

# Management Response on External End Evaluation Partners for Resilience (PfR) 2016-2020 programme

31 August 2020

## 1 Introduction

This evaluation was commissioned by the Steering Group (SG) of the Partners for Resilience Strategic Partnership (PfR SP) programme, which is funded by the Netherlands Government under its Dialogue & Dissent funding framework (2016-2020). The Alliance was founded in 2010 by five Netherlands-based organizations: CARE Netherlands, Cordaid, the Netherlands Red Cross, the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre and Wetlands International, and evolved into a global network of about 50 partner civil society organizations (CSO's) worldwide - active at grassroots, national, regional and global level. The Alliance (funding arrangement) is led by the Netherlands Red Cross.

The overall aim of PfR's Dialogue & Dissent programme is to make vulnerable people more resilient to disasters in the face of climate change and environmental degradation and to enable sustainable inclusive growth. To achieve this overall aim, PfR lobbies and advocates for the adoption of Integrated Risk Management (IRM), a framework that promotes principles and dedicated working methods aimed at integrating disaster risk management, eco-system management and climate change adaptation. The programme is made up of one global programme, four regional programmes (Asia, Central America & the Caribbean, Horn of Africa and West Africa) and ten country programmes (Ethiopia, Guatemala, Haiti, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Mali, the Philippines, South Sudan and Uganda).

## 2 Purpose of the evaluation

Objectives of the evaluation as stated in the Terms of Reference for the evaluation:

1. **Assess the validity of PfR's Theory of Change (ToC)**, including Key Assumptions made, in relation to capacity strengthening of CSO's and engagement with stakeholders in IRM;
2. **Assess the effectiveness, relevance and sustainability of PfR in strengthening the capacity of CSO's** to lobby and advocate for Integrated Risk Management (IRM) in the policy, practice and investment domains;
3. **Assess the effectiveness, relevance and sustainability of PfR's engagement with stakeholders in IRM:** to understand the extent to which a) outcomes have been achieved that are steps towards the PfR objectives (changes in policies, practices and investments in favour of IRM) and b) what the contribution of PfR has been towards achieving or not achieving these planned outcomes;
4. **Review the governance arrangements of the PfR programme** and generate actionable recommendations for future PfR programming, with a specific focus on facilitating Southern ownership, Southern leadership and South-South cooperation<sup>1</sup>, and linking / creating synergy of our work at the different levels (local to regional to global) through identifying good practices and bottlenecks.

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<sup>1</sup> As of the beginning of 2020, the Alliance decided to move away from using the terms "Southern" or "South-South" when referring to activities in the countries of PfR implementation or when referring to colleagues and PfR stakeholders working in selected PfR countries. The Alliance prefers to refer to either a global network of partners, or local (or national) leadership and ownership (based on the subsidiarity principle) in low, low-middle and middle income countries. The ToR and the four objectives for this evaluation were however written before this decision was taken.

### 3 The Programme

The Alliance was formed in 2010 to implement its first PfR programme (2011-2015, largely funded by the Netherlands government under its co-funding scheme), which had a strong focus on service delivery and a budget of €35 million. The follow-up PfR programme, through a strategic partnership with the Netherlands Government and with a budget of €50 million, was formulated to respond to the MFA's successive funding framework Dialogue & Dissent (D&D) for (Dutch) civil society organizations. The focus shifted from community-based interventions to lobbying and advocating for the adoption of IRM sensitive policies, investments and practices, at sub-national, national, regional as well as global levels, including necessary capacity strengthening of Alliance network partners. This required a considerable shift in the Alliance's way of organizing, working and reporting.

The programme's context is defined by the global policy frameworks on Disaster Risk Reduction (Sendai), the Framework Convention on Climate Change (Paris Agreement), the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) as well as the New Urban Agenda (UN Habitat). These have provided the programme its overall legitimacy and reference for its global, regional and country level engagements. The pursuit of improved policies, increased investments and better practices in the realm of IRM should be realised through the strengthening of lobby and advocacy capacities of (mainly) civil society implementing partners in the ten countries, so that IRM-related issues could be promoted on a sustainable basis at the country level, but also at regional and global levels.

