MAINSTREAMING EMPOWERMENT IN THE BOLIVIA PRSP MONITORING AND EVALUATION AT THE MUNICIPAL LEVEL

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Background

Since the early 1990s, the Bolivian government has begun a transition towards a more decentralized form of government. As a result, the country’s 324 municipalities have greater autonomy and responsibilities and several social control mechanisms have been created to promote more participation in local government and more accountability.

In this context, the Bolivian government developed a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) in May 2001, which is being revised in 2003. The PRSP outlines an approach to increased poverty-related spending through investments in education, health and sanitation, and risk management. These expenditures will be planned and executed largely at the municipal level. The Popular Participation Law of 1994 established municipal oversight committees (comités de vigilancia) to help evaluate the impact of public policies and spending. However, without municipal information systems, the oversight committees and local governments lack the tools and resources necessary to fulfill their monitoring responsibilities.

Tracking Progress in Poverty Reduction

In response to this need, the Bolivia Country Office of the World Bank (WB) proposed a pilot initiative to improve information and mechanisms for tracking poverty reduction at municipal level. It includes developing a data collection methodology around two main components: i) a results-based approach focused on setting and meeting targets and linking these to available municipal resources; ii) a communications component that will present information to municipal oversight committees in an understandable format. Extensive preparatory work during late 2002 helped refine the proposal, incorporating recommendations from government and civil society representatives. By March 2003, the program was launched in fifteen municipalities chosen randomly from the three main geographical regions of the country—five each in the altiplano, valleys and eastern plains.
The program has four principal components, all at the municipal level:

1 **Participatory Approach to Reach Agreement on Social and Productive Targets:** The PRSP outlined clear, concrete indicators to measure poverty reduction throughout the country. The implications of those indicators for the municipal level remain to be defined. As a result, the pilot program has engaged municipal representatives in a participatory process to review the indicators and establish municipal targets for poverty reduction.

Workshops are held in each of the three regions with three representatives from each municipality. The WB Bolivia Country Office, with additional support from ENLACE/Inter-American Foundation, offers its technical expertise, collecting examples and experiences using indicators to monitor poverty reduction from Bolivia and elsewhere, which serve as reference points in determining appropriate targets.

During the workshop, participants develop a common set of indicators to be collected in each municipality, thereby allowing the data to be aggregated. Additional indicators specific to each municipality are also selected. Then the final decision on the expanded set of indicators is made at the municipal level through a series of events to ensure participation of key stakeholders.

2 **Developing a Data Collection Methodology:** With help from the National Statistical Institute (INE), a detailed data collection methodology will be developed for the information necessary to analyze effectiveness in achieving the established targets. Master’s degree students will develop questionnaires to elicit the information needed.

Data will be collected at the local level using Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs; i.e. Palm Pilots) and user-friendly survey software. The simplicity of the software and PDAs keeps training costs quite low. The data compiled using the PDA-based questionnaires can be downloaded directly into a database, avoiding additional costs and data entry errors.

Decentralizing data collection reduces costs and increases the breadth and depth of investigation. This provides more information, allowing better analysis of the impact of public policy actions in fighting poverty.

3 **Linking Results Orientation and Resource Allocation:** As part of the popular participation approach to municipal planning, the budgeting process will be modified to ensure that resource allocations are directly related to specific results targets. Budget priorities and amounts will be based on realistic estimates of costs associated with implementing local development goals. The relationship between results and resources will be a central focus of the budget monitoring process.

4 **User-Friendly Information Sources:** Collecting information proves useless if it cannot be digested by the intended audience. INE’s national scope and interests has limited the depth, format and relevance of disaggregated municipal information it collects, processes and disseminates.

This initiative will address the information needs of municipalities and the general public by investigating and developing alternative sources of information dissemination. These could include local newspapers, radio and community assemblies.

**Capacity building to generate local data for better local government**

As part of the development of a data collection methodology at the local level, a workshop in Cochabamba, on June 23-24, 2002 brought together representatives from the 15 participating municipalities: the mayor, the head of the local oversight committee and a technical expert from each municipality. Departmental representatives of the *Mecanismo de Control Social* (Social Control Mechanism) were also invited.

The workshop was organized around two main areas: (i) how information is used to track results, and (ii) the specific contribution of the pilot program in generating useful information. A major topic of debate focused around
information needs at the national and local levels. The role of INE’s La Paz-based headquarters and regional offices was discussed. It was stressed that the pilot was designed to generate data that the municipalities themselves might find useful rather than to provide the Government with more information about municipalities. The pilot contemplates two surveys — a core set of questions relating to national-level indicators, and a modular set of questions of local concern to collect specific local data.

