

To whom it may concern



<i>Date:</i>	11 December 2014
<i>Project:</i>	Both ENDS / MFS-II Fair, Green and Global Alliance
<i>Re:</i>	Management letter Final Report of the Mid Term Evaluation of the FGG programme 2011-2014
<i>Contact:</i>	Daniëlle Hirsch, dh@bothends.org, ☎ +31-20-530 66 00

Dear Sir, Madam,

With this letter on behalf of Alliance members Both ENDS, the Schone Kleren Campagne/Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC), Milieudefensie/Friends of the Earth International (FoEI)/Friends of the Earth Europe (FoEE), ActionAid Netherlands, the Centre for Research on Multinational Corporations (SOMO) and the Transnational Institute (TNI), I gladly present to you the Final Report of the Mid Term Evaluation (MTE) of the five-year Fair, Green and Global programme, which was conducted between March and September 2014 by Context, international cooperation.



This management letter constitutes the initial response of the FGG steering committee to the receipt of the final report of the evaluation. Below, we first clarify the process of the evaluation; and how the active involvement of FGG staff allowed for evaluation results to be immediately used in our current programme. Secondly, we summarize some of the findings that we feel underline both the strengths of our alliance and several assumptions underlying our programme. Third, we reflect on the more critical findings and explain how we follow these up: some have already led to adjustments in the past months, for others we are looking into adjustments in the short or longer term, and some are acknowledged as a constant challenge.

### ***Process of organising the mid term evaluation***

The organisation of a mid term evaluation was foreseen from the start of the FGG programme. In 2013, we developed a Terms of Reference for the evaluation based on consultations with the various organisational units within the programme (mainly steering committee and programme committee) on their needs for such an evaluation. This resulted in a focus on our relevance, approach, and effectiveness. An MTE Task Force was formed consisting of three members of the steering committee and the PME advisor to guide the process and take decisions along the way. An Advisory Committee of four external experts was formed to provide methodological feedback on the ToR, the selection of the evaluator, the inception report and the draft final report. In March 2014, the ToR was disseminated widely among acquainted consultants as well as through Partos and an email list of evaluators. Consequently seven proposals were received, four of which were shortlisted and invited to present their proposal. Based on these presentations, *Context, international cooperation* (hereafter Context) was selected as their proposal and approach best fit our needs and preferences.

**Utilization focus: involvement of FGG staff**

From the onset it was our objective to organise the evaluation in a utilization-focused<sup>1</sup> way; hence there was a lot of involvement of FGG staff in various stages of the process: recreating and analysing a timeline of the alliance during the kick-off, focus group discussions and two joint learning workshops where Context guided us to add meaning to data gathered through other means and preliminary findings. These activities included active participation of steering committee, programme committee, Advisory Group and programme staff. For each of the four case studies, FGG staff but also partner organisations were involved. The draft report was read by a large number of staff and commented thoroughly. Four staff members were present at the triangulation interviews with external stakeholders. All of this has meant that the entire process offered ample opportunities for us to reflect, learn and exchange ideas. The fact that the process took place parallel to the formulation of our proposal for a strategic partnership with the Ministry from 2016 onwards, meant that we could immediately translate several lessons learned to adaptations in our future programme.

**Findings: underlining strengths and confirming assumptions FGG Alliance and programme**

Besides reflections and lessons leading us to adapt our programme, the evaluation importantly underlines several strengths of our current approach and organisational set-up, and confirms several assumptions underlying these. We appreciate that the evaluation has provided an evidence base for our approach and assumptions, allowing us to build on our programme with confidence.

