



Mid-term Evaluation 2008

In autumn 2008, the Round Table Africa partners have executed a mid-term evaluation. The aim of this evaluation was to check whether the realization is in line with the planning towards fulfilling the overall objectives by the end of 2010. The method used was an online questionnaire sent to all people directly involved in the program:

- ESAMI and MSM staff
- All African researchers (DBA) and their supervisors
- Contact persons at the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Out of this group of around 50 people, 28 persons responded. Below you find the main findings, and quoted response on the following subjects:

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1. Capacity building component of Round Table Africa

"When I look back at myself, I see remarkable change in thinking towards the development process in Africa let alone positioning my ideas in the global context."

"The researchers selected present and work in their own countries. The trickle down effect will be tremendous."

39% of the respondents were of the opinion that research capacity is being created in the area of sustainable business. A critical comment was made about the lack of indicators set for the capacity provided by the program, which makes monitoring difficult.

According to the respondents, the capacity most needed at ESAMI and for a researcher in Africa, is on research methodology and value chain analysis. Other areas mentioned are:

- Entrepreneurship and leadership skills
- Business development support
- Competitiveness analysis
- Writing skills
- Contextual analysis
- Multi-stakeholder analysis and facilitation

"Understanding sustainability, knowing different roles of public and private actors, having negotiating skills, being aware of international trade agreements and their influence on doing business in Africa."

When it comes to institutionalization of the research capacity, the respondents opt for either a special department within ESAMI (current situation), or a consultancy firm owned by ESAMI and MSM. However, a private consultancy is perceived not to be financially sustainable. 60% of all respondents think that financial sustainability is possible with a relation to training and graduate programs.

2. Value chain analysis

Value chain analysis is an important methodology for Round Table Africa, used to identify gaps and opportunities for sustainable economic development. The researchers were asked whether they consider the value chain analysis a sound tool for identifying potential business projects. The overall respond was positive:

Yes	60.7%
Depends	39.3%
No	0.0%

Main comments made are that apart from the value chain analysis, considerable attention should be given to a sound stakeholder analysis, the institutional (business) environment and sector competitiveness.

“A useful tool but it is not enough; the business environment, the market penetration strategy and positioning and the financial plan must also be developed in a comprehensive way.”

“Value chain analysis aids in assessing profitability and constraints in processes and movement of products at various stages. These are fundamental requirements for identifying opportunities.”

“It can be difficult for an actor outside the chain to perform the analysis and obtain relevant data, which is reliable to base the intervention for value chain development.”

3. Country and sector diversity

Round Table Africa is spread over several countries and a variety of economic sub-sectors. This resulted in a diversity of value chain analyses. The respondents were asked to give the most important Pro's and Con's of this approach.

In favor of diversity:

- Comparative
- Broad expertise
- Expertise (researchers) spread over the region
- Development opportunities in many countries
- Identification of regional opportunities – promotes regional integration
- Potential to identify commonalities of value chain development approaches.

“The diversity in itself is strength. The world is now a global village and there are a lot of synergies in collaborative arrangements cutting across different countries.”

Against diversity:

- Fragmentation of capacity, knowledge and resources
- Questionable whether comparison between different countries and sectors is possible
- Generalization of information may not be possible due to context specificity
- Costly for students, because 2 regions in different countries need to be analyzed per student
- Selected sectors in some countries were not crucial.

4. Round Table meetings

The Round Table meetings are the pivot of Round Table Africa in which all stakeholders relevant for economic development should meet. It has been the intention to organize 5 country specific meetings with each 50 participants. Respondents are asked what they perceive to be the most important aims for these meetings.

Response: Aim of RTA meetings	Number of times selected
To exchange and distribute information	21x
To get commitment of important stakeholder	18x
To do matchmaking and networking	15x
To identify concrete business opportunities	15x

The respondents were also asked to give their opinion on the idea to become more flexible in the type of Round Table meetings to be organized. These may be sub-sector specific or on district, country or regional level. The large majority of respondents is in favor of small, sub-sector specific meetings, possibly to be followed-up by a big international conference. 30% of the respondents prefers national meetings, covering the most relevant (sub-) sectors.

