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Research on the current state of PRS monitoring systems

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with Robert Lloyd

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Summary

This report reviews recent literature on monitoring Poverty Reduction Strategies. It discusses four challenging areas: institutional arrangements; the role of non-government organisations; implementation and intermediate output monitoring; and using results. The main findings are:

- Severe capacity constraints are not sufficiently acknowledged. International agencies should be less ambitious about what can be achieved and in what time frame.
- The "technical secretariats", responsible for implementing monitoring, are of central importance. Their need for analytical skills is widely acknowledged, but expertise in data management, communication and marketing are also necessary.
- Building cooperation between ministries and agencies responsible for producing data is proving difficult. Success often depends on the status, capabilities and personalities of key people, not on formal mandates and frameworks.
- Unless countries have strong local monitoring systems, it is hard to see that building local PRS monitoring capacity should be an immediate priority, given the magnitude of this task.
- There is often confusion about the role of civil society in government monitoring systems. It is important that all stakeholders are aware of the involvement offered and that sufficient thought is given to the capacity, information access and influence required for civil society to perform their role.
- The "chains of causality" between policies and outcomes remain problematic. This leads to problems in identifying appropriate intermediate indicators. Given scarce resources, a focus on monitoring budget allocations – linked to a small set of basic provision indicators – may be a reasonable and realistic starting point.
- Administrative data provide essential information, but often not of sufficient quality for PRS monitoring. It is worth exploring possibilities for combining them with other sources to generate "best estimates".
- Demand for PRS monitoring information, other than to meet donor requirements, is often very weak. Monitoring systems must include marketing and communication activities to build this demand.

Keywords: PRSPs, monitoring, evaluation, participatory processes, poverty assessments, institutional reform, decentralisation, poverty indicators.

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Executive summary

A review of recent documents on poverty reduction strategies (PRS) monitoring indicates that in most of the PRS countries there are severe capacity constraints across the range of skills required and suggests that those constraints are usually not sufficiently acknowledged or acted upon. They should imply the adoption of a less ambitious attitude as to what can be achieved and a willingness to make hard choices in prioritising activities. Success or failure will often be dependent on the capabilities, status and personalities of a few key players.

Some argue that locating PRS monitoring under the ministry of finance can provide the necessary incentives to carry other actors along. However, the "virtual" monitoring system set out in the PRS Papers (PRSP) does not necessarily indicate the real power relationships between the various departments and personalities involved. It is probably more useful to seek to promote reasonable working relationships between the PRS monitoring committee and the ministries, local governments, agencies, etc. that are meant to provide information. A good working principle would be that the burdens imposed on marginal stakeholders – those with little real incentive to cooperate – should be minimised.

PRSP preparation may have generated an interest in monitoring systems and data within government, but this interest does not typically extend to the detailed activities required to effectively implement those systems. The PRS "technical secretariat", which it is to be hoped can take on these tasks, is therefore of central importance. There is much emphasis in the documentation on the need for analytical skills within these units. It would be more useful to assess capacity by relating staffing requirements to the specific tasks to be undertaken. Monitoring institutions also need sufficient staff to undertake the more mundane and routine activities which are an essential requirement of an effective monitoring system, and expertise in communication and advocacy to promote the use of the information produced. In most countries specialised analytical and policy review skills may be better contracted-in, especially if they address sector-specific issues.

Many of the PRS countries are committed to decentralisation policies that imply a need for local monitoring systems. However, this does not imply that national PRS monitoring should necessarily be predicated on such systems. In many countries the capacity constraints which apply at national level are of a higher order of magnitude at local level and will take many years to remedy. As and when they are functioning effectively they will undoubtedly contribute to PRS monitoring and those responsible for the national system should obviously collaborate and provide support to the extent practicable. However, building local capacity throughout the nation should not necessarily be seen as a priority for those responsible for PRS monitoring, given the magnitude of this task and their overall financial, human resource and time constraints. Moreover, particularly where there is popular support for decentralisation, local monitoring systems are more likely to function well if they are seen as evolving in response to a genuine local demand for the information produced, rather than as data-collection outposts of a central agency.

Even if government priorities are expressed in the PRSP, these may not be owned by sectoral ministries or other agencies, which will typically have their own agendas and priorities. Sharing and combining information is not usually part of the culture of such institutions. The cautious approach would be to assume that, though there may well be scope for joint activities, for example on PRS and sectoral monitoring, ministries will generally regard the former as primarily a source of additional demands with no obvious benefits. As suggested above, if this position is adopted, the aim would then be to make such demands as minimal as possible. Alternatively, it could be reasonably argued that PRS monitoring might provide an opportunity for improving the present situation which is clearly unsatisfactory. There would clearly be considerable advantages if existing government monitoring systems could be gradually enhanced and coordinated so that the requirements of PRS monitoring could be met without the creation of a separate dedicated agency. The National Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy (NIMES) initiative in Uganda should provide evidence of the potential value of this strategy.

Civil society involvement in PRS monitoring should have a number of benefits. If effective it can indeed increase the input and agency of civil society organisations (CSOs) and improve the transparency and accountability of government actions. However, all sides must be aware what form of involvement is being offered. Does "participation" involve some degree of empowerment and control over outcomes or is it simply another word for informing CSOs about what government intends to do? Both may be useful activities but they should not be confused.

It is by no means self-evident that CSOs should always seek to be involved in joint monitoring activities, particularly if that involvement is heavily dependent on government funding. It can be argued that at least some would be much better occupied in the independent analysis of monitoring data, so that they can be in a position to seriously debate the interpretation of findings with central and local government agencies. However, the ability of CSOs to play such a role will depend on their internal capacity in terms of analysis and exposition, the extent to which official sources of information are made available to them in a timely fashion and their access to effective channels of communication and influence.

There is currently much discussion of the need for "missing middle" indicators relating to policy implementation. However, it must be remembered that the lack of such indicators in early PRSPs was not a simple oversight. The emphasis on outcomes and impacts reflected a reasonable desire for evidence that policies were resulting in actual as opposed to potential improvements in the living standards of the poor. In many cases the precise chains of causality between policies and outcomes were, and remain, problematic and open to debate. Such uncertainty makes the selection of relevant indicators problematic. Moreover, even if optimal indicators (i.e. most appropriate given a clear understanding as to how a given policy initiative is intended to produce a desired outcome) can be defined, they may well prove difficult or expensive to estimate to the required level of precision (i.e. such that substantive change is sufficiently larger than measurement error) over the timescale required.

Given scarce resources, a focus on budget allocations and expenditures may well be an appropriate response, particularly if it involves effective tracking exercises with mechanisms to ensure transparency

and accountability. This is a similar route to that proposed in the Kenya Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (IPRSP) (discussed in Booth and Lucas 2001). Linking these data to a small set of basic service provision indicators that can reliably reflect annual changes could provide a reasonable starting point in assessing if a PRS is on track.

Routine data systems have the great potential advantage that they can deliver geographically disaggregated information. To the extent that decentralised decision-making and policy implementation is effectively implemented, they could be more useful than survey estimates if quality problems could be overcome. However, that remains a daunting and at least medium-term task. One question which is rarely addressed is whether the poor quality could be ameliorated at least in the short run by analytical means. It would seem useful to explore further the possibilities for combining routine data with other sources to generate best estimates.

The preference of donors for survey-based data is understandable and may be perfectly rational in the short term. Surveys are typically the only source of data that can be readily disaggregated by population socio-economic characteristics. They can be used to enhance the value of routine data systems, for example, by demonstrating the links between geographical and socio-economic factors as in poverty mapping. However, the adoption of standardised survey packages for PRS monitoring should be carefully examined. Many surveys originated in a research context and their content may not be optimal for the uses to which they are now being put. An interesting question would be: "What are the minimum data required from such surveys to provide the necessary evidence on PRS implementation issues in a given country?"

Donors are often reluctant to become involved in potentially long-drawn-out, hostile and often unproductive debates on the reliability of indicators. The approach adopted by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), of requiring that at least the quality of key indicators be openly assessed and alternative methods of improving quality proposed where necessary, is an interesting model.

It would be helpful if the distinction between "qualitative methods" and "participation" were more clearly maintained. The routine labelling of qualitative exercises as "participatory", which often seems to be done in order to emphasise agencies' concern with community involvement and "ownership", may be becoming counter-productive. A useful and workable distinction might be to encourage the use of the word participation only for monitoring activities which are independent of government or donor agency control.

With some notable exceptions (for example, Mozambique, Uganda, Tanzania and Vietnam), at least in the short run there will probably be limited demand for PRS monitoring data, other than that generated by the need to meet the requirements of donor review processes. Few PRS countries have traditionally used performance monitoring to drive policy change or budget allocation decisions. PRS monitoring agencies will need to have very good marketing and communications skills if they are to persuade government officials and civil society of the value to them of the information being produced. Targeting findings to meet the specific interests of sectoral ministries, local government, CSOs and other stakeholders is essential. Two specific approaches seem to have made some headway: governments

(national and local) and CSOs do appear sensitive to indicators which show their position relative to other countries, provinces, districts, etc.; and poverty mapping seems to have a similar potential to provoke responses that may influence policy debates.

Some existing poverty and social impact analysis (PSIA) exercises provide attractive examples of the type of policy analysis process which might engender a greater interest in the use of PRS data, if it became part of the routine activities of the monitoring system. Given capacity constraints, it may be necessary to base such activities initially within the technical secretariat, possibly reinforced by local or international consultants. However, extending the basic approach to involve CSOs would be an attractive possibility.

1 Introduction

The overall objective of this study was to assess, mainly using available documentation but also by discussion with a limited number of individuals closely involved with the process, some of the key practical issues arising from experience with the implementation of PRS monitoring systems.

As a first step the study reviewed recent available materials on Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS) monitoring from sources other than the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the UK's Department for International Development (DFID). Given the volume of documentation on this subject which originates from these agencies, this restriction was intended to extend the range of sources considered. The review therefore focused on other donors, international agencies, developing country official publications, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and academic journals. The restriction has not been followed absolutely. A substantial amount of interesting material arises from consultancies, workshops, presentations, etc. which have either been to some extent organised or funded by the World Bank or DFID or involved their representatives. In addition, some factual materials which seemed helpful to the discussion and were known to be readily available from the World Bank Poverty Reduction Strategies Papers (World Bank PRSP) website were referenced.

It may be interesting to note that the general avoidance of World Bank, IMF and, to a lesser extent, DFID materials proved more difficult than expected. Much of the easily available material on the websites of other donor agencies tended to discuss PRS monitoring in the context of a broader discussion of PRS issues and often in very general terms – for example, stressing the need for better data, capacity building or community involvement – rather than dealing with the specific experiences or technical issues with which this review was primarily concerned. Much of it was also responsive to World Bank initiatives or activities, rather than proactive in proposing new approaches or methods. A substantial proportion of the (often critical) NGO material was also responsive, though it did frequently propose alternative, typically community-oriented, monitoring approaches. Searches of the academic literature proved disappointing. Given the lead time required for journal publication, the limited number of articles available on monitoring tended to relate to the earliest round of PRSPs and thus considered only the initial small group of sub-Saharan African countries. As might be expected, this bias was reflected to a lesser extent in all of the sources.

Some of the more interesting material gathered by the above process is contained in Annex 2. Here, the main aims will be to: (a) provide a brief outline of the issues raised by the review; (b) indicate the various positions taken up in the documentary materials; and (c) suggest possible approaches to determining best practice within a given context. For the purposes of this last and most important objective the limitation on sources mentioned above will obviously be disregarded. For simplicity, the report is structured under four main headings:

- Who monitors? Institutional arrangements and monitoring capacity
- The roles of NGOs

- The “missing middle” – monitoring implementation and intermediate outputs
- Using the results – dissemination, analysis and policy change.

This structure has been adopted in order to focus attention on specific issues raised by PRS monitoring, as distinct from more general concerns with the collection, analysis, dissemination and use of policy relevant data in PRS countries. The first section will review the various arrangements adopted to implement PRS monitoring. This will consider which department or agency is allocated primary responsibility, the arguments for and against decentralised monitoring, and the links with sector-specific information systems. The second will focus on the roles played by NGOs, either inside formal institutions or independently, with particular reference to the role of national parliaments. The third section will examine the area which has increasingly come to be seen as the key weakness in PRS monitoring systems: the difficulties of providing short-term (at least annual) estimates of progress in programme implementation and intermediate outputs. This section will focus on issues arising from the use of three primary sources of data: routine data systems, rapid surveys/studies and qualitative/participatory methods. It will also address a related concern, that of providing such data at the required level of disaggregation, both geographically and by population sub-group. Finally, the fourth section will review the extent to which PRS monitoring data is analysed, disseminated and used to influence policy.

Where possible, the discussion will be informed by reference to tables derived from the relevant sections on monitoring taken from the 34 PRSPs currently available on the World Bank PRSP website. These tables are given in Annex 1.

2 Who monitors? Institutional frameworks and monitoring capacity

This section focuses on the institutional arrangements established for PRS monitoring. As expressed in a recent evaluation of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) support for the PRSP process, this activity: ‘requires effective institutional structure and appropriate capacity as well as strong grounding in different techniques and methodologies’ (UNDP 2003a). The essential question is whether the institutions given responsibility really have the capacity to undertake the various tasks involved. The word capacity is here used in the broad sense, to include not only issues of technical expertise, but also the equally important aspects of leadership, appropriate allocation of responsibilities and resources, and effective work and management practices including incentives (Orbach 2003).

In a number of respects PRS monitoring presents an original and daunting challenge. Many of the earlier poverty monitoring exercises, including those undertaken to provide an input to PRS design, focused on the compilation of existing output/outcome indicators. In many respects they involved activities similar to those undertaken to produce the annual volumes of statistics published in many countries. They were often based primarily on the existing findings of integrated household surveys, participatory poverty assessments (Brock, Cornwall and Gaventa 2001) and information provided by the routine data systems of sectoral ministries. PRS monitoring also involves the use of information from a

variety of sources, typically including routine data from at least four ministries (finance, education, health and agriculture), one or more household surveys and a number of special studies, often involving qualitative or participatory methods. However, the demands made on those responsible for the estimation of PRS indicators from these sources differ in at least four important respects.

First, whereas a poverty status report usually combines the most recent estimates available for the various sources, which may well span a number of years, all the information in a PRS monitoring report should obviously relate to the specific time period over which assessment of progress is being made. Second, information has to be provided on progress in both short-term poverty reduction and PRS implementation. These two factors taken together entail a move away from a preoccupation with final outcome indicators, which predominate in poverty monitoring, to include many more input and intermediate output indicators. Third, those taking responsibility for monitoring have a much greater "burden of proof". They have to be convinced, and to convince others (including a possibly sceptical donor audience), that the information available from each source meets an adequate standard of reliability and sensitivity such that it can be used to assess what may well be relatively limited changes in PRS indicators over the course of a single year. Fourth, the presentation of the findings, for example at an annual review meeting, has potentially serious consequences. At the very least, progress will be applauded and lack of progress questioned. At worst, insufficient progress from a donor perspective may be linked to a decision not to provide a further tranche of funding.

Two interrelated strategies, which might be characterised as "political" and "technical", have generally been adopted to address these issues. The first stresses the need for monitoring to be a "high-status" activity. Senior politicians and government officials have to be seen to actively support the monitoring process and lend authority, typically by their presence on a high-level oversight committee (which we will refer to as the PRS monitoring committee), to the demands made on ministries and agencies that are required to provide the necessary timely, reliable information. The second focuses on the need for the identification or creation of a specialised technical unit or secretariat (here called the technical secretariat), which has the capacity both to provide the expertise needed to implement the monitoring process and to provide assistance to contributing agencies where required. Donor support to monitoring has tended to focus on three related areas: the activities of the high-level committee, which often includes donor representatives; the provision of financial and/or technical assistance to the secretariat; and similar support to ministries, statistics departments and NGOs and community-based organisations (CBOs) for relevant specific surveys or studies.

2.1 The PRS monitoring committee

The high-level committee is typically allocated primary responsibility for coordinating the efforts of other monitoring units, for example the national statistical office or relevant departments in line ministries, and preparation of the annual PRS implementation reports. In many sub-Saharan countries (e.g. Kenya, Mozambique and The Gambia) the key player tends to be the ministry of finance, on the reasonable basis

that poverty reduction activities have to be intimately linked to overall resource allocation decisions. In the Asian countries, on the other hand, initial indications are that ministries of planning will take the leading role (e.g. Vietnam, Bangladesh and Nepal). This may simply reflect the relatively higher status of planning ministries in these countries (though this approach does not seem to have been followed in the former Soviet Union (FSU) countries) but would be of concern if it also relates to a view that the PRS is 'primarily about (donor) investment expenditure rather than (government) recurrent expenditure' as suggested by an Overseas Development Institute document (ODI 2003b) on PRS monitoring in Asia.

