

Management Response and Action Plan

Editor of the management response	Heleen Annemans – M&E	Date	08/06/2022
Other stakeholders involved:	Steering committee: Jan Coenen (Head International Cooperation Office), Cedric Bohi (Policy advisor IC Office), Veerle Vanlerberghe (FA4 promotor, COS member), Dionicia Gamboa (FA4 Peru collaborator, Partner representative) Discussed with FA4 promotors and collaborators on Wednesday June 8 th 2022.		
Approved by management committee on (date)	13/06/2022		
ACTION PLAN TO BE REVIEWED ON (indicate multiple dates if necessary)	Bi-annual update to COS, until the action plan is fully implemented		
ACTION PLAN FINALISED ON			

Title of Report	Final Evaluation of the Framework Agreement 4 (FA4) (2017-2021) – Country programmes		
Date of Final Report	16/06/2022	Time Period of the Project	December 2021 – June 2022
Partner institutions and other stakeholders involved	<p>All partner institutes included in FA4 were consulted to inform the evaluation.</p> <p>Per country several interviews were conducted to validate findings from the desk review. In addition, per partner institute a limited number of key stakeholders with an overview over the whole intervention was asked to complete a survey on the capacities they gained through the five year programme.</p> <p>The country reports were shared with promotors for comments. Promotors were asked to share the reports with partners to also collect their feedback.</p> <p>Preliminary results were discussed with partners and promotors on Wednesday 18/05/2022 to validate the findings of the evaluation.</p> <p>The draft final report and draft management response were discussed with the steering committee on Tuesday 31/05/2022 before sending them to the promotors for feedback.</p> <p>The management response was discussed with promotors on Wednesday 07/06/2022 and presented for approval to the Management committee on 13/06/2022.</p>		
Name of Evaluator(s)/Researcher(s)	<p>Syspons GmbH</p> <p>Matias Krämer d'Oliveira – lead consultant</p> <p>Julia Forke – consultant</p> <p>Several other Syspons team members to conduct the country analysis and interviews</p>		

Summary

(approx. 0.5 – 1 page)

The Institute of Tropical Medicine (ITM) has commissioned Syspans to conduct the *Final Evaluation of the Framework Agreement 4 (FA4) (2017-2021)*. This evaluation is grounded in two rationales: on the one hand, ITM needs to account to its donor DGD for the funding received for the five year period. This **accountability** aspect also **influences the scope** of the evaluation, as it is mandated by law that the final evaluation assesses all OECD/DAC criteria for evaluation for all outcomes. This implies almost by definition that **the evaluation will be rather broad and present general findings**, as opposed to going into detail on specific learning questions. However, the second rationale behind the conduct of the evaluation is the **learning perspective**. Where FA4 was originally not designed with an institutional, overarching Theory of Change as a backbone, the evaluation did retroactively map this TOC, offering ITM insights into its intervention logic on capacity strengthening.

The evaluation included two levels of analysis:

1. **Programme (FA4) level:** Based on data from the country-level interventions the evaluation team aggregated data to come to conclusions on ITMs overall performance on the OECD/DAC criteria and to assess the strength of the causal chains to framework agreement/programme level. This analysis was based on the reconstruction of an overarching theory of change to understand to what extent those links exist, and on data collected on the performance of the country programmes.
2. **Country /outcome level:** The country-specific outcomes were assessed. Thereby, the evaluators drew on the overarching retroactively mapped theory of change but considered the unique causal chain path for each of the country interventions. The evaluation team conducted an in-depth analysis of each of the 10 country-level outcome interventions along this causal chain.

To conduct this evaluation, the assessors made use of a number of data collection methods:

1. Desk review / document analysis: the performance scores, lessons learned and logical frameworks drafted by promoters per project year ; in addition to ITM policy documents
2. Participatory workshop to develop TOC with partners and promoters to better understand ITMs intervention logic
3. Quantitative data collection: 2 to 3 key stakeholders were selected per partner institute to respond to a survey on the effects of ITMs capacity strengthening interventions. The number of respondents was kept limited, since only those respondents were selected who had a holistic overview of the activities at the partner level per country.
4. Qualitative data collection: ten country case studies were conducted, during which data from the quantitative phase and the desk review were triangulated with responses from key informants

Overall the evaluation process went well, with smooth communication between the evaluation team and the steering committee / M&E officer at ITM.

