



External Evaluation of ECDPM

2016-2020

Vol 1: Main report

November 2020

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Table of Contents

Acronyms	iv
1.Executive Summary.....	vi
2.Context for the External Evaluation.....	1
2.1. Evaluation Context	1
2.1.1.Evaluation Purpose and Goals.....	1
2.1.2.Methodological Points	1
2.1.3.The Evaluation Team	5
2.1.4.Evaluation Questions and Judgement Criteria	5
2.2. Global Context	5
2.3. Institutional Context.....	5
3.Overall Conclusions and Recommendations.....	7
3.1. Conclusions.....	7
3.2. Key Recommendations	10
4.State of Play - Evaluation Findings.....	14
4.1. Evaluation Question 1: Strategic Choices	14
4.1.1.Judgement Criteria 1.1	16
4.1.1.1. Findings and Analysis JC 1.1.....	16
4.1.2.Judgement Criteria 1.2	19
4.1.3.Judgement Criteria 1.3	19
4.1.3.1. Findings and Analysis JC1.3.....	19
4.1.4.Response to Evaluation Question 1.....	20
4.2. Evaluation Question 2: Implementation	21
4.2.1.Judgement Criteria 2.1	21
4.2.1.1. Findings and Analysis JC2.1.....	21
4.2.2.Judgement Criteria 2.2	27
4.2.2.1. Findings and Analysis JC2.2.....	27
4.2.3.Judgement Criteria 2.3	30
4.2.3.1. Findings and Analysis JC2.3.....	30
4.2.4.Judgement Criteria 2.4	33
4.2.4.1. Findings and Analysis JC2.4.....	33
4.2.5.Response to Evaluation Question 2.....	36
4.3. Evaluation Question 3: Using Assets for Added Value	39
4.3.1.Judgement Criteria 3.1	39
4.3.1.1. Background JC3.1.....	39
4.3.1.2. Findings and Analysis JC3.1.....	40
4.3.2.Judgement Criteria 3.2	41
4.3.2.1. Background JC 3.2.....	41
4.3.2.2. Findings and Analysis JC3.2.....	42
4.3.3.Judgement Criteria 3.3	44

4.3.3.1.	Findings and Analysis JC3.3.....	44
4.3.4.	Response to Evaluation Question 3.....	44
4.4.	Evaluation Question 4: Contributions to Outcomes and Impact Areas.....	47
4.4.1.	Judgement Criteria 4.1	47
4.4.1.1.	Findings and Analysis JC4.1.....	47
4.4.2.	Judgement Criteria 4.2	49
4.4.3.	Judgment Criteria 4.3	49
4.4.4.	Response to Evaluation Question 4.....	49
4.5.	Evaluation Question 5: Organisational and Programmatic Choices	50
4.5.1.	Judgement Criteria 5.1	50
4.5.1.1.	Findings and Analysis JC5.1 - Results Framework, Programme Structure.....	51
4.5.2.	Judgement Criteria 5.2	52
4.5.2.1.	Findings and Analysis - JC5.2 - Diversity	52
4.5.2.2.	Findings and Analysis - JC5.2 - Geolocation.....	53
4.5.2.3.	Findings and Analysis JC5.2 - Cross Fertilization.....	53
4.5.3.	Judgement Criteria 5.3	53
4.5.3.1.	Findings and Analysis JC5.3 - Learning and Quality Support	53
4.5.4.	Judgement Criteria 5.4	55
4.5.5.	Response to Evaluation Question 5.....	55
4.6.	Communications, Outreach, Uptake (EQ2, EQ5, Judgement Criteria)	56
4.6.1.	Findings and Analysis - JC2.2 and JC5.4 (knowledge uptake).....	57
4.7.	Theory of Change (EQ1, EQ4, Judgement Criteria).....	62
4.7.1.	Findings and Analysis - JC1.2, JC4.2 and JC4.3 (theory of change).....	62
4.8.	Previous Evaluation Report Recommendations	65
Annexes.....		66

Acronyms

ACET	African Center for Economic Transformation
ACP	African, Caribbean and Pacific countries
ADA	Austrian Development Agency
AFD	Agence Française de Développement
AGA	African Governance Architecture
AI	Artificial intelligence
AIRD	African Institutions and Regional Integration programme
AU	African Union
AUC	African Union Commission
BLM	Black lives matter
AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Area
CHARE	European Commission – Change for Results EEIG
CMD	Centre for Migration and Development
CSO	Civil society organisation
DEVCO	Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development
DFID	Department for International Development
EAT	Economic and Agricultural Transformation programme
ECDPM	European Centre for Development Policy Management
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EEA	European External Affairs programme
EEAS	European External Action Service
EEIG	European Economic Interest Grouping
EIB	European Investment Bank
EIPA	European Institute of Public Administration
EP	European Parliament
EPA	Economic Partnership Agreement
EQ	Evaluation question
ET	Evaluation Team
ETTG	European Think Tank Group
EU	European Union
EUD	European Union Delegation
FOOD	Food systems, food security, agricultural transformation programme
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
HLR	High level representative
HQ	Headquarter
HR	Human resources
IATA	Reporting system
INGO	International non-governmental organisation

IPSS	Institute for Peace and Security Issues
IT	Information technology
JC	Judgement criteria
LQS	Learning Quality and Support programme
MDF	Management for Development Foundation
MFF	Multi-annual Financial Framework
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MS	Member state(s)
MT	Management Team
i.NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NUPI	Norwegian Institute of International Affairs
NWO	Dutch Research Council
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PBL	Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency
PCD	Policy coherence for development
PCSD	Policy coherence for sustainable development
PE	Political economy
PEA	Political economy analysis
PRC	Permanent Representatives Committee of the African Union
RECs	Regional Economic Communities
ROPPA	West African Farmers' Association
SAIIA	South African Institute of International Affairs
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SECURE	Security and Resilience programme
TALD	Territorial Development
TF	Task force
TMEA	TradeMark East Africa
TOC	Theory of Change
UEMOA	Union Economique et Monétaire Ouest Africaine
UK	United Kingdom
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNIMIB	Università degli Studi di Milano-Bicocca

"Today's problems are a result of yesterday's solutions"

1. Executive Summary

This report is the result of an external evaluation exercise¹ that provides a critical review of the context and performance of ECDPM. The evaluation covers the period 2016 - which marks the end of the last strategic plan - to 2020.

The overarching purpose of the evaluation was to reach judgement on whether, given the evolving context in which it operates, ECDPM has adequately and successfully implemented its 2017-2021 Strategy, and achieved relevant outcomes during the evaluation period. To this end, the evaluation assessed the pertinence and impact of the Centre's work, particularly from the point of view of its diverse stakeholder groups. It also sought to ascertain whether the institutional and programmatic structure was well aligned to deliver on the Centre's mandate and objectives effectively and efficiently. Based on findings and recommendations, the evaluation is also expected to inform the design of ECDPM's 2022-26 Strategy.

It equally served as a learning exercise for ECDPM, an accountability tool for stakeholders and contributes to reporting obligations.

The evaluation was carried out by a four person team and involved multiple - mostly virtual - interactions and consultations with management, staff and board members of ECDPM, institutional partners as well as a reference group of evaluation experts that had been set up for this evaluation. Interviews with external stakeholders was a key dimension. In total, more than 40 internal and over 75 external actors were interviewed, plus 52 respondents to an online survey, with an overall Europe/Africa balance of 65/35.

The evaluation found that:

Overall, ECDPM has adequately and successfully implemented its 2017-2021 Strategy, and achieved many relevant outcomes during the evaluation period. External stakeholders gave positive feedback on the quality of the Centre's work, its role as an independent think tank, and its timely response to new topics. The Centre's ability to pull together timely, relevant knowledge and analysis, and feed that into policy makers and/or policy processes has been a strong point, upheld by its core institutional funding, its ability to raise additional funds, and its ability to work in a "matrix format" that allows it to be relatively reactive and deliver "nexus" analyses across various themes.

On ECDPM's roles and niche the evaluation team concluded that the Centre is arguably one of the top go-to think tanks on understanding EU policy making and the Brussels external action sector, and to some extent its MS. ECDPM provides a plethora of reliable, rigorous and interesting publications and events on contemporary policy debates.

Its commitment to strengthening EU - Africa relations is a driving focus, and its deep understanding of EU policy making processes reinforces its potential to contribute to mutual appreciation of diverse interests and priorities of European and African policy makers. The Centre delivers its "broker role" through a variety of actions, including facilitation of dialogues sometimes under the radar, training, consultancies, consultations, sharing advice, delivery of technical expertise with various actors (including local), and development or application of well appreciated diagnostic tools, amongst others.

¹ March to November 2020

At the same time, in conjunction with the decolonisation of aid and knowledge, and with Africa's determination to speak for and negotiate for itself, there are more African actors interested and willing to visibly represent "African" perspectives. The AU is not where it was 5 years ago, and there are more (European) institutions working with these actors than was the case five or ten years ago. As a consequence, the Centre no longer stands out as one of the few in Europe sympathetic to an African point of view; and the jury is mixed as to whether the Centre represents Africa through a European lens, or whether the information it presents is based on an interactive process of co-creation and co-analysis with Africans on Africa, or with Africans on Europe. The Centre's credibility as a non-partisan broker in Africa, or for Africa, able to contribute to relations between Africa and the EU from a non-partisan standpoint, is shifting. There are three spaces - European think tanks, African think tanks and research bodies, and the space where these interconnect. Moving forward this space can be a strong focus of the Centre.

What does emerge strongly, however, is that the Centre's knowledge of and on Africa, and its ability to co-create with African institutions, has allowed it to produce knowledge about Africa in a few instances, and to inform its analysis of EU positions and infuse these with an African dimension; and to thereby draw conclusions relevant not just for Europe but for a wider audience.

To uphold the legitimacy and credibility of the Centre in Africa, particularly as the political environment in Africa shifts towards a more equal footing with the outside world, and explores its geopolitical ambitions, it is important, however, for the Centre to do more co-creation with African-led and -based research bodies (and other non-state and state actors), have deeper sustained partnerships, and broaden diversity in the institutional and programmatic set up of the Centre, including in top decision making levels, but also at programme and associate level. This niche area will be weakened, moving forward, if the process for analysing and gathering data on Africa is not more systematically the result of co-creation/co-analysis with dynamic African actors.

In relation to the EU, the Centre has proven manifold the key niche it occupies in its ability to be an institutional memory holder, and a keen and dedicated expert on the many facets of EU external actions, instruments, decision making processes, policies, programmes and its external relations. Its ability to interact regularly with EU and MS officials at many different levels renders it quite uniquely placed, yet able to remain 'non-partisan' and (constructively) critical. Moving forward, the Centre is well placed to push the needle on what the expansion of the EU's global role could look like.

And equally, it is clear that when the Centre takes on a thematic topic (from climate change, to migration, to food security and beyond), the quality of rigour is there; the external uptake and use of the knowledge produced is solid; and important cross-thematic threads are often present. At the same time, much more uptake across Africa would enhance visibility and perhaps credibility.

At the knowledge-driven and pragmatic partnerships levels, the Centre has demonstrated strong ability to reach out to, and work with, a multiplicity of partners. At the same time, there appears to be a lack of a consolidated, explicit "centralised fund-raising strategy" that allows for a complete and focused overview of the whole approach, with most programmes individually responsible for mobilising additional funding and consolidating knowledge driven and pragmatic partnerships; whilst also responding to the "service requests" generated by core institutional funders; and taking on consulting work. The additional funding facilitated consolidation of partnerships and the creation of new ones; though core funding inevitably filled funding gaps that mobilised funds did not quite fill. Mobilised funds clearly facilitated joint research. Some illustrations include the Centre's pivotal role in the European Think Tanks Group (ETTG); or the Centre's valued work with IPSS, in Addis Ababa, on African peace and security related work.

The Centre adopted a multi-pronged approach to address the recommendations of the previous evaluation to increase its ability to think and act politically. It established a theory of change process, meant to guide all workstreams and encourage them to apply a political analysis of pathways and obstacles to change; and it continued to promote application of analytical tools such as political economy analysis (PEA) and ECDPM's particular "5 lenses approach", along with other political analysis approaches, gender analysis, policy coherence for development, and territorial approaches to local development. To make thinking and acting politically systematic and widespread will require time, resources, incentives and deeper collaboration with local actors and technical experts. In fact, the capacity of the Centre to engage and be politically savvy requires continuous investment, buy in and enhancement - to make sure such important work is part and parcel of the Centre's niche and additional value beyond the current levels.

Diversity is not particularly well addressed: though Gender diversity was championed by the creation of a Task Force and later taken up by Human Resources, much work remains in relation to increased diversity amongst staff members, in particular at senior levels, and associates, in relation to the three G's: Geography (race), Generation, and Gender. This is not a question of numbers only so much as it is a question of corporate culture and ensuring diversity integrates how research is framed, what and how questions are asked, and to whom. Diversity of perspectives across the Gs are vital to depth of content, moving forward.

Important strategic choices were made organisationally:

The complex structure of programmes, task forces, cross-cutting themes, analytical tools etc. (and how finances are allocated) dilutes the Centre's ability to strongly focus on its key priorities and appears to place most topics on a horizontal rather than a vertical order of priority, though this is not matched with resources attributions. While multi-disciplinary output and the "nexus" lens is a key Centre attribute, the ability to 'matrix' across programmes and to deliver products that benefit from this, seems to exist despite the structure more than because of the structure.

The establishment of cross-cutting task forces/focus approaches to champion key issues (Africa-EU relations, gender, climate, and policy coherence) contributed to better integrate the contextual complexities that were relevant for the strategic priority areas but suffered from mandates that were not always clear as well as minimal dedicated budgets. Though some cross-cutting areas were explicit focus requests in the theory of change process (gender, climate) others were not (Africa-Europe relations, Africa, Europe, North Africa). Tracking of cross-cutting imperatives and strategic priorities was uneven.

The further professionalisation of functional units supporting primary processes resulted in a reduced reporting burden on programmes; more attention to corporate identity focused decision making; more centralised support for fund raising and clear financial and institutional partnership successes; modernised HR systems; vastly increased visibility and user-friendliness of communication and knowledge products and tools. The creation of the Learning and Quality Support unit strongly contributed to strengthening ECDPM's internal accountability; learning and quality processes. There is strong capacity within the Centre for constructive self-reflection and criticism; reorganisation of working modalities; and high-quality monitoring and reporting.

The evaluation recommends *i.a.*, that as ECDPM devises its next five-year Strategy it should:

Make Strategic Choices for Sustained Outcomes

Reflect, in collaboration with European and African stakeholders, on how the Centre might aspire to influence the conversation about nexus areas between European/EU strategic priorities and African strategic aspirations as identified in policy documents (e.g., Agenda 2063 and Europe/EU Priorities, EU-Africa Strategy).

Engage Differently and More Dynamically with, in, and on Africa

Consider a dedicated and well financed African focused strategy/initiative, led by a senior, politically well leveraged, and networked African researcher and policy expert. Establish presence in Africa - at least in Addis Ababa – to engage with the AU, Member States (PRC) and RECs policy processes, to enhance update and brokerage of knowledge and to strengthen co-creative partnerships and collaboration with peer institutes in Africa towards a dialogue of equals; including as an important factor in strengthening analysis of Europe-Africa relations and the varied perspectives therein. This would help to reinforce the more systematic integration of African dimensions across workstreams; and increase return on investments in deeper partnerships.

Review Niche and Recentre Identity

Ensure that ECDPM's identity going forward is centred on the niche areas of its future. Recognise and reinforce the clear niche on EU and its external actions, EU's geo-political roles and ambitions; consider explicitly broadening the European scope beyond EU, emphasise the nexus lens as a key niche area upheld by the intense capacity to mix multi-disciplinary rigorous analysis with cross-cutting analytical lenses on a broad number of topics. Consider a re-centring towards paying more attention to emerging trends and opportunities (e.g. revitalised agency and strengthened capacities of Africans to address their own priorities as well as the global BLM movement which resonates deeply there) and to contribute to, and play an important part in, decolonisation of knowledge and analysis.

Reimagine Influence and Brokering Modalities

Invest in institutional partnerships and collaboration as a means of delivery, knowledge production, uptake and brokerage with European and African stakeholders - political institutions, think tanks, universities, and other research bodies. Upgrade infrastructure and IT tools for more digitally smart, mobile-friendly, user friendly, modern and multi-lingual communication platforms and presence. Reach into Africa with multi-lingual research products and processes.

Enhance the Corporate Culture and Increase Diversity

People are the backbone to any think tank, including ECDPM. Corporate cultures must keep up with the times and evolve with them. To help effect changes to corporate culture, ECDPM should accelerate its current delivery on the Management Review recommendations; establish a Board led diversity exercise to more precisely identify concerns and issues across the Centre pertaining to the 3 Gs - gender, geography (race), generation - and other corporate-culture topics; and devise a diversity strategy that recognises that this is not only, nor primarily, a numbers game. It is not a question of identity politics. It is about ensuring depth and quality to the analytical process used to frame research, and bolstering credibility.

Restructure towards a Fit-for Future Organisation

Consider a simplified, more matrixed and flexible structure that helps ensure a maximum focus on whichever key future priorities and cross cutting imperatives are identified. Ensure that modalities for tracking delivery against key future priorities are implemented. Move towards an integrated vertical and horizontal decision making modality to help avoid the silo effect, help have a more centralised overview of budget allocations and approach to fund raising in order to ensure core funding for key priorities, and (continue to) avoid being market-driven rather than strategy driven; and to allow programme teams to focus more on delivery of substance.

2. Context for the External Evaluation

2.1. Evaluation Context

ECDPM delivers its work using five-year strategic plans and applies iterative monitoring and review processes generated in-house and provided to institutional funders. In addition, the ECDPM Board commissions an external evaluation every five years. These evaluations serve as a learning opportunity, act as accountability and transparency mechanisms, and provide input to the development of new strategies.

2.1.1. Evaluation Purpose and Goals

This report is the response to a request from ECDPM's Board to conduct an external evaluation that focused on the Centre 'as a whole' and was both "strategic and institutional in nature". The evaluation attempts to provide a critical review of the context and performance of the Centre, assess how it is evolving, and provide some insight on the pattern of outcomes related to the Centre's efforts. The evaluation covers the period 2016 (end of the previous strategy) to September 2020.

The overarching purpose of the evaluation was to reach a judgement on whether, given the evolving context in which it operates, ECDPM had adequately and successfully implemented its Strategy 2017-2021, achieved relevant outcomes during the evaluation period, and played its various roles successfully, in particular, from the point of view of its diverse stakeholder groups. It also sought to ascertain whether the institutional and programmatic structure was well aligned to effectively and efficiently deliver on the Centre's mandate and objectives, reinforce its strengths and "added value". It aimed to determine whether the socio-economic, political and global environment during the period under evaluation (2016-2020) was appropriately reflected in the strategic choices of the Centre. It also aimed to determine if and how the Centre adapted, evolved and optimised emerging opportunities to achieve the strategic plan's results and outcomes. The evaluation also considered, without going into data parameters, how the Centre positioned itself for engagement and influence, addressed research relevance, ensured quality, and positioned itself for learning and strategic thinking.

The evaluation, as requested, highlights strong and weak points as well as relevant dilemmas the Centre faces, and makes a global assessment (*i.e. not a programme by programme assessment*) of the pertinence, effectiveness, efficiency and impact² of the Centre's work in particular from the point of view of its diverse stakeholder groups.

The evaluation was conducted, and the report has been written, so as to also constitute an accountability tool for stakeholders, including for the Board and institutional partners. This report equally contributes to reporting obligations, in particular for the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (the main institutional funder).

2.1.2. Methodological Points

Process

The evaluation was guided by the Centre's 2017-21 overall strategic goals and intended outcomes and impact, as well as the 5 evaluation questions and the 17 judgement criteria as laid out in the ToR for the external evaluation.

² In fact the evaluation is focused on outcome level, not impact level.

To evaluate the Centre as “a whole” the Evaluation Team did not conduct a series of individual performance assessments. Rather, in fulfilling the requests laid out in the ToR, it drew illustrations from the workstreams, core programmes, task forces, support units, and ‘primary processes’. It triangulated these, and relevant qualitative and quantitative data, through internal and external interviews, in order to establish solid evidence to illustrate the successes and challenges of the Centre, and inform evaluation team analyses.

The evaluation process itself was iterative. After a first reading of output, internal assessments and other monitoring, the team conducted interviews with internal stakeholders; this was followed by interviews with external stakeholders, and the launch of a survey for external stakeholders which were not interviewed personally. This allowed interactions with external stakeholders to be strongly informed by a thorough overview of the Centre’s work and internal processes. As well, several interactions with the Centre throughout the evaluation process allowed the team to adjust and refine understanding. Interviews with members of the Board of ECDPM were conducted towards the end of the interview process. This allowed for rich discussions focused on external input and initial reflections by the evaluation team, and allowed the team to triangulate certain points.

Indeed the evaluation process involved multiple interactions and consultations with ECDPM³, including participation in portions of several all-Centre strategic retreats, presentation of initial findings to the management team; and an institutional partners meeting at which findings were shared and discussed. The inception report, methodology, initial and final conclusions benefitted from consultations with the Board and the reference group⁴. The results of these dialogue processes were absorbed into the evaluation team deliberations. As such, the iterative evaluation process served as an interactive learning process for the Centre and the Evaluation Team (ET), and provided relevant food-for-thought for the 2022-26 Strategy formulation process.

Evidence and data

Evaluations rely on evidence, and its triangulation, in order to properly analyse and assess successes, challenges, and opportunities. In terms of output, and linkages between output and stated outcome goals, ECDPM provides in its reporting (including IATA) a plethora of succinctly captured illustrations of evidence. Good examples are contained in the annual reports and the IATI reporting. Examples are lifted from the latest annual report and can be found in Annex. The evaluation team was able to validate and verify this evidence through its own reading of ECDPM’s internal papers and external publications, through its survey (also in Annex) and its interviews with external and internal stakeholders. ECDPM also conducted an extensive internal assessment exercise, with internal assessment notes produced for each programme and some task forces as well as a synthesis note; and internal mid-term strategic review note. These were admirably self-critical and candid, for the most part and provided important insight into the Centre’s own reflections on what worked well, and where challenges remained. They also underlined the extent to which transparent internal discussions push the Centre to do better, to self-analyse, to encourage change and to innovate. Other categories of evidence sources are listed in the inception report and in the methodology (available in Annex).

The evaluation team took great care, when presenting findings, or using interview citations in this report to ensure these were backed up by the team’s own readings of outputs, and a sufficient number of interview comments so as

³ The team, in the first draft of the Inception Report, tried to re-organize and re-draft the evaluation questions and suggest different assessment criteria for these so as to facilitate and simplify the evaluation exercise. Ultimately these were not accepted, though some changes to the original EQ/JCs were made by the Centre; and the evaluation team agreed to accommodate as best it could to the EQs and JCs.

⁴ The reference group, consisting of three eminent evaluation experts from The Netherlands, Finland and Germany, reviewed the inception report, a draft final evaluation report and provided constructive comments; and validated the report and methodology used by the Evaluation Team.

to render these plausibly valid, since external interviews are the primary source of triangulating the data, analysis, and internal interviews provided by the Centre to the team, as the methodology indicates.

Many data points are made explicit in the report to make the evidence for judgements and recommendations traceable. However, they remain illustrations of the predominantly qualitative judgements of the evaluation team as a result of a broad-based triangulation effort.

The external respondents were suggested by ECDPM, and the evaluation team chose to either interview these respondents in person or to send them survey questions (available at Annex). The purpose of external interviews was to validate information and analysis provided by ECDPM; identify how and to what extent external stakeholders interact with, and use the output of, ECDPM; identify patterns and trends in perception and use of ECDPM; identify useful and constructive suggestions or lessons learnt; identify narratives, and examples of outcomes or impact.

In terms of evidence towards outcomes, the team used the very well-produced data from the Centre, illustrating how, where and when output resulted in relevant outcomes; and triangulated it with interviews, the survey to external actors, and data points from ECDPM publications and website.

In choosing illustrations and in drawing conclusions, the views and perceptions of internal and external stakeholders (what was said, what was not said; what was perceived to be results and influence at different levels) were combined in a careful consideration of data, output, documentary and other analysis, cross-reading and cross-checking, and interpretation by the team, using - and based on - its broad and deep understanding of topics, environments and processes relevant to ECDPM and to the evaluation.

