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ANNEX III TO FINAL REPORT

EVALUATION OF NPT AND NICHE



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1. SUMMARY: INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON OF POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

In the following, the Netherlands' Programme for Institutional Strengthening of Post-Secondary Education and Training Capacity (NPT) and the Netherlands' Initiative for Capacity Development in Higher Education (NICHE) have been subject to an international comparison of similar development cooperation programmes. In accordance with the "Most-Similar-Approach,"¹ different international programmes aimed at strengthening organisational capacity development have been compared to the activities of NPT and NICHE programmes of Netherlands Organization for International Cooperation in Higher Education (Nuffic) along the following criteria (see also chapter 4.1):

- Programme Objectives
- Programme Target Groups
- Programme Funding
- Programme Approaches
- Project Duration
- Project Ownership

Based on these criteria, nine international education development programmes were analysed. The most similar education development programmes can be found in Belgium, Finland, Norway and Sweden. They have therefore been selected for an in-depth comparison with NPT and NICHE.

1.1 Overview of the characteristics of NPT and NICHE in international development cooperation

A sound post-secondary education policy, organisational and research capacity as well as advanced knowledge play a pivotal role in development, both in the North and the South. The processes of globalization and the importance of competitive knowledge emphasize the necessity for a country to have strong organisational and individual capacities in post-secondary education and research. The role of institutions of post-secondary education in fostering knowledge and insight, innovative abilities as well as creative thinking has been acknowledged as a precondition for poverty alleviation in developing countries (see chapter 2.1.4).

A wide range of programmes aim at education development as part of their countries' development policy. A central aspect of the NPT/NICHE programmes is the focus on individual and organisational capacity development in the field of post-secondary education, which is not a common aspect of all education development programmes. For example, programmes like the *ALFA-EU Programme*, financed by the European Union; the *Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan (CFSP-UK)* organized by the Department for International Development (DFID-UK) and Denmark's *Cooperation with Research Institutions and Think Tanks*² of the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) do not state organisational capacity development as part of their programme objectives. Furthermore, the educational development objectives of DFID include the primary sector of education only. Hence, although addressing educational needs in developing countries, they are not comparable with NPT and NICHE programmes according to the "Most-Similar-Approach".

In contrast, the *Programme Area No.5 "Educational Cooperation with Developing Countries"* of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and the *Canadian Francophone Scholarship Programme (CFSP)* have defined individual and organisational capacity development as their objective. But both had to be excluded from the international comparison as well, due to functional differences with the NPT/NICHE programmes. On the one hand, the DAAD has

¹ Within the *Most Similar System Design* cases are compared that show similarities in as many variables and aspects as possible. It is based on the hypothesis that between most similar cases variables causing differences will be easier to identify.

² For more information see: DANIDA (2011): Research Organization and Think Tanks <http://um.dk/en/danida-en/partners/research/>

formulated capacity development as an overall objective for the programme area; which includes several different programmes, each having its own aims. Thus the organisational effects on capacity development cannot be traced back to one specific programme. Even if the specific programmes could be taken into consideration, the financial budget of each DAAD programme rather equals budgets of single projects in NPT and NICHE. On the other hand, the CFSP initiated by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) is designed as a scholarship programme to enhance individual capacity which in the long term should foster organisational capacity development (cf. CIDA, 2011a, online). With this approach however, CFSP is more comparable with the *Netherlands Fellowship Programme* (NFP) than with NPT and NICHE. Therefore, a comparison based on the "Most-Similar-Approach" is not only difficult to conduct, but runs the risk of deriving false conclusions.

Finally, the Flemish *Institutional Cooperation Programme* (IUC), the *Norwegian Programme for Development, Research and Education* (NUFU), the *Swedish Department for Research* (SAREC) and the *Higher Education Institutions-Institutional Cooperation Instrument* (HEI-ICI) in Finland could be identified as comparable with NPT and NICHE programmes. The **common objective** of all these programmes is organisational and individual capacity development, although the roads to achieving this target differ to a certain extent.

With the exception of NUFU, which has a strong focus on individual capacity enhancement as a means of organisational capacity development, all other programmes aim directly at developing organisational capacity in the post-secondary education, similar to NPT and NICHE. The *Norwegian Programme for Development, Research and Education* (NUFU) aims at organisational capacity development and competence enhancement in the Southern partner countries (cf. SIU, 2010, pp.4/5).³ The organisational capacity development is expected to be an outcome of several programme features, like partnerships and joint projects between higher education institutes in Norway and the South, cooperation on the field of educating Master's and PhD students, and the development of Master's and PhD programmes. However, although some of these programme features directly target the organisational development of the Southern partners, the focus is on individual capacity enhancement as a means of organisational capacity development (Ibid.).

