

Reference	SWG 2/4/5
Title	Proposals concerning evaluator's recommendations as regards Expert Groups
Submitted by	Sweden and Lithuania
Summary / Note	-

Proposals concerning evaluator's recommendations as regards Expert Groups

Section 3.3.4

"2. NDPHS should elaborate and develop clear criteria and a transparent process upon which new Expert Groups should be established and/or old Expert Groups can be dissolved. Newly founded EGs should have not only a clear mandate from the beginning, but also be restricted in regard to the duration of their existence and the focus of their activities. Changes in focus and time have to be formally approved and criteria not met should be viewed as an indicator which can lead to the dissolution of the EG. Decisions towards the establishment of new groups should be based on clear indicators as well as a unanimous political will to pursue the matter, with clear, documented commitments by all relevant partners to participate."

In general the idea to introduce clear rules around EGs should be welcomed. This would increase the status of the EGs.

Proposal:

This recommendation should be followed in principle. Before an EG is established it needs to be made clear that the majority of Partners consider it important and are ready to support and take part in the work.

The mandate should be time limited, but the time given must take into account the need for a realistic period in order to start, elaborate ideas for projects, keep the contacts that are needed in order to facilitate the project. In some cases consortia are formed and coordinated by the EG, and this is quite time-consuming a task. Also, financiers of projects must be guaranteed that their financing is properly taken care of. On the other hand, it is probably not the EG that receives the financing but the parties who implement the projects.

One idea could be that a mandate is given for three years. Then a thorough assessment/evaluation of the activities and the resources at disposal is made (at

present the Terms of Reference for the EG:s are actually valid for two years). In the meantime the EG Chair reports and he/she keeps a dialogue with the CSR. When it comes to the dismantling of an EG one of the criterions to use could simply be: does the EG consider that there is more for it to do or does it consider that it is time to end? In a way linked to this are an assessment of the possibilities for the EG to make progress. If it is shown that it is impossible to get forward, then the EG should be dissolved, already before the mandate period is ended. But if the EG can show that there is promising progress, even if it at that stage can show no concrete results, then it should be allowed to continue and finish its work.

The evaluator's recommendation to use clear criteria for new Expert Groups to be established should be followed up. The recommendation about "a unanimous political will" is however not realistic. Instead it is proposed that the wish of a clear majority (how big?) of countries to cooperate in a common subject area should be a criterion. Given the voluntary spirit of the Declaration it would be difficult to require documented commitments, at least not as a formal document.

Process

1. One or more Partners present a proposal to the CSR to establish an EG on a certain problem/theme.
2. The CSR representatives investigate the interest of their countries to establish such an EG and to take part in the work.
3. At the next CSR meeting the decision is made to establish the EG or not to do so. Proposals for criteria for the establishment of an EG:
 - The problem/theme of the EG is an item
 - a) of common interest to the majority of Partner (countries) and considered to be important,
 - b) is deemed to support the priorities and strategies of the Partnership, and
 - c) it is considered that there is a clear added value in regional cooperation concerning this item
 - The majority of Partner (countries) are willing to take part in the work
 - One Partner is ready to be Lead Partner and to take the responsibility of finding financial means for the "machinery" (for example an ITA) permitting the work to go forward.
4. When the decision to establish an EG has been taken, Partners are invited to send the names of their representatives to the Secretariat. At the first meeting of the EG the group agrees on draft Terms of Reference to be proposed to the CSR, working methods, routines etc.
5. The mandate and ToR are decided finally by the CSR. The mandate/Terms of Reference should more clearly than today steer the priorities and activities of the EG into line with priorities and strategies (target groups etc.) of the

Partnership according to the Declaration (should also be done for already existing EGs.).

