

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

DGEPP	Directorate General of Evaluation of Development Programs
NSO	National Statistics Office

History and Context

Niger's first national poverty reduction plan was adopted in 1998. Subsequently, in January 2002, the country launched its poverty reduction strategy (PRS) and the associated Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). The national plan and the strategy led to an increased focus on the design of a poverty monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system. During the elaboration phase of the PRS and following PRS implementation, a number of initiatives, workshops, documents, and studies were prepared with the goal of establishing a system to track progress in PRS implementation and assess the impact of policies on poverty and living conditions.

This chapter is based on a background country report by Francesca Bastagli (2004a) and inputs by Saloua Sehili 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.

Unfortunately, the actual monitoring of progress toward improvements in indicators has been weakened by the absence of good survey data and by weak capacity in processing the existing information base.

Description of the PRS Monitoring System

Origins of the system

As part of PRS preparations, an initial diagnosis of existing M&E capacity was undertaken in 2001. This involved examination of the strengths and weaknesses of monitoring activities at the planning, sectoral ministry, regional, and project levels. The PRS noted a variety of data sources, but underlined that duplication, lack of coordination, and lack of harmonization among methodologies limit the comparability of different sources. While the PRS makes reference to data collection, analysis, and the selection of indicators, it contains few details on institutional arrangements and policy feedback. It concluded that there was a need to develop a harmonized system for M&E of government programs, strengthen technical skills at all levels, strengthen existing training programs to support M&E and ensure the sustainability of interventions and the adequacy of content, strengthen the M&E culture, and build a dialogue with donors so as to harmonize initiatives in M&E.

Despite the limited emphasis on the structure of the system, the PRS helped focus attention, foster debate, and encourage the initiation of a number of studies related to poverty monitoring. Moreover, it called for the establishment of a poverty reduction information system to gather data from existing sources. Although the PRSP secretariat (see below) produced an M&E strategy, this is short on details regarding the roles of the various actors in the system. The first PRSP progress report (July 2003) criticizes the system for its continuing lack of coordination and the overlap with other systems. Although there has been subsequent development, there is still no comprehensive plan.

Main institutional actors

The *PRSP permanent secretariat* was created during the formulation of the PRS. It is located in the cabinet of the prime minister and therefore exercises both a political and strategic role. The unit is responsible for the overall coordination of the implementation and M&E of the PRS. It consists of

nine people; one staff member is responsible for PRS M&E, and the others coordinate PRS implementation in various sectors.

The permanent secretariat publishes the annual PRSP progress report, which consolidates information from annual sectoral reports submitted by individual ministries. Although ministries currently send their reports directly to the permanent secretariat, it is likely that, in future, they will be sent to the Directorate General of Evaluation of Development Programs (DGEPP; see below) in the Ministry of Finance and channeled from there to the permanent secretariat.

Niger's new statistical law, approved in April 2004, created the *National Statistics Office* (NSO) out of the old Direction de la Statistique et des Comptes Nationaux (Directorate of Statistics and National Accounts) situated in the Ministry of Finance. The NSO has recently been taken out of the ministry and made fully autonomous. The main rationale behind the increased autonomy is the NSO's need for greater financial and human resources. Access to such resources was restricted under the previous structure due to the statistics directorate's dependence on the budget of the Ministry of Finance and the fact that recruitment procedures limited hiring.

Although the NSO has been formally created, its actual operation in accordance with the new law awaits the drafting and implementation of two decrees. Until then, the NSO will continue to function as the statistics directorate did. In reality, the NSO is therefore still under development, but its managers have been appointed, which should help in the preparation of a statistics strategy. Both the World Bank and the European Union have provided support to the NSO.

The *poverty observatory* will be a permanent structure situated within the NSO. Its regulations are still being drafted, and it has therefore not yet been officially established. There is agreement that it should have a limited structure, with few permanent staff, and that experts should be brought in for particular tasks. The observatory will be the principal analytical body of the system. It will define data needs, develop surveys, and supervise NSO poverty-related activities. Moreover, it will publish the annual Millennium Development Goal report and the Human Development Report.

The *national statistical council* will oversee the entire statistical system and provide a meeting point for all actors in the monitoring system. Its members will include all stakeholders, including representation of civil society. The minister of finance will be in charge, and the position of vice chair will be held by a member of the PRSP secretariat. The council's main

responsibility will be to provide broad guidance to and oversight of NSO activities. It will convene once or twice a year. Additional details on its operations have not yet been determined.

The newly established *Directorate General of Evaluation of Development Programs* in the Ministry of Finance is responsible for the M&E of all government programs and projects. Its responsibilities include the provision of technical support for M&E work in line ministries and the maintenance of a database containing monitoring information of all government programs and projects.