A PRSP consultants workshop report (ODI 2002a) makes the interesting point that the lead role taken by ministries of finance in sub-Saharan Africa represents a major institutional change. Traditionally, monitoring systems in these countries have also been located within that branch of government responsible for development planning, either in a planning ministry or in related units in line ministries. The report argues that the officials in such units are accustomed to a technical and bureaucratic approach to monitoring appropriate for the implementation of (often donor-funded) projects and that the shift to a more 'strategic and learning-oriented' approach required for PRS monitoring may well be seen as a challenge to their professional skills and a threat to their existing status. This feeling may be reinforced by the perception that overall control has shifted to the ministry which oversees their budget.

Tanzania provides an interesting case study in that considerable efforts were made to seek wide agreement, both within and beyond government, on the design and implementation of the PRS monitoring system (Annex 2 Note 1). Evans and van Diesen (2002) are generally impressed by this attempt to broaden involvement:

> There have been criticisms of the institutional framework, with some arguing that it is unnecessarily complicated and cumbersome in a way that is typical of compromise solutions. Yet there is a strong feeling particularly amongst Government stakeholders that this is a workable framework that makes appropriate use of the existing capacity and mandate of various organisations.
>
> (Evans and van Diesen 2002)

However, there are concerns that sharing responsibility between different agencies may lead to a lack of clarity as to who does what. In a consultancy report for the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) on support to the PRSP in Burkina Faso, Gerster and Sawadogo (2003) comment on:

> parallel structures at the central level with very limited effectiveness and efficiency. Confusion prevails in the sense of very different interpretations of the tasks of sector groups, high transaction costs of meetings and heterogenity of participants. NGOs consider it as a heavy and opaque follow-up mechanism, duplicating the ordinary established channels instead of empowering them. Some donors qualify the follow-up set-up bluntly as "dysfunctional". Moreover, since mid-2002, the implementation is overshadowed by the rivalry between the two key Ministries in charge of PRSP.
>
> (Gerster and Sawadogo 2003)

Similarly, a report on the PRS monitoring framework for Pakistan (ODI 2002b) points out the potential for confusion and duplication of effort between the Planning Commission, supported by the Centre for Research on Poverty Reduction and Income Distribution, and the PRSP secretariat, based in the Ministry of Finance, both of which were at one stage independently undertaking design work on the PRS monitoring framework. More recently, this situation seems to have lead to the circulation of apparently contradictory poverty monitoring indicators (personal communication 2004). The World Bank Operations Evaluations Department (Hauge 2001) raised similar concerns with reference to the Uganda Poverty Eradication Plan (PEAP) PRSP, noting the rigid separation of resource monitoring and poverty monitoring systems, though both are coordinated within the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development.

2.2 The technical secretariat

The consultancy report on Pakistan (ODI 2002b) also stresses the need for an effective technical secretariat. It argues that it is

> necessary to identify a single, competent, institution which can and will assume responsibility for (i) identifying the ongoing data needs for PRSP monitoring; (ii) allocating the necessary funding; and (iii) ensuring that the information is collected, is sufficiently reliable, and is made available for PRSP monitoring purposes on a timely basis and in a useful format.
>
> (ODI 2002b)

The Poverty Monitoring and Analysis Unit (PMAU) in Uganda, which has been supported by DFID, is perhaps the best known example of such a unit and appears to be generally well regarded. PRSP Synthesis Note 7 (ODI 2003a) notes a consultancy report which claims that it 'has operated very effectively as the linchpin on which the whole poverty monitoring effort depends'. The UNDP has similarly offered financial and technical support to the establishment of such units in a number of countries including Azerbaijan, Mali, The Gambia and Vietnam (UNDP 2003b). In terms of capacity, their main concern appears to be that this unit should have adequate staff with skills and experience in data analysis, interpretation and dissemination. In Azerbaijan, for example:

> In response to a need identified by the government in the PRSP, UNDP and other members of the UNCT have offered to support the establishment of a Poverty Monitoring Unit within the PRSP Secretariat. Staff of the unit will be trained to use various surveys and other sources of information and, in turn, will train and support members of other government bodies . . . In this way, poverty monitoring efforts will have a much larger impact on the development of effective poor-poor policies.
>
> (UNDP 2003b)

This emphasis on analytical skills, or lack of them, is widespread in the documentation and, while often taken as self-evident, may require closer examination. As will be argued below, such skills are certainly not the only requirement for effectiveness.

2.3 Centralised versus decentralised systems

PRS monitoring systems tend to be established at the national level. However, in many countries, government policy includes a commitment to decentralisation, at least for service delivery, and it is argued that in such cases the PRS process should support the development of a capacity for data collection and analysis at lower administrative levels. In Tajikistan, for example, a Presidential decree has ordered the establishment of poverty monitoring systems at regional and local level (personal communication). Asche (2003) suggests three possible reasons why decentralised monitoring might be considered appropriate: (1) it is regarded as having the potential to deliver findings of a higher technical quality; (2) in order to support administrative decentralisation; or (3) to allow an effective 'division of labour' between collaborating donor agencies. While not dismissing any of these as necessarily invalid, he argues that the claimed benefits are often overstated. For example, central agencies are often perfectly capable of determining regional variations in poverty and there is little evidence that decentralised monitoring does in fact promote effective decentralisation. Asche suggests that only where decentralisation is already well established does the need for location-specific information provide a rational basis for decentralised monitoring systems.

Such an approach was adopted in Tanzania. The Poverty Monitoring Master Plan (Tanzania 2001) sees local government authorities (LGAs) as 'the obvious place for coordination' of routine data. The Local Government Reform Programme was intended to promote the development of a monitoring and evaluation system that 'makes information available that is important to local decision makers'. The Local Government Monitoring and Evaluation System was originally intended to be fully operational in 2004, at which point it was to become the 'key source for poverty monitoring indicators'. Improvements in existing routine data systems were to be undertaken in order to meet demand until the new system was fully established. There are indications that this may take somewhat longer than planned (Evans and van Diesen 2002).

The consultancy report on Pakistan (ODI 2002b) suggests that decentralised monitoring can have an important role, if certain conditions are met. It argues that 'PRSP monitoring frameworks are intrinsically "top down" in nature, that is designed to enable federal or provincial governments to monitor progress within provinces or districts under their jurisdiction'. However, if decentralisation is taken seriously and those districts are made responsible for PRS implementation in their local area, this should clearly be guided by appropriate and reliable monitoring data. The report suggests that national sample surveys, because of limitations on sample size, are unlikely to provide such data. Reliance will have to be placed on administrative sources or on local data collection exercises, with a greater or lesser degree of community involvement. The quality of this data is seen as largely dependent on the perceived incentives. Good data

may be produced by local governments if they feel under pressure to demonstrate the effectiveness of service delivery and by community groups if they feel that the issues they raise will feed into policy decisions. The report suggests that if these conditions can be met 'local level monitoring represents a great opportunity'.

The consultants workshop report (ODI 2002a) referred to above takes a more sceptical view, at least of the extent to which scarce resources should be allocated to supporting local monitoring arrangements:

> While the idea of monitoring as closely as possible to the ground is always appealing, and local planning needs of course to be as well informed as possible, the cost, relevance and level of demand need to be taken into account before any initiatives at this level are attempted. There was a general feeling among the consultants that the rather centralised nature of current PRS monitoring efforts is appropriate right now.

2.4 Sector specific versus cross-sector systems

A substantial report commissioned by KfW considers the relationship between sector programmes and PRSP implementation (Hasselbarth 2001). This recognises potential risks if PRS monitoring agencies are seen simply as imposing additional data requirements and introducing increased complexity into existing sectoral monitoring arrangements. However, it also sees a potential for complementarities and mutual gains:

> if a coherent overall set of indicators and monitoring system can be ensured, the increased complexity on the one hand should be compensated by the efficiency gains on the other hand. Therefore, the sectoral indicators should also be integrated into the PRSP and the indicators to be monitored have to be harmonized. Where the PRSP should concentrate on a number of core indicators, the sector programmes can focus on more in-depth and implementation-oriented indicators for the relevant sectors…the division of responsibilities for the collection of data and the forwarding to the institutions responsible for the analysis and monitoring has to be clearly defined.

A review (CIDA 2002) of PRS monitoring arrangements in five countries (Burkina Faso, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali and Niger) suggests that harmonisation between PRS and sector ministries will not be a simple process:

> the current conditions do not seem conducive to timely and satisfactory ownership of the monitoring function by the concerned civil society actors and governments. Indeed, when it comes to the governments, apart from some specific cases, the work methods are not yet adapted to the requirements of the PRS monitoring-evaluation. In fact, it seems that the sectoral ministries remain disinclined to reconsider their work methods from the vantage point of the priorities expressed in the

PRSs . . . the experience of shifting paradigms and national strategies over the past decades tends to elicit a degree of caution *vis-à-vis* the PRSP approach, which is perceived as new and which some still consider as another externally imposed initiative.

(CIDA 2002)

The consultancy workshop report discussed above (ODI 2002a) also considers the relationship between PRS monitoring systems and the routine data generated by sector ministries. It argues that the temptation to disregard such data and attempt to construct a new system 'that monitors everything' should be resisted, both because it will not be successful and because it risks antagonising those line-ministry officials whose support is most required.

While line-ministry routine monitoring systems are often not functioning effectively, replacing them with a single unified centralised system is both impractical and inappropriate. Attempts to do this will only swamp central bodies with information they cannot handle. Less obviously, this approach also carries with it the risk of undermining what line-ministry commitment there may be to a PRS process. Often, line ministries already feel "worked around" rather than "worked with" in PRS processes. Encouraging the improvement of line-ministry monitoring systems – and then monitoring those – would be a better level of ambition for PRS monitoring…It does not exclude timely, cost-effective initiatives from the centre to complement or check up on the routine data that sectors agree to collect.

(ODI 2002a)

Encouraging sector ministries to improve their own internal monitoring arrangements, for example, by working with more disaggregated data and using service delivery surveys or Participatory Poverty Assessments (PPAs) to complement or validate routine data from local service providers, is seen as a more effective way to improving the quality of the overall PRS monitoring system. The potential for improving sector routine data systems will be considered further below.

An important recent development which considers both cross-sectoral and decentralised information systems is currently being developed in Uganda. The National Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy (NIMES) (Uganda 2004a) has the aim of establishing an institutional framework 'to bring greater coordination to M&E [monitoring and evaluation] initiatives in Uganda' by providing mechanisms that align them to the stated needs of key stakeholders. Essentially, these mechanisms involve the creation of a series of formal committees on which representatives of agencies responsible for a wide range of information systems will meet on a regular and frequent basis to pursue a gradual process of harmonisation, rationalisation and enhancement aimed at increasing their combined value for evidence-based policy-making.

This process is intended to take place across both sectors and levels of government. For example, local education management information system (EMIS) data should be explicitly linked to national data on education collected by the Bureau of Statistics and, where relevant from a policy perspective, EMIS

concepts and definitions harmonised with those of the health management information system (HMIS). Two existing programmes, Uganda Info, a national indicators database managed by the Bureau of Statistics, and the LOGICS Management Information System (MIS), which is being developed by the Ministry of Local Government to enhance district level data, will be used by NIMES with the aim of ensuring that key stakeholders have access to required information from a wide range of existing M&E and MIS databases.

PEAP monitoring, described in the document as 'the most important cross-Government policy framework', is the driving force behind the proposal. 'Ensuring that the PEAP data and information needs are met will be an important focus' and two key tasks of NIMES will be to 'operationalize the M&E aspect of the PEAP matrix by matching the proposed indicators with specific M&E or MIS systems' and 'ensure that accurate, reliable, timely estimates of the indicators are available'. Other cross-sectoral policy frameworks are to have access to NIMES and it is also seen as playing a major role in the definition of district level data needs. For the latter purpose, a specific District Data and Information Coordination committee is to be included.

2.5 Government and donor monitoring procedures

PRS monitoring has been seen by a number of agencies as a key activity in terms of determining ownership. The UNDP, for example, suggests that:

> There is a contradiction between the principle of national ownership of PRSPs and the fact that monitoring is seen as principally to report to external agencies. With its emphasis on nationally owned MDGs, the UNDP would be the logical agency to raise this anomaly and press for PRSP reports aimed at national audiences, which would secondarily be used as progress reports to donors and lenders.
>
> (UNDP 2003a)

It emphasises the need for government ownership of the monitoring process in its consideration of involvement in the PRS for Azerbaijan.

> Many international organizations, concerned with government commitment to implement the PRSP strategy, thought UNDP should play an important role in monitoring implementation of the PRSP based on UNDP's perceived neutrality. While there may be some benefit from independent monitoring, monitoring implementation is the responsibility of the government and should be undertaken in the context of annual (and possibly quarterly) progress reports. UNDP's resources would be better used to support this.
>
> (UNDP 2003b)

Ownership was also the main issue at a meeting in 2002 of the Strategic Partnership with Africa (SPA) Task Team on the Post full-PRSP Process (SPA 2002). Their "Vision" of a PRS monitoring and reporting system emphasised the need for a unified system, owned by national governments, agreed with all donor agencies and based on an agreed minimal set of PRS indicators, reliably estimated from data generated by the national PRS monitoring system (Annex 2, Note 2). The meeting reached agreement that most of the outstanding problems related to a single issue – national monitoring systems were not sufficiently well developed (both in terms of capacity and the extent of civil society involvement) to gain the trust of donors. Hence there was a reluctance to abandon established and proven parallel systems.

The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) review described above clearly identifies this problem:

> Notwithstanding the existence of serious concerns relating to PRSP monitoring and the presence of dialogue platforms…implementation of monitoring-evaluation mechanisms is the subject of only a handful of very ad hoc initiatives on the part of certain donors. None of the countries in the study has an overall plan covering monitoring-evaluation capacity enhancement based on priorities established and recognized by the national authorities and all of the donors. Moreover, there are no mechanisms common to the donors for supporting these efforts.
>
> (CIDA 2002)

More optimistically, the SPA Task Team meeting suggests that in some countries these issues were to some extent being addressed. It cites the Action Plan for the Reduction of Absolute Poverty (PARPA) in Mozambique, where ten donors had pooled budget support, agreed an accountability framework, and accepted government quarterly reports on financial execution of the joint donor programme, quarterly reports on budget execution and annual audit reports. Similarly, a recent World Bank/Development Assistance Committee (DAC)/Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) meeting on harmonisation (World Bank and Secretariat of DAC/OECD 2003) comments favourably on the example of Bolivia, where four development cooperation agencies (those of Netherlands and Sweden, and the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank) had agreed with the government on a uniform monitoring system that included joint donor field visits and a uniform report to all donors.

Again, in the SDC consultancy report on Burkina Faso, in spite of the complexity of the government institutional arrangements, considerable progress on harmonisation is reported:

> As a consequence of the joint budget support based on the PRSP, the state secretariat for economic affairs (seco) has reviewed and revised its procedures regarding the follow up and disbursement of budget support. These procedures are largely harmonised with the other donors of the budget support group. The Director General of the then Ministry of Economics and Finance is reported to

> speak 'warmly of the benefits of donor coordination, because the donors now receive the same monitoring and reporting documents'. In summer 2002, policy dialogue between participating bilateral donors and the Government also took place as a joint exercise for the first time.
>
> (Gerster and Sawadogo 2003)

The European Community (EC), in an article on the Burkina Faso DCSLP (Cadre Stratégique de Lutte contre la Pauvreté – version of the PRSP) in the *DAC Journal* (OECD 2002), makes clear both its support for the principle of a unified monitoring and reporting process and its perception of the substantial difficulties involved in realising this ambition.

> Because of the weakness of Burkinabe statistics and difficulties in their tracking, much remains to be done before the EC and the DCSLP will have a meaningful results tracking systems. Nevertheless, the useful innovations that have been introduced to date represent an interesting point of departure (perhaps a first?) in addressing everyone's need – from the Burkinabe citizen to the European Parliament – for a reliable DCSLP impact reporting system.

2.6 Discussion

Underlying much of the discussion around PRS monitoring systems are two key facts. The first is that in most of the countries involved there are severe capacity constraints across the range of skills required. The second is that these constraints are not sufficiently recognised or acted upon. They should imply the adoption of a very conservative attitude as to what can be achieved and a willingness to make hard choices in terms of prioritising activities. Success will often be dependent on the capabilities, status and personalities of a few key players. Does the nature of the institutional framework matter in this context? As indicated above, some argue that locating PRS monitoring under the Ministry of Finance greatly increases the likelihood that it will be linked to government expenditures and that this will provide the necessary incentives to carry other actors along. However, as suggested above, the "virtual" monitoring system set out in the PRSP almost certainly does not indicate the real power relationships between the various departments and personalities involved and these will typically be more important than any formal administrative arrangements.

