

MAURITANIA: EVALUATION PRACTICES IN MAURITANIA— GOVERNANCE, TRANSPARENCY AND CREDIBILITY

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INTRODUCTION

In 2001, Mauritania was one of the first countries to establish a poverty reduction strategy paper (PRSP). This framework, which makes the fight against poverty central to all policies, was prepared through an approach recognized as participatory by all actors. At a meeting that December, the international community saluted the country's economic and structural reform efforts and affirmed their commitment to strengthening the partnership with the Mauritanian government concerning the objectives of the national strategy for poverty reduction. This support was confirmed when the country fulfilled its commitments under the programme to aid heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) in June 2002. Mauritania's debt to members of the 'Paris Club' of rich countries was then cancelled.

Since 2007, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Development (MAED) has been coordinating the system for implementation, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of the PRSP. During the first three fiscal years of the PRSP, M&E was part of an unchanged institutional framework. The situation improved somewhat with the provision of information (including the Demographic and Health Survey 2000, Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys and general population census for 2001). In addition, the development of several reference tools, such as the medium-term expenditure framework and regional poverty alleviation programmes, have opened new prospects for strengthening the monitoring of PRSP implementation.

Until recently, M&E operational activities directly related to the PRSP were largely concentrated on annual production of the PRSP implementation report. The process each year was almost identical: work of the thematic groups; drafting of thematic reports, with support from national consultants; preparation of a draft summary report; and, based on the draft summary report, interregional workshops and national conferences, leading to a consensus document. It should be noted that these activities are a clear improvement over previous systems for public policy management and dialogue, when economic policy framework documents were the principal reference for the reform activities. However, the monitoring process could be improved by actions such as revitalizing institutional mechanisms;

updating core benchmarks and meeting deadlines for annual reporting; making the design of monitoring more strategic; and further strengthening national statistics to better meet the needs of the PRSP.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF THE NATIONAL STRATEGY TO REDUCE POVERTY

Objectives

The monitoring and evaluation system is a crucial element of any strategic framework for poverty prevention. Its basic objectives are to (i) monitor poverty in its various dimensions, (ii) monitor implementation of the various PRSP programmes and (iii) assess the specific impact of the main public programmes and the PRSP as a whole on growth and poverty. It must therefore provide information on progress, measure the efficiency and effectiveness of the policies implemented, and contribute to adjusting the measures taken based on the results noted concerning the population's growth and living conditions.

Chain of results

The M&E components are shown in figure 1.

The resources permit implementation of specific measures as part of sectoral and cross-sectoral programmes so that activities can be carried out. Programmes produce results thanks to the products obtained from the activities undertaken. Identification of the corresponding indicators (resources, inputs, activities, products and results) that are most relevant to monitoring the implementation of each of the priority PRSP issues and programmes is the principal basis for building the M&E system.

Components of an M&E system

The PRSP M&E system can be viewed as a whole led by the two functions of monitoring and evaluation, structured around 'activity blocks', shown in figure 2.

Monitoring of poverty refers to monitoring the trends and dynamics of poverty.

Monitoring of PRSP execution is the heart of operational monitoring activities. It aims to capture the degree to which specific PRSP objectives are achieved through the production and use of information concerning the implementation of government policies/programmes that underpin the national poverty reduction strategy.

