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THINKFOREST

**[EVALUATION OF THE EFI FORESIGHT
AND POLICY SUPPORT
MULTI DONOR TRUST FUND]**

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Evaluation of the EFI Foresight and Policy Support Multi Donor Trust Fund

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Introduction

The European Forest Institute (EFI) is an international organization whose convention has been ratified by 26 member countries. The Organization has 115 Associate and Affiliate Member organizations in 37 countries. The objectives of the network organization are to conduct research and policy support. EFI established the Multi Donor Trust Fund for Foresight and Policy Support Programme (FPS) in 2015, to respond to the need for more general science-policy synthesis reviews and systematic policy support. The Programme is run by an integral unit of the research institute, with a team consisting of the Assistant Director Lauri Hetemäki, the Policy Support Officer Ulla Vanttinen, and a Communication Officer, Rach Colling. A Multi-Donor Trust Fund (MDTF) was installed to finance the Programme, which objective is to meet the Member Countries' need for science-based policy support work and the facilitation of longer-term systematic planning. Ten member countries have joined the MDTF since 2015.

An external evaluation after a period of three years was carried out according to the EFI MDTF Guidelines, considering all activities implemented before May 2017. The aim was to review the impact of the ThinkForest events and MDTF publications, and to suggest recommendations for a continuation of the programme and fund. The Evaluation Panel (Panel) consisted of representatives from science and the user groups Confederation Européenne des Propriétaires Forestiers (CEPF) and the European Commission, which were represented in their personal capacity. The Panel met in April 2017, in order to plan the work and discuss predefined questions about the programme.

To measure the effectiveness of policy support work, extensive investigations are needed. Impact of policy support work can be assessed, for example, by analysing changes in policy discussions or policy and stakeholder strategies. Given the frame and timeline of the evaluation process, the Panel agreed to evaluate the process primary on the assessment and experiences made by its members. The MDTF Annual Reports, Guidelines and Steering Committee meeting minutes were used as additional source of information. The analysis of the ThinkForest questionnaire from 2017 and additional face-to-face interviews on this issue gave further insights into the impacts and functioning of the programme.

This evaluation report presents the highlights of the discussions' outcomes between the evaluators and focuses on recommendations for a successful continuation of the programme.

1) Background of the Multi Donor Trust Fund

In 2015 the European Forest Institute started the MDTF on “Foresight and Policy Support Programme” (FPS). The focus areas of the Programme are foresight analysis (a strategic activity) and policy support. The achievements accomplished are collective scientific assessments, foresight and policy analysis, ThinkForest events, communication and media strategies, capacity building and the facilitation of benchmarking and sharing of experiences and information. The first phase of the MDTF started on 1st of January 2015, for the duration of three years.

The FPS programme acts according to following principles:

- neutral scientific assessments and policy briefs
- analytic work with no conflict of interest
- work based on already existing research
- Scientific Advisory Board of EFI and others engaged in reviewing process
- communication at European level
- edited outputs to serve policy makers

The programme is chaired by the ThinkForest President, the former Swedish Prime Minister Göran Persson, who is supported by the MDTF organizational management.

Since 2015, ten member countries have joined the initiative. The steering committee of the MDTF assembles therefore the member states (MS) Austria, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Spain, and Sweden, as well as the Director of EFI and the chair of EFI’s Scientific Advisory Board. Several observer countries have participated in the SC meetings (Bulgaria, Poland, Switzerland, and the UK).

The core of the MDTF is to support policy makers by offering timely science-based information in a format that is targeted specifically for them, and by that, contributing to the ongoing political discussions. This is done through synthesising existing science literature to science-policy publications and organising ThinkForest science-policy forums. EFI researchers together with the Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) can propose topics for the MDTF activities, while the final work agenda is set by the MDTF Steering Committee (SC).

2) The effectiveness of the Multi Donor Trust Fund

2.1 Policy support

The primary target group of the activities are policy makers at the European level; the topics are therefore encompassing relevant political discussions of the European forestry sector.

