

The Gambia – Government Innovations in Evaluation: The Gambia’s Experiences and the Drive to Strengthen the National Evaluation Capacities towards the SDGs

ALAGIE FADERA

Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs

The Gambia’s attempt at planning for poverty reduction predates the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). The country developed its Strategy for Poverty Alleviation (SPA) in 1994 and two years later renewed its commitment to poverty reduction through the preparation of Vision 2020. The Vision (1996–2020) on the search for growth, equity and social justice underpinned by proper management of technical, financial and human resources to achieve increased standard of living of the population by transforming the Gambia into a dynamic middle-income country was well founded. Six major activity areas relating to agriculture, industry, trade, tourism, financial services and human resource development call for special attention.

The Gambia planned to realize these goals through a series of medium-term development plans. The SPA II, which became the country’s first Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP I), was implemented between 2003 and 2005, the PRSP II between 2007 and 2011, and the current Programme for Accelerated Growth and Employment (PAGE) from 2012 and 2015. Sector/ministry strategic plans are expected to be aligned with the priorities expressed in the medium-term national development plans (NDPs) for effective implementation. These are operationalized through medium-term expenditure frameworks (currently being piloted) and the annual budgets. The attainment of these objectives calls for robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems that consist of frameworks as well as capacities at the national and sectoral levels.

This paper examines the different systems set up to aid monitoring and evaluation. It looks at the capacities of institutions to collect, compile and analyse information to aid M&E of NDPs and the MDGs, and how these can be made more effective for the SDGs. Specifically, the paper will discuss the institutional arrangements for M&E, identify the systems at sectoral and national levels, and identify measures to enhance M&E within the context of sectoral strategies, NDPs, and the MDGs. Based on the identified challenges, the paper will explore ways of making the systems more robust and result-oriented for the SDGs. The paper will benefit from desk reviews and key informant interviews (KII).

MONITORING AND EVALUATION SYSTEMS

M&E systems exist at sectoral and national levels to track progress towards achieving the objectives as set out in sectoral and national development plans. The Education Management Information System (EMIS), Health Management Information System (HMIS), and the Gambia's National Agricultural Database (GANAD) have been set up to support M&E at the sectoral level. At the national level, the Gambia Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation System (GIMES) has been developed. These systems are geared towards providing data and information for annual progress reports (APRs) and mid-term evaluations (MTEs).

EDUCATION SECTOR MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The education sector has developed the 'Education Sector Strategic Plan 2013–2022' which serves as the basis of monitoring and evaluation. The strategic plan is built on six programme areas and outlines the major strategic activities to be implemented to attain the desired policy objectives. The M&E framework outlines indicators of all sector programmes in accordance with the Education Sector Strategic Plan as well as the relevant reporting structures, formats, and schedules.

In terms of structure, the M&E framework provides for a senior management team chaired by the Minister, Coordinating Committee Meeting (CCM) chaired by the Permanent Secretary, and Service Level Agreements (SLA). The CCM is composed of all the directors, principal education officers, managers, deputy managers, deputy permanent secretaries and partners of the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education. The two committees each meet bi-monthly and rotationally within the six education regions. The senior management team and CCM monitor both the policy and implementation of the sector programmes. Against the SLA, each directorate and unit head produce quarterly and annual reports detailing both the activity/progress and a financial report. Participatory performance monitoring involves communities overseeing their schools to improve academic performance.

The statistics unit under the Planning Policy Analysis Research and Budgeting Directorate maintains and regularly updates the EMIS database. The database is accessible online and offline to users to effectively implement and monitor the identified priority areas under the sectoral policy. The statistical unit collects, processes, analyses and reports full and complete statistics that describe the condition of the basic and secondary education system in the Gambia. This helps in making projections and forecast in order to make sound policy decisions. This initiative is within the overall framework of the national strategy for the development of statistics (2016).