Participants were trained to use the data collection and analysis tools—the PDAs and Perseus survey software. Each group was given the opportunity to conduct a small survey using the tools. Data were collected, aggregated and presented to workshop participants to highlight different aspects of the entire process.

The workshop stressed the need for each municipality to commit human resources to carry out the pilot. The role of government agencies was also detailed to foster transparency and manage expectations. INE and UDAPE (Unit for Political and Economic Analysis in the central government) will provide technical assistance and support to municipalities in the use of hardware and software. After discussing the schedule and objectives of the pilot, interested mayors were asked to signal their commitment to participate through a written document along with INE, UDAPE and the World Bank. All fifteen municipalities agreed to the terms of the pilot.

Municipal Empowerment

One of the initiative’s principal objectives has been to strengthen municipalities’ effective participation and capacity to foster effective decision-making, implementation and monitoring for better pro-poor outcomes. As greater responsibilities are transferred to the local level through the decentralization process, participatory mechanisms in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of municipal public policy are central to the development of sustainable and credible systems of public management.

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The initiative aims to promote greater information dissemination, participation and awareness among local governments and oversight committees. It also seeks to raise the awareness of national government agencies as to the importance and usefulness of collaborating more with local and municipal organizations and the role that civil society can play in monitoring and evaluating poverty reduction efforts.

The INE traditionally has been responsible for implementing all surveys and generating statistical information. This proves to be costly and therefore restricts the depth of the information gathered. This new initiative conversely offers a low-cost and high-return method to increase local participation to generate data.

Despite its current status as a pilot project, there are clear opportunities to scale-up this model to all municipalities. However, this will require a full assessment of the results of the 15-municipality pilot and a study of the financing options available from the government and international donor community, including the World Bank. It has been proposed that the expansion be conducted in two stages. In the first phase, municipalities would be selected randomly to receive three different kinds of interventions that would ensure that valid inferences and comparisons could be drawn. The second phase would gradually expand the number of municipalities participating to the total of 324.

Transparency and communication are fundamental enabling factors for the success of this type of initiative. Information sharing among stakeholders, including the government, donors and NGOs, during the design and implementation of the project is crucial. In many instances, this helps coordinate different efforts and ensures they “all fit together.”
Some Initial Lessons

Although the project is only in the fieldwork phase of data collection, some lessons can be derived from initial challenges and obstacles. Technical difficulties proved a principal complication in the process. Some PDA models had inadequate capacity for data collection and the survey software had to be reconfigured for better results and easier use.

Some other obstacles identified during the June workshop included: (a) some municipalities did not have the necessary computers (and ports) to use the PDAs; (b) some municipalities — especially the largest ones in eastern and northern Bolivia — did not have sufficient human resources to carry out surveys; and (c) there were concerns about the willingness of Government agencies (especially INE) to allow greater participation of municipalities in designing the modular surveys.

However, two promising aspects for success and the possibility for expansion are also evident at this early stage in the program. One is the level of interest generated at the local level, among elected politicians and civil society. The second relates to the level of understanding achieved among participants on the role that information plays in improving municipal government.

Once targets are set, it is important to ask what needs to be done at the municipal level to achieve the targets and to establish the link between results-orientation and the assignment of resources. This last link in the chain will require changes in the participatory municipal planning process, but will not be financed by this initiative.

The major impact of scaling up the initiative would be the considerable public benefit of obtaining hard evidence on the impact of the participatory processes. To date, most participatory processes are viewed as resulting from the 1994 and 2000 participation laws, which make an implicit link between participation and better outcomes, but: a) the implementation of the laws has not been fully completed, and b) there is only scattered evidence on the impact of these participatory processes. The possibility of expanding the experiment to all municipalities should be discussed with the government and representatives of the Social Control Mechanism who also have an interest in demonstrating the impact of participatory processes. This is particularly so given that planning and monitoring mechanisms at the local level (such as Programas de Desarrollo Municipal – PDMs, and Planes Operativos Anuales – POAs) are not focused on outcomes and impacts. To date, Bolivia’s National Dialogue process has focused on compiling demands, with little attention given to achieving better results and outcomes.

Capacity building should be provided mainly in the areas of: a) results-based methodology in local planning tools, building on existing tools developed by the Fondo Nacional de Inversión Productiva y Social (FPS); b) participatory methodology for developing indicators and linking them to targets, personnel management and the budget process; and c) piloting user evaluation scorecards.

Conclusions

Through the process of decentralization, Bolivia has taken notable in-roads towards a results-based management approach, with particular attention given to municipal governance. The government has established a solid and progressive legal framework to facilitate this transition with the formalized contribution of civil society. Specifically, participatory approaches are being employed for the definition of key targets, the collection of data and the analysis of information. Through the process, both municipal governments and civil society are strengthening their capacities and skills to promote more effective public management.

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