Evaluation questions and judgement criteria

The team notes that the 17 judgement criteria (JC) attached to the 5 evaluation questions (EQ) were at times fairly convoluted; and different angles of almost the same query were scattered across them. Therefore, there remains a degree of overlap across chapters in the evaluation report, and in some instances, JC's from different evaluation questions are grouped together.

Each judgement criteria (see Annex) has been considered in-depth and findings, conclusions and recommendations for each judgement criteria were presented in an initial draft of the evaluation report. The evaluation report consolidates the detailed judgement-criteria-related recommendations and conclusions into a set of overall conclusions and key recommendations in chapter 3 . Findings and responses to each evaluation question at the are in chapter 4.

Methodological challenges and points to note

The evaluation team encountered a few methodological challenges in conducting this exercise, in particular due to Covid-19 related circumstances, and several points need to be emphasised.

The evaluation *primarily* focused on assessing the relevance of outputs and their contributions to outcome level results by ECDPM, rather than contributions to impact, as measuring impact for a “think and do” tank is complex and difficult, and the impact goals delineated in the Strategy are fairly high-level, and closely aligned with some of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Impact links, it was agreed, were unlikely to be linear or solely attributable to the Centre. Outcomes delineated by the Centre were more tangible and it was easier to draw contribution links and plausible attribution links between them and the Centre's output.

Other challenges to note:

- a. the evaluation took place almost entirely on a virtual basis, so the team was unable to meet or deliberate in person over a set of consolidated "team days"; this made the analytical process longer and more time consuming;
- b. external interviews, internal interviews and interactions, and meetings with Board, institutional donors, and reference group were almost exclusively virtual;

in relation to external interviews:

- i. it was not possible to have even numbers of respondents for each topic, programme or workstream;
- ii. securing external interviews was highly challenging, with about a 50% response rate overall, but a lower response rate from African stakeholders (about 30% return rate) (in Africa and in Europe) despite repeated 'reach out' attempts;
- iii. methodologically, the balance of external interviews was not ideal but when "interview results" are used or quoted, they are representative of several respondents' viewpoints; the report never represents one person's or a minority viewpoint, ever, and evaluators used their judgement, and their own analysis, to assess the extent to which a series of comments appeared valid and was reiterated by various respondents;
- iv. several interviews in Africa (and a few in Europe) were either "off book" or "non interviews", and were therefore not official though they were with individuals suggested for interview by ECDPM. This amounted to about 4 % of external interviews, but the standing and relevance of those individuals encouraged the team to consider their points seriously and integrate them into findings⁵.

Other methodological points worth noting:

- c. the interview team was able to speak with a broad cross-sector of internal and external actors across the programmes, task forces, units and cross-cutting domains. In total 40+ internal and 75+ external actors were interviewed in Europe and in Africa. These were from government, intergovernmental and regional organisations, EU, think tanks, research bodies, CSOs, NGOs etc. Interviews lasted between thirty minutes to two hours; most were over an hour. Many internal interviews were grouped by programme or task team/focus members;
- d. the response rate to the survey created and conducted by the team towards actors who were *not* interviewed (in Africa, Europe, and a few outside these two geographies) was good, as far as surveys go (50,5% (103 invitations/52 respondents) as was the Europe/Africa balance (roughly 65%/35%);⁶
- e. combined, respondents and externals, the team received data from 127 stakeholders; combined with internal interviews, the number reaches about 170;
- f. where illustrations, citations, or examples are used - focused on a specific workstream, topic, or output - these are meant to illustrate a point - and not to specifically criticise or praise an individual, a team, a programme or an output;
- g. it is possible to have a general statement that is overall positive, while still pointing to reservations or suggestions for improvement.

A more detailed description of the methodology is available in Annex.

⁵ These individuals are not listed; this is entirely in keeping with OECD DAC Evaluation Criteria.

⁶ The evaluation team did not officially correlate responses from different types of actors in the survey to responses from the same types of actors in the external interviews; though it found no surprises between responses from survey takers and external interviews by type of actor because in each type of actor we received a range of responses and viewpoints. The type of actors surveyed are represented in section 5.7, Q1 (in Annex on the Survey responses).

2.1.3. The Evaluation Team

The four-person evaluation team combined a wide set of directly relevant thematic expertise and professional experience. These include: insider experience with political negotiations in Africa; multilateral and donor policy negotiations at national and international levels; international cooperation and aid policy drafting and management; programme and project management in the field (including in Africa) and headquarters; research; think tanking; teaching; training; evaluation and monitoring experience; political economy analysis; business and board management. Team bios are available at Annex.

2.1.4. Evaluation Questions and Judgement Criteria

The subject areas of the evaluation questions are as follows:

Context and Strategic Choices of the Centre
Implementation Issues
Using Assets and Delivering Added Value
Outcomes and Impact
Organisational and Programmatic Choices

The five evaluation questions and their seventeen judgement criteria are in Annex.

2.2. Global Context

As outlined in Chapter 4.1 below, which presents the findings on the strategic choices of ECDPM for the period 2016 – 2020, the Centre has very well captured the global context and relevant research questions (the “what”) and processes (the “how”) for its current strategy. It has also reacted appropriately and timely to new developments which could not be fully grasped at the outset of its current strategy period (Brexit, geopolitical developments, Covid 19). Going forward, and in view of the next strategy of ECDPM, it appears that the ongoing shifts in societies as well as in international politics are disruptive in several respects and probably demand more than the usual incremental adjustments of thematic foci and ways of working. The evaluation team is of the opinion that in view of the ongoing disruptions - in geopolitics, in Africa, and in the EU; in the ways of cooperation and communication; in debates about interests, values and identity; in the decolonisation of politics and knowledge - what was appropriate five years ago has to be thoroughly reconsidered for the next strategic period. Therefore, despite the overall very positive findings on the Centre’s work in the ongoing strategic period, the team does not hold back in pointing to critical issues which are of relevance for shaping the Centre’s future work, particularly when they are backed by critical remarks and suggestions of external stakeholders.

2.3. Institutional Context

Mission: As stated in its current strategy, "the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) is an independent think tank working on international cooperation and development policy in Europe and Africa. Its mission is to promote forms of international cooperation that can effectively address key global development challenges and generate inclusive and sustainable solutions. It supports European, African and global actors in devising coherent, integrated policies and in ensuring their effective implementation. ECDPM partners with and supports responsive institutions and engaged societies, working together with others to establish innovative cooperation frameworks and tools." (ECDPM Strategy 2017-2021). ECDPM has been operational since 1986, with offices in Maastricht (HQ) and Brussels.

Strategy: ECDPM has a five-year strategy, and a five-year results framework with a five-year business cycle. The strategy, implementation plan and results framework present the Centre-wide theory of change, intended areas of impact, and intended outcomes /objectives /actions for the Centre's programmes. A logical framework structure is applied to present and track results, including to IATI. Programmes and other work streams use theories of change to guide their work and decisions, with some 20 theories of change produced since 2016 to accompany some 20 different workstreams.

New Strategic Priority Areas: The current strategy identifies four main strategic priorities, cited below:

1. our primary focus will be on Europe-Africa relations;
2. we will fully incorporate North Africa in our geographic remit;
3. we will deepen our engagement with government, intergovernmental and diplomatic actors, with private-sector actors and interest groups, and with farmers' associations, civil society networks and local authorities;
4. we will consider more deeply the internal factors that shape European external action outcomes.

Organisational Structure: ECDPM delivers its strategy through seven programmes, and three of these (each with a programme head) are grouped under one cluster heading (EAT); as well as through task forces or focus on cross-cutting areas (EU-Africa, climate change, gender, political economy analysis, policy coherence for sustainable development, territorial development) and with assistance from the support units (listed further down). Staff are generally organised around these main programme areas:

1. European External Affairs
2. African Institutions and Reform Dynamics
3. Migration
4. Security and Resilience

Economic and Agricultural Transformation Cluster (3 programmes):

5. Trade, Investment, Financing for sustainable development
6. Food systems, food security, agricultural transformation
7. Private sector engagement

ECDPM carries out cross-centre work, including through its centre-wide task forces that aim to ensure cross-institutional or horizontal approaches; and topic teams are created to address *ad hoc* or cross-centre topics, and at times to integrate these within the main programmes.

This includes Task Forces or a cross-cutting focus as follows⁷:

1. Gender Task Force
2. Europe-Africa Relations Task Force (includes former North Africa Task Force)
3. Climate Change Task Force
4. Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (PCD/PCSD)
5. Political Economy
6. Territorial Development⁸

Support units: fulfil normal support functions of a think tank and ensure major institutional support functions:

1. Learning and Quality Support Unit (LQS)
2. Communications Unit for results and knowledge uptake

⁷ ECDPM Strategy Implementation Plan 2018-2021, page19.

⁸ A dedicated Theory of Change and workstream on Territorial Development was dropped in 2019 due to lack of a critical mass of activities and TD was then "mainstreamed".

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3. The Institutional Relations and Partnerships Unit⁹
 4. The Human Resources Unit
 5. The Finance Unit

Funding and budget: The funding sources combine the use of long-term institutional (non-earmarked) funding with additional discreet financing sources. As the 2020-2021 Work Plan explains, ECDPM's total budget is set at €8 million, with institutional funding accounting for roughly 60%. The remaining roughly 40% is from project and programme funding, and most of this is project funding. Staff numbers have decreased slightly since 2017.¹⁰ The core institutional funders by country are: The Netherlands (slightly over 50% of core funding), Sweden, Ireland, Switzerland, Luxembourg, Belgium, Finland, Denmark, Austria, Estonia. (An entire section addresses finance issues further in the report.)

Risk assessment: The Centre states that whilst elaborating its Strategy, it included specific reflections on external risks, programmatic risks, organisational risks, finance-planning-control risks. And considered probability and impact of these, in order to establish risk mitigation measures.¹¹

3. Overall Conclusions and Recommendations

3.1. Conclusions

Taking the 17 judgement criteria and 5 evaluation questions as the yardstick, overall, ECDPM has adequately and successfully implemented its Strategy 2017-2021, and achieved relevant outcomes during the evaluation period.

Its thematic (programmatic) focus, the use of political, gender, policy coherence, and climate change assessments along with the Centre's various cross-cutting imperatives and coupled with active fulfilment of its three core roles and methods of working allowed ECDPM to have plausible and excellent, top drawer contributions towards its key outcome area objectives, namely:

- Better informed and empowered actors
- More inclusive dialogue and policy processes
- Coherent and integrated policies
- Reduced policy gaps
- Empowered institutions
- Effective multi actor partnerships

In relation to ECDPM's roles, value added, and methods of working, the Centre unquestionably:

- Generates knowledge that is politically informed, evidence-based and practical.
- Facilitates uptake of knowledge by key public and private actors through dialogue, implementation support and smart communication.
- Acts as a non-partisan broker, leveraging expertise, knowledge and networks in Europe.
- Bridges many policy domains and delivers pertinent and practical "nexus" insights.

⁹ ECDPM Strategy Implementation Plan 2018-2021, section 4.3.

¹⁰ According to Human resources, 67 staff in 2017, 66 staff in 2020.

¹¹ ECDPM Strategy Implementation Plan 2018-2021, Annex 2 Risk Matrix.

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- Enjoys a strong reputation as a credible and rigorous think tank and do tank, deeply knowledgeable about EU and MS, that is also a historically important knowledge keeper on Africa, able to influence policy by brokering knowledge and providing advice.
 - Is active on the EU Africa bridge, and a good source of insight on Africa-EU relations, despite a shifting reputation in this area, in particular, but not only, from African perspectives.

ECDPM does indeed deliver: practical policy advice; training and support advice; and expertise by providing background information to partners and the media; thorough and rigorous policy research, sharp analysis and fresh ideas; and partnerships and dialogue - including through organising and speaking at debates, conferences and workshops, and connecting people, brokering partnerships and creating space for dialogue. It does this in a fine and eloquent application of its roles and working methods. It is this particular combination that ensures ECDPM is both a "think" and a "do" tank, and holds a niche in the international cooperation- Europe arena; and influences the EU-Africa' arena.

ECDPM adapted its Strategy 2017-2021 to the evolving general political, institutional and financial context in which think tanks such as ECDPM operate, by making strategic choices regarding 'the what' and the 'how'. These were, for the most part, appropriate. The strategic priorities made sense, and the Centre delivered output and outcomes that supported these priorities. This is in particular true for the priority focused on European external actions, though they are not alone.

At the same time, how the priorities translated into programmes and organisational structure was uneven, with priorities 1) Europe-Africa relations and 2) fully incorporate North Africa rendered to Task Forces (with minimal funding), priority 3) reflect the multi-actor nature of the 2030 Agenda treated as a general principle; and priority 4) consider internal factors that shape European external action outcomes treated as a full-fledged programme. Each of the seven programmes, around which the main body of work and the bulk of staff were organised, addressed topics of relevance to Africa, with both the AIRD and the EAT programme cluster heavily focused on Africa; and the SECURE programme focused explicitly on both Europe and Africa. And other programmes focused on Africa in some instances. However, there was no explicit or measurable "Africa strategy", no "Africa-EU relations" strategy, and though issues of relevance to North Africa have been addressed, all programmes have not yet fully incorporated North Africa.

No tracking systems were used to explicitly track the four priority areas of the Strategy though the 4th area (Europe) had dedicated a programme, so its output was "tracked".

The support to Africa-EU relations, in particular, despite some good outcomes and output, and the thinking through of the Centre's approach to Africa, are in need of a reconceptualisation to fit in with the current evolutions around de-colonisation of aid, decolonisation of knowledge, and the need for stronger and better "co-creation", and realistic assessment of the Centre's value added going forward. Therefore, despite good progress in advancing the four priorities, there is also room to grow.

Important strategic choices were made organisationally on four levels, most tangibly successful, and also with room to grow:

The first level was the choice of Programmes around which the main body of work was focused. These contributed clearly to upholding the Centre's niche, by using its core roles and its working methods. And contributed, with other activities, to its credibility.

The second was to establish cross-cutting task forces or approaches to champion key issues (Africa-EU relations, gender, climate, and policy coherence); with a general push for cross-programmatic and cross-Centre teams and workstreams whenever feasible. These had some real successes but suffered from not always clear mandates, and minimal dedicated budgets, and uneven tracking systems.

The third was to professionalise further the functional units supporting primary processes. The Learning and Quality Support unit was established with success; the Finance unit was enhanced; the Human resources unit was professionalised (and the head is part of senior staff); the Communications unit was further professionalised and (the head is part of senior staff). Each had tangible and relevant impact. This included less reporting burden on programmes, more emphasis on corporate "identity" focused decision making, enhanced learning and accountability; vastly increased visibility and user-friendliness of output/publications, website; more centralised support for fund raising and clear finance and institutional partnership successes; modernised HR systems (with clearer understanding of human resources systems, gaps and opportunities; and a push for better gender-balance; but no senior African currently in the Management Team (MT)).

A fourth was to remain in Europe and to not expand to have a permanent and physical presence in Africa.

In terms of "fit-for-purpose" structure, it was apparent that the Programmes/Task Forces/Cross Centre work organisational choices created a relatively complex organisational structure; and cross-centre collaboration systematically ran up against funding-financing structures and challenges (that were often overcome but at what opportunity cost).

So organisational choices on the "how" do support the "what" but there is room to grow moving forward. And the how does not yet allow ECDPM to entirely realise its goal to fully integrate EU-Africa *relations* in its programmes, nor fully integrate North Africa. There is a strong imperative to re-consider modalities for increasing co-creation, co-analysis with Africa, in Africa - when it comes to addressing *relations* between the two continents, and when it comes to addressing topics of particular *interest to Africa*; and in ensuring African perspectives help to drive the research frame and the content focus. This is accompanied, in relation to the Centre's quest to be "independent" and "non-partisan" by a strong imperative, moving forward, to consider to what extent its major programme area choices and work topics are relevant and priorities for both Africa and the EU (Europe). And to consider options for stronger presence in Africa.

Finally, in relation to ECDPM's niche and identity, as a "think and do" tank, it very clearly occupies an important niche with unique selling points, not least as a provider of analysis delivered with a rigorous "nexus" lens. It clearly holds a strong and well-recognised niche in relation to the EU, EU Member States, and EU external actions. In terms of its Africa-EU relations, and related "Africa" "niche", the results are patchy at higher continental and regional political/political/policy process levels; whilst its credibility and effectiveness around themes, and therein related to Africa, remains strong. Most importantly, though, the Centre is reviewing what it means to "do" in Africa, as it moves forward, and considering how to ensure it has sufficient co-creation in Africa, given evolving contexts, and this is commendable. Equally, the Centre is considering affirming a future emphasis "on Europe, beyond EU"; and a focus on significant non-EU dynamic actors in Africa (European and others; government and private sector).

ECDPM "niche" is confirmed by the high demand for its services and outputs, more from Europe, but also from Africa, and in particular for more information, i.a.,:

- on Europe, the EU, and its Member States (including for Africa)
- on Africa (including for Europe and for the EU and its Member States)
- political analysis on consequences of policy choices

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- insights on gaps and areas of convergence between the Continents, and this for all themes and workstreams
 - insights relevant to relations with Africa
 - nexus lens on thematic priority issues (i.e. multidisciplinary lens and content)

3.2. Key Recommendations

The evaluation team has synthesised the below set of recommendations, and some of these intentionally overlap. In view of the next strategy of ECDPM, it appears that the ongoing shifts in societies as well as in international politics are disruptive in several respects and probably demand more than the usual incremental adjustments of thematic foci and ways of working. Given these ongoing disruptions - in geopolitics, in Africa, and in the EU; in the ways of cooperation and communication; in debates about interests, values and identity; in the decolonisation of politics and knowledge - what was appropriate five years ago has to be thoroughly reconsidered for the next strategic period. The evaluation team believes that the below elements are highly relevant for shaping the Centre's future work, as it transitions towards a new strategic period to reinforce its strengths, make some evidence-based decisions, seize opportunities and address challenges moving forward.¹² Detailed options for consideration for each of the 17 judgement criteria used for the evaluation are available in Annex.

1. Make Strategic Choices as Opportunities for Sustained Outcomes

As ECDPM devises its next five-year Strategy, and makes strategic choices, it could:

- Reflect on how the Centre can influence the debate about the future of European development cooperation, within international cooperation more broadly, the "values" vs "interests" and the "decolonisation of aid and knowledge" debates and what these mean for "international cooperation" (including increased focus on finance mechanisms and private sector and other global actors); and reflect on how this translates across ECDPMs strategic choices.
- Reflect, in collaboration with European and African stakeholders, on how the Centre might aspire to influence the conversation about nexus areas between European/EU strategic priorities and African strategic aspirations as identified in policy documents (e.g., Agenda 2063 and Europe/EU Priorities, EU-Africa Strategy).
- Consider strengthening and broadening non-EU Europe analysis and focus, and the interplay between EU actors and other European actors, and not only in relation to Africa.
- Reflect on how the Centre might aspire to influence the dialogue about relations between the two; and ensure an explicit Africa-EU relations strategy:
 - think politically – what does a political analysis tell us about trade-offs from EU or from Africa perspectives, and
 - review how this informs their relations, and choices made by the Centre.
- Invest in strategic partnering and presence in Europe and in Africa. Politically analyse policies from multi-perspectives, and contribute to policy influence and deliberations.
- Enhance the strategy to manage external know how, outreach and uptake as integral to delivering relevant quality knowledge.
- Create a strategy to co-create and partner with and in Africa.
- Ensure organisational structure and tracking reflect strategic priorities.

¹² These recommendations do not imply that the Centre is not already addressing or carrying out some of these elements; simply that these are especially important moving forward.

2. Review Niches and Identity

Ensure that ECDPM's identity going forward is centred on the niche areas of its future.

- Retain EU's external actions and geopolitical role in the international cooperation context as the Centre's strategic niche area, and provide room and adaptability to integrate global agendas – global sustainable development - and key global players. Consider explicitly broadening the European scope beyond EU.
- Retain Africa-EU strategic priority and focus on Africa as niche areas that require a certain recentring of the identity towards greater multi-actor co-creation with Africa and drill down on the juxtaposition or commonalities of African and European perspectives.
- Consider a re-centring towards paying more attention to emerging trends and opportunities (e.g. revitalised agency and strengthened capacities of Africans to address their own priorities as well as the global BLM movement which resonates deeply there) and to contributing to, and playing an important part in, decolonisation of knowledge and analysis.
- Emphasise the nexus lens as a key identifying element of ECDPM and a niche area upheld by the intense multi-disciplinarity of ECDPM and its capacity to mix multi-and inter-disciplinary analysis with cross-cutting analytical lenses (gender, climate, politics, economics etc on a broad number of topics).
- Interpret explicitly “development” as global sustainable development, with development cooperation as one policy area to be managed, with others, towards sustainable development, and as part of international cooperation.
- Consider how the Centre's strengths will fit into the evolving environment, and whether some of these, and niche areas it can fill in future, may need to be branded differently, moving forward.
- Seize and address emerging priorities and diversity in Africa and Europe
- Reflect these dynamics in the Centre's institutional and organisational structures.
- Devise a system to allow more systematic delivery of cross-cutting lenses results.
- Consider more co-creation with actors beyond the Centre to reinforce credibility, identity and effective uptake.

3. Engage Differently and More Dynamically

with, in, and on Africa

- Deepen political analysis of policy implications of “all sides” Africa, Europe, EU and globally (think politically about policy choices). Consider drilling down on the obstacles and pathways to change - and exposing these from various perspectives.
- Ensure more co-creation, ring-fence funds.
- Consider a dedicated African focused strategy/initiative, core-fund financed, led by a senior, politically well leveraged and networked, African researcher and policy expert.
- Establish presence¹³ in Africa - at least in Addis Ababa – to engage with the AU, Member States (PRC) and RECs policy processes to enhance update and brokerage of knowledge strengthen co-creative partnerships

¹³ feasible in a post COVID context to have such presence remotely and innovatively and at minimal costs– by sharing hosting costs with a like-minded think tank.

and collaboration with peer institutes in Africa towards a dialogue of equals; including as an important factor in strengthening analysis of Europe-Africa relations and the varied perspectives therein. This would help to reinforce the more systematic integration of African dimensions across workstreams; and increase return on investments in deeper partnerships.

- Broaden multi-actor focus on dynamic public and private actors and their partnerships in Africa, including beyond EU/European actors.

in Europe, beyond EU

- Continue to work with actors in EU member states (not only governments) on teasing out the influence of EU's internal diversity on its external policies.
- Extend the ETTG to eastern and southern Europe as a research and dialogue platform for the development of coherent EU-policy concepts.
- Consider geopolitics of EU within broader Europe, but also beyond Africa.

4. Reimagine Influence and Brokering Modalities

- Invest in institutional partnerships and collaboration as a means of delivery, knowledge production, uptake and brokerage with European and African stakeholders - political institutions, think tanks and other research bodies.
- Strengthen EU Africa bridge – enhance niche & credibility in and on Africa, establish longer term strategies for consolidated partnering with African stakeholders, consider greater presence, towards more balance of perspectives but also a focus on EU's need to “get behind the scenes” to better understand Africa – and vice versa - towards a dialogue of equals.
- Critically assess the Centre's influence and brokering strategies – strengthen links between influencing policy debates and processes, outreach, communications, co-creation and brokering knowledge for enhanced credibility and depth of knowledge. Communications and outreach are intrinsic to credibility and uptake, impact, and partnering, and not just to visibility.
- Integrate audience knowledge needs at the early stage of workstream conceptualisation and management to increase potential influence and uptake; and ensure the "fit for purpose" knowledge is identified, "fit for purpose" knowledge sources are used and "fit for end-user" knowledge products released.
- Upgrade infrastructure and IT tools for more digitally smart, mobile-platform friendly, user friendly modern and multi-lingual communications platforms and presence; including social media.
- Reach further into Africa with multi-lingual research products and processes; and increase publications in French, Arabic, Portuguese, Spanish.