### 4 Summary

The Alliance is pleased that the evaluation confirmed that "there is broad agreement that the PfR programme is highly relevant and of added value in line with its objectives." This was further elaborated upon by the analysis that PfR SP has to a large extent been successful in strengthening the capacity of CSOs, achieving meaningful results in terms of improved policies and enhanced practices, thereby making communities resilient in the face of increasing disaster risk. It was noted that "the programme was able to balance coherence and diversity. This allowed PfR to respond to different local contexts. Linkages to global frameworks have helped shape legitimacy for IRM promotion and global frameworks were localised to a certain extent. Recent efforts to further strengthen the programme's attention on inclusion and resilience should be appreciated."

In addition, it welcomes the appreciation of the close collaboration within the Alliance, and the assessment that this has provided room for tailored context specific approaches that has been particularly fruitful. PfR specifically welcomes the evaluators' conclusion that the Alliance has been beneficial to its implementing partners.

The evaluation provides important directions for future work. There are strong recommendations, among others, in relation to the PME system, government stakeholders, the role of field staff and strengthening of the linkages across various programme levels.

The below sections of this management response express the view of PfR on the conclusions and recommendations in the evaluation report in detail.

## 5 Conclusions, Recommendations and Responses

### 5.1 Evaluation Objective 1: “Assess the validity of the ToC”

**Conclusion 1 – The Theory of Change marked a good start for PfR SP but was insufficiently built upon and worked with as a strategic tool during the course of the programme’s implementation.**

*Recommendation 1 – Revisit and update the PfR’s overall Theory of Change (ToC) to take into account lessons of experience and the realities of a programme that works in many different contexts and spans the local, regional and global levels.*

Response: PfR fully supports this conclusion and recommendation, which, in the evaluation report on p. 8-10, is followed by further critically important context and nuance. The overall ToC was developed specifically in such a way that at the various programme levels the ToC could be further tailored to the specific global, regional, national and local contexts - with the aim to increase the overall effectiveness, sustainability and ownership at these levels. Certainly at national level the ToCs were regularly updated based on the local knowledge, and joint reflections by country teams during, for example, the bi-annual PME meetings. The general ToC was for a long time not regarded as a strategic steering instrument which should be regularly revisited – rather the steering was done at the above programme levels where the majority of activities took place, through their respective ToCs. Nearing the final stage of the programme it is not deemed useful anymore to revise the overall PfR D&D ToC. However, in future work the PfR partners will ensure that in subsequent PfR programmes the overall ToC will be used more as a strategic tool.

**Conclusion 2 – There is broad agreement that the PfR programme is highly relevant and of added value in line with its objectives**

*Recommendation 2 – Build further on the niche developed by PfR in the domain of IRM but further clarify the priorities that should be followed based on objectives derived from the global policy frameworks.*

Response: PfR fully supports this recommendation, especially as the funding, implementation and evolution of the international policy frameworks (Sendai Framework, Paris Agreement, SDGs and New Urban Agenda) is ongoing. The further rollout of the policy frameworks will facilitate future priority setting. PfR recognizes that choices should be made in order to avoid spreading time and resources (too) widely and thinly. The fact that the Alliance, by nature of each of its members’ thematic and geographic focus, brings a wide array of topics, will be a challenge that makes this recommendation even more relevant. Depending on the level of operation and context, choices/priorities will be based on a balance of the evolving global policy frameworks and priority issues in the countries or areas of operation.

