Evaluation Report 2/2006

Norad

Evaluation of Fredskorpset

Executive Summary



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1. Background

In 2000 Fredskorpset was re-established as an independent organization administratively under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). The objective is to "assist in implementing the overarching aims of Norway's collaboration with the developing countries". In the Decision by Parliament (St.prp.nr. 67 (1998-99)) it is stated that Fredskorpset shall contribute to strengthening civil society in the South while promoting contact and cooperation between people and organizations in Norway and in the South.

Six years have passed and Fredskorpset has developed two main activity areas: (i) The exchanges of participants through partnerships and (ii) the information and communication on development issues through networking. By August 2006 Fredskorpset employs 26 staff in Norway, six contracted staff in three regional offices in the South, and operates on a budget of NOK 165 mill.

MFA considers it timely to take a closer look at the development of the organization throughout the 2000 to 2005 period, and to assess what role the organisation plays today, and whether any changes are called for. Therefore, Norad's Evaluation Department in the spring of 2006 commissioned an evaluation of Fredskorpset. (See Terms of Reference (TOR) in Annex 1). They state that the evaluation is to be formative with a strong learning element. The main users will be MFA and Fredskorpset.

2. Assessment of the Exchange Programme

Findings from Case Studies

The assessment of the Exchange Programme on the basis of the case studies is done at the following levels in relation to the overall objectives of Fredskorpset:

Target Group	Objectives	Achievements
Participants from South	Enhanced attitudes, knowledge and skills	Mostly very high. Often resulting in improved c.v. and career options. This could be further enhanced by combining on-the-job training with courses and e-learning.
Participants from Norway	Enhanced attitudes and knowledge	Mostly high, but sometimes with frustrations concerning inefficient partners: mostly in the South, but sometimes in Norway. Improved career options.
Institutions from South	Enhanced capabilities in development oriented services delivery[1]	Not so high for several reasons: • Capacity needs assessment can be improved. The fundamental problem in most institutions is shortage of funds. • Participants are often not recruited from within and often not returning to the organization. The age criterion is a constraint especially for women. Shortage of funds has negatively affected capacity to retain participants. • Capacity building work by participants not systematic.

1 It has been suggested by Fredskorpset to include internationalization, international cooperation and networking among the objectives, but in the assessment of the ET, this can only be justified when it is an explicit objective of the partner organisation in the South, and included in the partnership agreement.

Target Group	Objectives	Achievements
Institutions from North	Enhanced capabilities in internationalizati-on and international enhanced cooperation and networking	Not so high for several reasons: • Participants often not recruited from and not returning to organization. The age criterion of the Primary Programme is a constraint especially for women. • Capacity building work by participant(s) often not well planned and implemented
Society in South	Development and Good Governance	The potential is very high, but not as yet fully utilized. Most partners are doing valuable development work. If capacity building can be enhanced and exchanged participants are retained for some time, the development impact and sustainability can be very high.
Society in North	Enhaced knowledge and engagement	It is primarily the Youth Programme which aims at information dissemination to society at large. (In addition there are also the indirect and unsystematic effects of returned participants from the other programmes, through their personal networks. The extent of these effects is hard to assess.) For most youth exchanges, the achievements here are high.

There are important differences between the four programmes:

1. In general the South-South partnerships are very successful also with regard to capacity building. The reasons are (i) that the exchanges are often based on a participatory capacity needs assessment, (ii) that the participants quickly become efficient in their new organization, and (iii) that the monitoring from the South regional office is very professional and very effective. A few partnerships are managed by the regional office of a Norwegian institution. This has had a negative impact with regard to capacity building.

2. The Youth Programme focuses on attitudes and knowledge of participants and dissemination of knowledge at home. Youth partners have their own extensive preparatory programme and they have a well prepared plan for dissemination of the knowledge acquired abroad. The average length is 10 to 11 months, six of which are abroad. It is likely that the cost effectiveness can be enhanced by reducing the length of the stay abroad so that more youth can benefit from the programme.

3. The Primary Programme and the Senior Programme have experienced difficulties in recruiting qualified participants from among the staff of the partner organizations. One of the reasons is the age group definitions, which act as a serious constraint for recruitment, particularly for women from the African partner organizations. Indirectly the age group requirement is a serious limitation for the fulfilling of the capacity building objective of the Primary and Senior Programme.

The Management of the Programme Cycle
The case studies identified success factors throughout the exchange cycle. Subsequent discussions with Fredskorpset made it clear that significant improvements in management routines had been introduced since the case study exchanges was planned and initiated. The discussions also identified areas of potential additional improvements. The most important areas of future improvements are listed below.

Project idea. There are few partnerships in the priority areas of good governance and public-private-sector partnerships. Fredskorpset has initiated special measures and may use special conferences in order to promote “relevant partnerships”.

