

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Afristat	Economic and Statistical Observatory for Sub-Saharan Africa
DNPD	National Development Planning Department
DNSI	National Statistics Department
ODHD	Observatory for Sustainable Human Development

History and Context

The government of Mali adopted its first national poverty reduction strategy (PRS) in 1998. The document provides a policy framework for guiding antipoverty measures in the country and links with sectoral policies and programs. The PRS process had to be revised when the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative was launched, a prerequisite of which was the development of a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper

This chapter is based on a background country report by Francesca Bastagli (2004b) and inputs by Virginie Briand and Quentin Wodon. The study was undertaken in the second half of 2004 and has been partially updated to reflect conditions in the summer of 2005. Substantial changes may have occurred that are not reflected in this chapter, and readers are encouraged to seek additional information if they wish to focus on the system of this particular country.

(PRSP). Consequently, an interim PRSP was proposed in July 2000, and a complete PRSP was finalized in May 2002.

The crossover between the PRS and the PRSP initially posed problems and caused confusion, particularly in the definition of the respective roles. Despite the overlap with the existing strategy, it is now generally agreed that the PRS falls within the PRSP, which therefore provides the overall framework.

Description of the PRS Monitoring System

Origins of the system

A monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system was developed by the PRSP coordination unit in the Ministry of Economy and Finance in March 2003. The document is a good attempt at taking stock of existing M&E activities and building them into a system. It identifies three components of government monitoring flows: the vertical dynamics (the flow of information between actors within a sector); the horizontal dynamics (information flows between sectoral administrations), and the role of civil society. Moreover, it distinguishes financial resource monitoring, program implementation monitoring, and impact monitoring.

Main institutional actors

The *PRSP coordination unit* is responsible for coordinating the PRS process, including M&E efforts and information dissemination. It is a “light” structure located in the Ministry of Economy and Finance. Its activities are supported by the technical secretariat in the National Planning Department. A reform is under way to increase the human capacities of the structure. A decree was expected by the end of 2005. The team was then to be constituted of a coordinator, an information and communications assistant, four senior analysts, and eight assistant analysts divided into four units: budget and macroeconomic policies, institutional development and the improvement of governance and participation, sustainable human development and reinforcement of basic social services, and basic infrastructure development and support for productive sectors.

The *policy committee* is also responsible for oversight and coordination of the process. It is presided over by the prime minister and includes nine ministers, seven civil society representatives, the Joint Committee of

Mali–Development Partners (presided over by the minister of economy and finance), and the steering committee (headed by the secretary general of the Ministry of Economy and Finance). Members of the steering committee include representatives of thematic groups (see below), the ministries, and the PRSP coordination unit. The committee represents the meeting point of all the various actors who receive and review the annual PRSP progress reports and helps to ensure the representation and participation of all stakeholders in the oversight and coordination process.

The *national technical committee*, headed by the secretary general of the Ministry of Economy and Finance, is organized into 13 PRSP *thematic groups* and nine *regional committees*. The thematic groups meet regularly, maintain attendance sheets, and help bring ministry officials and civil society together. They take stock of the progress of action plans for their respective thematic areas. They are supposed to prepare annual reports to help in drafting the annual PRSP progress reports. For various reasons, including lack of capacity, these reports have not been prepared annually. Since 2002, two annual reports have been prepared. The first one covers the year 2002, and the second one, which was delivered in August 2005, assesses the progress made between 2003 and 2004.

During the elaboration phase of the PRSP, 11 thematic groups were set up, and two were added at a later stage (mines, energy, and water, and gender and poverty). The gender and poverty thematic group grew out of an existing group on poverty, gender analysis, and monitoring and is now the thematic group on poverty, solidarity, and social protection. It is headed by the technical counselor of the Ministry of Social Development, Solidarity, and the Aged and prepared its first report on “Social Protection, Solidarity and Related Aspects” in July 2003.

According to the M&E plan, monitoring at the regional and local levels will be carried out by the nine regional committees of the national technical committee. However, due to human resource constraints in terms of both recruitment and qualifications, the regional committees are not yet operational.

The *National Development Planning Department* (DNPD) is housed in the Ministry of Planning and National Development and is responsible for publishing the annual PRSP progress report. The report is compiled from annual sectoral reports submitted by the thematic groups and dealing with progress in PRS implementation in each sector. More broadly, the DNPD is responsible for monitoring government projects, macro-economic development, and donor coordination.

The *National Statistics Department* (DNSI) is also housed within the Ministry of Planning and National Development. It is the central body responsible for data production. In terms of poverty monitoring, it collects data through surveys and centralizes the information collected by line ministries. It also provides technical support to the statistical departments of the ministries.

