



Mid-Term Evaluation of the Joint Donor Team in Juba, Sudan

Evaluation Report 2/2009
Executive Summary



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Introduction

Following the signing of Sudan's Comprehensive Peace Agreement in January 2005, the Governments of Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to establish a Joint Donor Team (JDT) for South Sudan. Denmark joined this partnership in December 2005 and Canada in May 2007.

The Team opened its office in Juba in May 2006 with a stated mission to:

- Promote policies in support of sustainable peace, poverty reduction and the attainment of Millennium Development goals in South Sudan;
- Support the World Bank managed Multi-Donor Trust Fund (MDTF) and cooperate with the Government and other stakeholders in South-Sudan
- Manage programmes which cannot be implemented under the MDTF;
- Encourage donor harmonisation in Sudan, as well as to act as a pilot for donor integration elsewhere.

The JDT is now in its third year of operation. The purpose of this mid-term evaluation, which was agreed by the Strategic Management Board (SMB) at the time of signing the MoU, is to take stock of JDT's progress against the above objectives.

The two main questions relevant to this evaluation are:

- What has been the value-added of the JDT in South Sudan?
- How effective is the JDT as a working-model for joint donor engagement in a fragile state context?

The evaluation was conducted in three phases. An inception stage discussed the Terms of Reference of the assignment with Norad Evaluation Department – the office responsible for commissioning this evaluation – the head of JDT and representatives of the Joint Donor Partners (referred to as Donor Partners) in their respective capitals. The second stage comprised a two-week field visit to Juba and Khartoum, the launch of a web survey and follow-up interviews. The web survey aimed at capturing stakeholders' perceptions of the JDT's achievements with respect to the Paris Declaration commitments. A total 50 stakeholders, both external and from Donor Partners, responded. The survey has been an important tool to complement narrative data collected during the field visit and the follow-up interviews.

The third stage of this evaluation has been the compiling of data and writing of the Final Report. In this report, Chapter 1 introduces the purpose of this evaluation,

Chapter 2 analyses the Southern Sudan context, and Chapter 3 explains the methodology. The main analysis is provided in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. Our main findings and recommendations are based on the OECD-DAC criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and impact. A framework logic linking JDT's inputs (activities) with outputs (Paris Declaration principles) and outcomes (state-building and poverty reduction) is also used to support this evaluation.

JDT Strategic Development and Portfolio

This section summarises findings in Chapter 4. This Chapter focuses on JDT's inputs over the evaluation period. It assesses the relevance of its mandate and describes strategic development over the evaluation period. The main findings are as follows.

The model supported by the JDT initiative was in conformity with the Paris Declaration agenda. However, the assumptions that underpinned the JDT initiative at the time of signing the MoU in 2006 have not materialised:

- The World Bank-managed MDTF was expected to be used as a single aid instrument, allowing for strong donor coordination and alignment. But by 2007, almost half of the partners' development assistance was taking place outside the Fund, either on bilateral programmes (26%) or through other UN pooled funds (19%).
- Humanitarian needs were expected to decline gradually, with attention switching to long-term assistance as a result of peace. This has not been the case and about one-third of the partners' expenditures still go towards humanitarian assistance (USD 110m in 2007). The role of International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) hence remains crucial.
- Programme management outside MDTF has remained bilateral, with JDT only having responsibility over two small funds, the Technical Assistance Fund and the Small Scale Fund. Plans for a pooled civil society fund and expectations that the Team would play a management role in the DFID-led Basic Services Fund, launched in 2006, were not met.

There were important changes in strategic direction over the evaluation period. JDT lacked coherent strategy, after the Strategic Management Board stopped short of approving a multi-annual strategic plan, submitted by the Team in early 2007. Initially, the Team was to focus on three priority sectors: basic health and HIV/AIDs; Security Sector Reform, Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration; and peace-building; and public finance management.

- On security sector reforms, a joint assessment report confirmed the need for greater coordination in this sector and recommended that the partners agreed on a common policy framework as a platform for engagement in Southern Sudan. Instead, activities were pursued bilaterally and security sector reforms were dropped from JDT's priorities.
- Focus on public finance management was widened to include planning, budgeting and public sector reform, after it proved too difficult to find a public finance management adviser. This decision also reflected a change in context as the government of Southern Sudan took an early lead in developing Budget Sector Plans.