Quality of Feasibility Study and Planning Process. Partnerships are granted funds from Fredskorpset. The amounts spent are significant, but the outcome is often poor because many partnerships are dominated by the North partner and because only few partners have relevant skills and experience to undertake an in-depth study and to translate it into a coherent capacity building programme. Hiring a local consultant for a few days can improve the feasibility study significantly at a moderate cost. Fredskorpset staff could benefit from courses in capacity and training needs assessment and capacity building methodologies.

Preparation of Partners. This has been significantly improved since 2004. But except for the South-South Programme, training is mainly directed at North partners, while South partners often remain less prepared and with less information about the Fredskorpset programme. Moreover, the primary partners are yet to fully implement the guidance provided by Fredskorpset. Fredskorpset needs to improve its monitoring of the primary partners.

Preparation and Utilization of Participants. Participants are generally well prepared by the Fredskorpset preparatory course. Some have noted a need to improve the quality and management of the courses in South. However, the preparation and utilization of the participants in the actual work in the host partner organization is often poor. This is the responsibility of the partner organizations, but Fredskorpset needs to provide guidance to organizations, which do not have competences and routines to make efficient use of their staff. Fredskorpset also needs to monitor that the participants are well utilized as a resource in accordance with the capacity building plans of the partnerships.

Fredskorpset Monitoring of the Partnerships. The initial philosophy was that partnerships were equal and should be "self-monitoring". Fredskorpset have realized that a more pro-active role is required in order to ensure optimum benefits. Still, a complete monitoring programme including the secondary South partners needs to be developed.

Handing Over. Some participants have left their host organization without ensuring that the "results" are shared and sustained. A few have terminated the contract prematurely because of unresolved problems. The Fredskorpset procedures for handing over, debriefing and coming home can be further improved. It is important that the home-coming seminar for participants and partners continue to be used as part of the institutional learning.

Follow-up information dissemination. The one-month obligatory information dissemination after return is not given systematic emphasis, and there is a lack of compliance with this obligation in many cases. Fredskorpset should introduce mechanisms to ensure that this requirement is adhered to in the future.

Phasing out of Fredskorpset support. According to Fredskorpset guidelines, partnerships can be supported for a maximum of three to five rounds of exchanges, but there are no guidelines on how Fredskorpset resources can be phased out and other resources phased in in order to enable partners to continue their cooperation in accordance with the overall objective of Fredskorpset. There is a need for Fredskorpset to develop special guidelines and perhaps special support modalities for a "phasing out strategy."

Findings and Conclusions Regarding the Exchange Programme

The Fredskorpset Exchange Programme has demonstrated its potential as a capacity building programme. The relevance of the partnership portfolio as well as the services delivery of most South partners is high in relation to (i) the objectives of Norwegian Development Assistance and (ii) the host country development priorities. Most partners are implementing activities directly related to the Millenium Development Goals (MDG). Therefore the potential benefits of enhanced capacity are high, and the impact and cost-effectiveness are gradually improving.

Fredskorpset has demonstrated its capacity to refine the programmes and strengthen the facilitating framework and its support to the partners in the implementation of the exchanges. However, there is still considerable room for improving the impacts.

3. The Information and Communication Activities

The Board is responsible for Fredskorpset's communication strategy, and it has also been guided by the MFA. The strategy documents are very broadly formulated, stating e.g. that Fredskorpset is supposed to contribute to "a more equitable sharing of the wealth of the world" and that the communication activities are supposed to contribute to "insight and involvement" in North-South and development issues.

The lack of more operational objectives is reflected in the management of the activities. Even though most of the Fredskorpset information and communication activities seem relevant, there is no consistent strategy connecting them. The activities are distributed between two different departments, each with its own plan of action.

The Fredskorpset philosophy sees the participant as a change agent. The communication activities of the participants are an essential part of at the communication activities of Fredskorpset. However, this is not reflected in the management of the communication activities of the participants, which is basically the responsibility of the partners. Neither of the Fredskorpset departments concerned with communication is directly responsible for the obligatory information dissemination activities of the participants.

Fredskorpset has used public events to establish an impressive network of local communities all over Norway. This is potentially of great value to the Fredskorpset partners and participants as well as the communities themselves. These events also represent a unique, but still relatively un-exploited platform for public debate about topical and fundamental North-South and development issues. A study of the "Bringing People Together" events was undertaken in 2005. However, there is a need to continuously assess the impact of the communication activities directed at the public.

4. Assessment of the Fredskorpset Organization and Management

The Fredskorpset organization is small, un-bureaucratic, flexible and service oriented.

MFA exercises its overall responsibility via the annual budget appropriations and the related instructions regarding priority themes. Through the annual budgets new programmes and responsibilities have been introduced and its implementation is monitored via a half-annual review meeting during which Fredskorpset presents progress report.