A more similar approach to NPT and NICHE programmes of developing organisational development can be found in IUC, SAREC and HEI-ICI's programme focus. The *IUC Programme* of the Flemish Interuniversity Council VLIR-UOS supports long-term multidisciplinary cooperation between Flemish academics and institutions in the Southern partner countries in order to develop local organisational capacity (cf. VLIR-UOS, 2008a, online). Moreover, the programme targets the improvement of institutional policies, management and quality of education (cf. VLIR-UOS, 2011f, online). The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) is in charge of the *Swedish Department for Research* (SAREC)⁴, which equally focuses on human and organisational capacity development (cf. Government Offices of Sweden, 2010, p.12). Capacity for research shall be developed in the southern partner countries to enable Southern and Swedish partners to conduct research of relevance to developing countries (cf. Government Offices of Sweden, 2010, p.10). In order to achieve these objectives individual research capacity development is supported through training, cooperation and networking opportunities. Furthermore the establishment of successful research environments is promoted by improving the infrastructure, administration and management of post-secondary education in the South (cf. Government Offices of Sweden, 2010, pp.20-27). Finally, the Finnish Centre for International Mobility (CIMO) conducts the *Higher Education Institutions-Institutional Cooperation Instrument* (HEI-ICI) programme. Organisational capacity enhancement in post-secondary education is the primary objective of the programme and is approached through training, educational infrastructure enforcement and curriculum development (cf. CIMO, 2011a, online).

³ The programme was launched in 1991 and will be reformed and integrated into NORHED programme in 2012.

⁴ SAREC has been renamed as the Unit for Research Cooperation in 2010. The objectives basically stayed the same (cf. SIDA Research Cooperation, 2010: online/ Eduards, 2006: p. 11) and more data is available for SAREC, which will be primarily considered here.

Differences in eligibility criteria between NPT/NICHE and the other programmes can be identified as well. The programmes' **target groups** are geographically, sectorally and organizationally specified. To a certain extent all programmes show signs of politically determined eligibility criteria that are aligned to the national development policy.

The main purpose of all programmes is to initiate and support bilateral project cooperation between institutions in the donor and beneficiary countries. NPT and NICHE offer additional possibilities for multilateral North-South-South project cooperation as well. While this broad definition of targeted cooperation also occurs in IUC and NUFU (cf. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, 2011b; NORAD, 2009, pp.28-29; VLIR-UOS, 2011a, online), it is not envisaged by HEI-ICI and SAREC. Moreover, the initiation of the new development policy by the Dutch government, which foresees a division of potential partner countries into three different profiles, will also affect NICHE in the future (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, 2011b). Such a division has already been implemented in NUFU, IUC, Finnish HEI-ICI and SAREC. They differentiate between countries of focus and additional countries to achieve a more *geographical focus* (cf. NORAD, 2009, p.63/ VLIR-UOS, 2010, p.22/ CIMO, 2011a, online/ Government Offices of Sweden, 2010, p.27). In contrast to the others CIMO – despite their prioritization of long-term partner countries – specifically considers all ODA-countries as eligible (cf. CIMO, 2011a, online). Besides geography, *sectoral eligibility criteria* exist in SAREC and NUFU, which are comparable to the new spearhead system of the Dutch government which will be applied to NICHE (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, 2011b). The concentration on thematic areas or sectors is usually in line with the donor country's priority sectors of development policy (cf. Eduards, 2006, p.8/ NORAD, 2009, p.63).

Differences to NPT and NICHE can be identified in regards to the eligibility criteria for *participating organizations*. While Nuffic has quite loose eligibility criteria for participating organizations that can include post-secondary education institutes of all kind, ministries and national agencies as well as NGO's (Nuffic, 2008a), the compared programmes' criteria are far narrower. SIDA includes research agents on the post-secondary education and ministry level (cf. Government Offices of Sweden, 2010, p.27). VLIR-UOS and CIMO aim their programmes mainly at research institutions and universities (cf. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2010, p.6/ VLIR-UOS 2008b, p.10). NORAD offers the narrowest possibility, accepting applicants from the department or faculty level (cf. NORAD, 2009, p.64).

