History and Context

Mauritania’s Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) was adopted in January 2001 following a participatory preparation process. The main operational approach of the poverty reduction strategy (PRS) comprises four-year action plans. These are supported by multi-year public investment plans, which are reviewed annually and are subject to detailed mid-term evaluations. There are also Programmes Regionaux de Lutte contre la Pauvreté (Regional Programs for Poverty Reduction, PRLPs), which are evidence of the operation of the PRS at the regional level and set priority actions for each region. The PRLPs are being implemented.

This chapter is based on a background country report by Christian Bonifas (2004) and inputs by Nicola Pontara and Hawa Wague-Cisse. 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.
gradually. Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of the PRLPs are carried out according to the same framework as the M&E for the national plans of action. The allocation and impact of priority public expenditures are reviewed in quarterly Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative reports, which are produced by the government and focus on the use of HIPC resources, and in public expenditure reviews, which are elaborated jointly by the World Bank and government authorities (issued in 2004, 2005, and ongoing). The government is currently preparing a new PRS.

Description of the Monitoring System

Origins of the system

Between 2001 and 2004, there was no single reference document or legal regulation defining the M&E system. Rather, the system consisted of a set of uncoordinated and dispersed activities. During this period, many different activities were carried out in many locations with no common outlook or central coordination concerning the objectives, responsibilities, and priority procedures. These included monitoring the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), preparation of the first PRLP, implementation of the components of the master plan for statistics, development of various M&E schemes among public agencies or important programs, and programs to modernize public administration. This recently changed through the adoption of the 2005 decree on the organization of the M&E system for the PRS (see below).

Institutional framework and main institutional actors

The M&E system constitutes a critical component of any PRS. Its main objectives include poverty monitoring, the monitoring of PRS implementation, and evaluation of the PRS.

In Mauritania, the system has separate institutional mechanisms for each of these objectives. The system consists of oversight functions and technical functions.

Oversight and discussion bodies

The interministerial committee for poverty reduction is chaired by the prime minister and includes members from all large ministries and agencies. Originally, the committee supervised the elaboration and validation of the PRSP
and was meant to play the same supervisory role in implementation. However, the committee did not meet regularly. Since 2005, the committee has been in charge of the overall coordination of the PRS process, the review of reports on PRS implementation, the approval of annual action plans and multiyear programs of implementation, and the review of MDG reports.

The dialogue committee is chaired by the minister of economic affairs and development. It includes senior executives in the main ministries and other agencies, together with representatives of municipalities and civil society. Originally, the committee was responsible for the technical preparation of the PRSP, as well as the promotion of a participatory approach. It has now been reconstituted as a forum for discussing results, organizing consultations, ensuring communications on progress, and strengthening the capacity of nongovernmental agents. In practice, until the 2005 decree, the committee only met twice a year to discuss the annual progress report.

The donors committee is composed of all development partners and the government. Its mandate is to review the implementation of the PRS and the progress toward the MDGs, evaluate the issues faced in the implementation of priority programs supported by donors, and ensure greater alignment and coordination among donor activities.

Technical bodies

The technical committee for poverty reduction is chaired by the adviser in charge of development policy in the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Development. It comprises a coordination secretariat, a representative of the technical ministries, and the presidents of the thematic groups. Originally, the committee was in charge of PRSP coordination and activities related to the monitoring of PRSP implementation. In practice, however, the committee mainly met to validate the annual progress report. In 2005, its mandates were broadened to include the preparation of a quarterly synthesis note on PRS implementation, a biannual report, and an annual report on the basis of inputs from ministries and government agencies.

The technical sector committees exist at the departmental level and include department executives (planning and monitoring and financial and statistical services) and resource persons, as well as representatives of technical departments, civil society, and development partners. The committees are required to centralize information, elaborate and monitor programs, and assist in decision making in the ministerial departments. There are currently 38 committees.
The *technical thematic groups* include representatives of the ministries, civil society, and development partners, as well as resource persons. There were originally 13 groups, but their number was reduced to five in 2005. The groups focus on cross-cutting issues, including the delivery of basic services (health care, education, water, sanitation, electricity, and telecommunications), the promotion of economic activity among microenterprises and cooperatives, growth and competitiveness, governance and capacity strengthening, and M&E.

The *public expenditure technical committee*, created in 2005, is responsible for the overall monitoring of public spending through the review of priority expenditures identified in the PRS.

