

**Putting the new aid paradigm to work:
challenges for monitoring and evaluation**

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Putting the new aid paradigm to work: challenges for monitoring and evaluation

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Abstract

Over the last few years a remarkable shift has taken place in the aid instruments advocated for low-income countries, characterised by a conversion from project to more programme oriented aid and by the inclusion of ‘broad-based civil society participation’ as a form of new aid conditionality. PRSP constitutes a new framework for policy negotiations with the recipient government but also a new set of rules for aid implementation. As most of the PRSPs are currently in the early stages of implementation, so far scant attention has been directed to monitoring and evaluation and particularly to the implications of the PRSP ‘participatory’ rhetoric and ‘programme-based’ approach. This paper contributes to this under-exploited field of research by stocktaking and assessing different aspects of M&E systems for a selected number of SSA countries. Findings of our desk study confirm evidence from other studies that M&E is among the weaker parts of most of the PRSPs. We argue that PRSP with its focus on ‘process conditionality’ functions as a catalyst for change, while its basic philosophy of ‘participation’ and ‘comprehensiveness’ puts at the same time unrealistic demands on at best embryonic national M&E systems.

Résumé

Depuis quelques années une véritable transformation s'est opérée dans les instruments propagés pour l'aide aux pays à faible revenu, caractérisée d'une part par la mise en exergue de l'aide programme au détriment de l'aide par projet, et d'autre part par une participation obligatoire de la société civile. Le DSRP (document de stratégie de réduction de la pauvreté, en anglais PRSP) offre aux bailleurs un nouveau cadre de référence pour la conduite des négociations avec les pays bénéficiaires, mais implique également de nouvelles règles de comportement pour l'exécution de l'aide. Etant donné que la plupart des DSRP sont dans leur première phase de mise en œuvre, peu d'attention a été jusqu'ici consacrée au suivi et à l'évaluation, et en particulier aux implications du discours 'participatif' et 'axé sur les résultats' du DSRP. Le présent papier se situe dans ce domaine sous-exploité de la recherche. Il propose un diagnostic de l'état actuel des systèmes publics de suivi et évaluation dans un nombre de pays subsahariens et les analyse sous différents angles. Les résultats de notre étude de bureau confirment le constat d'autres études comparables que le suivi et l'évaluation sont parmi les points les plus faibles de la plupart des DSRP. Nous défendons la thèse que le DSRP, avec sa 'conditionnalité axée sur le processus' agit comme catalyseur de changement, tandis que ses principes de 'participation' et d' 'approche globale' (en anglais : *comprehensive*) entraînent des pressions irréalistes sur des systèmes nationaux de suivi et d'évaluation au mieux rudimentaires.

1. Introduction

It is now generally acknowledged that a new paradigm has emerged on how to provide effective international aid. Since the turn of the century, major multilateral and bilateral donors have rallied behind the PRSP approach, developed at the end of 1999. PRSP stands for Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, and constitutes the linchpin of a comprehensive new approach. Literally, it refers to a policy document that is produced by the recipient country, and that replaces similar documents such as the Policy Framework Paper that used to be imposed by the IMF and the World Bank on low-income aid-dependent countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. The PRSP by contrast is country-produced and hence, at least in principle, country-owned. It addresses macro-economic policies but it goes beyond and tackles social (poverty, gender, ...), environmental and governance issues. Once a PRSP has been given the stamp of approval by the donor community, donors use it as the framework for their aid activities. Ideally, they now provide most of their funds without earmarking them to particular projects, which used to come with donor management and control strings attached. Such projects were the traditional means of bypassing ineffective governments and reaching the poor. In contrast, under the PRSP approach, sectoral and general budget support are now the preferred aid instruments. A double diagnostic has led to this considerable shift in donor thinking and practice. On the one hand, it was recognized during the 1990s that government failures in the recipient country were a major part of the explanation of why especially African low-income countries were lagging behind in terms of economic growth and human development. If the fundamental constraint to development at the national level is not micro and technical (lack of decent roads or basic health services, inadequate agricultural research and extension, etc.) but macro and political (malfunctioning and corrupted public services, political leaders uncommitted to broad-based, sustainable human development, lack of transparency in public affairs, voiceless and powerless citizens, etc.), then it stands to reason that donors make this a major feature of their aid programmes. They can do this by using the influence that aid procures to press for institutional improvements of the public sector and of democratic governance or even by shying away from the hopeless cases and shifting their aid to governments that have a proven track record in improving public sector governance. On the other hand, it was also recognized that donors share a considerable part of the blame for the perceived failure of low-income aid-dependent countries. By trying to bypass governments, they actually weakened them institutionally in several ways. Providing aid to government, respecting its policy priorities, using its budgeting and allocation mechanisms, and using the same government's control mechanisms, rather than imposing those of the donor, is now seen as the more enlightened answer.

The consequences of the new approach for M&E are huge and daunting. Under the PRSP approach elaborate systems of donor-managed M&E systems linked to donor micro-managed projects are in principle wound up

and replaced by improved and expanded national M&E systems. This supposes a large degree of trust in the willingness and capacity of the governments to bring their national M&E systems in a reasonable time up to internationally acceptable standards. In this sense, as in quite a few others, the new PRSP approach is a bold leap in the dark. All the more so since it is openly admitted that present national M&E systems are hugely inadequate. Indeed their glaring deficiency is part of the diagnosis that led to the new approach. In line with this, donors are now paying considerable attention to efforts to enhance national M&E systems in PRSP countries. Yet for obvious reasons, most of them do not readily abandon their own control mechanisms, and thus insist on M&E exercises using donor systems. They also create new ones, such as joint government-donor public expenditure reviews, expenditure tracking case studies, and the like.

This is the setting for the present paper. Existence of acceptable national planning, budgeting and M&E systems, or at least observable improvements in such systems, and trust in a recipient country's policy priorities is in principle necessary for the effective and successful move towards aid instruments which are characterised by a shift from donor control to recipient control and from identifiable aid activities to non-identifiable aid activities. Trust in institutional capability of recipients is extremely important in this respect¹. Reinforcing public institutional competence is not straightforward, not even in industrialised countries. Apart from technical training and administrative reform, the management culture must be changed, and so must the way of doing politics. Of course, this is what the PRSP approach is all about, but if one looks at it from such close quarters, the challenge is formidable.

Donors are caught in a chicken-egg dilemma. As long as a minimum institutional capacity in terms of design, implementation and evaluation apparatus is not installed and functioning, the move towards new aid instruments which shift more responsibilities to recipients may well be resisted by the more conservative donors, while those that go along with the new approach may still provisionally chose to duplicate the recipient country's fledgling systems with their own, putting additional demands on recipients that go a long way to undermine the whole approach. Donors seem to expect that within a not too long period of time an effective M&E system will be in place that elaborates a clear policy and performs the functions of accountability and improvement of interventions through systematic feedback, and that such a system will live up to international standards, including those of independence and impartiality, credibility, usefulness and feedback, and participation of stakeholders.

Considering how crucial a sound M&E system is to the success of the PRSP approach, one is struck by the relative lack of attention that has been given to the issue so far, both in Joint Staff Assessments (JSA) and in independent reviews. The aim of the present study is to contribute to this under-exploited field of research by stocktaking and assessing different aspects of

¹ There is some similarity with the shift from project to programme funding of intermediaries such as NGOs and multilateral agencies by official bilateral donors. Such a move also requires a level of trust in the institutional quality and overall policy of such intermediaries, which goes beyond trust in their capacity to execute a well-defined and circumscribed project. The analogy is however not perfect. Trusting a technically competent and development oriented multilateral agency or NGO involves much less risk than trusting the governments and bureaucracies of weak and corrupt states.

M&E systems for a selected number of countries. In doing this, we limit ourselves in this first phase to a desk study on the basis of official PRSP documents (PRSP and Annual Progress Reports).