6. The EG chairs take part in the CSR meetings at least once a year, and always in the PAC. At these meetings with the CSR they report on the progress of the work, through self-evaluation (the implementation of the plans and the impact of the work of the EG and the projects it facilitates), and on possible deviations from their mandate/ToR. They also report on their own appreciation of the possibilities to continue the work, considering the developments as regards the field of responsibility of the EG, the interest of Partners and the possibilities to find financing for the basic needs of the EG.
7. A dialogue will be held between the CSR and the EG Chair concerning the work and situation of the EG. In the first hand, the dialogue should aim at helping the EG to improve its performance if necessary, in order to fulfill its task according to the mandate. If an EG needs to deviate considerably from its mandate/ToR this is to be approved by the CSR.
8. Such a dialogue could result in
 - Normal continuation of the work
 - a decision of the CSR to change the mandate/ToR of the EG
 - the dissolution of the EG before the mandate has come to an end

Criteria for the dissolution of the EG:

- The EG Chair considers that there is no longer interest among Partners or financing bodies in the subject-matter of the EG
- There is no possibility to find means for financing the basic needs of an EG
- The EG has not made any progress for one year

9. When the period of the mandate is nearing its end an assessment is made by the CSR as regards the dismantling or the possible continuation of the EG

“3. NDPHS should consider the establishment of a mechanism which forces Expert Groups to defend – in regular intervals, yearly or every second year – their own existence, with the possibility of dissolution of the Expert Group in the case of failure to legitimize its continuation. Every Expert Group should be forced to bring forward arguments for its continued existence, with the reservation by the CSR that if the arguments are not totally convincing, knowledge about the subject is not sufficient or additional deliberation is needed to employ an external expert to make an assessment of these arguments in order to support or contradict them. This could generally include a peer-review-process in certain intervals, conducted by experts in the respective fields, all depending on available funding.”

Proposal

The proposals made under para. 2 are enough for the CSR to assess the progress of the EGs and to give directions as regards their work. When elaborating the mandate, work programmes etc. formulate goals, mid term goals and criteria that make it possible for the EGs and for the CSR to assess the real progress, concrete results and possible problems that need to be solved.

In order to take care of a situation outside the regular reporting and dialogue mentioned above the Terms of Reference could say something like: "The Chairs of the Expert Groups should initiate a dialogue with the CSR if they find difficulties for the EG in fulfilling its task". That would mean that also outside these evaluations the question of continued work can be raised at any time, especially by the EG chairs.

The recommendation about knowledge of the subject should not be followed. The members of an EG are the official representatives of the Partners, and it is the responsibility of Partners to see to it that the right representatives are in place. The EG itself cannot influence that. And it seems very strange that the CSR should employ an external expert in order to assess the words of the EG:s. Instead, if a situation should arise with lack of confidence, it is up to the CSR Chair to take a discussion with the EG Chair. Could possibly the Secretariat have some monitoring role?

Peer-review could be very interesting both for CSR and for the EG:s in order to learn and develop from having some external assessment of the work. It might however be difficult to put down on paper that is has to be done at certain intervals. When it comes to working methods etc., maybe it could be something for the EGs to do for each other?

"5. NDPHS should review its collaboration with WGCC and discern in how far NDPHS is really benefiting from the groups status as associated Expert Group and decide if and how the cooperation can be intensified or the formal bond should be abolished. For the consultant, it is more or less useless to "boast" an associated Expert Group where the association is only on paper and exists mainly through putting the WGCC's annual report into the NDPHS-documentation."

Proposal

This proposal should not be followed. It can be reported already at the next CSR.

This proposal seems to be based on a misunderstanding. The WGCC focuses on co-operation concerning a) trafficking of children (i.a. a hands-on cooperation between authorities to find trafficked children, to have contacts with home authorities and aims to bring children back to parents), b) sexual exploitation: prevention etc, on-line exploitation of children, c) the rights of children in institutions. Among other things it organizes training for all kinds of professionals

who are to help these children. This seems to one of the few activities which are clearly linked to “social well-being”.

The Declaration states, concerning expert groups (section 5.3), that “in case a relevant expert group or network already exists within the ND area, the CSR may invite that group ... to function also as an expert group under the Partnership in accordance with its original mandate and the objectives of the Partnership”. Our understanding is that the idea of this section is to improve coordination and transparency as regards all cooperative efforts in the ND area. Keeping the WGCC as an Expert Group to the NDPHS brings at least three benefits for the NDPHS: the coordination and transparency, advice and cooperation as far as the WGCC’s mandate and resources allow, as well as the enormous network to which the WGCC has access and which they are ready to share with others in the Partnership.