While the selection mechanism of projects and partners is quite unique in NPT and NICHE, the **programme funding** is to a certain extent comparable to the other programmes. Similarities and differences can be found in total programme budget, share of project funding and eligible costs. The annual budgets of the considered organizations vary between about 5 Million and 20 Million Euro annually. HEI-ICI, with a programme budget of approx. 5.5 Million Euro per year, marks the minimum end of the scale (cf. European Commission, 2010, online). NPT/NICHE's budget marks the maximum end, with more than 20 Million Euros available annually (cf. VLIR-UOS, 2008b, p.9). Considering the share of funding that is provided for each project, the IUC Programme and the NPT/NICHE programmes provide most with up to 100 per cent. However, co-funding is expected in HEI-ICI, SAREC, IUC and NUFU Programmes (cf. VLIR-UOS, 2008b, p.13/ VLIR-UOS, 2009, pp. 7-8/ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2010, p.19). The IUC works with a gradual financial retreat of VLIR-UOS during the project development until "[a]fter 10 years, the partner university is expected to capitalize on the created capacity and international linkages and be able to compete for other funding sources" (VLIR-UOS, 2009, p. 7).

The eligibility of *personnel costs* is a key differentiation between the programmes. Generally it is expected that the Southern partner institutions contribute to the projects with unpaid staff time (VLIR-UOS, 2008b, p.13). However, salaries for staff are in some cases eligible for the Northern partner institution, as is the case in NPT, NICHE (Visser et al., 2007) and SAREC (cf. SIDA, 2006, p.38). IUC and NUFU count on the programme contribution of the Northern partner organizations without offering financial compensation for staff time and effort (cf. VLIR-UOS, 2008, p.14). HEI-ICI is the only one offering budget for staff salaries of both partner institutions (cf. CIMO, 2009, p.11/16-17).

In order to successfully contribute to the development of the Southern partner countries, most programmes have chosen their **programme approach** to be demand-driven. With the help of the potential beneficiary countries, demands are supposed to be recognized and possible solutions identified (cf. Bautista et al., 2011, pp.14/15). The NPT/NICHE, SAREC, IUC and HEI-ICI programmes all work together with the partner countries' post-secondary education institutions and ministries in order to identify potential demands (cf. Visser et al., 2007; Boeren et al., 2006, p.9; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2010, p.10). But the assessment of demands differs. In NPT/NICHE it is to a far extent channelled through the Dutch embassies and/or fact-finding missions. In a divided process demands are identified and articulated. Demand articulation is conducted independently by the requesting organization (see chapter 2.2.4.). SAREC, NUFU and IUC preferably work with their partner institutions to accomplish demand identification and the embassies play only a minor role (cf. Boeren, 2006, p.16/ Eduards, 2006, p.18/ NORAD, 2009, p.49/ VLIR-UOS, 2008b, p.26). The Finnish HEI-ICI counts on strategy papers and action plans as demand evidence (cf. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2010, p.16). Norway's NUFU programme on the other side was qualified as rather supply-driven. "[I]n particular the NUFU programme, continuously is linked to Norwegian partners and partner institutions, to Norwegian set priorities and to administrative and programme responsibilities entirely resting with Norwegian partners" (NORAD, 2009, p.66). Besides this, the compared programmes have differences regarding their approach on how to match the demands of the Southern partners and the expertise of the Northern partners. While e.g. the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs chose a public tender procedure system to ensure matching project partners, SIDA's scientific committees and internal/external advisers are to identify possible long-term cooperation partners (cf. Eduards, 2006, pp.13-15). In the 2006 evaluation of SIDA this procedure was mainly critiqued on the basis of missing transparency (cf. Eduards, 2006, p.8).

Another relevant question of programme approach concerns the **duration of the cooperation projects**. In the compared programmes, the duration of the projects vary between 1 and 15 years. The time frame of HEI-ICI is, with 1-3 years, one of the shortest (cf. CIMO, 2011b, online). Mid-level duration of about 4-5 years can be found in SAREC (SIDA, 2006, p.11) and NPT/NICHE projects (Visser et al., 2007). The IUC and NUFU offer the longest project duration periods of up to 12 to 15 years (cf. NORAD, 2009, p.24/ VLIR-UOS, 2011b, online).