Rather than relying on the latter, it is probably more useful to seek to promote reasonable working relationships between the PRS monitoring committee and the ministries, local governments, agencies, etc. that are meant to provide the information on which it relies. The head of that committee clearly has to have sufficient status (or contacts) to request cooperation from senior counterparts but it is doubtful if either mandated authority or an implied threat to budgetary resources will provide the desired response. In general the best course of action may be to make the burden involved in providing data sufficiently light so that it is easier to comply than resist. A willingness to accept data in the form most easily provided rather than in the precise form required can contribute to this objective.

The preparation of PRSPs may have generated some interest in monitoring issues and data both in government and civil society, but to a great extent this appears to have been a general interest, for example in joining the process of identifying indicators and designing formal monitoring systems, rather than a practical interest in the detailed activities required to effective implement those systems, generate reliable estimates of indicators and use those indicators to explore policy issues and options. This implies that the PRS technical secretariat, which it is to be hoped can take on these tasks, is of central importance.

As indicated above, there is much emphasis in the documentation on the need for analytical skills within the technical secretariat. There appears to be an assumption that those who are well qualified and experienced in data analysis are necessarily well equipped and motivated to pursue work on other equally important areas such as data quality assessment, data management and dissemination. In practice, it is often the case that many analysts regard these as less technically interesting activities to which they are not prepared to devote a great deal of time and effort. It would be far more useful to assess capacity by relating staffing requirements to the specific tasks to be undertaken. Such an assessment would, for example, consider if monitoring institutions have sufficient (possibly more junior) staff who have the necessary training, experience and incentives to undertake the more mundane and routine activities which are also an essential requirement of an effective monitoring system. It would also have to balance the need for high-level analytical skills against the expertise in communication and advocacy that is required to promote the use of the information produced. Where specialised analytical and policy review skills are required it may be better in many countries to contract-in the expertise required, especially if sector-specific issues are to be addressed.

In many PRS countries technical secretariats often have few, possibly just one or two, motivated and capable senior staff. Donors sometimes fund these staff members on salary scales which are substantially above those available within government. Withdrawal of donor funding will typically see those individuals seeking out other international agencies to maintain their income, probably disrupting the unit's activities. Given the core role of the secretariat, it would be of considerable advantage if they had security of support over the PRS period and some degree of autonomy over staffing, salary, benefits and equipment issues.

Many of the PRS countries are committed to decentralisation policies and, if these are taken seriously, they clearly necessitate the development of local monitoring systems that can provide the information required for local decision-making. However, this does not imply that national PRS monitoring should necessarily be predicated on such systems. In many countries the capacity constraints which apply at national level are of a higher order of magnitude at local level and will take many years to remedy. As and when they are functioning effectively they will undoubtedly contribute to PRS monitoring and those responsible for the national system should obviously collaborate and provide support to the extent practicable. For example, the establishment of reliable electronic communications between national and local monitoring systems would be of advantage to both. However, in terms of overall PRS monitoring resource allocation it is hard to see that building local capacity throughout the nation should be seen as an immediate priority, given the magnitude of this task and overall financial, human resource and time constraints. Moreover, particularly where there is popular support for decentralisation, local

monitoring systems are more likely to function well if they are seen as evolving in response to a genuine local demand for the information produced rather than as data-collection outposts of a central agency.

Even if government priorities are expressed in the PRSP, these may not be owned by sectoral ministries or other agencies (including the statistics office), which will typically have agendas of their own. In general, sharing and combining information is not usually part of the culture of such institutions. Given this position, two possible strategies might be adopted. The cautious approach would be to assume that, though there may well be scope for joint activities on PRS and sectoral monitoring, ministries will generally regard the former as primarily a source of additional demands with no obvious benefits. As suggested above, if this position is adopted, the aim would then be to make such demands as minimal as possible.

Alternatively, it could be reasonably argued that PRS monitoring might provide an opportunity to change this situation for the better. There would clearly be considerable advantages if existing government monitoring systems could be gradually enhanced and coordinated so that the requirements of PRS monitoring could be met without the creation of a separate dedicated agency.[1] If existing monitoring institutions felt themselves to be full partners in such an initiative and were perhaps provided with some additional resources in return for their involvement, concerns relating to the costs of such involvement and the lack of relevance to their specific interests could be minimised. Problems relating to "missing middle" indicators might also be reduced as such indicators are often central to the day-to-day activities of sectoral ministries and they would presumably be very interested in joint activities to enhance their reliability or timeliness. As indicated above, such an approach has been recently adopted in Uganda under the NIMES initiative. Though the report of a workshop on the proposal (Uganda 2004b) reveals some initial confusion as to the objectives (it was suggested that the name be changed to NMEF – National Monitoring and Evaluation Framework to avoid concerns that it involved the creation of a integrated system which would impose additional reporting requirements) there appears to have been a generally enthusiastic welcome for the underlying principles of the coordinating framework. It will clearly be some time before its effectiveness can be assessed.

3 The roles of non-governmental organisations

Participation is a central tenet of the PRSP process. Many agencies regard it as an essential mechanism for increasing national ownership and improving the efficiency of government policies. The engagement of civil society organisations (CSOs) and the participation of citizens in general in policy-making may have increased in most countries as a response to this principle, but there remains a lack of clarity about the

[1] This section owes much to comments on an initial draft by Aline Coudouel of the Poverty Reduction Unit of the World Bank.

nature of their engagement and how it should be facilitated. Participation, at whatever stage from consultation to monitoring and evaluation, is too often viewed as consensual and apolitical. The risks and costs of participation have not been fully understood nor accounted for.

> The image evoked is of a transparent and rational process. People say what they think. Everyone gives their views and is heard. Everyone has a position on the policy under discussion. Working together in harmony, across enormous power differentials, solutions are found to which everyone can agree.
>
> (Lucas and Cornwall 2003)

In the general context of encouraging "ownership" of PRSs, there has been a great deal of discussion around the need to engage a broad range of stakeholders in the monitoring process. This, it is argued, can: improve the quality of monitoring; raise awareness of the changes taking place; and allow communities to contribute to the implementation process, for example by identifying problems and proposing policy changes. In a review of 21 PRSPs, Schnell and Forster (2003) note that more than half explicitly mention qualitative or participatory poverty and impact assessments in the M&E chapter. Only one country not in sub-Saharan Africa, Albania, did so, though others (Nicaragua, Vietnam) did use PPAs to support the PRSP poverty analysis.

The World Bank PRSP sourcebook specifically highlights the need for involvement beyond government in various aspects of monitoring and evaluation systems:

> nongovernmental actors – research institutions, civil society organizations, special-interest and advocacy groups, and others – have an important role to play in the design of the monitoring and evaluation system, in actually carrying out monitoring and evaluation activities, and in using the results.
>
> (Prennushi, Rubio and Subbarao 2001)

Below we consider two possible approaches to playing that role, essentially inside or outside the institutionalised PRS monitoring system.

3.1 An institutional role for civil society?

Pain and Kirsch (2002) argue that control of the monitoring system by the ministry of finance or any other central agency of government, be it the Vice President's Office in Tanzania or the National Economic Commission in Malawi, runs the risk that it will become, or be perceived to become, not only centralised but exclusive. They suggest that if the capacity of civil society agencies for involvement is careful assessed, and appropriate support provided, their active involvement:

> offers the opportunity for the production of independent analysis and inputs into the public debate concerning what works and what doesn't. Further, if the understanding of joint monitoring is taken

> seriously it can help to achieve the principles of ownership, partnership, and comprehensiveness better than any rhetorical government speech. In an extreme case this can help to promote citizen action based on their involvement and create a space for action to be taken at a political level as a direct response to the demands for action created by civil society.
>
> (Pain and Kirsch 2002)

This concern for wider engagement is strongly endorsed by the UNDP, who argue that one area of comparative advantage for them lies in:

> strengthening independent monitoring and evaluation capacities that are in line with the broader approaches to participation and transparency. Such capacities have to reside in civil society so that an independent assessment of performance can be made and so that government departments and programmes can be held accountable to the goals set in the PRSP.
>
> (UNDP 2003a)

UNDP view support to participatory assessments (UNDP 2001) as reflecting one aspect of their general policy of encouraging an increased involvement of CSOs and community-based groups in the overall PRSP process. Funding CSOs' activities which contribute to the monitoring and evaluation of poverty reduction strategies is seen as complementary to funding their contribution to the formulation of those strategies. On the other hand, the consultants workshop report discussed above takes a very cautious and limited view of the potential role that NGOs and CSOs can play:

> There is a common expectation, particularly among donors, that NGOs and CSOs can and will carry out some sort of "community level monitoring" of the PRS. Here too a distinction needs to be made between intelligent use of tools like PPAs and participatory beneficiary assessments that can provide quick "symptomatic" feedback on the basis of a small sample or case study, and instituting a comprehensive system. The latter should be regarded as out of the question. Such proposals rest on a serious underestimation of the technical challenges of building systems that are rigorous, reach down to the community level and generate data that will be actually used.
>
> (ODI 2002a)

Forster (2002) urges a need to be realistic about the extent to which "real" participatory monitoring is on offer. He broadly distinguishes three very different levels of involvement, all of which are sometimes described as participatory: the provision of monitoring information; sharing control over the content, process and results of an evaluation activity; and engaging in the identification or implementation of corrective actions. Asche (2003) highlights the importance of understanding the role and political implications of the choice of strategy, as 'seemingly innocent participatory PRSP monitoring can have

politically very different meanings'. In extreme cases, he suggests, the encouragement given to communities to become involved in PRS monitoring may be simply a way of diverting them from seeking effective political influence on the implementation process:

> In several PRSP countries we are observing a tendency that is supported unwillingly by part of the donor community and that in fact will ultimately lead to participatory monitoring replacing genuine social participation in the implementation of the national PRSP. Whilst PRSP writing is still seen as a broad, consultative process, participation actually stops with the paper being handed over to the government for implementation, and social forces only come into play again when monitoring of results begins. Participatory PRSP monitoring, in this case, actually stands in for institutionalized political participation.
>
> (Asche 2003)

On the other hand, some forms of participatory monitoring can have the strategic and conscious aim of strengthening social consultation and control. It is important that all involved parties are clear about which of these options is being pursued. Some methodologies, for example CoImPact, which is favoured by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), aim to go far beyond the levels of accountability normally encountered in industrialised countries, and can raise politically challenging questions. The implications, and the extent of government willingness to respond, must be taken seriously (Asche 2003). For example, most NGOs are convinced that, whatever the feedback from monitoring exercises, broad macroeconomic policy is not up for discussion. When the Honduran NGO Interforos withdrew from the PRSP process because it felt alternative approaches were being pushed aside, the government responded that its options were tightly constrained by prior agreements with the IMF (Panos 2002).

While most donors and governments support the concept of involving civil society in PRS monitoring, few have provided an effective institutional basis for their involvement. A recent World Health Organisation (WHO) review of 21 PRSPs found that in the formal descriptions of most monitoring systems:

> Nongovernmental organizations and academic institutions are mentioned as monitoring partners in just three countries: Zambia, Honduras and Albania. Some other PRSPs do mention activities designed to gather opinions from poor people as part of their PRSP monitoring. For example, Malawi conducts annual stakeholder workshops as well as broader district level surveys and Uganda will receive input from the Participatory Poverty Assessment Project. Ethiopia has also recognized a need for a PPA, and Guinea will ensure that qualitative data is included in all its surveys. Fundamentally, however, monitoring remains in the hands of government structures and institutions with little external assistance or input.
>
> (WHO 2004)

A report by Oxfam (2002) similarly argues that the monitoring sections of PRSPs mainly focus on technical information to be collected by governments themselves rather than looking to the engagement of citizens to generate the kind of flexible feedback that could inform and help shape policy over time. There are a number of institutional arrangements by which civil society can potentially be involved: joint civil society and government initiatives; independent citizen monitoring; and citizen participation in government-led consultations (Forster 2002). Two interesting examples of alternative approaches are provided in Tanzania and Uganda (Annex 2 Note 3).

Overall, with a limited number of interesting exceptions, PRS monitoring is very concentrated in government hands and 'the terms of engagement…remain very much in the realm of the "invited participation" and "consultation", where more powerful actors frame the way the others are involved' (Brock 2000: 18). According to the categories of participation in PRSP processes identified by McGee (with Norton 2000), there is little evidence of real empowerment (initiation and control by stakeholders), but perhaps evidence of some gradual movement from consultation towards joint decision-making (Pain and Kirsch 2002).

3.2 Independent civil society monitoring

Some international NGOs have argued that developing independent monitoring initiatives may give civil society the chance to take more control over the process than engaging with government (Oxfam 2002: 11). Thus far, the great majority of participatory exercises appear to have developed as government-led initiatives backed by donors. The review by Schnell and Forster (2003) indicates that, of the 21 countries considered, only in Honduras did CSOs appear to have taken the lead in this area.

Hughes (2002) questions whether CSOs can engage with government on an equal footing and without compromising their values and autonomy. Some CSOs are sceptical about government commitment to participatory processes, and fear that participation in government systems will compromise their credibility as a watchdog over state policy and actions (Gould and Ojanen 2003). In addition, it has been suggested that such independent systems can serve to complement government efforts. Whereas the latter tend to focus on quantitative methods and take a national perspective, civil society approaches will generally be more qualitative and locally focused.

A paper by Seshamani (2003) attempts to provide a rationale for an independent monitoring system in Zambia. It notes that civil society perspectives on what constitutes successful implementation do not always coincide with those of government. For example, there has been strong dissatisfaction with the emphasis on economic indicators. CSOs are said to be interested in exploring and monitoring a much wider range of factors than those determined by government. There is a concern, too, that civil society would be permitted a very limited role in government monitoring – not sufficient to articulate all their needs and concerns. An appraisal of the Government of Zambia's monitoring system noted that the roles of anyone outside of the Ministry of Finance and National Planning appeared to be merely 'peripheral add ons' (Republic of Zambia cited in Seshamani 2003).

Cornally (2003) reports a coalition of four CSOs who were dissatisfied with government monitoring proposals and have therefore drawn up a National Plan for Capacity Building and Consultations for the Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation of the PRSP in Honduras. The aim is to ensure an increased role of civil society and local governments in the implementation, follow-up and evaluation of PRSP policies, programmes and projects. Through five months of workshops, they aim to increase the level of understanding of PRSPs amongst CSOs and then set up thematic monitoring committees. They would then be able to lobby for the inclusion of CSO committees in the government PRS monitoring plan and propose new indicators. They will also help to facilitate improved communication between government, civil society and donors. Cornally's report (2003) notes high levels of interest but very weak capacity among NGOs. There are also high levels of concern about the political will of the government to facilitate civil society monitoring of the PRSP and to adapt the implementation of the strategy according to the results of the monitoring carried out.

Whatever role they are to play, the capacity of CSOs to take up joint monitoring activities certainly needs to be addressed. In some countries there is a history of NGO capacity and civil society is well organised and networked. In others, however, the capacity needs are great. For example, civil society in Rwanda is described as 'embryonic and unable to play even a timid role in holding the government accountable' (Renard and Molenaers 2003). Most civil society and advocacy groups are small, voluntary and not well organised. In many African countries their social base is narrow and often urban, cosmopolitan and professional. In some cases domestic CSOs are "crowded out" of policy debates by better-resourced and more visible international NGOs. This is detailed by Gould and Ojanen (2003) in the case of Tanzania, where international NGOs have gained, often with substantial financial backing from donors, far more significant representation in the spaces for civil society involvement in the monitoring system than local CSOs, raising serious questions as to the true nature of "civil society".

Civil society relations with donors and the funding of capacity building are important factors. GTZ Social Policy Advisory Services (SPAS), in operation since 1999, provides an interesting example of support to NGOs in this area, more recently in relation to PRS monitoring. Funding for civil society implementation of monitoring plans is also a struggle, especially, though not exclusively, where these lie outside the government system. Poverty Action Funds (PAF) monitoring committees in Uganda are voluntary, but the related networking and training activities of the Uganda Debt Network (UDN) are funded from organisations such as Oxfam UK and the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA). In Tanzania, however, even those agencies involved in the PPA consortium working closely with government, have had to second a staff member at their own expense and were only compensated by government for field expenses. This clearly limits participation to those organisations which are financially secure (Gould and Ojanen 2003).

Many Northern NGOs responded to requests for capacity support to local CSOs in PRSP consultation processes. However, while the need to shift the focus from poverty assessment to monitoring has been noted, practical assistance has, with some exceptions such as Oxfam's support to the UDN, been

limited. Some national NGO networks have themselves undertaken programmes of skills development to build civil society capacity. In Uganda, the UDN has organised workshops which are said to have been well attended and attracted a number of district government officials (UDN 2002).