Some of the major appreciative conclusions that we gladly embrace are:

- The appreciation of the *relevance* of our work for the reasons relating to the following four areas:
  - o The FGG strategic objectives and programme are assessed to be relevant from a societal perspective: we 'address emerging issues in a comprehensive manner, using an innovative approach ... to eventually contribute to a fundamental shift in the current development paradigm.' Having a global programme with a strong focus on power holders, tracing symptoms of social, environmental and economic problems back to their source and addressing them at global scale while linking to local realities.
  - o The organisational approach is assessed as coherent with the objectives and programme: different programme functions are being performed both by different organisations jointly and separately. Complementarity, a shared agenda, absence of power struggles and balancing autonomy with joint collaboration are strengths of the Alliance.
  - o The relationships formed are relevant to this approach: particularly the relations with partner organisations are characterised as trust-based rather than control-based – although efforts could be made in terms of improved (South – South) communication. The alliance members act as networks and existing alliances are respected, avoiding building artificial structures.
  - o The organisational form has evolved to a relevant state: the identity and autonomy of the alliance members are respected and acknowledged while programme delivery is aligned and somewhat integrated. Opportunities for improvement in terms of organisational form concern the learning agenda and the transition agenda.

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<sup>1</sup> Utilization-Focused Evaluation (UFE), developed by Michael Quinn Patton, is an approach based on the principle that an evaluation should be judged on its usefulness to its intended users. Therefore evaluations should be planned and conducted in ways that enhance the likely utilization of both the findings and of the process itself to inform decisions and improve performance.

- The evaluation characterises the FGG *approach* as a 'multi-track and multi-dimensional one. [...] This diversity and complementarity in its approaches may be considered as one of the major strengths of the FGG Alliance.' (p. 30).
- According to the evaluation 'it can confidently be concluded that in all four SOs the *effectiveness* of the work of the FGG Alliance's outputs and outcomes are "considerable" to "high"' and 'the Alliance organises its efforts as long-term programmes, which indeed seems to be the most appropriate way of working.' Factors contributing to the effectiveness include the deep expert knowledge of the Alliance members; the perseverance; intensive contacts with civil servants and strong contacts with parliamentarians; and good use of media leading to societal movement. Some additional appreciative observations on effectiveness arising from the four case studies were:
  - o The fact that our work contributes to policy changes in the long term, but within a shorter timeframe also to more tacit objectives of 'strengthening agency of ... affected communities' (p. 24). This confirms our mutual capacity development approach and the importance of a facilitating role.
  - o The fact that our multi-strategy approach, perseverance and multi-actor involvement 'systematic preparation' sometimes allows us to seize arising opportunities as a catalyst for change (p. 24).
  - o How making use of specific cases can contribute to change on the ground in the case concerned, although this is difficult, but can more importantly contribute to awareness raising in a sector (p. 24).
  - o Similarly, how we have been able to set agendas, i.e. 'create necessary conditions, opportunities and space for critical dialogue between civil society and key policy makers at EU level and in various countries worldwide (North and South).' (p.25).
- *Explaining factors* mentioned that, according to Context, have contributed to our success can be mentioned in five areas.
  - o The context: a conjuncture of political and economic developments; and the funding by the Dutch government created opportunities for our work.
  - o Organisational factors: a functional collaboration which fostered gradual emergence of coherence, synergy and joint action; quality of leadership; a healthy tension around strategic and operational issues; the formation of an alliance of six relatively small and flat and therefore flexible organisations; with one of the smaller recipients of the grant taking the lead.
  - o The approach in which different organisational and programme functions are performed in complementary manner, with autonomy respected and functional collaboration.
  - o Programme factors include joint programming within the scope of the objectives; availability of relevant and professional competencies, capabilities and capacity; and the link between local and global and between theory, research and practice.
  - o Relationships: the alliance is well managed; relationships of member organisations with Southern partner organisations are respected and shared.

### ***Follow-up to lessons learned and recommendations***

Besides the aforementioned points of appreciation, the evaluation also defines lessons learned and recommendations in twelve areas. Most of these have been discussed within the Alliance as part of the evaluation process. All will be closely looked into and lead to various options for follow-up: several have already been followed up, others inspire us to make short term adjustments to our programme or organisational form, yet others lead to longer term adjustments, while some observations we acknowledge but accept to be a reality for the moment. We have grouped the lessons learned into the following five areas:

## **I. Alternatives and the transition agenda**

(2): 'it is recommended to continue work on the alternatives agenda – which is basically a transition agenda - thus offering relevant and workable solutions to global and local challenges. Major challenges hereby are (1) finding a good combination of 'expose', 'propose' and 'practice' and (2) mainstreaming and integrating the alternatives in the broader work of the FGG and thereby making it more of a crosscutting issue.'