Data on various components is collected at different levels of the education sector, either for establishing new or updating an existing database. The unit collects data at school, cluster, regional and national level for different programmes and initiatives. The primary data include indicators related to students, teachers and schools.

The data is centrally processed and managed in the EMIS by the Planning Directorate and is accessible to all partners/users. The processed data is then used for various purposes

including education-planning processes and by the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit for both feedback and reporting.

Inadequate staffing, limited number of qualified statistician and lack of timely availability of secondary data challenge the effective functioning of the EMIS and, by extension, the education sector M&E system.

HEALTH SECTOR MONITORING AND EVALUATION SYSTEM

The Ministry of Health and Social Welfare has elaborated the Gambia National Health Strategic Plan (NHSP 2014–2020) which serves as the basis for the M&E plan. The M&E plan has been developed to operationalize the strategic orientations of the NHSP and aims at informing policymakers about progress toward achieving the targets set. The M&E plan spells out the institutional arrangements, indicators and systems that provide data for M&E.

A key source of data for M&E is the Health Management Information System (HMIS), the principal health care monitoring system for collecting routine information. The Gambia HMIS, part of the M&E framework for the health sector, was initiated in 2006 and has undergone several assessments. The role of HMIS fits within the larger context of health sector monitoring and evaluation efforts in the Gambia. Health information collected as part of the HMIS includes disease cases and deaths for less than five years of age and above.

Data on health services is provided through health centres, district hospitals, and referral services. The HMIS was substantially revised in 2011 to collect more relevant data. It has been built on a new web-based platform that enhances data sharing and use. In addition, reporting formats have been introduced for all referral hospitals and private facilities, so coverage of reports should grow. Other data systems, facility surveys, and household surveys complement the HMIS.

Over the years, improvements in quality and completeness of data have resulted from the sustained effort to strengthen the HMIS. Inadequate capacity⁶⁷ within health facilities and the Regional Health Management Teams, completeness and quality of data remain problems.

The M&E system within the health sector makes provision for monitoring and evaluation of implementation and results at the national, regional and facility levels. In terms of roles and responsibilities, the Cabinet and the National Assembly are expected to review sectoral progress in the past year (based on the Annual Health Sector Performance Report), against the policy imperatives set out in contribution towards the second National Health Policy and NDP. The senior management provides overall sectoral political and policy oversight with decentralized levels expected to track progress and implementation of regional M&E plans. The coordinating role of M&E lies with the Directorate of Planning and Information of the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare.