Section one sets out in more detail the catalysing potential of the PRSP and highlights how it inevitably pushes M&E issues to the forefront. Before presenting in section three detailed findings from our own desk study we briefly comment upon what has emerged from a few studies that have focused on the quality of national M&E systems and that, similarly to ours, are comparative in nature and based on documentary evidence. Section four concludes and qualifies the starting point of our paper. While the PRSP certainly may be considered a catalyst for change, at the same time, it makes unrealistic demands on at best embryonic national M&E systems. The PRSP rationale requires M&E systems that are 'multi-stakeholder', 'multi-purpose', 'multi-dimensional', 'multi-method', 'multilayer' and finally 'multi-criteria'. Such requirements are challenging for any M&E system and particularly burdensome for the infant national M&E systems of most PRSP countries.

2. PRSP: a catalyst for change

As argued in the introduction, the PRSP is used here as a label for the new aid architecture. Donors are well aware that minimum standards for recipient M&E systems are not satisfied at the outset. One may consider the PRSP with its emphasis on 'process conditionality'² as a necessary catalyst for the shift towards new aid instruments: it makes the implementation of effective national planning, budgeting and M&E systems a conditionality. It thus forces a number of institutional issues on the reform agenda whose implementation may well take considerable time, but which are deemed crucial for the new aid approach to work³.

The list of such issues includes the following:

i) *Results and performance-based management and budgeting*: more attention to outcomes and to linkages between outcomes and inputs. It is to be expected that results-based management (RBM) will generate a demand for and a pressure towards M&E. If resource allocation and planning is on the basis of outcomes then one needs information about the outcomes. An illustration is Uganda where line ministries only get resources from the donor-sponsored Poverty Action Fund if they can prove that outcomes are in line with goals of poverty reduction. Such a carrot-and-stick approach obviously generates an incentive for the line ministry concerned to collect information on outcomes, but it is equally clear that there is a need to cross-check and validate the information thus generated.

² See Booth (2003) on PRSP philosophy of 'process conditionality' and the degree to which the shift towards this new form of conditionality has already effectively been realized.

³ For country evidence see for instance Evans and van Diesen (2002) who in their review of Tanzania's Poverty Monitoring System consider the PRSP process an important catalyst. They state (p. 5) that 'without an initiative like the PRSP, it might have taken much longer for Tanzania to establish its poverty monitoring system'. See also Booth (2003) on the value added of PRSP for boosting reforms in Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Tanzania, Mozambique.

ii) *Iterative learning*, moving away from blueprint ex-ante planning and budgeting towards more flexibility, where results of monitoring and evaluation effectively feed into future cycles, one of the most important incentives for suppliers of information being that their information will be used. An iterative approach is conditional upon the effective functioning of feedback mechanisms, so as to disseminate and integrate M&E findings in the decision-making process. Moreover the PRSP itself is iterative, in that it is supposed to be renewed every three years or so. And the country has to produce annual progress reports.

iii) *Evidence-based approach*⁴. This is also clear from the emphasis placed on ‘diagnosis’ (expanding the knowledge base). The PRSP has effectively led to an upsurge in data collection, especially on poverty; to a renewed interest in particularly household surveys, which has led to a dramatic improvement in the availability of survey-based household-consumption data⁵. In order to make the diagnosis informed by the poor themselves, participatory techniques are increasingly propagated (see also v). In the diagnostic phase, i.e. while preparing the PRSP, most countries have organized some ‘informational’ Participatory Poverty Assessment. In some cases this initial PPA had a mobilising power to organise non-state stakeholders; in some cases it has established a working relationship between state and non-state stakeholders, which had not been interacting so closely before; it has been copied to some extent during the monitoring phase (particularly poverty monitoring); and finally has laid the basis for some degree of institutionalisation.

iv) *Crucial role for central ministry in charge of the PRSP*, typically the Ministry of Finance or/and Planning. The ambition to put a system of RBM into practice, the need for alignment and discipline in budgeting, planning and M&E cycles, all point in the same direction. Note that under traditional project-funding by donors, line ministries have a large degree of freedom in negotiation directly with donors. Under the PRSP logic, they come under the tutelage of the Finance or Planning Ministry.

v) *‘Participatory (inclusive) development agenda’*: the PRSP has fostered entry points for participation of a broad range of stakeholders (ownership). This bringing of new actors into the policy process has both technocratic and political connotations. Stakeholders include state actors (central ministries; line ministries, although line ministries may well lose autonomy compared to the previous aid architecture; national statistical office; parliament; decentralised executive and legislative bodies; implementing agencies) and non-state actors (civil society organizations, research institutes, private sector). The idea is that non-state stakeholders (and in particular those that directly represent beneficiaries, users of service delivery) can play key roles in producing evidence about the implementation and impact of service delivery and policy processes (supply of information for the M&E system) as they are users themselves or have ‘grassroots’ contacts and are therefore well placed

⁴ Evidence-based approaches to policy making are probably rarities: their implicit rational and linear view of policy diagnosis, then formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, feeding back into following rounds, do not square well with political reality. Typically, evidence is only a small ingredient in policy making (see also Oxfam, 2002).

⁵ Razafindrakoto and Roubaud (2003) are rather sceptical and indicate that given the poor quality of the usual household surveys, the present proliferation of surveys does not necessarily lead to any progress in knowledge about poverty and appropriate remedying policies.

to channel and represent the voices of the beneficiaries. The implicit assumption is that such civil society actors are sufficiently 'representative' and close to the poor so as to act on their behalf. The idea is further that these non-state actors exert pressure for more information for accountability reasons and in order to improve public service delivery. A problem may arise with this reasoning if some of the non-state stakeholders become too closely engaged with state M&E systems. Or they themselves may be important service providers. This is often the case with local non-governmental development organizations (NGOs) that may depend for a considerable part of their funding on providing services to the poor on behalf of the state or donors. If donors strengthen non-state actors in their demand for information and accountability, if in other words donors increase the voice of civil society, then this may indirectly lead to a strengthening of M&E systems, which is what donors want eventually. If from the start a broad range of stakeholders are involved, in particular non-state actors, they also become aware of the limitations of statistical surveys, of the basic criteria (validity) that need to be respected, they better see the need for the collection of particular information, while they can also highlight what they find important themselves.

vi) *Multidimensional approaches to M&E*, inspired by a desire to devote more attention to qualitative, difficult-to-measure issues. This has given impetus to methodological approaches seeking to combine qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Note that other terminologies are possible for qualitative and quantitative methodologies: conventional and non-conventional are also often used; contextual and non-contextual is used by Booth et al. (1998). Qualitative approaches are also mostly linked to participatory approaches. Even though qualitative approaches are in practice often automatically labelled 'participatory approaches', they are clearly not synonyms. The former refers to the generation of 'subjective data' and to a methodology that differentiates from quantitative research mostly on the basis of the data collection and analyses techniques that are used while 'participatory' rather refers to 'who participates' in the monitoring and evaluation (and mostly to participation of a broad range of stakeholders, mostly beneficiaries). In practice 'participatory' is often used in the very 'restrictive sense' of 'sources of information' and not in the sense of 'empowerment', which necessitates a much higher degree of participation, also in the 'grand design'.

vii) *Donor alignment and harmonisation*. These twin notions are crucial in the new aid vocabulary. With alignment is meant that donors accept recipient policy priorities and use recipient systems of implementation and control. Alignment thus pertains to the domain of north-south relations. With harmonization is meant that donors work together in order to reduce the high administrative 'transaction costs' their own aid procedures inflict on recipient governments. Common rules for international competitive procurement or joint evaluation missions are cases in point. This is the domain of north-north relations. The relationship between donor alignment and recipient country institutional capabilities in planning, implementing, monitoring

and evaluation goes in two directions. Stress on donor harmonisation and alignment is conditional upon recipient countries' institutional capabilities: if there are no institutional capabilities, donors will be reluctant to wind down their own M&E procedures and may continue to micro-manage projects using their own systems. Strengthening and building of a recipient countries' institutional capability also critically depends upon the willingness of donors to abandon their own parallel M&E procedures that are very demanding on recipient bureaucracies, thus releasing capacities and resources for building up of the latter's institutional apparatus. The remaining multiple donor-driven M&E procedures constitute a huge opportunity cost for recipient countries. Under the PRSP, there is pressure on donors to harmonise and align even if the institutional capacity of the recipient is not yet completely satisfying. The important thing is that the institutional capacity of the recipient shows a minimum degree of performance, that recipients show a willingness to bring about the necessary reforms, and that as a consequence a significant increase in its performance can be expected over a reasonable period of time.

