MONITORING SOCIAL POLICY OUTCOMES IN JAMAICA:
DEMOCRATIC EVALUATION AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

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Abstract: This paper documents a continuing initiative to monitor and improve social policy in Jamaica. Developed as a key component of the Jamaica Social Policy Evaluation (JASPEV) process, the initiative seeks to link technical innovation in the collection and flow of information to a process of institutional change and inclusiveness at different levels of governance. Under JASPEV, the Jamaican Cabinet Office is promoting a system of locally-generated but nationally-comparable benchmark indicators designed to encourage institutional change in the relationship between citizens, the political directorate and technocrats that will improve social policy design and delivery. This involves citizens in sampled communities as primary gatherers of outcome and impact monitoring data on a chosen theme, the first theme chosen being “youth inclusion”. This institutional challenge is considerable. The politicised nature of institutions in Jamaica, the role of hierarchy and patronage and the prevalence of “turfism” within and between political parties is widely recognised. The challenge faced should not be understated, yet the set-up of JASPEV is beginning to create political space for institutional change and greater inclusiveness, through its emphasis on the interaction of nodes of local and national evidence-based policy discussions.

Keywords: social policy, social monitoring, institutional change, Jamaica

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1. Introduction

This paper documents the methodology presently being developed to monitor and improve social policy in Jamaica. Designed as a key component of the Jamaica Social Policy Evaluation (JASPEV) process, the methodology seeks to embed a combination of methods within a participatory process of institutional change at different levels of governance.

Post-independence social policy in Jamaica produced strong social outcomes, particularly in health status and educational attainment. In more recent times there is, however, an increasing concern as to whether social policy delivery has remained effective in a present-day context of scarce public resources. There is also a perception within and beyond government that, with high levels of unemployment, violence and social exclusion, there is an urgent need for “joined-up” social policy that goes beyond narrow and separated concerns with social sectors. The JASPEV process was designed to address a range of specific concerns about the management and implementation of social policy. Primary among these were: a perceived lack of ways to achieve policy coherence; a lack of mechanisms for establishing and updating strategic priorities; the continued reduction in public resources for social policy; and the perceived lack of a culture of evaluation and responsiveness to users in the delivery of public services.

The two key outputs of the JASPEV process in its first phase were a Social Policy Framework entitled Jamaica 2015 (Government of Jamaica, 2002) and a five year Action Plan (2002-2007). Taken together these documents seek to provide: a vision for the kind of society Jamaica aspires to being and achieving; a set of key policy goals which sum up a range of concrete outcomes or results representing progress towards realisation of the vision; a set of goals and objectives for changes in institutional systems and relationships supporting achievement of the policy goals; a framework for assessing progress over time towards the goals; and an Action Plan outlining a five-year programme of measures to strengthen the design and implementation of social policy, to drive progress towards the outcome and process goals outlined. The key goals identified in the document Jamaica 2015 are grouped into outcome and process goals, each with accompanying frameworks of benchmark indicators. The relevant parts of the document (in summary form) are listed in Annex 1. The first phase of JASPEV involved a year long process of analysis, consultation, reflection and design. It also built a set of relationships - within communities and local government, the administration, the political

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1 For more information on JASPEV see http://www.jaspev.org/
directorate, civil society and the research community – which provided the platform for taking forward the implementation phase.

The JASPEV process is part of a broader emerging paradigm of “democratising” research, based on the proposition that broad ownership of the generation and analysis of evidence will lead to more effective and sustainable policy process. The process is influenced by methodological traditions with contrasting ideological roots but complementary objectives and methods: New Public Management approaches, emphasising outcome-based diagnosis and demand-led institutional transformation; and Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation, with its roots in project and community development. Under JASPEV, the Jamaican Cabinet Office is promoting a system of locally-generated but nationally-comparable benchmark indicators designed to encourage mutual learning and institutional change.

2. Policy, power and institutional change: The inheritance

Monitoring at national and local levels can be a key tool for ensuring progression towards fulfilling social policy goals. In some contexts this function can be played by third parties, such as public sector auditing bodies, yet in many countries independent public sector watchdogs do not exist and have little chance of being established and accepted by civil society in the short term. In these cases NGOs can play a very effective monitoring and social auditing role (Zadek et al, 1997) by developing a consensus on what should be monitored and establishing a process for placing information in the public domain. Methods have been designed and adapted for this purpose, with report cards (Gopakumar and Balakrishnan, nd) a good example of a tool used successfully to audit service providers.