On the project level, the distribution of administrative and financial responsibilities between the project partners in the donor and the beneficiary countries influences **project ownership**. In the compared programmes, the financial responsibility generally lies with the Northern project partner. Currently, NORAD and Finnish CIMO adhere to this practice (cf. NORAD, 2009, p.33/ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2010, p.26). In the case of NORAD's NUFU the funds are disbursed through the Norwegian partner universities - in order to ensure that Norwegian administrative standards are met. Nevertheless, in the end the beneficiaries are dependent on their Norwegian partners in financial matters (cf. NORAD, 2009, p.33). Nuffic as well as Swedish SIDA and VLIR-UOS take efforts to strengthen Southern project ownership by gradually moving financial management responsibility to the cooperating institutions in the South (cf. Eduards, 2006, p.16).

In some cases, the programmes also aim at strengthening the ownership of the Southern partner by supporting a more active role in the preparation of the project proposals. Like NPT and NICHE, both the IUC and HEI-ICI programme (cf. VLIR-UOS, 2008b, p.23/The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2010, p.13) demand that the Southern institutions write their own expression of interest for the projects. Afterwards, matching partners are searched for by the respective International Development/Cooperation Agencies and with the help of the tender procedure in NPT and NICHE. In the case of the IUC programme, all applications are pre-checked by the Institutional Coordinator for Development Cooperation (ICOS) and hence at the Flemish University level (cf. VLIR-UOS, 2008b, p.27). While in SAREC, the Southern partners prepare the project proposals after being invited by SIDA (SIDA, 2006, pp.11/12), NUFU works with joint project proposals handed in by both partners (cf. NORAD, 2007, p.7).

1.2 Programme results in terms of efficiency and effectiveness

After the direct comparison of the programmes, the respective programme results have been analysed in terms of efficiency and effectiveness based on the accessible information. The level of information regarding the programmes' cost **efficiency** could not be assessed due to a lack of comparable data sources. Nevertheless, the question of effectiveness⁵ can be addressed on the basis of existing evaluation reports. While the IUC (cf. VLIR-UOS, 2008b/2009), NUFU (cf. NORAD, 2009) and SAREC programmes (cf. Boeren et al. 2006/ Eduards, 2006)⁶ have been evaluated, the HEI-ICI programme was launched just recently (in 2009) and no evaluation is accessible so far. Therefore programme results for the HEI-ICI cannot be taken into account.

From the evaluations of SAREC and NORAD different dimensions influencing **effectiveness** can be extracted. The features of the programmes that focus on direct organisational capacity development measures, the openness of organizational eligibility criteria, a demand-driven nature of the projects and (financial) project ownership of the Southern cooperation partner are seen as influential on effectiveness according to Boeren et al.; Eduards and NORAD (cf. Boeren et al., 2006, p.30/ Eduards, 2006, pp.13-15/ NORAD, 2009, pp.25/66). In NORAD's evaluation of the NUFU programme a lack of effectiveness is reported due to the programme's focus on individual capacity enhancement as a mean to foster organisational capacity development (cf. NORAD, 2009, pp.22-24). Eduards' evaluation of SAREC supports this argument by describing the increased effectiveness of the programme after concentrating on direct organisational capacity development (Eduards, 2006, pp.13-15). Furthermore, the NORAD evaluation recommends a more holistic approach in regard to eligibility criteria at the organizational level. This is perceived to foster effective development aid (cf. Recommendations NORAD, 2009: p. 25). Moreover, an increasing demand-driven nature of projects and the gradual transfer of responsibility to the Southern partner countries is also recommended to foster NUFU's programme effectiveness (cf. NORAD, 2009, p.66/69). This view is supported by VLIR-UOS experiences (VLIR-UOS, 2009, p.11).

1.3 Summary and conclusions

The international comparison showed that HEI-ICI, SAREC and IUC are most similar to NPT and NICHE concerning the objective of direct organisational capacity development. However, while a geographical and sectoral focus on target groups is just being implemented in NICHE, most of the other programmes' target groups are already specified in these terms. Differences were also identified regarding the possibility to finance salaries. With the exception of HEI-ICI, the compared programmes do not offer the possibility to finance salaries of the Southern partner institution. In comparison, NPT/NICHE and SAREC allow for salaries to be paid to Northern staff. NPT and NICHE's demand-driven approach is common to most programmes, but considerable differences can be found in the ways to identify and articulate these demands. While NPT and NICHE expect the Southern project partners to prepare the project outline, hence enabling them to assess their own demands, this is not common practice to all the programmes. The NUFU programme with its more supply-driven nature represents an exception concerning programme approach. Regarding the duration, NPT/NICHE projects have a mid-term duration compared to the other programmes. Moreover, the comparison identified differences and similarities as regards the financial ownership. Efforts to strengthen financial project ownership of the Southern partners have been taken up by NPT/NICHE, SAREC and IUC.