5. Enhance the Corporate Culture and Increase Diversity

People are the backbone to any think tank, including ECDPM. Corporate cultures must keep up with the times and evolve with them. Corporate cultures affect the depth of analytical lenses and help to frame research. To help evolve the corporate culture:

- Accelerate delivery on the Management Review recommendations.
- Establish a Board led "diversity exercise" to identify a pathway to change across ECDPM pertaining to the 3 Gs - gender, geography (race), generation and other corporate-culture topics so as to broaden internal dialogue, analytical scope and depth.
- Devise a diversity strategy (human resources and programming) that recognises that this is not only, nor primarily, a numbers game. It is about ensuring depth and quality to the analytical process used to frame research, and bolstering credibility

6. Restructure towards a Fit-for Future Organisation

As ECDPM prepares for the future, it could consider the following in order to create a "fit-for-future" organisational structure and management approach, so that structure and fund allocations match strategic priorities.

- Consider a simplified, more matrixed and more flexible structure that helps ensure a maximum focus on whichever key future priorities and cross cutting imperatives are identified (few programs, several cross-centre teams matrixed around workstreams better able to include cross-cutting and multi-thematic analysis and actors, no task forces).
- Strengthen the office of the Director (director and deputy director) toward an integrated vertical and horizontal decision making modality, led by the Director's Office with the Management Team (and staff representation), to help avoid 'silo effect'.
- Strengthen the Africa focus at each level through a senior African advisor/manager position; more consistent and permanent presence and representation in Africa; backed up by more African staff, associates and external experts.
- Retain and strengthen the LQS unit to support planning, internal quality control, improvement, accountability and peer learning etc.
 - Extend LQS mandate to develop 'cross cutting themes and analytical tools' focused on upskilling for (not on delivering on) richer more pertinent analysis.
 - Consider one theory of influence (change) per pillar/programme theme with simplified modalities for each workstream to ensure corporate relevance and identify how it will influence change pathways.
 - Ensure that modalities for tracking delivery against key future priorities and thematic imperatives are implemented.
- Raise prominence of, and resources for, Outreach and Communications as make or break for a think tank institution like ECDPM
 - Upgrade IT and communications infrastructure for mobile friendly and top quality search enabled platforms.
 - Devote AI resources to multi-language communications.
 - Ensure early audience and stakeholder analysis per workstream/activity, with subsequent outreach, engagement and communications plan as sine qua non for moving forward (and secure funding for this).
- Review Finance Allocation and Structural Modalities - keep the right balance

- Beef up core funding or maintain to at least current levels of total funding. ECDPM's unique place is heavily reliant on the independence this provides.
- Continue to diversify funding, and beef up programme (not project) funding in order to assure the right balance and avoid any danger of being market-driven rather than strategy driven.
- Revise budget allocation system (driven by Director's Office, with Management Team and staff representation), with a more centralised overview of budget allocations and approach to fund raising in order to ensure core funding for key priorities, and (continue to) avoid being market-driven rather than strategy driven.
- Ensure key strategic priorities and areas that solidify "niche" are properly financed (and tracked), for example :
 - allocations and long-term strategies for "presence and credibility" in Africa/with Africa and in Europe/with Europe.
 - nexus lens capacities, including ability to work in cross-centre teams, integrate diverse voices, and use the results of "cross cutting" assessments (policy coherence, gender, climate, youth, technology, political analysis, relational analysis, change management, etc).
 - ability to attract, retain, upskill quality staff with field experience.
- Consolidate centralisation of fund raising, reflect on fundraising pressures, upskilling requirements and the need to allow programme teams to focus mostly on delivery of substance (not fundraising).

4. State of Play - Evaluation Findings

The following sections provide summaries of the evaluation team's findings and analyses, against the evaluation questions and judgement criteria. Where a judgement criteria is shaded in blue, this indicates it is treated later in the report. The previous section on conclusions and recommendations obviously builds in the findings and sub-conclusions delineated in this section.

4.1. Evaluation Question 1: Strategic Choices

EQ 1 : How relevant were the strategic choices made by the Centre in its 2017-2021 Strategy considering the evolving EU / international agenda / environment for cooperation?

JC 1.1 Extent to which the Centre adapted its Strategy 2017-2021 to the evolving general political, institutional and financial context in which think tanks such as ECDPM operate, by making appropriate strategic choices regarding 'the what' (i.e. adaptations and innovations) and 'the how' (i.e. approaches, working methods and modalities).

JC 1.2 Extent to which the various theories of change (at all Centre and specific programme levels) were realistic in the light of the evolving context for international cooperation.¹⁴

JC 1.3 Extent to which the Centre has been able to incorporate new policy issues or challenges that became pressing after 2017 and after the formulation of its 5-year plan.

Background EQ1

The Global Development Agenda 2030 (Sustainable Development Goals) brought to the fore global actors' renewed impetus to work together to tackle global challenges based on principles of equal partnership and cooperation

¹⁴ This JC is treated in a different section of the reported, dedicated to theory of change.

(SDG17). The SDGs and related indicators have influenced how the Centre has formulated impact goals and how it has engaged with various partners and stakeholders, including funders whose priorities have shifted to provide support to implementation and tracking progress of the SDGs.

In Europe, the EU has strived to define her global role while internally economic and political dis-integration tendencies have persisted. This has also been visible in international affairs as well as in development policy, where EU member states act in their perceived national interests and at times only hesitantly support the EU Commission's External Affairs policies. ECDPM is at the interface of this and has, in the view of the evaluation team, generally made informed, pragmatic choices as to which theories of change and workstreams it emphasises in order to contribute to outcomes that can realistically be achieved in this global context.

The ECDPM Strategy 2017-21¹⁵ identifies several global developments that are relevant for the Centre's work. These were understood as "...an opportunity to question the validity of current frameworks for international co-operation."¹⁶ The Centre took into account these trends in the design and implementation of the Strategy, and states as an objective "to find more effective ways of organising international cooperation in order to achieve the Global Goals and make progress on other core economic, foreign policy and security interests"¹⁷.

The Centre narrows down its focus for the period 2017-21 to EU-Africa relations, and against the global context it presents, the strategy appropriately expresses the vision to focus on "...the transition from primarily aid-driven partnerships to international cooperation approaches that are based on mutual interests and accountability"¹⁸ and to "...gradually put in place stronger, more symmetric partnerships based on mutual interests and accountability."¹⁹ The notion of "mutual interest" depicts an understanding of cooperation with Africa "beyond aid" which has been a characteristic for ECDPM's understanding of EU-Africa relationships already at a time when these were still stuck in a post-colonial donor-recipient relationship (See the previous ECDPM Strategy 2011-16).

Where feasible and appropriate ECDPM adapted its work streams, interventions and strategic priorities to take into consideration the prevailing and pressing political, economic, financial and scientific issues of the time. Indeed, ECDPM made a series of strategic and organisational choices in terms of what it would focus on, and how.

The strategic choices focused on the four priority areas, outlined in the prior section on institutional context. The other strategic choice addressed these issues through 7 main programmes. An overview of ECDPM's 7 programmes (outlined in a prior section on institutional context) is below.²⁰

European External Affairs: The EU is dealing with a number of challenges close to home, while at the same time seeking to play a more significant role in solving global problems. ECDPM assists the EU institutions and member states in working towards coherent and effective foreign and development policy. And ensuring knowledge about the EU is shared with key partners, and used in dialogue and policy processes, including with African stakeholders.

African Institutions and Regional Dynamics: African countries and regions are taking steps to develop and implement policies to promote their own socio-economic development, but meaningful institutional reform is often undermined, hijacked or even reversed by groups or individuals operating according to particular interests and

¹⁵ ECDPM, Strategy 2017-2021, p. 7.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ ECDPM, Strategy 2017-2021, p. 8.

²⁰ cited from ECDPM Annual Report 2019.

incentives. ECDPM studies the actors and factors at play within different reform processes, and works with actors. This programme was created in 2019 and merges the former Africa Institutions programme and the regional integration work stream within the Economic and Agricultural Transformation programme.

Migration: Migration and mobility can stimulate development as drivers of social and economic change, but they also pose significant challenges. ECDPM examines the challenges, and potentials of migration for global development; and improving dialogue and cooperation on migration between Europe and Africa.

Security and Resilience: African and European institutions are torn between managing urgent crises and tackling the structural causes and consequences of violent conflict. ECDPM explores more effective and sustainable ways to prevent conflict and build peace, and how to promote strategic partnerships between African and European actors.

Economic and Agricultural Transformation and Food Security: Economic and agricultural transformations are central to many African and European development strategies. These can create more and better jobs, stimulate economic growth and tackle inequality. ECDPM helps accomplish these goals through a focus on trade, investment and finance, private sector engagement, and sustainable food systems. This is three programmes wrapped into one cluster, each with a programme "head".

All programmes were expected to use political economy analysis regularly and to consider climate change, gender, policy coherence, Africa, Africa-EU relations²¹, the relations between Europe and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Group of States. Some of these themes were (also) specific workstreams (e.g., Europe-ACP relations²², or policy coherence for (sustainable) development); or task forces (e.g., Africa EU relations; North Africa; gender; and later, climate change).

4.1.1. Judgement Criteria 1.1

JC 1.1 Extent to which the Centre adapted its Strategy 2017-2021 to the evolving general political, institutional and financial context in which think tanks such as ECDPM operate, by making appropriate strategic choices regarding 'the what' (i.e. adaptations and innovations) and 'the how' (i.e. approaches, working methods and modalities).

4.1.1.1. Findings and Analysis JC 1.1

The evaluation team, following triangulation interviews and reviews of output, and reporting data, confirms that the new strategic priorities to

1. focus on Europe-Africa relations;
2. incorporate North Africa;
3. reflect the multi-actor nature of the 2030 agenda; and
4. consider more deeply the internal factors shaping European external action outcomes;

were adapted well to the political, institutional and financial context prevailing at the time the strategy was drafted. A majority of respondents noted, and the evaluation also confirms, the continuation of a strong "Europe" niche resulting, in part, as a consequence of the strategic choice to focus more deeply on the internal factors shaping European external action outcomes, and continue a dedicated and large programme to this purpose.

²¹ The strategy cites Europe-Africa relations; the evaluation team notes however that the Centre focused primarily on EU-Africa relations. The evaluation report uses EU-Africa relations intentionally.

²² The evaluation team did not review work on Europe-ACP relations.

In terms of the “how”, the Centre delivered on the strategic choices by contributing to knowledge, policies, maintaining critical niche areas of expertise, strengthening partnerships, responding to stakeholders’ interests and mobilising resources. It did this through delivering on its core roles, using its 'value descriptors' (delineated further down).

At the same time, the Centre’s organisational structure (work programmes and task forces) did not reflect equal emphasis on, and resources for, each of the strategic priority areas; nor did it track outcome against each priority area. For example,

- a. strategic priority (4) was supported by a dedicated EEA programme;
- b. whereas strategic priority (1) "focus on EU-Africa relations" was supported by a task force, labelled as a “cross programme task force”; and treated as a principle to accompany all work where possible; there was no clear programme of work or strategy to ensure delivery on the expectation that "all programmes focus on EU-Africa relations" (except the Europe programme, though in fact it did); the task force did not have a budget to fill any perceived gaps required to deliver on the expectation; and no tracking system in order to pinpoint which actions influenced (aimed to influence) EU-Africa relations, and why (and how); or which actions wanted to influence these but did not, and why;
- c. strategic priority (2) was supported by a North Africa task force labelled as a “cross programme task force” that was later melted into the EU-Africa relations task force; it was not exactly clear how the geographic emphasis on North Africa fit into the relational emphasis of the task force on the relations between the two continents; the Centre did produce interesting and useful work on North Africa as an "actor", and on some countries in North Africa, but this geographic focus area is not part and parcel of all programme work so there is room to grow in filling this priority area (2);
- d. while strategic priority (3) – to reflect the multi-actor nature of the 2030 agenda - was treated as a principle to accompany all work where possible but without a task force; and without a tracking modality to track delivery; and with different programmes considering the multi-actor nature to differing degrees - and working in different ways (which is normal and to be expected) with a multitude of actors involved in the 2030 agenda across Africa and Europe.

The focus “on” Africa more generally was distributed across the thematic programmes – with some specifically focused on Africa, such as the African Institutions (that later included Regional Dynamics) Programme; whilst other programmes included a (strong) focus on Africa, such as the Economics, Agriculture and Trade (EAT) programme, the Migration programme, and the Security and Resilience programme. (The evaluation team chooses to use the term "on" Africa because "in" Africa suggests a physical presence in Africa, and in English one focuses "on" something not "in" something; and the "on" and "with" distinction is used to make it clear that a focus "with" Africa suggests a mixture of outside looking in, and inside looking out; whereas a focus "on" Africa suggests outside looking in.) In this sense, programmes worked both "on" Africa, and sometimes "with" Africa. Some work was (partly) conducted "in" Africa.

The "internal assessment notes" conducted by all programmes and most task forces and units in preparation for the external evaluation and the internal strategic reflection exercises, combined with the internal interviews conducted by the evaluation team, acknowledged that while significant progress was made to further the strategic priorities, some programmes experienced several challenges that included:

- a. too many strategic focus areas: the need to ensure that theories of change and work streams addressed results framework imperatives, strategic priorities, cross cutting issues and communications imperatives, on top of a focus on pathways to change and obstacles and opportunities therein, and the four priority areas, was often a very complex undertaking, with mixed results;

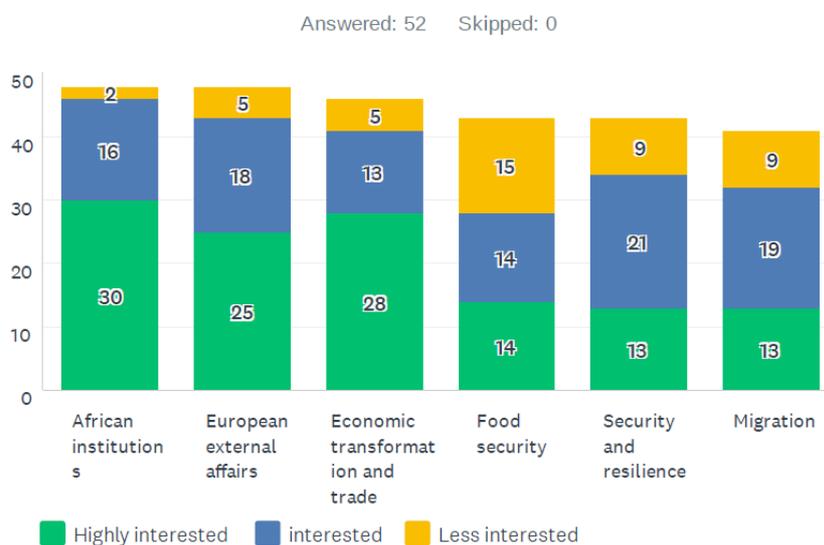
- b. fundraising pressures were high, constant, and compounded by growing competition in the think tank and management consultancy world.

There is good evidence that the Centre was able to adapt *how* it delivered its strategy to the evolving environment. For example, regarding economic issues, the Centre initially focused on trade dimensions, then decided to integrate a broader picture by tackling economic governance issues. This led the Centre to merge trade and governance into one programme called the Regional Integration programme (though trade is firmly a focus also in the EAT cluster Programme). This created strategic analytical linkages between in-country occurrences and dynamics between countries. Political Economy Analysis (PEA) and the “five lenses technique” were applied to better understand trade policy reforms and remaining gaps to bridge. This is a good illustration that as the strategy was implemented, various workstreams were taken up or dropped, according to circumstance, relevance and need, in a flexible manner; and that various roles and ways of working were applied to uphold the strategy. (Later the Programme evolved to be the current "African Institutions and Regional Integration" (AIRD) Programme).

In relation to whether or not the Centre's strategic organisational choices to focus particularly around 7 programme areas was adapted to the context, and relevant to the interests and needs of the stakeholders, internal and external interviews responded positively, in the majority.

The external survey (of respondents not interviewed) also reveals the below data, which illustrates 57% professed high interest in AIRD, 53% in EAT, 48% in EEA; and 27% professed high interest in FOOD, 25% in Migration, and 25% in SECURE. The sample (52 respondents) is too small to be statistically significant however; and simply provides a rough reality check.

Q3 Which of ECDPM's areas of work are you particularly interested in?



Increased cross-Centre work and creation of task forces was engaged in order to integrate better the contextual complexities that were relevant for the strategic priority areas. The extent to which these task forces effectively resulted in concrete outcomes is mixed, and is discussed later in the report.

Reporting and learning mechanisms were further centralised by the creation of the Learning and Quality Support unit (lessening burden on programmes whilst ensuring more focused overview on results, monitoring, learning, and the overall strategy); and fund-raising burdens, whilst still the responsibility of programmes, were assisted by increased centralised support from the finance and institutional relations units. The professionalisation of the HR

functions aimed at enhancing working culture and conditions helped improve management approaches and undertake the recommendations emanating from a previous and in-depth internal management review. These strategic organisational choices were clearly made to enhance the Centre's ability to deliver its strategic thematic priorities.

4.1.2. Judgement Criteria 1.2

This judgement criteria is considered in section 4.7 (on Theory of Change).

4.1.3. Judgement Criteria 1.3

EQ1/JC 1.3 Extent to which the Centre has been able to incorporate new policy issues or challenges that became pressing after 2017 and after the formulation of its 5-year plan.

4.1.3.1. Findings and Analysis JC1.3

A majority of external interviews underscored the ability of the Centre, in a timely fashion, to incorporate new and crucial policy issues and challenges that became pressing after the 2017 – 2021 Strategy had been formulated. This is confirmed by the evaluation team findings.

Many crucial policy issues were addressed. For example, the Centre's decision to focus in-depth, and well ahead of most others, on the European evolutions in relation to the new multi-annual financial framework (MFF) and implications for issues relevant to ECDPM focus areas. This timely and rigorous output²³ according to most external interviews, directly contributed to each of the outcome areas defined by the Centre; and had plausible impact (according to external respondents) on some impact areas.

New workstreams were initiated in order to adapt to shifting circumstances. A few illustrations include the focus on the international cooperation implications of:

- Brexit <https://ecdpm.org/dossiers/brexit-international-cooperation/> ;
- Covid-19 <https://ecdpm.org/dossiers/covid-19-international-cooperation/> ;
- Women in mediation in Africa <https://ecdpm.org/publications/women-mediation-africa-apsa-aga/> .

The Centre also increased its focus on the need for a 'nexus' approach to key emerging issues. A few illustrations:

- Climate change, circular economies, and foreign policies: <https://ecdpm.org/publications/integration-climate-change-circular-economy-foreign-policies/> ;
- Climate change and conflict: <https://ecdpm.org/great-insights/complex-link-climate-change-conflict/> ;
- Migration, security, and development: <https://ecdpm.org/publications/global-flows-migration-security/> ;
- West African rice, value chains, trade facilitation and food security: <https://ecdpm.org/publications/rice-trade-value-chain-development-in-west-africa-approach-more-coherent-policies/> .

Whilst the use of social media, blogs, seminars/webinars and dialogues sporadically highlighted attention on key evolving dynamics, for example:

- on AU-EU relations - <https://ecdpm.org/events/building-stronger-partnership-africa-europe/>; or <https://ecdpm.org/talking-points/au-eu-summit-not-immune-covid-19-blessing-disguise/>;
- on climate security - <https://ecdpm.org/great-insights/complex-link-climate-change-conflict/climate-security-africa-un-security-council/> .

²³ <https://ecdpm.org/dossiers/multiannual-financial-framework-mff/>

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- on the EU's financial architecture - <https://ecdpm.org/events/team-europe-financing-global-recovery/> ;
 - on African perspectives on labour migration: <https://ecdpm.org/events/labour-migration-african-perspectives-cooperation/> ;
 - on women, peace and security Africa: <https://ecdpm.org/talking-points/meaningful-inclusion-next-frontier-women-mediation-africa/> ;
 - on climate change and the European Investment Bank prioritisations: <https://ecdpm.org/talking-points/eight-ways-european-investment-bank-help-tackle-climate-change-africa/> .

4.1.4. Response to Evaluation Question 1

EQ1 How relevant were the strategic choices made by the Centre in its 2017-2021 Strategy considering the evolving EU / international agenda / environment for cooperation?

Considering the evolving EU / international agenda and the evolving environment for international cooperation, the evaluation response to EQ1, based on the judgement criteria JC1.1, 1.2²⁴, and 1.3, is that: the strategic choices made by the Centre in its 2017-2021 Strategy were extremely relevant concerning the "what"; the Centre was also able to incorporate a number of new and important policy issues and challenges during the period under evaluation. It is well positioned to integrate and align to global trends. Its work contributes to EU attempts to be a global player with influence, though more work on the EU's global role is needed.

Concerning the "how", it made a series of choices that were mostly appropriate, implemented, and well adapted to deliver on its Strategy. These allowed it for example, to be able to be "ahead of the curve" in a number of areas; and to address new developments in a timely and effective manner (e.g., Brexit, Africa's development partners, multilateralism crisis, climate change, COVID 19). The Centre made important organisational and process decisions that were effective, but with also some room to grow as the Centre moves forward. Task forces, though meant to "break" silos and help oil a matrixed approach to topics, mostly were not really well defined, purposes varied, their topics were not always "tracked" and their usefulness mixed; so that this does not appear to be a first choice modality to use moving forward.

The Centre's ability to pull together timely, relevant knowledge and analysis, and feed that into policy makers and/or policy processes is a strong "unique selling point", upheld by its core institutional funding, its ability to raise additional funds, and its ability to work in a "matrix format" that allows it to be relatively reactive and timely. These factors allowed the Centre to be ahead-of-the-curve and to delve into topics not yet fully on the radar screen of the Centre's stakeholders without necessarily having to first stretch out the funding-request cap and thereby delay the process.

²⁴ Addressed in a further section.

4.2. Evaluation Question 2: Implementation

EQ 2: How effective was the implementation of the Strategy across the programmes, workstreams, task forces and at all-Centre level, particularly with regard to the ‘new strategic priorities’ and other innovations introduced in 2017?

JC 2.1 Extent to which ECDPM has managed to find an effective ‘niche’, ensure a coherent package of activities and be a credible actor (for instance compared to other think tanks and institutes) in its various engagements?

JC 2.2 Extent to which the various programmes and workstreams have been able to consolidate or to establish (new) partnerships, facilitate joint research, mobilise additional funding and ensure effective uptake of the knowledge produced.

JC 2.3 Extent to which the Centre put in place the adequate processes, tools and methods to align its work to innovations such as the commitments to think and act politically and to integrate gender analysis in its programmes.

JC 2.4 Extent to which the specific strategies, measures, initiatives undertaken by the Centre to strengthen its cooperation in and with Africa during the period were valuable and adequate for achieving this strategic priority, and their relative level of success.

4.2.1. Judgement Criteria 2.1

JC 2.1 Extent to which ECDPM has managed to find an effective ‘niche’, ensure a coherent package of activities and be a credible actor (for instance compared to other think tanks and institutes) in its various engagements?

4.2.1.1. Findings and Analysis JC2.1

The Centre combines its three main roles and implementation modalities to reinforce its ability to be a credible actor, able to fill specific “niche” areas.

The Centre’s self-assessments suggested that it maintained a niche and was considered a credible actor for the following reasons:

- a. strong track record, profile and long-term engagement;
- b. established approach, i.e. as a non-partisan knowledge broker, is in demand;
- c. works in specific areas or fields which are not covered by other actors.

The external interviews and analysis confirmed the above and underscored that the Centre's niche and credibility are manifest through:

- a. stakeholders' interest, demand for and use of its knowledge products;
- b. recognition and appreciation for its expertise and work delivered;
- c. efforts and initiatives by the Centre to support development of new niche areas in younger programmes, set new priorities, work in collaboration with variety of actors;
- d. its ability to deliver work for which it has competitive advantages or an edge over other comparable think tanks and actors;
- e. its focus on issues, themes and topics relevant to policy makers combined with a very deep understanding of the EU policy process and the brussels bureaucracy;

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- f. its strong and fairly unique potential to contribute to those processes meaningfully²⁵²⁶ ;
 - g. its commitment to Africa, and its commitment and focus on strengthening EU - Africa relations;
 - h. its integration of a number of key Africa-related dimensions.

The credibility and niche of the Centre are reinforced by the use of its knowledge products, and availability of that knowledge. Indeed, policy makers and negotiators, across Europe and Africa, confirmed, and the evaluation team concurs, that:

- a. it is arguably one of the top go-to think tanks on understanding EU policy making and the Brussels bureaucracy²⁷; and that
- b. key stakeholders look for, and consult, its publications, its convenings on contemporary policy debates at the EU, and globally, and on diverse aspects of international cooperation, including related to Africa;
- c. the Centre's niche, identity and relevance remain its grounded understanding of, and demonstrable capacity to influence, EU Policy making processes and its external actions therein; and should remain strongly active in this area.

