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Cultural Organization



Management of  
Social Transformations  
Programme

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## **Draft Outline on MOST -Phase 2- Formative Review (2004-2007) Progress Report: Preliminary findings and recommendations for the ICG**

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### **FINDINGS**

#### Strategic issues

1. UNESCO offers an extraordinary arena for numerous activities. MOST is unequalled not only as a worldwide social science program but also because of the UNESCO brand and the advantages of an intergovernmental organization. This all means, for instance, that MOST has large potential for inviting researchers and partners to implement programs. It is also remarkable that in spite of the financial problems UNESCO has been able to recruit qualified and committed staff for MOST.
2. MOST is a well-networked organization with a large number of partners, just as desired. Therefore it is difficult to define the borders and also the achievements of MOST. A networking organization like MOST seldom does anything alone and afterwards it is impossible to know exactly what the input of each partner was. This problem is reflected in the budget: in the period 2004-5 extra-budgetary resources accounted for some 90 percent of the total expenditure and in 2006-7 for over 80 percent. To what extent these extra-budgetary outlays promote the aims of MOST or are truly controlled by MOST is a most difficult question.
3. Both politicians and researchers are often critical of the conditions of their interaction. Conventional conferences tend not to be the places for more in-depth interaction between top politicians and top researchers. However, there is also experience of serious interaction – better conditions for a dialogue can be created on different levels, among different actors, including media and NGO's, and even on the top level assuming the existence of mutual will and trust.

#### Financing

4. The character of the budget of MOST is unusual, not only because of the proportion of extra-budgetary resources, but also because of the high degree of decentralization in the regular budget. For example, in 2004-5, 31 percent of the regular budget was decentralized to the field offices and 50 percent to the International Social Science Council, the International Social Science Journal (which is not directly a MOST activity,

see para. 19) and UNESCO Chairs/UNITWIN Networks (which are a cooperation platform inside UNESCO). Thus less than one fifth (\$300,000) was used directly for MOST Phase 2. On the other hand, not all the headquarters costs are visible in the regular budget.

5. With regard to the efficiency of MOST, my evaluation cannot but be partial. However, although it is not easy to formally assess the efficiency of MOST, there is no doubt that the funding over which MOST headquarters has control is extraordinary meagre and is moreover diminishing. Hence the number of activities under MOST is indeed creditable.

### Progress

6. During the first years of MOST 2 the program had to complete the tasks of Phase 1. The change was not easy as there were productive research networks that wanted to continue. There was a promise that UNESCO on a wider level would take over the three central themes of Phase 1. The new start for the new phase to build efficient bridges between research, policy and action culminated in the 2006 IFSP Forum, which was an enormous task for the modest Secretariat. Of course, many partners were involved but this increased the coordination function of the Secretariat.
7. Former evaluations have been carefully studied by the Secretariat and taken into account as far as possible.
8. In particular, MOST has attempted to activate National Committees but, in fact, UNESCO cannot much influence their functioning, which has also been mentioned in their responses to their last evaluation enquiry.

### Relevance of activities

9. Events like the IFSP Forum, the regular forums of Ministers of Social Development in four regions, the participation of MOST in the World Social Forums; especially the one held at Nairobi in 2007 and smaller meetings and seminars bringing together researchers and politicians are indispensable for the MOST programme. As spaces for dialogue they represent simultaneously both the main objective of the programme and an arena of reflection and learning for the future. These meetings have a central role in learning how to create conditions for the Research-Policy nexus and they also provide environments for developing research.
10. It has been an excellent idea to use the 2006 IFSP Forum material for serious basic research. MOST has invested a considerable proportion of its small regular programme resources in this research. The research report presents both high academic quality and political relevance and effectively reveals the current trends and approaches analysing the Research-Policy linkages as well as obstacles related to the aim of improving those linkages. Although linkage is a traditional topic in both political and academic discourses, it is not a key target of social research. Thus, research on the linkage presents an important opportunity for a major social research programme that could attract governments' attention and funding. If UNESCO can demonstrate the necessity of such an international research programme it will be a most valuable outcome of MOST.
11. UNESCO's influence on capacity building among social scientists has mainly taken the form of cooperation with the International Social Science Council and in regional contexts. At the moment we can say that MOST has had a remarkable capacity building impact concerning the Research-Policy nexus at both individual and institutional levels. The need expressed for two-way information flow has been duly taken into account. Two