In terms of inputs, JDT's main activities evolved over the evaluation period to include:

- Supporting the MDTF: as well as co-chairing the Oversight Committee, JDT provided technical support to the MDTF Secretariat and in the identification and selection of key projects.
- Managing programmes: JDT managed the Technical Assistance Fund and the Small Scale Fund from 2007, and, with the former worth USD500,000 and financing short-term advisory inputs and the latter worth USD200,000 and supporting capacity building for local organisations.
- Engaging in policy dialogue: The Team established a close relationship with the Government with its office in Juba becoming a landmark for meetings. JDT also engaged in policy dialogue at sector level through its participation in Budget Sector Working Groups, MDTF, and directly with the relevant Ministries.
- Representing Donor Partners outside MDTF: the Team represented Donor Partners in Budget Sector Working Groups and provided advisory inputs to UN pooled funds that received their financial support.
- Reporting to Donor Partners' capitals: Communication between the Team and the capitals was weak at the beginning of the evaluation period, but the quality and frequency of reporting subsequently improved. JDT spent more time than envisaged organising field visits for Donor Partners.
- Working with NGOs: The Team established close relationships with international NGOs working in Southern Sudan, a role which was not envisaged in the MoU.

In conclusion, assumptions that were made at the time of drafting the MoU, with regard to aid delivery and the Government of Southern Sudan's agenda, did not materialise. As a result, the JDT had to adjust its range of activities to match the reality of the South Sudan context, while responding to the demands of Donor Partners. There was a missed opportunity, after JDT invested considerable efforts drafting a multi-annual strategic plan, which Strategic Management Board (SMB) did not approve.

JDT Outputs and Delivery

This section summarises Chapter 5. This Chapter identifies JDT's outputs at three levels: its contribution to the Paris Declaration agenda; its contribution to programme delivery; and its contribution to state-building.

While difficult to measure, results of the on-line survey and specific examples indicate the following JDT's contribution to the Paris Declaration. JDT's contribution to promoting ownership in Southern Sudan is rated as high.

- One of the Team's early achievements was its support to the Government of South Sudan in developing an aid strategy. Elsewhere, JDT supported the preparations for the 2007 and 2008 Sudan Consortiums; following the recruitment a temporary economist, JDT helped the Government draft its Future Priorities paper.
- JDT also contributed to strengthening government capacity in budget planning – an essential step towards making poverty reduction strategies operational. The Team helped to make the Budget Sector Planning process more effective by working closely with the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning and encouraging greater donor participation (and more linkages) in the respective Budget Sector Working groups.

JDT's contribution to strengthening donor alignment to government policies is also rated as high.

- The Team played a significant role in promoting policy dialogue between donors and Government on often sensitive issues, such as public sector reforms. JDT also encouraged NGOs to participate in the Budget Sector Working groups, an initiative subsequently endorsed by the Government. The majority of donor-funded projects in Southern Sudan are implemented through NGOs.
- JDT, however, had only limited influence on strengthening on-budget aid reporting in Southern Sudan. Despite its encouragement, few Donor Partners report their projects to the Inter-Ministerial Appraisal Committee.

JDT's contribution to promoting donor alignment to government systems is rated as moderate.

- Here, the Team has principally worked through the MDTF. Because of its limited technical capacity, the Government needed donor support to take the lead in the implementation of the MDTF. This was done with mixed success: for example, it took almost two years for the procurement issues to be resolved.
- The Team's direct contribution to strengthening public finance management has been limited, although its involvement in joint donor missions and the Accountability Budget Sector Working Group has been significant.

JDT's contribution to donor harmonisation in Southern Sudan is assessed at two levels: amongst Donor Partners and more widely, with boundary partners. JDT's contribution is rated as moderate in both cases.

JDT was perceived as effective in representing Donor Partners under one banner, hence showing a "united front". Outside this representative role, however, the Team has found it difficult to "harmonise the harmonisers":

- While shared analysis improved over the evaluation period, thanks to JDT's efforts, Donor Partners have not united behind a single one-policy framework, as it was initially envisaged. The Team has also had little success in encouraging Donor Partners to combine their missions. On using common arrangements, the JDT has not been able to curb the increase in the Donor Partners' bilateral programmes, although they remained in principle committed to joint programming.

JDT's contribution to donor harmonisation outside its own group is also rated as moderate.

- JDT's work with boundary partners has been less visible; promoting shared analysis (through the facilitation of meetings or the commissioning of work) is where JDT is seen to have made a positive impact.
- JDT has also strengthened donor harmonisation between UN, WB and bilateral agencies, through its involvement in the MDTF and to a lesser extent, other pooled funds. Examples include lobbying the World Bank to strengthen the Technical Secretariat, and helping to resolve procedural disagreements between the headquarters of the Bank and UN agencies by liaising closely with Donor Partners.

JDT's contribution to improved programme delivery in Southern Sudan is primarily linked to MDTF performance. Here, results have been disappointing: it took one year after the Fund became operational for project development to move into an implementation phase. As a result, disbursements only reached 15% in the second quarter of 2006. With the support of JDT, MDTF performance improved the following year, leading to a 40% disbursement rate. JDT advisers have played a role in the selection of projects submitted through the MDTF, including in health and police. Less attention has been paid to the quality of implementation, however. JDT's contribution to the performance of other multilateral programmes has been less visible, yet positive.