An alternative to third party monitoring, however, is for community actors themselves to benchmark outcomes and then work backwards to policy and other outputs (e.g. from a identifying a more peaceful community as an outcome to identifying frequency of public telephone vandalism as an outcome indicator and from there designing social policy and other interventions). Importantly, this process prompts local diagnosis and action, often involving new forms of institutional alignment and forcing a higher level of accountability amongst participating agencies or “duty bearers”. It also develops a revisable model of effects that permits longer term outcomes to be tracked in the shorter run.
Local government initiatives in the USA (the “Oregon Shines” programme\(^2\)) and Australia (Tasmania Together\(^3\)) have demonstrated this powerful process in which (locally-owned) information generation drives institutional change. The Oregon initiative reflects a tradition of thinking about institutional learning and change that can be traced through management models. It builds on familiar elements of “New Public Management” approaches, including an emphasis on improving coordination, ‘joined-up’ government, innovative partnerships between the public, private and voluntary sectors, flexibility and orientation to outcomes in the management of public policy. The Oregon Model adds to this a strong emphasis on local-level engagement in the definition of benchmarks and the organisation of appropriate local level action to tackle identified issues and problems.

A quite separate but latterly converging stream of thinking about change is that rooted in participatory development. Francis (1999) notes the convergence of ideological strands of thinking on participation and highlights the the radical tradition of participation in Latin America with its emphasis on empowering process (Freire, 1972, Fals Borda, 1988) and the Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) tradition emerging from agricultural research in the South (Chambers, 1994). Francis makes the link between these traditions and the more functional management and organisational thinking of the US, with its emphasis on improving efficiency and outcomes.

Participatory monitoring and evaluation challenges the instrumental use of quantitative input-output indicators to measure project progress. Participatory M&E reflects the principles of participatory development by stressing the process of assessment, reflection and action that overrides concerns of extractive data collection by project “outsiders” (see Crawford this volume; Estrella et al, 2000; Guijt and Gaventa, 1998). This type of contrast should not, of course, be overstated, as in practice oppression can take many forms.\(^4\)

It is an emphasis on process, however, that brings the institutional-learning approach of New Public Management together with participatory research’s interpretation of reflection and action. The convergence provides new opportunities to democratise the process of public policy management through institutional change. Institutional change occurs when parties in a market or non-market relationship perceive that in order to renegotiate their contract they need to

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\(^2\) The experience with the Oregon Progress Board and the ‘Oregon Shines’ programme in the USA is documented in various reports on a regularly updated website: Progress.Board@state.or.us

\(^3\) For further information see http://www.tasmaniatogether.tas.gov.au/

\(^4\) The wrong form of “participation” as often practiced by some international organizations can appear to be a kind of “brain liposuction” performed on long-suffering intellectuals in the South.
restructure a higher set of rules or violate some norm of behavior (North, 1993). The incentives that influence those contractual decisions can be either price-based or norm-based. Fundamental changes in relative prices are an important source of institutional change in a market-based economy because of their impact on the economic incentives that shape contracts (North, op cit, 84). Critical here is that sociocultural norms evolve and change over time and are often transmitted from generation to generation or from administration to administration. So, while formal rules can be changed or introduced in a short period of time, informal constraints, embodied in tradition and social norms change slowly and are relatively impervious to formal rule changes.

When reflecting on historical or contemporary contexts when “good” institutional change happened, we can see that Foucault’s (1980) concept of “positive” power in the construction of new subjective truths provides the key to these considerations. The changes in norm-based discourse that gave rise to institutional change in the shape of the abolition of slavery in the U.S., for example, emerged not from utilitarian price-based rationality (slavery remained profitable) but from a process of norm-based deliberation in the context of a functioning electoral system. The concept of “deliberative democracy”, or decision making by free and equal citizens, can be traced from Pericles to Habermas (Elster, 1998), and is evident in Sen’s (1999) plea for democratic freedom as a critical component of individual capabilities. In the context of policy monitoring “good” institutional change requires changes in incentives and sanctions operating on the actors involved, at the same time that “deliberative spaces” are created for the voices of those previously excluded from the policy process. This concept moves us towards what Evans (2004, 32) describes as an emerging “theory of institutional change” that informs much of the case study discussion below.