According to the Terms of the Reference of the external evaluation, a number of issues were posed to the Panel to consider. Below the specific questions are formulated under 10 different focuses.

Questions to the Panel:

1. Priority setting:

1.1 Do MDTF activities address the right topics?

1.2 Is the process of selecting topics for policy support work appropriate?

The results of the survey and the discussions of the evaluation panel showed a high satisfaction with the chosen topics. The interviewed representatives from the European Parliament, European Commission and countries Permanent Representation to the European Union underlined the professional treatment of the chosen topics.

Added value is given when selected topics are relating to upcoming policy discussions and when reports are published timely. The relevance of the working programme could therefore be enhanced by strongly connecting it to the Brussels' agenda and the European Commission's work programme. It is suggested that the insights of EFI employees, based in Brussels, should be included in the strategic planning and selection of topics, to better exploit their valuable insights. Stakeholder networks are important when considering the selection of topics and can provide insights on upcoming policy discussions, while their role should not influence the scientific credibility of the unit's activities.

The foresight activities of the unit are perceived as important indicators for selecting relevant themes. The foresight chapter could have a more prominent role in the MDTF Annual Reports, giving first ideas for the upcoming period.

The Steering Committee determines the topics and activities of the upcoming period. It is perceived as very important to combine a variety of expert opinions in the decision-making processes of the MDTF. During the SC meetings the chair of the Scientific Advisory Board (SAB), as well as the participating donor and observer countries, have the opportunity to raise concerns or present new ideas to all members. As observer countries are welcome to join the SC meetings also external points of views are included in the process. A prominent role of research in the selection process of topics is to be ensured, to guarantee scientific excellence in the outcomes and publications.

It is agreed that the final decision should stay with the members of the SC only.

The programme needs to cover long-term and ad-hoc topics, while guaranteeing an efficient utilization of resources. One branch of the programme could therefore consider long-term issues, while the other one addresses the more 'short term' topics. The differentiation between the in-depth FPS reports "What Science Can Tell Us" and the more compromised series "From Science to Policy" already indicates a tendency into this direction.

The flexibility of the programme was pointed out as an important factor to react timely to urgent topics. Policy support is often needed on a short notice. The continuation of independent working processes and the ability of the organizational management to take short notice decisions should be ensured.

1.3 Does it have the right thematic priorities?

1.4 Are the activities interdisciplinary enough?

The Panel concluded, in line with the survey results, that the thematic priorities were well chosen, though some users see the focus of the programme as too forest-centric, while others see it as not technical enough. The analysis of interviews showed that discussions of more global themes (e.g. Sustainable Development Goals) might be also of importance. Due to the increasing complexity of policy topics, holistic approaches are needed to answer to convoluted issues. It is therefore important to identify crosscutting topics and to increase cross-sectoral collaboration. This can be achieved by inviting scientists from other fields, to contribute to the publications, and by inviting speakers to ThinkForest events from outside the sector. An increasing awareness outside the sector would add value to the MDTF activities.

The Panel advises that crosscutting issues can be further considered in the foresight reports, as well as the observed broadening of forest related topics, as recent discussions on bioeconomy and the review of the European bioeconomy strategy shows. Developing the interactions with the Standing Committee on Agricultural Research (SCAR) and related foresight activities would also enhance interdisciplinarity and cross-sectoral approaches, and raise awareness outside the sector. However, it is agreed that the recognition value and core of the programme should continue to be the forest sector.

Another issue discussed was the region to be addressed with the chosen topics. While a better inclusion of the regional offices of EFI could increase the impact at a regional level and the knowledge about the FPS within the member organizations, it is unclear where the network wants to draw a line. The policy support work has been EU centric so far, but the holistic approaches of the policy support work could mean an outreach beyond the European Union. This issue could be further elaborated in the strategy and foresight chapter of the MDTF report.