3. A selective literature review

Before presenting, in the next section, some findings from our desk review of PRSP and of Annual Progress Reports (APR) of the PRSP, we briefly comment on what has come out of similar work on the quality of national M&E systems. We have mainly looked at research that, like ours, is comparative and based, in part or in full, on documentary evidence. Booth and Lucas (2002) in their review of 21 sub-Saharan African PRSP and I-PRSP and 19 JSAs include information on the actual situation in five main areas of monitoring activity that they consider important in a PRSP context. Included are input monitoring, budget reform and expenditure tracking; monitoring of implementation processes and intermediate outputs and outcomes; measurement and assessment of poverty outcomes and impacts; increased access to information for PRSP stakeholders; and the use of information for policy improvement. Another interesting document is the PRSP Synthesis Note 7 (June 2003) prepared by the PRSP Monitoring and Synthesis Project that reviewed PRS Monitoring in eight African countries. An overview is provided of indicators used and characteristics of M&E systems⁶. A third reference is a 2003 review study of the Participation and Civic Engagement Group of the World Bank on Participation in Monitoring and Evaluation of PRSPs; this study is limited to participation. Finally we draw on the evaluation of the PRSP performed by the independent evaluation departments of the World Bank (2004) and the IMF (2004). The general impression that comes out of this literature is that M&E gets less attention than it deserves. M&E, but by extension also the national systems elaborated for planning, budgeting (and particularly linkages among these) are the weaker part of most PRSP and thus often described in Joint Staff Assessments as ‘challenging’ or something to that effect.

We structure our comments around five broad topics: policy, organization, capacity, participation, and quality, a categorisation we will also use in the next section.

3.1. Policy

There is not much explicit attention in the literature to the ‘grand design’ and broad policy of M&E but instead much emphasis on targets and indicators.

The Results Based Approach propagated in the donor discourse may partly explain why the identification of indicators gets so much attention in the M&E sections of PRSPs, to the point of sometimes being the exclusive focus of attention. The fact that indicators for M&E are identified is presumably considered as positive by donors. In the same vein, targets are usually identified against which changes in performance on indicators will be assessed. In some cases (Uganda and Mauritania) where targets were not achieved, further consideration led to the conclusion that they were unrealistic and they were subsequently adapted. Although donors like to see targets that are derived from the Millennium Development Goals, accepted by the UN in 2000 (UN, 2000), recipients seem to be less under the impression. In fact their PRSP

⁶ Issues included are key features of system; details of institutional framework; key outputs of the system; indication about how indicators have been chosen; multidimensionality; general description of core set of indicators; realism of targets; attention to inputs and intermediate indicators, and final outcomes: evidence of attention to monitoring chain; attention to budget reform and public expenditure tracking; data collection instruments used; recognition of poor quality of routine/administrative data; participatory monitoring; role of parliament; attention to sub-national level; costing the system.

targets often do not correspond to those of the MDGs (PRSP Synthesis Note No. 7, 2003). There may be very good country-specific reasons not to copy the MDG targets and it may be considered a signal of country ownership of indicators. But it may lead to duplicating of monitoring efforts later on if donors put additional demands on national statistical systems to get information on MDGs.

Identification of indicators seems very uneven. For some sectors like education and health they appear not selective enough, in the sense that too many indicators are retained. It is highly unlikely that large numbers of indicators can actually be monitored by overstretched public systems. For other sectors, notably employment and governance, fewer indicators have been identified. This was noted in several JSA of PRSP. An impressionistic review of the JSA of Progress Reports suggests that a lot of countries have reacted and refined this, some more than others. In most cases however it is not really clear if all indicators retained are effectively monitored, and what is done with the monitoring information collected.

Booth & Lucas (2002) make the valid point that strong attention on inputs and final poverty outcomes has led to a 'missing middle' in M&E. This can be partly blamed on the Results Based Management that donors favour (White, 2002). As a consequence, not enough data is collected on intermediary outcomes. There should be M&E of the overall policy chain. In evaluation terminology, one could say that there is too little consideration for the 'operational channels'. This is not surprising as interventions are typically not conceptualised on the basis of an explicit program theory, including a process theory and an impact theory. From an evaluation theory point of view one could say that interventions themselves are not very well conceptualised, and thus an issue of 'evaluability' arises (Rossi P.H. et al., 2004). If a proper program theory had been elaborated, the missing middle of output or intermediate outcome indicators would automatically have come into focus. Booth & Lucas (2002) correctly link the diagnosis of a 'missing middle' to the need for process evaluation.

Related to the idea that there should be M&E of the overall policy chain, Booth and Lucas (2002) argue that Public Expenditure Management (PEM), which provides the framework for input monitoring, should be much more closely integrated with M&E. More generally, the impression that comes across both from the literature and our cursory analysis of PRSPs and related documents is that in a lot of cases, indicators are detached from the bigger picture. Often it is not clearly indicated how they logically flow from the objectives set in the PRSP.

Yet such identification is necessary to assess the appropriateness of indicators. By themselves, indicators are neither input, output nor outcome indicators; such characteristics derive from the level to which they are attached in a logical framework.

The whole M&E design is often methodologically ill thought through. All kinds of problems with construct validity and reliability of indicators arise. Indicators are used to measure 'complex constructs', whose operationalisation is not straightforward, and often do not address well threats to construct

validity such as mono-operation bias. Indicators, and in particular qualitative indicators, also often suffer from low reliability. For instance, as Booth and Lucas (2002) point out, a blind eye is often turned to the manifest unreliability of official reporting systems on which monitoring depends. Such problems with data quality are not sufficiently taken into account when identifying indicators (Razafindrakoto and Roubaud, 2003). On the other hand, availability of survey-based household-consumption data has improved in many PRSP countries. This should assist in monitoring outcomes and impacts. Furthermore a good M&E plan should pay attention to the timeliness of data, it should in fact map the various decision making cycles to which M&E data should be directed and seek as much congruence with planning and budgeting as possible. There is not much evidence that this is the case, and thus the risk of underutilised data increases.

A final weakness in M&E policy and design is the conflation of the twin components of monitoring and evaluation. Evaluation seems very much an afterthought, hardly distinguishable from monitoring. Monitoring outcome is often equated with evaluation. That one ought to be measuring 'changes in outcome' rather than levels of outcome, and further control for confounding factors to arrive at some measure of 'impact' is hardly ever mentioned. Donors have some responsibility for this. In the World Bank's PRSP sourcebook for instance, monitoring and evaluation are not well distinguished; indeed, they are used interchangeably more often than not, as if donors feel that pushing beyond monitoring overstretches the capacity of national systems. This may well be so but, if only for reasons of intellectual clarity, the two terms of the M&E should not be confused. One of the consequences of this leaning towards monitoring at the expense of evaluation is that the balance between policy feedback and accountability is lost. Whereas monitoring is inherently closer to implementation, for evaluation there is also a need for independence and impartiality. In all M&E systems the trade-off between independence and feedback exists, but in PRSP documents that trade-off is often obfuscated. Institutional arrangements do not seem to be driven by these questions of how to keep a good balance between independence and feedback.

The absence of attention for evaluation also means absence of attention for the linkage between monitoring and evaluation. If data from monitoring is also to be used for evaluation, there is a need to take this into account from the start. More specifically, information on important external factors will have to be gathered, and often more disaggregated data need to be collected. One casualty of the cursory treatment of evaluation is poverty and social impact analysis (PSIA), which is the jargon expression for efforts to trace ex-ante the possibly harmful effects of trade liberalisation or similar orthodox policy measures on the poor. The appeal of PSIA has increased: a high proportion (73%) of PRSP countries indicated over the year 2002-2003 that they would apply it (IMF and IDA, 2003g). In reality it seems to be considered as something entirely external, performed by donors with little participation of national stakeholders. The areas where PSIA should focus on are largely de-

cided by the WB and IMF. In some cases like Uganda and Chad CSOs have been consulted in an exercise on the priorities and sequencing of PSIA for proposed structural policies (IMF and IDA, 2003g). But PSIA gets hardly any attention in sections on M&E; if there is an evaluation plan PSIA is not really considered part of it. Consequently there is no guarantee that data collection for monitoring does feed into the PSIA. Neither is a feedback mechanism elaborated, so that the results of PSIA fail to feed back into national policy cycle, a few exceptions like Zambia notwithstanding.