A new statistical law approved by the government and submitted to the National Assembly redefines and strengthens the responsibilities of the DNSI, particularly the decentralized responsibilities. The law does not, however, address the issue of increased autonomy, even though the possibility of increasing the independence of the DNSI (in terms of financial autonomy) has been discussed. The DNSI therefore continues to operate as a department in the Ministry of Planning and National Development. A workshop was held in November 2005 to validate the DNSI master plan, which will be used to plan statistics production for the next five years and provides a diagnosis of the difficulties faced by the national statistical system.

PRS assessment is primarily the responsibility of the newly reinstated *Observatory for Sustainable Human Development* (ODHD). Drawing on information produced by the DNSI and the planning and statistics units in the line ministries, the observatory is responsible for the analysis of PRSP impact indicators. Moreover, it publishes and disseminates annual reports on national human development and progress in achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

The ODHD was first established in 1996 and operated until 2000, when its activities were suspended during the elaboration of the PRSP. It was reconstituted in September 2003, and its statute is currently being modified. The ODHD suffers from a lack of clear legal status. Its continued activity is not ensured partly because of a lack of external funding. The ODHD is currently situated in the Ministry of Social Development, Solidarity, and the Aged.

Planning and statistics units in each line ministry prepare data on the execution of projects and report on the implementation of programs.

Other institutions involved in monitoring activities and producing information that feeds into the PRSP M&E process include the *National Budget Department*, which monitors the implementation of the medium-term expenditure framework and the program budget; the *National Public Debt Department*, which monitors HIPC funds; and the *Finance and Audit Office*, which monitors the anticorruption program.

Overall Status

Mali's first PRSP progress report was completed in April 2004. It provides insight into the performance of the PRS monitoring system, including specific comments on the institutional challenges encountered. It highlights that the agencies in charge of monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the PRS had experienced delays in carrying out their responsibilities and had not fully embraced their roles.

Moreover, the PRSP progress report notes the following problems in respect of methods, tools, and indicators: the lack of clear baselines and targets, an inadequate national information system, a weak culture of results-based management, a strong focus on budget monitoring at the program level and a consequent lack of attention to process and intermediate indicators, and a lack of reliability of various information sources.

According to the second PRSP progress report, several institutional M&E mechanisms (orientation groups, thematic groups, regional committees, technical secretariat) are still not operational or functional. The report underlines the lack of capacity among various national, sectoral, and regional structures in charge of the M&E process. Though some progress has been made, the second report acknowledges that the difficulties in methods, tools, and indicators recorded in the first progress report are still apparent.

The analysis of Mali's monitoring system highlights the need for greater clarity in the allocation of roles among the various institutions and for a clearer separation between PRS implementation and monitoring responsibilities to ensure that there is no conflict of interest or institutional confusion.

Key Topics

Leadership of the system

Overall, the government focus on poverty reduction is high; this is borne out by the first poverty reduction plan in 1998, as well as the 2002 PRS. There are, however, indications that ownership is, at times, undermined by donor intervention. The elaboration of a PRSP in the context of an existing poverty reduction strategy is viewed by some as an external imposition contributing to institutional confusion and weakened ownership.

Furthermore, the demand for information derived from monitoring is weak. The first PRSP progress report was only completed in 2004 and was

largely written by a consultant funded by the United Nations Development Program. This suggests that the process has not yet become institutionalized.

Coordination

The institutions with the key monitoring responsibilities are housed in three different ministries. The Ministry of Planning and National Development currently hosts the DNSI and the DNPd. The PRSP coordination unit operates out of the Ministry of Economy and Finance, even though its responsibilities (PRSP coordination and medium-term strategic planning) require close coordination with the DNPd and the DNSI. The ODHD is located in a third ministry, the Ministry of Social Development, Solidarity, and the Aged.

This institutional dispersion of actors is said to encourage participation by different bodies. This argument is used to justify the housing of the ODHD in the Ministry of Social Development, Solidarity, and the Aged, a ministry that is smaller and has weaker capacity than others. Supporters of this arrangement argue that the mandate of the ODHD covers topics (such as human and social development) addressed directly by the ministry. On the other hand, the location of the ODHD in the ministry implies it has weaker resources to draw upon and adds an additional actor to an already complex system.

The number of actors involved in the PRSP and M&E system is high, but this does not appear to be of particular concern to coordinators of the system; witness, for example, the recent increase in the number of thematic groups from 11 to 13.

Recent institutional developments also point toward institutional instability. The transformation of the Ministry of Planning and National Development and the transfer of the DNPd and the DNSI from one ministry to another, while not greatly affecting staff composition or day-to-day operations, does contribute to interinstitutional tension and confusion concerning the allocation of responsibilities.