The *directorates of studies and planning* in each line ministry monitors indicators in the respective sector, compiles administrative data collected at the local level, and publishes the annual report on ministry activities. These reports are sent to the NSO and the DGEPP. Moreover, the directorates prepare annual sectoral reports that are submitted to the PRSP secretariat for the annual PRSP progress report. The directorates also complete reports at the request of institutions and donors.

Overall Status

The institutional arrangements of the system represent a relatively compact architecture, particularly in comparison to the complex systems of other countries. The system is two tier, meaning that poverty monitoring (outcomes and impacts) and PRS monitoring (inputs and outputs) are distinct activities and that they feed into a single monitoring system. As in many other countries, there is evidence that coordination functions have been assigned to several bodies. While responsibility for the coordination of PRS monitoring resides with the PRSP secretariat, the relationship of this function and the coordination of poverty monitoring efforts allocated to the poverty observatory and to the national statistical council are not entirely clear.

In addition, there is potential for reporting responsibilities to become burdensome. Monitoring directorates in line ministries may be overwhelmed in that they are currently reporting to the DGEPP in the Ministry of Finance, the NSO, and the PRSP secretariat and have separate obligations to donors and other international agencies requesting information. As a result, better role definition is required to address the risks of overlap and overburdening in responsibilities, as well as to mitigate against possible tensions and rivalries.

On the other hand, substantial progress has been made in data collection. PRSP progress reports have repeatedly stressed weaknesses in household surveys, but progress has been achieved recently. A survey on employment and living conditions was completed in Niamey in 2004. A new national survey was completed in the summer of 2005, with modules on employment, education, health, income sources, household consumption, agriculture, microcredit, the perceptions and priorities of the poor, and the evaluation of projects and investments carried out in communities. The government has budgeted funds for a follow-up budget and consumption surveys, which will be useful in revising the national account and in measuring inflation, among other tasks. A general census of agriculture and livestock (RGAC 2004/5) is under way and will allow for a better understanding and modernization of the agropastoral sector. Finally, the United Nations Development Program is funding work to assess basic needs requirements in the country, and a new Demographic and Health Survey (EDSN/MICS III) is being implemented to enhance the monitoring of progress particularly toward the MDGs.

Progress has also been achieved in terms of the information base for the implementation and revision of the PRS. For example, the authorities have funded an independent technical and financial audit of the special program of the president of the country. This audit will be complemented by a qualitative analysis of the factors that enable households to emerge from poverty that is to be launched, with Bank support, by the PRSP secretariat. In addition, the coordination unit for the rural development strategy has requested a separate study on ways to maximize the impact of the rural investments funded by the president's program. Together, these initiatives should provide a stronger information base for revising the PRS early in 2006, but close follow-up will be needed to avoid delays and ensure that all these initiatives are part of a coherent strategy to establish more effective M&E.

Key Topics

Leadership of the system

Government commitment to the creation of a PRS monitoring system is high as evidenced by the number of documents and workshops being issued relating to monitoring. It is difficult to determine the extent to which there

is internal demand for information, however. While, according to the government, there is a demand for monitoring information during the policy process, this demand is not being met. This is a result of resource constraints. The lack of resources is shaping the degree of ownership of the poverty monitoring process. The historical reliance on donors and other external funding is considered to have weakened country initiative and ownership.

Capacity

Delays in data production and analysis, as well as poor data administration (see below), are being attributed to understaffing. At the DGEPP, for example, one individual is responsible for the administration of the entire database. The responsibilities of this individual include data insertion and analysis on the basis of requests made by other DGEPP staff. The DGEPP M&E plan itself observes that such situations increase the risk of mistakes and limit the analysis of data.

Participation

While communication and coordination among national stakeholders and international agencies could be improved, Niger presents an interesting case because of the Nigerien Network of Monitoring and Evaluation (see ReNSE, at <http://www.pnud.ne/reanse/>). In 1999, a staff member of the United Nations Children's Fund launched the network, an informal group of M&E professionals. It provides a lively, ongoing forum for discussion and information dissemination on issues of M&E.

During the formulation phase of the PRS, participation was guaranteed through the thematic groups. Although they no longer meet regularly and have not been assigned specific monitoring responsibilities, the groups are consulted for comments on the annual PRSP progress report and were to be reconstituted for the PRS review in 2005.

Various participatory workshops have been held, such as an April 2003 workshop organized by the Central Office of the Census on priority themes and indicators to be elaborated. Furthermore, a workshop conducted in June 2003 made progress in the selection of indicators (and there is now a consensus on about 60 core indicators).

Although the national statistical council will be the main consultative body, it has not yet been established. The details of participation still require

clarification, particularly regarding the representation of all stakeholders. While plans for participation are in place, they have not yet been implemented.