67 As indicated in the key informant interviews (KII).

AGRICULTURE SECTOR PARTICIPATORY MONITORING AND EVALUATION (PM&E) SYSTEM

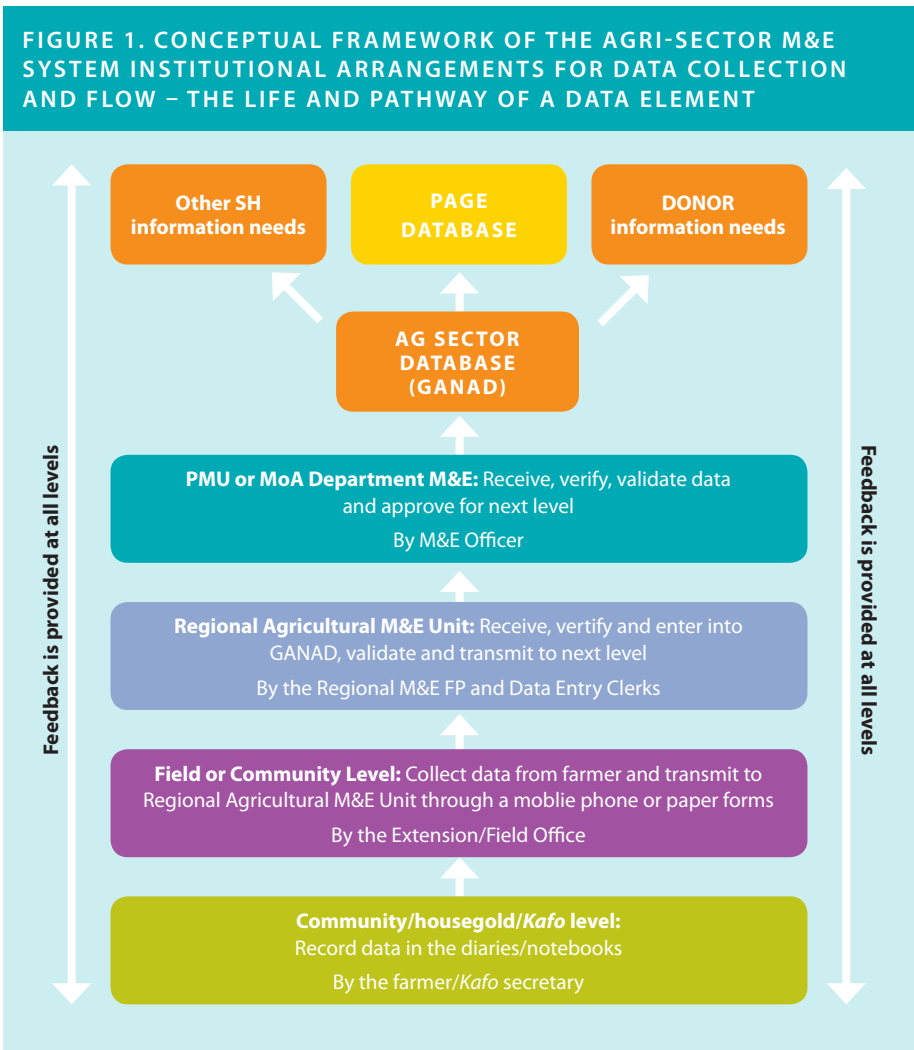
The Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) has developed a Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (PM&E) system for the agriculture sector that is built upon existing M&E systems in projects, MoA departments and other implementing line ministries. The PM&E is based on the National Agriculture Sector Strategy and the Gambia National Agriculture Investment Programme (GNAIP). The M&E system is designed to generate data/information that directly feed into higher level reporting for the Programme for Accelerated Growth and Employment (PAGE), Vision 2020, the MDGs, donors and its own learning and knowledge management system.

The objectives of the PM&E are to guide and standardize sectoral data collection, processing and utilization; collect, analyse, package, share and ensure effective utilization of, progress and impact data/information to inform implementation decisions, policy and future project and programme designs at all levels from farmers to the policymakers; and contribute useful information into the projects' knowledge management systems ensuring that lesson learning and impact stories are identified, developed and effectively shared and utilized. The PM&E framework provides the structural and functional aspects of the sectoral PM&E system: the core/priority indicators; institutional arrangements for M&E delivery; key resources needed at various levels (including personnel); the respective data flow channels; the key stakeholders; and the prescribed data collection and analysis methods and software; data collection and analysis responsibilities, among others.

The PM&E system has a Management Information System (MIS) which makes provision for paper, mobile phone and computer-based systems of data collection. These data are collected periodically from the farm level up to when it reaches the Planning Services Unit (PSU) and Central Projects Coordinating Unit (CPCU) for verification and analysis. All the data that is collected is entered into the Ministry's centrally coordinated online electronic database, GANAD. This database is a key component of the PM&E system meant to systematically capture, process, store and share progress data/information. It is an integrated data management and analysis system which contains various sub-systems located at regional, PMU and MoA departmental levels.

The basis of GANAD is a list of priority indicators from the GNAIP logframe. An indicator definition manual that specifies the required datasets for each indicator was comprehensively developed for accurate sectoral progress reporting. Forms to collect the datasets from the primary beneficiaries were designed and data collectors trained for onward transmission to the regional office for capture/entry into GANAD.