3.3 The role of parliament

In a study of the 28 sub-Saharan Africa countries involved in the PRS process, GTZ (2003) considers the actual and potential role of one particular group of stakeholders – national parliamentarians. They point out that: 'Monitoring – controlling the actions of the executive – is one of the fundamental functions of parliament, and is also embedded in the constitutions of the African PRS countries studied'. However, they concede that effective oversight is rare, even in apparently straightforward areas such as the basic government accounts: 'In only one fifth of the HIPC countries are the audited accounts submitted to parliaments within 12 months'.

A few PRSPs (Guinea, Mauritania) explicitly indicate the need for parliamentary involvement in budget monitoring (Schnell and Forster 2003). However, Pain (2003) points out that there is no mention of a specific role for parliament in the PRS Sourcebook and argues that this is a neglected area that merits more attention. He suggests that in a truly democratic environment, parliament 'should be responsible overall for the monitoring of the PRS' and notes that the issue is of particular importance in countries such as Vietnam, Cambodia and Yemen, where parliament would expect to debate and approve the national plans. One encouraging development is said to be the emergence of a coalition between parliamentarians and civil society groups on issues relating to the PRS in a number of African countries. He cites the links between the Malawi Economic Justice Network (www.mejn.org) and the Parliamentary Committee on Budget and Finance.

The Chair of that committee, L.J. Chimango, M.P., has described the difficulties of the task facing parliamentary committees in attempting to play an effective role in monitoring the Malawi PRS (Chimango 2002). He argues that substantial capacity building will be required in leadership development, training and support staff:

> A basic level of understanding of economic parameters is necessary for effectiveness in poverty reduction. Skills to access information are also necessary in the fast moving world of Internet. Minimum working facilities and an environment with capacity to follow up on issues is also critical…The Malawi experience also reveals that for the committees to succeed, well-motivated and trained clerks and research staff must service committees. Consulting services are expensive. Therefore, the sustainability of the Committees' efforts lies in the recruitment of highly professional staff, hopefully those who will sympathise with the Committees' zeal and mission. All too often, a committee's enthusiasm can founder because of lack of support from Parliament staff.
>
> (Chimango 2002)

Mozambique has also legislated to provide a specific role for parliament in monitoring the PRS (PARPA). Responsibility is divided between three existing committees, which have the authority to summon ministers to report on progress (ODI 2003a).

3.4 Discussion

In principle, civil society involvement in PRS monitoring should have a number of benefits. If effective it can indeed increase the input and agency of CSOs and improve the transparency and accountability of government actions through increasing public awareness and understanding. However, as indicated above, all sides must be aware what form of involvement is being offered. Does "participation" involve some degree of empowerment and control over outcomes or is it simply another word for informing CSOs about what government intends to do. Both may be useful activities but they should not be confused.

It is by no means self-evident that CSOs should always be involved in joint monitoring activities, particularly if that involvement is heavily dependent on government funding. It can be argued that at least some would be much better occupied in the independent analysis of monitoring data, so that they are in a position to seriously debate the interpretation of findings with central and local government agencies. This of course presupposes that governments are willing to accept this option and make required information available in a timely fashion and appropriate form. It will also depend on the capacity of CSOs in terms of analysis and exposition and their access to effective channels of communication and influence. These are areas where external support, for example from international NGOs, may well be required, again assuming government approval. The establishment of some form of mediating agency for quality assurance may also be helpful in ensuring that CSO "evidence" is sufficiently convincing to persuade government agencies that it is necessary to take it into account. The independent poverty observatories in West Africa seem an interesting model.

The Bolivian example discussed in section 4.3.1 seems of particular interest, because of the legal framework which has been created in the National Dialogue and Popular Participation Laws. The Comites de Vigilancia, composed of six elected CBO leaders, are intended to ensure that community project priorities are reflected in local investment decisions. In principle they have the right to insist on audits and can petition for funds to be frozen if they suspect serious misuse. Of course, establishing such arrangements does not imply that they will function as intended and local power relations may well have much greater influence than national laws.

4 The "missing middle": monitoring implementation and intermediate outputs

Ideally, PRS monitoring should allow assessment of the extent to which identified policy actions have a positive impact on targeted populations. This requires that all the links in the chain between policy and impact should in principle be determined and quantified. Monitoring must therefore be concerned with inputs, proximate (intermediate) outputs, outcomes and final impacts.

Booth and Lucas (2004) are among a number of authors to focus on the failure to address this requirement in early PRSPs, which generally focused on the relatively easier tasks of budgetary or expenditure analysis at one end of the chain and survey-based impact evaluation at the other. This failure has come to be known as one instance of the general problem of the "missing middle" – the need to specify more precisely how well-intentioned policies will deliver promised outcomes and impacts. It is of considerable concern because intermediate output indicators which can predict longer-term outcomes with reasonable reliability have come to be seen as central to the PRS implementation process. They are the only way to obtain short-term feedback on the practical consequences of policy actions and hence the possibility of modifying those which are not on track.

However, the problems associated with the identification and estimation of such indicators should not be underestimated. DANIDA, in a review of the Tanzania PRSP (DANIDA 2001) points out that, for many of the suggested intermediate output indicators, short-term change will be at best small and difficult to monitor: 'It might well be that a decade is a realistic time-frame for expecting new initiatives to have a profound impact on the chosen intermediate indicators'. The report argues that in some cases perhaps the best that can be realistically expected and effectively monitored in the short run is 'the specification of budgetary targets for allocation of discretionary recurrent expenditure…to priority areas identified in the program'. Scott (2004), in a consultancy report on Honduras, also emphasises the long-term nature of the process of developing monitoring indicators. He suggests a useful distinction between 'first and second generation' indicators, moving gradually from the initial necessity to begin with indicators which may be 'deficient with respect to definition, coverage, accuracy, frequency of data collection or timeliness of dissemination' to improved versions over a time horizon of three to five years.

A WHO review of 21 PRSPs (WHO 2004) seems to confirms that, in spite of widespread agreement on the need to improve the situation, the "missing middle" problem is still very much in evidence, at least in monitoring PRS initiatives in the health sector. This review found that while impact indicators such as maternal and infant mortality were routinely targeted in monitoring systems, intermediate health indicators, other than that of simple coverage by health services, were much less well represented:

> there were often glaring gaps where whole components of the health strategy lacked any means of monitoring. Most typically, these were components related to strengthening the quality of care, improving management, strengthening data collection, etc . . . One gap, which was fairly consistent

across PRSPs, was the failure to provide for monitoring of activities to reduce financial barriers to health care. Although 15 PRSPs addressed this issue, only three presented indicators that could be monitored.

(WHO 2004)

Three broad and potentially complementary strategies have been pursued to address these issues: improvement of the existing routine data systems (RDSs) commonly used by ministries to track intermediate indicators; the development of national surveys (with particular emphasis on "rapid" or "light" surveys) specifically intended to deliver data relevant to PRS implementation at least annually; and special studies (including qualitative/participatory exercises), which either replace or at least triangulate estimates from routine sources for specific localities. The following three sections will consider experiences with each of these options.

Before proceeding it may be useful to note that the review found only one serious attempt to address the apparently central question: "How should decisions be made as to the most efficient allocation of resources across diverse PRS monitoring sources?" In an innovative study in Tanzania, Rommelmann, Setel, Hemed, Mponezya, Angeles and Boerma (2003) attempted a cost-effectiveness analysis of 11 different sources of information on national level indictors identified in the Poverty Monitoring Master Plan, Health Sector Reform Programme and Local Government Reform Programme. They argue that:

> demand for information is increasing at all levels, yet resource allocation in information system investments has lacked an evidence base, a comparison of costs and outputs that might inform decisions. Resources have been and may continue to be relatively scarce for service-based M&E efforts within line ministries, as well as for an increasing number of alternatives such as continuous "stand-alone" information systems (e.g., demographic surveillance sites), and cycles of repeated surveys (e.g., DHS or household budget surveys) that are generally carried out by statistics bureaus. It is our hope that the comparative costs and results presented here may assist in any expansion or consolidation of information collection efforts undertaken in Tanzania, and that our methods might be built upon in other contexts. (Rommelmann *et al.* 2003)

Unfortunately, but perhaps not surprisingly, they were forced to radically adjust their initial aims:

> While a formal analysis of the cost-effectiveness of information systems was our initial objective, it was not attempted. The primary reasons for electing not to conduct a formal analysis related to constraints of time and resource, and the complexity of operationalizing an appropriate effectiveness parameter that could be measured across systems.
>
> (Rommelmann *et al.* 2003)

4.1 Routine data systems

This section is concerned with efforts to improve the completeness and reliability of relevant administrative reporting systems and data, including sectoral management information systems. Almost all PRSPs (28 of the 34 listed in Annex 1, Table A.4) indicate that the routine information systems associated with service delivery in at least the education and health sectors will be one of the key components in the estimation of intermediate output indicators. There are grounds for arguing that PRS monitoring systems should be based as far as possible on such systems. In most countries data scarcity is not a problem. The major (and mutually reinforcing) constraints on effective use relate to: its poor quality; the limited analysis, interpretation and dissemination undertaken; and lack of compatibility and coordination between the various sources. If these constraints could be overcome, the benefits in terms of the establishment of sustainable sources of quality information which could serve the needs of both service delivery systems and national policy would be considerable.

Over recent years, there have been a number of innovative exercises – some involving computerisation and communications technology but others simply based on better management of information and human resources – which have attempted to achieve this objective. The issue to be considered here is to what extent these exercises have been successful and whether they suggest that further investment in this area is the most useful use of scarce resources in developing improved PRS monitoring systems.

It is interesting to note that the difficulties in using routine data systems for monitoring purposes were little discussed in the initial round of PRSPs. For example, the section on monitoring strategy in the PRSP for Mozambique emphasises the central role of such sources:

> with regard to process indicators, the strategy is based on indicators normally used by the sectors to monitor their activities and progress . . . The main sources of information for the process indicators are the sectors themselves (Ministries), but data from the National Statistics Institute (INE) will also be collected, as well as information from research, case-studies, and qualitative evaluations.
>
> (Mozambique 2001)

The implied assumption that RDSs can deliver much of the required information can be compared with the more cautious approach adopted in a progress report by the PRSP Secretariat in Pakistan (Pakistan 2003). This appears to indicate a perceived need for survey-based "validation" of the data derived from health and education management information systems (HMIS and NEMIS) and to provide timely feedback on intermediate indicators:

> The government has decided that a Core Welfare Indicators Questionnaire (CWIQ) survey would be conducted on an annual basis to capture the information relating to all intermediate indicators in the full PRSP . . . Similarly the PIHS questionnaire is also being audited to be reflective of all information that needs to be captured in relation to outcome of the PRSP process . . . Therefore, intermediate

> indicators would be captured by CWIQ and final outcome indicators would be monitored through PIHS . . . CWIQ would provide quick results as well as third party validation to HMIS and NEMIS data relating to the above mentioned intermediate indicators.
>
> (Pakistan 2003)

This decision, which appears to represent a substantial departure from earlier intentions, may have been influenced by a consultancy report (ODI 2002b) which addressed the limitations of the HIS and NEMIS. Both were reported to 'suffer from substantial weaknesses, and are not used very much for the purposes for which they were originally intended'. A discussion of the underlying causes included those typically cited in this type of assessment: lack of equipment, lack of qualified staff and the need for additional training. One specific issue was the problem of recruiting suitably qualified and experienced staff at provincial level. The EMIS in Balochistan, for example, was reported to have been 'essentially non-functional for two years' for this reason. This problem, of recruiting and retaining appropriate monitoring personnel at lower administrative levels, is one that would be recognised in many countries.

An additional problem identified in the health sector MIS in Pakistan was the absence of any effective linkage between the main system and those associated with parallel programmes. Again this is a familiar position. In most countries there are a multiplicity of sectoral information systems, often linked to a variety of vertical programmes which have no incentive towards integration or even rationalisation. A recent review in Cambodia (Lucas 2002), for example, lists some 20 health monitoring systems, some essentially moribund through lack of funding but others linked to programmes (TB, HIV/AIDS, Malaria, etc.) with substantial donor support. The latter often have very specific, agreed reporting requirements. This may be an advantage if the associated indicators are compatible with the needs of PRS monitoring but if not there may be considerable reluctance to suggestions that established procedures should be modified in any way.

There is a wealth of similar documentation detailing the shortcomings of RDSs in most PRS countries, even those which regard these systems as essential to PRS monitoring (Annex 2 Note 4). As indicated above, many countries see the improvement of at least the EMIS and HMIS as an essential step towards an improved PRS monitoring system. However, many donor agencies would probably share the more cautious view of the consultancy report on Pakistan (ODI 2002b), which argues that simply meeting the needs of PRS monitoring would not provide sufficient justification for the considerable resource allocation that would be required.

> There is therefore a need to invest substantially in improving the coverage, reliability and timeliness of HMIS data – but only if there is a realistic prospect that this information will be widely used in policy making and management at province, district and local levels, as well as for PRSP monitoring . . . support to EMIS can only be justified if accompanied by measures to substantially

increase the use of the information collected, and to encourage dissemination and use of EMIS results at local level. PRSP monitoring alone does not provide sufficient justification for investing in strengthening EMIS.

(ODI 2002b)

The above report provides no basis on which to assess the magnitude of the "substantial investment" that might be involved. In general, while many agencies describe the general shortcomings of RDS, few provide any detailed guidance as to how these might be overcome. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is one exception to this rule. Its annual country reports typically list key indicators, data quality issues and potential corrective actions. In a discussion of key indicators for Zambia (USAID/Zambia 2003), for example, it identified problems relating to coverage, quality, level of disaggregation and timeliness of the data on primary enrolment in centres intended to provide basic education to the most disadvantaged children. A series of possible actions to remedy this situation are proposed:

Regular supervision (school visits) by Ministry and/or implementing partner; increased supervision at provincial and district levels in 2003; increased training of center mentors; and development of an EMIS-based tracking and reporting system . . . If it appears that these actions are insufficient to ensure quality information, we will authorize the Implementing Partner to hire special data collectors to go to each center to collect the information.

(USAID/Zambia 2003)

Note that the potential cost implications of the suggested procedures are considerable, given that they provide for the intervention of an independent external agency to ensure that routine data collection procedures are followed at each of the participating education centres. A similar approach, involving systematic data audits at health facilities has been adopted in some health districts in Cambodia – primarily those managed by external agencies. It appears to be relatively effective, in that the HMIS data from these districts are generally regarded as reliable, whereas those from all other districts are treated with the greatest suspicion. However, again such improvements come at a high price (Annex 2 Note 5).

The WHO has argued that many projects intended to implement or improve national level routine information systems in low-income countries have produced little improvement and in some cases made matters worse (WHO 1994). They have for many years focused instead on supporting district level health information systems:

many national policymakers . . . have decided to attack the information problem at the roots…Bolivia, Cameroon, Eritrea, Morocco, New Zealand, Niger, Pakistan, Philippines, and South Africa are examples where comprehensive HIS restructuring efforts have taken place recently or are

> still underway. One of the more consistent findings of these experiences is that decentralization of information management toward the district level is an effective strategy to improve routine information systems.
>
> (Lippeveld 2001)

The new district HMIS in South Africa seems to provide an apparently successful application of this approach. However, recent research on a project to improve the HMIS in Uganda finds that it too can run into serious problems (Annex 2 Note 6). Health information statistics are generally seen as substantially more problematic than those in education. Booth and Lucas (2004) discuss an innovative EMIS in The Gambia which should be a primary source of PRS monitoring data and Pernu and Nousiainen (2002) suggest that recent work to improve the EMIS in Nepal has also achieved a considerable measure of success.

One additional concern, which should perhaps receive more attention, is that some of the information generated by RDS may be politically sensitive. WaterAid (2003) point out that such systems are often the source of figures quoted to indicate the improvements achieved by national or local governments. They report that in Nepal careful analysis of 22 district profiles indicates that some 56 per cent of the population is covered by existing water supply schemes. Moreover, many of the supply systems are in need of rehabilitation and the actual percentage served by functioning systems could be as low as 34 per cent. Both figures are considerably less than the official national estimate of 70 per cent. WaterAid describe the pressures on the responsible agency:

> Recently DWSS provided data to the National Planning Commission indicating far higher coverage than was reported in the district profiles. It seems that DWSS are in a difficult position; on the one hand they want to show progress and that coverage is increasing, yet on the other if they show coverage to be too high donors are likely to conclude that water supply and sanitation are not priorities for investment.
>
> (WaterAid 2003)

4.2 Sample surveys

One of the longest running debates of statistical policy has been as to the appropriate use of sample surveys as alternatives to RDS. The difficulties of improving the latter to the extent that they can deliver at least reasonably useful and reliable data have persuaded many international donors to follow the survey route. This in turn has diverted both financial and human resources away from the improvement option which, in principle, is generally agreed to be the appropriate long-term approach. This issue naturally arises in PRS monitoring, with the added constraint imposed by the relatively short time horizon within which results are required. While most of the PRS countries have indicated that they will undertake large-scale surveys (living standard management surveys (LSMS), demographic and health surveys (DHS), etc.) at various points over the PRS period, for monitoring purposes the main interest lies in the use of routine

surveys that are intended to deliver findings at least on an annual basis, or on those specifically intended to track policy to outcome links. Here we note three types of survey proposed by a number of countries (all deriving from original design work undertaken by the World Bank and other international donors) that address three key PRS themes – household poverty, budget tracking and service delivery.