2. Quality:

2.1 Is there enough scientific excellence?

2.2 Are there adequate mechanisms and processes for ensuring quality?

The authors of ThinkForest publications are selected by the operational management, based on their scientific excellence. The evaluation panel welcomes the achievements to include outstanding scientists from EFI member organizations and from non-members. A selection process, exploiting the full network of scientists, considering a broad geographical distribution and looking for cross-disciplinary contributions, is to be favoured.

Continuous efforts should be made to guarantee the independence of the selected authors. ThinkForest publications are outstanding in the regard that opposing views from within the sector are included, displaying a holistic picture of opinions and research results.

The Panel understands the difficulties of lengthy selection processes of authors, when topics need to be addressed in an urgent manner. It is therefore suggested to continue with two selection processes for the different FPS publications - a more extensive process for preparing "What Science Can Tell Us" compared to the 'ad hoc' publications of "From Science to Policy". Open tenders should be carried out for the in-depth publications, which facilitates a more competitive process and can further increase the scientific quality of publications. For the selection process the Scientific Advisory Board could play a more important role. A more inclusive role of the SAB in discussions will assure a broader scientific consultation in the selection of the lead authors.

The evaluators underline the importance of showcasing transparent selection processes, to guarantee the creditability of the policy support work. This can be facilitated by publishing the rationale of the MDTF selection processes in the operational guidelines and also at the beginning of each publication.

The quality of scientific work is commonly assessed through a peer-reviewing process, followed by a publication in scientific journals. While for the scope of the ThinkForest assessments, peer-reviewed publications are not necessary, the publishing of the synthesis reviews in journals would add value and increase their reliability. We therefore recommend striving for peer-reviewed publications for a better visibility and notoriety of the policy reviews. Future ThinkForest reviews should furthermore include the references of the literature used, to enhance the value of the publications not only for policy makers, but also for scientific peers adopting the papers.

3. The accomplishments and impact of policy support work:

3.1 Does the work and its results have enough impact?

3.2 Are there effective mechanisms and processes for planning and monitoring impact?

Based on the impressions of the Panel members, the accomplishments and impact of the MDTF activities were seen throughout as positive. The current process is considered as building recognition. The organized events and publications received mainly positive feedback by the user groups. Added value is given and a greater impact is reached also due to the fact that policy makers can rely on a well-established platform, known for carrying out objective research work, without the influence of specific interests on the published outcomes.

The Panel stresses that the impact of the policy support work will differ depending on the locations of ThinkForest events. While activities in Brussels raise awareness at the forefront of policy making, mainly within the European Commission and European Parliament, local events can have a crucial impact on regional developments, support local activities, while representing the work of researchers (EFI) and strengthening the link to the EFI members. Before organizing events and selecting the location, the target groups have to be known. The continuation of focussing on Brussels, while also organizing events outside the city, is considered as a good strategy for a broad impact of FPS' work.

It has to be mentioned that the impact of policy support work depends on manifold factors. To measure the effectiveness of the programme, a long-term observation is needed. Quantitative indicators as the number of participants at events, downloads of publications from websites or "likes" on Social Media can be taken as first measures. The provided analysis shows a satisfying impact of the first period of the MDTF. A qualitative assessment, identifying changes of discussions or strategies and citations of the MDTF outcomes, would be needed for a solid conclusion on the effectiveness of the policy support work.

Successes:

- High satisfaction with chosen topics
- Authorship is based on scientific excellence
- Begin of qualitative impact assessment of MDTF

Recommendations:

- Inclusion of a variety of expert opinions in decision making processes
- Enhanced consultation of EFI employees based in Brussels
- Stronger connection of topics to Brussels policy agenda
- Differentiation between long- and short-term topics
- More crosscutting and cross-sectoral approaches
- More emphasis on foresight analysis
- Strategic determination for a regional outreach of the programme
- Better transparency of selection processes of authors

2.2 Networking

The ThinkForest events of the MDTF have attracted more than 600 participants *in situ*, and many more via web-streaming and videos. The events give opportunities to share the outcomes of the scientific synthesis reviews and to discuss their policy implications. The analysis of the ThinkForest questionnaire showed in a five categories scale that the participants of the meetings were mainly "very or somewhat satisfied" with the networking occasions. The FPS programme should therefore continue to enhance the exchange between scientists and policy makers. One participant of the questionnaire asked for new formats of networking, e.g. time for group work during the events.