In terms of a coherent package of activities, the evaluation findings also confirm that:

- a. knowledge generated was mostly in alignment to the strategic choices and the Centre's niche;
- b. comparable think tanks and relevant stakeholders recognise and acknowledge the Centre's niche and view the package of activities as mostly coherent.

In relation to providing a coherent package of activities related to influencing development cooperation and sustainable development specifically, the evaluation found that the Centre generated significant research and analysis aimed at influencing policy; and external interviewees highlighted:

- a. that various outputs strongly contributed to and influenced development and sustainable development policy considerations in positive and constructive ways;
- b. though some respondents pointed to a perception of a lack of "on the ground implementation perspectives" or field experience in some of the research produced (so that research was more theoretical, less "practical", perhaps less realistic at times).

In terms of ability to ensure a coherent package of activities and ensure uptake, the evaluation also found that:

- a. there was good evidence of uptake through references to and perception of the Centre's knowledge products and approaches by relevant stakeholders;
- b. though uptake seemed far more systematic and wide-spread across Europe than across Africa (so that a "Europe niche" is more strongly perceived than any "Africa niche").

In relation to whether there was a coherent package of activities in relation to the Centre's strategic choice concerning primary focus on Europe-Africa relations, and integrating North Africa, the evaluation team noted that:

- a. the Centre seems to mostly use EU and Europe interchangeably but that moving forward it may need to focus on both - as related but distinct - and that mostly the focus is on "EU"²⁸;
- b. though there were explicit Africa objectives in programmes, and the AIRD was fully focused on Africa, there was also a general assumption that activities would integrate "Africa" where relevant and feasible but no

²⁵ "Up-to-date and analytical briefing, good grasp of the inner workings of the EU and Member States as well as ongoing processes. Good balanced analysis. Excellent for feeding into our thinking and engagement." (European survey respondent)

²⁶ "There are very few institutions of comparable value in Europe." (European survey respondent).

²⁷ "Better than some other institutions, ECDPM is regularly in the core of the most relevant EU external action policies and processes." (European survey respondent).

²⁸ This was particularly highlighted by non-EU but European respondents, but not only by them.

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- tracking system for this, or for North Africa, and the ToC requirements did not specify this focus (though of course all programmes are supposed to focus on relation between activities and strategic priorities);
- c. there was an assumption activities would focus on and contribute to relations between the two continents whenever possible but no tracking system for this, the ToC requirements did not specify this focus, and though there was a task force dedicated to this, the internal assessment process did not produce a separate note for the task force on Europe-Africa relations. Rather, this was integrated into the internal assessment note for the Institutional Relations Unit²⁹ and under the section addressing Africa-EU relations, it details that:
- i. the task force primarily served the purpose as a forum for exchange of general information so as to ensure colleagues are up-to-date with the ongoing and planned initiatives and events; and could build a longer term common understanding on key aspects of the EU-Africa partnership;
 - ii. that several ECDPM colleagues were widely solicited by different institutions and players, both official and non-official in key EU-Africa processes e.g., the preparatory process to the October 2020 EU-Africa Summit in Brussels³⁰; and
 - iii. the task force information exchange function was particularly relevant to inform about those instances; and more day to day policy relevant work took place outside the TF, but was not tracked.
- d. several respondents from Africa, and a couple from Europe, pointed out that the Centre's focus on the relations, and even perhaps its pick of thematic topics to address, could have been more coherent in relation to delivery of the strategy -because they believed that the Centre's choices (programmatic, thematic) were driven more by EU priorities (including EU priorities for the EU-Africa strategy); and rather less driven by Africa priorities (e.g., by the aspirations announced, for example, by the AU, or the Africa Agenda 2063³¹ or by topics that are particularly of interest to Africa in its relations with Europe); *whilst this impression is not uniformly shared it was expressed by significant and important stakeholders (African and European)*;
- e. this is *not* to imply that the Centre is not independent in its critique of the EU, its MS, and their decisions, policies, and other actions; indeed there are moments in which points important "for" "Africa" have been brought starkly to the attention of "Europe"; but this does not detract from the findings on the process for deciding focus areas;
- f. and respondents also pointed to the urgent need (to enhance credibility and bolster niche) to integrate further the perspectives and implications of other key players on the African continent (i.e. apply a multi actor approach) in particular non-state actors, and their own relations with Africa, and how this might affect EU-Africa, or Europe-Africa (quite different, and not only because of Brexit) relations; (and this backed up by analysis of output, and the evaluation team concurs).

In discussing this key priority and aspect of the Centre with internal and external actors, both European and African, sometimes at great length, the Evaluation Team found the following concerning the Centre's credibility, and niche, on Africa-EU relations:

- a. high value was attached, by Europeans and by Africans, to instances in which the Centre accompanied delegations, delegates and actors in preparing for negotiations or presidencies by shedding light on knotty issues, providing clarity on EU or on African perspectives, assisting in identifying strategic areas of focus, and providing sharp analysis on the consequences of various policy options;

²⁹ *nota bene*: While it would not necessarily matter that this was produced as part of this unit (and indeed the head of unit for a time was head of that task force), the point is that very little space is given to considering the extent to which the Centre did actually influence those EU-Africa relations, how, and when; and no tracking data was available in the note, nor did the team find any. When the evaluation team asked external actors to identify specific instances in which ECDPM influenced Africa-EU relations, few examples were produced in relation to the current Strategy 2017-2021.

³⁰ It was not possible to have any clear answers from external stakeholders on the role the Centre had played in this particular process; this may be for reasons linked to political sensitivity.

³¹ "ECDPM is recognized as a valuable and honest partner by Brussels and organizations in Brussels. To which extent this is applicable to African organizations, I don't know." (African survey respondent)

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- b. high value and credibility were attached to providing thematically based knowledge and playing a broker role for example in areas addressed by AIRD and EAT (including FOOD) at sub-regional/country, and in some instances by SECURE;
 - c. but there were mixed messages in relation to the Centre's role at intergovernmental and regional levels in Africa in terms of the extent to which it had played a useful broker role at these levels, and whether it had required capacity to "address" *relations* between the EU and Africa at those levels³², and to therein play a "broker" role, at least for Africa;
 - d. so that the ideation of "broker role" in the relations at a higher, more institutional and strategic level was questioned (despite some reference to useful brokering) and the evaluation team found that not all stakeholders in Africa believed that ECDPM (had played) or should play a broker role in influencing inter-governmental African policy making, moving forward.

To reinforce credibility of its niche as a "non-partisan" broker, interviewees and findings suggest:

- a. the Centre might consider stronger and more consistent integration of African actors in the analytical processes concerning Africa, in order to bolster credibility and bolster balanced "insight" and improve "access" concerning Africa;
- b. indeed, at the intergovernmental and regional levels, respondents underscored that moving forward, European-based think tanks, to have strong (political) legitimacy, credibility, and to maintain a "non-partisan" (i.e. not the mouth piece of EU) identity, must deliver more explicitly co-created (with Africa) output³³; and most especially, continue to use, and bolster, perspectives (on Europe and on Africa) to explicitly inform EU-Africa *relations*;
- c. whilst a small number of African stakeholders with significantly important and strategic positions at the policy making and think tank level, interviewed in Africa and in Europe, and several EU staff, questioned the extent to which, moving forward, the Centre should aspire to the role of 'non-partisan' broker active on the Africa-EU relational bridge; suggesting that in promoting EU clearly and strategically to all actors (European, African etc) it would, in any event, be fulfilling a crucial unique selling point, and a strong niche that is in high demand; and that this clarity on Europe would greatly enhance understanding by Africa (leading presumably to better informed negotiating positions and improved relations in the long run).
- d. whilst many suggested (African and European think tankers, and policy makers) that, in order to build the Centre's credibility moving forward, and to help relations between the two Continents, the Centre should shift its focus towards :
 - juxtaposing different "positions" (African, European) and comparatively analysing possible consequences;
 - paying attention to emerging trends and opportunities to contribute to, and play its part in, decolonisation of knowledge (e.g., revitalised agency and strengthened capacities of Africans to address their own priorities as well as the global BLM movement which resonates deeply there);
 - paying attention to the general shift from development aid to partnerships for sustainable development;
 - supporting Africans' better understanding and appreciation of:
 - European interests, agendas and priorities in creating their own policy options

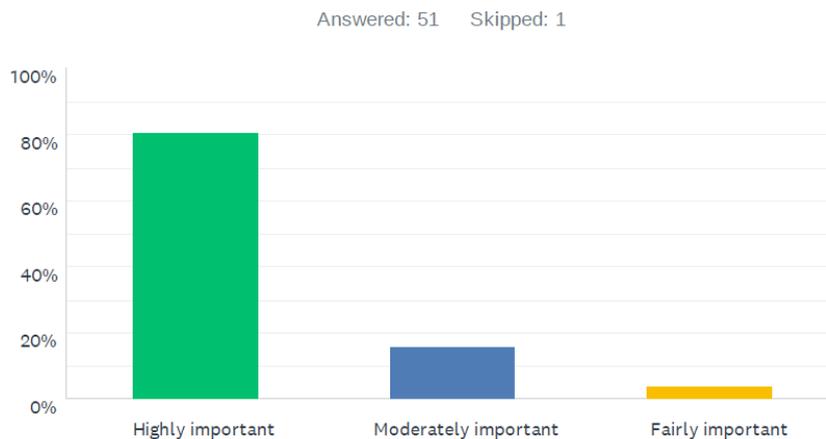
³² i.e., staff with strong understanding of African regional and intergovernmental policy making processes, close connections with key figures, and ability to thereby identify key areas to promote or deblock in order to improve relations.

³³ "ECDPM is in competition (or complementary) with other European TT. It is especially useful in the area of EU-African relations, e.g., the EU trade and aid policies towards African countries. While independent, it could probably be occasionally more critical in its evaluation of EU policies." (African survey respondent); "We cannot easily bring ECDPM into our deliberations and discussions if they are not coming with an African partner institution; we are focused on Africa driving Africa now." (African external stakeholder interview at intergovernmental level.)

- the emergence of new partnerships including with China and what this means in terms of heralding new realities and opportunities - including the AfCFTA.

The below graph illustrates that 80% of 52 survey respondents (not interviewed by the ET) believe that the Centre's contributions to EU-Africa relations are highly important.

Q7 Compared to other sources of research and advice on EU - Africa relations, how important is ECDPM's contribution in this area?



And here are some interesting citations from the survey and interviews, that were iterated in different ways many times:

“There is no comparable think tank in Europe to ECDPM. Its commitment and focus on strengthening EU and Africa relations is clear. Deep understanding of EU policy making processes and potential to contribute to mutual appreciation of diverse interests and priorities of European and African policy makers.” (European policy maker)

“The think tank most focused on EU-ACP-Africa relations. Critical external voice challenging conventional wisdom”. (European survey respondent)

“Over decades ECDPM has built a niche EU-Africa in relations. It is known, respected and sought after for its expertise and way of work on both sides of the equation.” (African survey respondent)

“The Centre is arguably one of the top go-to think tanks on understanding EU policy making and the Brussels bureaucracy. We look up and consult their publications and convenings on contemporary policy debates at the EU from ECDPM “ (African policy maker)

“The Centre’s past leverage and niche garnered during its support as an insider to the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPAs) negotiations and working with the ACP is no longer valid. Several political shifts in Africa and Europe as well as emergence of new partnerships including with China herald new realities and opportunities including the AfCFTA and the shift from development aid to partnerships for sustainable development. The Centre’s niche, identity and relevance remain its grounded understanding and influence of EU Policy making processes. There is significant demand in Africa and opportunity to equally contribute to better appreciation and understanding of EU Policy making processes and vice versa. To do so entails that the Centre seizes and addresses emerging priorities and diversity in Africa and Europe and reflects these dynamics in its institutional and organisational structures. This inevitably

demands working better with strategic partners in Africa and Europe including think tanks, the AU and RECs “ (African policy maker).

In relation to providing a coherent package of activities related to Africa, and knowledge concerning Africa, and therein credibility:

- a. a great deal of ECDPM output has a focus on Africa;
- b. there are clearly instances (as underscored by both European and African stakeholders) of advancing knowledge on both sides and increasing mutual understanding of the other's perspectives on thematic topics;
- c. as previously mentioned, there were some doubts expressed in terms of the extent to which knowledge related to Africa had been the result of co-creation and/or triangulation³⁴ with Africa / African stakeholders; though there is also strong evidence that some work *was* the result of co-creation or triangulation in particular thematic work on food security, private sector, territorial development, finance; suggesting a difference at more 'local' levels;
- d. in terms of the knowledge role, and its importance for enhancing credibility, and niche, African stakeholders underscored there is significant demand in Africa to better appreciate and understand EU Policy making processes, priorities, perspectives and interests; and that fulfilling that demand enhances credibility (and indirectly helps the relations aspect); Europeans underscored the same, in reverse;
- e. a few respondents queried the reputational impact of conducting a politically sensitive piece of work for Europe on (and in) Africa, without having the freedom to share completely the results of that work in-country, even when the process itself involved many Africans, suggesting that the credibility of the Centre lies firmly in its ability to be perceived as independent and non-partisan; and there is a difficult balancing act to ensure the Centre is not seen to be working with African actors in order to (simply) mine data.
- f. the evaluation team found that almost all work produced by the Centre is shared with the public - so the previous point underscores how important each and every instance can be for credibility and reputation, as does the next point;
- g. some respondents, both African and European, pointed to the difficulties in maintaining credibility when taking on work in an area of complex political dynamics whilst having only intermittent access to key actors in the field in order to ensure in-depth and "on the ground" grasp of the complex dynamics (political and other); underscoring that "field access" seemed readily possible in relation to Europe/EU and only intermittently possible, and more superficially, in relation to Africa;
- h. lack of long term and "permanent" presence in Africa was suggested as one causal element for this by many respondents, African and European;
- i. lastly, an illustration of a lost opportunity to shed light on different approaches and perspective on a similar and pressing issue is found in the comparative work conducted on whole-of-government responses to migration³⁵; it does not examine African government responses to migration and mobility, even though these issues are prevalent for African countries³⁶ ³⁷. According to UNHCR statistical yearbook 2016, Africa had roughly the same number of refugees as Europe; and roughly double the number of combined refugees and

³⁴ regrets were expressed that the perspectives and knowledge of Africans present in Europe, including delegations, diaspora, etc, were not more systematically and continuously consulted as a source for discussion, ideas, perspectives, and triangulation.

³⁵ "Insights from whole-of-government responses to migration - lessons learned and cross cutting issues for the Belgian context" (ECDPM 2019).

³⁶ with examples such as Ethiopia (the 2nd largest acceptor of migrants until recently with its very open door and integrative approaches to migrants, IDPs and refugees; or such as South Africa, the economic powerhouse of the continent, and an obvious migrant magnet. Ethiopia hosted, in 2017, roughly 800 000 refugees.

<https://www.unhcr.org/ethiopia.html?query=ethiopia%20refugees> "Empowering Africa's Most Vulnerable"

<https://www.nrc.no/expert-deployment/2016/2020/report-launch-empowering-africas-most-vulnerable/>

³⁷ In 2013, IOM recorded 2.4 million regular migrants to South Africa. <https://www.iom.int/southern-africa>.

internally displaced people that Europe did.³⁸ This underscores a need (discussed later) for the Centre to negotiate to integrate African perspectives into service-contract or consultancy-financed work, whenever and wherever possible and appropriate, in order to build a full picture of the perspectives and aspiration on both sides (Europe, Africa).

4.2.2. Judgement Criteria 2.2

EQ2/JC 2.2 Extent to which the various programmes and workstreams have been able to consolidate or to establish (new) partnerships, facilitate joint research, mobilise additional funding and ensure effective uptake of the knowledge produced³⁹.

4.2.2.1. Findings and Analysis JC2.2

Partnerships

The Institutional Relations and Partnerships unit spends a great deal of effort to "promote ECDPM at the institutional level" and thereby consolidate its reputation in such a way as to lay the ground work for, and to consolidate, alliances, partnerships, and an ability for programmes to mobilise additional funding, and to mobilise knowledge driven pragmatic partnerships and joint research. The unit is managed by the deputy Director.

According to the ECDPM internal assessment note on institutional arrangements (2020), ECDPM focuses on three types of partnerships⁴⁰:

(i) Alliances with institutional partners

- EU Institutions such as DEVCO, EEAS, EP, Council Secretariat, EU Member States, EU Presidencies.
- 9 EU Member States are long-term institutional partners
- African Union and Regional Economic Commissions

(ii) Knowledge driven partnerships in Europe and in Africa

- Think tanks, knowledge platforms, change-makers, influencers
- HLR of the AUC, African Ambassadors to Brussels days
- Tony Elumelu Foundation (Nigeria), Barefoot Law (Uganda)
- ECDPM hosts ETTG (European Think Tanks Group) Secretariat

(iii) Pragmatic partnerships

- UEMOA Think Tanks Network, SAIIA, IPSS, ACET, TMEA, Horizon 2020 projects RESPECT and CASCADES etc; ONE, Open Society, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation etc., ETTG.

Internal interviews highlighted that the term "partnerships" is not consistently employed across the Centre, with various definitions and understandings of what this means and entails, from "provider of funding, to institutional MoU, to occasional partner, to alliance, to co-creator".

External interviews, and evidence, confirmed that indeed the Centre maintains and fosters different sorts of partnerships and alliances, and these are highly valued by the partners. At the same time:

- quite a few knowledge driven and pragmatic "partnerships" are one-off events though, and do not necessarily build towards longer term relationships centred on longer term collaborative partnering - a strong exception is the peer-to-peer partnership of the ETTG (European Think Tanks Group), hosted by ECDPM;

³⁸ <https://www.unhcr.org/statistics/country/5a8ee0387/unhcr-statistical-yearbook-2016-16th-edition.html>

³⁹ "Effective uptake of the knowledge produced" is considered under section 3.6.

⁴⁰ In Annex an excellent overview from its latest Annual Report, is presented.

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- b. external interviews underscored the increased urgency for the Centre to expand "work *in partnership*" (e.g., joint research) with external actors (African and others) so as to further consolidate the legitimacy and credibility of its output;
 - c. gathering data with field help is not partnership exactly.

At the alliances level, the Centre, as expressed in its internal assessment note on institutional relations, and as corroborated by external interviews and analysis, has demonstrated an impressive ability to foster and maintain strong alliances with core institutional funders and with the EU institutions; and has maintained alliances with RECs through specific thematic focus areas of most relevance (e.g., trade, private sector, territorial development, food security etc).

It was not possible to establish the extent to which the Centre has maintained an alliance with the AU, and though the internal assessment note claims an MOU with the AU since 2008, the AU Secretariat claimed the MOU had expired. The evaluation team concludes that perceptions of "alliance" and "formal relationships" is a complex endeavour; but also notes that, today, without a formal MOU recognised by the AU Secretariat, it is difficult for external actors to engage with it; in particular if they do not "team up" with actors who do (have a formal basis of engagement). (The team did not investigate reasons for the differences.)

More importantly perhaps is the question of whether the Centre was able to build new relationships with key AU colleagues and with other colleagues in RECs, and how the Centre can sustain the relationship beyond individuals within the Centre or within the institution in question. It is important also to note that comparable institutions such as the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, Norwegian Refugee Council, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI)⁴¹, Centre for Migration and Development (CMD) appear to have made good in-roads, and not just because of the physical presence that some of them have in Addis, but because of their strategic, action-oriented partnerships and programmes, including embedded seconded staff. NRC is present physically and largely seconds experts and works with partner programmes.

The team notes that on the European side, and despite turnover within the European institutions, in delegations etc, ECDPM has no lack of contacts and easy "meet ups" therein; and can "dig for" the nuanced understanding of (as it were) European realities. The team presumes that this is partly based on a much more systematic and consistent effort to invest in multi-stakeholder relationships at all levels with Europe, and also a stronger recognition of the intrinsic value, from the EU and European side, to invest in that relationship with the Centre, and hugely facilitated by permanent presence in Brussels (and Maastricht). At the knowledge-driven and pragmatic partnerships levels, the Centre has demonstrated strong ability to reach out to, and work with, a multiplicity of partners (as illustrated in the above, and confirmed by external interviews) in Europe.

Mobilising Additional Funds

All programmes were able to mobilise additional funding, but this ability (or funding raising 'savvy') is unevenly distributed across the Centre; with all programme staff unequivocally "burdened" by the time-consuming resource mobilisation "imperatives" ; and many suggested that establishing and maintaining partnerships with African actors in particular often required additional funding that was not always easy to obtain; in particular when there were joint research aims.

⁴¹ And they do focus on AU-EU relations, i.a., : NUPI - <https://www.nupi.no/en/News/How-is-the-COVID-19-pandemic-affecting-the-Africa-Europe-partnership>.

At the same time there appears to be a lack of a consolidated, explicit "centralised, fund-raising strategy" that allows for a complete and focused overview of the whole approach; with most programmes individually responsible for mobilising additional funding (with mostly administrative help from support units) and consolidating knowledge driven and pragmatic partnerships; whilst also responding to the "service requests" generated by the core institutional funders. There do not appear to be institution to institution wide agreements to explore and deliver joint research on a regular basis - except for the ETTG (European Think Tank Group) process, deemed excellent and a role model by all accounts.

The additional mobilised funding facilitated consolidation of partnerships and the creation of new ones; though core funding inevitably filled funding gaps that mobilised funds did not quite fill. Mobilised funds clearly facilitated joint research, and consultancy-type evaluations and assessments, a good source of "on the ground learning" for the Centre;. For example, the Centre's highly valued work with IPSS, in Addis, on African peace and security related work.

The Centre has no single budget for consultants. Each programme decides what money it wants to spend on consultants for each activity. Cumulatively, across the Centre, this results in a fairly considerable use of consultants (and budget).

Mobilised Funds and Partnership Dilemmas

Challenges to establishing more functional partnerships (co-creation, joint research) included:

- lack of "institution to institution" Memoranda of Understanding with the consequence that rapid and timely co-creation was sometimes impededⁱ⁴²
- difficulties of mobilising funds focused on "partnerships" and lack of funding was claimed by the Centre to be a main obstacle to partnering with African actors (though African actors did not always concur with this perspective).
- marked preference by institutions such as ECOWAS and AU to be seen to work with African actors first; or consortia that include African actors, and with institutions with which it has a MOU.
- worries that joint research and consolidated partnering requires:
 - longer time frames
 - entails high coordination costs in terms of management and accountability) and
 - compromises (lack of independence) in terms of approach and message.

Interestingly, several institutional donors (who provided funding) underscored that they would be interested in considering a ring-fenced approach to ensuring funds encourage co-creation/joint research with African actors (where relevant).

Think tanks in Africa suggested ECDPM consider an African equivalent to ETTG, and include research bodies in universities (etc).

⁴² For example, there is no formal or even informal agreement, any longer, between ECDPM and the AU Secretariat. Whilst the Centre is not alone in this situation, it renders interactions with the Secretariat challenging. This is compounded by the absence of any permanent ECDPM representatives in Addis, apart from the ECDPM Board Chair

4.2.3. Judgement Criteria 2.3

EQ2/JC 2.3 Extent to which the Centre put in place the adequate processes, tools and methods to align its work to innovations such as the commitments to think and act politically and to integrate gender analysis in its programmes.

4.2.3.1. Findings and Analysis JC2.3

The previous evaluation of ECDPM (2016) recommended it increase its ability to think and act politically.

As the Centre's own mid-term review (2019) states:

- various advisers and staff were involved to develop ECDPM's "five lenses" dimension of its political economy analysis approach; and during the current Strategy period, a senior "PEA" adviser was active until retirement in 2019;
- politics and power have always been important ingredients of the worlds ECDPM works in and with;
- understanding these dimensions has been part of the "from policy-to-practice" work of the Centre as a "do" and "think" tank;
- ten years ago, the Centre decided to analyse power and politics in a more systematic way;
- the purpose in applying a political economy approach was to improve the effectiveness of the Centre by improving its capabilities to analyse power and political dimensions for the contexts or change processes.