4.2.1 Core Welfare Indicators Questionnaire (CWIQ)

The CWIQ survey (World Bank 1999) was developed by the World Bank, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the UNDP. It was designed to provide a means by which leading intermediate output PRS indicators could be estimated annually using a relatively simple survey instrument on a sufficiently large sample of households to allow for necessary disaggregation on at least a regional, gender and age basis. It includes indicators on well-being and access to, utilisation of, and satisfaction with, basic services. Because of the simple structure and machine-readable format, the time required for data processing and analysis should be minimal. The surveys have been adopted by number of African PRS countries, including Guinea, Malawi, Rwanda and Senegal, as a source of information on intermediate output indicators. As indicated above, Pakistan (Pakistan 2003) has also decided that an annual CWIQ survey will be a core component of the implementation monitoring system.

4.2.2 Public Expenditure Tracking Surveys (PETS)

PET surveys (Lindelow and Dehn 2001) were designed primarily to track budgeted expenditures down to the units providing services (schools, clinics, etc.) to see what proportion of such expenditures reached the units and how they were translated into service provision. Because they involve detailed work at facility level a range of data on inputs, outputs and quality are collected which are directly relevant to PRS requirements. Four countries, Cameroon, Mozambique, Rwanda and Uganda, specify that such surveys will be routinely undertaken in the monitoring and evaluation chapters of their PRSPs.

Participatory PETS (PPETS), as the name suggests, involve CSOs in the collection, analysis and dissemination of input and expenditure data. In the review of 21 PRSPs Schnell and Forster (2003) report that nine of these (Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Malawi, Mozambique, Niger, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia) intended to undertake PPETS.

4.2.3 Quantitative Service Delivery Surveys (QSDS)

These provider surveys, targeted thus far at health facilities and schools, were initially developed as a research activity within the World Bank (Dehn, Reinikka and Svensson 2001). They are intended to be complementary to PETS, focusing on quantitative performance data derived mainly from the records of front-line service delivery units. Exercises have been undertaken in five African countries: Chad, Madagascar, Mozambique, Nigeria and Uganda. However, thus far only Uganda has explicitly indicated that further rounds of the QSDS will be used to provide PRS monitoring information. Though it does not mention the QSDS, the consultancy report on monitoring in Pakistan (ODI 2002b) proposes something

similar. 'There is a very strong case for conducting a light, frequently conducted survey, collecting information from education and health facilities as well as from households. Such a survey could build on the best aspects of the CWIQ and MICS [Middle Indicator Cluster Surveys] surveys.'

4.3 Special studies and qualitative/participatory monitoring exercises

As noted above, formal civil society involvement in PRS monitoring systems tends to be focused on implementation. In principle, the associated monitoring of input, output and performance satisfaction indicators can often have a far more powerful influence on policy processes than final outcome monitoring – if timely, reliable data can be collected, analysed and disseminated. This is an important concern given the scarce resources available to CSOs and the need to maximise impact and leverage in advocating for pro-poor policies. The methodology adopted for such exercises will obviously vary according to the objective. Many commentators suggest that in practice a combination of participatory and more traditional methods, building on existing information systems where feasible and relevant, may be most effective, particularly in influencing high-level policy-makers. The following sections detail experiences with some of the most widely used approaches.

4.3.1 Budget monitoring

The way policy is translated into actual activities on the ground is by having resources allocated to it within the annual budget of a country. As such, the budget can be a key vehicle for civil society to monitor whether or not a policy is being implemented. There are various stages in the budget process which allow opportunities for influence by civil society: budget formulation; budget debate and analysis; and monitoring budget implementation (inputs and outputs).

Oxfam, which has supported a number of such activities, has provided detailed guidance for CSOs in influencing budget processes (Oxfam 2002). This document advocates the need to focus on a few critical areas, organise activities around a limited number of simple questions and messages and work with parliamentarians to feed into budget debates. The difficulty of accessing relevant information on budgets (allocations, distributions and spend) is clearly a significant challenge for many CSOs. Again, the Oxfam document suggests methods to overcome this potential constraint working with allies, parliamentarians, sympathetic government officials and donors.

The UDN has facilitated civil society monitoring of Poverty Action Funds in Uganda. It has achieved this through the establishment of local Poverty Monitoring Committees (PMCs) composed of grassroots community representatives. Through a number of workshops, the UDN has developed the skills of these committees to be able to organise their own monitoring exercises, publish reports and use them as tools for dialogue with local government officials. Such committees now exist across 17 (of around 50) districts in Uganda. The UDN reports that a number of these have experienced difficulty in accessing budget data and that members are often afraid to issue public complaints. Some monitoring committees have extended their activities to campaign against corruption and have joined the Anti Corruption Coalition of Uganda

(ACCU) (Gariyo 2002; UDN 2002; Hughes 2002). The Uganda model has been adopted, though as yet with less success, in Malawi. Here collaborative work was undertaken between CSOs and the Parliamentary Budget and Finance Committee (Lawson 2003).

Another often-quoted example of budget monitoring relates to the work of the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (Idasa). This is a South African public interest organisation which established the Budget Information Service (BIS) to analyse the allocation and use of public resources and to understand the impact of the budget on the poor. BIS has become an important source of independent, critical analysis of the budget. Equally important, it aims to enhance and facilitate the participation of civil society, the media and legislatures in the budget process through education, support and awareness-raising. Idasa has recently stepped up its efforts to analyse the impact on budgets of the HIV/AIDS crisis, following the release of data on the high level of HIV/AIDS incidence among the poor (International Budget Project 2001).

"Social audits", a term associated with Latin American PRSPs (e.g. Bolivia, Honduras and Nicaragua) is similar in intent to the PPETS described above in that they aim to monitor whether allocated funds reach intended beneficiaries. In Bolivia, the Catholic Church, along with 30 other organisations fed their poverty reduction priorities into the government-organised "National Dialogue". High among their concerns was the issue of corruption and civil society pressured the government for an ongoing role in implementing and monitoring the use of debt relief funds. As a result, the government established a legal requirement for civil society oversight in debt relief expenditures (Catholic Relief Services 2003).

The institutional structure for monitoring activities, the Social Control Mechanism (MCS), is still in the process of being defined. However, over 10,000 citizens and small organisations have formed departmental and municipal level oversight committees. A national office will provide overall coordination, and a "Verification Commission" will ensure transparency and integrity through approval of departmental committee staff. Though the MCS strategy has not yet been fully endorsed, some committees are already operating and acting on complaints. In a notable achievement, the national office intervened in a salary dispute in which health workers had not received payment for three months, despite the fact that these salaries are covered by Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) funds. The Minister of Health credited the MCS with negotiating a solution to the conflict, and all back salaries were issued as of July 2002 (Catholic Relief Services 2003). Such links with formal accountability systems is seen as essential (Schnell and Forster 2003) and in Honduras this has involved the establishment of an ongoing relationship between CSOs on the one hand and the Comptroller-General, Prosecutor's Office and the Commissioner for Human Rights on the other.

4.3.2 Report cards and satisfaction surveys

Report cards and satisfaction surveys are regarded as an effective way of gathering systematic feedback from citizens on the quality and performance of government service providers, to highlight gaps and bottlenecks in service delivery and to improve accountability of service providers. The equivalent of a customer satisfaction survey, they reflect peoples' actual experience and can provide space for their ideas

for improvements to be expressed. The concept predates the PRS and was first introduced by the Public Affairs Centre in Bangalore, India in 1993. Those surveys not only indicated where people were experiencing poor services, but also highlighted very low levels of awareness of anti-poverty programmes (Catholic Relief Services 2003). The approach has since been replicated in a number of countries including Kenya and the Philippines, and is identified as a PRS monitoring tool in Albania, Ghana, Nepal, Rwanda, The Gambia and Uganda.

4.3.3 Poverty observatories

The UNDP has supported the establishment of "poverty observatories" in a number of countries, particularly in French-speaking sub-Saharan Africa. These vary in character but are essentially independent agencies which either undertake or support others to undertake frequent and rapid poverty relevant assessments and disseminate findings to both policy-makers and community members. They emphasise broad stakeholder participation in the monitoring process.

A detailed description of an observatory in Vietnam is described by Vu (with Asselin 2001). It is based in two poor mountainous districts and aims to provide a comprehensive poverty profile for the district populations. This observatory is said to have been established on two basic principles:

> Community-based data collection: Local people (leaders of hamlets, mass organisations, rural intellectuals, etc.) are involved to be surveyors. Respondents trust local monitors and they are not in trouble or shy when they provide their owned information. And, because monitors know their community, they have a good sense of whether people are responding truthfully…
>
> Participatory approach and localisation of information: By empowering and transferring information to commune members, people have been able to devise solutions and make decisions on their own behalf. Community members and decision-makers can quickly assess which policies are effective at fighting the causes of poverty.
>
> (Vu 2001)

Benin and Burkina Faso have identified poverty observatories as one main source of PRS monitoring data. UNDP clearly regards their use as one way to deliver the required "missing middle" indicators:

> Since the purpose of monitoring PRSPs is to determine their short-term impact and effectiveness, periodic national household surveys will not be sufficient…UNDP should encourage the development of more frequent surveys and rapid assessments of the poor and by the poor themselves and help to ensure that the results of these surveys are fed back in a timely way to policy-makers and community leaders. This is one of the goals of the poverty 'observatories' in some francophone African countries.
>
> (UNDP 2003b)

4.4 Disaggregation issues

PRS monitoring has tended to focus on the generation of indicators which relate to national populations, with the risk that certain sections of those populations (e.g. women, children, the elderly) or particularly vulnerable groups (e.g. the disabled, those in remote rural areas, ethnic minorities, urban street-dwellers) may continue to suffer, or even be plunged further into poverty as aggregate level indicators appear to suggest the success of PRS policies.

As might be expected, there is a general agreement that disaggregation is in principle intrinsically beneficial.

> Even though there may be limitations, the better the distinctions drawn between the social strata – e.g. between non-landowners and landowning farmers – the better PRSP monitoring will be able to determine the causes of poverty and their change over time by the effect of poverty reduction strategies.
>
> (Asche 2003)

However, there is much less agreement as to how and to what extent these issues can be effectively addressed, particularly in view of the limited capacity of monitoring systems. Three types of disaggregation have been discussed at length in the PRS monitoring literature: poverty and vulnerability; gender; and geographical area. A number of other recent studies are included as Annex 2 Note 7.

4.5 Discussion

It is now widely accepted that in the short run PRS monitoring should focus at least as much on implementation progress as on trends in poverty. There is much discussion of the need for "missing middle" indicators relating to policy implementation. However, it must be remembered that the lack of such indicators in early PRSPs was not a simple oversight. The emphasis on outcomes and impacts reflected a reasonable desire for evidence that policies were resulting in actual as opposed to potential improvements in the living standards of the poor. In many cases the *precise* "chains of causality" between policies and outcomes were, and remain, problematic and open to debate. Such uncertainty makes the selection of appropriate indicators problematic and this is reflected in the "scatter-gun" (collect information on a large number of possibly useful indicators) or "usual suspects" (estimate the standard indicators recommended by international agencies) approaches commonly proposed. In many cases, even if "optimal" indicators (i.e. most appropriate given a clear understanding as to how a policy initiative is intended to produce a desired outcome) can be defined, they may well prove difficult or expensive to estimate to the required accuracy over the timescale required.

Given resource constraints, the suggestion by DANIDA that budget allocations and expenditures may be the most appropriate focus for short-term monitoring is an interesting starting point, particularly if it involves effective tracking exercises with mechanisms to ensure transparency and accountability. This is

a similar route to that proposed in the Kenya Interim PRSP (IPRSP) (discussed in Booth and Lucas 2001). Linking these data to a small set of basic service provision indicators that can reliably reflect annual changes – school attendance, health care utilisation, boreholes constructed, etc. – could provide a reasonable starting point in assessing if a PRS is on track.

Routine data systems have the great potential advantage that they can deliver disaggregated information which allows policy-makers to determine not just that schools and hospitals in general are failing to improve service delivery but also which specific schools and hospitals are failing or succeeding. They may sometimes even be able to show that such failures are not in relation to the population as a whole but only to women, the elderly, particular ethnic groups, etc. If the quality problems could be overcome they would often be far more useful than sample surveys, but that remains a daunting and at least medium-term task. One question which is rarely addressed is whether the poor quality could be at least ameliorated in the short run by analytical means. For example, even where there is a known bias, for example, lack of returns from the poorest areas, this is often ignored or at best treated by means of a crude *ad hoc* adjustment in the estimation of indicators. It would seem useful to at least explore further the possibilities for combining routine data with other sources to generate genuine "best estimates".

Experience suggests that surveys tend to be donor-driven. Few statistical offices can resist proposals for large well-resourced surveys, even if this means diverting their best personnel from other planned activities. The preference for survey-based data is understandable and may be perfectly rational in the short term. The task of designing, implementing and analysing even a large-scale national sample survey under difficult circumstances is much less daunting than attempting to extract reliable data from the often routine data systems that exist in many PRS countries. Surveys are typically the only source of data that can be readily disaggregated by population socio-economic characteristics, in some instances even allowing direct comparison of outcomes as between the poor and the non-poor. They can be also be used to enhance the value of routine data systems, for example by demonstrating the links between geographical and socio-economic factors as in poverty mapping.

Of greater concern is that the preferences of donors are sometimes evident not only in terms of timing but also in terms of detailed content. This may be based on the desire for internationally comparative data or simply on the fact that it is easier to adopt a mainly standardised package than attempt wholesale localisation. In the case of the CWIQ surveys, for example, because they utilise machine-readable questionnaires, amending the content entails modification of the supporting software. The PETS and QSDS can be seen as valuable attempts to address the "missing-middle" issue, seeking to quantify the links in the chain between policy and outcome. However, given that they originated in a specific research context, it may again be reasonable to question if their content is optimal for the use to which they are now being put. An interesting question would be: "What is the minimum data required from such surveys to provide the necessary evidence on PRS implementation issues in each specific country?" This might result in a considerable simplification of current survey procedures.

Donors are often reluctant to become involved in potentially long-drawn-out and technical debates on the reliability of specific indicators. Even attempts at constructive discussion on possible sources of error can easily provoke defensive or antagonistic responses from those who feel that their professional skills are being challenged by powerful outsiders. In many cases donors will prefer to seek out alternative sources – bypassing the responsible agency to seek out data from other government departments or possibly urging the need for yet another round of data collection. The USAID approach, of requiring the quality of key indicators to be openly assessed and alternative methods of improving quality proposed where necessary is an interesting model.

It would be helpful if the distinction between qualitative methods and participation were more clearly maintained. There is general acceptance that qualitative methods, which include a range of tools often associated with participatory approaches, can help to overcome some of the weaknesses in quantitative methods, drawing out issues and explanatory factors that can be missed by analysis of information from RDS or traditional surveys. Their disadvantages have equally been the subject of a substantial literature. Such arguments have lead to a widespread acceptance of the use of complementary qualitative and quantitative methods. Triangulation of sources is generally accepted as offering possibilities for increasing the richness and reliability of analysis (McGee with Norton 2000; Carvalho and White 1997). However, the routine labelling of qualitative exercises as "participatory", which often seems to be done in order to emphasise agencies' concern with community involvement and "ownership", may be becoming counter-productive.

This practice has generated considerable antagonism, certainly within many international NGOs, over what is widely regarded as the hijacking of the participation agenda by the international financial institutions (IFIs). For them the defining characteristic of "participatory" monitoring is that civil society has overall control of the monitoring process.

> The key distinction should be the degree of control and involvement that participants have in determining the scope and themes of enquiry, in generating data, in analysis and in the generation of recommendations or solutions. Many of the forms of enquiry currently described as "participatory" involve informants only in the generation of information. (Participation) appears to involve substituting questionnaires with the templates for PRA diagrams and asking people to fill in the blanks, capturing their "voices" as they speak.
>
> (Lucas and Cornwall 2003)

A useful and workable distinction might be to reserve the "participation" word to monitoring activities which are independent of government or donor agency control. This would by no means exclude such activities – simply that they would be formally labelled as qualitative or rapid appraisal exercises.

5 Using the results – dissemination, analysis and policy change

The World Bank proposes that dissemination should involve 'mechanisms tailored to different groups in civil society, as well as policy makers, programme managers, programme beneficiaries, the general public, the media and academics' (World Bank 2000, cited in Pain and Kirsch 2002). The diversity of information needs and absorptive capacities of each of these groups needs to be taken into account in designing dissemination strategy (Pain and Kirsch 2002).