good examples are the organization in 2009 of two MOST Summer Schools on Research-Policy linkages, one in the European region and the other in Latin America.

12. It is well understood among the actors responsible that the Research-Policy linkage as an abstract research object only interests some researchers and few politicians. To raise broader interest there must be programmes intended to generate better policies by improving the interaction. MOST has decentralised such programmes to six UNESCO regions with separate regional priority themes.
13. Accepting specialized Non-Governmental Organizations in the MOST programme was an important step ahead. NGOs will certainly enhance the prospects for fruitful interaction between policy-makers and researchers.

### Regional spread of activities

14. There are considerable differences in regional activities. These are apparently due to the attention currently devoted to social sciences in the regions and partly to the success in finding an attractive regional priority theme. Latin America with its theme "Combating Poverty" is often presented as a regional success story. Following the strategy of UNESCO, Africa and "Regional Integration Policies" have also attracted more attention. Europe and North America have been at the other end with of a tiny budget, without Ministerial Forums and having chosen a less optimal priority theme "Ageing Populations".
15. Ageing of the population certainly is a priority theme, at least in Europe, but it has not been a perfect choice because of difficulties in attracting researchers and politicians to work with UNESCO under the title. Even if it may be generally agreed that MOST channels the majority of its resources to developing countries, it is questionable to ignore the potential that European and North American scholars and politicians could bring to MOST. The European research priority should be selected against this background.
16. MOST has put considerable expectations on National Committees as the decentralized part of its organization. The National Committees are exceedingly diverse; some of them have a national role to play, some do not. It is unfeasible to generalize that MOST National Committees have become more pro-active and fulfilled the ambitions of the directive bodies.

### Products

17. The Online Policy Research Tool is an innovation that in several ways serves the main aims of MOST. It provides easier access to the outcomes of selected but many-sided research that can be used in policy-making. The Tool also emphasizes material from the South and increases options for South-South interaction as desired. The problem with the Tool, however, is that, although introduced in 2007, it still stays in pilot status. MOST simply has not been able to invest enough in the development of the Tool.
18. *Number of publications, their circulation and visibility, also through Internet (see, for instance, the list of publications of the current biennium published under the MOST IGC 2009 website).*
19. During the evaluation period the International Social Science Journal spent a considerable part of the MOST funding. The Journal has a long history and is unique in many ways (multilingual character, interdisciplinarity, capacity to promote social sciences in developing countries) but it was evident that UNESCO was no longer the editor and

publisher ISSJ needed, mainly for financial reasons. After the evaluation period the publication has been outsourced to South Africa.

### Intersectorality and cooperation

20. International networking capacity has continued to be a primary strength of the Programme as confirmed by the reports of the Secretariat and the budgets. The proximity to other scientific UNESCO programs remains under-exploited as before, although there is ample cooperation in the field of SHS. National Committees sometimes offer useful platforms for broader interdisciplinary cooperation. (*Co-operation with ISSC is in principle positive, but I have to find out more about it.*) A very positive feature brought about by the IFSP Forum is the enhanced cooperation of MOST with United Nations agencies active in the fields of social sciences, such as for instance UNDESA, UNDP, UNU and others.