FIGURE 1. CHAIN OF RESULTS

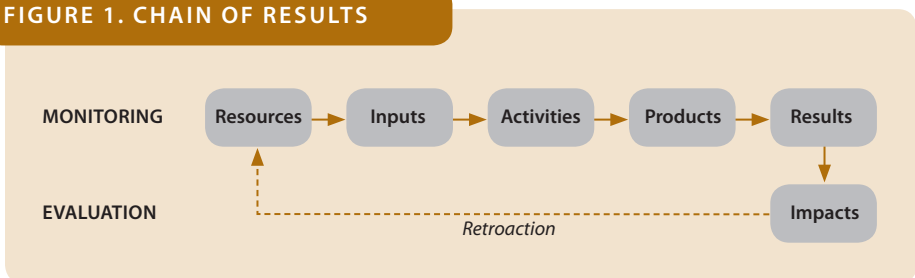
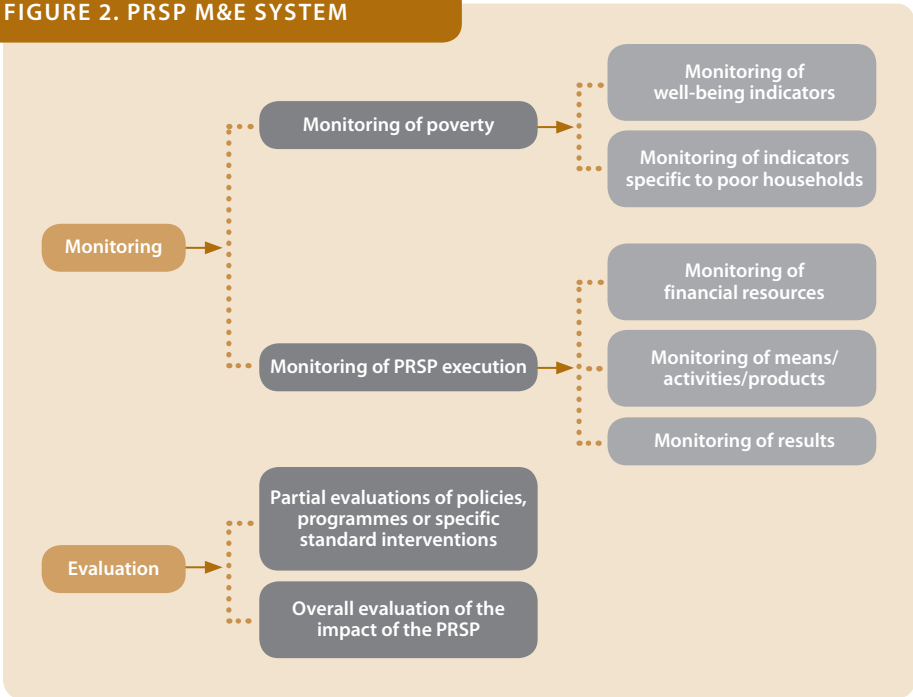


FIGURE 2. PRSP M&E SYSTEM



Monitoring should lead stakeholders to suggest changes in execution of operations or budget allocations, to meet the PRSP's goals more effectively. Monitoring sheets or scorecards and periodic reports are tools to inform stakeholders about performance. The evaluation is intended to:

- Measure and interpret changes in the situation of the poor in conjunction with various public programmes;
- Assess the effectiveness and efficiency of priority programmes in terms of their long-term objectives (defined in the strategy);
- Propose the necessary adjustments to increase the impact of these programmes on reducing poverty and improving general living conditions.

The evaluation system is supplied in part by the monitoring data, especially the performance indicators, but it is also based on impact indicators, which measure characteristics of poverty in space and time. The system also requires the use of various complementary tools (such as programme reviews and special surveys), which generally require more resources, that combine quantitative and qualitative methods and demand expertise in various areas of the PRSP. The PRSP is evaluated through partial impact assessments and evaluations of the PRSP as a whole.

BOX 1. COMPONENTS OF MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF THE PRSP

MONITORING OF INDICATORS OF THE POPULATION'S WELL-BEING

These indicators provide information on living conditions of households: per capita income; level of capital (physical, human, institutional, financial); socio-economic infrastructure available; access to basic social services (health, education, drinking water, communication, etc.). The data available particularly through censuses and administrative information systems permits assessment of the country's development according to international standards.

MONITORING OF INDICATORS OF THE WELL-BEING OF POOR HOUSEHOLDS

The analysis of poverty trends and dynamics is concentrated at this level. The indicators collected should permit assessment of the importance of 'input' or 'output' flows for the poverty situation, and the analysis should identify the factors that explain the movements observed.

RESOURCES MONITORING

It seeks to understand (i) changes in the initial allocation of credits, (ii) the level of consumption of financial resources, and (iii) routing of these resources to their final destination. This monitoring, focused on appropriations allocated to priority anti-poverty actions, is organized around three main concerns:

- Identifying the **actual allocations of financial resources** (by source of funding and overall) according to their destination (sector, activity, region, etc.);
- Monitoring the **level of use of the resources** and the rate of financial implementation of the programmes;
- Monitoring the **effective provision of resources to their final destinations** (tracking of expenses to destination or 'step by step' monitoring).

MONITORING OF RESOURCES AND ACTIVITIES/OUTPUTS

This helps to understand the execution of projects/programmes/policies through their inputs and outputs. It therefore:

- **Monitors means** (physical, human and material inputs acquired through funding) implemented as part of the sectoral and inter-sectoral programmes whose common aim is to reduce poverty;
- **Monitors activities** carried out using these means.

This monitoring is performed using a small number of key indicators in relation to the physical quantities implemented (inputs) and obtained (outputs) in the context of the priority programmes. These variables can be understood in the context of programme budgets and the MTEF. It involves assessing the values obtained in relation to the initial planning.

