

The design of the project conceived its execution based on the implementation of a two level institutional arrangement: (a) A regional team (originally two, one at Harare and one at Abidjan), assisted by two Committees, SAC and TAB; and (b) the national teams or working groups that will carry out the country NLTPSs. The African Futures project is concerned basically with the activities of the regional structure; nevertheless, these being service activities for the national efforts, they have an impact on the national teams' achievements, and therefore these must also be included as part of the project's framework. An arrangement such as this (as implemented or possibly with slight modifications) is adequate and almost unavoidable, given the problems common to African countries recognized above, the need for a project which recognizes the individual situation and needs of each country and must absolutely avoid substituting for national efforts, and the project's intention to create conditions which would contribute to a process of internalization of strategic futures thinking in the countries themselves. However, such an institutional arrangement poses **intrinsic implementation difficulties**, which the evaluation mission considers were **misjudged** or **underestimated** when the project was conceived; more so if one takes into account the different funding arrangements for the NLTPS project (regional level) and the NLTPS country exercises.

During the design of the NLTPS project **the efforts involved in the preparatory process** (in particular phases I and II as stated in Annex III of the Project Document) **were grossly underestimated, both in time and resources**. At the time it would have been very difficult to do otherwise. The fact is that the step from a government recognizing the need to execute an NLTPS such as described in the Project Document and signing this document in agreement, to its actual commitment and agreement with the minimum institutional arrangements and conditions necessary to carry out a project with the characteristics described in the Project Document has not been a straightforward and easy process. In some cases the time elapsed between the first contacts of the regional team leader and government officials and the official constitution of the national team in charge of the country NLTPS and the launching of the exercise has surpassed one year; typically it has taken from 4 to 6 months. Under these circumstances it is tempting to conclude that, in the most difficult country cases, the respective governments lack interest and the regional project is trying to force an exercise the government does not recognize as interesting or useful, and therefore, that in these cases the sensitization and negotiating efforts by the regional team should be abandoned in order to concentrate in countries with more favorable conditions. The mission has concluded, however, that the situation is less simple. In all cases the **difficulties do not arise from a lack of interest from the government, but in practical operational considerations**, which include one or several of the following:

- Differences of opinion as to the institutional structure of the project. A certain degree of independence of the national team from the government is needed, in order to ensure the necessary freedom to analyze different futures and aspirations;

at the same time the team should be able to work closely with the government to incorporate its policies and preoccupations in the analysis, to have access to information generated by government sources and to ensure that the findings and results of the country NLTPS are useful and have a good chance of being incorporated by the government (and other segments of society) as an important element when formulating its medium and short term plans and policies.

- Difficulties in finding an appropriate team leader (and team members), which (ideally) should have among other characteristics, convocation power, technical prestige, credibility and leadership, willingness to acquire an expertise on prospective studies, ability to work with a multidisciplinary (or transdisciplinary) team, capacity to handle both quantitative and qualitative methods of enquiry, intellectual and political independence, and an open and critical frame of mind which will allow him to challenge established “truths” and opinions while maintaining at the same time a rigorous approach.
- Difficulties in defining what would be the acceptable degree and modalities of the participatory process, including the institutional arrangements for the establishment of consultative bodies for the exercise and the dissemination of results.
- Agreement on the minimum technical and methodological steps required by the exercise to be useful and credible.
- Difficulties derived from the specific context and political conditions of each country, such as the timing of national elections and the corresponding political campaigns, which temporarily deviate the energies of government officials and other personalities away from the NLTPS, regardless of the interest they may have in such an exercise.
- Difficulties in finding the necessary funds for the national teams to initiate the NLTPS. In some cases (eg, Guinea-Bissau) this has introduced additional delays.

The Project Document explicitly states the following expected outputs:

Immediate objective 3.3.1:

Output 1. A conceptual and methodological framework for national long-term perspective studies.

In general terms this has been successfully achieved (see below). The regional team has established and documented a methodological guide suggesting a process consisting of the following four phases:

Phase I: Issue identification.

- (i) Preliminary preparation of the studies.
- (ii) Conducting the National workshop (aspirations and strategic development issues).

Phase II: Preparing the base of the study. Analyzing the forces of social change. Understanding the past and the present (a systemic, selective, interdisciplinary, holistic and integrative analysis).

- (i) Researching the key factors and variables.
- (ii) Analyzing agents of change.
- (iii) Internal-external linkages.
- (iv) Critical questions about the future.

Phase III: Constructing Scenarios.

Phase IV: Strategy formulation.

A fifth phase is also mentioned in some of the documents produced by the regional team; namely:

Phase V: Strategic agenda and action plan.

The above general framework is **well thought and structured** and responds very adequately to the spirit and objectives of the project. **No major changes seem to be necessary or convenient.** The documents explaining the objectives and main ideas and processes which constitute each of these phases (except phase V, for which no separate document exists) are clear, well written and suggest different alternatives as to the tools available in each case, allowing for the needed flexibility. Additional documentation of a more detailed nature on the different tools and methods would be convenient. The regional team has already commissioned some papers in this direction from well known experts, but the quality of these is uneven and should be reviewed and improved.

In spite of having this excellent technical guideline, given the design of the NLTPS project (regional project), the degree of control which the regional team can exert over technical issues related to the execution of the countries NLTPSs is limited. The regional team has no doubt established itself as a very competent team in the field of prospective studies, both in absolute terms and in the eyes of the national teams. In spite of the implementation difficulties thus far encountered, the regional team has been able to maintain a very reasonable degree of acceptance and adherence from the national teams to the general technical guidelines described above, allowing at the same time ample room to accommodate for local specificities. Nevertheless, the regional team's technical credibility and ascendancy over the national team, its main strength and tool to guide the process, has not always been enough to prevail over poor technical choices made by the national teams. These