**Conclusion 3 – PfR deployed a sophisticated approach to lobbying and advocacy but there is space to add a political lens to the analysis of country, regional and global processes**

*Recommendation 3 – Enrich context and actor analysis relating to PfR engagements with questions pertaining to political aspects of the country and institutional environment in which activities are planned and implemented.*

Response: To effectuate this recommendation PfR relies on the assessment of the implementing partners at local/ country/ regional/ global level, to determine which approach to take. Extra attention should be given ensure to include more political economy aspects in context and stakeholder analysis to have a (more) complete picture of the many dimensions of DRR, EMR and CCA in each context. PfR has worked with governments and key stakeholders in compromised civic space through agencies with legally established roles (notably the mandate of National Red Cross

Red Crescent Societies, acting as auxiliary to their governments) and through many years of collaboration with governments in the fields of disasters, climate and ecosystems, and is therefore well positioned to undertake such analysis. PFR is known as a knowledgeable and cooperative yet independent partner and the evaluators' finding underlines the importance to avoid politicizing positions and engagements in the respective fields. This in turn ensures stakeholders' trust in PFR and helps to retain its civic space. It will depend on the respective Alliance members and their partners to act on it and find ways to strategically or tactically address contentious issues and deal with the associated threats and risks.

## 5.2 Evaluation Objective 2: "Assess strengthening of CSO capacity".

### **Conclusion 4 – Capacity Strengthening - a strong focus, but the programme needs to further refine its capacity strengthening approach and instruments**

*Recommendation 4 – Update PFR's capacity strengthening strategy and toolbox, to reflect the multi-dimensional character of capacity strengthening processes and make resources available to support the capacity needs of all relevant actors involved in IRM policy, investment and practice processes.*

Response: The novel nature and scope of the programme necessitated the establishment of new instruments and training. Consequently, this was systematically taken up from the start in 2016, but became tailored and effective from midway the programme period. Over the course of PFR SP, many advocacy capacity strengthening resources (e.g. a [capacity strengthening analysis](#) was concluded in Sept. 2019) have been created and tailored to need by all teams. In 2020, these are gathered to create an online inventory for PFR and other actors to access in the future. This will include the overall capacity strengthening strategy and related templates and tools.

### **Conclusion 5 – Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation: A complex and laborious system was created with good elements to be further explored. Donor accountability demands put a strong footprint on PME but knowledge and learning elements gained gradually ground during the life of PFR SP.**

*Recommendation 5 – Simplify the Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation approach to make it less "accountability heavy" and more learning focused. This can be achieved by integrating PME with KML more structurally, operationally and institutionally, and by providing further guidance and support on the use of the outcome harvesting methodology.*

Response: This is a welcome recommendation and as was noted on p. 72, especially during the latter part of programme implementation efforts were made to simplify and align processes. Balancing overall accountability through PME systems, based on donor requirements, versus the effectiveness of lobby and advocacy methods (and the evidence component through the Knowledge Management and Learning (KML) systems) is a continuous challenge for PFR on which the evaluators rightfully put a finger. In future programmes this is intended to be comprehensively developed, integrating the various sectors.

However, a few steps are already being taken in line with this recommendation. With regards to the integration of PME and KML, there is now better coordination and cooperation among KML staff and the PME group. Furthermore, for the final report of the PFR D&D programme, the narrative reporting format is being simplified with more emphasis on strategic level reflections (with reference being made to the evaluators' first recommendation). PME staff from the different partners will be supporting the final PME workshops and the outcome harvesting monitoring that is being applied. It should be noted though that major adjustments are not realistic and may lead to confusion as the D&D programme is nearing its end date.

**Conclusion 6 – The programme displayed concerns for and developed well-targeted actions to address inclusiveness and vulnerability. It also adopted a stronger position on gender mainstreaming over the course of the programme**

*Recommendation 6 – Promote gender mainstreaming across the programme by building on the constructive steps already taken, including the gender marker assessments, and by developing a gender mainstreaming strategy and guidance note. Further strengthen current approaches to inclusiveness and vulnerability by supporting the implementation of the inclusive resilience building guidelines.*

Response: PFR welcomes this recommendation and likes to indicate that further steps for improvement have been taken, as was recognised by the evaluators (p72). The introduction of the [Inclusion guidelines](#) and the [Gender marker](#) is indeed regarded as significant steps towards gender mainstreaming and improved inclusion of vulnerable and marginalised communities. In line with the recommendation PFR will prioritize the implementation of these guidelines and tools in future programmes.