The neglect of evaluation and the related weakness of accountability are of course worrying to donors. They try to compensate in part for this by increasing the role of non-state stakeholders who are supposed to act as watchdogs, and by organising their own separate evaluations.

3.2. Organization

Where participation has been institutionalised in the M&E system, several approaches can be distinguished, ranging from the centralised (Uganda) to the decentralised (Tanzania)⁷. In both countries the system has brought together a broad range of users and providers of information. They differ mostly in the degree of power they give to central bodies. They both have a Monitoring Steering Committee that exercises central oversight and consists of representatives of a broad range of different stakeholders, and an official secretariat, located centrally in the Ministry of Finance. The power this unit wields is different: in Uganda the unit has a leading role, whereas in Tanzania it is one player among several. While the Tanzanian model is more open and inclusive for non-state stakeholders, promoting in this way broad-based ownership, the absence of a centralized system may lead to a vacuum of authority and initiative (Evans and Ngalwea, 2001). What is not mentioned or specified in such discussion of institutional arrangements are the complex issues related to the relationships between the different providers and users.

⁷ On the differences between M&E system in Uganda and Tanzania see among others Evans and Ngalwea (2001); Booth and Lucas (2002); PRSP Synthesis Note No. 7. On Uganda's institutional M&E design in particular, see among others Hauge (2001); Prennushi et al. (PRSP Sourcebook chapter 3, annex C.1.); on Tanzania see a.o. Assey (2001); Evans and Ngalwea (2001); Evans and van Diesen (2002); Prennushi et al. (PRSP Sourcebook chapter 3, annex C.2).

3.3. Capacity

This is generally acknowledged as being a major issue. Most PRSP countries have weak public sectors in general and very limited human resource capacity when it comes to the complex tasks of M&E in particular. What expertise there is tends to be dispersed over different organizations (Statistical Office, Finance Ministry,...). Donors try to close the gap with technical assistance, and through institutional strengthening and reforming M&E systems, but in the best of cases the results take a long time to mature. The overall impression is that there is, and will be for a considerable time to come, a formidable mismatch between the demands put on the system by donors, and national capacity.

3.4. Participation

The poor have been involved in participatory poverty assessments (PPA) during the preparation of PRSPs in a numerous countries. In the subsequent phase of implementation, participation typically drops. There are

some interesting exceptions to this. In Malawi, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda and Zambia there are cases of 'second and third generation PPAs'⁸ that are being used for monitoring PRSP and that also show higher degrees of institutionalisation (World Bank, 2003). In their research McGee and Norton (2000), and Robb (1999) and Norton (2001) have identified conditions for PPA to become monitoring and policy influencing instruments ('from voice to leverage'⁹). These appear to include the creation of linkages with policy research institutes which are not only able to collect data, but also to analyse data and disseminate them, thus making the results of PPA a body of social knowledge. Ownership of information is not really power, ownership of 'information analysis' is, and CSOs themselves often have low analytical capabilities. Useful are also efforts to embed PPA within official M&E policy, rather than just having an odd PPA performed once in a while.

When participatory monitoring does take place, it is mostly 'poverty monitoring'. This is not surprising, but gradually there are also more cases of participatory monitoring of inputs and outputs and intermediate outcomes. For each of the levels of indicators, there exist now lists of conventional and more participatory data collection techniques. In the case of outcome monitoring, conventional household surveys may be combined with participatory poverty monitoring. The same goes for output monitoring, where more and more emphasis is put on using traditional approaches in combination with participatory service delivery surveys, participatory beneficiary assessment, or citizen report card systems. Such participatory techniques work best of course where services are easy to measure and monitor. There are similar efforts at participatory budgeting and budget analysis techniques, participatory auditing and participatory tracking studies of input-output linkages. One critical comment here is that most attention in this debate seems to go to technical issues. There is much less attention to institutional issues which are nevertheless important, as traditional and participatory data collection techniques are mostly applied by actors with different institutional backgrounds. How to ensure that the output is compatible? In reality data coming out of such disjointed exercises is often so disparate that not even triangulation is possible. There is typically no overall strategic plan indicating which techniques will be used to generate what kind of data; no map on how to integrate both outputs into one system. If later on the aim is to aggregate and synthesize there is need to take this into account from the start. There are nevertheless cases of good exploitation of dual data sources: PPA and conventional techniques have apparently been well combined in Uganda and Zambia¹⁰.

Participation typically is conceived in an instrumental fashion, as an effective way of gathering data and insights. Such participation is mostly limited to 'information sharing' and then mostly in one direction. The poor and destitute are recognised as stakeholders, and they deliver information into the system, but they, or rather the CSOs that act on their behalf, do not yet make demands on the system. Information dissemination from central level to CSOs is necessary to enable CSOs to play a role in terms of accountability.

⁸ For an overview of differences between first and second generation Participatory Poverty Assessments, see Norton (2001).

⁹ Norton (2001, p. 41) makes a linkage with the major World Bank initiative 'Voices of the Poor', which aimed at promoting consultation and voice and he addresses the need to evolve to leverage and power. This may necessitate considerable shifts in current PPA approaches (conceptual, methodological, ethical and political).

¹⁰ See Bird and Kakande (2001) in Norton (2001) on Uganda; see McGee and Norton (2000) on Zambia.

What is missing here is some institutional automatism to take into account the information needs of CSOs, or a move towards a shared control over decision-making, in the sense that more stakeholders are participating in the elaboration of a 'grand design' of an evaluation programme, choosing which indicators to monitor, which data sources to use, and so on (World Bank, 2003). However, bringing CSOs closer into the government system of M&E also poses the problem of their 'independence'. This is compounded by the fact that CSOs also often play an important role in implementing the very policies they are supposed to be critically monitoring and evaluating (Brock, Mc Gee and Ssewakiryanga, 2002). This issue is particularly valid in countries where CSOs have to a large degree been integrated in official M&E, such as Uganda (Brock, Mc Gee and Ssewakiryanga, 2002)(Wordofa, 2002).

If quite some attention has been devoted in literature to the participation of non-state stakeholders, the same is not the case with state stakeholders. Line ministries, decentralised authorities and implementing agencies all have essential roles to play, particularly in monitoring. Only in some cases, e.g. Uganda, have problems of coordination been noted between the PRSP M&E institutional set-up and the existing sectoral line-ministry monitoring systems. Most attention at these levels has been for the improvement of the quality of the existing Management Information Systems (MIS). Some M&E systems have tried to inverse the standard approach: they did not wait for information to come from local level to centre, but instead any available information from the centre was communicated to the local level, so that the latter was enticed to fill in information gaps or to react to information it considered incorrect.

3.5. Quality

The World Bank's 2004 PRSP evaluation study concludes that the PRSP "has spurred sustained interest in enhancing institutional capacity" in M&E at the national level (World Bank (OED) 2004: 16). Gradually, more and more countries get donor support to address the constraints in national systems. This is among others the case for Gambia, Guyana, Guinea, Rwanda and Yemen. The same World Bank study includes the results of a survey among almost 800 stakeholders in 10 PRSP countries, which reveals that out of 39 questions the one on M&E received the most negative response (World Bank (OED) 2004: 66, table D). In fact, to the question 'An effective structure to monitor and evaluate results has been established', 41% of the correspondents answered with 'Disagree' or 'Disagree completely', whereas a further 21% answered 'Don't know or unsure'.

As we will illustrate in more detail in the next section, not much seems to be done with the indicators once they have been collected. In the Annual Progress Reports, there is in general a dearth of analysis of why certain targets were not met, or recommendations on how to improve performance in these fields.