Here, we consider two aspects of the use of PRS findings: direct feedback mechanisms which should have the potential to change specific policies; and broader issues of communication with the population at large. Finally, the relationship of Poverty and Social Impact Analysis (PSIA) to PRS monitoring is briefly considered.

5.1 Feedback and policy review mechanisms

The ODI consultancy report on Pakistan (ODI 2002b) discusses the need to address the issue of how the findings of the monitoring system can be effectively used to enhance policy. They suggest that the lack of mechanisms to achieve this is a serious weakness:

> there is much more to PRS monitoring than just compiling and reporting on the monitoring indicators . . . One key function is the **need for in-depth evaluation of PRS policies**, especially if monitoring indicators suggest that these are not having the intended effects, **which leads into a broad process of discussion and review of PRS policies**. No mechanism for the latter has yet been established, and no institution has been identified that would fulfil the in-depth evaluation role (which in practice might involve identifying and commissioning special studies, information collection activities etc.). It is probably preferable that this institution is different from the one responsible for compiling and reporting on the monitoring indicators.
>
> (ODI 2002b)

The minimal outputs of PRS monitoring, which might be seen as one such feedback mechanism as far as donors are concerned, are the required annual PRS Progress Reports to the IFIs. Stakeholder participation in the preparation of this report varies widely (Schnell and Forster 2003). In Albania, as discussed below, a distinct CSO report is prepared in parallel. In other cases the stakeholder groups, usually those involved in the original PRSP consultations, may be involved on a continuous basis in the preparation of the report, commenting and proposing revisions and ensuring the awareness of a wider audience (e.g. Honduras, Nicaragua, The Gambia). A third common approach is via a series of consultative workshops with a variety of stakeholders, intended to inform and invite comment (e.g. Burkina Faso, Ghana, Guinea, Guyana, Malawi, Uganda).

In some cases it is suggested that the progress report may be the only output (ODI 2003a). Of the 34 PRS countries, 12 have at least one progress report on the PRSP website and just three have two or more. Given that specification of the monitoring system was not an issue on which a PRSP risked rejection, the

initial progress reports generally reflect the fact that such systems are at a very early stage of development. It is not the intention here to review those documents, but it is evident from a cursory examination that they are very substantial (often 300 pages or more), have clearly taken considerable effort to produce and that much of the quantitative information presented tends to pre-date the PRS period.

A compelling example of a much simpler feedback mechanism, in this case to government policy-makers, is quoted in PRSP Synthesis Note 7 (ODI 2003a). A study in Uganda by the PMAU demonstrated that increased investment in the water sector had not resulted in an increase in the number of sources of safe water. This is reported to have directly influenced a decision that reforms should be undertaken before additional funding would be made available. This example seems to bear a close resemblance to the series of PSIA studies conducted recently by the IFIs and DFID in a number of PRS countries (Hanmer and Hendrie 2002). Its attractiveness from a monitoring perspective lies in the fact that the data could be easily and inexpensively assembled and open to an unambiguous interpretation which was difficult for those responsible to refute. Schnell and Forster (2003) note that the PSIA approach was still being developed at the time many PRSPs were prepared and thus few (Uganda being one exception) mention it. However, 'they have a substantial potential for opening up impact monitoring and evaluation to participatory approaches'.

Feedback mechanisms are by no means intended to be restricted to policy-makers and programme managers. A number of the participatory monitoring approaches discussed above are specifically intended to include a phase when findings are fed back by communities into policy discussion. Asche (2003), for example, describes the way in which GTZ intended Qualitative Impact Analysis (QIM) to work in Malawi:

> 1. In cooperation with the government – in fact, by the government itself – certain sectors and poverty dimensions are selected and compared over time in order to be able to reveal trends with regard to issues on which policymakers need feedback from the population. Following the integration of QIM into the PRSP process, these naturally include poverty-related and socio-political issues.
> 2. Surveys and group discussions are held in selected districts. Even these decentralised processes are guided/chaired by specially trained central government officers who are thus exposed to a local reality that they are frequently unfamiliar with.
> 3. The prepared results are finally directly fed back into central government's decision-making processes, and also disseminated to the wider public in the country in question.
>
> (Asche 2003)

Asche argues that the specific aim of this process was to engage governments and strengthen accountability. The results are described as encouraging, with evidence that it did sometimes result in policy change.

5.2 Communications

The PRSP Sourcebook includes a discussion on communications strategy which suggests that 'strategic use of communication tools and concepts can help ensure this process of inclusion through sharing and dissemination of information and knowledge at all levels of society'. It argues that popular ownership of the PRS 'relies on accurate, consistent and continuous communication that provokes response and encourages debate and dialogue'. To illustrate the problem, a study by the Panos Institute (2002) of the roles of different stakeholders in PRSP processes in Uganda, Lesotho and Ethiopia found that, in spite of the supposed emphasis on ownership, participation and widespread consultation, most people in those countries had no idea what a PRSP is.

Widespread dissemination of information to civil society is obviously one key to increase overall PRS understanding, ownership and engagement. In most cases this task is allocated to government agencies – typically under the ministry of finance or ministry of planning. Three countries describe distinctive dissemination models in their PRSPs. The Ugandan approach (which includes the Poverty Forum, a periodic public debate on poverty issues, and publication of the biennial Poverty Status Report and a range of other PMAU outputs) is generally seen as a good traditional example. The arrangement in Albania, where the government has indicated that it will invite CSOs to jointly prepare an independent report which will be appended to the annual PRS progress report, seems an interesting and innovative mechanism for a more formal channel of communication. However, there must be doubts as to what would happen in practice if the two documents were seriously contradictory. In Tanzania, a multi-stakeholder working group has been established to take responsibility for the overall design and implementation of the dissemination strategy.

The Panos report (2002) makes the argument that the media should be among the best-positioned institutions for the role of information dissemination, stimulating public debate and acting as a government watchdog. A strong and independent media should be able to provide information to citizens which would allow them to take a more active role in policy dialogues which are going to impact on their lives. Unfortunately, they suggest, in most developing countries the media are not prepared, or themselves well enough informed, for this role.

The reasons for the lack of interest in, and awareness of, issues relating to PRSPs among the media need to be analysed and addressed. As Panos note, there is a preference for politics and entertainment over reporting on poverty or development issues. Furthermore, in Africa in particular, there are few specialist journalists trained in economics or development issues. Media in many countries are principally urban-based, and have relatively little interest in issues in rural areas. Finally, poor relationships between media and government or NGOs limit the flow of relevant information from these sources to journalists.

Of course, in many PRS countries the press is largely government controlled and not free to share information that will call its legitimacy into question. Hudock (2003) notes that of the first 19 countries to complete a PRSP only two can be said to have a free press according to a Freedom House assessment. She argues that the potential of the media in PRSP processes remains largely untapped, and media reform

should be more highly prioritised in PRSPs themselves. Though, as indicated above, the PRSP Sourcebook highlights the importance of the use of the media, few financial and technical resources are directed to supporting relevant initiatives. Hudock recognises that there would be serious concerns if donors were seen as directly supporting particular national media outlets. However, she suggests that they could play a useful role in supporting regulations and institutions which encourage development of the sector. UNDP (2001) has conducted PRSP-related media training sessions in Malawi.

As noted above, many civil society monitoring activities have remained outside the government systems with the purpose of providing an independent source of information to advocate for policy change. Possing (2003) suggests that despite a lack of encouragement from the World Bank and other donors to take this more critical, rather than collaborative, role there is significant evidence of civil society action in this area. He argues that NGOs can play a key part to play in sensitising and mobilising local people, to make them aware of their rights to public information and accountability roles. One key area in which civil society can, and does, play a significant communications role is in working to expose and control corruption. As noted above, the UDN in Uganda has been strongly involved in training and awareness-raising on this issue and has helped to set up a regional anti-corruption coalition (Gariyo 2002:3).

5.3 PRS monitoring and PSIA

A report to the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2003), evaluating World Bank and IMF support to the PRSP process in seven countries (Bolivia, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Tanzania, Uganda, Vietnam and Zambia) complains that very little formal, systematic assessment of policy impact had been undertaken:

> Thorough and comprehensive poverty diagnostics in the form of ex-post and ex-ante PSIAs, which should form the foundation of the PRSP have not yet been systematically applied in any of the reviewed countries. Hence PSIAs have not been applied yet in policy priorities and for undertaking trade-offs. (Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2003)

The report suggests that support by the Nordic donors for the application of PSIA will assist a situation in which such support has previously been uncoordinated and on a case-by-case basis. This is intended to allow an established feedback process, use of PSIA to provide an input to the design of the PRS monitoring system and greater transparency, through the dissemination of PSIA information to a wide audience.

Pilot PSIA exercises in five PRS countries, Armenia, Honduras, Mozambique, Rwanda, and Uganda (Hanmer and Hendrie 2002) appear to support the idea that focused studies can produce policy-relevant findings within a relatively short timeframe (40 days) and based mainly on existing information. Of particular interest is the discussion of the need for both quantitative and qualitative information and the value of micro-level and case study data in addition to the traditional household survey data. 'Small, short,

rapid appraisal methods can pay big dividends, and national knowledge can . . . provide useful "rules of thumb" regarding economic behaviour by which first order approximations of impact can be judged' (Hanmer and Hendrie 2002).

The above report mentions that one study, in Honduras, was constrained by the absence of a social accounting matrix (SAM). While such frameworks are costly to develop, the broad insights into general equilibrium effects that they can provide are almost impossible to envisage by other means. Future PSIA work may be assisted by the work of the International Food Policy Institute, which has developed a series of highly disaggregated SAMs for a number of the poorest countries. Two interesting examples are given in Annex 2 Note 8.

5.4 Discussion

With a few notable exceptions (for example, Uganda, Tanzania, Mozambique, Vietnam), it seems that at least in the short run there will be limited overt demand for PRS monitoring data in government, other than that generated by the need to meet the requirements of donor review processes. This will especially be the case for those PRS indicators initially developed for the IPRSP, which are widely seen as driven by the IFIs and lacking local ownership. If the link between performance monitoring and donor funding is used to promote PRS implementation, it may result in perverse incentives in terms of monitoring. If failure to achieve agreed targets has unpleasant financial consequences there is little incentive to strengthen monitoring systems which have the potential to highlight that failure. The appropriate approach would seem to be to encourage the identification of bottlenecks and if necessary offer the possibility of additional support in overcoming them.

While many countries have expressed a general interest in improving their statistical M&E capacity there is as yet little evidence as to the potential implications for the policy process. Few PRS countries (Uganda and Tanzania perhaps provide recent counter-examples) have traditionally used performance monitoring or evidence-based research to drive policy change or budget allocation decisions. In general policy is political and personal (Booth and Lucas 2004). Modification of this position is possible but not without the establishment of appropriate incentives. For example, in Uganda the formal links which have been established between poverty orientation and allocation of funds from the PAF is reported to have considerably increased the demand for data and analysis by line ministries (Schnell and Forster 2003).

In the absence of such specific incentives, PRS monitoring agencies will need to have very good marketing and communications skills if they are to persuade government officials and civil society of the value to them of the information being produced. Tailoring feedback to match the specific interests of targeted stakeholders is clearly of great importance. This applies to sectoral ministries and local governments as much as to CSOs. Two specific approaches seem to have made some headway. Governments, both national and local, and CSOs do appear to be very sensitive to comparative and

ranking indicators, which show their position relative to another country, province, district, etc. For similar reasons, poverty mapping also appears intrinsically attractive and offers considerable scope both in dissemination and in generating responses that can influence policy debate.[2]

The PSIA exercises quoted above provide very attractive examples of the type of policy analysis process which could engender a greater interest in the use of PRS data, if it became part of the routine activities of the monitoring system. Again, given the capacity constraints, it may be necessary initially to base such activities on the technical secretariat, possibly reinforced by local or national consultants. However, extending the basic approach to involve CSOs would be an attractive possibility.

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[2] Note that the NIMES proposal in Uganda recognises the importance of this approach by including a specific Geographical Information System (GIS) coordinating committee as one of its key components.

Annex 1 Tables derived from the 34 full PRSPs available on the PRSP website

Table A.1: Coordinating responsibility for monitoring system as specified in the PRSPs

	Ministry of Finance	Ministry of Planning	Other
Albania	Technical secretariat within the Ministry of Finance		
Armenia	PRSP M&E unit located within the Ministry of Finance and Economy		
Azerbaijan			State programme on poverty and economic development will have overall responsibility for coordinating the implementation process and also for monitoring that process
Benin			The institutional framework for M&E is the National Commission for the Development of the Fight Against Poverty. Placed under the auspices of the Minister of State for Coordination of Government Action, Development and Forecasting
Bolivia			Evaluation of the BPRS will be carried out by the Social and Economic Policy Analysis Unit. This is the technical secretariat of the National Economic Policy Council and the National Social Policy Council
Burkina Faso	Ministry of Economy and Finance		
Cambodia		The General Secretariat of the Council for Social Development is responsible for formulation, implementation and monitoring. This body is housed within the Ministry of Planning, which is the principle agency responsible for coordinating efforts in monitoring the NPRS	
Cameroon			M&E coordinated by the Technical Committee for Monitoring Economic Programmes

Chad		The PRSP steering committee is responsible for monitoring the PRSP under the auspices of the Ministry of Planning, Development and Cooperation. Above this is a high inter-ministerial committee for PRSP supervision	
Ethiopia	The Welfare Monitoring Unit in the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MOFED) will coordinate the system		
Georgia			The Bureau of Coordination and the Monitoring of the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Programme of Georgia will coordinate and monitor the implementation of the PRSP
Ghana		The National Development Planning Commissions M&E Division will undertake the M&E of the PRSP. The Ministry of Economic Planning and Regional Cooperation will supervise and monitor the implementation of the M&E plan.	
Guinea			Standing Secretariat for Poverty Reduction
Guyana			The PRSP Secretariat is responsible for implementing and monitoring
Honduras			Leadership resides in the Social Cabinet, coordinated by the president. The Technical Support Unit is the technical secretariat to the Social Cabinet under the auspices of the Ministry of the Presidency
Kyrgyzstan			The implementation of the National Poverty Reduction Strategy will be coordinated by the National Comprehensive Development Framework Council (CDF) chaired by the President. The CDF Secretariat coordinates implementation and coordinates M&E

Madagascar			A technical cell is in charge of drafting and monitoring the PRSP. The office of the chairman of the technical cell is held by the Vice Prime Minister in charge of Economic Programmes, Public Works, Transportation and Territorial Development, joined by the Minister of the Economy, Finance and Budget and the chief of staff of the President's Office
Malawi			The Cabinet Committee on the Economy will assume overall control. Beneath this will be a Monitoring Committee consisting of principle secretaries from relevant ministries. The committee will be served by a Technical Working Committee (TWC) that will coordinate M&E efforts and provide analysis
Mali		National Planning Department	
Mauritania			Inter-ministerial Committee for Poverty Reduction
Mongolia	Overall implementation and monitoring of the PRSP will be coordinated by the Ministry of Finance and Economy. The Poverty Research Group of the MOFE will be the main acting body to coordinate implementation, monitoring and reporting for the PRSP		
Mozambique	Ministry of Planning and Finance		
Nepal		The National Planning Commission (NPC) has an overall supervisory role and is mandated through its Central Monitoring Division and recently established Poverty Monitoring Section to monitor progress towards poverty reduction	
Nicaragua			The Technical Secretariat of the Presidency will coordinate the implementation and M&E of the PRSP at the national level, with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Central Bank of Nicaragua and Ministry of Finance

Niger			Permanent Secretariat of the PRSP plays the leading role in the coordination, implementation and M&E of the PRSP
Pakistan	The Federal PRSP Secretariat in the Ministry of Finance coordinates the PRSP and collaborates with provincial monitoring units, the Federal Bureau of Statistics, Centre for Research on Poverty Reduction and Income Distribution and the Planning Commission for poverty assessment, outcome and impact analysis studies		
Rwanda			The Poverty Observatoire, a unit of the National Poverty Reduction Programme is overall coordinator of the monitoring system.
Senegal			The Inter-ministerial steering and decision-making council under the Prime Minister.
Tajikistan			The government intends to establish a unit within the executive office of the president on 'monitoring and improving the PRSP'
Tanzania			The Vice President's Office will have overall responsibility for monitoring the implementation and impact of the PRSP at the national level
The Gambia			The high level economic committee will provide institutional guidance and political leadership to the implementation of the SPA and have responsibility for its monitoring
Uganda	Poverty Monitoring and Analysis Unit		
Vietnam		Ministry of Planning and Investment will take the lead role in coordinating with line ministries to establish an inter-ministerial working unit and coordinate the implementation of the PRSP. The function of this unit, in cooperation with line ministries and provinces, is to carry out and M&E progress in implementing the strategy	