Questions to the panel:

4.1 Is the work engaging the science network (including EFI Associate Members) in adequate extent?

The authorships of the ThinkForest publications illustrate a broad range of scientists, coming from EFI, EFI member institutions and non-members. As stated in the previous chapter, further attention

can be paid to a geographic distribution and to select authors on a more cross-sectoral level. Scientific excellence was the striving factor of the selection processes of the FPS lead authors. The Panel welcomes the effort of safeguarding the quality of the synthesis reviews and suggests continuing with this approach and to further include the SAB in the process of selecting authors for the studies.

It was communicated to the Panel that a balance of speakers at events is sometimes difficult due to the uncertain availability of invited speakers. The Panel recommends for the selection of speaker from the science community to making use of the full potential of EFI's network and member institutions. Further collaboration with EFI's regional offices could enhance the impact of the policy support work also at a regional level.

4.2 Is the work engaging the policy and stakeholder networks in adequate extent?

Typical ThinkForest events include 5-10 speakers, of which 2-3 are from the scientific community. The primary target groups of the ThinkForest events are the European Parliament, European Commissions and EFI Member Countries policy makers. However, stakeholder networks have been invited to join the MDTF events from beginning on. The stakeholders' involvement was perceived as hesitantly in the beginning. The feedback of some groups in Brussels indicated their concern about another player possibly competing with their work. Further effort can aim at changing this perception, reassuring the MDTF activities as complementary and not competitive. This could be reached by for example increasing the information flow, coordination and discussion with stakeholders ahead of upcoming activities.

The round table discussions (by invitation only) are events targeting policy makers, particularly representatives from the European Parliament and European Commission. These events received very positive feedback from the participants. Stakeholder organizations consider the format of round table discussions as excluding, as they are usually not invited to join. A solution for this can be back-to-back meetings, including a public discussion followed by a closed roundtable meeting.

The Panel suggests developing a more systematic approach to include stakeholders in the discussions, which will enhance collaboration and transparency of the process. A broader diversity of speakers, representing a more regional and political heterogeneity, would be seen as advancement, and is also mentioned by participants of the questionnaire.

<p>Successes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Added value through different event formats <p>Recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Organization of back-to-back meetings to include all target groups• Systematic approach to incorporate stakeholders' opinion in discussions• Strive for regional and political heterogeneity of speakers
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2.3 Communication

Quantitative indicators are demonstrating the impact of the communication efforts of the FPS team. The media coverage of the MDTF activities was built on:

- Published articles
(32 articles in 2015, additional 17 follow-up articles by stakeholder groups;
25 articles in 2016, additional 40 follow-up articles by stakeholder groups)
- Social media
(1800 tweets in 2015, 1800 tweets 2016)
- Press releases
(6 in 2015, 5 in 2016)
- Policy Support Newsletters
(1500 subscribers)

The Website and the Policy Support Newsletter are the main tools for the public outreach, as well as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube. The events were web-streamed, which was seen as a useful offer, although the knowledge about this additional service is too low and could therefore be better advertised.

Questions to the panel:

5.1 Is the communication effective and efficient?

5.2 Are the communication channels adequate?

5.3 Does it succeed to reach target groups and is it effective (website, publications, mailing lists, social media, etc.)?

The efforts of communicating the activities of the foresight and policy support programme have shown success. The analysis of the questionnaire indicated a raising awareness for the FPS programme. The effectiveness of the communication strategy in policy support work is mainly dependent on the relevance of the selected topics. Efficiency is given, also bearing in mind the personnel and financial resources of the MDTF.

It is important to first identify target groups to use suitable communication channels, and to reach a satisfactory participation in the planned activities. The main target group was identified as European policy makers. If the scale or impact of the outreach activities should increase or additional target groups are identified, further resources would need to be allocated for communication purposes. To date the communication of the MDTF is covered by one employee working part time.