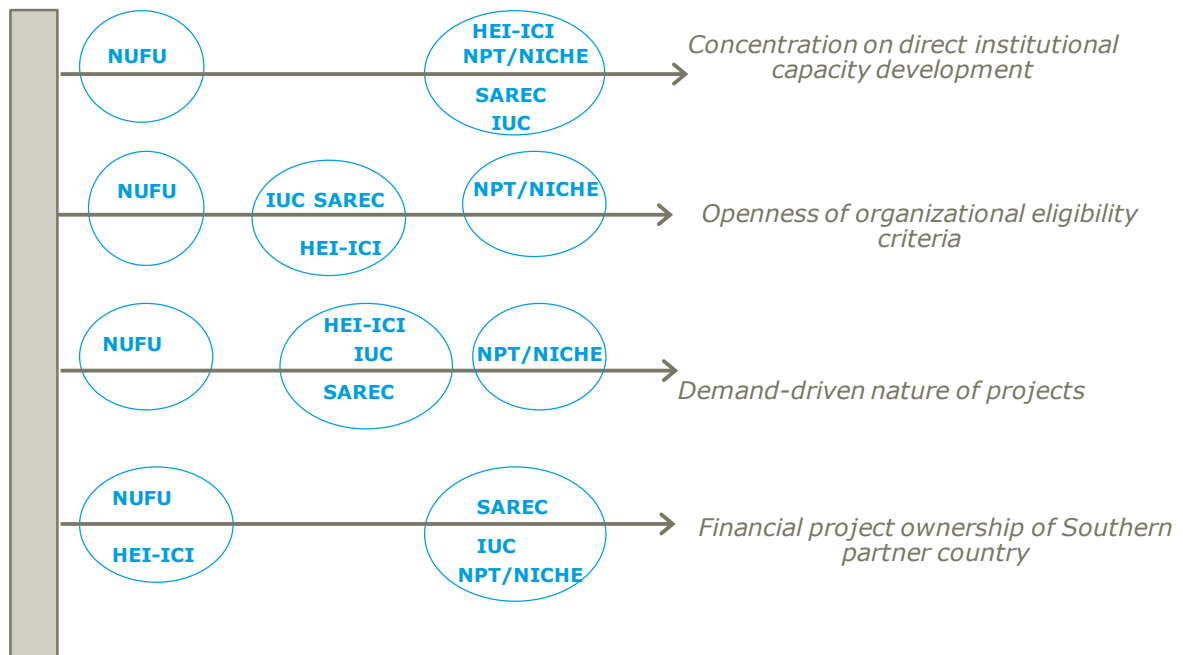
The openness of organizational eligibility criteria, the pivotal role of the Southern partner institutions in demand articulation together with the tender procedure for partner matching and project selection plus the extensive annual budget are distinctions of singularity of NPT and NICHE.

⁵ Effectiveness is defined according to OECD evaluation criteria as the extent to which the development intervention's objectives were achieved (cf. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, 2011e, online).

⁶ As Unit for Research Cooperation is fairly new, no evaluation is available yet. Hence the assessment of the programme results will be based on the evaluation reports concerning SAREC (cf. Boeren et al. 2006/ Eduards, 2006).

As outlined before, the dimensions of differentiation influencing the programmes' effectiveness are as follows: *concentration on direct organisational capacity development, openness of organizational eligibility criteria, the demand-driven nature of the projects and financial ownership of the Southern partner country*. They derive directly from the comparison criteria mentioned at the beginning: programme objectives, target groups, programme approach and project ownership. To visualize the similarities and differences on these pivotal dimensions, they were clustered in the following figure. Programmes close to the arrow's starting point are furthest away from the dimension in question.

Figure 8: Comparison of International Post-Secondary Education Programmes



Source: Rambøll Management Consulting 2011

Altogether, the figure shows that SAREC is most similar with the NPT/NICHE programmes on all considered dimensions. The IUC programme is very analogous as well, differences are only to be found on the dimension of organizational eligibility criteria. HEI-ICI programme practice is also very oriented towards organisational capacity development and a demand-driven nature of projects, but takes a less holistic and slightly more Northern centred approach than NPT and NICHE. NUFU's rather supply-driven, non-holistic and Northern ownership-based project implementation is very different from all the others.