The Centre adopted a multi-pronged approach to respond to this political analysis imperative. It established a theory of change approach, meant to guide all workstreams and encourage them to apply a political analysis to pathways and obstacles to change; and it continued to promote application of analytical tools such as political economy analysis (PEA) and ECDPM's particular "5 lenses approach", along with other political analysis approaches, gender analysis, climate change, and territorial approaches to local development.

Review of documentation and results of internal and external interviews reveals the following:

- the theory of change exercises for each workstream/activities integrate a political analysis of obstacles and pathways to change but these vary greatly in depth and application and do not appear to automatically impact conceptual level delivery;
- the Centre uses interesting and useful tools/approaches such as TALD, PEA, gender analysis (and to some extent a focus on climate change);
- the use of these tools allows the programmes to understand the complexity of some situations and approach the key political or gender issues with more nuance;
- considering the mission and the roles of the centre, these tools were relevant and improved the content and effectiveness of output;⁴³
- the introduction of these tools within the programme teams has not benefited from a systematic pedagogical approach though: while some are familiar with these tools, some others felt they had insufficient upskilling (and also time) but would like to be able to take full advantage of these tools;
- the tools gave the opportunity to ECDPM to mobilize additional funding through consultancy contracts signed with clients interested in the use of these tools (and ECDPM was then able to strengthen its skills therein);

⁴³ "For its image and continuity of existence it is vital that ECDPM stars "ahead of the pack" and questions the usual way of looking at things. The political economy project is great in that sense." (African survey respondent).

- political analysis tools (PEA, TALD, gender and even climate change analyses) are instrumental in reinforcing continuous efforts of the programme staff to go beyond programme team settings and improve internal sharing and cross fertilisation⁴⁴;
- though cross fertilisation of the results of the use of these tools is not necessarily strong, a positive illustration includes;
 - the "Changing Nature of Support to Peacebuilding" which used PEA to examine EU, Sweden, Germany and the UK, and also published these case studies alongside the overall report.

Gender analysis

- gender issues are addressed by the different programmes of the Centre to varying degrees⁴⁵, sometimes in rather general terms as part of the inclusion aspects (AGA, SECURE), sometimes through a specific publication on gender related issues (FOOD, SECURE);
- gender analysis is not systematically used in delivery of workstreams, although the theory of change process requests a reflection on the pertinence of gender, (and climate change); there was no dedicated budget to ensuring gender expertise and gender analysis; and no "experienced gender advisor" to help champion or review content, or raise funds;
- and lost opportunities to apply a gender lens to important work produced by the Centre exist (work on financial instruments; work on the MFF; work on migration policies, to name a few).

Climate change

- programme staff were asked, in the TOC formulation process, to consider climate change aspects, with mixed results;
- whilst some significant climate focused work was carried out, e.g., joint consortium work CASCADES⁴⁶ (www.cascades.eu);
- a task force, with a budget, was also created recently to beef up climate change content, focus and capacity.

Territorial Development (TALD)

- the TALD approach was emphasised as highly instrumental in allowing top-down decentralisation reforms (supported by EU cooperation with African countries) to be complemented by a bottom up approach in which subnational governments, local private sector, local civil society were able to articulate and integrate specific thematic issues in the local public policies such as environment, climate change, resilience and even the COVID-19; and have these linked up to the higher level;
- application of the TALD facilitated solid collaboration with the European Commission and its delegations in Africa, as well as, importantly, with local authorities and associations who participated in nine (9) regional seminars (30 to 40 people per seminar), including in West Africa, East Africa and North Africa;
- the workstream and the theory of change on territorial development have been closed; and the methodology equated to territorial development is used as a cross-cutting one, across the Centre, as relevant;
- the evaluation team did not manage to assess whether the lack of an activity/workstream or Theory of Change on the topic will result in the use of this tool decreasing - though experience with "cross cutting"

⁴⁴ For example, AIRD team has a foot in almost all the other programmes thanks to PEA approach.

⁴⁵ This draws from the scoping analysis on gender carried out by the Gender Taskforce, review of documents and external interviews.

⁴⁶ <https://ecdpm.org/cascading-climate-risks-towards-adaptive-resilient-european-societies/> or contributions to climate adaptation and change talks: <https://ecdpm.org/dossiers/climate-change/>

issues and analytical tools suggests that without a driver to emphasise use, and identify easy opportunities, there are risks the tool will be applied less.

Political economy analysis

Drawing from the Centre's own internal assessment note, internal and external interviews, and analysis of output, the evaluation found the following.

Capacity building

- the LQS unit "hosts" political economy - helping to provide training, build capacity and methodologies;
- a senior adviser dedicated to strengthening PE and governance was provided until 2019, and there is still other senior capacity available for deployment to bigger projects and to help ensure the PE focus carries through;
- LQS offered a PE training programme to about 25 staff through an on-line course provided by ODI and The Policy Practice,
 - designed for development practitioners, not think tankers, uptake by staff/applicability was deemed uneven;
- ECDPM provided external training sessions and workshops on PEA, for example: DEVCO, GIZ, Finland, AfD, Capacity4Dev, groupe ODYSSEE Mali (a Bamako-based think tank), AUC (Fridays of the Commission), donor community in Addis (two lunch discussions), EU Delegation in Tunisia.

Capacity

- the depth of knowledge required and the understanding of the politics and ground realities required to conduct a PEA, and to think politically seemed to be stronger in the "older" generation of staff; and less strong amongst the "younger" generations (with exceptions); and this may in part be due to what is a relative paucity of younger staff with on-the-ground field experience (as opposed to exclusively research and think tank experience) including in countries outside of the EU.

Applying PEA and Demand for Services

- the PEA approach employed by ECDPM is an "own brand" approach with the 5 lenses framework; but internal interviews revealed frustrations at not always feeling fully capable of applying the 5 lenses approach easily, without further knowledge and practice with PEA;
- in other words - the Centre is trying to go beyond political economy analysis as a methodology for research, and to develop methodological guidance in the sense of political economy *approaches*, which prioritise analysis but also consultation, learning, iterative adaptation, feedback loops and pragmatism; but this appears to be challenging;
- PE is particularly used in the AIRD programme (including via TALD) but evidence of application of the PE lens across ECDPM work and programmes, is patchy;
- external demand has increased for ECDPM to deliver specific "PEA" work on an issue or a sector:
 - occasionally, ECDPM chose to mobilise core resources to conduct a PEA study, (e.g., Cotonou Partnership Agreement (Bossuyt et al. 2018);
 - while in other cases, externally funded resources were used (e.g., PEA Tunisia for the EUD; or 5 lenses framework for assessing the political economy of regional integration);

In terms of lessons learnt:

- thinking and acting more politically does not necessarily begin or end with a PEA...and thinking politically is helped by a PEA but does not require it; ...and if a PEA is used, thinking politically is linked to how the results of the PEA are *integrated*;
- learning cannot be stimulated through simply "mainstreaming" PE techniques (i.e., technical capacity); it is vital to look for ways to maintain and improve the organisational *incentives* for PE learning and application and for generally strengthening thinking and working politically.⁴⁷;
- it is important to maintain funding independence⁴⁸ when the Centre embarks on highly politically sensitive work or to ensure ability to release information publicly if the work is the result of additional mobilised funding including consultancies and services delivery.

4.2.4. Judgement Criteria 2.4

EQ2/JC 2.4 Extent to which the specific strategies, measures, initiatives undertaken by the Centre to strengthen its cooperation **in** and **with** Africa during the period were valuable and adequate for achieving this strategic priority, and their relative level of success.

4.2.4.1. Findings and Analysis JC2.4

The Centre formulated four new strategic priorities, as previously mentioned: 1. Focus on Europe - Africa relations; 2. Fully incorporate North Africa; 3. Reflect the multi-actor nature of the 2030 agenda; and 4. consider internal factors that shape European external action. According to the self-assessment, while the latter two priorities worked well, the focus on Europe-Africa relations and incorporating North Africa produced successes but also encountered challenges.

Triangulation through interviews with internal and external stakeholders concurred and revealed the following:

Strategy

- there does not appear to be an explicit "strategy" for addressing Europe-Africa relations, and no explicit "theory of change" therein;
- there does not appear to be an explicit "strategy" for Africa; and no clear theory of change analysis for the Centre's approach to Africa; (though there was a task force on North Africa it was later melted into the Europe-Africa *relations* task force).
- this seems to have resulted in an *ad hoc* approach to addressing Africa related topics and issues, with some very focused on Africa (e.g., EAT, AIRD , SECURE and others focused in a more *ad hoc* way; and the same is true for addressing Europe-Africa relations; and North Africa - (this does *not* take away from the high quality of output in all these areas);
- the theory of change process did not include a request to outline the relevance of Africa-dimensions, or explain (the absence of) an African focus, or address/discuss Africa-EU relations aspects; this is true in relation to North Africa; and Africa;
- the internal assessment notes process did not produce a specific note for the Africa-EU relations task force; and there is no tracking system and no list of clear instances in which the Centre influenced these relations; same is true for North Africa;

⁴⁷ drawn from the internal assessment and evaluation team interviews and analysis

⁴⁸ external interviews revealed that frustrations were voiced at the Centre's inability to always share complete results of PEAs in some instances in African

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- the engagement with Africa sometimes appeared *ad hoc*, and supply driven rather than strategic and demand driven; whilst at other times the contrary was true;
 - it seems the Centre means "EU" when it writes "Europe-Africa relations" but these two terms (Europe, EU) often seem to be used interchangeably though they obviously mean different things.

Funding

- apart from the AIRD, EAT and SECURE programmes, core funding for Africa, including North Africa, appears to have been limited (though the funding mechanisms are complex, so this may need nuance);
- this is even more true for the area of the *relations* between EU and Africa;

African delegations in Europe perspectives

- the Centre was instrumental in helping quite a few African diplomats in Brussels (many of whom have plenipotentiary powers to negotiate directly with the EU) to better understand the EU, its thematic and policy issues, and what is at stake;
- it was not clear that the same diplomats felt they were a key resource or repository of vital insight for the Centre;
- so impressions seemed often to be that the Centre focused more on EU's agenda for Africa and focused less on addressing African demands/perspectives towards the EU.

Africans in Africa perspectives

- it was relatively difficult to obtain interviews with African stakeholders across Africa, though informal conversations (in Africa) were possible;
- these interviews varied from:
 - very positive comments on the quality and rigour of the Centre's knowledge products and "ahead of the curve" analysis and on its incontrovertible technical competence, capacity and leverage..⁴⁹;
 - ...to more nuanced discussion of how, on African related issues and policy engagement, the Centre's political awareness and understanding of the dynamics could improve.
 - indeed some interviews were very specific and suggested the Centre should increase its investment and programme presence with Africa as well as co-creation, collaboration, partnership and co-analysis with a variety of African actors, beyond multi-lateral institutional players, and work more with research bodies, think tanks and CSOs.

Interface role between the EU and Africa; and how working on, and with, Africa affects that interface role

- the Centre preponderantly focused on the relations with national and intergovernmental regional and continental institutions ;
- this contrasts with all the dynamics carried by non-state actors, who are more and more visible and influential today everywhere in Africa. Some programmes (FOOD for example) have established relationships with networks of non-state actors involved in agriculture and livestock; and stakeholders repeatedly underlined how such initiatives should be encouraged and amplified so that the interface role that the centre has given itself has more impact on the social, political, and economic dynamics led by non-state actors in Africa;

⁴⁹ "ECDPM played with ICSTD a crucial role to mediate between the EU and African regions to progress the EPA negotiations. ECDPM provided useful policy documents and analyses on EU and Africa trade trends and opportunities." (African survey respondent).

- collaboration with civil society organizations, researchers, research units in universities, think tanks, local authorities and the private sector were seen as vital areas/actors that the Centre could engage with more;
- despite examples to the contrary across the Centre (e.g., EAT (including FOOD), AIRD, SECURE programmes), the Centre's reputation in Africa is that it does not always sufficiently team up with think tanks/research institute peers and partners across Africa; *while statistics from the Centre may or may not back this up, depending on which analytical parameters are used to define "teaming up", the reputation is what it is;*
- at the political level, the Centre appeared to be the "go to" place for African actors mostly in relation to better understanding Europe, its policies and decision making processes; while the Centre appeared to be a "go to" place for European Member State aid /foreign policy desks for insight and thematically related information on Africa;
- there were fewer interview respondents who suggested they would turn to the Centre to help them broker Europe-Africa or EU-Africa *relations*, and this narrative seemed to be gaining traction,
- this may also be in part because the roles, services, and output provided by the Centre are not as well known in Africa as they are in Europe; the Centre was far less visible in Africa than in Europe (also apparent in statistics from the Communications unit); and this is particularly true for those Francophone, Lusophone and Arabophone African countries that have not benefited from specific country-focused work by the Centre, and very few output in these languages;
- while the correlation between this and being the "go to place" for relational issues is not direct, it is plausible to imagine that less visibility impacts credibility;
- some external interviewees suggested that the lack of continued and strong presence in different regions in Africa (and not only in Addis) is also an important factor that impacts the Centre's partnering challenges; its visibility; and at times it "legitimacy" to stand on the Europe-Africa relational cusp; whilst respondents also highlighted how the Centre could serve, in the future, as a bridge between the EU and West Africa, as the insert box details.

ECDPM, in the future, could, according to several respondents *"serve as a bridge between the European Union and West Africa, generating knowledge based on what is happening across the European Union and making it available to local actors and decision makers. The Centre can mobilise consultants in the West African space to generate knowledge and share it at the level of the European Union. For example, despite appearances, there are not many people at the European Union level who are familiar with the regulatory provisions of the ECOWAS area. Likewise, there are not many institutions or decision-makers at the ECOWAS level who are familiar with the regulations at the European Union level (for example, understanding the large number and specificities of sanitary and phytosanitary measures at the entry of the European Union concerning fruits, vegetables and other agricultural products)."*

"ECOWAS and other actors in Africa are interested to have in-depth comparative studies and analyses regarding competition between European products and local products. Apple, wheat, corn, chicken are examples of European products which, despite the costs of importing into West Africa (Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Ghana, for example), are sold in consumer markets cheaper than local products. It is necessary to understand these mechanisms and see to what extent these import practices have a negative effect on sectors, employment and encourage migration." African policy maker

Geo-location

In relation to the perennial question of ECDPM's geographic presence on the African continent, a majority of external stakeholders, European and African, also underlined the importance of the following points, nicely encapsulated by one African respondent with deep knowledge of policy processes on the continent and ECDPM:

"geographical proximity to Africa's policy making hub at the AU in Addis Ababa, and in other regions, would not only be symbolically important but would equally strengthen the Centre's leverage and ability to participate in formal and informal processes as a knowledge broker on Europe and African issues, and on their relations. In a post COVID 19 context such geographical presence need not manifest

in brick and mortar office spaces but can be in the form of strategic partnership through, for instance, secondment of a senior expert already present in the regional and/or hosted by a think tank in the region".

4.2.5. Response to Evaluation Question 2

EQ2: How effective was the implementation of the Strategy across the programmes, workstreams, task forces and at all-Centre level, particularly with regard to the 'new strategic priorities' and other innovations introduced in 2017?

Based on the findings and analyses enumerated for each of the judgement criteria, the evaluation team's response to Evaluation Question 2 is as follows:

Strategy

The Centre's implementation of the Strategy across the programmes, workstreams, task forces and at all-Centre level, was effective, but in varying degrees. It was very effective in relation to the strategic priority to focus on Europe. With regard to the strategic priorities to focus on Europe-Africa relations, to fully integrate North Africa and to work with a broader set of actors, it was effective at varying degrees. In relation to other innovations since 2017, the Centre clearly consolidated efforts to ensure its structure and systems rallied to ensure implementation of the Strategy. Of particular note, the Centre was able to attract and retain core institutional partners to an impressive level; and core institutional funding remained a vital element of ECDPM's ability to implement its strategy with independence, using its roles, reinforcing its niche, and applying its methods of working. The Centre has an impressive ability to innovate across diversifying funding and fundraising. At the same time fundraising imperatives pose a serious challenge and are a big time consumer; and depending on the source/type of funding, may not always allow the Centre to be as "independent" as it could be - in particular in deciding what to do with the results of its research. This re-emphasises the importance of diversified core institutional funding for independent think tanks.

Conclusions by the evaluation team, in relation to sub-criteria linked to the evaluation question response are also provided below.

Niche

There is no comparable think tank in Europe to ECDPM. The Centre is arguably one of the top go-to think tanks on understanding EU policy making and the Brussels bureaucracy and provides a plethora of reliable, rigorous and interesting publications and events on contemporary policy debates.

The Centre has managed to find an effective 'niche' as an institute focused on international cooperation; in particular it has a strong and confirmed niche on its priority area focused on EU external actions. The evaluation also confirms the Centre's ability to ensure a coherent package of activities and be a credible actor in many of its engagements, in particular thematic.

Its commitment to and focus on strengthening EU and Africa relations is a driving focus, and its deep understanding of EU policy making processes reinforces its potential to contribute to mutual appreciation of diverse interests and priorities of European and African policy makers. Other European think tanks have a unique selling point in other areas, e.g., Brueghel in EU economic policies, others in foreign policy.

At the same time, in conjunction with the decolonisation of aid and decolonisation of knowledge; and with Africa's determination to speak for, and negotiate for, itself there are more African actors able, interested and willing to visibly represent "African" perspectives, and more (European) institutions working with these actors than was the case five or ten years ago.

As a consequence, the Centre no longer stands out as one of the few in Europe sympathetic to an African point of view; and the jury is mixed as to whether the Centre represents Africa through a European lens, and whether the information it presents is always sufficiently based on an interactive process of co-creation and co-analysis with Africans on Africa; or with Africans on Europe.

The demand for the Centre to play a non-partisan broker role in Africa, or for Africa, and the demand for it to contribute to relations between Africa and the EU from a non-partisan standpoint, is shifting. In particular, African actors are far more intent in taking the lead in policy making and knowledge production, and this will increase in the future.

The Centre's knowledge of and on Africa, and its ability to co-create with Africa, demonstrated strong potential to credibly produce knowledge on Africa in many instances, and to inform its analysis of EU positions and infuse these with an African dimension; and to thereby draw conclusions relevant not just for Europe but for a wider audience. This niche area will be weakened though, moving forward, when the process for analysing and gathering data on Africa is not the result of co-creation/co-analysis with dynamic African actors.

The evaluation team also concludes that the above points are affected by too few African staff (permanent staff, associated experts, senior management, suspended fellow programme). Moving forward the Centre will need to double down on increasing co-creation, and triangulation - all along the decision making and output-production process; consider an increase in African staff at each level, and a more permanent presence in Africa in order to maintain and enhance the Centre's credibility and capacity to deliver its Strategic priorities concerning Africa and Europe-Africa relations.

Alliances and Partnerships

At the alliances level, the evaluation concludes that the Centre has demonstrated an impressive ability to foster and maintain strong alliances with core institutional funders and with the EU institutions; and has maintained alliances with RECs through specific thematic focus areas of most relevance (e.g., trade, private sector, territorial development, food security). The Centre does not appear to have maintained an alliance with the AU in this strategic period.

At the knowledge-driven and pragmatic partnerships levels, the Centre has demonstrated strong ability to reach out to, and work with, a multiplicity of partners (as illustrated in the above, and confirmed by external interviews).

The Centre has a proven ability to consolidate and to establish (new) partnerships, facilitate joint research, and mobilise additional funding, as the Annex illustrates.

At the same time there appears to be a strong need to consolidated an explicit "partnership strategy with Africa" (as in cooperation) that explicitly addresses various partnership angles, from source of "finance", to source of data, to sources of "co-creation" and "enhanced knowledge delivery" to whether, and how, the workstream/design process sufficiently emphasises, and tracks, delivery on this.

The evaluation team concludes that understanding of African and EU policy making processes and inter-continental relations would be greatly helped if the Centre seized and addressed emerging priorities and diversities in Africa and Europe, and reflected these more in its institutional and organisational structures and its relationships with partners in Africa and in the EU, including think tanks, other non-state actors, regional and continental bodies.

Uptake of Knowledge

The question of "ensure effective uptake of the knowledge produced" is addressed further down in the report but it is important to underscore that the evaluation team concluded unequivocally that the ability of the Centre to ensure, across Africa, and across Europe, a prolonged and consistent uptake of the knowledge it produces is a key factor in building reputation and brand; and paving the path for continued funding and increased interest and willingness to "co-create" or "partner" with the Centre; and to define ECDPM as a legitimate player in the relational cusp between Africa and EU; and on the various thematic themes and topics the Centre addresses with acumen. Getting the knowledge to the right place, at the right time, in the right format, and in the right language are key here, as discussed later.

The reports and publications made by ECDPM have great value in the eyes of the stakeholders in Africa. For example, the information on hidden interests and policy gaps in some of these reports and publications are used by African stakeholders to develop their own arguments for the in-country policy dialogues and for the negotiations with EU. However, beyond producing good think pieces, ECDPM, in a co-creation approach, could engage more with African think tanks, research centres and even practice based organisations. As a farmer-based leader said:

"together with ECDPM we want to produce knowledge. We need to value the knowledge produced by local actors, because knowledge is not only generated by people from the academic world".

To uphold the legitimacy and credibility of the Centre in Africa, in particular as the political environment in Africa shifts towards a more equal footing with the outside world, it is important for the Centre to do more co-creation with African led and based think tanks (and other non-state and state actors), have deeper sustained partnerships, and broaden diversity in the institutional and programmatic set up of the Centre, including in top decision-making levels.

Thinking Politically and Applying Political Economy, Gender and Climate Lenses

The Centre's human resources are highly intelligent, creative, and agile with many instances in which they have been able to "think politically". They are committed, have integrity and exceptional capacity to deliver quality and relevant knowledge products, and (to increase their capacity to further) integrate political, territorial, gender, and climate analyses.

To increase this as systematic and widespread will require time, resources, incentives and deeper collaboration with local actors and technical experts. In fact, the capacity of the Centre to engage and do political work (and related analytical work. gender, climate, territorial development etc) requires continuous investment, buy in and enhancement – to make sure such important work is part and parcel of the Centre's niche and additional value beyond the current levels.

The integration of a theory of change approach has encouraged a political analysis of obstacles and pathways to change and a focus on gender and climate change. The ability to illustrate how these are meaningfully integrated into the delivery of workstreams is a work in progress, however.

The gender task force has promoted better uptake of gender issues in the substantive work of the Centre (especially considering no standing budget was allocated to the task force, other than staff time spent on gender issues, though resources were allocated when these were requested) but there is a lot of room to grow before this analysis is appropriately and more systematically integrated in relevant areas. It is not clear whether a gender task force, as opposed to a senior gender advisor is the most appropriate way to ensure uptake of the use of this tool; in particular in the absence of dedicated or ring-fenced resources, and a strong incentives structure.

Given the constant delivery pressures across the Centre, it is unclear, in the absence of senior advisors able to meaningfully encourage uptake and advocate for finance and budget allocations, and in the absence of clearer institutional incentives and tracking systems, whether cross-cutting analytical tools will be able to be more systematically applied. The extent to which it is feasible to use external technical and local expertise as warranted, is not always clear, so that the Centre may want to consider ring-fencing funds here.

4.3. Evaluation Question 3: Using Assets for Added Value

EQ 3: How has the Centre used its specific assets, including its three main roles and different types of funding to achieve optimal outreach and enhance chances of producing positive effects as a non-partisan foundation working in the medium term on change processes?

JC3.1. Extent to which the various programmes and workstreams have optimally exploited (through specific working processes and methods) the Centre’s three main roles, were able to engage in relevant “do-work” for enhanced uptake of knowledge, effective implementation and the development of innovative practices.

JC. 3.2 Extent to which the availability of core/institutional funding proved to be a critical condition for ECDPM to perform its role effectively in a flexible manner and ensure its sustainability.

JC 3.3 Extent to which the support and contributions made by ECDPM add value to the work and mandates of its partners, institutional funders and other stakeholders (in Europe and Africa).

4.3.1. Judgement Criteria 3.1

JC3.1. Extent to which the various programmes and workstreams have optimally exploited (through specific working processes and methods) the Centre’s three main roles, were able to engage in relevant “do-work” for enhanced uptake of knowledge, effective implementation and the development of innovative practices.