The communication channels used are adequate. Many different channels are exploited and a wide outreach is achieved. The live streaming of past events was well perceived, although the knowledge about this offer should increase. A more systematic approach to reach the target groups based on different communication channels could enhance the visibility of the programme. It was indicated that the different newsletters and designs used both by EFI and MDTF are leading to some confusion. Thus the role of the FPS programme within EFI could be further communicated and made clearer. The use of well recognizable templates could ease the differentiation between EFI and the MDTF activities. A participant of the questionnaire furthermore suggested increasing the number of reminders for events in the newsletters.

Communicating the key messages of FPS publications in an appealing way can lead to an increasing impact. This includes communicating concise messages highlighting the most important outcomes of the synthesis reviews. The key messages sent to governments and other policy makers should be simple and practical. The messages could be delivered in the Newsletter, as suggested by interview partners.

The relevance of the current president of the FPS programme was perceived as important for the visibility of the policy support work. His degree of popularity has added to the recognition value of ThinkForest.

Successes:

- Communication efforts show successful impact

Recommendations:

- Know your target group when selecting communication channels
- Increase advertisement of event live streaming
- More visible differentiation between FPS and general EFI activities
- Communication of concise key messages to policy makers

2.4 Publications

In 2015 two “From Science to Policy” studies and four ThinkForest Briefs were printed and made available for download. In 2016 two “From Science to Policy” studies and one ThinkForest Brief were produced. An increase in downloads indicates the raising interest in the publications.

An Annual Report, including a chapter on foresight, is published online. The 2015 and 2016 Annual Reports don’t indicate scientific publications from the FPS programme in peer-reviewed international journals, while its’ work is based on scientific findings. More than 1500 people have subscribed to the “Policy Support Newsletter” to date, which shows a high interest into the MDTF activities.

Questions to the panel:

6.1 Is the format of the publications suitable?

6.2 Is the number of publications appropriate?

6.3 Is the process of comments and review transparent?

6.4 Is the selection of authors transparent?

While most users perceived the different formats of the FPS publications as very useful, some have difficulties to identify the different purposes of those. A half-page explanation at the beginning of each publication could indicate purpose and development of the paper, and could also explain the selection process of authorship. This would ease the understanding of the different publication formats and increase the credibility of the synthesis reviews.

To further improve the transparency of how the publications are developed, detailed guidelines of the selection process of authors should be included in the MDTF operational guidelines and FPS programme. Open tenders are considered as important to foster competitive processes and increase the quality of the scientific contributions. The first round of the tenders could be open just for EFI’s member organizations, to enhance the collaborations within the network. This could also be an incentive to join the European Forest Institute.

The Panel was informed about the difficulties in attracting authors for the MDTF publications, as the remuneration often does not compensate fully the efforts or time needed by the scientists. Given the expected outreach of the publications, a main objective of the authors is for sure the influential purpose of the work.

While the selection of authors is a responsibility of the organizational team, the Steering Committee has the opportunity to comment on draft publications. The authors are free to decide whether to include the input or not. Thus the Steering Committee role is restricted only to commenting, but not to reviewing the studies. The Panel considers this as a crucial principle in order to safeguard the science integrity and credibility of the studies, and MDTF work in general.

The number of publications of the previous years has provided sufficient additional knowledge for the user groups. To measure the impact of policy support work, not the number of publications is decisive, but the outstanding quality of the reviews. Efforts should continue to deliver high quality outputs, while not risking an overflow of information to the policy makers. Concise and practical messages are considered as very useful for the target group.

In order to enhance global visibility and recognition of this EFI unit, attention could be given in the future to peer-reviewed publications in scientific journals based on FPS programme. However the MDTF does not fund new research, but bases its work upon already existing scientific findings.