(8) 'It is suggested that efforts are made to integrate the transition agenda ('alternatives') and that attention is placed on gender issues at the strategic level within the four SOs.'

### *Follow-up already realised*

Within the proposal for the strategic partnership, the alternatives, or transition agenda, were mainstreamed within the three Theories of Change. Developing alternatives is acknowledged as a crucial step towards achieving results in all areas of our work and it has been defined as one of the six result levels in each of our Theories of Change.

### *Short-term adjustments*

In 2015, two important activities will be organised jointly besides the regular programme activities under SO1:

- A utility focused evaluation of at least two of the local alternatives will be organised to learn about characteristics, benefits and challenges of developing, testing and up-scaling alternatives.
- A booklet will be written (comparable to our booklet 'The strength of lobbying and advocacy') consisting of a compilation of the alternatives we have worked on in the current FGG programme and summarising some of the characteristics, strengths, results and challenges of this work. This will also contribute to knowledge development and dissemination.
- If relevant, we will organise a workshop on alternatives, positioning this in transition theory, as part of the programme development for our future strategic partnership.

## **II. Mutual capacity development approach**

(11) 'The strategy in the area remains often quite implicit. As CDS is core to the subsidy framework of the Dutch government (MFS II), the Alliance may consider to develop an overall strategic framework and a strategic approach to CDS.'

### *Follow-up already realised*

Our mutual capacity development approach is the basis for both our current programme as well as our future strategic partnership. In light of the observations arising from the MTE that it is not entirely clear from previous documentation what this strategy entails and how it works, we have paid extra attention to the issue both in our Annual Report 2013, as well as in our proposal for a strategic partnership with the Minister of Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation. We have noticed in recent interactions that our approach is indeed clearer now.

### *Short-term adjustments*

We will continue to pay attention to the nature of our capacity development approach in interactions and communication with others. In the development of the programme of the strategic partnership we will pay specific attention to this issue with the aim to find the right balance between a joint approach while maintaining the identified strength of respecting each FGG member's own modes of cooperation with their partners and networks.

### **III. Internal organisation**

On Learning Agenda and knowledge development: (8) 'The fifth SO about the joint learning agenda of the Alliance may need to be organised differently, finding a proper balance between breadth and depth is an issue of resources as well.'

And: (9) 'the learning agenda will require more systematic and explicit attention (and, as a consequence, resources)'

On gender: (10) 'Focus on, and monitoring, gender problems and solutions may need to be done more systematically and consciously. Apart from this it is desirable to pay more attention to gender issues and gender sensitivity at the strategic level within the Alliance.'

On communication: (12) 'There is a need for better alignment, coordination and strategising of the communication to ensure that FGG speaks with a common voice about the structures it aims to change.'

#### *Follow-up already realised*

Communication: Although this was not anticipated, three to four times a year the FGG communication staff members meet and exchange. Also, based on a felt need, a protocol for joint external communication has been developed and is under constant review.

General: In the partnership proposal, the organisational form has not yet been defined, but the functions currently grouped under our fifth strategic objective will be organised differently.

#### *Short-term adjustments*

In the course of 2015, the FGG Alliance will assess the current organisation design and strengthen it where relevant, based on the findings from the MTE, as well as other internal reflections. Organisational issues to reassess include the organisation of knowledge development and learning within (and beyond) the alliance, joint communication, but also possibly joint fundraising. We also acknowledge the need to resolve the framing of the debate on gender and how this would fit in our broader policy analysis.