4.3.1.1. Background JC3.1

ECDPM’s three main roles are

- i. Generating knowledge that is politically informed, evidence-based and practical;
- ii. Facilitating uptake of knowledge by key public and private actors through dialogue, implementation support and smart communication;
- iii. Acting as a non-partisan broker, leveraging expertise, knowledge and networks in Europe and Africa.

ECDPM’s added-value descriptors are

- i. a focus on implementation and what works and does not work, alongside the three core roles, to produce actionable insights and policy recommendations;
- ii. think and work politically, using political economy analysis and gender and climate ‘lenses’;

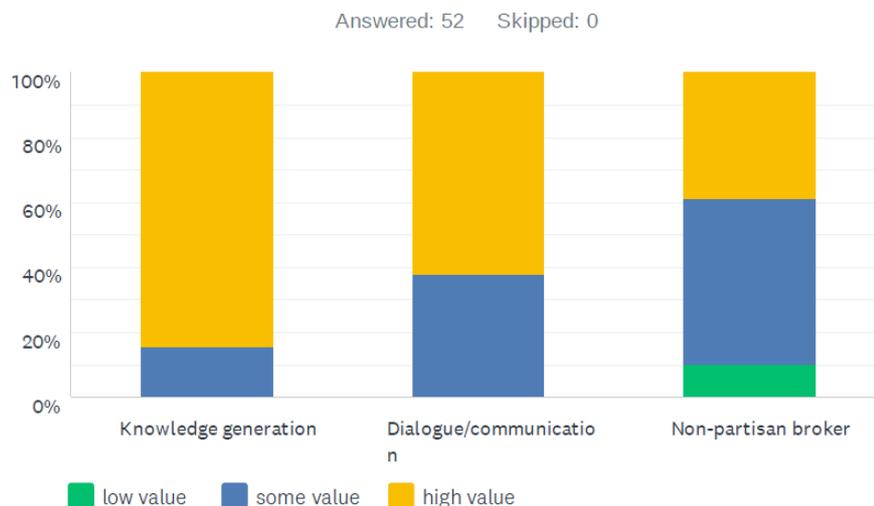
- iii. ability to bridge different policy domains ;
- iv. 30 years of experience in Africa-EU relations.

4.3.1.2. Findings and Analysis JC3.1

On the three roles, analysis and interviews underscored, without a doubt, that ECDPM fulfils all three roles and appropriately uses different sorts of funding (using core financing to supplement programme or project funds as necessary) to do so. At the same time, this same process particularly made apparent a shifting perception on ECDPM's role as a 'non-partisan broker' and this is emphasised in the EQs. For this reason, the team agreed to focus in particular on this role.

The Centre delivers its “non-partisan broker role” through a variety of actions, including facilitation of dialogues (sometimes under the radar), training, consultations, sharing advice, delivery of technical expertise with various actors (including local), and development or application of well appreciated diagnostic tools, (amongst others).

Q6 How do you value the different roles of ECDPM as a think and do tank?



Internal interviews, reviews of documentation and conversations with external stakeholders revealed the following:

- the Centre combined its three core roles mostly appropriately to deliver outcomes and output; external interviewees repeatedly underscored the three main roles as unique selling points and of value⁵⁰;
- interview results were mixed on the Centre's "role as a non-partisan broker"; whilst many Europeans and Africans interviewed underscored how useful the Centre has been in brokering knowledge and dialogue with a perception that this broker role was indeed 'non-partisan', other interviewees - in particular in Africa at intergovernmental, regional, national and research institution levels - pointed to a strong and growing perception that the Centre applies an ultimately European lens to its work in and on Africa, using European funding, and does not sufficiently co-create with Africa, in all senses of the term.
- core institutional funding and ability to fundraise, coupled with good use of internal staff capacities (including across programmes) reinforced the Centre's ability to play its three roles in an integrated and mutually reinforcing manner;

⁵⁰ "ECDPM's knowledge products inform our technical support activities with governments in regional communities, particularly in Africa. Additionally, ECDPM also supports project design and implementation activities, aside from serving as resources persons on missions and dialogue events, which is very useful for our work" (European survey respondent).

- there was overall a good level and scope of collaborations and partnerships with key stakeholders to foster implementation, mobilise additional resources, harness diverse niches and competencies, and scale up interventions and emerging opportunities;
- there was good specific evidence and examples of centre wide synergies including joint initiatives by various work streams, programmes and staff members to bridge policy domains for greater coherence and outcomes.
- the Centre's "do" work overall is a particularly unique selling point for the Centre. The evaluation interviews confirmed that:
 - This support role is based on the ability of the Centre to make available to actors, in the context of exchanges between them, structured information and a more nuanced understanding of what is happening in regional, national political, economic and social dynamics.⁵¹
 - The support role to EU presidencies, preparations for political negotiations were highly valued, by European and African stakeholders, in Europe and in Africa.
 - This support role (do work) is central because it makes it possible to move from the strategic and analytical documents to real implementation support especially in the "pre-implementation phase, and respondents underlined, in particular in relation to AIRD, EAT and Food interventions, that the Centre facilitates the link between Policy and Practice, and the translating of political orientations into operational modalities.
 - The Centre's work with civil society (for example, ROPPA) reinforced insights and capacity to enter into political dialogue with state authorities and regional organisations.

In relation to "producing knowledge that is evidence based, practical and politically informed", respondents, and a reading of output (what is produced and what is not), reveal a few points worth noting. These include that:

- Some programme areas produced excellent think pieces (for example on peace and security) whilst at the same time stayed silent on particularly political points (for example the "silencing the guns" debate; whilst the Centre is not an arms-specialised think tank, it is worth noting that the expectations amongst the African cohort, and Europeans in Africa, was largely that the Centre would/could have had interesting thoughts to share.
- Some knowledge generated was more theoretical and less practically applicable (e.g., work on climate change, security reform) and did not give the impression of having been produced by strongly field-experienced authors.
- Some output did not appear as politically informed or politically focused as it could perhaps have been; this may be due to the fact that quite some output was the result of consulting work for evaluations and assessments.

The above points underscore a dilemma for any think tank in relation to the balance between producing thinking, and knowledge that is politically informed and practical on the one hand, and the extent to which consultancy work helps or hinders those endeavours.

4.3.2. Judgement Criteria 3.2

JC. 3.2 Extent to which the availability of core/institutional funding proved to be a critical condition for ECDPM to perform its role effectively in a flexible manner and ensure its sustainability.

4.3.2.1. Background JC 3.2

The funding sources combine the use of long-term institutional (non-earmarked) funding with additional discreet financing sources, both programme funding (in which ECDPM solicits funding) and project funding (by which ECDPM

⁵¹ For example, the study on breeding in West Africa, carried out by the FOOD Program, has created a dynamic of interactions and discussions between regional and local actors, including networks of breeders and agriculturalists.

responds to a consultancy call). As the 2020-2021 Work Plan explains, ECDPM's total budget is set at €7 million, with institutional funding accounting for roughly 60%. The remaining roughly 34% from project funding and roughly 6% programme funding. Staff numbers have decreased slightly since 2017.⁵²

The funding sources, in order of contribution, are as follows (source:ecdpm.org/funding and ECDPM 2019 Annual-Report) (see also overview of "partners" in Annex):

The ten core institutional funders are:

The Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Irish Aid, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), Luxembourg Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Austrian Development Agency (ADA), Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁵³

Project funders include:

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation; European Commission - Particip GmbH, Germany; European Commission, Belgium; Austrian Development Agency (ADA) Austria; Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), Germany; African Center for Economic Transformation (ACET), Ghana; Agence Française de Développement (AFD), France; European Investment Bank (EIB), Luxembourg; Chatham House, United Kingdom; European Commission - Change for Results EEIG (CHARE); European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA), the Netherlands; European Commission - mediatEUr ; Oxfam-Magasins du monde, Belgium; Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, Belgium; MDF Training & Consultancy, the Netherlands ; TradeMark East Africa (TMEA), Kenya ; PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency, the Netherlands ; King Baudouin Foundation, Belgium ; The Netherlands Red Cross, the Netherlands ; NWO-WOTRO, the Netherlands ; Netherlands Enterprise Agency, the Netherlands ; Imani Development, South Africa ; Hivos, the Netherlands ; Ecorys -Netherlands ; FoodFIRST Coalition, Socires, the Netherlands ; Bertelsmann Stiftung, Germany ; Other funders.

Programme funders include:

Universities and Research - Università degli Studi di Milano-Bicocca (UNIMIB), Italy ; Department for International Development (DFID PO: 40082120), United Kingdom ; Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Denmark ; Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Sweden ; Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, Belgium ; European Commission ; Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, Luxembourg ; Austrian Development Agency (ADA), Austria ; Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Estonia.

4.3.2.2. Findings and Analysis JC3.2

External interviews and review of internal documentation, analysis, interpretation and reflection reveal that the Centre has maintained and fostered institutional relationships with a large number of core institutional programme and project donors, despite current and prevailing financing contexts. The Netherlands remains a core and vital institutional partner, accompanied by nine other European governments. This is relatively unique situation amongst European think tanks, and allows the Centre to be viewed as "independent" as opposed to "Dutch".

External interviews and internal documentation demonstrate that the funding sources and mechanisms have allowed the Centre to fulfil its roles and reinforce its unique selling points, including by providing the flexibility needed to strategically decide with independence on key paths of investigation.

⁵² According to Human resources, 67 staff in 2017, 66 staff in 2020.

⁵³ The UK DFID, once an important core institutional donor, is no longer a core donor in that sense.

A dedicated strategy to diversifying the resource base and to attracting diverse funding sources was largely successful, and supported by a specific fund-raising strategy. Indeed, the Centre has successfully diversified its funding sources, and managed both supply-driven funding and demand-led funding. The Centre has accessed successfully funding based on proposals submitted to interested funders. These funders overwhelmingly report positive use of finances and positive output.

At the same time, internal and external interviews revealed some dilemmas:

- Fund raising obligations across the programmes and workstreams were often perceived as overwhelming, in particular for younger and smaller programmes (and despite successful fundraising). This was due to varied combinations of lack of time, too much pressure to constantly raise funds, lack of broad enough networks, lack of fundraising experience and skills.
- The more "centralised" fundraising function by the institutional relations unit was seen as helpful, but mostly in relation to administrative paper work alleviation⁵⁴.
- Available funding for task forces was uneven, rendering the ability to have concrete impact more difficult.
- The lack of ability to adequately raise sufficient funds was cited as the main reason for closing the dedicated "Africa Institutions programme" and adopting a more "mainstream Africa" approach.
- However, inadequate financial resources remain a significant bottleneck to the Centre's "mainstream Africa approach" and lack of funds are often cited as the reason for co-creation challenge. Funding of the Centre's work and interventions was from development partners in Europe (and North America). Although the Centre allocated non-earmarked and core funding to work in/on Africa across some thematic programmes (e.g., AIRD, EAT (FOOD), SECURE), it was insufficient to develop and implement long term strategic interventions and there was no corporate agreement to "ring fence" a portion of workstream-related funding allocations in order to help ensure a focus on Africa and to co-creation;
- The credibility of the Centre as an independent and non-partisan "think and do" tank risks to be weakened, it was suggested by external interviewees, when they take on consulting work. But the ever increasing use of commercial firms to deliver research and implement policy initiatives shrinks available resources for think tanks, who are obliged to take on consulting work and balance any legitimacy concerns this may raise. The evaluation team, while recognising that consultancy work (evaluations, assessments) allows the Centre to plunge into the field, learn, gather knowledge and perspectives, and therefore also increase staff knowledge.. producing an evaluation as a consultant is not exactly the same as producing an evaluation as part of "think work";
- On the other hand, internal interviews also revealed a strong conviction that consultancies for research and policy implementation in the field are a key element in ensuring the Centre has its feet firmly planted in the realities of the field, and understands better field implementation challenges.
- There is also a reasonable argument that ECDPM learns from doing consultancy work and gets access to internal knowledge (for instance through participating in evaluations) that it does not have access to otherwise. This is worth quite a lot and justifies spending some core resources in order to gain that insight. Indeed some say this is essential.
- While consulting work can supplement resources, the experience of the Centre is that many of these consultancies end up drawing on limited core funding. This is also often true for work proposed by ECDPM and funded by external donors.
- Some interviewees suggested that unless consultancy work is fully funded by the client - the work should be limited to the scope of the available resources for the task.
- External interviewees underscored the imperative to encourage think tanks, perhaps through the ETTG, to consider developing an engagement strategy aimed at impressing upon the EU and European donors the

⁵⁴ IR team has a dedicated fundraiser who provides useful expertise in negotiation of rates, preparation of budgets, how to fill in templates, knowledge of consultancy companies, etc.

imperative of core-funding for independent think tanks, in order to alleviate pressures and help guarantee independent and quality products.

4.3.3. Judgement Criteria 3.3

JC 3.3 Extent to which the support and contributions made by ECDPM add value to the work and mandates of its partners, institutional funders and other stakeholders (in Europe and Africa).

4.3.3.1. Findings and Analysis JC3.3

Institutional donors benefit from a tailored service delivery option, and this has clearly contributed to the attractiveness of being a core donor. External interviews underscored that this "service" relationship has enhanced partnerships between the Centre and the donor, and helped increase the Centre's "insider understanding" of key European countries and the EU, enhancing the relevance of output. Internal interviews reveal that though at times these "service" contracts are time consuming, they always enhance the Centre's knowledge bank, broaden its experiences and perspectives.

The Centre has also responded to funding opportunities through which donors set the terms and conditions via tenders for evaluations, studies, and facilitation work. The team found a few things:

- external interviews of those donors overwhelmingly responded positively to the outputs, and use of financing, provided through these exercises;
- the Centre did not always negotiate successfully to integrate dimensions not mentioned in a service or consultancy contract (e.g., Africa, gender analysis; climate change);
- most of the consultancy generated output was shared publicly.

External interviews, for the majority, emphasised that the support and contributions made by ECDPM strongly add value to the work and mandates of its partners, institutional funders and other stakeholders (in Europe and Africa). And this was true across all programmes.

At the same time, though the majority were very happy with output, several respondents pointed to a lack of "fit" between audience needs and final output format. An example (amongst others) is the work carried out on integration of climate change and circular economies in foreign policies. This excellent work was extremely dense, so that policy makers struggle to find the time they need to translate the findings into workable policy recommendations.

Though other interviews pointed to the opposite, for example in relation to territorial development, food security, approaches to private sector, to name a few.

4.3.4. Response to Evaluation Question 3

EQ 3: How has the Centre used its specific assets, including its three main roles and different types of funding to achieve optimal outreach and enhance chances of producing positive effects as a non-partisan foundation working in the medium term on change processes?

Based on the judgement criteria, the team comes to the following conclusions in its response to Evaluation Question 3. The Centre has used its specific assets, including its three main roles and different types of funding, to achieve a good level of outreach and this has enhanced its ability to have positive effects on change processes in the medium term. The support and contributions made by ECDPM add value to the work and mandates of its partners, institutional funders and other stakeholders. The availability of core/institutional funding is a critical condition for

ECDPM to perform its role effectively in a flexible manner, ensure its independence, and its long-term sustainability. It is a major prerequisite for the Centre's ability to flexibly choose research topics and provide targeted funding for research teams as determined by the Centre's strategy, be reactive, and ahead of the curve to "lead" thinking.

In more detail:

Rigour

ECDPM delivers practical policy advice, training and support; expert information (by providing background information to partners and the media); thorough and rigorous policy research, sharp analysis and fresh ideas. It is involved in partnerships and dialogue - (including through organising and speaking at debates, conferences and workshops, and connecting people, brokering partnerships and creating space for dialogue). It does this in a fine and eloquent application of its roles whilst using its 'value descriptors'. It is this particular combination that ensures ECDPM is both a "think" and a "do" tank, and holds a unique niche in the international cooperation 'Europe-Africa' arena.

The support and contributions made by ECDPM add value to the work and mandates of its partners and institutional funders; and add value to the work and mandates of other stakeholders in Europe and Africa.

Broker role

In relation to the Centre's role as a "non-partisan broker", the Centre has demonstrable capacity and influence on EU policy making processes; and a clear ability to broker information about Europe to Africa and other external stakeholders.

Such leverage at the policy level is neither matched nor desirable in Africa. What is critically important is for the Centre to pay attention to emerging trends and opportunities (i.e., revitalised agency and strengthened capacities of Africans to address their own priorities as well as the global BLM movement which resonate deeply) to contribute to and play its part in decolonisation of knowledge without creating a tabula rasa. Inevitably that entails a radical shift from analysis of Africa to analysis with Africa and how it brokers with Europe; and to equally contribute to support Africans' better understanding and appreciation of European interests, agendas and priorities in addressing their own policy options.

At the more localised level, and in relation to themes, the Centre's "do" role as a facilitator of the "from policy to practice" link is clearly recognised by African stakeholders; and there is clear demand to continue here, and even to expand. This is especially true for EAT and AIRD programmes. And this "do" function is a healthy focus of the other programmes. At the same time, the Centre sometimes struggles to incorporate theoretical research with practical "do" experience. Field experience of the Centre's staff will continue, therefore, to be an imperative.

Funding

ECDPM has solid and committed financial and institutional partners able to provide solid core institutional funding. This relatively unique situation for think tanks today allows it to maintain operational autonomy and set its own agenda.

It has an impressive ability to maintain and foster institutional relationships; attract core and other funding; diversify its resource base; and raise funds. Core and other funding is used parsimoniously, with good value for money.

Institutional funding is a guarantee for ECDPMs independence and non-partisan role. In addition, the ability to acquire additional programme and project funding is based on a solid stock of multi-annual institutional funding.

Fundraising imperatives detract from staff time and create high levels of pressure, however. This fundraising imperative weakened the Centre's ability to deliver an all-of-Centre strategy for Africa, a more consolidated "Africa programme", and flexibility to co-create; though funds is not the only factor.

Institutional funders do influence the thematic choices of the Centre by commissioning studies, policy papers and other services as determined in their funding agreements (service delivery). However, it appears that – although the work for institutional funders requires considerable time allocations for staff – the work for the funders is commissioned in the given thematic frameworks as determined by the Centre's strategy, and reinforces its ability to acquire important knowledge and to deliver the strategy with excellence.

Consultancies, that bring additional and needed funding to the Centre do allow the Centre to acquire new knowledge and perspectives, broaden its network. At the same time, the blur between "think tank" and "management consultancy" is a risk.

Funding for old-style „development research“ as well as development assistance and related research budgets will probably decline. This is clearly a challenge for the Centre, since the institutional funding is sourced mainly from „development“ budgets. However, funding for evidence-based research on topics related to global sustainable development or related to the EU's external action are less likely to decline. Research budgets in general are increasing in the EU and MS, despite the current decline in the MFF. There is a considerable awareness of the need for independent evidence-based research among stakeholders. The challenge is to tap relevant funds.

Lastly, it was not clear the extent to which core priorities were fully funded with core funding. The evaluation concludes that the financial allocation systems could be reviewed and updated, with a stronger role provided at the central level through the Director's Office, to ensure allocation of core budgets to, first and foremost, core priorities.

4.4. Evaluation Question 4: Contributions to Outcomes and Impact Areas

EQ 4: How successful was the Centre in achieving the various types of outcomes and contributing to the four impact areas it has defined?

JC4.1 Extent to which various programmes and workstreams have plausibly contributed to the all-Centre theory of change outcomes and the four impact areas.

JC4.2 Extent to which the existence of an all-Centre theory of change and the use of theories of change in the various programmes and workstreams helped to produce relevant outcomes.⁵⁵

JC4.3 Extent to which the Centre's overall results framework and its Theory of Change process is adequate in guiding the Centre to achieve its agreed outcomes and in helping staff to identify key enabling factors and potential obstacles to avoid so as to achieve impact.⁵⁶

4.4.1. Judgement Criteria 4.1

JC4.1 Extent to which various programmes and workstreams have plausibly contributed to the all-Centre theory of change outcomes and the four impact areas.

4.4.1.1. Findings and Analysis JC4.1

The Centre's 2017-2021 Strategy identifies 6 outcome areas and 4 impact areas. The Centre's self-assessment acknowledges that measuring outcomes and even more so impact for a think tank is complex and is fraught with significant challenges. It is difficult to draw a causal link from outputs and interventions to the outcomes. The evaluation team concurs.

The Centre intended outcome areas included:

- Informed actors;
- Inclusive dialogues and processes;
- Coherent and integrated policies;
- Reduced policy implementation gaps;
- Empowered institutions and actors; and
- Effective multi actor partnerships

The Centre was of the view that while it was possible to claim direct contributions to the first two outcomes (informed actors and inclusive dialogue and processes), it was far more challenging to make similar claims to the other four – whose influence and contributions were more indirect. For the latter four, the Centre relied on the maturity of its various workstreams, its track record, credibility, strong networks and clearly identifiable niche to assume plausible contributions to the stated outcomes.

The outcomes were integrated as a solid driving focus in the formulation of work stream theories of change; and highly rated in accountability reporting to IATI. Using, inter alia, the results framework's qualitative pointers, the team reviewed output against the outcome areas, considered the IATI narratives, annual reports etc and discussed the narratives, pointers and output with external stakeholders, with the intended outcomes as a driving conversational thread.

⁵⁵ This JC is addressed in a separate section on Theory of Change.

⁵⁶ Idem.

The evaluation findings confirm that the results framework's qualitative pointers were appropriate and relevant in assessing whether the Centre had contributed to its intended outcomes. The Centre has provided an ample selection of public goods, publications, services, and "fresh ideas" to policymakers and practitioners in Europe and Africa, through provision of research and analysis; brokered dialogue and partnerships; policy advice and training; input to, or organisation of, knowledge exchange (debates, seminars, dialogue, conferences, workshops); generation of highly expert information.

Therefore, the evaluation team found that the Centre directly and indirectly contributed to the intended outcomes. Whilst no one "output" delivered on all outcome areas, the Centre as a whole delivered positive results in each of these, and external stakeholders overwhelmingly endorsed this.

Illustrations of concrete evidence are provided in Annex. They are produced by the Centre itself (and were used by the Team in its triangulation interviews and output verification research). These also illustrate the major emphasis the Centre places on ensuring it is fulfilling its key roles in such a way as to achieve its outcomes; and that this is tracked, recorded, and communicated.

Equally, OECD and EU MS highlighted the crucial role played by the ECDPM-led community of practice on policy coherence for sustainable development in facilitating information flow, introducing new important perspectives, and allowing concerted policy dialogue and strategizing so that PCD was protected in the broader coherence agenda. The use of Chatham House rules in the community of practice was deemed essential. So too was the Centre' work on specific thematic issues such as trade and policy coherence implications:

- <https://ecdpm.org/publications/promoting-policy-coherence-lessons-learned-eu-development-cooperation/>
- <https://ecdpm.org/great-insights/square-pegs-round-holes-trade-policy/making-eu-trade-development-policy-smarter/>

The four impact areas include:

- Effective international cooperation framework and tools for tackling global challenges;
- Legitimate and accountable public institutions and engaged societies;
- Peaceful societies based on rule of law, social cohesion and human dignity; and
- Sustainable economic transformation with shared prosperity and decent jobs.

The results framework, the all-Centre theory of change, and the individual theories of change each considered the intended impacts and drew relevant links to these by intended outcomes and outputs.

Donors emphasised the usefulness, for them, to directly find "familiar terms" and to be able to "hook into" these broad impact areas (considered key by donors and their governments/institutions) when proposing funding for the Centre, and when considering service and other contracts.

The external evaluation team was not able to assess direct attribution or contribution to these high level impact areas. At the same time there was clear evidence that the Centre had produced output, and outcomes that were in line with each of these impact areas. It is plausible to suggest that the Centre enhanced European, African and global actors' knowledge and perspectives; and these are key elements of influence. This plausible "linkage" with the impact goals was reinforced in conversations with external stakeholders.

4.4.2. Judgement Criteria 4.2

This JC is considered in a separate section further on in section 4.7

4.4.3. Judgment Criteria 4.3

This JC is considered in a separate section further on in section 4.7.

4.4.4. Response to Evaluation Question 4

EQ 4: How successful was the Centre in achieving the various types of outcomes and contributing to the four impact areas it has defined?