Successes:

- Useful formats of FPS publications

Recommendations:

- Explanation indicating purpose and development at beginning of reviews
- Open tenders to foster competitive processes and increase scientific quality
- Concise and practical messages targeting the user groups
- Aim for peer-reviewed publications resulting from the FPS programme findings

2.5 Events

In 2015 four ThinkForest Seminars were organized. Two events were organized in Brussels, one workshop was held in the Sonian Forest close to Brussels and one in Paris, as a side event during COP21.

In 2016 four MDTF events were organized. One ThinkForest seminar was held in Helsinki, Finland and two in Brussels. A new format of events was successfully introduced - the roundtable discussion for participants by invitation only, organised in Brussels.

A total of 265 people participated in the 2015 events and about 400 in 2016. The attendees included national government (ministries) civil servants, representatives from the EU institutions, embassy and permanent representation staff, stakeholder group representatives, and the research community. More than 1000 people followed the events by watching the live video stream.

Questions to the panel:

7.1 Is the setting of events appropriate to the themes and audience?

7.2 Is a satisfying number of participants reached?

The setting and places of events organized within Brussels and outside has been very well perceived by the participants, by creating a new space to discuss forest-related issues. The survey analysis indicates that the discussion of more cross-sectoral cases and the engagement in cross-cutting topics could further increase the level of satisfaction. Some participants of the survey were not satisfied to a full extent regarding the selection of speakers and opportunities for a dialogue at the events. The

participation in smaller events was considered as easier by some interviewees, who emphasized the format for discussions as more useful there.

A crucial factor is to identify the target audience and also the expected results of the event before planning ThinkForest events. Different target groups and stakeholders can be reached by selecting an event location inside or outside Brussels. It needs to be considered which topics to present where. It is unlikely that Brussels staff can attend events abroad, if not invited as speakers. Furthermore, the interview results showed the need for drawing a conclusion at the end of meetings, to make it clearer how the discussions could continue.

The number of participants at MDTF events furthermore depends on the topicality of the selected theme, the invited panellists, and concurrent events taking place. A detailed stakeholder and target audience mapping would enable a better understanding of a satisfactory number of event participants.

The live stream of the events was acknowledged as a great and innovative possibility to follow the meetings. In future the communication regarding this additional service could be enhanced. Good media coverage is of importance especially for events organized outside Brussels.

The questionnaire analysis showed that more reminders about scheduled events should be sent through the newsletters and other channels.

Successes:

- Satisfactory setting and number of events

Recommendations:

- Choice of event locations depending on target audience and expected results
- Summarizing event outcomes and indication of follow-up of discussions
- Stakeholder and target audience mapping to identify user groups
- Better communication of live streaming service and event reminders

3) Management and accountability

3.1 Internal working process and management

The operational team of the Foresight and Policy Support Programme consists of Lauri Hetemäki, EFI Assistant Director, Rach Colling, EFI Communications Officer, and Ulla Vanttinen, EFI Policy Support Officer. The team members work part-time, between 6-10 months per year, for the programme. The President of ThinkForest is the former Swedish Prime Minister, Göran Persson. The Steering Committee of the Multi Donor Trust Fund assembles the donor countries, the Director of EFI and the Chair of EFI's Scientific Advisory Board. Representatives of observer countries can join the SC meetings.

Questions to the panel:

8.1 Is the overall organization of the MDTF appropriate?

8.2 Does it have an effective and efficient management? (EFI team)

8.3 Are the financial and human resource management policies and practices clear – and adequate?

8.4 Does the MDTF team operate adequately and do they act/interact properly?

8.5 Is the functionality and organization of the MDTF adequate and effective?

8.6 How is internal working processes development over the time?

The overall organization of the MDTF is considered appropriate, given the current budget and amount of organizational tasks. While the functionality of the MDTF is dependent on the financial support by donor countries, the operational team should keep an objective position in the science based policy support work. This is considered as crucial to safeguard the neutrality of the research assessments and to achieve a beneficial collaboration between the member countries. It is furthermore important to note, that the lump sum of the funding should have no influence on the balance of the contributing countries' votes.