Furthermore, the Declaration underlines the priority of focus on children, vulnerable groups, strengthening of social care etc. (section 4). This is about the only Expert Group who follows these directives. It clearly influences their national administrations. So, there are many objective and relevant reasons to have it as an associated Expert Group.

This proposal is one that we should not put a lot of time on. But the SWG might consider how to make the links between the NDPHS and the WGCC more clear and understandable for all.

Section 4.2.6

“2. The Expert Groups should be tasked with the duty to compile and assess evaluations available for projects they claim to have facilitated one way or the other. This compilation should be updated on an annual basis and contain summaries of evaluations (be it self-evaluations or external evaluations) in order to have an overview of results and impact of these projects. EGs should in addition seek funds to conduct evaluations themselves or motivate external experts linked to NDPHS to apply for evaluations of facilitated projects in order to build up its own evaluation capacity and to compile worthwhile information about “best practice” which can be translated into general conclusions. The current database could be extended with a separate access to evaluation reports (which is quite different from just “papers”), which will enhance the overall credibility and attractiveness of the website.”

Proposal

This is an important proposal. It is strategic for the NDPHS to be able to show concrete results. Evaluations are an important tool for this purpose. Short descriptions replying to questions like: “Did we do as we planned” and “What was the effect, and was it as we expected?” Already the formulation of projects, work programmes etc. should prepare for such evaluations. Evaluations are also a way to get interesting experiences for future projects and also improved possibilities to both political and financial support. One easy way of doing this could be to use an internal evaluation: a couple of members of the EG could spend a few days

studying a project and come forward with expert advice. In some cases this could perhaps be done even between the EGs.

However, at the same time it is important to strike a balance so that such evaluations do not become a burden for the EGs, both as a workload and financially, risking to use too much of the resources.

“3. NDPHS should ask Expert Groups to identify and describe openings for dissemination and mainstreaming of their own topics in national decision-making in ND-member states, in order to be able to organize targeted activities – like workshops or information exercises – to access decision-makers probably not yet involved in NDPHS and to influence important issues in health (and maybe social) policy. EG experts should be able to elaborate who and where in their respective country a specific topic might be received with open minds, so that the visibility of NDPHS and its impact can be increased.”

This is an important recommendation, and here we see added value from the cooperation. The EGs should in their ToR be invited to consider this recommendation.

“8. NDPHS should emphasize that Expert Groups should develop their proposal to the CSR about the focus of their activity always in an inclusive way, adding ownership to the topics chosen. Topics which are at the heart of only a few members will not gather sufficient motivated support from other EG-members to participate fully in any task connected to it. If it seems to be difficult to find a common denominator – that is, if no proposed focus finds the goodwill and engagement of a majority of EG-members – than this is a possible indicator in regard to the future viability of the problematic EG as a whole. Here, some minimum standards of participation should and could be defined and adhered to. A Working Group in which only a chosen few are working and the rest is looking is futile. If the topic is nevertheless regarded as important by the stakeholders of NDPHS, other forms of organization – like a project run by the Secretariat with external experts – could be considered instead of an EG.”

Generally this recommendation is reasonable. The focus of the work should have the support of the members of the EG, or at least the majority.

Minimum standards of participation:.....??

It should also be possible for the CSR to set up ad hoc working groups/study groups/project groups outside the EG structure, in a flexible structure that can be adapted to circumstances and on themes also outside those of the EGs. Perhaps sometimes a few Partners could run it instead of the Secretariat. The important thing is that this work is coordinated by the Secretariat, or with a special EG in case the subject-matter touches upon the subject area of that EG.

Proposals for work of a consultant:

- 1. Propose easy methods of self-evaluation**
- 2. Poss. Comments on criteria to be used for establishing and dismantling EGs**