No major delays were experienced in the process. The proactive communication between both teams ensured that any questions from either side were quickly addressed. At regular points in time promoters and collaborators, both at ITM and partner institutes, were requested for feedback to the process. This was done to increase buy in by all stakeholders in the process, and to increase relevance of the findings. However, due to the wide scope of the evaluation it is challenging to go more in-depth, which left some stakeholders less satisfied.

ITM is satisfied to read that the evaluation offers positive results across all OECD/DAC criteria for all countries, alongside a number of feasible recommendations to further improve our international cooperation projects. We are especially pleased to read that all our partners appreciate the working relationship with ITM staff since this is essential for fruitful collaboration. In addition, we appreciate the finding that ITMs flexibility in terms of funding and adapting to research and education needs in a changing context is valued by our partners. As an academic institution it is paramount for us to stay on top of things and this flexibility is key to remaining relevant. It also increases the impact we can have through our education and research initiatives together with partners.

The six recommendations which will be discussed further below are all deemed feasible and accepted by ITM. In the action plan, we explain how we plan to implement the recommendations.

Completeness Assessment**(0.5 pages)**

The report is substantial and complete.

It includes the necessary table of contents, list of abbreviations, tables and figures to easily navigate its content.

An executive summary giving a brief overview of the programme background, evaluation rationale, findings, conclusions and recommendations has been added to the final version of the report on request of ITM. This enables reading to get a rapid overview of the most important information from the report.

The document includes a clear overview of the project and the evaluation approach, for the reader to get sufficient background to understand the rationale behind the intervention and its assessment. The methodology has been outlined in a concise but clear manner, with additional explanations on its limitations and a literature overview added in annex. More details on the methodology can also be found in the inception report which is published as a separate document. The ethics section in the report as such is not very elaborate, but a detailed ethics proposal was approved by ITM's Institutional Review Board before the evaluation was conducted. No objections were made. To ensure GDPR, a data protection agreement was signed. This is not stipulated as such in the report.

The report includes clear findings, which are well structured and flow logically from the data obtained. The conclusions are clearly linked to the findings, and triangulate different sources. Both positive and negative feedback are included. The recommendations are realistic, clear and feasible. There are six key recommendations, an amount which is very feasible for implementation.

The annexes include the design and methodology, the evaluation matrix, TOCs per outcome, and an assessment of capacities before and after intervention. The data collection and analysis tools (capacities & capabilities matrix, analysis of self-assessments (performance scores), interview guides, and the online survey) are sent as separate annexes to ITM but are not included in the final report.

Quality Assessment**(0.5 pages)**

The quality of the report is assessed as very good, with an overall score of 85% on a pre-defined quality assessment checklist.

The evaluation design was appropriate, using a contribution analysis approach to assess where ITM project added value in terms of outcomes and the establishment of preconditions for impact. The data sources used were diverse, drawing from project documents, monitoring information, and primary data collection through interviews and surveys. The data collection tools used were appropriate and adapted to the stakeholders engaged. The way the survey was used, with only a limited number of respondents per country outcome, can be criticized, as one could ask oneself whether such a low number of respondents is representative. However, this choice was made in dialogue with the steering committee based on (i) the rationale that only a few people within each country programme have sufficient knowledge of the whole intervention to assess the changes for all capacities and (ii) time and budget limited the ability of the evaluation team to analyse a broader dataset. The findings were validated with stakeholders at various points throughout the process, with people being invited to participate to a Theory of Change workshop, a validation of findings meeting and the final presentation of the evaluation results.

Data analysis was based on previously defined evaluation matrices, and data collection tools were shared with the steering committee during the inception phase. The evaluation team also applied evaluator triangulation by organising exchanges between the various team members. However, a bit more could have been done to this respect, seeing in one of the country reports it was clear a number of key documents were not consulted by the responsible person.

The findings in the report flow logically from the data collected and are structured in a clear manner. The report highlights both positive and negative findings and identifies key inhibiting and enabling factors. The conclusions are logically derived from, and triangulate the findings, especially at the aggregated level of FA4 as a programme encompassing the ten country outcomes.

The formulated recommendations are clear, feasible and not too numerous, so they are assessed as implementable and practical by ITM.

The communication products provided (10 factsheets, highlighting key findings and a success story per country) are well designed and the message is well oriented toward the intended target audience.