Field data collectors across the country approach the primary beneficiaries using specific paper forms. The collectors transmit the data to the regional offices through M&E focal persons who check and validate the information before it is captured into the system. At the regional level, the information is entered into the database. The regional M&E focal person/the Regional Agricultural Director (RAD) release the project-specific data to the respective PMU or MoA departments (non-project data). The PMU M&E receives and checks the data before releasing it to MoA headquarters' PSU and CPCU for final analysis, report generation



Source: Ag-sector Monitoring and Evaluation System Framework

and transmission to the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs (MoFEA), PMUs and departments, which also perform data analysis and generate donor-specific reports.

The PSU is in charge of the overall management of GANAD. The PSU M&E officer has overall technical management responsibility while the head of the PSU is the overall officer in charge of the sectoral database. At the regional level, the M&E focal person has overall technical management responsibility while the RAD is the officer in charge of the regional level GANAD technically managed by the regional M&E focal person. Likewise, at the PMU the project M&E officer has overall technical management responsibility while the project director/coordinator is the officer in charge of the project level GANAD.

The PM&E is a 'multi-track' system based and anchored on existing MoA and implementing partners' institutional arrangements. Each track represents an institution that is tasked with sector PM&E tasks like data collection and reporting and is also essentially a channel for data/information flow. The first priority is to reorganize and retool the existing and instituting new, M&E units within MoA and its line departments and service units or projects. This will be replicated for other sectoral implementing partners as necessary. While there may be limited capacity at some levels within the ministry, the PM&E system has innovatively leveraged the capacity of M&E officers and experts within the various projects under its purview. This has helped to strengthen the M&E function. However, based on key informant interviews (KII), further capacity enhancement is needed in the areas of database development and monitoring, project performance appraisal and tailor-made training programmes to respond to the SDGs.

THE GAMBIA INTEGRATED MONITORING AND EVALUATION SYSTEM

At the national level, GIMES has been developed with support of UNDP. The overarching objective of the system is to develop and operationalize an integrated electronic (web-based) M&E system that facilitates accurate and timely measurement of development results. Monitoring and evaluation was expected to be based on the various indicators set out under the PAGE Results Measurement Framework, which measures progress at the national and sector levels.

The web-based system is expected to allow ministries, departments and agencies to directly update their own data on the system anytime and anywhere. The flexibility of the system allows administrators to design or modify reporting forms, analysis format and data entry forms. Information from GIMES is expected to feed into the APR and MTE of the NDP and PAGE.

The M&E of PAGE has been vested in the High Level Economic Committee (HILEC), National Coordinating Committee (NCC), National Implementation Team (NIT) and Technical Advisory Committees (TACs) at the regional level with MoFEA providing the day-to-day coordination role. HILEC is a committee of the Cabinet chaired by the Vice President and consists of key Ministers and the Central Bank Governor. The NCC consists of permanent secretaries, representatives from the private sector and the NGO community, and the statistician-general. The NCC has overall responsibility for ensuring that the objectives of PAGE are achieved. The NIT consists of senior staff members across all sectors entrusted with ensuring adherence with the planning process, completion of yearly action plans, and monitoring and evaluation of the overall process.

However, a major drawback of PAGE has been the weak monitoring and evaluation framework⁶⁸. This has affected the effectiveness of the APRs and the MTE. This challenge has been compounded by the weak M&E capacity at both the sectoral, regional and national levels. The structures that were envisaged for effective M&E of PAGE have not been adequately functional.

68 PAGE Mid Term Evaluation.

CONCLUSION

The paper reviewed the efforts geared towards setting up innovative M&E systems at the sectoral and national levels to track progress towards achieving the objectives such as EMIS, HMIS, GANAD and GIMES. It also looked at the capacities of relevant institutions to collect, compile and analyse information to aid M&E of NDPs and the MDGs, and how these can be made more effective as we move to the SDGs.

While the systems have led to some improvements in the M&E systems, limited capacity has been identified as a key challenge. The key informant interviews as well as the PAGE MTE emphasize the need to strengthen M&E capacities.

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