The expected continuation and growth of the MDTF will need a reconsideration of tasks and the operational and administrative activities. As the FPS is a multi-year programme, it is suggested to include a strategy for the upcoming periods in the Annual Report. In this regard an important step will be to increase synergies with the EFI's employees in Brussels, to exploit the full potential of the insights into Brussels' policy processes.

The ongoing activities of the FPS are considered as satisfactory visible. To enhance the impact, the communication team will need to expand their work. Given the broad range of events and publications, it is considered crucial to differ between efforts carried out by EFI and those organized by the MDTF. Further steps should be taken to draw a line between the EFI's programmes; however this requires an increase of resources for the communication tasks of the FPS programme.

The organization of the MDTF has proven to be sufficient. The SC meetings held once per year guarantee the continuation of the programme and are important to determine the activities of the upcoming period. The Panel considers it as very important that representatives of observer countries can join the SC meetings, thus considering also "outsiders" input regarding the selected themes and planned activities. The interaction within the team is considered as positive and adequate. The Chairman of the SC meetings should take an active role as objective facilitator of constructive discussions. An active participation of the donor countries and MS in the decision-making processes is highly relevant for the success of the MDTF.

All parties involved should act according to the MDTF principles and guidelines.

Successes:

- Objective position of the operational team
- Value of "outsiders" in selection processes

Recommendations:

- Safeguard neutral assessments of researchers
- Reconsideration of tasks due to growth of MDTF
- Strengthen role of Chairman of SC meetings as active and objective facilitator

3.2 Membership and funding

Eight EU member states supported the MDTF in 2015, ten in 2017. The budget of 2015 was a total of € 512 867 EUR. One new member joined the programme in 2016, summing up the budget to € 616 920 EUR in 2016 (nine donor countries).

Questions to the panel:

9.1 Is the financial base of MDTF as a whole satisfactory? How could it be improved?

9.2 How are resources (financial, intellectual, and human) used?

9.3 Are there safeguards in perspective of unforeseen difficulties (e.g. stepping down of donor)?

9.4 Is enough transparency of funds given?

Given the MDTF budget of the last years, the programme has proven a satisfactory level of utilizing the resources. To continue the ongoing efforts and increase the effectiveness, the core funding has to stay at least the same. The given success of the activities so far is an incentive to join the MDTF.

A better visibility and further impact of the FPS programme can be reached through an increase in outreach activities and events. An active engagement of the EFI network and member organizations could lead to a better recognition at a regional level, resulting in a sound impact within a farther target group.

The expenditures of the MDTF are considered as justified, which is documented by the report of an independent auditing for the period of 1st January 2015-28th February 2017. The donors are informed on the spending of the programme in the Annual Report, reports requested by the individual countries on an annual basis and through the Steering Committee meetings. The budget of the upcoming year is announced and accepted during the SC meetings. This approach is considered as systematic and straight forward.

Successes:

- Success of activities as incentive to join MDTF
- Justified budget planning and expenditures of programme

4) The Impact of the Trust Fund on EFIs work

The founding of the FPS unit has opened new possibilities for the research institute, while also leading to new responsibilities.

Questions to the panel:

10.1 How has the establishment of the MDTF influenced the work and reputation of EFI?

10.2 How is the administrative process organized and can this be improved?

The FPS programme gives added value to the policy branch of EFI's work. The policy support work of the institution used to be mainly on the topics of FLEGT and EUTR. The MDTF allows a broader approach and increased the positive reputation of the research network.

The increasing influence of the MDTF activities is resulting in a responsibility to strive for objective scientific excellence. It is therefore of utmost importance that the FPS programme of EFI keeps a neutral position within the stakeholder networks in Brussels and beyond. It cannot risk being considered as biased, but should bring forward objective foresight and policy support work, using the full potential of EFI's research network.

While the process has opened new potential to the organization, the added value for EFI members has yet to be increased. A better communication and feedback of the FPS efforts to the EFI member

organizations should be anticipated, with the possibility to generate new research questions and develop new collaborative research projects and innovations as a consequence of the MDTF work and findings. A more inclusive role for member institutions and regional offices and an enhanced communication strategy could increase the attention and support also within the regions.

