

Conclusions of the Analysis

It is possible to imagine an idealized, evidence-based policy cycle in which development programs are constantly monitored to assess their impact on poverty, policy makers always make rational decisions after due consideration of sound technical advice, and policies are implemented faithfully through the budget and service-delivery processes. However, this is far from the reality in countries involved in implementing a poverty reduction strategy (PRS). Indeed, there is little evidence that developed countries operate in such a fashion either. In every country, policy emerges as the outcome of multiple forces that are difficult to describe, let alone control. Evidence-based policy making and institutional learning are key objectives of the PRS initiative, but they are notoriously difficult to institutionalize.

However, for all the complexity of political systems, there are always points in time when technical advice is sought and given, when governments and public agencies are held to account for their performance, and when citizens and interest groups have a chance to influence policy through advocacy and debate. At these points in time, information on poverty and the performance of development programs that has been gathered, analyzed, and disseminated through a PRS monitoring system can play an important role. A PRS monitoring system should be designed to link into these various windows and entry points in the policy process.

It may be useful to think of the PRS monitoring system as involving two levels of activities. One is an inner circle of activities that take place largely within the government administration and that encompasses the selection of indicators and monitoring priorities, the coordination of monitoring activities, analysis, evaluation, and the dissemination of outputs. The

other is an outer circle of activities that revolve around the connections between the PRS monitoring system and government processes and external stakeholders.

For planning purposes, it is useful to think of the inner circle of activities as a unified monitoring system. However, at the outset, many of the actors involved will not perceive the inner circle in this way. They are likely to resist the rationalization and coordination required to operate the system. In the fragmented public sphere that characterizes many PRS countries, it is rarely feasible to establish a new and complex system purely by decree, and attempts to do so have failed to increase cooperation and compliance.

The second circle of activities may be thought of as an open-textured network rather than as a system. This network links the PRS monitoring system to other systems throughout government and democratic institutions. To be effective, a PRS monitoring system must ensure that its outputs have been adapted to the needs of and are accessible to as many actors as possible both within and outside government.

Because the buy-in from stakeholders is critical, the process of the development of a PRS monitoring system may be as important as the institutional design. Effective systems are not static “ideal” structures, but rather they need to encourage and evolve with broader processes of change. The design process and the resulting system are likely to be very different in each country. Nonetheless, the following elements have been identified as important in the country studies:

- a process design that brings stakeholders together to discuss joint objectives and common problems and enables the design of the system to emerge as an organic solution to practical challenges
- a process design that builds on existing systems and activities to prevent duplication and competition with other systems, particularly the statistical system
- flexibility in the institutional design to allow the emerging system to evolve as changes occur in the political and institutional context and in the capacity of the various actors
- effective advocacy throughout the government administration carried out by system champions and supported by senior political leaders to emphasize the need for PRS monitoring
- a system built with the central objective of providing timely, relevant information to stakeholders at the various entry points of decision-making processes, including the parliamentary process

- coordination mechanisms that minimize the burden on participants and develop incentives for participation and compliance
- clear roles, responsibilities, and expectations, including ensuring that monitoring responsibilities are written into budgets, organizational charts, and job descriptions
- appropriate support by a secretariat for working groups and committees and well-targeted strategies for building monitoring and analytical capacity through the government administration
- effective information flows among actors, including a solid dissemination strategy that reflects an appreciation of the needs and abilities of various users
- opportunities for participation by civil society and donors to ensure that their needs will be met by the PRS monitoring system—including through the consideration of their inputs—and to develop their confidence in the system, leading, in turn, to their greater use of the outputs of the PRS monitoring system
- commitments by donors to maximize the incentives for coordination by aligning their reporting requirements to the PRS monitoring system and to support the PRS monitoring system as a whole rather than simply supporting discrete system activities in an uncoordinated fashion.