Yemen		A steering committee for the poverty information and monitoring system with the Ministry of Planning and Development will be formed as the supervising agency with the membership of the PRSP committee	
Zambia	The overall monitoring function will be undertaken by the Planning and Economic Management Department (PEMD) in the Ministry of Finance and National Planning		

Table A.2: Arrangements for decentralised monitoring as specified in the PRSPs

Albania	The M&E system will be extended to the local government
Armenia	Provincial Governors' Offices will conduct the M&E of the PRSP programme activities at the provincial level
Azerbaijan	
Benin	A Municipal Monitoring Committee chaired by the mayor will be established at the municipal level and a Departmental Monitoring Committee will be established in each department
Bolivia	Regional information systems will be established at the municipal and departmental level At the departmental level, the Results Orientated M&E system (SISER) will be strengthened
Burkina Faso	
Cambodia	Commune councils are to play a key role in accumulating data and for providing feedback for M&E
Cameroon	
Chad	Monitoring the implementation of PRSP is undertaken at the regional, departmental and subprefectural levels of each region. In the future this monitoring system will be extended to the canton and village levels
Ethiopia	
Georgia	
Ghana	Regional Planning Coordination Units coordinate and report on M&E activities in the regions. District Poverty Monitoring Group do the same in the districts
Guinea	Guiding principles for the design and implementation of this system will be the need to decentralise data collection and analysis Regional poverty monitoring committees will be set up
Guyana	Village councils are stakeholders in the monitoring process
Honduras	Municipalities and departments are involved in the coordination, implementation and follow-up of the PRSP
Kyrgyzstan	Local state administrations carry out M&E activities An information network uniting CDF secretariat, ministries, departments and local state administrations will be established for effective M&E
Madagascar	

Malawi	All district assemblies are to establish statistical units responsible for data collection and processing, database management and report production District development plans are being established by the districts that will input into subsequent reviews of the PRSP District level monitoring of indicators will take place
Mauritania	
Mongolia	Local governments involved in specific PRSP programmes will be responsible for implementation and monitoring
Mozambique	
Nepal	Village and District Development Committees have a central role in the implementation and monitoring of PRSP activities
Nicaragua	Municipal technical units will be involved in the monitoring process
Niger	Development of regional data collection systems
Pakistan	Provincial monitoring units play a key role in the overall M&E system
Rwanda	Output indicators and process and impact indicators are monitored by a range of agencies including local administrations Provincial administrative reports
Senegal	Steering agencies at the regional level headed by the governor
Tajikistan	
Tanzania	
The Gambia	Information systems should be established at the sub-national administrative level
Uganda	
Vietnam	Along with line ministries, provinces will organise on an annual basis the M&E of activities that fall under their responsibility, and report the results of implementing the objectives to higher-level organisations
Yemen	Planning and investment committees at the governorate and district levels will be involved in the implementation and monitoring of local activities
Zambia	

Table A.3: Civil society involvement in monitoring as indicted in the PRSPs

	Core institutionalised involvement	Non-core institutionalised involvement	Non-institutionalised involvement	Reference to a need for involvement
Albania		• The National Civil Society Advisory Group will play a coordinating role for civil society participation in the M&E process. It will prepare a document at the end of each year to present the conclusions of civil society on PRSP progress		
Armenia		• The PRSP participatory steering committee (responsible for ensuring inclusive participation in the M&E system) will include NGO representatives		
Azerbaijan		• Civil society are represented on the Advisory Board that coordinates stakeholders' involvement in the M&E process		
Benin		• The Plenary Committee of the National Committee of the Fight Against Poverty includes civil society representatives. This body offers guidance and recommendations on the PRSP		
Bolivia			• The National Dialogue (to be conducted every 3 years) allows CSOs to comment on the monitoring of poverty	• Statement on the need for civil society involvement in M&E
Burkina Faso				
Cambodia		• The Senate and parliament responsible for reviewing the PRSP's progress	• NGOs monitor the NPRS, providing comments on socio-economic household surveys and monitoring the progress of implementation	• CSO are expected to play a key role in providing feedback and information for M&E
Cameroon		• A National Poverty Reduction Network (RNRP) will be established to act as a framework for societal supervision of all the activities undertaken to implement the PRS		• M&E will be conducted with a participatory approach involving the beneficiaries
Chad	• The PRSP Steering Committee includes NGO stakeholders			

Ethiopia				
Georgia		• Parliament is to evaluate the achievement of the PRSP's objectives. Regular quarterly reporting systems will be introduced between parliament and the relevant executive agencies responsible for PRSP implementation	• Civil society can liaise with the Bureau of Programme Coordination And Monitoring • Annual national conference will bring together all stakeholder (including NGOs) to discuss progress	• Government will support NGOs to monitor and evaluate the PRSP independently
Ghana		• The structure allows for participation by stakeholders in both governance (the GPRS M&E technical committee) and implementation and feedback (through the National Inter-Agency Poverty Monitoring Group)	• Parliament plays a role in monitoring poverty reduction programmes • CSOs provide an independent view on poverty. Members may be seconded into the NDPC and district monitoring groups to add strength to M&E • Civil society involved in the selection of indicators	
Guyana		• Civil society will be involved in the implementation, planning and monitoring of community programmes (constitutional changes passed in 2000 guarantee this)	• Public consultations to review progress on implementation of the PRSP • Neighbourhood Democratic Councils, RDCs, village councils and NGOs asked to comment on progress	
Honduras		• Three representatives of civil society are on the Consultative Council for poverty reduction- the advisory body to the social council. The council will serve to channel demands from civil society	• NGOs and target groups will be involved in: implementing, co-implementing projects and in the follow-up and evaluation of activities	

Kyrgyzstan	• The National Comprehensive Development Framework Council includes representatives from civil society. This body coordinates the implementation process		• The system of M&E is based on participatory principles, involving all stakeholders • CDF's secretariat will consult with civil society	
Madagascar	• The technical cell in charge of drafting, monitoring and giving strategic direction to the PRSP has civil society representatives	• Civil society representatives will also be on the thematic advisory groups that periodically conduction monitoring activities	• Participatory workshops on monitoring will be run every year in each of the provincial capitals	
Malawi		• The Technical working committee that serves the PRSP monitoring committee will have civil society representation	• Civil society is to be involved in expenditure tracking and output monitoring. They are also involved in the PER	
Mali		• Civil society representation on thematic groups of the technical committee		• Plans to further deepen the participatory process
Mauritania				
Mongolia		• Civil society will have institutionalised representation through working groups • Institutionalisation of participatory process will focus on the expansion of experience with citizens report cards – this will ensure wide engagement	• NGOs involved in specific PRSP programmes will be responsible for implementation and monitoring • The community-based monitoring system introduced within a UNICEF project will be extended for the locally run assessment of livelihoods	
Mozambique			• Civil society will play a role in the monitoring system through participating in debates on PRSP progress • NGOs consulted on the most appropriate M&E strategy and tools	

Nepal			• Civil society should participate in the decision-making and management processes at the village level	
Nicaragua		• The participation of civil society in the M&E system will be coordinated through Council for Economic and Social Planning		
Niger				
Pakistan			• Monitoring system provides the means for all stakeholders to play a role	
Rwanda			• Civil society involvement in community implementation	
Senegal				• Need for civil society participation in the oversight and implementation of policies
Tajikistan				
Tanzania	• Civil society representatives on two of the four technical working groups for PRS monitoring	• Autonomous research institution, Research on Poverty Alleviation (REPOA), mandated by the government to play a lead role in determining priority areas for research and analysis of progress	• Civil society involvement in undertaking PPAs	
The Gambia		• Civil society and parliamentarians represented on stakeholder monitoring group that will act as M&E quality assurance group; analyse and debate results from monitoring activities; make recommendation to inter-departmental monitoring committee; and ensure that M&E meets objectives • Stakeholder monitoring group will channel civil society demands to the monitoring committee	• Civil society involvement in conducting PPAs	
Uganda	• Uganda Debt Network monitors utilisation of Poverty Action Fund. Quarterly exercises at district level • Monitoring committees of community leaders and other beneficiaries established at local level to			

	provide information using observation and participatory processes			
Vietnam				• Institutionalise the consultation process with civil society organisations for the M&E of the PRSP
Yemen			• CSOs involved in the production of data for M&E	
Zambia		• Ministry of Finance and National Planning will collaborate with NGOs and civil society to implement monitoring system		

Table A.4: Sources of data as specified in PRSPs

	Routine data	Surveys	Participatory methods	Observatory	Other
Albania	• Line ministries are responsible for the M&E of policies in their sectors	• LSMS			• Administrative data mapping • Poverty Quality Assessment • Independent and specialist agencies called upon to conduct studies • Citizens report card initiative
Armenia	• Ministries monitor and evaluate indictors relevant to their spheres	• Household survey (annual)			
Azerbaijan	• Administrative data on public sector investment will be used to look at increases in investment in electricity lines, sewage, irrigation and water pipes	• Household budget survey • Labour force surveys (LFS) (in development) • Second rural infrastructure survey • Comprehensive survey of living standards of refugees and internally displaced people • Women and child welfare survey • Infrastructure survey • Environmental monitoring survey • MICS			• Civil society will be involved in data collection through NGO-led qualitative research activities

Benin	• Line ministries	• National household survey system • Employment survey • Price survey		• Poverty observatories	• An impact evaluation system
Bolivia	• Administrative systems will make it possible to build indicators relating to the supply of public services (particularly health and education)	• Household survey • Quality of life survey			• National Census of Population and Housing (CNVP) 2001 • Geo-referenced information systems
Burkina Faso	• Routine management systems (e.g. stats produced by ministry of basic education and literacy)	• Surveys into the informal sector in urban areas 2001 • Migration and demographic survey • Annual small-scale survey of household living conditions • National survey of household budgets and consumption 2001–2 • Study of economic governance to be carried out by UNDP	• PPA 2001	• Poverty observatories	• Quantitative study of poverty • Qualitative study of how households perceive poverty • Vulnerability and insecurity maps
Cambodia	• Line Ministries responsible for implementing NPRS in their respective sectors, for performance monitoring of their own performance	• Demographic surveys • Household surveys • LFSs • Socio-economic household surveys	• Rapid assessments and localised qualitative studies similar to PPA		• NGOs are expected to provide useful data from their micro-level surveys and evaluation studies • Decennial census of population and housing

Cameroon	• Administrative systems	• Third generation population and housing survey • Employment survey • Informal sector survey • Survey on household consumption and living standards • Education survey • Third DHS • PETS • National wide 1.2.3 survey (employment and informal sector) • Targeted surveys: HIV/AIDS, children			• Poverty mapping
Chad	• Routine administrative data	• Household surveys • Living condition surveys • Spending and income surveys • Employment surveys • Population and health surveys (2004) • Targeted surveys • Survey of users of public services (2003)			• Population census • Public expenditure tracking through the health sector • Qualitative surveys to gain perspective on the poor's perception of poverty
Ethiopia	• Each sector has formulated Sector Development Programmes that provide a steam of quality administrative data	• National integrated household survey • Household income consumption and expenditure survey	• PPA		• NGO surveys and monitoring systems that augment the info available from official data • Poverty mapping

Georgia	• The government will use data from line ministries	• LSMS			• NGOs will conduct supplementary qualitative surveys
Ghana	• Sectoral administrative data	• Household survey	• Participatory impact assessment using citizen report cards and expenditure tracking of social service expenditure		
Guinea		• Basic comprehensive poverty survey • CWIQ survey	• Participatory surveys on people's perception of poverty		• Poverty map
Guyana	• Line ministries	• Biannual household and expenditure surveys			• Poverty map
Honduras	• Sectoral registries	• Household survey			• National population census
Kyrgyzstan	• Line ministries				• Non-state actors can use M&E data to conduct independent analysis and, prepare reports on effectiveness of programme execution
Madagascar	• Ministries provide the information their sectors	• Household surveys	• Participatory evaluation of poverty		
Malawi	• Line ministries	• CWIQ • Food price surveys • Integrated household survey (every 5 years) • DHS (5 years)	• Quality Impact Monitoring Survey		
Mali		• Household poverty survey 2001			

Mauritania		• Living conditions survey • DHS survey			• General Population and Habitat census
Mongolia	• Line ministries	• Household and expenditure survey	• UNICEF community-based monitoring system for assessment of livelihoods		
Mozambique	• Line ministries		• PPA and Rural Participatory Diagnoses (1–2 years)		• PER • Questionnaire of indicators of well-being (yearly)
Nicaragua	• Line ministries	• LSMS • DHS • Income expenditure surveys • Employment surveys			
Nepal	• Responsibility for supervision and monitoring is with the line ministries	• NLSS surveys 5–6 years • Household survey 2–3 years • Client satisfaction surveys	• Participatory monitoring, expenditure tracking		• Poverty mapping
Niger	• Line ministries	• General agricultural survey • Household expenditure survey • DHS			• General population census • Poverty maps • National qualitative survey on the perception of poverty among households
Pakistan	• Line ministries	• Annual CWIQ surveys • Integrated household survey			

Rwanda	• Output indicators and process and impact indicators are monitored by among other agencies line ministries • The line ministries produce information that serves as a basis for other work in poverty monitoring	• CWIQ • DHS • Agricultural survey • Household living conditions survey • PETS	• Participatory poverty research assessment • Citizens Report Cards		• Population Census • National Poverty Assessment
Senegal		• Household budget and consumption survey • CWIQ			• Poverty perception surveys
Tajikistan	• Line ministries				
Tanzania	• Line ministries collect through routine administrative systems	• Household budget survey • National accounts and economic survey • DHS • Reproductive and child health surveys			• Academic and research institutes collect data on an *ad hoc* basis • Indicators measured at community level • Population census • PER
The Gambia	• Line ministries	Integrated household surveys	• PPA (semi annular) • Citizen's Report Cards		
Uganda	• Line ministries administrative data	• Household budget surveys • PETS • SDSs • DHS	• Participatory Poverty Assessment Project		

Vietnam		• Household living standards survey (2 years) • Employment and statistical survey			• General Population Survey (10 years)
Yemen		• Household survey			• CSO contracted to conduct poverty surveys and update data • Poverty map
Zambia	• Line ministries	• Living conditions monitoring survey • Prices survey • Employment survey • DHS			• NGOs, academic institutions, research centres play a key role in collecting and analysing additional data

Annex 2 Notes and additional material

1. In Tanzania a Round Table on Poverty Monitoring included stakeholders from government, academic and research institutions, NGOs and donors. The resulting structure is headed by a Poverty Monitoring Steering Committee, which has representatives from each of these groups and is intended to provide general guidance. The linked Technical Committee for the Poverty Reduction Strategy takes responsibility for preparation of the Annual PRS Progress Reports, supported by a Poverty Monitoring Secretariat, based in the Vice President's Office and staffed from that office, the Ministry of Finance and the President's Office. Four Technical Working Groups – Surveys and Census, Routine Data Systems, Research and Analysis, and Dissemination, Sensitisation and Advocacy – each of which includes stakeholders from government, non-government groups and/or donors, are tasked with the substantial work on poverty monitoring. Of particular interest, an autonomous research institution, Research on Poverty Alleviation (REPOA), was mandated by the government to play a lead role in determining priority areas for research and analysis of progress (DANIDA 2001).

2. The "Vision" of a PRS monitoring and reporting system presented at a meeting in 2002 (SPA 2002) of the SPA Task Team on the Post full-PRSP Process:

- A single, overarching review process
- Production of a singe Progress Report using information generated by the national system
- Process led by government – Progress Report disseminated to national stakeholders, covering key issues identified through national consultations
- Review is timed to the budget cycle so that results feed into budget process
- Review covers agreed indicators (drawn from the PRSP) outlined in a single, common performance assessment framework negotiated with donors
- Required data at sector and national level kept to a minimum. Information on inputs and outcomes supplemented by financial reporting and PERs
- Sector and project R & M [reporting and monitoring] requirements function as building blocks feeding into the review process
- Consultative Group meetings used to underwrite the process and engage a broad range of stakeholders

3. Tanzania provides an example of civil society–government joint monitoring initiative, though the degree to which civil society acts on an equal footing with government is questionable. The Poverty Monitoring System (PMS) is the government institution which will provide the data and information required for the monitoring and evaluation of the PRS. Non-state involvement takes the form of four national lobby networks and one international NGO which are included in the national Poverty Monitoring Steering Committee. Civil society actors have also been invited to participate in two of the four PMS Technical Working Groups. Gould and Ojanen (2003) note that the hand-picked membership

of the Research and Analysis group includes mainly academic and donor non-state actors rather than local advocacy organisations. However, the fact that this group has ensured the incorporation of a PPA within the PMS has opened a key channel for broader civil society influence on the PRS policy process. Among the 15 members of the PPA implementing consortium were five national NGOs, five international NGOs and the Institute of Development Studies of the University of Dar es Salaam. These worked alongside the lead agency (a not-for-profit academic consultancy) and three government agencies (the President's office, Finance and National Bureau of Statistics).