Successes:

- Added value to EFI's reputation

Recommendations:

- Ensure objectivity and additional value of work to policy discussions
- Enhance involvement of EFIs' member organization and regional offices

5) Findings and recommendations

This section highlights the main outcomes, reflecting the opinions of the evaluation panel. The Panel recognizes the Multi Donor Trust Fund's added value for facilitating an active science-policy interface. The events and publications of the MDTF have proven effectiveness to a satisfying extent. Nevertheless, the Panel made a series of recommendations to further improve the activities and impact of the policy support work.

5.1 Efficiency and Effectiveness

- + The programme has proven efficiency and flexibility in responding to urgent issues.
- + It provides policy support based on scientific excellence.
- + The inclusion of different opinions in the selection process of topics also from outside the Steering Committee is seen as positive.
- + The two formats of publications (long-term and ad-hoc assessments) is perceived as useful.
- + The effectiveness of the communication efforts is reflected in the increasing brand recognition of 'ThinkForest' and EFI science-policy publications.
- The identification and differentiation between EFI's work and the FPS activities should be made clearer.
- The development and aim of the scientific reviews should be stated clearly at the beginning of MDTF publications.
- The key messages of publications should be communicated to policy makers in a concise and practical way.
- Transparency of the selection process of authors could be improved.
- EFI member organizations and regional offices should be further included in the MDTF activities.

5.2 Objectives, Goals and Implementation

The objective of the MDTF is to provide science-based knowledge to support policy work and to enhance the policy-science dialogue.

- + The FPS programme offers attractive services and activities, while ensuring objectivity and holistic approaches of the policy support work.
- + The current activities are considered as suitable for facilitating a policy-science dialogue.

- + The efforts of communicating the activities of the foresight and policy support programme have shown success. The awareness for the programme is rising.
- + The ThinkForest President adds visibility to the programme.
- + The different settings of events are perceived as positive by the user groups.

- A systematic approach and mapping of stakeholder networks is missing. It will help to include a wider range of interest groups in the discussions.
- The EFI Scientific Advisory Board could be further included in the work of the FPS programme, in the selection of topics and authors.
- The use of the full potential of EFI’s network and especially of EFI’s employees in Brussels should be enhanced.
- Networking opportunities for participants at ThinkForest events can be enhanced by offering different formats of meetings.
- The programme’s objectives should consider more cross-cutting themes, which could be reached by including speakers and authors from other sectors.

5.3 Internal Organization

- + The organizational management ensures a smooth implementation of the programme’s goals.
- + It is noted that all SC members and authors of publications act according to the MDTF principles and guidelines.
- + The MDTF is expected to continue and grow, leading to a necessary reconsideration of communication tasks and operational activities with clear structure.
- + The active participation of the donor countries and other member states in the decision-making processes is considered as relevant.

- A more inclusive role of member institutions and EFI’s regional offices will increase the attention and support within the European regions.
- Better synergies should be reached by consulting EFI’s employees based in Brussels.
- The efforts and work of EFI and its FPS unit could be better distinguished.

5.4 Added value

The added value of the foresight and policy support work of the Multi Donor Trust Fund is given through:

- **Policy work based on scientific excellence**
The well-known research platform ensures an independence of assessments. Opposing views and different research outcomes can be considered in the synthesis reviews. The assessment outcomes will be communicated to target groups in a concise way.

- **The flexibility of the programme**
Timely recognition of upcoming topics ensures a great impact on the policy discussions.

- **Foresight reports**
The foresight section of the Annual Reports should play a stronger role in shaping the MDTF working programme, and should be expanded. It could be delivered as a separate document from the Annual Report in the format of a “white paper”.

– **Reaching the target groups**

The target groups are aware of the ThinkForest publications and events.

The relevance of topics should be in line with the timing of policy discussions.

Different target groups can be reached by strategically selecting the topics and places of events.