Decentralization

A slow process of general decentralization is underway, and this process is difficult to advance due to low capacity at the local level. Currently, line ministries report administrative data to the central offices. However, there are capacity constraints in the ministry regional offices. Furthermore, although regional services of the NSO have been planned, they have not yet been established.

Indicators and data sources

There have been some lags in the dissemination of monitoring results as evidenced by the fact that the 2001 census has still not been made entirely public. The delays in data dissemination are being exacerbated by capacity and financial resource constraints. Moreover, the awareness of the various sources of data across government is weak. Nonetheless, the main constraint in Niger has been the shortage of data rather than the obstacles in processing data. A workshop conducted in June 2003 made some progress in the selection of indicators. The PRSP synthesis document lists 42 indicators and, for each, the frequency of production, the level of disaggregation, the source, and the institution responsible; there has been a subsequent agreement on monitoring approximately 60 core indicators. With the implementation in 2005 of the first comprehensive national household income and expenditure survey, many of the outcomes will now be easier to monitor.

It is also worth noting that there is consensus on the importance of analyzing the spatial dimensions of poverty in Niger (the construction of a poverty map) and assessing the feasibility of creating a geographically disaggregated information system to inform budget allocations at the local level and to help local authorities during the process of decentralization. This geographic information system could integrate existing sources of data (the 2001 census, the school map at the Ministry of Education, the national health information system at the Ministry of Health, the geographic information system at the Ministry of Hydraulics) into a more coherent, flexible, and unique overall system. If such a system were to be created, much of the work involved would consist in ensuring consistency in data formats

and geographic code identification and in building a user-friendly methodology for accessing these data. Support will need to be provided to the country in implementing this geographic information system.

Separately, establishing a code in the budget nomenclature that will facilitate the monitoring of poverty-related expenditures is also a priority. In this nomenclature, the categories of spending deemed to be directly related to poverty reduction are likely to be different from the list of priority expenditures to be protected under the country's budget regulation and cash management process, as some of these expenditures (for example, part of the wages to be paid to public servants) are not necessarily related to poverty-related activities, and some poverty-related activities, while important, may not need to be protected to the same extent as other types of spending in the short run. Overall, better identification and classification of those expenditures considered directly linked to the fight against poverty will also help strengthen the coherence between budget laws and the objectives and targets of the poverty reduction strategy.

Products

Besides the annual PRSP progress report, poverty monitoring outputs include the Millennium Development Goals Report and the Human Development Report currently drafted by academic researchers and the United Nations Development Program. The latter two reports will be prepared by the poverty observatory once it becomes operational.

Dissemination

Several concrete steps have been taken to encourage information feedback into the policy process. These include the strategic coordination and timeliness of reporting and the dissemination of information, such as, the publication of the annual PRSP progress report to influence the budget. Yet, in reality, there is no evidence that this has been provided for. Information dissemination has also been achieved through workshops, such as the April 2003 workshop held in Niamey on 2001 census data.

Finance and donor support

Because of a shortage of national resources, the role of donors in shaping the M&E system is significant. In terms of data collection, a number of

individual surveys and databases, as well as the analysis of information, emerge from and are financed by donor projects. Survey and data analyses carried out by the NSO and other government and academic bodies rely heavily on external funding. Even administrative or routine data systems that operate more independently rely on donor funding, and the line ministries operating such systems address specific data inquiries by external agencies.

Donors have also contributed to the institutional profile of the poverty monitoring system. The establishment of a poverty observatory was strongly backed and funded by the European Union and the United Nations Development Program. However, more coordination among donors would result in reducing the duplication of effort and the overburdening of the NSO and line ministries.

Lessons

As in many other countries, one of the key weaknesses of the M&E system in Niger is the lack of a comprehensive, integrated monitoring plan. The introduction of a poverty observatory and the reporting flows that have been created between the directorates of studies and planning in the ministries and the PRSP secretariat are examples of efforts to strengthen monitoring activities. However, because Niger is such a poor country, there is often a lack of capacity for systematic M&E.

There is an agreed list of indicators to be followed by the PRSP, and participation has been implemented and encouraged throughout the PRSP process. There have also been gains in data collection; the first national income and expenditure survey in 10 years was implemented in 2005.

However, stronger coordination and oversight functions are required. While the location of the PRSP secretariat in the Office of the Prime Minister and the clear allocation of PRSP coordination responsibilities to this unit ensure continuity and political weight, the responsibilities in coordination to be carried out by other institutions are less clear, as illustrated, for example, by the incompatibility within the geographic information systems and databases. The creation of a new structure for the NSO, which will include a poverty observatory, is a sign that progress should be achieved in the M&E system in coming years.