## **Recommendations<sup>1</sup>**

### Actuality and continuity

1. UNESCO's mandate to promote social sciences is more relevant than ever because of the globalization of social issues and the increasing need for their global governance. Because of immense natural and socio-economic changes political strategies require updating. Social sciences are at their best when raising public discussion about the necessary reforms and the means to achieve desired political aims. In our turbulent times social sciences are more useful than ever. Today, it is time to invest in social sciences. UNESCO for its part provides a good environment for this process because when UNESCO integrates science, education, culture and communication it also increases the impact of social sciences on policy making. However, we have to keep in mind that the interaction between policy makers and researchers is not enough for democratic politics: citizens, their organizations and media must also be involved. Should MOST concentrate on talking with "policy makers" or more broadly with "politically influential persons" or "opinion leaders"?
2. There is every reason to continue MOST Phase 2. The mission of MOST 2 is important and fruitful although realizing it is difficult and involves pitfalls (e.g. autonomy of research). Impressive steps in understanding the conditions of successful Research-Policy linkage would generate worldwide interest and respect for MOST.

### Considerations

3. For a program with only modest own resources attractiveness is crucial: MOST must be of interest. The real dynamic force to take MOST forward is not only in the participation of top researchers; it is necessary to get young researchers and politicians to join the programme. This is easier if MOST examines future-oriented social issues, many of which are intrinsically interdisciplinary. A question is whether UNESCO can move fast enough to utilize its potential as a respected and influential worldwide meeting place, when some of the administrative rules underline the role of practices that increase slowness and decrease attractiveness.
4. The existence of regional priority themes is a solid base for MOST because it limits meeting costs and maintains the relevance of discourses. However, a comparative approach is often more powerful when imposed on a worldwide perspective. Today

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<sup>1</sup> Expectation: 'specific recommendations that can be practically implemented in the near future' (ToR)

burning social issues are global more often than before. Especially in UNESCO European and North American researchers and Member States would benefit the world and themselves more if they were included in worldwide networks.

5. As a promising innovation at the heart of MOST Phase 2, the Online Policy Research Tool desperately needs more institutional support and resources for development. Outside partners investing in the Tool are of paramount importance. Small data retrieval sources remain in the shadow even if they are extraordinary.
6. MOST did not finish with all research when it started the Phase 2, but is doing small-scale, high-quality research on the Research-Policy linkage. MOST cannot be a sponsor of research but it could well be the heart of a large network of researchers working with this issue.

## Appendix

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### Timeline of evaluation:

- First interviews: August 31-September 4.
- Observation: Intergovernmental Council Bureau and Scientific Advisory Committee, September 25-26. Intergovernmental Council, September 28-30. General Conference, November 15-20.
- Deliverables: Progress Report September 28 and Final Evaluation Report, December 15, 2009.

### Final Report; Table of contents

#### Executive summary

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#### Evaluation framework

- Purpose and scope of evaluation
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- MOST Phase 1
- MOST Phase 2
- The mission and aims of Phase 2

#### Evaluation approach:

- What the review is expected to provide
- Methods
- Data collection, key data sources:
  - Documents (Reports of the secretariat, x former evaluations, planning papers, research publications, normative instruments)
  - Interviews in UNESCO (SHS staff, Experts, National Members). More national members and partners to be interviewed.
  - The Policy Research Tool
  - Observation (taking part in the meetings of IGCB, SAC, IGC, and GC)
  - Scope of the desk review:
    - Thinking: theoretical reflection on research-policy linkages.
    - Shaping: networking, capacity building, dissemination and policy advice.
    - Debating: Discussions with a view of building consensus, new synergies, horizontal cooperation, democratic consultation.

#### Main questions:

- Strategical emphases
- Relevance of activities
- Delivery mechanisms or modalities
- Adequacy of funding

- Geographical spread of activities
- Effectiveness and efficiency
- Sustainability
- Risks and limitations
- Critical questions raised in former evaluations
- Critical questions raised by the UNESCO organization

**Central indicators**

- Financing
- Output
  - Research
  - Publications
  - Policy dialogue
  - Online Policy Research Tool
- How to measure progress and impact?

**Findings**

**Recommendations**