

Rethinking the Networks Model of the Foundation

Key findings provided by the European Commission for distribution at the Networks Meeting 2017 of the Anna Lindh Foundation.

Introduction:

This document provides institutional context and independent analysis to support a comprehensive assessment of the “Networks model” of the Foundation. The analysis has been provided by the European Commission and independent evaluators in the framework of two complimentary processes commissioned and carried out during 2016/2017:

First, the “Mid-Term Evaluation of the Support to the Anna Lindh Foundation”, commissioned by the European Commission as principal donor to the Foundation since its inception, to provide “overall independent and systematic evaluation” on EU support to the Foundation. Through a tender procedure – specifically FWC Beneficiaries LOT 7 (Governance and Home Affairs area) - , a consortium headed by ARS Progetti S.P.A. were contracted by the Commission to implement the Evaluation with the following specific objectives: (i) conduct the mid-term evaluation on the current EC Action Grant contract with the Foundation; (ii) evaluate areas of the ALF structure including governance, organisation and funding model; and (iii) provide recommendations to the Commission on future financial support to the Foundation for the new multi-annual programme phase from 2018. The Evaluation comprised on desk research and assessment, including in-country meetings with Heads of Networks, strategic partners, EU Delegations, programme beneficiaries and the Headquarters of the Foundation, with expertise provided by independent consultants Ms Abigail Hansen and Ms Nadia Saad.

Second, the “Working Matrix for the Multi-Annual Programme of the Foundation”, implemented by two specialists in Euro-Mediterranean cooperation and “structured dialogue with civil society”. The assignment was commissioned by the Foundation headquarters with a terms of reference to: (i) further develop, in terms also definitions of means of implementation and budget modalities, in an Action Document the programming pillars adopted by the Board of Governors of the Foundation; (b) alongside proposal for monitoring & evaluation system, produce the logical framework required for the new Action Grant to be signed in 2018 between the Foundation and the European Commission, taking into consideration recommendations provided by the EC in its Mid-Term Evaluation; and (c) provide analysis and initial ideas about the Networks model of the Foundation. In line with the assignment, the experts - Beatriz Sanz Corella and Juan E. Nicolas Adan - prepared a Survey that was sent on a bilateral basis to all the Heads of Networks of the Foundation and all the employees of the Headquarters.

While both processes provide coherent analysis on the Networks model, the Mid-Term Evaluation primarily exposes the issues of the current Networks management and rationale for comprehensive review of the model, while the work of the Experts provides initial strategic thinking on how to operationalise the recommendations of the Mid-Term Evaluation.

Strategic framework:

The assessment of the Networks model is framed by the Strategic Plan “Working Together Towards 2025”, adopted by the Board of Governors of the Foundation on 11th June 2015. The Board Plan that is characterised by its long-term approach and recapturing of the founding operational principles of the Foundation, sets out as its central aims: “reaffirming the Foundation as the region’s central

institution for intercultural dialogue and opening up a long-term perspective for the Foundation's action with renewed emphasis on quality, impact and visibility."

The series of Strategy "Progress Reviews" adopted by the Board of Governors of the Foundation during its multi-annual programme phase 2015 and 2017 outline evidence of the initial impact of the Strategy and how the strategic pillars can be a basis to putting Civil Society Networks at the heart of the new programme phase 2018 to 2020, noting the following:

The positive validation of the new programming pillars adopted by the Board of Governors on 8th March 2017 by the Advisory Council and independent evaluators, with the EC Evaluation noting "the newly adopted four programming pillars for 2018+ have been built on a far-reaching process, are well-conceived and aligned with the ALF long-term strategy (...) It is considered that this approach should address identified challenges notably activity dispersion and an administrative approach". This streamlined programming approach will be essential to support Networks on the frontline of providing a coherent and understandable "offer of the Foundation to the civil society at large". It will also be important to ensure enhanced capacity of the Headquarters for Networking, beyond the activity dispersion that has been a risk to the Foundation since its inception, and for Monitoring that is central to ensuring impact, reach and sustainability.

The impact of the new capacity of the Headquarters for strategic communication, partnerships, and business development that can be a basis to empowering the Networks of the Foundation to scale-up the reach and impact of intercultural action in the field. This capacity has been illustrated at a preliminary stage by the cooperation agreements with the private sector and international institutions - from Facebook headquarters to the World Bank Group - that provide a framework for scaling-up civil society support in 2018-2020. The EC Evaluation notes strategic opportunities for the Foundation through a "new partner-led strategic fundraising model has been applied effectively" and a "new policy voice role that can be a key component of the future organisation". In the field, this should result in increased resources for civil society (partner-led strategic fundraising) and increased advocacy impact (policy voice role).