The ethics of the evaluation were approved by ITM's Institutional Review Board in terms of GDPR, consent, appropriateness of data collection tools etc

Report Recommendation 1

ITM should **maintain its participative approach** in further intervention designs under the following FAs. Accordingly, it should involve key stakeholders from the beginning to enable a highly needs-oriented intervention design and execution.

The evaluation showed the high relevance of the participatory project design and implementation approach of ITM. It has led not only to a high relevance and ownership of activities in the interventions by partner institutes but was also a key element in the achievements in the realm of efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability. Moreover, while the participatory approach is a success factor for ITM in FA4, it can be further expanded to more intensively include further stakeholders, such as policy-makers (see recommendation 4). It could also be expanded to include partners that more deliberately are included to create synergies (see recommendation 6).

Management Response : Accepted

Explanation

ITM is committed to a continued approach from 'Switching the Poles' to 'Connecting the Dots', meaning we always look for opportunities for co-creation with our partners, starting from a solid, joint, needs and capacity assessment. Our eye-to-eye and longstanding partnerships are at the core of the successful implementation of our programmes, as can be seen in the final evaluation results. In all country reports the good working relations with ITM staff are mentioned. We proud ourselves in this finding and will ensure we remain committed to this type of collaboration.

From an internal staff survey evaluating the FA5 drafting process, we learn there is still room for improvement when engaging with partners on new project ideas. Especially having sufficient time is of essence. We take these additional findings into account in the action plan below.

Action Plan

#	Actions planned	Deadline	Responsible Office/Unit/Department	Responsible Person/Role	Implementation stage	Actions taken	Supporting documents
1	Development of a capacity assessment tool which can be used by partners and promoters to assess the capacity gaps in terms of research, education, infrastructure/technology transfer, management, networking and translation of findings into policy and practice.	2023	International Cooperation and Development Office (ICDO) ; validation by COS and later AC and MC	Heleen Annemans	Not started		
2	Development of clear (internal) guidelines / process on the development of DGD framework agreements, including on the	Start 2023	International Cooperation and Development Office ; validation by COS and later AC and MC		Not started		

	participative approach and how to include partners in the process.						
3	Re-start the Joint Partner Meetings, to ensure partners not only know their specific promoters, but also ITM as an institution, and each other to enhance networking and synergies	December 2022	COS		First discussion on agenda and operational modalities initiated – planned for December 2022		
4	Include partner representative of the general council in COS meetings at least 2x per year	September 2022	COS				

Report Recommendation 2

ITM should **continue with their holistic approach to capacity development**, which supports strengthening all relevant organizational capacities.

While country interventions had set some priorities in term of institutional capacity development (commonly research capacities), all interventions followed a holistic and comprehensive approach to strengthening partner institutions. This holistic approach responds to the experience of ITM that different institutional capacities are interrelated and that focusing only on one, would not be successful. This experience was visualised in the FA4-ToC and was validated by this evaluation. In this regard, ITM has gathered extensive experience in all relevant capacity development areas and thus could explore setting other priorities in individual interventions (e.g. on educational capacities) under the condition that its high participatory and holistic approach (see also recommendation 1) remain at the centre of the intervention's design.

Management Response : Accepted

Explanation

A holistic approach to capacity strengthening is at the core of ITM's understanding of international cooperation. We have incorporated this logic also in our FA5 programmes which focus on five components: joint research and education projects, technological platforms, networking and getting research into policy and practice. These five pillars form a comprehensive framework encapsulating our capacity strengthening efforts. ITM will keep on addressing all these aspects of capacity strengthening in its future work. To ensure all stakeholders have the same understand of what this holistic approach entails, a clear vision on capacity strengthening, including definitions of key concepts needs to be further refined and disseminated. The vision/strategy will inform the new policy plan (2025) and FA6 development (2026/7).