The design of the PMS, including the use of a PPA as a pivotal policy feedback mechanism was strongly promoted by UNDP (Gould and Ojanen 2003). It is still unclear, however, how PPA findings will feed into the PRS process and its budgetary framework. Gould and Ojanen therefore suggest that the PMS 'does not wield direct political clout in any measurable degree and the higher echelons of decision making authority are buffered against the direct influence of non-state actors (or "the poor") by an ambiguous and multi-staged chain of bureaucratic reporting systems'.

In Uganda, the UDN Poverty Action Fund (PAF) monitoring runs in parallel to government. Findings from civil society monitoring are fed to the relevant official agencies to validate or challenge government findings (UDN 2002). This arrangement is said to work reasonably well and the UDN also participates in PAF quarterly meetings organised by the Ministry of Finance Planning and Economic Development (MoFPED). In terms of PRS implementation, it is the responsibility of local government, supervised by sectoral ministries, to monitor outputs. The UDN is also setting up a broader Community Based Monitoring and Evaluation System (CBMES) to mobilise community members in assessing the process and quality of service delivery. This has been successfully piloted in one district, and lessons drawn for scaling up. However, there are serious resource constraints (UDN 2002).

4. The Tanzania Poverty Monitoring Master Plan (Tanzania 2001) argues that:

> RDS provide data at regular intervals, annually or more frequently, while surveys and the census can only provide estimates at relatively long intervals. In the context of the PRSP, frequent estimates of poverty monitoring indicators are required. Secondly, many existing RDS are national in their coverage and can provide disaggregated information at district and ward levels. As the success of the Poverty Reduction Strategy depends to a large extent on appropriate actions by Local Government Authorities (LGAs), the data generated by RDS are of great importance.

However, it also describes the "major challenges" faced in ensuring the quality and timeliness of the information derived. The HMIS notionally covers all health facilities in the country (including public, NGO and private) and is described as a major tool for planning, monitoring and evaluation. However, its use is said to be limited by the poor quality of information, delays in reporting, and limited dissemination of findings. The underlying problems are the subject of a detailed assessment in an interesting thesis (Mukama 2003), which also considers the comparable system in Mozambique. Similarly, the usefulness of the EMIS is said to be constrained by: failure to submit data or incomplete reporting by some schools;

inaccurate returns due to poor record keeping; attempts to disguise or distort information by some head teachers; delays in distributing and/or returning forms; and frequent errors made at the various levels of data aggregation.

A Uganda PEAP monitoring strategy document (Uganda 2002) confirms the general poor quality of data available and identifies the causes as:

> inadequate logistical support, in terms of equipment, transport facilities, and allowances, which has resulted in poor supervision of many routine monitoring activities; inadequate skills and weak incentives to collect and analyze data, especially at the local levels, with the result that most administrative data are not properly recorded.

These problems are said to result in biased or simply inaccurate data that is often incomplete because of reporting delays. The document also underlines an additional well-known problem in that: 'most routine administrative data are facility-based. They provide information on those already getting access to services, not on those who are for one reason or another outside the reach of current provision.' However, with all these limitations the document still argues that the government must provide the support required to make the systems function effectively if they are to monitor the priority programmes for poverty reduction.

A consultancy report on the Malawi PRS monitoring system (Kiregyera, Scott, Ajayi and Nsemukila 2002) again discusses some of the underlying causes of the poor quality of data delivered and emphasises that a simple "technical fix" based on computerisation will not be sufficient. It suggests that the failure:

> results from a lack of resources, limited human capacity, high staff turn-over, weak incentives and the absence of a discriminating demand for information by policy-makers. Where computerised MIS have been introduced, the problem is not only the risk of a mismatch between the demands of the hard/software and the managerial/technical skills available, but the fundamental lack of experience in systematically using data to inform decision-making.
>
> (Kiregyera *et al.* 2002)

5. In the district managed by Medecins Sans Frontières (MSF), for example, they and UNICEF provide by far the largest component of health staff salaries and have a decisive influence on the terms and conditions of service (van Damme and Meessen 2001). They can therefore both provide incentives and create a framework within which these can be linked to performance. This is in line with the advice given by Conway and Beckerleg (2002) in a discussion of the general low quality of routine health information in Cambodia: 'Extremely low salaries are a major impediment to improving performance . . . However, to be effective in improving performance, salary supplements must be linked with improved Human Resource management procedures.' Unfortunately, the level of funding required to ensure success is probably only available where long-term external support is available. In the Cambodia case, attempts to extend the audit approach to districts which lack such support have been much less successful.

6. Recent research on a project to improve the HMIS in Uganda (Gladwin *et al.* 2003) appears to identify serious problems with an approach based on establishing decentralised systems. The central issue would seem to be that too much attention was focused on narrow technical aspects of the new system and too little on critical organisational and human resource issues. For example:

> The hierarchy of power in health units and at district level constrained HMIS implementation, as decentralization was not fully enacted or understood. The previous hierarchy of power placed the Medical Records Officer (MRO) in a lowly position, but the district MRO was now expected to be an HMIS supervisor, even of clinically trained staff, and fellow DHT members were expected to produce reports the MRO could file, collate and even interpret, which meant he had the right to demand reports from these staff.
>
> (Gladwin, Dixon and Wilson 2003)

Training health workers in the use of the new system proved much more demanding than expected. The most difficult area related to low-level staff undertaking relative mundane tasks:

> unfounded assumptions were made about health unit staff and procedures when identifying relevant information management strategies. For example, HMIS data collection, processing and information use assumes a certain level of general education and specialist training amongst health workers, but this was not available, especially in smaller health units. Too few support supervision visits for HMIS training were made for health unit personnel to grasp new skills, such as data processing, compiling graphs and statistics.
>
> (Gladwin *et al.* 2003)

Greater success appears to have been achieved in South Africa (Wilson, Hedberg, Rohdde and Puchert 2003). The District Health Information System (DHIS), which was first piloted in 1997, has become a nationwide system which is being exported to a number of other countries in the region and appears to be generally highly regarded. The indicators provided seem highly correlated with PRS "missing middle" requirements.

> The DHIS is capable of reporting monthly, enabling timely action to rectify deficiencies. Indeed, for less dynamic measures of the system, the annual clinic audit has proven to provide good data on a range of useful measures: personnel levels, service provision schedules, infrastructure, equipment and objective measures of quality. These supplement the monthly data on service provision, drug supplies, work loads and disease patterns that can change rapidly. The system is most useful if it can provide fast and up to date indicators of what the problems are and where they are localised.
>
> (Wilson *et al.* 2003)

7. Disaggregation issues

Vulnerability and targeting

In a review which covers the PRSPs for six countries and IPRSPs for a further 14, Marcus and Wilkinson (2002) found that 'While poverty statistics were sometimes disaggregated into poor and extremely poor, as in Ghana and Kyrgyzstan, the distinction between chronic and transient poverty was never mentioned nor was the meaning of vulnerability in particular country, regional or social contexts spelt out.' However, 'almost all . . . identify "vulnerable social groups" including: children, older people, disabled people, refugees and people living in isolated areas.' They argue that the focus on quantitative data sources has tended to limit the possibilities for addressing diversity and that the use of more qualitative and participatory methods 'should enable a more nuanced picture of poverty and disadvantage to emerge.'

A recent study on the degree to which poverty reduction strategies will actually target the poor in terms of improving health status (Laterveer, Niessen and Yazbeck 2003) systematically examines the first batch of 23 HIPC IPRSPs. The aim was to assess the extent to which they actually pursue the pro-poor focus of health policies as set down in national policy documents. The findings indicated that there was little effort to analyse health issues in relation to the poor, or to include the specific interests of the poor in health policy design. One area of special concern was 'the effort put into collection and use of poverty-related health data. Although 57% of the documents state that health surveys were conducted, the poor are rarely mentioned'.

A more recent review by the WHO (2004) again looked for evidence, this time in PRSPs, of geographical or vulnerability targeting relating to health policies. 'Overall, this was difficult to find. For example, of the 21 PRSPs reviewed that addressed communicable diseases (other than HIV/AIDS), only one explicitly targeted poor populations or regions.' The only exception related to water and sanitation policies, where rural/urban targeting was adopted in half of the documents. Four different approaches to targeting were identified overall: by urban/rural; by region or district (for example, the Vietnamese PRSP links policy on poor and remote mountainous areas to specific measurable targets on availability of medical staff and health facilities); targeting the poor(est), typically by providing financial assistance for health care costs; and targeting specific vulnerable groups such as women or indigenous populations (for example, the Bolivian PRSP targets the proportion of the indigenous population covered by basic health services). The failure to address the poorest groups was seen as a major weakness:

> Few PRSPs attempt to monitor the impact of their health programmes on the poorest members of the population…For example, out of the 21 country health strategies that address communicable diseases, only one presented poverty-focused indicators to monitor the programme. The figures are the same for reproductive and maternal health programmes, although slightly improved for HIV/AIDS (three) and child health (two) . . . It has been well argued that health programmes

> focused on the needs of the poor will not necessarily reach the poorest groups. Poverty-focused monitoring indicators are thus a key tool for assessing the impact of health programmes on poor people – a tool which most PRSPs fail to employ in their health strategies.
>
> (WHO 2004)

Gender

One of the most discussed areas in terms of the need for an approach to PRS monitoring which acknowledges diversity is that of gender. The review by Marcus and Wilkinson (2002) 'confirms the World Development Movement's (2001) assessment that gender analysis is largely missing in PRSPs and IPRSPs' except for 'a few references to the poverty of female- versus male-headed households, or to differences in boys' and girls' school enrolment rates'. With the exception of Kenya and Honduras, 'other gender issues, including access to land or other assets, employment, or issues of gender and governance were not mentioned'.

A major contribution to the World Bank and IMF PRSP Review was provided by UNIFEM (2001). This was based on assessments done by NGOs, consultants and national women's groups in countries with both interim and full PRSPs. The study reviewed a wide range of IPRSPs, PRSPs and secondary literature from Laos, Yemen, Lesotho, Ghana, Bolivia, Lesotho and Tanzania. The report argues that data collection is one of the key areas where there is a singular lack of gender dimension in the PRSPs. One example quoted is that analysis of gender as a cross-cutting dimension is typically restricted to a few specific sectors such as health and education, where gender issues are traditionally addressed. It suggests that because attention is still focused on conventional measures of poverty, available monitoring data cannot adequately address the poverty levels of women.

A review of 15 IPRSPs and three PRSPs by the World Bank's Gender Division was reported in Kabeer (2002). This indicated that: less than half discussed gender issues in any detail in their diagnosis of poverty; few integrated gender analysis into their monitoring and evaluation sections; while gendered information was usually provided for health, nutrition and population and to a lesser extent education, in other places gender was typically mentioned in passing or with a "vague intention".

A more recent study (Bell 2003) was based on Information gathered from interviews with key people in governments, NGOs, Danish embassies and academic institutions as well as Internet and library resources. The report provides an overview on gender and PRSPs with particular reference to Tanzania, Bolivia, Vietnam and Mozambique. While again generally pessimistic, it does suggest that community-based assessments which have a strong emphasis on social differentiation, such as the PPAs in Tanzania and Vietnam, are likely to encourage gender-sensitive monitoring. 'Experiences with participatory poverty assessments (PPAs) show that gender issues arise more strongly if a participatory approach informs poverty diagnosis (McGee, Levene and Hughes 2002)' (cited in Bell 2003). However, it also points out that effective implementation of PPAs may be possible in a country such as Tanzania, which has a history of solid gender analysis skills and experience of gender advocacy at different levels, but is much more difficult in countries such as Mozambique which lack such expertise and experience.

Whitehead (2003) considers the ways in which gender issues are addressed in relation to the PRSPs of Tanzania, Bolivia, Malawi and Yemen. It asks why they differ, and how this is linked to the particular design of each PRSP process. The analysis is based on telephone interviews and a review of primary and secondary documents. It concludes that a gendered PRSP analysis should highlight gender inequality as a cause of poverty, the different experiences of poverty for women and men and the different effects of policy and budgetary decisions on women and men. It also calls for a broader perspective on poverty measurement to address dimensions which particularly affect women: vulnerability, powerlessness, voicelessness and male-biased governance systems.

Geographical disaggregation

The basis for concern here is well described by Bird, Hulme, Moore and Shepherd (2002):

> there is clear evidence of the existence of "hardcore poverty" in "spatial poverty traps" in rural areas in the developing world and good grounds for believing that contemporary development processes will ensure that such concentrations of human deprivation will persist and deepen in coming decades . . . Almost 1.8 billion people live 'in less favoured areas including marginal agricultural, forest and woodland, and arid areas' (Pender *et al.* 2001)'.
>
> (Bird *et al.* 2002)

A research exercise in South Africa (McIntyre, Muirhead and Gilson 2002) looked at the possibilities of identifying geographical poverty traps by defining small-area-based indices of deprivation. The project:

> looked at the feasibility of developing a broad-based area deprivation index in a data scarce context and considered the implications of such an index for geographic resource allocations. Despite certain data problems, it was possible to construct and compare three different indices: a general index of deprivation (GID), compiled from census data using principal component analysis; a policy-perspective index of deprivation (PID), based on groups identified as priorities within policy documents; and a single indicator of deprivation (SID), selected for relevance and feasibility of use. The findings demonstrate clearly that in South Africa deprivation is multi-faceted, is concentrated in specific areas within the country and is correlated with ill-health. However, the formula currently used by the National Treasury to allocate resources between geographic areas, biases these allocations towards less deprived areas within the country. The inclusion of the GID within this formula would dramatically alter allocations towards those areas suffering from human development deficits."
>
> (McIntyre *et al.* 2002)

An early research exercise in Cambodia (Attfield 2000) emphasised the attractiveness of map data and makes a case for their use in a policy context:

> The quality and effectiveness of the GIS output allowed the visualisation and comprehension of abstract concepts. This stimulated demand for the development of the system and has enabled the education policy development process. In particular, policy on equity of access to education has had to be re-evaluated based on the graphic demonstration using the GIS that poverty and not distance was the major barrier to school attendance. Without the initial investment and development of the GIS it would not have been possible to rapidly and effectively communicate ideas relating to education policy and strategy.

In Vietnam, Minot, Baulch and Epprecht (2003) undertook an original project aimed at examining spatial patterns in poverty and inequality, with the idea that this information could improve the targeting of poverty alleviation programmes. Their method of geographical disaggregation relies on the presence of two major datasets, the Vietnam LSMS survey for 1997/8 and the Population Census for 1999. Poverty estimates at the commune level were made in four steps. First, a common set of variables was identified as determinants of poverty that could be estimated from both the household survey and the population census. Second, regression equations were estimated from the LSMS survey to find the relationship between expenditure poverty and the chosen set of variables. Third, the estimated poverty equations were applied to each household in the population census to estimate expenditure poverty by household in the population census. Fourth, the household poverty data was aggregated to commune, district and higher levels of aggregation as desired. At the second step, around half of the variance in expenditure poverty is explained and the estimating error in the most disaggregated final estimates of poverty are quite large. Nonetheless, careful presentation and interpretation of these errors in the report give confidence to the key results reported.

The method can also be applied to other countries but is heavily dependent on the close proximity of a good household survey and a population census. Similar exercises have recently been undertaken in Malawi (IFPRI 2002) and Nepal (Bastola 2003). In general, the construction of 'poverty maps', using a variety of approaches is widespread. The Povertymap website (www.povertymap.net), which is jointly funded by FAO, UNEP and the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), currently lists exercises in 23 countries.

8. Fontana (2003) has modified existing SAMS for Bangladesh and Zambia for gender analysis by a disaggregation of labour inputs and by including gendered social reproduction and leisure activities as own production and consumption in the households. Her innovative study includes gendered poverty impacts of trade liberalisation on the import side and for export markets in the North for Zambia and Bangladesh which are potentially of great interest for PSIA. Similarly, recent work at Imperial College Wye and IFPRI provides a spatial disaggregation of the agricultural sections of the SAMs available for Malawi and Zimbabwe (Dorward 2003; Dorward, Morrison, Wobst, Lofgren and Tchale 2004) and that has facilitated groundbreaking work on spatial poverty traps using a disaggregated Computable General Equilibrium (CGE) household model of the agricultural sector. By empirically linking the agricultural commodity and

labour markets with household and farm characteristics, the new Malawi and Zimbabwe household models show, for example, the impact of a decrease in commodity prices that leads to an expansion in the output of large farms, a decline in the output of small farms, an expansion of wage labour supplied by small farmers (often women), an increase in large farmer income and an increase in poverty of small farmers especially women.

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