There is uncertainty as to who is ultimately responsible for PRSP monitoring. While coordination formally lies with the PRSP coordination unit in the Ministry of Economy and Finance, staff at the Ministry of Planning and National Development argue that their ministry is the main body responsible for PRSP monitoring.

Participation

The poverty monitoring system is participatory and involves a number of institutions composed of different stakeholders. Participation is institutionalized through the thematic groups. The thematic group on poverty, solidarity, and social protection is particularly popular. It currently has approximately 30 participants per meeting and is divided into two working groups: poverty monitoring and analysis and social protection and solidarity monitoring (activities of the Ministry of Social Development, Solidarity, and the Aged).

There is a framework agreement between the state and civil society regarding the involvement of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in project implementation and monitoring. Although the framework is strong, direct NGO involvement in monitoring is fairly recent, and its role still unclear.

The frequency of and high attendance at thematic group meetings offer good examples of participation. However there are indications that these meetings could be reinforced by practices that ensure more representative participation and a greater focus on more substantial issues. Moreover, participation during the data collection and reporting phases could be strengthened by establishing a more detailed plan on NGO involvement in carrying out these activities and reporting information to central players.

The rural development sector participation process provides an illustration. Several groups worked on the preparation of the first rural development strategy component of the PRSP. Discussions within commissions and groups (agriculture, rural development, infrastructure, irrigation, fisheries, and cattle breeding) were followed by a plenary commission that approved the contributions of the subgroups. Various structures participated in the discussions: technical services of the departments, donors via the Joint Commission, and civil society (NGOs, the private sector, consumer groups, and artisans). Regions were integrated in the process as well, and all the structures participated at varying levels and degrees in the preparation of the report. There was a strong commitment to base the PRSP on a participatory process, which led to the creation of a consultation framework aimed at taking into account the different points of view. Nevertheless, the experience demonstrates the difficulties associated with such a process: (1) because of a lack of time to build ownership of the process, as well as insufficient technical knowledge, some civil society participants and

regional advisors considered their interactions with national authorities limited; (2) because of insufficient human resources, there was significant turnover within some working groups; and (3) the participation of department technicians was not sufficient to ensure a process of ownership at more senior levels and throughout the department.

Decentralization

In 1992, the Malian government launched a decentralization process that contributed to the reshaping of the administrative landscape of the country into 703 communes, 49 cercles, 8 regions, and 1 district (Bamako). The transfer of responsibilities and resources from the central government to local communities has been slow, however.

The design of the PRSP monitoring system reflects this trend of decentralization and assigns PRSP monitoring responsibilities to decentralized bodies, more specifically, the nine regional committees of the PRSP technical committee.

The M&E plan sets out the desirable information flow between the local and central levels. However, the plan is hampered by local capacity constraints, and the decentralization process is therefore not yet functional. Moreover, the nine projected regional committees have not yet been established.

In the process of extending the M&E system to local institutions, it is advisable to build on existing decentralized bodies (as opposed to adding additional ones to the system) and to undertake a realistic assessment of capacity, which could be strengthened through targeted training and capacity building.

The decentralization process is not recent, but most of the progress has occurred during the last 15 years. Today, the process faces two main challenges: the decentralization of financial resources and the reinforcement of local capacity to use and manage these resources. From the point of view of the M&E system, decentralization highlights a third difficulty: the insufficient level of information at the regional and local levels. To assess and monitor the impact of the PRS, information on poverty and other indicators is needed at all levels of government. This knowledge would reinforce the decentralization process through a better understanding by local authorities of their population in terms of basic needs. In other words, there is a need for spatially disaggregated data as part of a broader geographic information system. Yet, in Mali today, as in many other countries, while

different types of disaggregated data exist, they are scattered among departments, institutes, donors, NGOs, and so on. An integrated geographic information system would serve as a better monitoring and decision-making tool. Steps have been taken to contribute to such a geographic information system, including through the preparation of a poverty map for the country.

Indicators and data sources

There is no agreed single set of the indicators that need to be monitored, and this lack of clarity is exacerbated by the fact that donors sometimes put pressure for follow-up on additional indicators (see below).

Dissemination

The PRSP M&E plan assigns key responsibility for the dissemination of information to the PRSP coordination unit. This includes organizing the publication of monitoring documents and the dissemination of these documents to technical departments, the regions, development partners, and NGOs. Moreover, the coordination unit will design a strategy for information dissemination to the public (including radio, television, municipal meetings, and so on).

Despite ambitions in the M&E plan, reporting, dissemination and feedback remain weak. This is borne out by the low awareness about the annual PRSP progress report among key stakeholders in the monitoring system. Moreover, the limited degree of dissemination is out of proportion with the amount of data collection under way. Important survey information exists, but reporting is slow and incomplete. Monitoring activities undertaken regularly by line ministries and the DNSI yield relevant information on living conditions; yet, official reporting is delayed, and reports often do not build on existing information. Furthermore, notwithstanding the high quantity and frequency of meetings and workshops, information does not appear to be circulating.