Action Plan

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1	Further clarify ITMs vision and intervention strategies for international cooperation and solidarity, with wide stakeholder engagement within and beyond the institute. This vision should include what we understand by key concepts such as capacity strengthening, institutional strengthening, leave no one behind, what criteria are to be eligible for development cooperation funding etc. Definitions should be based on for instance OECD policy papers.	2024	International Cooperation and Development Office and Management Committee , with validation by and inputs from COS and Academic Council		Not Started		
2	Based on the Theory of Change developed during the evaluation, fine-tune a general ITM TOC for capacity strengthening. The ToC should be adaptable to specific country and global programme contexts and form an integral part of the vision and strategy on capacity strengthening.	2024	International Cooperation and Development Office Validation by COS and later AC and MC		Not Started		
3	Inform stakeholders within ITM and partner institutions about ITMs vision on international cooperation and solidarity. This can for instance be done at one of the recurrent meetings with FA5 promoters and during the Joint Partner Meeting	2024	International Cooperation and Development Office		Not Started		

Report Recommendation 3

In order to promote positive development of the **transversal topics gender and environment**, ITM should **set targets and indicators** for the achievement of these for the partner institutions. These should be developed together with the partners to suit the different country and institutional contexts. In addition, the preparation of plans to achieve the targets on the part of the partner institutions should be supported with expertise from ITM.

ITM should therefore **create overarching guidelines** that serve as orientation for those stakeholders designing and implementing country interventions. Such an orientation might also be helpful as country contexts (e.g. policies, cultural sensitivity, etc.) could have implications on how cross-cutting topics, such as gender, should be included. Such a guideline should explain the rationale behind the cross-cutting topic (e.g. pointing at requirements and understanding of funding institutions and existing ITM strategies and concepts) to make sure that involved stakeholders have a strategic understanding of why the topics should be included. Additionally **encourage discussion on the guidelines with partner institutions**. As a guideline, this document should also be practical in nature and support those

involved in the design of country interventions. This could be achieved through an **assessment matrix** that needs to be filled out and guides the stakeholders through a reflection process on why and how the cross-cutting topics should (not) be included (e.g. due to cultural, political reasons, country contexts and specificities of the intervention). Finally, ITM could consider setting targets (including indicators) specifically on cross-cutting topics mandatory. To not force specific topics on partners, this could be complemented by a mandatory requirement that asks stakeholders to thoroughly explain why cross-cutting topics are not considered relevant at the target-level of intervention.

Management Response : Accepted

Explanation

ITM recently finalised its **Gender and Diversity Policy**. In this policy, we set clear targets and actions towards better inclusion of Diversity and Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in our research, education and cooperation efforts and for ITM as an institution in general. In our new FA5 we have already included increased monitoring of our gender efforts by integrating gender disaggregated data. For international cooperation we acknowledge that we can and need to go beyond fixing the numbers as is the present case, towards a certain amount of gender transformative projects, addressing the roots causes for inequality. This is already the case for many of our projects focusing on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, but can be further integrated in the approach of other projects. As ITM we recognize that within our partner institutes much knowledge on gender inclusive approaches circulates. ITM should get to know what is already being done by our partners, where expertise lies, and how we can mutually reinforce each other on the topic. In terms of integration of environmental issues, ITM increasingly puts this on the agenda. The impact of climate change on global one health is drastic. This implies that we need to carefully assess the impact of our own projects on the environment (waste management, use of insecticides, carbon emission), but also the impact of the changing environment on the work we do and its relevance in this rapidly changing health context. In its FA5, ITM included a specific thematic network on Health, Climate Change and Urbanisation which will help partners connect and encourage exchange on this issue. Considering the suggested strategies for a better inclusion of gender and care for environment in our interventions, we take them to heart and agree that a clear guideline is necessary.

Action Plan

#	Actions planned	Deadline	Responsible Office/Unit/Department	Responsible Person/Role	Implementation stage	Actions taken	Supporting documents
1	Under take survey at level of partners to identify experience, best practices, ideas for knowledge sharing	2023	International Cooperation and Development Office Validation by COS and Gender and Diversity Working Group	Heleen Annemans	Not started		
2	Analyse all FA5 projects with a gender lense (are they gender blind, sensitive or transformative)	2023	International Cooperation and Development Office				
3	Analyse all FA5 projects on environmental impact and inclusion of issue of climate change – potential tools: KLIMOS toolkit	2023					
4	Organise a session for promotors on gender equality and how to include it in research,	2023	Policy offices (Education, Research, Cooperation) ;				

	education and cooperation (including results action 1)		Gender and Diversity Working Group				
5	Based on the survey, programme analysis and discussion with promoters, draft a clear guidelines on cross cutting topics to support design and implementation within country interventions.	2024	International Cooperation and Development Office				
6	Launch Thematic Global Network (TGN) Health, Climate Change and Urbanisation and ensure all within FA5 are aware what the network offers.	2022	TGN-HCCU	Bruno Marchal Katja Polman			