An institutional perspective on the sanctions and incentives governing policy change demands an operational focus on enhancing transparency of political decision-making and accountability for the decisions made. The World Bank, for instance, has sharpened its operational focus on governance and social accountability in the wake of its three-pillared World Development Report (WDR) 2000/1 strategy. The “Accountability Triangle” (Figure 1) presented in the WDR 2004 Making Services Work for the Poor (World Bank, 2003) provides a clear analytical framework for identifying operational entry points to generating transparency and accountability in practice.
The “short route” to accountability (Route A) brings citizens and providers together through participatory mechanisms that include health sector committees, community-based school management and participation in the delivery of social protection instruments, such as social funds. Here much good work is being done by the World Bank with country partners on identifying mechanisms for strengthening social accountability in service delivery.

This short route can bring “quick wins” but can also be captured or compromised relatively easily in the absence of interventions that tackle the “longer route” to accountability through voice in policy making and the compact between policymakers and service providers. We know that one of the most powerful ways of increasing voice and accountability in policy making is information (World Bank, 2003, 7). Here, experiences with national and local public policy monitoring provide a growing body of knowledge on ways to transform the institutional structures that govern the policy process. They involve creating new channels of information and spaces to deliberate on that information at the macro, meso and micro level, thus encouraging institutional realignments of policymakers, bureaucrats and citizens. We now turn to consider one innovative example of this approach being developed and implemented for social policy monitoring in Jamaica.
3. Monitoring social policy in Jamaica

With the above discussion in mind, the methodological challenge for those seeking to improve social policy outcomes in Jamaica is three-fold (Holland et al, 2005):

- To establish more effective institutional links between the providers and users of policy-relevant information so that the information generated is timely and relevant resulting in powerful, evidence-based policy analysis;
- To combine more effectively data sources and methods for social policy analysis allied to an increased appreciation of the comparative advantages of a different methods; and
- To embed policy research into a continuing process of institutional transformation and empowerment at different levels of governance, in a way that makes the policy process demand-led by local society as well as supply-driven by technocratic expertise.

Recognising these challenges, the JASPEV “taskforce” developed an organisational arrangement, allied to a social policy information system, which aims to stimulate the institutional connections necessary for improved social policy design, delivery and outcomes. The driving force behind the system is the process of benchmarking indicators of change at the local level (see Figure 1). Community members across different localities identify their own benchmarks and teams of volunteers measure and monitor progress against these benchmarks and in comparison with other localities.
In order for the monitoring instrument to be useful for analysis and action it needs to possess three types of measures: diagnostic, process and outcome. Diagnostic measures refer primarily to those questions which elicit information that provide a context for understanding the existing reality while driving debate, discussion and diagnosis about the outcome. Table 1 provides an example of an indicator of youth inclusion, employment status, which identifies and codes the factors that prevent youth in a community from taking a job.

Table 1. Example of a diagnostic measure of “Youth Inclusion”

What would be the main reason preventing you from taking a job if one was available now?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nothing (would accept)</th>
<th>Awaiting a promised job</th>
<th>Pregnancy</th>
<th>Amount of Pay</th>
<th>Have to stay with relative/children</th>
<th>Home duties</th>
<th>Do not need a job</th>
<th>Illness</th>
<th>Other (specify)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Process measures refer primarily to those questions which help local people to take immediate action to advance progress towards the desired (benchmarked) outcomes. These measures tend to be intermediate and assist the community in developing a plan of action. Such measures reveal aspects of attitudes, perceptions, behaviours, relationships and resources, which if reordered, could lead to significant progress towards the outcome. At best they are measures that reflect a mutually agreed “theory of change” that will drive local action and reorder how people relate and interact with each other with a view to achieving outcomes. Table 2 illustrates the range of measures that out-of-work youth might take to get a job.