“The combination of several sub-sectors in one meeting will stimulate exchange of ideas/approaches. At such national meetings sub-sector workshops can be organized to take concrete steps towards sector development. At the end of the whole trajectory you, obviously, must have one big conference to evaluate the program and look at the future.”

“Sector specific meetings would be effective in attracting interested participants who would be able to exchange and deliberate on the sector specific issues and at the end of the meetings, most likely a number of opportunities would be discovered and pursued further through close-knit networks.”

5. “Partnering with Africa” seminar, May 2008

Regarding the “Partnering with Africa” seminar, which Round Table Africa organized in May 2008, the respondents were given the opportunity to describe the most important outcomes for them and make suggestions for improvements.

First of all, the ability to exchange ideas, obtain information and get insight in the views of potential investors and relevant stakeholders from specific sub-sectors was perceived as an important outcome of the seminar for the majority of the respondents. In addition, for the DBA candidates, an important contribution of the seminar was the feedback provided by the participants, related to the content and quality of their research (fine-tuning of the topic, focus of research, suggestions for improvement).

Secondly, networking was perceived as an important outcome of the seminar, i.e. meeting with a wide variety of actors and potential investors, and interacting with African and European professionals.

Finally, a few positive outcomes were related to the awareness created about Round Table Africa program, the valuable insights obtained during the lecture of Prof. C. K. Prahalad and the recognition of the Value Chain Analysis as a tool to identify business and investment opportunities.

“I came to realize that it is a challenging program: on the one hand students need to produce scientifically sound results, on the other hand, stakeholders look for applied research that helps them to solve problems. Yet, it is exactly this tension that makes RTA unique.”

Suggestions for improvement were quite diverse. The most important mentioned by the majority of the respondents relates to the type and quality of information presented. This can be explained by the fact that the presentations were based on preliminary results of applied research, which was not yet in an

advanced stage. The positive side of this is that it enabled the DBA candidates to fine-tune their research and focus on most relevant aspects. However, several cases were considered as too academic, without a link to practice. Moreover, the comment was made that investors require concrete data on opportunities and financial requirements in a sub-sector, which was lacking in most of the cases.

Another important suggestion made is related to the available time for presentations and individual discussions and the set up of the workshops. As several DBA candidates were grouped per thematic workshop, there was lack of time to discuss presentations individually. Moreover, several DBA candidates suggest that preparation for the seminar was rushed and more time is required in the future to prepare a workshop. Related to this comment, the contact between DBA candidates and their supervisors requires improvement, i.e. more guidance from supervisors to prepare the presentations.

Next to this, three other areas of improvement mentioned are: a) the speakers, b) presence of invitees (*"potential investors did not show up, perhaps due to lack of being notified on time"*), and *"allocation of time for formal and informal meetings between students and investors"*.

6. Information and networking

The respondents are asked to give their opinion on the information and networking component of Round Table Africa. Although 42% agreed that this program is providing the international donor and business community with evidence based information on sustainable business and is creating a network of practitioners, 27% disagreed. The most important comments and suggestions made are:

- More space on the website for summaries of the research work
- Pro-active promotion of expertise, for instance by stimulating researchers to visit a conference in Africa or Europe to present research findings
- Start writing articles for existing practitioners' journals
- (Quarterly) journal.

7. Institutionalization

Business development requires a supportive institutional environment. The respondents were asked whether they think that additional networks or platforms in Africa are needed, and more in particular whether Round Table Africa should set-up or strengthen sector-based Partnership Committees in different countries. The idea of these committees is that they are composed out of representatives from public and private organizations and aim to initiate sector-specific projects.

Regarding the need for additional structures, almost 70% of the respondents think that such structures are important. However most of the people stress the need for **strong local / national commitment** from a diversity of stakeholders.

"Local actors who will lead such platforms have to be committed and see the benefits of such a platform. Therefore, it means that such a network should be initiated in a 'bottom up' manner."