4. A documentary review of PRSPs and Annual Progress Reports (APRs)

In what follows we present the conclusions of our own desk review of a number of PRSPs and Annual Progress Reports (APR) on the PRSP. In recognition of the fact that the PRSP approach is a process approach, and that therefore an initial assessment that is exclusively based upon a first PRSP may fail to capture the dynamics over time, we focus on those countries that have already produced at least one APR. APRs are normally written on the basis of monitoring information, and in it countries must provide information on progress in achieving targets and on improvements in the M&E system. We limit our attention geographically to the countries of Sub-Sahara Africa, the region where most of the PRSP countries are situated, and thus exclude a few countries in Eastern Europe (Albania, Kyrz Republic), Asia (Vietnam) and Latin America (Honduras, Nicaragua) that also had produced one or more APR at the time of our research (July 2004). Within the African countries retained there is considerable variation, but we assume that they share certain common political and institutional characteristics that will influence the chances of success of national M&E systems. The eleven countries studied, in alphabetical order, are Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia. We assess them on the basis of a questionnaire consisting of 23 questions relating to M&E. The full list of questions is reproduced in annex 1. We regroup the questions under five headings: policy, organization, capacity, participation, and quality. The same categories were used in the previous section in our brief literature review. The main results are presented in table 1. We use a four point scoring system: weak, partially satisfactory, satisfactory and excellent. In the columns under the scores, we list the number of countries that we assigned this score for every question. We then arbitrarily assigned numerical values from 1 to 4 to the scores, and on this basis calculated an average index per question in the last but one column. In the last column we give the rank order for every question on the basis of the average score. In what follows we first provide a detailed set of comments per question, and then move to a more general analysis of our findings. The scores are based on the information we found in the official documents (PRSP, APR). We also looked at the Joint Staff Assessments (JSA) of those documents produced by staff at the World Bank and the IMF. However, we found that the JSA were in general not very detailed on the issue of M&E and thus not very helpful. Often only a few bland general comments were made, of the “some progress has been made but much remains to be done” variety. In the few cases where the JSA contain more incisive comments, we will refer to it in the text. However, the scores we attached were not based on the JSA. We used our own best judgement, on the basis of the information produced in the official documents. In this first stage of the research we deliberately limited the information base for all countries to the same set of official PRSP documents. This necessarily means that for some of the countries (like Uganda and Tanzania) we disregarded other additional information sources on M&E, which may shed additional light on their

performance in M&E and which may nuance some of our findings. This first stage aims to provide an overall diagnosis and to identify a number of key-issues, which may merit particular attention. It is the basis for future in-depth analysis in a selected number of countries.

Table 1: M&E scores for 11 Sub-Saharan African countries

Topics	Weak (=1)	Partially satisfactory (=2)	Satisfactory (=3)	Excellent (=4)	INDEX [1-4]	INDEX rank
I. Policy						
1 The evaluation plan	3	6	2	0	1.91	13
2 M versus E	4	3	4	0	2.00	10
3 Selection of indicators	0	3	7	1	2.82	3
4 Selection criteria	2	1	4	4	2.91	2
5 Priority setting	2	5	3	1	2.27	6
6 Causality chain	3	8	0	0	1.73	16
7 Methodologies used	1	4	4	2	2.64	5
8 Data collection	3	3	4	1	2.27	6
9 Autonomy & impartiality	6	4	1	0	1.55	19
10 Feedback	4	2	5	0	2.09	9
11 Alignment planning & budgeting	7	3	1	0	1.45	22
II. Organization						
12 Coordination & oversight	5	3	2	1	1.91	13
13 Statistical Office	3	3	4	1	2.27	6
14 Line Ministries	1	9	1	0	2.00	10
15 Decentralized levels	5	6	0	0	1.55	19
16 Link with projects	7	4	0	0	1.36	23
III. Capacity						
17 Problem acknowledged	0	2	7	2	3.00	1
18 Capacity building plan	0	5	4	2	2.73	4
IV. Participation of actors outside government						
19 Parliament	7	1	3	0	1.64	17
20 Civil Society	4	3	4	0	2.00	10
21 Donors	5	6	0	0	1.55	19
V. Quality (on the basis of Annual Progress Reports)						
22 Effective use of M&E in APR	5	5	1	0	1.64	17
23 Internal usage of APR	4	5	2	0	1.82	15

Source: authors' desk review

In what follows we offer a more detailed discussion per question, re-grouped around our five broad topics:

4.1. Policy

1. The evaluation plan: score 1.91, rank 13 out of 23

Most documents contain some elements of an evaluation plan, but seldom are the cases where all the major issues are being addressed.

2. M versus E: score 2.00, rank 10 out of 23

In all countries there is an unbalanced emphasis on monitoring. Some countries (Niger, Mauritania, Ethiopia and Burkina Faso) do not even mention that one of the possible functions of monitoring is to feed into evaluation. While four countries (Tanzania, Mozambique, Uganda, Ghana) explicitly differentiate and elaborate on differences between monitoring and evaluation, indicating their different objectives, instruments used (see e.g. Mozambique and Ghana), none of the eleven countries really elaborate in depth on the institutional implications. The issue of whether to put monitoring and evaluation together into one unit, and where to put the M&E unit is for instance hardly touched upon. Emphasis on monitoring might for instance involve a different institutional location than emphasis on evaluation. The emphasis on monitoring, and the neglect of evaluation is also clear from the meagre attention that is given to the importance of autonomy and impartiality (see also question 9).

3. Selection of indicators: score 2.82, rank 3 out of 23

While there are differences in the quality and coverage, all countries have elaborated lists of indicators. Even more encouragingly, in countries that already produced more than one APR, the list gets more refined from progress report to progress report. Most countries are stronger on indicators related to social development such as education and health, and weaker on productive economic development. The identification of intermediate output indicators is often a problem. What is much more problematic is linking different levels of indicators into one causal chain (on importance of causal chain, see also question 6)¹¹. In countries where donors jointly support a whole sector through for instance sector budget support or basket funding (in the aid jargon labelled SWAPs: sector wide approaches), the quality of indicators developed in those sectors tends to be higher than elsewhere (e.g. Mozambique).

¹¹ Similar assessments may be found in among others Booth and Lucas (2002); PRSP Synthesis Notes No. 7 (2003).

4. Selection criteria: score 2.91, rank 2 out of 23

Criteria of selection of indicators are mostly well developed and documents give adequate information on who has selected the indicators. Criteria of selection of indicators have extensively been discussed in the PRSP documents of Tanzania, Ethiopia, Ghana and Mali.

5. Priority setting: score 2.27, rank 6 out of 23

There is an evolution over time in most countries: in the initial PRSP not much priority setting was visible, but most countries have re-

fined the list of indicators over time. See e.g. Tanzania that in a first round had chosen indicators on the basis of broad consultation. Subsequently a Technical Working Group refined the list of indicators.

6. Causality chain: score 1.73, rank 16 out of 23

In none of the countries are the different levels of indicators (input-output-outcome-impact) explicitly linked to each other. In most cases there is an emphasis on input and output, and much less attention on outcome and impact. In some countries (Mauritania) the need to draw this causal chain and to focus on the linkages between different levels in the chain is nowhere mentioned. This weakness is confirmed by the assessment in JSA: the JSA of the Burkina Faso's latest progress report indicates that not much analysis has been done on linkages between inputs, outputs and outcomes. In other countries, like Uganda, Zambia, Tanzania the importance is clearly understood, but still much effort is needed to put this into practice. The JSA of Uganda's third progress report for instance indicates that more action is needed regarding the identification of the causal chain of indicators (even if the Poverty Monitoring and Evaluation System explicitly states that it will be concerned with the whole chain, clearly more action is needed). Similar comments to the effect that there is a need to move further up the chain to the impact cause-effect theory are contained in the JSA of Tanzania's second progress report.

The lack of causality chain, and more fundamentally the deficient specification of a program theory on which interventions are based, has obvious implications for the analysis of the achievement or non-achievement of targets in the progress report (see later: question 22). Not surprisingly, if no prior theory can be referred to that makes clear which prior actions were expected to produce which results and why, it becomes difficult at the time of reporting to make much sense of the results.