Table 2. Example of a process measure of “Youth Inclusion”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Applied in writing</th>
<th>Applied in person</th>
<th>Registered at an employment agency</th>
<th>Advertised on radio or newspaper</th>
<th>Asked friends</th>
<th>Tried to get a loan</th>
<th>Other (specify)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Outcome measures, as illustrated in Table 3, arise from asking questions about what will indicate to the local community progress towards achieving the stated outcomes. These measures tend to be more long term and are relatively crude in measuring the outcome. If measurement of the outcomes shows that progress is not being made, then the assumptions, diagnosis, theory of change and identified actions will have to be revisited.

Table 3. Example of an outcome measure of “Youth Inclusion”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Working</th>
<th>Has Job but on leave</th>
<th>Looking for work</th>
<th>At home</th>
<th>Trying to start a business</th>
<th>In a formal or informal training programme</th>
<th>At school full-time</th>
<th>Other (specify)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
It is generally felt that whereas outcome measures are not likely to see any change in the short term, it is best to use process measures in the interim and check outcome measures at an appropriate time when that data is more likely to be available. For example, level of educational attainment data is not likely to be generated until the end of an academic year, however, the desire for further studies, or level of enrollment in education and training programmes, could be intermediate proxies of the outcome that could register change.

The data generated by participants fit different purposes. A core of indicators need to be quantifiable and (for benchmarking purposes) comparable across time and locations. A further set of indicators can be more contextual and more qualitative, allowing research participants and the consultative network to generate their own “local” narratives, analysis and action for change. This mix is necessary because of the intent to bring together in one discussion for policy purposes a combination of tacit local knowledge, and centrally available expert knowledge.

The institutional context for this data generation and diagnostic work is key to the success, or failure, of this model. Assessment of outcomes and process against a particular social policy theme (or prototype) is shared with a group of technical specialists (chosen on the basis of their expertise and their institutional capacity as change agents) in that thematic area and with a group of three policy makers (cross-party MPs and junior ministers) – a policy “troika” - whose Departments link to that theme. This triangular institutional set-up of three nodes – a policy node, a technical or strategic node, and an operational or local node - then forms the basis for a continuing loop of assessment, diagnosis, design and delivery of social policy. In this arrangement the local actors are not merely observer-participants with voice, but (in place of “exit” which they mostly do not have) they are granted a degree of leverage: they can become a load-bearing element in the process of evidence-based policy adjustment. In this way, the process also creates an institutional space at the local level for new alliances of civil society and state actors to mobilise local and private resources towards increased public accountability and improved policy outcomes.

In order to accomplish this result, significant questions and challenges face the JASPEV taskforce. These include:

- What is the correct balance between the local and policy demand for information?

5 The JASPEV taskforce is exploring the possibility of using the internet as a forum for comparison and discussion between local networks.
• What are the ‘right’ questions that the communities need to ask that will lead to institutional and policy action?
• How much information do the communities need to collect in order to influence the institutional and policy processes?
• What measures are appropriate for ongoing monitoring that tells us something about how overall efforts are taking us closer to our outcomes?

In grappling with and answering these questions the JASPEV process can be viewed as a large-scale project of action research, but to be acceptable politically (at all levels) the emphasis is necessarily on action.

4. Progress and lessons learned to date

The JASPEV process has now been operational for three years and there has been much significant and ground breaking progress during that period. The challenge has been to simultaneously change the incentives and sanctions operating on the political directorate while opening up local space for deliberation and improving the flow of evidence to support policy discussions. Progress has been particularly strong in the creation of a social policy information system that feeds policy debates amongst stakeholders in the policy process, while much work has been done in partnership with the Social Development Commission to cultivate deliberative space at the local level for measurement, reflection and action.

The greatest hurdles to the successful shift of JASPEV to a transformed system of social policy governance, however, are not technical but arise from the institutional and highly politicised challenges involved in linking the micro to the macro in a new policy dialogue. The triangular relationship described in the JASPEV model is designed to create new channels of communication and new modes of behaviour in addressing both short and long routes of accountability for social policy delivery. Yet this system is vulnerable if one or more of the nodes do not function as predicted, and this has clearly been the case at the political directorate node for the JASPEV process to date.