A counter comment is also made, stating that *"it is a function of the prevailing government/policy environment in each country and the vision and leadership of the governments."*

Regarding the idea of setting up Partnership Committees, the respondents are overall positive but stress the need for commitment and make a variety of suggestions:

- Create working groups of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- It requires a good administrative body and facilitator/project manager

- Focus only on potential strong sectors, where the actors are committed to contribute actively to a partnership.
- Parties involved need an incentive to participate
- Ensure involvement of DBA students
- Take care of patronization by politicians
- Terms of Reference should be carefully thought out and owned by Africans.
- Start with linking stakeholder groups/committees to individual projects. These could later evolve into sector-based committees.

“As far as the flower sector in Kenya is concerned, this idea is welcome as it will create a non-partisan and independent organization to support the business sector with information. There are many investors wanting to invest in the sector but it is difficult for them to get the required information as the existing institutions are serving specific interests.”

8. Program Management

The respondents were asked to judge the program management of Round Table Africa, entailing a Steering Committee, a director at MSM, a coordinator at ESAMI, and support staff.

	Totally disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Fully agree	I do not know	Response Count
The internal communication is well organized.	0.0%	30.8%	15.4%	38.5%	11.5%	3.8%	26
The financial resources are sufficient for a professional implementation of the program.	0.0%	15.4%	19.2%	23.1%	15.4%	26.9%	26
The human resources are sufficient for a professional implementation of the program.	0.0%	30.8%	26.9%	23.1%	11.5%	7.7%	26

Comments made are all related to the work by the researchers (DBA students):

- A more coherent and continuous coaching of the students/researchers is needed. The quality system in place does not respect any standard method, which makes its efficiency and effectiveness doubtful.
- There seems to be a problem in commitments and time-constraints of several supervisors
- Improve communication with the researchers
- More intense communication between DBA students and their supervisors is needed.

“ESAMI needs to be more involved like in the area of taking action on a delay by a supervisor to communicate to his/her student and also to issue progress reports. Research costs are not catered for by the program. This I believe will greatly impact on the ability of the researchers to conduct their fieldwork. The number of supervisors is quite small given their busy schedule.”

Last, regarding the roles and responsibilities, critical comments made refer to the need to:

- Clarify and strengthen the role of ESAMI
- Critically assess the roles and responsibilities within the MSM team: there seems to be too many chains of commands
- Improve the quality management system, to become result based.

9. Outputs and Outcomes

In the original project proposal, the outputs and outcomes are described that Round Table Africa should have achieved by the end of 2010. Respondents were asked to assess in how far they expect that these targets will be met, but they found it difficult to do so, resulting in non-informative



quantitative results. The qualitative comments however demonstrate that people think that in particular the desired outcomes (income and job creation) may be overoptimistic and not easy to achieve within the project time frame.

From a more principle order is the following statement:

"The method and the coverage do not cover all the aspects required for successful business launching or re-engineering. The people involved as supervisor have no first hand entrepreneurship experience. The coordinators must be aware that they are confused in setting objectives: most of the realizable ones concern "inputs" to the system (activities, events created, contacts set etc...). The link with the few important output (socio-economic) indicators is not proven. Other external factors interfere in a complex way. This is the missing part of the RTA project."

10. Conclusions

"Round Table Africa appears to me a very relevant approach to development in Africa, and hence needs every support to make the idea work."

Overall the respondents are reacting positively about the objective and approach of Round Table Africa. Capacity is being created, valuable research executed, the value chain analysis is seen as a useful methodology, and new networks are starting to emerge.

The main challenges for the second phase of the program can be summarized as follows:

1. Ensure formalized commitment (by Terms of References) of market parties in the development of potential business projects.
2. Improve support to and communication with researchers (DBA students) and supervisors to guarantee useful and reliable research findings.
3. Re-assess and agree upon roles and responsibilities between MSM and ESAMI to ensure local ownership and a more effective and efficient management.
4. Adjust the current set of outputs and outcomes into a more realistic one with indicators.

Last, the method of using an online questionnaire seems to be an effective and cost-efficient instrument for collecting feedback and input on an international program like Round Table Africa. As such it is worthwhile to incorporate such a mid-term evaluation in other MSM projects.