

Management Response to Independent Institutional Evaluation of ECDPM 2012-2015

1. Introduction

Our analysis is that the evaluation report responds to the Terms of Reference set out by ECDPM's Board and meets quality standards and is therefore useful for learning, accountability and preparing for our future. The evaluation is conducted with independent methodological rigour, with a significant evidence base and an expert contextual understanding that could be expected from an experienced external team applying international standards in institutional evaluation. We are grateful also for the role of the specialist independent evaluation Reference Group and the Board whose quality control input has been important. Overall we find this a well structured and systematic report with clear messages with useful and challenging suggestions for improvements in ECDPM.

In a new strategic period for ECDPM this is indeed a report that can help us to prepare our future in a changing global context. This report is well received given the challenging and evolving political, policy and funding environment we find ourselves in, in Europe, Africa and globally. The management has some specific views and responses to the conclusions and recommendations made and on a number of issues has come to similar views. The particular perspective the management has on how ECDPM is going to respond to these issues to be well placed for impact while also offering value for money in the coming 5 year period is articulated below.

There are a number of issues to focus on the management would like to highlight four as priorities. First that we continue to nurture and build on our niche as identified by the evaluation team. Second that our role as a think and do tank and non-partisan broker is part of our added value yet deserves continued attention. Third that we need to pay greater attention to ensuring coherence and alignment across all programmatic areas. Finally that we must focus our efforts on ensuring that we maintain institutional funding as it is critical to our impact.

2. Overall Response to Conclusions

The management has specific comments on the conclusions related to outcomes, niche and risks.

Outcomes

Firstly we welcome that the independent evaluation concludes that ECDPM, *“has performed well throughout the review period. ECDPM is a well-known, highly visible, independent and non-partisan ‘think and do tank’ that contributes meaningfully to a range of development-relevant policy processes within and outside of the EU institutions. Its pertinence and relevance to informing – and sometimes shaping – the European agenda distinguishes it as one of the leading development-focused think tanks in its field”*.

That ECDPM is recognised through rigorous independent assessment as being the leading think tank contributing to a range of development processes within and outside the EU institutions is something that we welcome had been independently confirmed.

Secondly we also accept the conclusion that while we have sometimes helped shape the European agenda that this is very much subject to wider political dynamics. To some extent we would also recognise that if ECDPM is to place itself as a facilitator and broker in Europe-Africa we could do more to build upon existing work with African institutions and partners. A greater depth of relationships based on substance collaborations rather than traditional capacity development is the right strategic approach for ECDPM.

Thirdly the management is particularly gratified to see that the ‘think’ and ‘do’ aspect of our work has been recognised as part of our unique approach and added value but take the conclusion seriously that we need to reflect on how deep and far we can go on the ‘do’ part of our work in terms of entering the realm of

supporting implementation in multiple domains. We take heed of the warning of the evaluation team here.

Fourthly our increasing focus on ‘working politically’ has been concluded to be the right strategic choice by the evaluation team is also important. Yet we also agree that we need to further institutionalise this approach and manage associated risks (in particular potential tensions with our non-partisan status) carefully if we are to expand this.

The management recognises the conclusion of the evaluation in relation to outputs that ECDPM was able to:

- *“contribute to well-informed and content-based policy dialogue, with effective participation of a wide range of European and African actors [...] ECDPM has been willing to say things that other stakeholders cannot afford to say”*
- contribute to *“a narrowing of the gap between policy statements and practice”*
- support the EU...*“to move towards more integrated and coherent policies”*

“The Centre’s achievements are all the more impressive in light of its ‘behind the curtain’ modus operandi [...] much of its contribution to wider outcomes cannot be publicly reported [...] it is difficult to attribute and credit major outcome-level changes to ECDPM alone, since much depends on the political context and the interests and actions of the different actors ... Nonetheless, ECDPM’s contribution to development-relevant processes have been significant”

The management are also gratified to see that the outcomes we have contributed to are recognised as is our ‘behind the curtain’ work that we do.

The Niche

The management broadly agrees with the niche identified by the evaluation team as:

“Understanding of European institutions and policy processes [...] access, leverage and convening power [...] supplier of thinking”

“understanding of ACP, and of African institutions and policy processes [...] ECDPM’s work within Africa is generally welcomed [...] the facilitation of EU-Africa policy processes remains an important and growing dimension of its unique niche”.

We will continue to nurture and build on our niche which we regard as one of our key performance drivers for our new 5 year strategy.

The Risks

On the **specific three risks** highlighted by the evaluation team of:

- 1) the pressure we will continue to face, to widen our *“programmatic portfolio, leading to a potential fragmentation of effort”*;
 - 2) *“volatility in the funding environment”* and the risk of a reduction of institutional funding that would lessen ECDPM flexibility and therefore impact;
 - 3) *“the potential downside risk posed to demand for ECDPM’s products and services, by EU institutions looking increasingly inwards and African stakeholders soliciting partnerships outside of the EU”.*
- On the first risk as already indicated, ECDPM recognises and acknowledges this risk of addressing fragmentation by promoting better coherence.
 - On the second risk ECDPM also fully agrees with the conclusion that a reduction in particularly flexible institutional funding would limit ECDPM’s impact.
 - On the third risk, the management acknowledges that the Centre needs to balance, stimulate and ensure that we respond to demand in Africa as well as Europe. We also need to recognise that while our primary niche is Europe-Africa we must acknowledge that in Africa and also

Europe we have to understand, appreciate and respond to the fact that other regions and countries are also increasingly important. Our work must incorporate these to a certain degree if we are to remain relevant. Our draft strategy will also be consulted on with a number of senior African experts and stakeholders as well to ensure that it is appropriately situated.