MFA appoints a Board with seven individual members representing different parts of the country, civil society and business. The role of the Board is to act as a link to the daily management in respect of guidance as well as supervision. During its first years the Board was uncertain about how to best fulfil its role and got involved in detailed daily management issues. Later it has been acknowledge that the role of the Board is to guide and to supervise on behalf of MFA.

The daily management rests with a Director who has delegated responsibilities to his organization consisting of 26 staff in Norway and a small team of contracted personnel in three regional offices in Kampala, Lusaka and Bangkok, respectively.

The Board – and at a few times the MFA – has, contrary to the intentions of the Statutes, engaged in operational matters, but the management of Fredskorpset has by and large been sufficiently flexible and effective to ensure the implementation of the Fredskorpset objectives and plans.

Initially the daily management of Fredskorpset seems to have been too optimistic about what could be left to the partners and to the participants, but over the years the daily management has become increasingly aware of the strengths and weaknesses of its organization.

The management is in the process of integrating the regional offices into the Fredskorpset organization in order to utilize the experience of the South-South Programme and provide a stronger platform for internal capacity building and institutional learning.

A cost effective and transparent Management Information System (MIS) needs to be introduced as the organisation grows.

5. Conclusions

Fredskorpset is a relevant and reasonably effective mechanism for the implementation of the overarching aims of Norway's cooperation with the developing countries. By combining objectives of development in the South and increased knowledge and involvement in Norway, and by its particular modality of exchange of people, it fills a niche within Norwegian development assistance.

With an enhanced utilization of the opportunities which the exchange programme through partnerships offers for human resources development and capacity building in the developing countries it can become an example for other donors to follow.

Fredskorpset offers an excellent opportunity for individuals and institutions in Norway to participate in international development work. The individuals are getting exposure, knowledge and invaluable social and communication skills. Already experienced institutions have been given a mechanism to maintain relationships with partners, and newcomers among public and private sector organizations have been provided with a facilitating framework for international networking and capacity building.

6. Strategic Recommendations

Operational recommendations are presented in the main text of the report. Recommendations of strategic importance are presented below:

Recommendation One: MFA should not add too many responsibilities on top of the existing ones so that Fredskorpset can be given time to focus on its core business.

Recommendation Two: The Board should introduce a performance based planning and budgetting system taking its point of departure in performance indicators. The 2006-2011 Strategic Plan should become an Action Plan directly linked to a financial framework and the annual work plans and budgets. The Board should present a proposal for a three year indicative financial framework for MFA.

Recommendation Three: Feasibility studies must identify tangible outputs, and these should be utilized to establish a simple performance indicator system. This must be used as a MIS to guide partners as well as Fredskorpset managers in their efforts to improve the quality of the exchanges.

Recommendation Four: The Senior Programme is expensive and has not as yet added value. The unintended constraint of the age limitations of the primary programme needs urgent attention. Merge the Senior and the Primary programmes and let exchanges be flexible within a framework focusing on the needs of the partners for capacity building.

Recommendation Five: Expertise in capacity building should be made available to partners. A simple solution would be to make "specialists" available through networks in the South for the feasibility study.

Recommendation Six: Partners sometimes need additional financial resources in order to ensure that enhanced skills of participants can be used for the benefit of the South organization and its clients for an extended period of time. The existing option to include additional activities in the budget, such as local seminars and workshops, should be utilized more actively.

Recommendation Seven: The engagement and experience of the participants should be integrated as part of the Fredskorpset information and communication strategy. The participants can be better utilized through improved planning focusing on the immediate network of the partner organization and the participant itself. The one-month follow-up period should be put to better and more systematic use.

Recommendation Eight: The public events organized by Fredskorpset have resulted in an impressive network in local communities in Norway. These events should be further developed to serve as a platform for public debate about topical and fundamental North-South and development issues.

Recommendation Nine: Fredskorpset should intensify its monitoring of the North-South exchanges, in particular in the South. This is probably most easily done through giving the regional offices this responsibility in addition to their current tasks with the South-South Programme.

Recommendation Ten: The responsibilities of the regional offices have been increasing with the number of active partnerships, partners and participants. Therefore, Fredskorpset need to consider its organizational structure in the South. The 2006-2011 Strategic Plan should include an organizational development plan and a human resources development plan, which utilizes potential synergies and integrates the Secretariat and the regional offices in terms of management systems and staff experience and competences.

Recommendation Eleven: The Board should review ways and means of enhancing the influence of the South partners at the Board level, and prepare practical proposals – such as video conferences – for enhancing the influence of South interests in the Board.

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No of copies: 650
November 2006
ISBN 82-7548-178-3



Print: Grefsile Trykkeri