
1. Introduction

A final evaluation of the Partos Program The Spindle, Partos Innovation Platform (2016-2020) was conducted by the external evaluators of IntoOutcome: Nele Blommestein (senior evaluator), Lisette Gast (senior evaluator) and Tereza Herodková (junior evaluator). This letter is a response to this evaluation. For the full End-Term Evaluation Report see the Partos website.

The aim of the End-Term Evaluation was to gain insight in the results of The Spindle and how they were achieved; to better understand the perceived effectiveness and the relevance of The Spindle in its role as a connector for innovation and impact; to account for these results and to learn for future programming. This End-Term Evaluation builds on the findings of the earlier Mid-Term Review (also by IntoOutcome), that was done end of 2018.

The End-Term Evaluation had many components: a desk research, in-depth interviews, Outcome Harvesting, a story based research with the use of Sprockler, dialogue sessions and a sensemaking session in the final phase with the team of Partos working for The Spindle. The evaluation was conducted between March 2020 and July 2020.

For the supervision over the quality of the evaluation and for maximum learning of its findings, Partos was happy to be able to form an External Reference Group (E.R.G.) with the following experts:

- Marieke de Wal, Erasmus Universiteit, Managing Director of The Partnership Resource Centre, senior expert in partnering in knowledge, pro-active stakeholder engagement and process evaluation,
- Judith Flick, senior program manager and trained innovation expert in international development, currently working for War Child,
- Ivan Pouwels, Owner of Cooperation Next and researcher for University of Twente, senior expert on strategy development and interorganisational cooperation in knowledge and innovation.

It is thanks to the energetic and flexible approach of Nele Blommestein, under whose leadership this evaluation took place, that, despite the implications of the COVID-19 outbreak on the process and the working conditions of the consultants, this End-Term evaluation was brought to a good end. The members of the E.R.G. unanimously expressed their admiration for the huge amount of work done under the difficult circumstances of these past months. The hard work resulted in a report rich material of both the process and the final report has helped our thinking about the future of Partos
work as a connector for innovation and impact. The reflections with the members of the External Reference Group on the findings provided us additional valuable insights.

With this management response Partos reacts to the findings of the evaluation and reports on how it will implement the lessons drawn from both this evaluation, and the reflections with the External Reference Group.

2. **Learnings from the external End Evaluation of The Spindle, Partos Innovation Program (2016-2020)**

The End Evaluation of The Spindle confirmed the relevance of The Spindle as a connector for innovation and learning, as well as of facilitator of innovation pilots. The Spindle’s activities were found to be unique, focused on complex processes of change and had an effect on the entire Dutch development sector. The majority of the harvested outcomes were unexpected by The Spindle team. This is inherent to any innovation program.

Critical enabling internal factors are the uniqueness of the team and that fact that The Spindle is part of Partos. Enabling external factors relate to the network of The Spindle and its partnerships. The hampering factors are the team’s overload and limited capacity, and the lack of support for innovation from management in partnering and potential partnering organizations. The consultants further conclude that the role of role as facilitator of innovation they recommend to apply a framework for change in complex contexts, like Theory U.

The findings and the recommendations by the ERG, support Partos in its decision to position the new learning and innovation program more explicitly as a Partos program, to realize an agenda of collective change with and on behalf of its members. For this we will strengthen our agenda setting role, with participatory agenda setting involving also Southern based partners of our members.

We recognize the conclusion that work overload was an internal factor of the Team, that hampered the effectiveness of The Spindle. We will address this with more focus on strategically important topics, and the mobilization of our members on these topics. In addition, we choose for a modest expansion of team capacity, investing in adaptive and participatory planning, and improved monitoring of our progress towards impact.

**Other Lessons and Recommendations and Our Response**

On the roles of The Spindle:

**Evaluators:**

- Extend your platform function, build on your role as innovation broker and take on your role as facilitator of complex processes of change more explicitly.
- The agenda setting to influence policies is the least recognized by respondents (pg 5 End Evaluation).

**E.R.G:**

- Make a better distinction between two approaches of facilitating innovation processes that are both valuable: one enabling bottom up initiatives of innovation; one focusing on innovation based on an agenda for collective change.

**Our response:**

- To extend our platform function for our stakeholders we will invest in a website, with more possibilities for peer-to-peer learning and knowledge sharing, further develop our networking database and continue to work with online learning tools.
• We will base our intervention strategies and activities more explicitly on the Theory U as a framework to facilitate complex change processes;
• In this proposal the role of agenda setting has been made more explicit and strategic, and the process of agenda setting is elaborated to be more participatory and adaptive.
• In our programming we will make clear distinction between two clear strategies to facilitate innovation processes:
  o One building on initiatives by our member organisations and their partners, similar in one or more of the thematic areas (c.f. The Digital Journey. The Summerlabs);
  o One with a more impact focussed approach and deployment of extra capacity and resources, based on an agenda for collective change.

On involvement of Southern partner organizations

Evaluators: Involve Southern partner organizations earlier in the process, capitalize on the digital insights the Corona times brought on us.

Our response: In the Partos Learning and Innovation Program, Southern partners will be more actively involved in setting the agenda, online learning will be used to strengthen South-North learning, and better use will be made of Southern innovators, and local knowledge and practices.

Monitoring and evaluation
Evaluators:
• Focus on short- and intermediate-term outcome that are within the program’s sphere of control. Set an accountability ceiling in the Theory of Change.
• Integrate M&E in ongoing practice and focus on using stories, or micro-narratives to capture emerging outcomes (expected or unexpected) and to assess possible adjustments in daily operations, resource allocations and strategy setting.

E.R.G.: combine qualitative research with quantitative research.
Our response:
• We added an accountability ceiling in our Theory of Change and adapted our PMEL framework regularly review our immediate and intermediate outcomes, and their expected contribution to our ultimate outcome. We choose for a mixed methodology approach including qualitative (collecting stories) and quantitative methods (collecting data on number of organizations committed to innovation, on advise of External Reference Group)

Amsterdam, 27 juli 2020

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