In order to reinforce the participatory approach, the following mechanisms were introduced:

- **Interregional workshops** were held annually after the PRS initiative was launched. They were attended by elected regional leaders and representatives of nongovernmental organizations, civil society organizations, and development partners. Originally, representatives of the 12 regions would gather at these workshops at four sites. In 2005, the interregional workshops were replaced by workshops for each region.

- The *national poverty reduction conference* is presented in the PRSP as a general assembly for poverty reduction. The conferences are held at the same time as the publication of the year-end balance sheet. They bring together numerous resource persons and representatives of the government, Parliament, mayoral administrations, nongovernmental organizations, unions, and development partners.

- In addition to the submission of the PRSP to *Parliament* at the end of the preparation process, the deputies discuss the results of each four-year plan. However, no monitoring procedure is planned in between the preparation process and the discussions.

**Overall Status**

Originally, the system did not assign specific responsibilities to the various participating institutions. The lack of terms of reference and procedural modalities, in particular for the committees and working groups, weakened the management of the system. Given the collegial structure, this was compounded by the absence of a permanent secretariat. This limited the value of the products of the monitoring system. In particular, the structure within
which the working groups operated was largely ad hoc, and there was no systematic process to establish priority indicators, focal programs, data collection, or the format and content of reports. Attendance was limited, and the working groups were mostly isolated from monitoring bodies in the sectoral ministries. Finally, the resources of the coordination secretariat of the technical committee for poverty reduction were inadequate.

Nonetheless, even during the initial phase, there was some progress in rehabilitating the statistical system, though the capacity of the National Statistical Bureau remains limited, the flow of information among actors in statistics is still deficient, and the quality of data needs improvement (see below).

The recent alterations to the system reflect the limitations revealed earlier in the process. In particular, the rationalization of the working groups, the clear definition of the roles and responsibilities of various actors, and the significant increase in the capacity of the coordination secretariat (six permanent experts) are likely to remove some of the major constraints observed early on.

**Key Topics**

**Coordination**

The coordination secretariat facilitates collaboration among the main institutions, supervises the preparation of the annual report, and organizes dialogue within this framework. Initially, the system involved a multiplicity of actors with varying interests and capacities and did not assign specific responsibilities to institutions. Consequently, it was difficult for the coordination secretariat to distribute tasks and organize the flow of information. The recent simplification and rationalization of the system has already allowed for improvements in the process of coordination among actors.

**Capacity**

The system still suffers from limited capacity in terms of both level and competency in the collection of the information required for M&E of the PRSP. Specifically, there is a lack of analytical capacity; and low wages have led to the loss of skilled staff, which affects the sustainability of administrative activities, the implementation of work plans, and the efficiency of working groups.
Participation

Until the adoption of the PRSP, reviews of economic policy were predominantly confidential. The participatory approach that has been followed since the PRSP represents an important step in improving the governance of public policies, although it has not been extended to policy evaluation. The technical thematic groups have facilitated discussion on the main themes relating to the implementation of the PRSP and have contributed to an easier flow of information for monitoring the different domains of the national PRS.

The participation of civil society, development partners, and the private sector has recently been institutionalized. The inadequate capacity of civil society to participate effectively is also a constraint.

Indicators and data sources

Despite much technical assistance, as well as seminars and forums dealing with the selection of indicators, a number of problems still exist. These relate to the appropriateness of the selected indicators with respect to the objectives of the PRS, the integration of the MDGs, the adoption of clear definitions that conform with international norms, the selection of the most appropriate source in the case of multiple sources that may be used for calculations, the subsequent implementation of reference documentation on the indicators (metadata), and the capacity of the national statistical system to produce the necessary data based on reliability requirements and deadlines.

There is a clear need to review existing indicators, as well as establish a second group of indicators that serve as a basis for the monitoring of poverty and the implementation of priority programs under the PRSP. Simultaneously, there is a need for the harmonization, standardization, and documentation of indicators. These challenges have been recognized and are guiding the preparation of the new PRS, which will ensure that progress is made in these areas.

The statistical system, analysis, and evaluation

The efforts involved in the PRS have resulted in important progress in rehabilitating the statistical system. These improvements have been achieved in line with the master plan for statistics adopted in July 2000 by the inter-
ministerial committee on statistics. Statistical surveys carried out between 2000 and 2004 considerably enriched the demographic and socioeconomic database. Some sectoral statistical systems were set up, which decentralized the collection, processing, and analysis of questionnaires. For example, the health information system produced a health map and a hospital information system; economic statistics and an employment information system were established; and a social database was initiated in 1999.