Report Recommendation 4

To further expand the country level impact of the interventions, ITM **should promote applicability for policy-makers at all stages of the research process.**

ITM should take into account (pre-)conditions and mechanism for research uptake. With regard to the **(pre)-conditions**, a sound understanding of the context in which a prospective intervention will take place facilitates research uptake. Here, it is essential not only to understand the broader context of the policy sector but also to identify structural barriers which can take – for example - the form of dominant health regimes, imbalanced power relations, capacity constraints on the side of the relevant stakeholders or existing conflicts between important stakeholders in the health sector. With regards to the **mechanisms** facilitating the uptake of knowledge, technologies or developed services experiences from other evaluations show that research uptake takes place with those stakeholders that are either the collaboration partners or the explicit targeted audience of the funded interventions. Thus, the selection of partners must be thought through carefully when setting up an intervention by already thinking about the end-users. If partners are not end-users themselves, uptake is facilitated if they have excellent pathways to the targeted end-user group of the respective intervention (e.g. policy-makers). These stakeholders should however normally not actively participate in formulating the research topics (e.g. because they can be politically influenced, which would be a reason for new politicians taking their place not to take up results). In contrast, they should be considered when analysing the context and potential structural barriers and involved throughout the implementation of data collection to create the necessary conditions for research uptake. In addition, the **establishment of particular modes of collaborations** with these relevant stakeholders – e.g. in the form of advisory boards – has proven successful in guaranteeing continuous needs-orientation of the research during the data collection and synthesis phase. It is therefore also important that preliminary research results are shared in a tailor-made format for each specific user group (e.g. policy-makers normally do not read extensive or complicated research articles). Finally, developing a clear and comprehensive ITM **strategy on research uptake** that delineates the creation of conditions for uptake can also be a success factor that could ensure a more proactive and consistent approach to research uptake by ITM and its interventions.

Management Response : Accepted

Explanation

ITM agrees that the country level impact of our interventions lies in the uptake of our research and education activities into policies and practice. The idea to better integrate GRIPP (Getting Research Into Policy and Practice) into our programmes is included in the FA5 programme (2022-2026). For all outcomes a progress marker is included to measure to what extent involvement of, and discussions with policy makers are taking place. We recognise that the implication of policy makers already at the on-set of research conceptualisation is key to make it relevant within a national/regional/local context, and to increase the uptake of findings. GRIPP has been identified as a key topic for learning at the level of ITM where we will (i) start a GRIPP Community of Practice together with partners ; (ii) where there is the intention of conducting a mid-term peer evaluation on the topic ; (iii) where the topic has been identified as a key research topic in the portfolio of the Health Systems Unit, who will be able to provide academic guidance on the topic to other programmes and (iv) where we recognise the urgency to link our own work to GRIPP in at the Belgian national, and international level through our own policy support to DGD and international organisations. GRIPP has also been identified as a learning trajectory at the level of the Joint Strategic Framework on Higher Education and Science for Sustainable Development together with VLIR-UOS and Ares.

The development of a strategy on GRIPP can help to provide guidance to programmes, keeping in mind that GRIPP is a very context specific matter.

Action Plan							
#	Actions planned	Deadline	Responsible Office/Unit/Department	Responsible Person/Role	Implementation stage	Actions taken	Supporting documents
1	Conduct a peer evaluation on GRIPP with a selected number of partners	2022-2024	International Cooperation and Development Office GRIPP sub-unit	Heleen Annemans Willem Van de Put			
2	Elaborate the pathway for the creation of a Community of Practice with partners and promoters aimed at the sharing of good practices, experiences and joint reflection on common challenges, as well as the identification of the needs for hands-on support to programmes on issues related to GRIPP	2022 2022-2026	International Cooperation and Development and COS	Cedric Bohi			
3	Include information session on what GRIPP community of practice entails in recurrent meetings with promoters	2022	International Cooperation & Development Office	Cedric Bohi			
4	Include session on GRIPP in Joint Partner Meeting (experience sharing among partners in a safe space)	2024	International Cooperation and Development Off. And COS	Cedric Bohi			
5	Develop guidelines on research uptake within international cooperation programmes (taking into account country specific contexts)	2024	GRIPP Unit				

Report Recommendation 5

ITM should **include sustainability targets into its project designs and actively promote sustainability** throughout the whole intervention process of implementation. For example, to tackle specifically the problem of knowledge loss due to high staff turnover ITM could support partner institutions in establishing expert/alumni networks, specifically design on- and offboarding phases to pass on knowledge, etc.

