the next point).

Capturing capacity development changes
We acknowledge the observed limitations of V4CP's monitoring system in capturing changes in CSOs capacities in the sense that the self-reporting by the CSOs, nor the outcome harvesting process are sufficiently able to capture more intangible results of capacity development, such as attitudes, confidence, raised profile, trust, and behaviour change. We do believe that achievements within the advocacy process, like for example CSOs increased engagement with

policy makers, provide proxy indicators for the changes in those capacities. For future capacity development programmes, we will look for additional ways to capture these capacity development changes and to better understand their significance in bringing about the desired changes.

Generation of evidence
Generation and dissemination of evidence is one of the three V4CP intervention strategies. Two different evidence generation approaches were followed. In WASH and Energy, evidence was generated by commissioning national consultants or local research institutes in collaboration with the CSOs. In FNS and Resilience, IFPRI led in providing evidence to CSOs. These different approaches have both shown advantages and disadvantages. The engagement of an internationally renowned research institute like IFPRI not only ensures high quality products, but also open doors for the CSOs, particularly at higher levels of government, and exposed CSOs to international developments. The challenge is to bridge the large gap between the research institute and the CSOs to ensure relevance and ownership. In the approach followed in WASH and Energy, relevance and ownership of evidence products by CSOs and other actors is more easily ensured. And the learning-by-doing approach further strengthens the sector knowledge and the research capacity of the CSOs.
We agree with the evaluation's recommendation that for future programmes strong links with local research institutes are to be created, whereby international research institutes would work more through local research institutes.

CSOs funding arrangement
We noted the evaluation's observation that the annual renewals of the CSOs contracts created uncertainty at some of the CSOs regarding their financial security. This is an important and somewhat unexpected observation, as many of the CSOs had an MoU with SNV covering the full five years, and SNV never received serious indications from the CSOs that they were uncertain about V4CP funding for the following year. Moreover, as the evaluators observed, SNV and the CSOs had developed trusted relationships, and the assumption has always been that funding would continue. However, if there would have been a next phase, the arrangement would certainly have changed towards a longer-term funding commitment.

Gender and Social Inclusion
We do agree with observation that GESI was insufficiently addressed in the first years of the programme, and with the recommendation that any future programme should start with a gender and social inclusion analysis, goals and PMEL system.

Sharing of learnings
SNV will use the evaluations findings, lessons learnt and recommendations to inform and where possible to improve the design and performance of SNV's ongoing and future programmes which include an evidence-based advocacy component.