7 Methodologies used: score 2.64, rank 5 out of 23

All countries, except Mali, identify, to varying degrees of detail, methodologies that will be used for M&E. In most countries, there is more emphasis on quantitative than on qualitative methodologies. What is spelled out less clearly is how to integrate such different methodologies. Yet there are hopeful exceptions. Ethiopia and Uganda have apparently extensively reflected on issues related to the integration of different methodologies. Ethiopia has devoted particular attention to methodological issues, such as the need to standardize different methodologies, and the need for harmonization of indicator systems. Uganda for its part has focused on more managerial and organizational issues. In Uganda different roles have been assigned to quantitative and qualitative methodologies, with surveys influencing the choice of areas for participatory poverty assessment, a feature that will increase the usefulness of PPA for policy-making. In the same country a lot of effort has been devoted to integrate data from different sources into one single database. Efforts are also documented for joint reporting of information from different sources. In Zambia participatory methods have also been integrated into of-

ficial M&E, with apparent close interaction between national statistical office and researchers responsible for participatory monitoring, and a fair degree of institutionalization of such participatory monitoring.

8 Data collection: score 2.27, rank 6 out of 23

Most countries identify sources of data collection well. The linkage between indicators and sources of data collection (the horizontal logic) is however less often well explained. In countries where there is a SWAP approach in at some sectors, like in Mozambique for health and education, the linkage of indicators to sources of data collection is remarkably better in those sectors.

9. Autonomy and impartiality: score 1.55, rank 19 out of 23

The need for autonomy and impartiality is a particularly neglected issue. What this suggests is weak accountability for outputs, outcomes and impact. This goes beyond accountability for financial inputs, the latter being taken care of through the PEM. More than half of the PRSP documents do not even mention the issue. Only in the case of Uganda, accountability is mentioned as one of the important aims of an M&E strategy. Whereas some countries, like Malawi, refer to the need for external monitoring and evaluation by CSOs, it seems that it is only effectively applied in Uganda where the Uganda Debt Network has developed Poverty Action Fund Monitoring Committees, which provide alternative information on expenditure matching commitments¹². The findings are also integrated into the progress report, which is indicative of the fact that in Uganda the government explicitly acknowledges the important role of independent monitoring.

¹² See also Gariyo Z. (2002).

10. Feedback: score 2.09, rank 9 out of 23

While most of the countries, except for Niger, Mauritania, Zambia and Mali, seemingly put a lot of efforts in systematic reporting and dissemination, effective integration of M&E results remains most of the time problematic. There are some exceptions (Mozambique and Uganda) where efforts are undertaken to establish feedback loops and increase the probability of effective integration. Even in these countries the reader is left with serious doubts about their effective functioning.

11. Alignment of planning and budgeting: score 1.45, rank 22 out of 23

Alignment with planning and budgeting seems to be one of the most problematic issues. In more than half of the countries, an institutional mechanism has not been established so far. In some countries, like Tanzania the current degree of alignment is still weak, but at least the issue is on the agenda (the PRSP indicates that a linkage will be established through the Public Expenditure Reviews (PER) and the Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF)). Some countries, like Ghana, Uganda and Mozambique are doing efforts. Ghana is currently working on the elaboration of a national expenditure tracking system (NETS) that will serve as a useful linkage

between monitoring and the MTEF. The JSA of the Ghana progress report mentions that there is an improvement between the correspondence of PRSP priorities and spending allocations in the budget 2004 by drawing on the PRSP M&E structures at the time of budget preparation. Of all the countries reviewed, Mozambique seems to have made most progress: the PARPA (Mozambique's PRSP) is considered to be a medium term programming tool, it is well integrated in the national planning system and there are linkages between existing government monitoring procedures of annual PES (Economic and Social Plan) and PARPA key indicators.

4.2. Organization

12. Coordination and oversight¹³: score 1.91, rank 13 out of 23

Coordination and oversight are essential. Given the comprehensive nature of M&E in the context of the PRSP, different actors are involved in data collection, analysis and feedback (statistical agency, line ministries, decentralized levels, central ministries). In most cases these actors had already been assigned roles in national M&E. For obvious reasons it is important to clarify whether the roles and responsibilities for M&E in the context of PRSP are additional or not. Alignment between pre-existing M&E systems, however rudimentary, and the new PRSP generated ones is of paramount importance. This issue of overlapping responsibilities is mentioned in the JSA of the Ghana PRSP where it is stated that further clarification is needed to create an unambiguous division of labour between agencies and ministries involved.

In almost half of the countries there is no well-established, clear institutional structure for coordination, support, oversight or feedback. As far as coordination is concerned, the absence of a clear institutional structure is not surprising given the absence of an overall M&E design. Sometimes, like in Zambia, the institutional arrangements for coordination are clear but not yet operational (the JSA indicates that institutional arrangements are clear but not yet operational and that coordination has been weak in the past).

In most countries where there is a committee for coordination and oversight, it is located in the central ministry of Finance and Economic Development. At best there is room for participation of representatives of line ministries (less of decentralized levels), with much less institutionalized participation at this level of non-state stakeholders (see also question 20). If non-state actors are involved, it is mostly in technical working groups (Ghana, Malawi). Where there is room for participation of a wider range of stakeholders this increases the complexity of the system (and probably also its functioning, although this is not clear at this moment). Tanzania for instance is one of the only countries where the institutional set-up provides a framework for broad-based participation of different state and non-state actors, but as indicated in the previous section, opinions diverge on whether this somewhat loose, less centralized system can actually work.

¹³ A general remark concerning the six questions under the heading "organization" is that not in a single case a clear organizational structure had been proposed in the PRSP, even in a country like Tanzania where later on a fairly strong monitoring system did emerge. In some countries the organizational set-up was only elaborated at the time of the first progress report, in a lot of others it was not yet fully operational at the time of the first progress report. On the basis of this desk study, we cannot give meaningful comments on the functioning (quality) of the organizational set-up that did emerge, except where the topic is discussed in one of the documents we consulted. In Uganda for instance, where the M&E structure is well elaborated, the JSA of the second progress report notes that M&E needs better implementation.

13. Statistical office: score 2.27, rank 6 out of 23

While in most countries, the role of the statistical office is more or less clear, streamlining existing surveys to the needs of the M&E system is less obvious. Ethiopia is the country that has best documented the role of the central statistical authority in the M&E system and where serious efforts seem to have been produced to streamline existing surveys into the needs of the M&E system. Niger on the other hand comes out of our readings as one of the weakest, and the JSA of the APR seems to confirm this when it notes that a statistical master plan is needed.

14. Line ministries: score 2.00, rank 10 out of 23

In most countries there are sector monitoring systems at line ministry level. However these are mostly of very doubtful quality. Linking up such sector units to the central unit is mostly only partially satisfactory and should be one of the major issues on the reform agenda almost everywhere.

15. Decentralized level: score 1.55, rank 19 out of 23

Decentralized M&E systems are problematic everywhere. In a few countries like Tanzania and Ghana local government M&E systems at least existed prior to PRSP, even if quality was problematic. In most other countries this stage had not even been reached. Even worse is the integration of proposed or existing local efforts into a global national M&E system. APRs for Tanzania and Ghana mention that capacity at local level is low, that the linkage between decentralized and central level is problematic. In Tanzania the problems are reportedly addressed through sensitization on the poverty monitoring system at the local level, with a focus on the roles of local authorities in data collection, processing and analysis. The JSA of the Ghana PRSP indicates that integration of district level planning and data collection into the PRS process will pose considerable organizational challenges. Many other country reports do not mention the problematic nature of linkages, nor do they indicate the importance of good functioning two-way information flows. In Ethiopia and Malawi the need for local authorities to analyze data and use it at the local level is recognized. The need for vertical integration of M&E between local and central levels is equally acknowledged, but it is not made clear how this should be done. When in other country documents these issues are at all addressed, the focus is on getting local authorities to collect information and feed it to the national level. That there is also need for a reverse information stream and for analysis and feedback into local decision-making seems to go unnoticed.

16. Link with projects: score 1.36, rank 23 out of 23.

This question on efforts to relay with/coordinate with donor M&E mechanisms scores worse than any other in the list. In none of the eleven countries is the coordination with donor M&E mechanisms for projects satisfactory, and in seven countries it is weak. Issue of harmonization and alignment of donors is hardly touched upon in PRSP documents. There is in fact not much reference to donors in the context of M&E. This is surprising

in view of the fact that donors dominate the M&E scene with their uncoordinated efforts to collect and analyze data on their own projects (see also question 21).

