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REPORT BY THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL COUNCIL OF THE MANAGEMENT OF SOCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS (MOST) PROGRAMME ON ITS ACTIVITIES

OUTLINE

Source: Article X of the Statutes of the Intergovernmental Council of the Management of Social Transformations (MOST) Programme.

Background: In accordance with this article, the Intergovernmental Council submits to the General Conference its report on the activities of the programme in 2002-2003.

Purpose: The report provides a summary of the main themes discussed during the sixth Intergovernmental Council Session, which was held in Paris from 19 to 21 February 2003. It covers, in particular, the external evaluation of the first eight years of the programme (1994-2002) and the related recommendations for improvement during the programme's second phase. Fundamentals of the report deal with the refocusing of MOST on the research-policy link and the requirement for turning MOST into a continuous, multiple-flow interface between researchers and policy-makers. This implies the strengthening of MOST's governing bodies, the improvement of functional structures, both within UNESCO and regarding cooperation with the field, as well as mechanisms enhancing the programme's visibility.

Decision required: The present report requires no decision.

1. The sixth session of the Intergovernmental Council (IGC) meeting in Paris, from 19 to 21 February 2003, was dedicated to the statutory external evaluation of the first eight years of the MOST Programme covering the period 1994-2002. Since the launch of this major evaluation exercise in 2001, MOST has concentrated its efforts on the continuation and finalization of running projects without launching new ones.

2. The IGC took note of the comprehensive external evaluation report presented by Professor Ossi V. Lindqvist (Finland), Chairman of the evaluation team. Professor Elvi Whittaker, former chairperson of the MOST Scientific Steering Committee (1994-1997), also presented delegates with a view on the future of MOST. The delegates' attention was also drawn to the proposals for the refocusing of the Programme made by the Secretariat. These presentations provided a basis for IGC's discussions concerning a focused relaunch of MOST.

3. The joint session of the Scientific Steering Committee and IGC drew general conclusions with respect to the restructuring of MOST under the main theme of strengthening and emphasizing the research-policy link.

4. IGC appreciated the presentation of the external evaluation and its 15 recommendations. Delegates took note of the popularity of the MOST Programme, indicated by the 1.8 million visiting the MOST website in 2001, and its successful participation in events, such as the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre. Delegates were informed about the activities of the different networks, recent publications and the MOST Summer Schools.

5. The evaluator's call for MOST to find its specific niche, especially in terms of focusing on its core business, the research-policy interface, received overall support. Other important issues related to capacity-building in developing countries to foster high-quality, multidisciplinary, problem-oriented research, while exploiting the full range of professional networks and connections in disseminating its results.

6. During the discussions several points were raised:

- the important status of the evaluation document which responded to a statutory obligation of the MOST Programme was underlined;
- the proposal to rename the programme encountered some opposition; MOST, acronym for "Management of Social Transformations" was confirmed;
- the suggestion that MOST be not confined to the social sciences was welcomed;
- the low profile of the MOST Programme needed to be addressed and its visibility increased;
- the need for the programme to attract extrabudgetary funding was highlighted;
- the Secretariat was called upon to give IGC the necessary time for fulfilling its role as the decision-making body on the reorientation of MOST;
- it was recalled that the three research foci of MOST stemmed from large consultation with Member States and were still relevant. A strong plea was voiced however to let the regions define their own regional priority themes; as illustrated by several calls from the Latin American region to have MOST working on poverty.
- the importance of the MOST National Liaison Committees was highlighted.

7. The Vice-Chairperson summarized the debates by recognizing the need for change, but noting that delegates were prone to a more “evolutionary” than “revolutionary” approach to achieve this re-orientation. The emphasis on the policy-research linkages is of highest importance, but the policy implications of the past research should be exploited.
8. The MOST Intergovernmental Council addressed a number of recommendations (see Annex) to the Director-General and the Member States on the main topics highlighted in the course of the debate. The results of the external evaluation were examined by the Executive Board at its 166th session, under agenda item 3.1.4 “Comments by the Director-General on the external evaluation reports submitted in the 2000-2001 and the 2002-2003 biennia” (166 EX/41).
9. The Executive Board adopted 166 EX/Decision 3.1.4, *inter alia*, “taking note of the recommendations made by the evaluators as well as the report of the Director-General on the implementation thereof” (para. 2) and inviting “the Director-General to implement in the appropriate manner those recommendations that he judges necessary in the light of the debate at its 166th session to improve the programmes to which they relate” (para. 4).
10. In application of the recommendations, the Secretariat convened the first IGC Bureau meeting from 27 to 28 June 2003. During this meeting the Bureau members provided further guidance with respect to the implementation of the recommendations.