6 The Social Development Commission is a GoJ Agency that works through outreach activities on community development activities. For more information see http://www.sdc.gov.jm/about/index.html.
Change in political culture requires political leadership that is prepared to take the risks involved in challenging the system. The context of institutional reform determines the pace at which such changes can take place. In Jamaica’s case the political culture - a highly clientelistic form of the inherited Westminster two-party system - is a major constraint to reform. Changes in the governance culture and structural arrangements are constrained by electoral concerns. The joint leadership approach exemplified by JASPEV’s cross-party experiment of a ‘troika’ of politicians to lead each of the thematic initiatives was limited by this political culture. While it sent out a strong symbolic signal that both political parties were prepared to work together on issues, in reality it functions in the same vein of narrow party interest. Both sets of political representatives see it as a way to promote their particular interests without refocussing on the aspect of joint leadership around the issues in the national interest. It has been difficult to get a forum of the three consistently. One representative, for example, used the information and insight gathered through his involvement to push through an initiative on youth unemployment. This represented a missed opportunity to show a unified political position on the first prototype theme of youth inclusion.

The fact that all members of the Troika are young seemed on the face of it to be positive. They represent the future direction of governance, the new arrangement for governance. It made it easy to sell them on the notion of a new political culture. However, it is precisely because they are young and need to earn their stripes that they are least able to make the shift that is necessary for real change. In the absence of a clear mechanism of how they would influence the policy process to bring the recommendations of their broad constituency to the decisions-makers meant the process relied heavily on their experience and influence with the more senior ministers in government. More experienced and committed practitioners can initiate policy dialogue and change in a more structured and effective way.

The distorting effects of these entrenched sets of political incentives on the JASPEV process has been strengthened by the lack if incentive amongst politicians to consistently engage in and support a process. The JASPEV objective competed with other policy objectives which are tangible outputs. Process issues are often relegated to a secondary position at best and deemed “esoteric” at worst. Despite many efforts the ministerial leadership has remained lukewarm to the possibilities offered by the JASPEV objectives to the overall policy and decision-making process. This factor led to the perception that the reform was being led by the
administration and not with the full support of the political leadership. In part the loss of momentum at the level of the political directorate between the design and implementation stages could be attributed to changes in the position of key stakeholders. But it has to be acknowledged that the element of JASPEV which sought to produce changes in incentives for political actors through a participatory process of policy design, implementation and evaluation has been at best a partial success.

The incentives for pursuing “joined up” government are no less elusive. It has been agreed by the public administration that joined up solutions to the delivery of effective policy outcomes are desirable. The challenge has been how to effect these changes in the context of an administrative system that does not reward these efforts. JASPEV’s ‘issues-based’ approach to promoting co-operation and team work across administrative boundaries has produced some encouraging results. In the leading reform cells of the administration, the Policy Analysis and Review Unit (PARU) and the Public Sector Reform Unit (PSRU) a strong effort has been made to take joint approaches to work around the deliverables of the JASPEV initiative. The results on the whole have been positive with the outputs of these efforts being more effective. It has been made easier because there is a common objective of meeting the project goals as well as a commitment to the overall reform objectives. This common vision is what drives the team to seek concrete results in the face of these difficulties. In the absence of this joined up approach, change is difficult. The efforts with the ministries have been most successful where the shared vision is consistent with the objectives of the ministry itself, and where results, however incremental, can be demonstrated. So that work around the police/youth relations addresses a priority concern of the ministry and when it succeeds can be replicated to broader objectives. The range of players that need to be joined up in this instance are fewer and include stakeholders with whom the ministry has often worked⁷. “Joined-upness” is easier to achieve in this situation, whereas it would be far more problematic for a Ministry of Finance, for example, which does not work in a direct way with its stakeholders and would find joining with new stakeholders challenging.

At the level of the technical node of policy deliberation, organizational learning through thematic networks has taken hold. At least two networks have been established since the project

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⁷ An example of successful collaborative work in this area is the adoption by the Ministry of National Security of the ‘Police-youth relations indicator’ as a tool for deepening citizen involvement in the fight against crime (Jaspev Quarterly Progress Report May 2005).
started. More groupings are taking place around common functions for the purposes of information exchange, honing skills and learning more about internal processes and international best practice. Some of these arrangements are loose, with sharing taking place occasionally while others meet formally every month or quarter. Members of networks have cited, “better understanding of processes and access to information” as key benefits of membership. It seems that individual development has been a key benefit of network participation. It has been less effective in supporting team work around ministries, however. Many still tend to work in silos and rarely seek the advice or support of colleagues in working through issues or solving problems. Monitoring as a motivational tool for performance is difficult to assess. Ministries are fatigued by request for reports. Such reports tend to be routine and not as effective as intended in many cases. Tools such as score cards that are simple, not time consuming, and show how ministries stack against each other seem to be useful for generating incentives for action.