3. Overall Response to Recommendations

Next to the following concluding recommendations of the evaluation team as note in headings the management makes a response in the subsequent paragraph:

3.1 “Continue to adapt ECDPM’s systems, policies and processes to the Centre’s current size”

The management believes that any further growth will have to be carefully monitored not least to ensure the Centre’s non-partisan, independent nature and niche are maintained. As a knowledge Centre with high quality, and well motivated staff, ECDPM values promoting entrepreneurship, innovations, flexibility and autonomy. Yet we accept that the management in collaboration with key programme staff using existing systems such as the new Strategy process and Bi-Annual Planning, need to adopt a more proactive approach to taking clear decisions on major new initiatives. Our new Learning and Quality Support unit will also work with programme staff to track processes against commitments.

3.2 “Accelerate the depth and breadth of the Centre’s ability to ‘think and act politically’ by integrating political analysis in both the planning and delivery of its programmes”

The management believes a further effort is needed to institutionalise the ‘thinking and acting politically’. We also need to ensure that expertise and learning are incentivised to do this in a structured manner. As the evaluation has indicated our “ability to think and act politically” is made possible by institutional funding.

3.3 “Expand the Centre’s strategic approach to gender dimensions more systematically in its programmatic work”.

The new ECDPM Strategy will have a commitment to gender as a cross-cutting issue, that will be included in programme design and developed in our results framework. The management will seek to engage in peer learning with other institutions and institute an internal task force on this issue. We recognise that progress in this area is both necessary and challenging and that this will require us to develop our staff capacity and expertise through training, guidance and support.

3.4 “Deepen investment in partnerships as a clear means to delivering ECDPM’s goals, rather than as an end in itself”, with increased pragmatism as to the ways in which ECDPM works to bolster partner capacity.

A limited number of strategic partnerships and alliances that are driven by common interests and mutual benefits on content and complementary network will be prioritised. Linking our partnerships strategy to the strategic outcomes that ECDPM could not deliver alone, rather than partnerships themselves, will be our driving rationale in the next strategic period.

3.5 “Ensure that ECDPM’s next mission statement, long term objectives, all-Centre and programmatic Theories of Change, results frameworks, and systems for planning and accountability and decision-making at all levels are fully aligned”.

The management agrees and sees a specific opportunity for increased coherence in the fact that ECDPM is currently developing a new mission statement, 5 year strategy, and an all-Centre Theory of Change to be put to the Board for approval. In addition we will be utilising the new Learning Quality and Support Unit and forums like the Programme Management Group to ensure learning and accountability throughout the period. The Management Team will take particular responsibility for ensuring alignment and coherence.

3.6 “Reduce the current overall number of work streams to ensure a connecting narrative and to have space to embrace a small number of new fields of focus”

The management recognises this is an issue for our effectiveness. Through the on-going strategy process we will seek to reduce the number of workstreams by closer aligning them to our niche. As noted we will use the processes just described (under 3.5) to pursue this end.

3.7 “Seek to consolidate long term institutional funding from the EU and its Member States, while continuing to diversify income streams”.

Our flexible institutional funding from multiple European states is central to the success of the organisation and we will work hard to retain it ensuring a good and on-going dialogue with those states on its importance and value. Our recent dialogue with institutional partners was an important step to gaining support for our new Strategy and insight into our partners current concerns. We continue to seek funding from the EU institutions that would not impact upon our independence. We will be looking to restructure our Institutional Relations and Partnership Unit to make it more responsive to fundraising demands and supportive to programmatic fundraising including looking for new and diversified sources. We believe that fundraising should however remain a responsibility and expectation from all senior programme staff and that all funding initiatives have to be aligned to our strategy otherwise they can be counter-productive and lead to fragmentation and loss of focus.

3.8 “Further strengthen external communication by paying more attention to stakeholder information needs, investing in better usage analytics, and improving planning and implementation of communication activities”.

The management accepts the recommendation, however we believe we need to step up urgently the level of our communication effort to address challenging issues, such as a more strategic approach to the supporting role communications can play in key policy processes we engage in and stronger visibility and communication in the Netherlands.

3.9 “Further improve knowledge management by giving increased priority to critical applications, making the Reporting System easier to use, and intensifying engagement towards a change in organizational culture”.

In line with this recommendation we will build our monitoring and reporting processes around our new Strategy and work plans. We will also seek to incentivise their use by making them more user friendly and more appropriate for encouraging an internal learning culture. We will work with our donors on strengthening the alignment and harmonisation of our reporting in order to cut transaction costs.