RESULTS MONITORING

It assesses the extent to which the results obtained have achieved the targets. It usually involves annual monitoring of a limited number of outcome variables within priority PRSP sectors.

PARTIAL EVALUATIONS OF THE IMPACT OF THE STRATEGIES

These partial evaluations are conducted regularly as part of implementation of the PRSP. They can provide information on the impact achieved by any particular strategy or action. They intersect with some of the monitoring data (results indicators available) and with the information obtained elsewhere by specific small-scale quantitative and/or qualitative surveys. The purpose of the exercise is to highlight the nature and importance of the effects of a specific intervention generally or on a region or specific social group. It is advisable to plan these partial evaluations according to the PRSP priorities and the importance of the interventions to be evaluated (importance of the resources implemented, for example, or even an innovative measure whose impact needs to be quickly known), taking into account the resources available.

THE OVERALL EVALUATION OF THE PRSP

This evaluation aims to measure the impact of all the policies implemented on growth, general living and poverty. It does not concern the impact of a particular strategy but rather the progress achieved after a period of three to five years. To be of high quality, this sequence of the PRSP process requires a consolidated analysis of all the products of the M&E system: scorecards, progress reports, surveys, partial evaluations and surveys of living conditions of households, which are only able to provide information on changes in poverty indicators.

CONTENT AND SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION MECHANISM

The ‘reference system’

Since 1999, the PRSP monitoring and evaluation mechanism has been discussed widely. Discussions have been largely focused on the statistical information system and the indicators, so they have not resulted in formalizing an overall frame of reference. In fact, an array of indicators and an action plan make up the ‘reference system’ for the M&E of the current PRSP.

Adopted six months after the PRSP, Orientation Law No. 50-2001 of 19 July 2001 on poverty prevention established a number of principles and guidelines for the National Strategy to Fight Poverty. It also specified the basic tools for planning, monitoring and evaluation activities related to actions to fight poverty:

- Four-year action plans to fight poverty are the main tools for implementing the PRSP. They are accompanied by multi-year public investment programmes that are reviewed annually (article 5). The four-year actions plans are subject to a comprehensive midterm assessment that aims “to highlight the performance report of the action plan in progress, the difficulties encountered in this context, and draw key lessons in order to increase the effectiveness of the public policies to fight poverty” (article 7). The government reports to Parliament on the implementation of each four-year action plan (article 8).
- Programme laws specify the objectives of the poverty alleviation policy and authorize the necessary expenditures (investment and operating) for each action plan in the priority areas (article 6).
- Programme budgets have been put in place since mid-2002 for the sectors of education, health, water resources, rural development and urban development.
- Regional programmes to fight poverty (RFPF) reflect the regional orientations of the PRSP and establish priority activities for each region. Monitoring and evaluation of the RFPF are carried out under the same conditions as the National Action Plan (article 13).

Benchmarks for monitoring and analysing poverty and living conditions

The reference framework in this area is based on the national statistical system relative to the information needs of the PRSP.

Benchmarks for monitoring implementation of the PRSP

The reference system in this area is based primarily on:

- Systematic updating of macroeconomic and sectoral strategies and development of information systems on the planning and monitoring of public activities;
- Improved reporting (progress reports on programmes, annual reports, etc.).

An update of the PRSP is planned yearly. To implement PRSP monitoring requires:

- Development of planning and monitoring capacities in the priority sectors (ministries of Economic Affairs and Development, National Education and Health, and the Ministry Delegate to the Prime Minister);
- Progressive development of programme budgets;
- Adoption of programme laws;
- Implementation of regional programmes to fight poverty;
- Regular implementation of public expenditure reviews relating to priority sectors and presentation of an annual monitoring report on the priority public expenditures and their impact;
- Standard annual audits for all programmes and investment projects.

Benchmarks for evaluation

The PRSP documents do not recommend a strategy for assessing the PRSP's overall impact or that of its major programmes. The evaluation is also usually broad, since it addresses an ongoing process of coordination. In fact, it falls more within the monitoring function than the assessment function.

The 'reference system' thus rests on two pillars:

- The general coordination mechanism, which supports participatory evaluation activities for the entire PRSP;
- Assessment mechanisms and tools, including (i) analysis reports on the impact of public expenditures, (ii) surveys of beneficiaries, particularly on the effectiveness of basic services and (iii) participatory assessments of programmes to fight poverty.

Assessments include:

- A midterm review of the PRSP, involving civil society and donors;
- An assessment of the cost-effectiveness of public spending in priority sectors;
- An overall assessment of the impact of HIPC resources and the PRSP on poverty reduction.