(Utility of suggestions might vary across interventions and countries)

- As staff retention is difficult to be sustained by a time-bound international intervention, ITM could consider working and **setting up beneficiary groups** (for example research groups) instead of focusing on individual persons. In a group context, knowledge and experience is disseminated and shared more frequently and in a more in-depth level. Accordingly, permanent staff from the partner institutions should be part of the (research) groups and fixed mechanisms of knowledge management and dissemination should exist.
- Another mechanism to ensure knowledge and expertise remains available to the partner institutions is the creation of an **alumni association** that also **serves as expert pool**. Beneficiaries could automatically enrol into such an alumni association, which could be an expansion of ITM's and/or institutional partners' existing alumni network. Experiences show that maintaining an active alumni network comes with costs and needs to be managed and create benefits for those participating. [see further explanation in report]
- Staff retention is often caused by the lack of funding. Accordingly, supporting the partner institutions' ability to attract **third party funding** can contribute to decrease staff turnover. Accordingly, ITM could more systematically support the **development of such capacities** by (a) offering **trainings**, (2) facilitating the creation of (research) **consortia** to apply to for funding and (3) further supporting the **visibility** of the partners vis-a-vis funding parties. This could also benefit the creation of synergies (see recommendation 6)
- Finally, ITM should consider setting **sustainability targets** for their interventions. Such an exercise comes with the need to reflect on what the pre-conditions for sustainability of results are and the reflection on what needs to be done during the time of implementation to ensure the durability of results. Setting targets therefore creates the need to develop and implement specific activities designed to increase the probability of the changes being sustained after the intervention ends.
- Experiences show that sustainability can mean different things depending on the country and the type of intervention and sector in which it is implemented. Accordingly, ITM should consider developing a **sustainability concept** that defines what sustainability means in the context in a health-research-policy nexus and offer some mechanisms and best-practice examples that might be included in the corresponding to be designed intervention.

Management Response : Accepted

Explanation

ITM agrees that we can improve on the criticism of sustainability. With regard to financial sustainability, we work towards increasing our partner institutes capacities to attract own funding, by increasing research capacity and offering education and networking opportunities.

In terms of technical/institutional sustainability, we work on increased capacity of our partners at different levels: in research, education, but also at the institutional level. Our priorities lie in enforcing individual and institution capacities to conduct excellent science and education. Working at the individual level can bring much benefit to an organisation, but can also include a risk of brain-drain within an institution. We acknowledge the need to train groups or, for instance in case of PhD support, to ensure that excellent candidates, with an added value for the partner institution, are selected and well accompanied throughout their trajectory. Even though the knowledge and skills built might not remain within a specific partner institution, they could still be considered sustainable, if the person remains within the health sector and has added value to the country's or global health system. Where deemed necessary and feasible, ITM can consider offering further institutional support beyond research and education strengthening. For instance, in our FA5 synergy programme ITM integrated a budget line to provide research management training for partners, which can take the form of leadership training for prime investigators and post-docs, grants proposal writing training etc.

In terms of social sustainability, our work on Getting Research Into Policy and Practise aims to increase sustainability and impact of the outcomes in the long run. To measure this however, we would need to set-up a specific monitoring framework.

Action Plan

#	Actions planned	Deadline	Responsible Office/Unit/Department	Responsible Person/Role	Implementation stage	Actions taken	Supporting documents
1	Inclusion of question on sustainability in the capacity assessment tool to be developed (see action 1 under recommendation 1)	2023	International Cooperation and Development Office				
2	Analysis of current practices to increase sustainability (knowledge transfer, institutional policies, GRIPP) within the FA5 country programmes	2023	International Cooperation and Development Office				
3	Organise a sharing of best practises session with promoters on the topic to discuss given suggestions on beneficiary groups and additional training on proposal writing	2023	ICDO ; Research Office				
4	Engage partner staff in discussions on retention of knowledge within institutions	2022	ICDO; Research and Education Office				
5	Organise research management training for partners (including topics such as grants writing, leadership skills, career development)	2023	Research Office				

Report Recommendation 6

To achieve more synergies at output and outcome level, the JSFs need to incorporate this target at the strategic, project/intervention and process implementation levels and be regularly updated.