**Conclusion 7 – Ownership of IRM is growing among organisations funded by the Alliance, but also those associated with PFR activities. Prospects for the sustainability of IRM-related lobbying and advocacy at country level depend on context and remain uncertain at this moment.**

*Recommendation 7 – Draft a programme exit strategy to ensure a smooth handover to local partners and to ensure that alternative funding opportunities and capacity strengthening support are identified that can sustain efforts beyond the life of PFR SP.*

Response: In the past two years sustainability and an ‘exit-strategy’ was high on PFR’s agenda at numerous occasions. Thereby, the choice was made to focus on context specific and locally owned exit strategies for the different teams. In addition, a global resource mobilization and fundraising group has been established recently to explore potential funding opportunities that could contribute to sustain and further build on the results of PFR SP, including on some of the new additional income streams developed over the last few years (such as [partnership with UN Environment](#)). As described by the evaluators, “sustainability of the IRM-related lobbying and advocacy depends on the context”, whereby we agree that this should be (and could have been) done in a more systematic and ongoing manner. For the future, PFR will ensure that an exit strategy is part of programme planning from the onset and (local) funding opportunities and capacity strengthening on fundraising will receive extra attention.

**Conclusion 8 – Implementing the IRM approach across three levels – country, regional and global – has been a well-recognised innovation but remains overall a work in progress.**

*Recommendation 8 – Connect IRM-related priorities derived from the global policy frameworks more strongly across the three levels (country, regional and global), pay particular attention to further develop and enhance the performance of the regional programmes and strengthen the translation and uptake of global IRM-priorities, derived from the global policy frameworks, into relevant country priorities and processes.*

Response: PFR’s ambitions are high and in this light we appreciate the above conclusion. Connecting several scale levels, across sectors and multiple stakeholders, to work towards integrated solutions is complex and elaborative, and thus requires long-term investment and commitment. At the outset PFR concentrated on the global programme and the country programmes. This is substantiated by the evaluators with the finding that “its ability to bring experiences from the local level into regional and global exchanges were mentioned as a particular asset of the programme” by interviewed stakeholders, under conclusion 2. Consequently, the regional level was only fully addressed when these other two levels were up and running, even more so because the regional programmes were to be managed and implemented by officers from the national programmes.

Working downwards from the global to the regional and national levels has proven more challenging than upwards from the work at country level. The regional level can play a critical role (as can be observed in the Horn of Africa). Available capacity, human resourcing, networks and budgeting are critical factors for success and since 2018, steps have been taken to advance the regional programmes. While limited capacity and different priorities prevented this, we do note that regional programmes should have received more attention at the onset of the programme, and could consequently also have contributed to the success of both the national and global programmes.

### 5.3 Evaluation Objective 3: “Assess engagement with stakeholders in IRM”

**Conclusion 9 – IRM-related lobbying and advocacy for improved policy and enhanced practices was successful but results relating to investments, a domain conceptually not fully clarified among PfR stakeholders, were fewer.**

*Recommendation 9 – Retain PfRs focus on influencing IRM policies and practice, but strengthen guidance on how to support the investment domain including how to strategically lobby and advocate for IRM investments. A stronger strategic focus should be accompanied by the mobilisation of relevant expertise to spearhead this area of work at global, regional and country levels.*

Response: We recognize that efforts have been most successful in the policy and practice domain, and we appreciate the evaluators’ observation. There has been a stronger focus on public investments with for example government budgets allocated differently, as was recognised on p.38/39 regarding Africa Union (AU), the Great Green Wall and LAPSET in the HoA. Moreover, “at the global level, various contacts were made with UN organisations and alliances, such as the Partnership for Environment and Disaster Risk Reduction (PEDRR) and development banks (Asia Investment Infrastructure Bank and the World Bank) to influence policies, which created selected off-springs for research and new partnerships.” (p.77).

