

MID-TERM REVIEW OF TOKTEN PROJECT - 2009



Conclusions,

Lessons Learnt and Recommendations

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UNDP Sudan

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1. CONCLUSIONS, LESSONS LEARNT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1.1 Conclusions

Based on the evaluation analysis presented earlier, the Consultant has reached the following conclusions:

- TOKTEN is, indeed, very relevant to the human capacity development needs of Sudan, and is compatible with government policies in this respect, as well as UNDP's strategic framework of support to the country.
- The project provides a very cost-effective and efficient option for transferring valuable knowledge and skills to Sudanese institutions through expatriate nationals in the Diaspora.
- TOKTEN Volunteers recruited are highly qualified professionals with appreciable experience in their respective fields.
- Valuable knowledge and skills have been transferred in a number of cases, and these are being used and are already impacting positively on some beneficiary institutions. There are a few cases where the project has not succeeded in doing this.
- The amount of knowledge transferred (and ultimately used) is a function of the duration of training, capacity of the trainees themselves, quality of supportive facilities, opportunity to practise while training, and the complexity of the knowledge and skills involved, among other things.
- The project is still to establish strong links with relevant organisations in the Diaspora that could enlarge its pool of volunteers.
- The ToR for Volunteers has not always been detailed enough as to specify precisely what activities the Volunteer should engage in during the assignment.
- The project has fallen short of the number TOKTEN Volunteers to be recruited. With a target of 200, only 43 have been recruited so far.
- The number of personnel who have benefitted so far from TOKTEN assignments across the thematic Areas has far exceeded the 1000 initially targeted for training.
- Only half the number of states proposed to be covered by the project has so far been covered; and there have been a disproportionate number of assignments to Khartoum relative to the other areas.
- Some of the TOKTEN assignments, especially those that involve a great deal of practical exercises, would require more time than others.

- Some Host Institutions have not always met their obligation to provide an environment that could facilitate and maximise the transfer of knowledge.
- The project has suffered from an unstable management structure at least at the Area Coordination level. The full complement of staff has not been achieved, and programme support from UNDP regional offices in the other states does not appear reassuring so far.
- The Database and Advocacy mechanism of the project has much to achieve both within and outside the country. Much greater advocacy still has to be done, perhaps starting with UNDP itself.
- TOKTEN partnership links with government appears weak at the moment, and seems to be limited to getting government and related institutions to commit themselves only to providing “conducive environments” for training to take place.
- The M&E mechanism does not provide enough scope for a more active participation of stakeholders, especially in determining project impact. It is particularly weak in measuring project impact.

1.2 Lessons Learnt

The following are the main lessons learnt from the implementation of TOKTEN Sudan so far, as perceived from this review.

Overall:

- 1 TOKTEN presents a very cost-effective and generally efficient way of transferring knowledge and skills acquired by Sudanese nationals in the Diaspora to their compatriots at home.
- 2 A rather unique feature of TOKTEN is that since Volunteers and trainees share the same linguistic and cultural background, greater empathy is forged that helps to facilitate the knowledge transfer. This gives the project an advantage over such other options as the use of ‘international experts’.
- 3 TOKTEN provides an opportunity for reconnection between many Sudanese in the Diaspora and their home country. In a few cases encountered in this review, TOKTEN assignments have led to the decision by some Volunteers to finally return home.
- 4 While TOKTEN is demand-driven, Host Institutions may require some assistance with properly articulating their ‘demands’. The TOKTEN Rwanda experience, which tends to blend ‘demand’ and ‘supply’ in recruiting and assigning volunteers, could serve as a good example.

- 5 The effectiveness and sustainability of a project like TOKTEN depends very much on intense and sustained advocacy, both locally and abroad, that should involve the broad spectrum of stakeholders. It is critical for full recognition to be demonstrated, first, by UNDP itself.
- 6 It is obvious that a robust and stable management structure is critical to the efficiency and effectiveness of programmes. Some of the problems of TOKTEN with not meeting certain targets are ascribable, at least in part, to the instability of this structure at the implementation level.