While in the context of FA4, ITM achieved complementarity with other stakeholders, room for improvement still exists with regards to the creation of synergies at the level of results. Synergies mean joint or coordinated efforts to achieve greater results at output and outcome level and efficiency. If such synergies are deliberate, they must be part of the design phase at both strategic and operational levels, and be part of the implementation, e.g. through continuous coordination and co-creation. In the context of FA4 this would translate into clearance about how synergies at the level of the country or the Joint Strategic Framework (strategic level) and the individual intervention in a country are designed to be achieved. Synergies that are not already incorporated and designed at the strategic level are oftentimes difficult to achieve at the operational level, as a lot of resources need to be spent to search, communicate, coordinate and co-create with (new) partners. In Framework Agreements, such as FA4, synergies could be achieved through the following principles:

- Synergies can be achieved **by amplifying the (research and innovation) funds and their impact** (e.g. finding a third party that supports the research, helps widen the target groups, etc. or that can help create the planned results with less resources). Here for example, DGD would – at the strategic level – include requirements or orientation towards the combined usage of different instruments to achieve combined objectives.
- Synergies can also be achieved **by combining different forms of (research and innovation) support** (e.g. combine the capacity development funding of FA4 with funding for knowledge dissemination and networking). This again could be designed at the strategic level but would need to be specified at the intervention level to assess its relevance and appropriateness.
- Finally, synergies can be created **by carrying innovative (research) ideas further** along the (research and innovation) cycle or value chain to ensure that successive projects build on each other. This for example could be implemented by expanding the type of institutions working in the consortium to include stakeholders that can support the co-creation process further. This for example could include considering (pharmaceutical) companies, NGOs or others that can take up results and apply them directly. This could also entail ensuring that results are disseminated and used horizontally, i.e. by other organisations in the country, (sub-)regions, etc.

Management Response : Partially Accepted

Explanation

ITM agrees that synergies are vital for their research uptake, and to enhance the scope of its research and education initiatives. In its various research and education projects ITM often works in consortia with other institutions. This practice, often a requirement in research proposals, can be better integrated into our framework agreements. However, under FA4 ITM found it difficult in many countries to create synergies under the geographic joint strategic frameworks since not many actors were active in the same area of work. Nevertheless, we did try to achieve synergies with other actors outside of the Belgian scope (WHO, Gates, Memisa). And even though we note here that working with actors outside of the health sector does not always come easy, we do acknowledge that synergies beyond our own field of work can help to go beyond our own impact by addressing root causes of inequality and health problems in a systematic manner, for instance by working on poverty, gender and human rights.

Under the new FA5 ITM teamed up with other academic institutions under a thematic JSF on Higher Education and Science for Sustainable Development. Through this JSF we will aim to enhance the visibility of academic actors within the Belgian development cooperation, and hence – potentially – increase synergies. Additionally, we look for synergies in research and education networks where we can expand our working scope and disseminate our findings and knowledge more broadly.

Even though we agree that synergy projects require specific funding, we only partially agree to the recommendation as we feel there should also be room for them to grow organically out of a joint need, and cannot always be planned at the on-set of a programme. In a programme such as the one in Guinea, a flexible budget line for upcoming synergies has been identified. This type of flexible approach to synergy and co-creation is more adequate when working in a rapidly changing health context. Flexible and planned synergies should be able to complement each other and exist side to side.

Lastly, a Research Capacity Fund has been created under FA5 to enable better linkages and create leverage between our DGD funded interventions and other research projects, such as those funded by FWO, EDCTP, the Flemish government and others.

Action Plan

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1	Within the framework of the JSF HES4SD opportunities for synergies and joint learning trajectories will be explored and implemented	2022-2026	ICDO	Cedric Bohi			
2	Leverage funding from Research Capacity Fund to increase synergies with other stakeholders and research and development funders	2022-2026	Research Office				
3	Sharing of best practices on synergies from country programmes during recurrent promotor meetings	2023	ICDO				
4	Dissemination of best practices and success stories with external parties	2023-2026	ICDO & Communication Office with input from partners and promotors				

Signature: _____

Name and Position: _____

Date: _____