Using the judgement criteria detailed in the previous sections (and the 2 judgement criteria that are treated in later sections, grouped together in a section on theory of change) the evaluation confirms that the Centre achieved its six outcome goals; and notably:

ECDPM plausibly

- informed actors, enhanced availability, access to, and use of policy-oriented knowledge and information (i);
- enhanced dialogue processes, helped make them inclusive, and played a facilitating role (ii);
- helped promote coherent and better integrated policies, and in particular influence the debates from policy coherence (for development) to policy coherence for sustainable development ; and by contributing evidence-based output and shedding realistic light on policy options and frameworks (iii);
- reduce the policy-implementation gap, in particular in relation to thematic work addressing food security; economics, trade and private sector endeavours (iv)
- empowered some institutions and actors to improve their institutional capacity and use the results of political economy analyses (v);
- promoted to some degree, the importance of multi-actor partnerships for effective implementation (vi).

The Centre appropriately reflected and analysed internal EU developments and positions, and a plethora of EU external action evolutions and developments. The EU MS and the EU benefitted from ECDPM⁵⁷. The Centre's focus on Europe-Africa and on thematic topics relevant to Africa, was an important part of that. The Centre was able to foster broader perspectives on EU's and Africa's roles, including to some extent their quests to be global players with influence. The Centre provided in-depth and useful analysis, insights and recommendations in crucial topical areas, *inter alia*: security and resilience; peacebuilding; migration; policy coherence; gender aspects of various themes; food security; circular economies; finance and financial instruments; trade; private sector; institutional development; territorial development, climate change, etc. The output (from blogs to newsletters to briefings to seminars to trainings etc) demonstrated consistent quality and rigour that helped ensure uptake and the achievement of the intended outcomes. ECDPM outcomes show well that it is positioned to integrate and to align global trends, to address new and emerging developments, with a nexus approach, in a flexible and in a timely manner.

⁵⁷ In particular, the team commends the excellent work of one of the programmes where there was across the board external consensus, the EEA programme. The team's consensus too was that this showed an impressive performance in terms of outcomes and even probable influence on effective international cooperation frameworks, and demonstrated, as mentioned earlier, overwhelmingly that it is a very strong niche for the Centre. There are other instances across each programme of plausible contributions to outcomes and excellent work.

4.5. Evaluation Question 5: Organisational and Programmatic Choices

EQ 5: How relevant and efficient were specific organisational choices made in the Strategy 2017-2021 for attaining the Centre's core objectives and ensuring outcomes?

JC 5.1 Extent to which the Centre is organised in an efficient, relevant and flexible manner that provides incentives for multidisciplinary teams to better integrate cross cutting issues across work streams (including through clusters, task forces and facilitation role of LQS).

JC 5.2 Extent to which the Centre has made serious and appropriate efforts to achieve a level of diversity / gender equity in the programme teams, management and Board - taking into account the constraints it is facing.

JC 5.3 Extent to which the creation of the Learning and Quality Support unit contributed to strengthening ECDPM's internal learning and quality processes.

JC 5.4 ~~Extent to which the Communication approach responded to stakeholder knowledge and information needs, adequately embedded at programme level from an early stage and helped to enhance outreach, knowledge uptake and impact.~~⁵⁸

4.5.1. Judgement Criteria 5.1

JC 5.1 Extent to which the Centre is organised in an efficient, relevant and flexible manner that provides incentives for multidisciplinary teams to better integrate cross cutting issues across work streams (including through clusters, task forces and facilitation role of LQS).

Background JC5.1

Organisational Structure: ECDPM delivers its strategy through seven⁵⁹ programmes as well as through task forces or focus on cross-cutting areas (climate change, gender, political economy analysis, policy coherence for sustainable development) and with assistance from the support units. This constitutes a relatively complex structure as evidenced below.

Staff are generally organised around the seven main programme areas:

1. European External Affairs (EEA)
2. African Institutions and Reform Dynamics (AIRD)*
3. Migration
4. Security and Resilience (SECURE)

Economic and Agricultural Transformation (EAT)

5. Trade, Investment, Financing for sustainable development
6. Food systems, food security, agricultural transformation
7. Private sector engagement

ECDPM carries out cross-centre work, including through its centre-wide task forces, that aim to ensure cross-institutional or horizontal approaches; and topic teams are created to address *ad hoc* or more permanent focus on cross-centre topics, and at times to integrate these within the main programmes.

⁵⁸ This JC is addressed in a separate section further on.

⁵⁹ EAT is a cluster of three programmes, each with its own programme "head".

This includes Task Forces or a cross-cutting focus as follows⁶⁰:

8. Gender Task Force
9. Europe-Africa Relations Task Force (includes former North Africa Task Force)
10. Climate Change Task Force
11. Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (PCD/PCSD) 61
12. Political Economy
13. Territorial Development

Support units fulfil normal support functions of a think tank and ensure major institutional support functions:

14. Learning and Quality Support Unit (LQS)
15. Communications Unit for results and knowledge uptake
16. The Institutional Relations and Partnerships Unit 62
17. The Human Resources Unit
18. The Finance Unit

*The African Institutions and Regional Dynamics programme, created in 2019, is a merger between the former African Institutions programme and the regional integration work stream within the Economic and Agricultural Transformation programme.

4.5.1.1. Findings and Analysis JC5.1 - Results Framework, Programme Structure

This section covers illustrations in order to respond to Evaluation Question 5. It does not cover all aspects, in particular given the recent Management Review provided to the Board in 2019. A separate discussion on communications is presented further on in the report.

Results Framework

In relation to the Results Framework, the all-Centre theory of change, and the individual theories of change, the evaluation team found that:

The results framework, which combines the all-Centre theory of change, was extremely useful as a communications and fund-raising tool. It also served to reinforce external accountability and reporting mechanisms. It consolidated a corporate approach around a core set of agreed ambitions, and provided a unifying approach for justifying workstreams.

At the same time, this structure is quite complex, and the individual theories of change were complex and not always sufficiently relevant to actual every day programme work and internal accountability. The theories of change had no clear theories of action, and in any event, ECDPM is not responsible for the change, and can't measure contribution to change, so that it is not entirely clear that ToC is an appropriate "tool" for programmatic decisions. The conjuncture of results framework approach and ToC approach is challenging.

Programme Structure

External interviews reveal very little interest with the internal programme structure of the Centre, though they agreed that they help identify key competency areas; and thereby facilitate partnership and funding. Internal

⁶⁰ ECDPM Strategy Implementation Plan 2018-2021, page19.

⁶¹ This includes hosting the PCD/PCSD Community of Practice.

⁶² ECDPM Strategy Implementation Plan 2018-2021, section 4.3

interviews revealed that the programme structure is heavy and too complex, with its programmes, task forces, cross-cutting imperatives, and functional units. Interviews, confirmed by evaluation team analysis, highlight an overly "silo" impression, with small centres all over the Centre. Though the cross-cutting work, and cross-Centre collaborations did take place, and were mostly positive, the financing/funding/fund raising imperatives linked to cross-Institutional collaboration were seen to be overly complex and burdensome; and the terms task forces and focus areas were not always consistently used, with a lot of variation, creating flexibility but also nebulosity. In relation to distribution of finances across the programme structure, external interviews revealed no interest in this issue. The evaluation team noted, as discussed elsewhere, that it was not entirely clear how the programme structure matched the imperatives laid out in the strategy for the period under review.

4.5.2. Judgement Criteria 5.2

JC 5.2 Extent to which the Centre has made serious and appropriate efforts to achieve a level of diversity / gender equity in the programme teams, management and Board - taking into account the constraints it is facing.

4.5.2.1. Findings and Analysis - JC5.2 - Diversity

The Centre, as a result of strong staff leadership, set up a task on gender equality intended to promote better diversity (read more women) amongst staff at all levels, and to address better use of gender analysis across programmes. (The evaluation team notes that the previous evaluation for the previous strategy had emphasised a need to enhance gender equality and gender analysis.)

The Task Force was not provided with a dedicated budget, though finances were made available against specific requests. Its main focus during the period was an extensive delve into issues related to gender diversity in personnel in order to produce a strong strategy, though this mantra was eventually taken over by the (professionalised) human resources unit. Lack of resources translated, until HR took over, as an "add-on" for the task force staff, on top of already heavy professional duties.

The Centre made some headway towards introducing better gender diversity at senior staff level (HR, Comms, Migration, EAT).

Several internal respondents (senior staff and mid-level staff) and external stakeholders expressed concern over slow progress on broadening diversity – beyond gender - to include generational and racial (geographic) diversity – especially in terms of knowledge generation, quality metrics and in management structures of the organisation. Whilst the issues are articulated and acknowledged in the Management Review report there is an urgent sense that more work needs to be done internally across the organisation to improve diversity. These "3 G" diversity questions are particularly relevant in relation to top management and the Board; and to attracting and to retaining quality staff at mid-level. External interviews highlighted branding links between reputation as increasingly "European" and a relatively European set of staff and associates; and suggested that more diversity will create (even) more depth in ECDPM's analysis and output, and in the choice of focus topics, and the process used to deliver these choices. So it is a question not of numbers but of corporate culture and analytical lens. ⁶³

⁶³ The evaluation team originally used the word "Euro-Centric". Whilst the dictionary definition of this term is perhaps harsher than the team intended, it is important to understand that the Centre does need to strengthen its reputation by being less predominantly European and ensuring this infuses not just its thematic/substantive delivery, but its choices of workstreams, priorities, strategic focus areas.

4.5.2.2. Findings and Analysis - JC5.2 - Geolocation

External and internal interviews underscored the importance of the Brussels office in supporting the "insider" access and networking that are such an important part of the quality and insights the Centre provides. (Access to EU and its institutions, delegations to the ACP, delegations to the EU, other key actors present in Europe's capital). And the importance of the Maastricht headquarters as helping to create a certain image of independence away from the Brussels bubble. At the same time, respondents questioned whether the Centre can legitimately have enough "insider" access, contacts, networking, and relationship building in and with Africa, without increased permanent presence in at least Addis, if not each of the regions. The evaluation team findings and analysis strongly concur. These points were also discussed elsewhere in the report.

4.5.2.3. Findings and Analysis JC5.2 - Cross Fertilization

Internal and external interviews and analysis revealed the following:

On the positive side:

- many instances of effective cross collaboration:
- plethora of outputs demonstrating cross-fertilisation and multi-disciplinarity application, producing relevant and useful outcomes;
- identification of this as a strong niche area and important to the Centre's branding, in particular moving forward and as development cooperation moves towards international cooperation whilst the global architecture increasingly complexifies.

On the room to grow side:

- heavy and complex programme structure, with insufficient flexibility so that cross-fertilization work comes at a heavy opportunity cost; many mini-decision centres create a "silo effect";
- organisational structure hinders an ability to more strategically address and co create with Africa;
- insufficient use of associates, fellows, expertise (including in Africa) hinders more cross fertilization;
- cross-fertilisation (and workstream content) is somewhat hindered by a strong and embedded corporate culture that is not sufficiently apt at integrating diverse views across diversity lines (gender, geography, generation), the corporate culture needs to modernise.

4.5.3. Judgement Criteria 5.3

JC 5.3 Extent to which the creation of the Learning and Quality Support unit contributed to strengthening ECDPM's internal learning and quality processes.

4.5.3.1. Findings and Analysis JC5.3 - Learning and Quality Support

The Centre made a deliberate choice to modernise and professionalise its Organisational structure by introducing a Learning and Quality Support unit. The unit led:

- operational planning including the establishment and peer-review of the individual theories of change, meant to facilitate implementation of the Centre's Strategy 2017-2021;
- monitoring and evaluation, quality support and learning in conjunction with the various policy processes the Centre engaged with;
- accountability, and reporting budgets expenditures, partners, geopolitical and sector spread, output and outcome monitoring data (including internal assessment exercises, the mid-term strategic review, and this evaluation exercise; as well as reporting monitoring data to IATI (International Aid Transparency Initiative) in line with its exacting standards for which it has received consistently high marks; and donors;

-
- developing, supporting and advising on research methodologies and approaches, on cross-cutting issues (policy coherence assessments and political economy analyses); on methodologies for quality assurance; and providing training.

The internal interviews confirmed that overall, the establishment of the LQS was a success, helping to improve the Centre's capacity to manage these key sets of issues with professionalism and in a timely fashion. External interviews underscore that the Centre receives consistently high marks from donors and from IATI.

In terms of learning and cross-centre interactions, staff expressed positive comments as well as frustrations - in particular - lack of time and insufficiently innovative approaches to sharing information - impeded better ability to "learn from one another". This, despite clear instances of good cross-learning - in particular through hands-on collaborative efforts to produce multi-programme outputs - and there are plenty of examples to illustrate this. At the same time, mentoring of experienced staff towards less experienced staff was revealed to be mostly *ad hoc* with the latter expressing frustrations at being provided with responsibilities they were not always well equipped to handle and a certain lack of concerted "mentoring"; though examples to the contrary were also mentioned. Not all staff felt able to be as constructively critical as they would have liked.

The LQS also participated in cross cutting tasks forces on gender, climate change, Africa-EU relations, and ran the focus on Policy Coherence.

Findings and Analysis JC5.3 - Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development

The LQS cross-centre focus area, Policy Coherence for (Sustainable) Development. and the community of practice it created, according to external interviews, had high levels of impact on national understandings of, and approaches to, policy coherence for development in the context of sustainable development and the SDGs. The work in the period under review builds on more than 15 years of solid work on the topic, including with and on Africa, the EU, and more global points.⁶⁴

The strong influence this work has had globally was overwhelmingly confirmed by external interviews with national actors (including in Africa), and confirmed by intergovernmental entities, such as the OECD and the EU. They pointed to raised awareness, increased coherence, training, dialogue facilitation, provision of knowledge and analysis. Whether this type of work should be within the remit of the LQS was questioned by the LQS itself. The evaluation

⁶⁴ A brief illustration includes: Rice trade and value chain development in West Africa: An approach for more coherent policies October 2020; Promoting policy coherence: Lessons learned in EU development cooperation James Mackie, briefing note for the CASCADES project, September 2020; Policy coherence issues emerging from COVID-19 with a focus on healthcare supply chains Fabien Tondel and Pamela Eunice Ahairwe, ECDPM paper, June 2020; Promoting West African rice: The crucial role of coherent trade policies; Clarisse Blancher, Cecilia D'Alessandro and Fabien Tondel, ECDPM blog, 31 January 2020; Implementing policy coherence: A challenge inherent to the 2030 Agenda; Fabien Tondel, Martin Ronceray, James Mackie and Nadia Ashraf, ECDPM blog, 19 July 2019; Where next with promoting policy coherence under the 2030 Agenda?; James Mackie, brief for the Barcelona Centre for International Affairs (CIDOB), May 2019; Understanding illicit financial flows and efforts to combat them in Europe and Africa Luckystar Miyandazi and Martin Ronceray, ECDPM paper, June 2018; Good enough coherence? Six lessons from good governance for policy coherence and the 2030 Agenda Jan Vanheukelom, James Mackie and Martin Ronceray, contribution to external publication, May 2018; Policy Coherence in 2017: Lessons from the United Nations High Level Political Forum Martin Ronceray, ECDPM blog, September 2017; Étude sur la cohérence des politiques pour le développement agricole et la sécurité alimentaire : le cas de l'agriculture et du commerce au Burkina Faso Fabien Tondel, Carmen Torres, Sayouba Ouédraogo, Didier Zoungrana, Boureima Sawadogo et Somlanare Romuald Kinda, juillet 2017; Policy coherence and the 2030 Agenda: Building on the PCD experience James Mackie, Martin Ronceray and Eunike Spierings, ECDPM paper, March 2017 Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater: Why Policy Coherence for Development still has a role to play Martin Ronceray, ECDPM blog, November 2016

team confirms that this choice was linked specifically to individuals within the LQS rather than a structural or organisational decision to link policy coherence directly to LQS issues.

4.5.4. Judgement Criteria 5.4

This judgement criteria is addressed in a separate section, further on in section 4.6.

4.5.5. Response to Evaluation Question 5

The evaluation team concludes, based on the findings, evaluation team readings, analysis, interpretation and reflection, that overall there are positive organisational evolutions and follow-up to the previous recommendations, and many of the organisational choices were relevant, as revealed by successful efforts to:

- adapt organisation and structure;
- upgrade and professionalise Communications, HR, and Finance systems;
- create a Learning and Quality Support unit and strengthen learning, quality and accountability;
- strengthen support for cross-Centre collaboration to harness multi-disciplinarity;
- start addressing diversity;
- provide incentives for multidisciplinary teams to integrate cross cutting issues.

There is a hugely impressive capacity within the Centre for constructive yet highly discerning self-reflection and criticism, and reorganisation of working modalities, and high quality reporting. The creation of the Learning and Quality Support unit strongly contributed to strengthening ECDPM's internal learning and quality processes.

Despite this excellent progress in many aspects of the organisational structure and approach, the team also concludes at the same time that there is room to grow in ensuring that the Organisational choices are fit for purpose as the Centre *moves forward*.

Some reflection points are highlighted below:

Diversity is not well addressed: though Gender diversity was championed by the creation of the Task Force and later taken up by Human resources, there is a lot of room to grow in relation to more diversity in staff, in particular at senior levels, and associates, in relation to the three G's: Geography, Generation, and Gender. The current diversity, and related issues, could undermine the credibility and legitimacy of the Centre in Africa, if left unaddressed. This is not a numbers question only; it is an analytical lens question.

The complex structure of programmes, task forces, cross-cutting themes, analytical tools etc (and how finances are allocated) dilutes the Centre's ability to strongly focus on its key priorities and appears to render most topics on a horizontal rather than a vertical order of priority, though this is not matched with resources attributions. While multi-disciplinary output and the "nexus" lens is a key Centre attribute, the ability to 'matrix' seems to be despite the structure more than because of the structure.

How core financial and human resources are distributed across the structure (programmes, units, task forces, application of cross-cutting themes and analytical tools) seems inadequately to follow a clear logic that is in line with the Centre's key priorities.

This seems partly to be linked to a lot of decision-making power devolved to the programmes, with perhaps insufficient consultation with the Director's office.

4.6. Communications, Outreach, Uptake (EQ2, EQ5, Judgement Criteria)

EQ2/JC 2.2.	Extent to which the various programmes and workstreams have been able to ensure effective uptake of the knowledge produced. (this is part of JC2.2)
EQ5/JC 5.4	Extent to which the Communication approach responded to stakeholder knowledge and information needs, adequately embedded at programme level from an early stage and helped to enhance outreach, knowledge uptake and impact.

In this section, in responding to the above judgement criteria, we focus briefly on the link between pathways to influence and change; and consider a key element of influence namely, the Centre’s approach to communications and outreach and how this relates to uptake of knowledge. This section is a separate section because the evaluation team concluded that the Centre, despite excellent progress, must vastly ramp up its integration of outreach and communications from early conceptual stages and audience-needs-analysis, right through to immediate and sustained efforts to encourage uptake (over the longer term), within the workstreams and programme management, alongside (and with the help of) efforts from and by the Comms unit. (This would go hand in hand with longer partnering relationships).

Background

How do people access information, and *what* information do they access? The past five years have witnessed an extraordinary decentralisation of communications and information. This is fundamentally shifting political and economic relationships, disrupting power relations, and in many cases sparking and supporting transformative change. And we know that information, data literacy and sustainable information practices are essential for achieving the SDGs.⁶⁵ For institutions and think tanks producing research aimed at policy influence and change, the value of communications and outreach to knowledge uptake, and the importance of the “research to policy” or “research to action” links, have increasingly moved centre-stage.⁶⁶ The ubiquitously connected world has also meant that access to, and use of, modern communications technology has become a key and crucial “currency”, or “vehicle” and an essential element of any strategy. This is in some part spurred by the dynamic increase in a plethora of available information, analysis and data, intensifying this competitive arena. An increasingly effective way of reaching out, in particular to young people and to countries with lower ethernet infrastructure is through mobile-friendly web-based platforms and social media.⁶⁷ “Fit to audience” websites and platforms are no longer luxury “add-ons”, particularly in Covid19-times.

Communications tend to be viewed as focused on media and production, and outreach tends to be focused more on policy impact. In reality, the distinctions between communications and outreach, and their influence on knowledge uptake and hence on « impact » or “outcomes”, are blurred, or combine. Outreach tends to bring along with it notions of on-going engagement, and inter-active relationship building or “stakeholder partnering” whereas

⁶⁵ Information Practices for Sustainability: Information, Data and Environmental Literacy Gobinda Chowdhury and Geoff Walton Northumbria University, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, Serap Kurbanoglu and Yurdagül Ünal Hacettepe University, Ankara, Turkey. Joumana Boustany Université Paris Descartes, Paris, France.

⁶⁶ Shaxson and Gwynn (2010) “Developing a strategy for knowledge translation and brokering in public policymaking” paper from Knowledge Translation and Brokering workshop, Montreal, Canada, 20 October 2010; Jones, B. (2011) Linking Research to Policy: The African Development Bank as a Knowledge Broker, African Development Bank Group, Tunisia; Knowledge Brokering and Intermediary concepts Analysis of an e-discussion on the Knowledge Brokers’ Forum Catherine Fisher Impact and Learning Team Institute of Development Studies

⁶⁷ In Ethiopia, for example, the number of mobile connections in January 2020 is equivalent to 41% of the population, whereas access to working internet connections (for desk tops) is far lower. In 2019 internet penetration stood at 19%, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-ethiopia> And more than half the world uses social media <https://datareportal.com/reports?tag=Digital+2020>

communications is often engaged only towards the end of a think tank product-process. But in reality, good branding, design, production, and multimedia thinking can each affect research impact.⁶⁸ Whereas think tanks “used to be able to influence policy by speaking directly to policymakers and policy-influential media outlets, the rise of social media has increased the role of the public in policy change. (..) This has radically altered the way in which think tanks engage with research and ideas, and how they target beyond policy makers, academia, the public and the media. »⁶⁹

4.6.1. Findings and Analysis - JC2.2 and JC5.4 (knowledge uptake)

Knowledge and Uptake

EQ2/JC 2.2. Extent to which the various programmes and workstreams have been able to ensure effective uptake of the knowledge produced. (this is part of JC2.2)

EQ5/JC 5.4 Extent to which the Communication approach responded to stakeholder knowledge and information needs, adequately embedded at programme level from an early stage and helped to enhance outreach, knowledge uptake and impact.

ECDPM, in its “Strategy 2017-2021”, aims to establish a systematic and integrated communications process, with a strong focus on facilitating uptake of knowledge. The Strategy underlines its three key roles (below) and highlights the importance of “smart communication”

- Generate politically-informed, evidence based and practical knowledge ;
- Facilitate uptake of knowledge by key public and private actors through dialogue, implementation support, smart communications, and knowledge management ;
- Acting as a non-partisan broker, leverage expertise, knowledge and networks in Europe and Africa

To deliver the “Strategy 2017-2021”, the Centre created a distinct “External Communications Unit”. This was a spin-off from what had been the “Knowledge Management and Communications Unit”, (the other new unit being the “Learning and Quality Support Unit”, discussed elsewhere)⁷⁰.

The “Strategy Implementation Plan 2018-2021” identifies effective communication as critical to shaping policy and practice; and to ensuring significant information reaches relevant audiences in timely manners. This includes the sharing of original research through a variety of channels, mostly in Europe and in Africa.

A communications strategy was agreed by ECDPM's Board. It was adapted to the Centre's overall Strategy, the rapidly evolving international context and the increased number of actors in the Centre's “playing field”. The strategy's main tenets prioritise increased visibility (including going beyond development audiences) and refined and timely stakeholder targeting in order to increase the chance of impacting the right policy change. Four principles guide communications work across the centre.

- i. coherent to the Centre's overall strategy and its programmes
- ii. bespoke to specific programme needs and audiences
- iii. integrated into the research process from the start
- iv. planned with medium to long term policy change perspectives in mind.

These principles accompanied a multi-pronged plan to focus on internal and external communications. On the external side, the focus concentrated on the “visual” and “ease of use” side of communications (simplify formats,

⁶⁸ <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/evolution-think-tank-research-communications-heres-what-ive-learned>

⁶⁹ idem

⁷⁰ ECDPM Internal Assessment Note – Communications – 2020, p 1, and ECDPM Strategy Implementation Plan 2018-2021

revamp publication layout, increase use of infographics, videos, social media, encourage use of a common “style guide”) while also aiming to embed “bespoke” communications and outreach for programme workstreams from earliest moments. This approach envisaged both the functions of a separate “support service unit” and an integrated-into-programme-conceptualisation-and-outreach dimension.