1.3 Recommendations

In the light of the above analysis and lessons learnt, the following recommendations are made:

1.3.1 Project management

- 1 UNDP support for TOKTEN should be strengthened. In particular, the full complement of project staff should be recruited, and the necessary resources made available. Mainstreaming TOKTEN and establishing greater synergy with other UN programmes sharing similar goals is an attractive option. This should provide an effective exit strategy for the project.
- 2 The tools for project cycle management should be reviewed with a view to facilitating the smooth running of the project and for improved institutional learning. This is particularly important because of the high turnover of staff at the implementation level. There should be a clear link between the project document, the assessment tools, various administrative tools, the activity plans (especially the ToR for Volunteers, and the tools for monitoring and evaluation).
- 3 The Project Team should play a more active role in all aspects of Host Institutions' TOKTEN activities (e.g. needs assessment, drawing up of ToR for assignments, selection of personnel for training, monitoring of activities during the assignment, and evaluation of outcomes). This should help to assure that the greatest benefit is derived from such assignments.
- 4 Related to the above, the TOKTEN Team should assure that the requisite facilities to support assignments exist in Host Institutions; and that the relevant personnel are selected for training.
- 5 TOKTEN assignment to thematic areas and locations should be prioritised. While recognising the demand-driven nature of the project, prioritising themes and locations, and perhaps sharing these with Volunteers may introduce the element of 'supply drive' to complement the 'demand drive' nature of the project. Prioritisation

should be contextual, and based on the *evolving* political, economic, and socio-cultural realities of the country.

- 6 Special terms for some longer assignments (3-6 months), depending on the nature of activities to be undertaken, should be contrived, while taking care not to create 'employment-like' conditions for the Volunteers. Such term may be attractive enough for some Volunteers to seek longer leave (e.g. sabbatical) from their employers where possible.

1.3.2 Information and Advocacy

- 1 Advocacy for the project should be stepped up locally and internationally. In particular, the distribution of promotional materials locally, and overseas to strategically important organisations, should be enhanced substantially. This should serve to expand the database of Volunteers. Moreover, links with other relevant Sudanese organisations in the Diaspora (e.g. Secretariat of Sudanese Working Abroad) should be established.
- 2 The upgrading of the TOKTEN website should be expedited, and more advocacy materials developed.
- 3 Advocacy visits should be better planned, and should involve all relevant stakeholders. The Consultative Forum in each project location prescribed in the Project Document should be actualised. This should not be confused with the routine advocacy visits.
- 4 Advocacy letters and materials should be sent to all government ministries, universities and other institutions of higher learning, NGOs, the private sector, and other relevant national entities.
- 5 Official duty tours abroad for direct contact and discussions with potential partners, embassies, and members of the Diaspora should be made.

1.3.3 Monitoring and Evaluation

- 1 The M&E mechanism of the project should be revised to provide more precise information on project performance. In particular, the use of performance assessment workshops following the completion of assignments should be instituted. This mechanism should emphasise the active role of beneficiaries and other stakeholders (see recommendation on Consultative Forum above).
- 2 As the project draws to a close, data collection and management are of primary importance. All previous data and those to be collected should be properly organised and made accessible at all times.

1.3.4 Partnerships

1. Greater commitment to TOKTEN by key partners should be sought. Clear input for government and beneficiary institutions should be defined (e.g. budgeting for TOKTEN support; and appointing a National TOKTEN Project Coordinator to be based in the most appropriate Ministry and to work closely with the Project Team). Moreover, the more active participation of the Ministry of International Cooperation (GNU) and the Ministry of Regional Cooperation (GoSS) in project decision making should canvassed.
2. Partnership links with the private sector should be strengthened. Key private sector organisations should benefit from TOKTEN assignments, and be convinced to contribute to TOKTEN costs.