Despite the improvements, a number of challenges remained. For instance, the master plan for statistics needed to be based on demand and reflect the priorities of the PRS; a review mechanism was needed; and the specialized commissions were running out of steam.

This led to the adoption of a new law on statistics and a new national strategy for the development of statistics, with support from the Economic and Statistical Observatory for Sub-Saharan Africa and Paris21. The new framework addresses some of the limitations of the previous system and anchors the activities of the statistical system within the data needs for PRS elaboration, implementation, and M&E.

Overall, the capacity for analysis remains relatively weak. However, Mauritania established the Centre Mauritanien d’Analyse de Politiques (Mauritanian Center for Policy Analysis), a research center that focuses on key topics raised in PRS design and implementation. This has filled some of the gaps, although analytical services in the line ministries remain weak, and there is limited demand by decision makers.

Although there have been 11 evaluations of sector strategies, these have not been systematic. Furthermore, the commitments laid out in the PRS have not materialized. For instance, the “exhaustive mid-term evaluation” of the PRS as a whole, which was scheduled for 2003, has not taken place. The weaknesses of the evaluation component relate primarily to the fact that there are no legal requirements for evaluation and no autonomous institution has been assigned this responsibility. As a result, evaluations are often led by the institutions that implement them. However, the preparation of the new PRS involves planning for an evaluation of the first PRS that should address some of these weaknesses.

Products

Annual thematic reports, as well as an annual implementation report on the M&E of the PRSP, have been produced. These reports have provided the opportunity for discussion during interregional workshops and national
conferences and contribute, at least formally, to the participatory approach considered for the PRSP.

There have been quarterly synthesis reports on actions taken through HIPC resources. These reports are produced by the technical committee in charge of the programming and monitoring of actions financed through HIPC resources, which is chaired by the minister of finance. The committee reviews budget implementation data for each action and feed back on outstanding issues (absorption capacity and the distribution of spending across sectors). Other current initiatives include a first tracking survey in the health sector, a public expenditure analysis, and the development of functional classifications of expenditures.

There are medium-term expenditure frameworks (MTEFs) in eight sectors (rural development, transport infrastructure, health, education, energy, water and sanitation, fisheries, and urban sectors) that specify the planning of priority actions. The preparation of these provides the opportunity to review sector policies and identify performance indicators for every program. The validity of the sectoral MTEF exercise has been partially undermined, however, because of the absence of a global MTEF setting the overall budget envelope. To remedy this situation, a first global MTEF was developed in 2003 (for 2004–6) and used for the preparation of the 2004 budget law. Despite significant progress, problems persist in the system; for instance, the development of the MTEF for 2005–7 has been delayed, and there has been a lack of full integration with the budget process.

**Dissemination**

There are periodic publications of administrative statistics on education and health. The national statistical system has published a compact disc of all surveys, plus 108 studies and reports conducted on poverty between 1980 and 2000. There are several Web sites, and a substantial amount of data is now available on line.

Despite this, information dissemination channels are not well organized and do not encourage the establishment of documentation centers that are regularly supplied with new products. There are indications of a need for a database that might serve as a reference for all national multisectoral monitoring processes (the PRSP, MDG reports, the Human Development Report) and regional monitoring (the PRLPs).
Lessons

One of the main lessons of the Mauritanian experience is the need for well-defined roles and responsibilities among the various actors in the system and a unified, regulated framework. Until these are established, activities will remain scattered or focused only on the preparation of the annual reports. The experience also underlines the importance of institutional coordination and of a strategy for the dissemination of M&E information (the reporting system, information access among stakeholders, the organization of data exchanges, and so on). In addition, the experience also underlines the need to improve indicators for monitoring the PRS and MDGs, as well as adjustments in the statistical information system so as to meet the demand for information.

The consolidation of the M&E system will face challenges in the future, including the implementation of a national strategy for the development of statistics that effectively plans and coordinates the activities of various agencies and focuses on demand, strengthened analytical capacity, more effective dissemination of information with formats adapted to the needs of various actors, as well as the strengthening of the capacities of civil society, greater use of monitoring information in the design of public actions, and greater alignment of planning tools (such as the MTEF) with the budget process.

More generally, the experience shows that a PRS monitoring system should be based on the reinforcement and rationalization of existing structures and not the creation of new ones. It should integrate and simplify existing monitoring systems. In the same spirit of rationalization, the system should coordinate assistance from development partners.