The strongest support for the project has come from operational node of the JASPEV triangle: the communities who want some connection with the process to be able to articulate their concerns and play their part in the process. The democratization of data and evidence gathering has been an important step in the development of the project. It has engaged the youth in the community and given them tools that they can apply to empower themselves. This aspect needs to be explored further to see how well they communities have applied their skills and exploited their deliberative spaces to seek their own objectives. Furthermore, the emerging relationship between the micro and the macro is encouraging. There is a general receptiveness on the part of ministries to getting citizen feedback and secure evidence as a basis for planning and policy development.

5. Conclusion

The recent convergence of varied strands of thinking on monitoring and evaluation provides new opportunities to democratize the process of public policy management. This chapter has outlined briefly an innovative approach to community-based monitoring that seeks to inform and provoke change in the design and implementation of social policy in Jamaica. The approach adopted in the JASPEV process is highly ambitious in its attempt to combine technical innovation in the collection and flow of information with institutional transformation at different levels of governance. The explicit objective of including the political directorate in the change
process is a key innovation – but also the level of the JASPEV design that has proved hardest to make work in practice.

The institutional challenge has proved serious and poses a continuing risk to the success of JASPEV as a process, a reminder that the evidence-based policy management is far from being a technical and technocratic exercise. The politicised nature of institutions in Jamaica, the role of hierarchy and patronage and the prevalence of “turfism” within and between political parties is widely recognised and criticised by a cynical and weary civil society. The challenge faced should not be understated, yet the set-up of JASPEV, while managerialist in tone and influence, does create political space for institutional change, through the emphasis on the interaction of nodes of local and national process. A twin track approach is needed to challenge this political culture. The first is to shift incentives and sanctions to encourage joined up thinking and political commitment to a more inclusive governance of the policy process. The second is to strengthen external accountability mechanisms by liberating local actors who are ready to take responsibility for policy results, and who are willing publicly to hold political actors accountable for results. Ultimately, it is on the democratic generation and ownership of information that emerging systems of accountability and delineation of responsibility for the delivery of social policy will stand or fall.
References


“To realise the vision of a better Jamaica, Government commits itself to achieving progress towards the following key goals, constantly assessing our progress, re-formulating our policies and strategies according to the best analysis and information available, and reporting back to the Jamaican people on the progress that has been achieved”.

**Key Outcome Goals**
1: Human Security
A peaceful and mutually respectful society with increased safety, security and freedom from fear in the home and in public spaces.

2: Social Integration
An inclusive and non-discriminatory society which respects group and individual rights, promotes social justice, accepts diversity, builds trust and communication between all groups.

3: Governance
More effective, complementary, accountable and transparent government structures, seeking to move decision-making closer to the people

4: Secure and Sustainable Livelihoods
Widened, higher quality livelihood and employment opportunities for all Jamaicans, with particular reference to those disadvantaged in the labour market

5: Environment
Improved environment for quality of life, for Jamaicans living and as yet unborn

6: Education and Skills
An education which facilitates life-long learning and acquisition of social and life skills for all

7: Health and Physical Well-Being
Enhance the broadly defined health status of the population

**Key Process Goals**
1: The Policy Process
*Strengthening coherence, timeliness, ownership, participation and quality in the formulation of social policy*

2: Strategic Planning and Resource Allocation
*Strengthening the integration and effectiveness of planning and budget processes through enhanced prioritisation, collaboration across Ministerial and other boundaries, realism about available resources, reliability of delivery of budget allocations and flexibility of resource allocation.*

3: Responsiveness and Institutional Learning
Promote the development of a more responsive, people-oriented and innovative culture in Jamaican Social Policy institutions.

4: Monitoring of Social Trends and Outcomes
Promote enhanced effectiveness of social information systems in shaping the development of policy through improved timeliness, relevance, richness, presentation and participation.