Building on this first stage of implementation of the Strategic Plan, the basic premise remains: by applying the Strategy to the Networks of the Foundation, the impact, reach and scale of civil society-led intercultural action will significantly increase. In returning to the founding operational principles of the Foundation, the Strategy will also ensure renewed focus on building the capacity of Civil Society Networks in line with the recommendations of the High-Level Group on Intercultural Dialogue of October 2003.

Key Findings:

The EU-commissioned Mid-Term Evaluation highlights the need for "a comprehensive review" of the Network model and management. A Summary of Key Findings from external evaluation implemented in 2016/17:

- (1) Networks' involvement in the strategic development of the Foundation is deemed limited. Despite evidence of regular opportunities for Networks engagement (eg. annual Heads of Networks meeting, systematic e-consultation processes), Network coordinators do not perceive they are effectively engaged in the strategy of the Foundation. In going forward, there is a shared commitment to be leveraged, with the EC Evaluation noting "ALF Executive, HoN and BoG remain fully committed to the ALF's founding mandate and principles, and in particular relative to the importance of civil society."

- (2) Members direct involvement in ALF programmes is very limited, and most of the resources available to support members and their work remain directed towards Heads of Networks (HoNs). The working matrix of the Experts outlines a series of areas in the new programming pillars where Members can be effectively engaged. Examples include: the Foundation supporting research initiatives by Members in the framework of the programming pillar “Intercultural Trends and Media”; and Members developing information on resources “which can serve as the basis to innovative data and an ICD resource centre”.
- (3) Horizontal and internal communication is limited. The EC Evaluation notes that “while external communication has considerably improved in recent years and months, horizontal and internal communication requires considerable reinforcement”. This is arguably a question of the quality of information and engagement over the quantity of opportunities. At the level of the Board of Governors, it has proposed that the Headquarters invests in its forthcoming phase in its capacity for effective horizontal communication and “stakeholder engagement” with the statutory bodies.
- (4) Terms of Reference of Network Coordinators need to be clarified. Evaluators raise a specific question on “the role of the Heads of Networks in selecting and filtering members needs to be discussed”. The external evaluation also exposes a concern of strategic partners to understand the scope of responsibility of in-country network coordinators and the mechanisms for performance management.
- (5) Insufficient knowledge of the Members, their work and potential. There is the need for a comprehensive mapping exercise to understand the current Network membership, its scope of activity and potential. The EC Evaluation notes that “monitoring of effectiveness at the national level is poor” and the Foundation headquarters needs to apply the same quality control standards at national networking level as it should with regional programming.
- (6) Regarding the issue of governance, the European Commission notes “the issue of restricted or shrinking civil society space has not been addressed adequately at the political or operational level”, and evidence of lack of clear governance arrangements for the work of the Networks, to the south and north of the Mediterranean, that according to the evaluation risks the credibility of the Foundation and undermines the independence of the Civil Society Networks. The EC Evaluation recommends that the Foundation Headquarters should engage in dialogue with Member States.
- (7) Certain Heads of Networks are considered by the Commission Evaluation not “real networks”. The assessment of external evaluators is that a number of Heads of Networks fall short of the requirement to act as networkers and multiplies to the civil society at large. “Rather there are a number of independent organisations who have their ‘networking mandate’ given by the Foundation”. It is recommended that the criteria for defining a Head of Network institution returns to the founding operating principles of the Foundation that emphasised the capacity of Networks to multiply the impact and visibility of the Foundation at the national level.
- (8) The need to reinforce networking and capacity-building. The EC evaluation states that the “network management requires comprehensive review and reform, moving from an administrative-driven relationship, to network development underpinned by capacity-building”. The evaluation also underlines that “Networking activities are highly valued, and lead to significant follow-up collaboration and initiatives”, and that ALF should expand capacity-building activities with CSOs to networking and partnerships, governance and leadership, and monitoring and evaluation.”

(9) The Foundation should continue adapting grant mechanisms. Progress has been welcomed in recent years in simplifying processes call for proposals. At the same time, the EC Evaluation recommends “consideration could be given to significantly increasing the minimum amount of individual grants and their duration, to reduce the administrative burden on the ALF Headquarters”. The EC Evaluation notes that “civil society continues to experience considerable frustration with EU financial and administrative procedures for applications and grants”.

Review Process:

At the Board of Governors meeting of 17 October 2017, there was the proposal was shared to establish a “working committee to review this crucial remaining issue, composed of representatives from the Board, the Secretariat, Advisory Council, European Union, and Heads of Network (..) The committee would analyse the output of the assessment to date and examine the various aspects of the issue: the funding mechanism; governance and organization of the Network; role and scope of mandate; interaction with other stakeholders; space of growth for the Networks; scope and tools of communication; the balance between procedural requirements of the main donors and the flexibility on the ground required by member CSOs; and the moral contract beyond the financial or administrative link between the Foundation and the Network.”