State-building is at the core of JDT's mandate to promote pro-poor policies in Southern Sudan and one of the main OECD-DAC principles of engagement in fragile states. In Southern Sudan, the challenges are enormous, as the formal government structures had to be built from scratch. While progress has been made in establishing the structures of government at regional and state level, the provision of basic services is still very limited and corruption has become a major issue. There have nonetheless been some important institutional advancements.

- JDT is perceived to have made a visible contribution to capacity building in the area of public sector management reform. Its contribution to capacity building is also recognised in the health sector and in governance.
- Sustainability, however, remains an issue. Despite the effective use of the Capacity Building Trust Fund and other donor-funded Technical Assistance mechanisms, capacity building in Southern Sudan is yet not institutionalized across government departments in a systematic manner.

JDT's adherence to the OECD/DAC fragile states principles has remained partial.

- This is in large part because of the lack of a joint diplomatic and developmental approach. This division between politics and aid derives from the difficulty of merging the JDT's six donor countries' political relationships with Sudan.
- One particular area of concern is that among Juba-based agencies there has been a focus on building the Southern Sudan state, with much less attention given to building the overarching relationship between the Government of South Sudan and the national government – the latter being a central plank of the Peace Agreement under the "Make Unity Attractive" agenda.
- On the positive side, the Team has been strong in adjusting to the Sudanese context, by seizing opportunities when they arose.

In conclusion, the JDT has become a key interlocutor for the Government, multilateral agencies, and International NGOs over the years. Its contribution to policy dialogue and government processes has also been important. This has had a positive impact on promoting country ownership and strengthening donor alignment and harmonisation.

- JDT's value-added has been principally linked to the presence and availability of its advisers in Juba. The Team's permanent presence as co-chair of the MDTF Oversight Committee (as opposed to a system based on a rotating representation) has proved an important entry point to sustained dialogue with the Government.

Access to quick funding has also helped JDT fill technical assistance gaps.

- But the proliferation of projects, including bilateral projects financed by JDT's Donor Partners, has continued to make aid coordination in Southern Sudan difficult.
- In addition, competing donor approaches to the "make unity attractive" agenda and the disconnection between political and development issues have limited JDT's ability to contribute to state building in a coherent and sustainable manner.

JDT as a pilot model for harmonization

A significant aspect of JDT as a pilot initiative is the way in which Donor Partners were expected to work together and relate to each other. Although the MoU places the initiative closer to a legal agreement, little in the arrangements prepared Donor Partners to work in a partnership.

- It was assumed that shared objectives and the provisions of the MoU and Joint Response Document, in combination with a Host Donor's administrative and financial systems, would provide a sufficient basis for an effective and efficient cooperation.
- That partners had different managerial systems and different levels of delegation was acknowledged as a risk before the launch of the initiative. Identifying and fixing all problems upfront was seen as unrealistic, and it was hence decided to start the initiative and deal with potential problems as they came along. This has not happened in practice.

Donor Partners have widely varying approaches: to the resources being committed to Sudan; to the extent of decentralised working from their headquarters; to the nature of engagement in policy with the Government of National Unity and the Government of Southern Sudan; and their wider context of global or regional interests. While such a diversity is often an attractive feature to join a partnership, in the case of JDT, these differences have fuelled tensions among Donor Partners.

One of the main issues for the JDT was that as the Donor Partners in Khartoum did not have a common strategy for Sudan.

- Not all Donor Partners had developed a country strategy. Their views as to whether South Sudan should be part of a common strategy for Sudan or be treated separately have differed. Therefore the JDT could not fit a common development strategy for the South into an overall Sudan strategy.
- This absence of a common strategy was, paradoxically, both a driving force for the drafting of a multi-annual strategic plan and a critical factor in a lack of constructive engagement by the Donor Partners that could have ensured its successful outcome.

Without exception, all Donor Partners and the JDT acknowledge that the governance structure has been inadequate and has performed poorly. Governance arrangements did not respond to the realities on the ground and held back progress by the JDT.

- The design assumed a high degree of independence and autonomy of the JDT and a light-touch oversight by the SMB and Advisory Group (AG). It was implicit that the JDT in South Sudan was to act independently of the donor programmes

in the rest of Sudan. This suggested treating Southern Sudan as a separate entity, which clashed with the “Make Unity Attractive” agenda.

- The SMB is made up of senior officials of Donor Partners’ development agencies based in national capitals. But management from the partner’s headquarters was too remote to adapt efficiently to this situation.
- The close proximity of Donor Partner representatives in Khartoum led the AG to wrest the management initiative from the SMB and impose a more hands-on style of interaction with the Team.