There are however some broad references to the twin issues of donor alignment and harmonization in some reports. In Burkina Faso an experimental (pilot) approach to development assistance was adopted in Burkina Faso in 1997, involving a wide range of donors. Known as the 'Conditionality Reformulation Test Exercise', it was coordinated by the EC¹⁴. The idea was for donors to reach a consensus on a series of performance indicators for key sectors of government activities. Those indicators would then be used as the basis for decisions regarding disbursement of financial assistance, whether grants or soft loans, preferably in the form of budget support. The document mentions that, while the experiment is fairly far advanced, it had not yet led to the identification of performance indicators validated by the donor community. In Zambia, the newly created Planning and Economic Management Department (PEMD) in the Ministry of Finance and National Planning will be the focal point for overall policy planning, coordination and monitoring, including the harmonization of external financing and TA. And in Uganda, the Poverty Monitoring and Analysis Unit of the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development is not only the locus of coordination of national efforts, but also of coordination with the World Bank. It should be added that the documents we studied are not the best source for information on donor alignment and harmonization, and we are aware that some interesting efforts are going on. But on the specific and highly relevant issue of integrating with parallel project M&E systems driven by donors, the reports should have something to say, and we interpret the silence as testimony to the fact that not much is being done.

¹⁴ See Adam et al. (2004) for more detailed information on the Conditionality Reformulation Test Exercise.

4.3. Capacity

17. Capacity problem acknowledged: score 3.00, rank 1 out of 23

All countries, with varying degrees of detail, acknowledge weaknesses in terms of human, financial, institutional capacity. Weaknesses regarding human and financial weaknesses are better defined than those regarding institutional capacity. In particular the linking of disparate M&E efforts in different parts of government, with all its organizational implications is not given due attention. The most frank assessment comes from Mali. The PRSP and ARP describe M&E as being in an 'infant stage', and talk of the need for a 'revolution' in M&E.

18. Capacity building plan: score 2.73, rank 4 out of 23

Plans for remediation seem well elaborated in half of the cases, sometimes with rich detail. In Malawi, for instance, there is a technical task force that has finalized a PRSP monitoring and evaluation master plan to address problems and an excellent overview table with remediation activities

is presented. At the other end of the scale, the JSA of Niger's APR indicates that the plan should go further than training, and in particular that civil service management reforms are needed, echoing the need for deep institutional reform that we identified throughout our own desk study.

4.4. Participation

19. Participation by parliament: score 1.64, rank 17 out of 23

Revealingly, the role of parliament is not even mentioned in half of the cases. In three countries however, the role of parliament is properly recognized, and there is adequate alignment with parliamentary control and oversight procedures. In Mozambique for instance parliament has been given competence to call ministers before parliament to report on progress of the PARPA. Also key indicators of PARPA are integrated in a regular system of quarterly and annual government reports to parliament. In Ghana parliament receives monthly reports, parliamentary sub-committees members participate in the M&E Technical Committee, and a parliamentary committee on PRSP implementation, monitoring and evaluation has been set up. In Uganda parliament has a central oversight function, including over the Steering Committee that follows up on World Bank policy lending to the PRSP.

20. Participation by civil society: score 2.00, rank 10 out of 23

In most of the countries studied there is a token of civil society participation in M&E, but this role is not institutionalized and remains very much ad-hoc. Sometimes CSOs were invited as members of working groups to establish monitoring indicators, but this typically did not automatically mean continued participation. This is an area where the JSAs tend to be more outspoken, as civil society participation is for donors a crucial characteristic of the PRSP approach. For instance the JSA of Ethiopia PRSP notes that although CSO participation at local and sector level seems well organized, such is not the case at the central level. As a consequence, civil society was not around the table when the M&E system was being designed and put in operation. Some reports, notably Malawi and Uganda, point at the possible role for civil society outside the official M&E system, that is, as 'independent' watchdogs. This function seems to have been best developed in Uganda.

21. Participation of donors: score 1.55, rank 19 out of 23

It proved difficult to assess this question on the basis of the PRSP and APR documents we studied, and this highlights the limitations of a desk review. While the importance of participation of civil society is given some prominence in most PRSP documents, the same is not true for donors, and there is little mention of a formal structure for donor involvement. This does however not mean that they are not around the table. They are mentioned among several other stakeholders that participate e.g. in the elaboration of the progress report. In most cases donors give feedback on progress reports, in

case of Tanzania, there was even a joint-donor statement added to the progress report. If anything, the weight of donors in national decision-making in PRSP countries, most of which are highly aid dependent, is too large rather than too small. The point we wanted to investigate is whether the dominant position of donors is acknowledged and translated in their participation in national M&E systems. Because if this is not the case, there is a high probability that they exert their influence in parallel, often informal ways. Unfortunately, the issue of clear structure for participation of donors in M&E does not really seem to be a topic discussed in PRSP documents.

4.5. Quality

22. Effective use of M&E in progress report: score 1.64, rank 17 out of 23

We were struck by the limited use of M&E results. The APRs are mostly of low quality as regards follow-up of performance, and particularly as regards analysis. In most cases, there was no baseline data at the time of the full PRSP, and the APR often is the occasion to fill in some of the gaps in this respect. When more than one progress report had already been produced, we saw progress in the efforts to compare actual performance with baseline data and targets, but stopping short of offering an analysis for the non-achievement of targets. The difference between changes in indicators and impact is for instance seldom touched upon. The best we could find in this respect concerns Uganda. The JSA of the first Ugandan progress report indicates that importance of exogenous factors was understood, but that more analysis was needed to understand to what extent the observed increase in inequality was due to structural factors or exogenous events. The second progress report scores better in this respect. For most other countries, JSA of progress reports mention the absence of analysis as one of the major shortcomings.

23. Internal usage of progress report: score 1.82, rank 15 out of 23

The APRs are imposed by donors as a way to keep the pressure on recipient governments. This has had some positive effects, as the previous discussion has illustrated. For instance, it provided an external impetus for renewed broad-based consultation and participation. APRs also revealed the limitations in the current M&E system. In Mozambique it became clear that linkages with line ministries were weak, in Burkina Faso that the system did not function properly, in Malawi that no workable monitoring framework had been established, in Mali that the technical committees which were the core of the system saw their responsibilities taken over by the PRSP coordination unit. On the down side, the compulsory production of an APR may lead to external accountability taking precedence over internal accountability. It is also a very time-consuming exercise that may have detracted some of the best experts from actually improving the system. Whatever the case may be, we did not find much evidence of countries using APR as an instrument of

internal accountability or feedback. Uganda and Mozambique are doing more efforts than others. In Uganda the APR is a summary of the poverty status report, which is also used for internal purposes, as a mechanism for dissemination of information and increase of ownership among stakeholders, and it is also submitted to parliament. But even here the JSA of the second APR comments that additional work is needed.

This ends our review of the 23 questions. As a further piece of information, we provide in table 2 a comparison of the overall M&E score of the eleven countries studied, calculated as the average over the 23 questions used in our desk study and thus again solely based on information the countries reported themselves in official PRSP documents (PRSP + APR). Differences in performance among individual countries were repeatedly noted on the previous pages. The table reveals that some countries outperform others fairly systematically.

Table 2: *Average M&E scores of 11 Sub-Saharan African countries*

	weak	partially satisfactory	satisfactory	excellent	index (1-4)
Uganda	0	7	14	2	2.78
Tanzania	3	7	9	4	2.61
Ghana	2	12	8	1	2.35
Mozambique	4	9	10	0	2.26
Ethiopia	6	9	5	3	2.22
Malawi	4	13	4	2	2.17
Zambia	7	11	5	0	1.91
Mali	12	7	1	3	1.78
Burkina Faso	11	8	4	0	1.70
Mauritania	15	6	2	0	1.43
Niger	16	6	1	0	1.35

Source: authors' desk study

5. Conclusion: too many challenges at once for M&E?

Donors may be justified in their hope that the PRSP process will act as a catalyst for institutional reform, yet the upgrading of at best embryonic national M&E systems to an acceptable level constitutes an enormous challenge. By way of conclusion, we summarize the major issues involved. The PRSP process, because of its comprehensive and holistic approach, requires M&E systems that are multi-stakeholder; multi-purpose; multi-dimensional and multi-method; multi-layer; and finally multi-criteria. The corresponding system requirements are daunting, alone and in combination. Some of the challenges are methodological; many others are organizational and institutional.

i) Multi-stakeholder M&E

- A first group of stakeholders are the different state actors involved. Their multiplicity in itself raises questions about “centralisation” versus “autonomy” and the desired degree of interaction. The increasing importance put upon the central ministries (Prime Minister Office, Presidency, Ministry of Finance and /or Planning) raises questions concerning the exact role of line ministries. Line ministries should play important roles in especially monitoring of input, output and outcomes while tasks of evaluation may be shared with the central level. To what degree are existing M&E units in line ministries integrated into the PRSP M&E system? To what extent are line ministries involved in the grand design, so that they also feel ‘ownership’ and show a sufficient level of commitment?