At the same time it should be recognised that civil society organizations in general often do not have a ‘natural fit’ with the for-profit sector beyond Corporate Social Responsibility programmes. We recognize that, therefore, more guidance in the investment domain could have strengthened this component of the programme. However, we also notice renewed and altered ambitions on a local scale, where water, environmental and climate impact on businesses are being discussed with Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and local Chambers of Commerce. Through further strengthening CSOs’ capacity and aligning interest and support with governments, future steps can be taken to engage with the private sector and/ or to influence investment plans, such as further influencing policies and licenses. For example through criteria for tender procedures to be all inclusive, transparent and include social and environmental responsibility and accountability through multi-stakeholder platforms and community engagement. An important connecting and brokering role can be played here by the Netherlands and European embassies.

**Conclusion 10 – The Alliance managed to strengthen its own capacity and was successful in strengthening the capacity of implementing partners to lobby and advocate for IRM at the subnational and local levels in particular. At the national, regional and global levels, Alliance members were the principal actors to lobby and advocate for IRM.**

*Recommendation 10 – Continue to focus on strengthening the capacity of national and local CSOs to lobby and advocate for IRM but invest more in their capacity to engage at the national, regional and global levels.*

Response: We concur with this conclusion and recommendation and believe this is a natural next step in the capacity strengthening approach, depending on context and resources (please note that when reference is made here to the Alliance members, this also includes the national counterparts of

the five Netherlands-based organizations which are often independent national CSOs in their own right). In certain countries entirely new (CSOs) structures needed to be formed, in others the approach was to identify the essential capacities that needed attention (e.g. to engage at provincial, national or regional levels). Any success in lobby and advocacy is primarily enabled by the strength of the network. Opening doors, making introductions and ensuring the ‘right’ people are at the table requires long-term investment and commitment.

Building on the above recommendation, PfR believes that many national partners have developed their capacity to a level that they can confidently engage in global processes as well. In future, the changing role of PfR Alliance members to be on the backseat with in-country CSOs in the driver’s seat will mean increased subsidiarity, ownership and responsibility. The Global Policy Group should therefore ensure much greater involvement in its work in subsequent programmes.

**Conclusion 11 – The collaboration with non-PfR partners, including the Netherlands MFA, was only partially successful.**

*Recommendation 11 – Seek more collaboration with non-PfR partners and donors in order to leverage funding, share experiences and scale up the lobbying and advocacy on IRM, also with the Netherlands MFA and its embassies in order to create synergies with resilience-related Dutch funding.*

Response: The PfR network is continuously expanding and new ways and networks are being explored and tapped into. For example, in 2017, PfR engaged with 266 key government actors, institutional stakeholders, and knowledge institutes, while in 2019 that number was significantly increased to 1,048 engagements. At the same time, we agree with the evaluators that the programme could potentially have had a larger impact if priorities and plans would have been more closely aligned with the MFA, Dutch embassies, and with similar funding streams that contribute to resilient communities. This was also recognised by the MFA through an evaluation of IOB named: [‘Strategies for partners: balancing complementarity and autonomy’](#).

#### 5.4 Evaluation Objective 4: “Review the governance of the programme.”

**Conclusion 12 – The governance of the Alliance is complex, but it somehow works.**

*Recommendation 12 – Strengthen strategic leadership and management at Steering Group and Programme Working Group level to ensure that diversity does not undermine programme coherence and further explore ways to enhance local ownership of the programme.*

Response: Local ownership and subsidiarity are central to the Partners for Resilience vision. Alliance members decentralize power and responsibility to enhance local resilience and to support self-managed, locally owned development. A 2019 PfR consultation with CSO partners and PfR country representatives on programmatic decision-making modalities noted that the governance structure works well overall, yet decision-making on global programme strategy, rules and regulations has been rather centralized. Efforts to change this are accompanied by strengthening local capacities for monitoring and evaluation, financial accountability and substantive reporting. This required balancing the autonomy of (many of) the local partners in applying structures and systems while at the same time contributing to an overall structure that, perforce, needs to deliver comparable and therefore uniform measurements to report at programme level to the donor. In this context the SG and PWG are expected to steer the programme, ensure programme coherence and compliance with specific and at times complex donor requirements. Therefore the evaluators’ recommendation to strengthen this needs to be carefully considered.