INSTITUTIONAL SYSTEMS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

To monitor implementation of the PRSP, the Mauritanian government has decided to continue the institutional arrangements established to develop it. It relies upstream on an inter-ministerial committee for the fight against poverty, a coordinating committee and a donors' committee. Downstream, the operational coordination of monitoring is entrusted to a technical committee, which has a secretariat of coordination and 13 thematic groups. To strengthen the participatory approach, additional mechanisms include interregional workshops and a vote by Parliament at the end of the report preparation process for each four-year plan.

The M&E reference system is unusual in not defining the specific responsibilities of the various institutions. Instead of a permanent PRSP secretariat under a leadership structure, often used in other countries, it is a 'collegial' structure comprising the senior officials of three institutions (MAED, National Office for Statistics and the Mauritanian Center for Policy Analysis) who oversee monitoring activities. The chairmen of these groups do not have permanent responsibility to produce monitoring information, and the technical services departments have no responsibilities as such.

POVERTY MONITORING AND THE RESPONSE CAPACITY OF THE STATISTICAL INFORMATION SYSTEM

Once the elements of the reference system have been formulated, it is necessary to assess the monitoring and evaluation system. All parties agree that a major effort has been made to rehabilitate the statistical system in Mauritania, but it has its strengths and weaknesses. Thus, for the first component of M&E, the question is to what extent the national statistical system can assess socio-economic conditions in general, measure changing patterns of poverty and understand its determining factors.

Strengths

- It has conducted new statistical operations at a steady pace, updating and considerably expanding the demographic and socio-economic database.
- It has sought to strengthen administrative data systems.
- A social database (MAURITINFO) has been established.
- Several structural actions have been undertaken, primarily concerning planning and monitoring of operations (aside from production of information itself).
- An investigation steering committee has been established to improve quality control.
- Dissemination of information is improved.
- Institutional capacity and decentralization are strengthened.
- More attention is given to regional capacity.

Weakness

- The national statistical system has inadequate capacity to assess socio-economic conditions, measure changing patterns of poverty and understand its determining factors, which are also constraints to establishing an effective M&E system for the PRSP.

MONITORING IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PRSP

Strengths

- The first four-year action plan has been reviewed annually and an array of priority investments added to it, as provided in the Orientation Law.
- Annual thematic and quarterly reports were prepared.
- The first regional programmes to fight poverty were developed.
- An internal government reporting system was designed to ensure more effective communication between the ministries and the Prime Minister.
- The major departments and public agencies have received specific M&E systems or are considering them.

Weakness

- There is lack of ownership of the PRSP; despite sustained information and coordination efforts, for many partners it continues to represent a rather formal frame of reference.

THE PRODUCTS OF M&E

These include the products obtained under the procedure established relative to production and approval of the annual report on implementation of the PRSP, as well as other monitoring tools, particularly those used for monitoring the PIP and the sectoral programmes.

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Weaknesses

- Overall, the shortcomings of the information system for monitoring implementation are closely linked to the methods chosen for operation of technical thematic groups, in terms of the content of the monitoring information and the choice of priority projects.
- Only shortened versions of the thematic reports are distributed, although they are by nature more likely to provide inputs for monitoring policies.

THE EVALUATION COMPONENT

This is clearly the least explored aspect of the M&E system. The country does not yet have the strategy, tools or capabilities to evaluate public policies. However, some strengths should be noted in the evaluation of sector strategies. Reviews have been conducted in some areas, and several priority programme evaluation exercises have been conducted in addition to the overall assessment of the PRSP.

THE STRUCTURAL CONSTRAINTS

A number of general and structural constraints hamper establishment of an effective M&E system:

- The multiplicity of stakeholders;
- An administrative culture insufficiently instilled with the principles of results-based management;
- Monitoring services that are insufficiently valued by department officials;
- Human resources and the low degree of development of civil society.

DOCUMENTS CONSULTED

Official Records of Mauritania

Poverty Monitoring

Profile of Poverty in Mauritania in 1996

Status of Poverty in Mauritania in 1998

Profile of Poverty in Mauritania, 2000 and 2008

A System of Indicators for Monitoring Poverty in Mauritania

Poverty Reduction and Sustainable Human Development: Monitoring Indicators, Monitoring and Research Team

Social Indicators

MAURITINFO documentation

Monitoring the implementation of the PRSP

Strategic Framework for Alleviating Poverty, 2001

National Audience for Consultation on the Draft Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper: General Observations, 2001

Report on the Implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper

Report of Implementation of the PRSP for 2002

Regional monitoring of the PRSP

Regional Profiles of Hodh Gharbi, Assaba and Guidimaka [2]

Toolbox for RPPF