### **IV. Programme**

(1) 'A balance needs to be continuously sought between capturing emerging critical processes and a concerted strategy that steers agenda setting over time. [...] So far the Alliance has managed this balance remarkably well. However, in order to safeguard the sustainability of this equilibrium longer-term strategies will preferably be anchored in a stronger embedded strategic framework based on a jointly developed Theory of Change.'

(3) 'A potential pitfall lies in the tendency to broaden the scope of action as - admittedly new and interesting - opportunities keep arising in the policy arenas covered.[...] overstretching one's scope may adversely affect the quality and depth of the policy analysis and subsequent lobby and advocacy interventions.'

(5) 'It is furthermore advised to provide more follow up than is already being done to local level implementation of policy changes, to put in place appropriate exit strategies, and to especially continue monitoring cases.'

#### *Follow-up already realised*

For the future strategic partnership between the FGG Alliance and the Minister, three Theories of Change have been jointly developed, with the close involvement of a high number of staff from all member organisations. The move from four strategic objectives to three Theories of Change hopefully leads to more focus. At the same time we recognise there is a constant push for broadening the scope of the work.

The need for a stronger focus on monitoring of the practice and implementation of changed policies is also recognised, and our strategies are increasingly shifting to this area of work, with increased interventions on enforcement mechanisms. This is reflected in the proposal for the future strategic partnership, where changed practice has been

formulated as an outcome which is equally important and needs to be monitored as changed policies (and as agenda setting).

#### *Short-term adjustments*

Within 2015, in the framework of programme development for a future strategic partnership, the balance between emergence and planning, and between breadth and depth of the programme will receive ample attention. For example, we will be taking this careful balance into account when defining the fields of work that will be included in the programme, and when redesigning our Monitoring and Evaluation processes.

#### *Acknowledgement of reality*

As Context rightly concludes: 'Finding such a balance in a focal range between addressing "the root of the root problems" (values and paradigms underlying harmful structures) and actual implementation of policies in specific contexts, will never be easy. The Alliance will always face the dilemma between firm planning and flexibility in action.' Similarly, a constant balance needs to be found between focus on the one hand, and the ability to work with a systems approach (recognising that many factors interplay to cause the problems we see around us and the ability to switch focus depending on opportunities) and to be flexible in response to changes in the context.

#### **V. Towards processes of influence and collaboration**

(4) 'The link from global to local appears to be relatively less well developed within the Alliance (as compared to the local-global link) and may deserve some more systematic and conscious attention in the nearby future.'

(6) 'complementarity of approaches may be fostered and needs to be continued in order to maintain an Alliance that is flexible enough to foster different practices and histories of members'

(7) 'Using a network of networks approach and broadening these networks with others 'types', [...] may be further pursued.'

(8) 'it might not be recommendable for FGG to work more on interaction between partner organisations in the global South, [this] may take the form of a donor-led platform that follows the money and stops when the money flow ends.'

#### *Follow-up already realised*

We acknowledge the value of the complementarity of our approaches and continue to seek a continuous flow between the different types of change we pursue. This was a major reason for us to write a new proposal for a strategic partnership in the current Alliance. In this partnership the collaboration within the Alliance and the networks of its members will be maintained and strengthened. In fact, it would fit our ambition to expand our networks as we believe this will allow us to be more effective.

#### *Short-term follow-up*

The fact that we respect each other's partner relations reflects a conscious decision not to form a donor-led platform. However, we will explore the needs and possibilities to invest more in interaction between partner organisations in case of further collaboration in the future.

Concerning the observation on the 'global to local link', we understand that this perception exists and will try to probe further where it arises, and will better communicate our way of working from global to local and vice versa.

**Conclusion**

Overall, the MTE has been a very useful exercise for us, and we would sincerely like to thank the team at Context, international cooperation for this.

We hope you enjoy reading the final report and would appreciate an opportunity to exchange ideas on the evaluation and its follow-up with you.

Kind regards,



Danielle Hirsch  
Director of Both ENDS, lead applicant of the FGG Alliance

*Annex:*

- Final Report of the Mid Term Evaluation of the Fair, Green and Global Programme 2011-2014