ANNEX

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SIXTH SESSION OF THE IGC MOST (19- 21 February 2003, UNESCO Headquarters, Room IV)

Recalling that UNESCO through MOST is active in promoting research in social sciences for the management of social transformation as well as bridging the gap between research and policy at all levels,

Recognizing that MOST is not the only social science research programme under UNESCO but is nevertheless a significant social science programme under UNESCO,

Understanding that MOST is unique in that it is an intergovernmental body that has global responsibility for developing and promoting social science for the management of social transformation,

Cognizant of the increasing need to bridge the gap between research and policy development,

Taking into account the significant programmes and activities that were undertaken by MOST in the last eight years and that many developed and developing countries have benefited from the research and other activities undertaken by MOST,

Aware that there are ongoing projects that are being supported by MOST,

Realizing that there are both commonalities and regional differences in challenges concerning research priorities and thematic areas,

Giving due consideration to the findings of the MOST Evaluation Report (1994-2001) by Professor O.V. Lindqvist, Professor R. Radhakrishna and Dr R. de Oliveira and the Proposals for Phase II (2002-2009) of the Management of Social Transformations (MOST) Programme by Professor Elvi Whittaker the IGC agreed as follows:

Mission

- (a) that the MOST Programme should be continued;
- (b) the mission of MOST for the next phase be as follows:

“MOST will continue to promote the development and use of social science knowledge that contributes to better understanding and management of social transformations consistent with the universal values of justice, freedom, human dignity and sustainable development.”;
- (c) retain the name of the programme as Management of Social Transformations (MOST).

Goals and priorities

- (a) In recognition of the increasing need to improve policy formulation the MOST Programme should concentrate on the improvement of the relation between policy-making and social science research and where necessary enhance quality of social science research.

- (b) Involve decision-makers and other social actors in defining research problems and in the subsequent phases of the study to ensure acceptance and use of the findings in policy formulation while ensuring the integrity of the research.
- (c) The research problems should build on the previous thematic areas of MOST and the expertise and network resulting from the past two periods with the prospect of including new themes deemed critical. These new priorities and themes should be defined through consultation process at regional and other levels taking into account the priorities of UNESCO.
- (d) In undertaking MOST activities, local needs and indigenous knowledge be taken into account.
- (e) Research projects should be issue- and solution-oriented as well as respect universal values and diversity.
- (f) Noting the recommendations of the five chairpersons of the five intergovernmental scientific programmes of UNESCO, MOST should actively take part in joint interdisciplinary projects with the natural science programmes of UNESCO.

Activities

- (a) The working group, consisting of the IGC Bureau and the Scientific Committee will develop a new result-oriented work programme covering the conceptual development of the policy research interface, methodology and international comparative perspectives, taking into consideration the initiatives coming from different stakeholders. This programme will be submitted to the IGC within one year.
- (b) Follow up on the research findings under the MOST Programme to be used as input for policy formulation.
- (c) Explore and analyse existing research findings before proposing new projects under the MOST Programme.

Capacity-building

In keeping with its objectives of capacity-building at national and regional levels MOST will focus on research and on developing linkages between policy and research through institutional reviews, cooperation between academic communities and stake-holders, new training ventures, Summer Schools, etc.

Structure and governance

- (a) Member States are encouraged to send specialists in the fields of social science and/or policy-makers as governmental representatives to IGCs.
- (b) IGC be given a greater role in governance, approval of strategies and programmes and the facilitation of relations with national research centres and policy-makers.
- (c) The role of the IGC Bureau should be considerably strengthened and it should meet twice a year.

- (d) The SSC should consist of a group of six experts, one from each region, including the President of the IGC as ex-officio member and the SSC should act as standing committee and be used on an ad hoc basis by the Bureau of the IGC and the Secretariat for the conceptualization of the Programme, development of strategies and for scientific advice at the project level.

Position of MOST

- (a) MOST should be an autonomous unit within the SHS Sector to increase its visibility and focus.
- (b) The structure and location of the secretariat should be finalized in the course of the 32 C/5 after decisions concerning the reorientation of MOST at the General Conference.
- (c) The secretariat must have the necessary human resources either on a permanent basis or on contract basis to perform its functions effectively.
- (d) The members of the secretariat should have scientific as well as managerial and institutional competencies.
- (e) The secretariat should be strengthened by bringing in outside competence on a rotating basis including through sabbaticals.

Enhancing visibility

- (a) The secretariat should develop a new programme for the identification and dissemination of best practices, capacity-building, etc.
- (b) The clearing house, publications and communication should be maintained at high, professional levels and should include not only academic and in-house publications but, as a crucial feature develop a programme for policy-makers at the local, national and international level.
- (c) Active attention must be given to improving outcomes through new forms of communication and collaboration between researchers, policy-makers and the wider public.

Coordination and evaluation

- (a) Member States which do not already have the NLCs or persons are encouraged to arrange for them as soon as possible.
- (b) The MOST secretariat in collaboration with National Commissions should undertake a review of the structure, operations and impact of the NLCs during the 32 C/5 period with recommendations and proposals to be submitted to the IGC Bureau.
- (c) Evaluations should be carried out throughout the course of the programme.

Funding and assessment

- (a) UNESCO should allocate the necessary funds, as well as raise extrabudgetary funds, to implement the MOST Programme and its projects.
- (b) The secretariat should undertake impact assessment studies and evaluations.