Staff shortages have limited JDT’s performance. Southern Sudan is acknowledged as a difficult development context and it has proven hard to recruit staff for longer periods. The JDT staff capacity – in terms of numbers, but more importantly in terms of level of experience – was not suitable for this situation.

- An underlying problem has been the method of recruitment. Posts are assigned to specific countries for recruitment but the pool of potential recruits has been limited to members of the respective civil services (mainly from ministries and aid organizations) in the partner countries. This approach has not resulted in the recruitment of the best available skills and expertise.

Although cost-effectiveness was not within the evaluation remit, we note that the budget for 2008 amounted to €2.1m, with €1.1m going to the Juba Office to cover local salaries and other operating costs, and the remaining €1m going to the host country to cover Human Resource and estate management. This budget does not include international staff salaries, a significant contribution in kind from the Donor Partners employing agencies. Nevertheless, this investment seems good value for money when compared with what Donor Partners would have had to spend to open bilateral offices in Juba. There is in fact scope to invest greater resources into the initiative, particularly in staff numbers and quality.

In conclusion, the JDT governance structure, with its multiple and overlapping areas of responsibility, has created both confusion within JDT and impediments towards fulfilling its mandate.

- The joint donor partnership concept was never discussed in terms of ‘rules of engagement’ among the six partners and if and how the JDT should ‘represent’ donor members in the South has remained a contentious issue.
- Vertical and at times informal communication channels have reinforced existing differences in communication flows among the Donor Partners and undermined the principle of joined approaches as well as the Team’s morale.
- In light of recommendations made by the 2007 Managerial Audit, there has been an agreement in principle to maintain the Strategic Management Board and the Advisory Group as originally defined in the Memorandum of Understanding signed between its Donor Partners.

Recommendations

The resources available to JDT should be compatible to its mandate. Operating in fragile states is labour-intensive. There is a need to invest greater resources both in staff numbers and quality.

As staffing issues are resolved, JDT's mandate needs to be revised appropriately to match the new donor landscape in Southern Sudan:

- JDT should be given a stronger role in monitoring the bilateral (and post-bilateral) programmes of Donor Partners. This will help reduce transaction costs as well as ensure greater coherence amidst its donor activities.
- JDT's advisory role in pooled funds managed by UN agencies should be formalized.
- JDT's work with NGOs should also be fully acknowledged and encouraged.

Similarly, the JDT governance structure needs to be redesigned to match the context of Southern Sudan. The recently-drafted Terms of Reference should ensure that clear roles and responsibilities for SMB, AG, and their respective relationship with the Host Donor and Team are established.

- The SMB should promote strategic direction on political and development policies in Southern Sudan while also outlining modalities of a donor integration model as represented by the JDT.
- The AG should remain in an advisory role with respect to JDT. Its key role should be in promoting the coherence of participant's political and development programmes in Southern Sudan, and the coordination between this and national policy.

Renewed engagement and commitment from Donor Partners is required to reinforce the Team in its delivery of objectives, outcomes and impact. It is important that Donor Partners strengthen their partnership by clarifying their 'rules of engagement' for the next stage of work for the JDT.

- Rules of engagement should be clarified with regard to joint donor mission and political and development presence in Juba
- With the support of JDT, Donor Partners should commit to greater complementarity and synergy of their activities within and across sectors.
- Early consultations should be sought when developing new projects. Joint donor mission should be organized in priority sectors.

In the absence of a joint strategy for Sudan or South Sudan, Donor Partners should at least agree on key strategic priorities for the JDT over the next stage, on the basis of a shared analysis and common understanding of the South Sudanese context.

- Context analysis, rather than the availability of advisers and/or bilateral interests, should dictate the choice of sector priorities.
- Clear political and developmental Benchmarks should be agreed upon to support the period leading to the 2011 referendum – which is the year JDT mandate expires.

In conclusion, JDT has shown that joint donor initiative can operate in a challenging aid environment. The establishment of a joint donor office and availability of full-time advisers in Juba have contributed to sustained and coordinated policy dialogue in Southern Sudan. The initiative has been welcomed by the recipient government as a good model to reduce transaction costs in its dealing with bilateral donors.

- Although programme management can remain bilateral, access to small strate-

gic funding is important for leverage and credibility purposes. Adequate staffing resources also matter greatly.

- Despite being like-minded, Donor Partners have inherited from different ways of working. Yet working in a highly-fluid environment like Southern Sudan calls for a pragmatic and flexible approach, as well as quick and consensual decision-making. Institutional constraints therefore need to be identified at an early stage. Roles and responsibilities within the governance structure, the level of delegation and rules of engagement are better being discussed upfront.
- As well as identifying the country's needs, through joint assessment missions, a shared understanding of the political context is important. A coherent approach to engagement is unlikely otherwise. All political dimensions – domestic, regional, and global -and their links with the respective strategies of Donor Partners will be key determinants in the success of the initiative.

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