The institutional framework does not facilitate the feedback of poverty monitoring information into policy-making and budgetary processes, which are not integrated. For example, the existing institutional rivalry and overlaps in responsibilities between the Ministry of Planning and National Development (responsible for the PRSP progress report) and the Ministry of Economy and Finance (housing the PRSP coordination unit

and responsible for budget formulation) negatively affect the feedback of PRSP monitoring information.

Donor alignment

The M&E plan notes the influence of donors over the monitoring system. Although the prioritization of indicator selection is recognized in principle, there is pressure for the monitoring of a large number of indicators in order to ensure the completeness of monitoring information and satisfy donor requests for information. In particular, the plan proposes that a rather long list of indicators be maintained because certain donors, including the European Union, tie their budget aid to the performance of selected indicators. The argument is that selecting many indicators will limit the risk of losing large amounts of aid if a specific indicator does not meet the agreed target.

Each donor has its own procedures and preoccupations. In the context of M&E, this means expectations are not the same, for example, in terms of the indicators to be monitored. The resulting pressure on the PRSP unit can be strong, and donor requirements may also affect the evaluation process since, in some sectors, each donor is in charge of its own projects. For instance, in the rural sector, there are more than 70 projects, which makes it difficult for the authorities to have an effective global rural development strategy. The transaction costs of dealing with multiple donors are also high for the authorities. Work to increase the effectiveness of aid has started through efforts aimed at harmonization through consultative meetings on budget support.

Finance and donor support

Donors fund a great deal of the data collection and analysis and influence the shape of institutions. The United Nations Development Program, in particular, plays an active role in PRS monitoring through its support for the ODHD. The World Bank has supported the 1994 *Enquête malienne de conjoncture économique et sociale* (Malian survey of economic and social conditions), the 2001 *Enquête malienne pour l'évaluation de la pauvreté* (Malian poverty assessment survey), and the 1-2-3 survey on employment, informal sector, and household consumption and poverty. In addition, a participatory poverty assessment is expected to be launched in 2006 by the DNSI in collaboration with the World Bank. The Economic and Statistical Observatory for Sub-Saharan Africa (Afristat) has supported DNSI

activities on request, working with the DNSI on the 1-2-3 survey, the rural census, and the development of methodologies for data analysis. It also initiated the Common Minimum Statistical Program, launched in 2000 in all member countries of Afristat, and aims to improve and harmonize the statistical information required for decision making and to reinforce regional integration.

The above efforts have been coordinated to some extent. Afristat, the World Bank, and the United Nations Development Program have collaborated on the design of a database to be housed in the DNSI. However, much remains to be done to improve donor coordination so as to ensure the development of a sustainable monitoring system.

Lessons

The PRSP M&E plan has made a serious attempt to systematize information on existing monitoring activities and to assign broad monitoring responsibilities clearly. In addition, there have been efforts to address institutional instability. For example, the new statute of the ODHD awards it permanent status and was formulated in reaction to the gaps in its operations (because of its temporary status) and its complete reliance on donor funding.

However, a number of weaknesses are evident in the system; these relate in part to the institutional framework. There are too many actors in a highly dispersed, loosely coordinated system, and it is not entirely clear where the overall leadership is located. Consequently, there is an increased risk of duplication and overlap in monitoring efforts. The reporting duties of the ODHD, for example, may cover indicators monitored by the thematic groups. Similar duplications are evident in the reporting of the line ministries and the respective thematic groups.

While the allocation of broad monitoring responsibilities is clear on paper, there are also a number of inter- and intrainstitutional tensions. The Ministry of Planning and National Development and the Ministry of Economy and Finance are both keen to maintain strong monitoring responsibilities. This type of institutional framework with a high number of actors, who are distributed among a variety of institutions, requires particularly strong information communication, dissemination, and feedback. Experience so far indicates that, despite the frequent meetings and workshops, existing information and reports are not disseminated widely to all actors. Also, on the budget side, the lack of coordination and interaction

among institutions means that the link between the budget and the PRSP remains weak, as it is in many other countries.

The large number of actors involved in poverty monitoring creates a need for strong coordination and oversight. As the main PRSP monitoring coordinator, the PRSP coordination unit needs to be reinforced. The PRSP coordination unit's mandate covers PRSP monitoring, but not all poverty monitoring activities; and, in this respect, the exact roles of the DNSI and the ODHD (as both PRSP and non-PRSP monitoring actors) need to be spelled out. Likewise, the responsibility of supervision over these two institutions requires clarification. Finally, the continued implementation and functioning of the system hinge on the identification of a clear, single set of indicators.