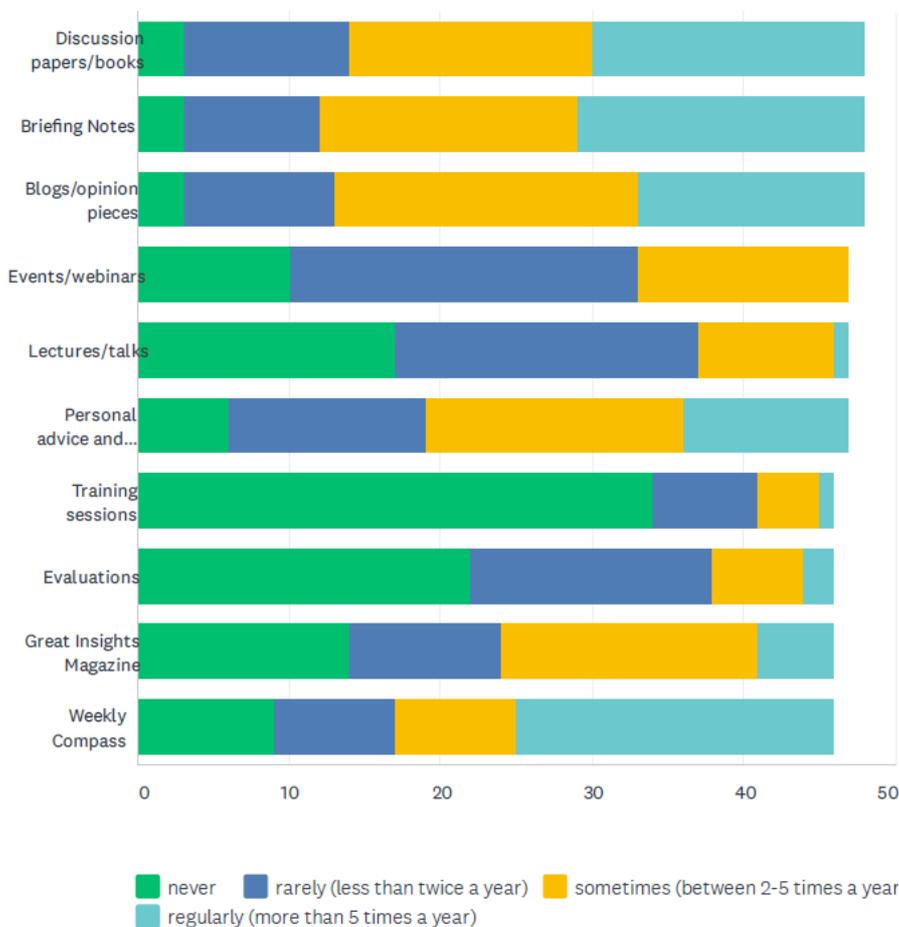
In addition, at the corporate strategy level, the focus on linkages with the SDGs visibly provided a facilitating narrative against which to scaffold ECDPM achievements, including in the Annual Report; and against which to embed fundraising actions.

On the internal side, the unit focused on the importance of ensuring internal information exchange to share knowledge across programmes and task forces and to “break perceived programme silos” (as explained in the unit’s internal assessment note 2020).

Through our review of internal documents, communications statistics and data (see Annex), interviews with internal staff, and conversations with external stakeholders, we are able to confirm that ECDPM has recognised the intensely complex, competitive, adaptive and rapidly changing international eco system, and has evolved positively its communications and media approach over the last five years.

Q4 To what extent are you using the services of ECDPM?

Answered: 52 Skipped: 0



As the statistics in Annex demonstrate, ECDPM has increased output and visibility overall, simplified formats, revamped publications layout, increased use of infographics, video, social media etc, consolidated a “corporate look”, created compelling publications, annual and other reports, seminars, briefs and meetings.

Not all products and topics, based on ECDPM data, were in equal demand; and a clear trend emerges that ECDPM is the “go-to” place when it produces knowledge and brokerage that is relevant to themes that are high on the political agenda and political processes of European and African audiences/stakeholders. In this light, ECDPM has a difficult balance to effect between reactive and proactive , as it recognises itself.

ECDPM’s reach into Africa, and the use of its output by African audiences was lower than European audiences⁷¹. In addition, both European and African audiences stressed the need to better adapt product formats, and increase “in-person” and “tailor-made-to-purpose” in-person events and briefings. Though researchers tended to underline the usefulness of the detailed reports and research produced by ECDPM, most policy makers underscored the usefulness of very short products, tailor-made for specific policy negotiations or sets of thematic policy narratives. Overwhelmingly, respondents called for executive summaries that present main conclusions and recommendations.

Additionally, many respondents, including African delegations in Brussels and EU Member State representatives underscored the high utility of not only in-person “briefings”, “presentations”, or “dialogue” formats but equally they pointed to the importance of including early discussions and dialogue at conceptual stages for ECDPM workstreams, and as work moved forward and evolved. In particular, African delegates pointed to the nuanced insight that conversations with them can bring to the work, choice of topic, and positioning of the Centre.

African stakeholders interviewed repeatedly underscored a few other salient points:

- The relative invisibility of ECDPM across the continent, and in particular in non-English speaking countries. Whereas publications in, for example, French, are sometimes produced, *“these tend to be focused on work that is focused in countries that are (already) Francophone, whereas for example in West Africa we are more interested in understanding what is happening elsewhere in Africa, but those publications are in English only”*.
- The relative and perceived Europe-focus of ECDPM’s engagement with knowledge uptake. Whereas ECDPM gathers information from Africa, stakeholders underscored a perception of under-representation of “African perspectives”, and a lack of “long-term knowledge uptake partnerships” in which the results of the Centre’s work are part of a long-term outreach approach to knowledge uptake across the continent, and to co-creation of knowledge.
- At the same time, the “Weekly Compass” is considered by its users as an excellent source of knowledge on and from Africa; and ‘representation’ is indeed strong there. Africans (and Europeans) underscored the high utility of this product and the “Insights”; as well as the “Briefs”.
- The relative need to more explicitly highlight the political analysis of policies, the political trade-offs, and areas of commonality and difference, between “Africa” and “EU”, across different output, was a common narrative.
- Political economy analyses were conducted in Africa during the period of the evaluation; and stakeholder interviews expressed frustration at the relatively low-level of socialisation of the PEA results. This fuelled an impression that the Centre had “gathered intelligence for the EU”, negatively impacting the Centre’s reputation as independent and non-partisan.
- Inconsistent interaction with African delegations in Brussels and in Europe, as integral to better identifying and analysing the more political dimensions across the Africa-EU bridge.

⁷¹ Refer to statistics ; and to Internal assessment note 2020 (communications unit).

External audiences, both in Europe and in Africa, were appreciative of the clear language and intellectual rigour provided through the communications and outreach products and actions, both written and “in-person”; as well as the top quality of presentation of publications, the internet presence, the use of graphics, videos, increased presence in social media etc.

Many respondents requested improved internet-search functions, and pointed out that much of the excellent work feels buried and not always easy to find. Whilst European and African policy makers tend to underscore the usefulness of “in-person briefs and dialogue” and “one pagers”, think tanks, research groups, and INGOs tend to underscore the usefulness of the depth-of-detail provided by the Centre’s longer pieces. Here the Centre has a dilemma common to any institution with a diverse audience base. This underscores the importance of identifying very early-on the likely audience(s), their knowledge and timing needs, and what that means for how the workstream is conceptualised, managed, packaged, socialised, communicated and delivered.

The Weekly Compass, the Insights, and the availability of briefing notes, discussion papers, and thematic dossiers; the rapidity of output addressing emerging topics were also underlined as key selling points for the Centre during external stakeholder interviews; and in the plethora of positive testimonials gathered by ECDPM. The evaluation survey also underscored that ECDPM is appreciated for its role in knowledge production, communication and knowledge brokerage, both in Europe and in Africa.

At the same time, interviewees overwhelmingly responded mostly negatively when queried on *whether the Communication/outreach approach responded to stakeholder knowledge and information needs, and whether these were adequately embedded, from an early stage of a workstream, and included an approach to outreach for early information and exchange, and thereby improved the chances of success of actions later aimed at sustained outreach, knowledge uptake and impact*. Equally, several external interviewees underscored that longer-term follow through plans to socialise and ensure continued use of, and focus on, key outputs was under-par, with some respondents emphasising that “it seems as though once a workstream is “done” they just move on to the next thing; with not necessarily much follow up; whereas sometimes the audiences are really looking forward to update of that product; or help to use it”.

In effect, as the Centre itself recognises in its Internal Assessment note concerning communications and outreach, the programme and workstream managers rarely embed an outreach and communications strategy from the earliest conceptual stages or pull this through into implementation and strategic socialisation plans.

Lastly, the Centre has focused a great deal on increasing use of various social media outlets (twitter, LinkedIn, blogs etc) with a certain measure of success, as illustrated in Annex. At the same time, given the visibility role these play and are likely to play in the future, the Centre’s “on-line presence” and platform received moderate praise from interviewees.

Response to JC2.2, JC5.4

Response to JC 2.2: Extent to which the various programmes and workstreams have been able to ~~consolidate or to establish (new) partnerships, facilitate joint research, mobilise additional funding and~~⁷² ensure effective uptake of the knowledge produced

and

Response to JC5.4 JC 5.4 Extent to which the Communication approach responded to stakeholder knowledge and information needs, adequately embedded at programme level from an early stage and helped to enhance outreach, knowledge uptake and impact:

Based on the findings, evaluation team readings, analysis, interpretation and reflection, the evaluation concludes that: ECDPM, as a think and do tank, delivers knowledge, translates knowledge to help people make sense of the information, and brokers that knowledge to help ensure information is available and delivered in a timely manner so as to contribute to enhanced policy processes and dialogue. It has a strong communications and outreach unit, that has increased visibility successfully, and is often able to respond to many stakeholder knowledge and information needs. At the same time, these dimensions and the inter-linkages between knowledge uptake, outreach, and influence (impact) are not always sufficiently embedded at programme/workstream level from an early stage in the workstreams, either conceptually or in practical terms.

The evaluation team also concludes that ECDPM's research and the information it generates, can expand policy capacities, broaden policy horizons, transform practice, policy and regulatory content⁷³ ; so understanding how credible evidence, political contexts, policy makers and other stakeholders interrelate has been crucial to shaping its research, and shaping how, where, with whom and when information is gathered and research results are shared. Careful consideration, by some workstreams and programmes, of these factors has increased the research-influence and plausible contributions to impact⁷⁴. These dimensions are clearly understood and upheld by the Communications unit. It is not clear to what extent the Centre as a whole fully grasps these dimensions; nor is it clear to what extent workstreams are willing to systematically devote the time, energy and resources these dimensions will require moving forward.

ECDPM will need to turn towards a more strategic approach to, and understanding, and financing of, the role that communications, media, and outreach play in creating the conditions necessary for influence towards SDG achievements; and the strong and interconnected relationship between communications, outreach, knowledge uptake and research impact.

⁷² The crossed out text has been treated elsewhere.

⁷³ "Think Tank Initiative: Stories of Influence : TTI's Methodology for Stories of Influence: IDRC's Categories of Influence and ODI's RAPID" <http://www.thinktankinitiative.org/sites/default/files/TTI%20Sol%20Methodology%20070513.pdf>

⁷⁴ Court, Julius, and John Young. "Bridging Research and Policy in International Development: An Analytical and Practical Framework." *Development in Practice*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2006, pp. 85–90. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/4029864 .

4.7. Theory of Change (EQ1, EQ4, Judgement Criteria)

This section regroups responses concerning Theory of Change related to questions and judgement criteria, as follows:

EQ1/JC 1.2	Extent to which the various theories of change (at all-Centre and specific programme levels) were realistic in the light of the evolving context for international cooperation.
EQ4/JC4.2	Extent to which the existence of an all-Centre theory of change and the use of theories of change in the various programmes and workstreams helped to produce relevant outcomes.
EQ4/JC4.3	Extent to which the Centre's overall results framework and its Theory of Change process is adequate in guiding the Centre to achieve its agreed outcomes and in helping staff to identify key enabling factors and potential obstacles to avoid so as to achieve impact.

Background

Theory of Change is essentially a comprehensive description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context.⁷⁵

"Theory of Change is essentially a comprehensive description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context. It is focused in particular on mapping out or "filling in" what has been described as the "missing middle" between what a program or change initiative does (its activities or interventions) and how these lead to desired goals being achieved. It does this by first identifying the desired long-term goals and then works back from these to identify all the conditions that must be in place (and how these relate to one another causally) for the goals to occur. These are all mapped out in an Outcomes Framework.

The Outcomes Framework then provides the basis for identifying what type of activity or intervention will lead to the outcomes identified as preconditions for achieving the long-term goal. Through this approach the precise link between activities and the achievement of the long-term goals are more fully understood. This leads to better planning, in that activities are linked to a detailed understanding of how change actually happens. It also leads to better evaluation, as it is possible to measure progress towards the achievement of longer-term goals that goes beyond the identification of program outputs." From <https://www.theoryofchange.org/what-is-theory-of-change/>

A theory of change identifies and defines the "current state" and projects a desired "changed state", and identifies enabling factors and obstacles that help or impede transformation toward that change. Assumptions related to change, and envisaged pathways tend to be sketched out. In particular, a theory of change expects unforeseen developments, opportunities and challenges, and therefore expects modifications to the pathways to change and possibly to the theory of change itself. The process is an iterative one, and is usually accompanied with a "theory of action" (the pathways outline) focused on effecting the desired change(s), mitigating risks, taking advantage of opportunities, and addressing obstacles as they present themselves. This can be called an outcomes framework. In development programming terms a "theory of change approach" is not the same as the more classic, linear "results framework" with a focus on output, output indicators, outcome and impact, and a set of objectives that tend not to evolve as the project is implemented.

4.7.1. Findings and Analysis - JC1.2, JC4.2 and JC4.3 (theory of change)

At the start of the new five year strategy ECDPM decided to develop and apply a Theory of Change approach. The newly established Learning and Quality Support Unit steered the ToC approach within the Centre.

⁷⁵ From <https://www.theoryofchange.org/what-is-theory-of-change/>

The Theory of Change approach, adapted to the Centre, intended to, and ostensibly did, contribute to: Strategic planning; Adaptation, review, and management of strategy and work streams ; Address the problematic link between results orientation and funding ; Monitoring and evaluation ; Accountability ; Knowledge sharing and learning .

The all-Centre Theory of Change highlights opportunities and challenges, identifies key assumptions, defines the Centre’s approach and roles and how these result in outputs, which then link to outcomes that, in theory, result in influencing key impact areas that are chosen in line with ECDPM’s mission. As such, this “All Centre” Theory of Change served its purpose to neatly combine an approach focused on effecting change, with an approach focused on reporting output and outcome against a more classic "results framework". In effect, in its formal documents ⁷⁶ the Centre integrates an “All Centre” Theory of Change into the presentation of its Results Framework focused on output, outcome and impact.⁷⁷ The ToC process helped to ensure that workstreams reinforced the Centre’s “core identity” and were relevant to the Strategy/overall ToC.

The end "combined result" reads more like a results framework that has included a focus on opportunities, challenges and assumptions. No clear set of baselines are laid out, and no clear “change” objectives are specified, though the “outcomes” are assumed to lead to changes that would reinforce the desired impact areas. In fact, in some ways the outcomes embody assumed changes (e.g., “informed actors” (an outcome target) leads to better policies, which leads, with other elements, to impact). As such, it is difficult to “mark progress” towards change; and no “theory of action” accompanies the All Centre Theory of Change, though there is a very clear, and commendable Strategy Implementation Plan 2018-2021, with regular work plans (e.g., "work plan 2018-2019").

The Centre, during the period, encouraged workstreams to consider how they would, and have, contributed to the results framework’s stated approach and roles, activities, output, output indicators, outcomes, common qualitative pointers, and key impact areas. The Centre equally requested staff to produce a “theory of change” (ToC) for any (potential) workstream or activity; underlining pathways to change and specific outcomes. This ToC process was aimed, in part, at ensuring that workstreams took into account complex and nonlinear change processes whilst also ensuring that workstreams contributed to the Strategy, the All-Centre results framework, and the All-Centre theory of change. It also served to remind staff to try to integrate both a gender and a climate change lens.

The ToC relationship with the four strategic priority areas was uneven, with no explicit request to focus ToC formulation on/discuss Africa, Africa-Europe relations, or multi-actor approaches, or Europe; and no tracking system to review which ToC incorporated explicitly which of the priority areas.

The centre engaged in 20+ specific Theories of Change which resulted in multiple workstreams/activities. (At the time of the evaluation, 16 Theories of Change and their 16 workstreams were in play.) The ToCs were considered, challenged and assessed through a peer exercise led by the Learning and Quality Support Unit. This served a function of “socialising” (potential) work across the Centre; aimed to reinforce “cross-centre” exchange, and potentially, collaboration; and served an accountability and a learning function. Mid-term reviews were planned mid-strategy cycle, with, at times, subsequent adaptations to some elements in the theory of change in question.

A “Theory of action”, or clear pathways to change generally did not accompany the theories of change in any detailed way. Instead, the results framework, and the required IATI reporting, encouraged workstream managers to focus on

⁷⁶ « Strategy Implementation Plan 2018-2021 », ECDPM, December 2018. <https://ecdpm.org/publications/strategy-implementation-plan-2018-2021/>.

⁷⁷ Important to recognise that donor and institutional partners mostly require this think tank to report against a results framework, and using DAC evaluation criteria terminology. These are not particularly suited to think tanks. (Consult NIRAS studies i.a., for more on this).

how outputs and roles contributed to the Centre's intended outcomes (and to some extent, its intended impact). So workstreams tended to convert the Theory of Change into the units required in the results framework (roles, output, output indicators, outcomes, impact).

The evaluation found that the presentation and content of the ToCs varied a great deal across the various programmes and task forces. Some Programmes produced their own "overall programme Theory of Change" against which to measure whether or not to embark in a new workstream; and adapted impact goals to be programme-relevant. This was an adaptation of the all-Centre Theory of Change and results framework. A particularly compelling version is available at Annex; it clearly drove decisions about what to do, and how to do it for that programme.

Internal assessment notes, carried out for each programme, each unit, and some task forces, as well as internal staff interviews, underline that:

- The results framework and reporting requirements helped ensure workstreams leveraged the core "roles" ECDPM fulfils and focused on the "added value".
- The ToC process proved to be a useful instrument for internal planning and communication in and across programmes.
- The ToC were not a part of "every day management, or planning" but served the purpose of encouraging reflection on how a workstream fit into the Centre as a whole, or, into a programme as a whole.
- It was not always clear how the ToC process contributed to moving the needle on reflecting on the underlying political reasons that change was, or was not, effected.
- The ToCs rarely addressed explicitly, in any detailed sense, the intended changes, the underlying assumptions or the pathways envisaged; and did not identify how they would measure any changes.
- There did not appear to be much focus on collaboration with stakeholders or how this might create opportunities or obstacles towards desired change.
- Some staff viewed the ToCs process as too bureaucratic.
- The ToC requested specific reflections on the relevance of gender or climate dimensions to the workstream in question. And this helped raise awareness.

In relation to the theories of change across the Centre:

- There was little apparent linkage across the 20+ Theories of change and the work streams, so the linkages to the overall ToC seemed tentative.
- There was ample evidence of workstreams that worked across the Centre to integrate different "nexus" angles (i.e. cross centre focus).
- Different programmes applied different methods for improving prioritisation considering the contextual environment in which the Centre operates; and these varied in large part also according to what external financing was available. The programmes demonstrated strong ability to adapt financing to "fit" into the strategic priorities of the Centre.
- In particular, the Centre managed to keep focus on its core business whilst accommodating the diversity of service delivery requests, and fundraising pressures.

External interviews concerning theories of change and workstreams suggested that think and do tanks generally aim to influence rather than to directly *effect* change and that since the Centre plausibly influenced policies and positions; it perhaps should think more in terms of "influence" (i.e., theory of influence).

In seeking an answer to the judgement criteria question "were the theories of change realistic in the light of the evolving context for international cooperation", the evaluation found that each workstream was accompanied by a peer-reviewed/LQS reviewed Theory of Change, and these probably helped make ToCs more realistic. And the

process encouraged a deep dive into contextual analysis (foundational factors, leadership, reform coalitions, power, politics, formal and informal institutions, potential for knowledge gaps in the context analysis and the change dynamics, relevant global challenges) and thereby encouraged the workstreams to think more “politically” and think about risks, obstacles and assumptions. At the same time, the theories of change struggled to identify change in such short time frames; the depth of analysis varied across workstreams; and though linkages to outcomes was plausible, attribution (or even contribution) to impact was questionable.

Overall, the theories of change process and structure did provide a scaffold against which to try to better understand complex and non-linear change processes, and to help ensure the theories of change and their ensuing workstreams were relatively realistic.

Response to JC1.2, JC4.2 and JC4.3 on Theory of Change

Based on the findings, evaluation team readings, analysis, interpretation and reflection, the evaluation response to the questions is that: The use of theories of change for all workstreams was relatively effective in maintaining a linkage to the strategic priorities and goals of the Centre with some caveats (lack of tracking). The use of task forces and focus areas may well have promoted a deeper cross-centre focus on the topics they addressed, thereby reinforcing the Strategy⁷⁸ but also contributed to a complex structure.

The existence of an all-Centre theory of change and the use of theories of change in the various programmes and workstreams helped to produce relevant outcomes. The process helped staff to identify key enabling factors and potential obstacles to avoid so as to achieve these. At the same time, interconnections between theories of change and the results framework are complex and reporting relatively cumbersome and time consuming. There are too many Theories of Change (i.e., one for each workstream, one for the all-Centre). For projects, a results framework approach focused on output and outcome links (and not impact) seems to be more adapted to the management and reporting realities of a think tank. It is not clear whether a theory of change approach is easy to apply for think tanks focused on influence and not directly responsible for change. A more streamlined and adapted approach may be warranted.

4.8. Previous Evaluation Report Recommendations

In 2015-16, an external institutional evaluation of ECDPM was conducted and covered the strategic period 2012-2015. The current evaluation team considered the state of implementation of the report's recommendations that were agreed in the Management Response to the recommendations. These are summarized in a box in Annex, and were included in the evaluation's “Inception report”.

The current evaluation team found that ECDPM has made progress in fulfilling the ambitions outlined in the nine sets of recommendations. The Centre focused on each of these, and integrated them into its Strategy and Implementation plans for the period of its (current) Strategy - 2017-2021. In effect, and as discussed earlier, the establishment of the Learning and Quality Support Unit facilitated the reporting system, enhanced focus on organisational culture and identity, and systematised decision-making processes to ensure clear relevance and connections to the Centre's Strategy and its intended outcomes, impact, and the application of its roles. The

⁷⁸ Examples of relevant publications thus include: Peace and Security drivers in North Africa (DP262); North Africa's Double pursuit Part I (DP238); Little enthusiasm for a continent to continent approach: Looking North and Moving South and Part II (DP239); Mixed messages stand in the way of an intercontinental deal; Maghreb's relations with Sub-Saharan Africa (DP225) and a Great Insights issue on North Africa: Hope in Troubled Times (Nov 2018) as well as various blogs and articles.(from Internal Assessment Note, North Africa Task Force).

professionalisation of the Human Resources unit, Communications unit, and the upscaling of the Finance unit clearly contributed positively to addressing points raised in these recommendations. And the appointment of senior women also responded to the recommendations.

At the same time, it was the evaluation team's conclusion that although progress is positive and visible in each of these nine recommendation areas, they remain valid and should be utilised as important drivers in considerations for the next period 2022-2026, the new Strategy and the corresponding set of organisational choices.

Annexes

See volume 2

- I. Evaluation Survey Responses
 - II. Recommendations for each Judgement Criteria
 - III. ECDPM Results Framework
 - IV. ECDPM Theory of Change
 - V. List of Individual Theories of Change
 - VI. An example of a specific Theory of Change
 - VII. Examples of Output and Outcomes
 - VIII. Overview of ECDPM Partners
 - IX. Communications and Outreach Overview
 - X. Readership and Followers 2018-2020
 - XI. List of References/Resources for the Evaluation
 - XII. List of Interview Respondents
 - XIII. The Evaluation Team
 - XIV. Evaluation Methodology, Questions, and Terms of Reference
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