**Conclusion 13 – Resources for managing and guiding the partnership administratively and on content issues were insufficient.**

*Recommendation 13 – Better resource PfR in the domain of coordination and management as well as for positions which are key to implementing the content related aspects of the programme at regional and country levels, i.e. capacity strengthening, KML, gender and investments.*

Response: While we appreciate the conclusion that there is certainly room for improvement in the sphere of management, we are hesitant to embrace the recommendation at the global level. The current structure and resourcing is the outcome of several years of working as an Alliance, ensuring effectiveness, sustainability and coordination among multiple programmes. It is born out of practice, but also by adhering to donor demands regarding the spending on management and coordination. At regional and country level we fully support this recommendation and the current capacity strengthening is geared towards such sustainable long-term commitment. Thus, in response to the conclusion, PfR will carefully regard the necessary capacities to indeed enhance management and guidance, while avoiding a top-heavy structure, and being cognizant of donor conditions.

**Conclusion 14 – The financial management arrangements of the partnership highlight the “centrifugal” risks of the Alliance structure.**

*Recommendation 14 – To mitigate the centrifugal forces built into the financial management of the Alliance, examine the different financing scenarios that accommodate MFA requirements and institutional interests of Alliance partners with a particular focus on opportunities and constraints embedded in more pooled and flexible funding arrangements.*

Response: PfR welcomes this conclusion, and will indeed make efforts to ensure strict ‘accountability’ while leaving enough ‘flexibility’, e.g. through pooled and flexible funding arrangements. In reality, accountability and flexibility are often at odds with each other. Further dialogues with donors, together with evidence creation of financial practices, such as the flexible ‘11th country budget’ in the PfR D&D programme, is a good model that may be applied in subsequent programmes.

**Overall conclusion 15 – The overall achievements of PfR SP are largely positive and in line with expectations but the real mission of the Alliance deserves further discussion and clarification.**

*Recommendation 15 – Discuss with international cooperation agencies and development banks to what extent a continuation of PfR may include (as part of its capacity strengthening approach) complementary support to government actors as part of a multi-stakeholder approach.*

Response: PfR believes that its mission and overall focus (enhancing the resilience of vulnerable communities through community-level interventions and by making policies, investments and practices risk-informed) are undisputed. This is supported by the finding that PfR SP “has been highly relevant and enjoys a high level of ownership among most stakeholders” (p.8). This is not at odds with working with and providing support to government actors, as per the evaluators’ recommendations. Actually capacity strengthening of government actors is not a goal in itself, but a solid component of our lobby & advocacy agenda to ensure risk-informed policies, investments and practices. We read this recommendation in connection to the evaluators’ finding that the contextual knowledge of the alliance members resulted in relevant tailor made approaches and a careful selection of local stakeholders to work with. In addition, the evaluation has found that the extent to which the programme responded to government priorities in different contexts “depended clearly on the extent to which a country had a well-functioning government” (p.10).

Furthermore, PfR has already taken steps in working with donors and development banks: through a parallel programme, funded by EU-DEVCO and implemented with [UN Environment](#), PfR is working on major infrastructural development plans in several countries, and engaging with for example the



World Bank. We regard the recommendation therefore as an encouragement to continue and where possible intensify these collaborations, and explore further opportunities in this field.

## **6 Concluding remarks**

The PfR Alliance is extremely grateful for the thorough work that ECDPM has done. We find it remarkable how well ECDPM managed to understand such a complex and large programme in a short period of time. Further challenges were posed by the global COVID-19 epidemic which has restricted movement in some cases, but ECDPM has been flexible and quickly adjusted its methodology where needed, for instance running online workshops with the PfR country teams. The participative approach allowed all staff involved to truly learn during the evaluation process.

The recommendations are very valuable for PfR and, while taking into account the above responses, we are committed to effectuate these. We are convinced they will guide, inspire and improve the further work of the Alliance (members) in the use of the ToC, in capacity strengthening, stakeholder engagement, governance, and beyond. Where possible they will be taken up in the final phase of the current PfR SP programme.