- The other group are non-state actors. How should the participation of non-state actors as CSOs and research institutes be organised: where and how, mainstreamed in ministries or separate cells? How about the organization of the two-way flow of information: the input of information of the CSOs into the national system and the output of the system to non-state actors? More specific questions also come to mind: how to render the input from CSO genuinely useful; how to organize the system so as to take into account the information needs from non-state actors; and how best to feed back the information to the demanders of information?

- The role of parliament is also a much neglected issue. Parliament should play an essential role, particularly as regards accountability. Donors have not been very attentive in this respect, not to say that they have largely neglected this important dimension.

- And what about the role of donors? To what extent does the M&E system take into account information needs of donors? If these are not taken into account, they will somehow elaborate their own systems or they will impose additional separate demands on national M&E systems. To what extent for instance do annual progress reports (APR) on the PRSP impose ad-

ditional demands on the M&E? To what extent are APR also used for national purposes, i.e. for government decision-making processes, or as accountability instruments in hands of CSO? To what extent is APR consistent with national reporting? To what extent are donors involved in the elaboration of the grand design (participation may increase the probability that they align their information needs to those of other stakeholders)? If donors do not as yet make full use of the new M&E systems, what is the degree of coordination between their own systems and the new systems?

A general (institutional) problem with the involvement of non-state stakeholders is to find a level of integration that allows for effective feedback but that does not endanger the needed independence of those actors so as to ensure accountability.

ii) With **multi-purpose** M&E we mean the twin functions of feedback and accountability. How is the trade-off dealt with institutionally? What about the location of the M&E unit: close to operational level (positive for feedback, but negative for independence), or far from operational and implementation level (negative for feedback, positive for independence)? To what extent is senior management committed and involved? Is there an independent budget? To whom does the M&E unit report? Are there explicit mechanisms to ensure feedback?

iii) Under the heading of **multi-dimensional and multi-method** M&E questions arise about the integration of qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Quite some research has been undertaken on methodological issues, more particularly the elaboration of more participatory, often more qualitative, techniques and how to combine them with quantitative, more conventional techniques. Much of this research precedes the PRSP context (Carvalho and White, 1997)(Baker, 2000), but is highly relevant to it. For every one of the four indicator levels (inputs, outputs, outcomes and impact), there now exist conventional and more participatory data collection techniques. Much less energy has been devoted to studying the institutional issues of multi-dimensional and multi-method M&E. How for instance to design and organize conventional surveys and all kinds of more participatory assessments in ways that make their output mutually compatible? In reality data sets are often so incongruous that it is not even possible to use one to perform a triangulation test on another. And does an overall strategic plan exist indicating which techniques will be used to generate what kind of data? Discussion of institutional issues along these lines is all the more important in view of the fact that quantitative and qualitative methodologies are mostly applied by different actors belonging to institutionally diverse settings.

iv) The existence, side by side, of **multi-layer**, in particular centralized versus decentralized M&E, raises questions regarding the degree of vertical integration. Monitoring should normally take place as close as possible to implementation, so what is the appropriate role for local authorities in the

M&E system? There are further questions about the scaling up of micro to macro, about collecting information at a micro-level, which may also be used at a meso and macro level. All this necessitates a clear vision, a plan about what information, analysis is needed at different levels and what information, analysis should be provided by different levels.

v) **Multi-criteria** M&E is illustrated by the juxtaposition of on the one hand process evaluation with criteria as effectiveness and effectiveness of implementation and on the other hand impact evaluation. There is perhaps a welcome move away from inputs towards outcome, but insufficient attention for changes in outcome, and even less for net impact and attribution. This is linked to the shift in attention from evaluation to monitoring¹⁵. The shift in emphasis towards monitoring also has implications for the trade-off between accountability and feedback, as it tilts the balance towards feedback. This may not satisfy all donors, and as a consequence some donors may well keep on using their own systems for a long time to come, thus weakening still fragile national systems.

¹⁵ Indicative is that in the joint World Bank-IMF staff assessment (JSA) of the PRSP, a document produced prior to its discussion by the Executive Boards of the two organizations, the section on M&E is labelled 'targets, indicators and monitoring'.

In addition to the five 'multi' issues just discussed, the timeframe that donors use under the PRSP approach may also prove problematic. As donors are pressed to switch to non-project aid instruments, they devote some aid resources to beef up the national M&E systems that must generate the justifications they will later need towards their own patrons (Parliament, public opinion). But how satisfactory will be the results that come out of a system of M&E under construction? This does not seem to worry the donors unduly. In fact they seem to devote more attention to improving public expenditure management. This may be partly understandable as PEM is more linked to the first phase of PRSP. Should this lack of urgent attention be considered as an indication that donors do not really take all that seriously the need to replace their own M&E systems with nationally owned ones? Does it mean that they do not really bother too much about outcomes but rather about aid spending ratios? Is this also why they accept that PRSP are remarkably silent on 'evaluation'?

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Annex 1 The questionnaire used for the desk study

Topics	Question
I. Policy	
1 The evaluation plan	Is there a comprehensive evaluation plan, indicating what to evaluate, why, how, for whom?
2 M versus E	Is difference and relationship between M and E clearly spelled out?
3 Selection of indicators	Is it clear what to monitor and evaluate? Is there a list of indicators?
4 selection criteria	Are the criteria for the selection of indicators clear? And who selects?
5 Priority setting	Is the need acknowledged to set priorities and limit the number of indicators to be monitored?
6 Causality chain	Are different levels of indicators (input-output-outcome-impact) explicitly linked (programme theory)? (vertical logic)
7 Methodologies used	Is it clear how to monitor and evaluate? Are methodologies well identified and mutually integrated ?
8 Data collection	Are sources of data collection clearly identified? Are indicators linked to sources of data collection? (horizontal logic)
9 Autonomy & impartiality (accountability)	Is the need for autonomy and impartiality explicitly mentioned? Does the M&E plan allow for tough issues to be analysed? Is there an independent budget?
10 Feedback	Explicit and consistent approach to reporting, dissemination, integration?
11 Alignment planning & budgeting	Integration of M&E results in planning and budgeting?
II. Organization	
12 Coordination & oversight	Appropriate institutional structure for coordination, support, central oversight, and feedback? With different stakeholders?
13 Statistical Office	Are surveys, censuses etc streamlined into M&E needs? Is the role of the statistical office in M&E clear?
14 Line Ministries	M&E units in line ministries and semi-governmental institutions (parastatals), and properly relayed to central unit?
15 Decentralised levels	M&E units at decentralised levels and properly relayed to central unit?
16 Link with projects	Any effort to relay with/coordinate with donor M&E mechanisms for projects?
III. Capacity	
17 Problem acknowledged	Are current weaknesses in the system identified?
18 Capacity building plan	Plans for remediation? Training, appropriate salaries, etc.?
IV. Participation of actors outside government	
19 Parliament	Is the role of Parliament properly recognised, and is there alignment with Parliamentary control and oversight procedures?
20 Civil Society	Is the role of civil society recognised? Are there clear procedures for the participation of civil society? Is the participation institutionally arranged or rather ad-hoc?
21 Donors	Is the role of donors recognised? Are there clear procedures for participation of donors?
V. Quality (on the basis of Annual Progress Reports)	
22 Effective use of M&E in APR	Presentation of relevant M&E results? Compared to targets? Analysis of discrepancies?
23 Internal usage of APR	Is the APR also used for internal purposes? Is it an instrument of national policy-making and/or policy-influencing and advocacy?

