Mauritania: Effective Ownership of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) Process

The Mauritanian PRSP focuses on poverty reduction, strong country ownership, and the active participation of civil society. The PRSP reflects many of the recommendations of civil society. NGOs commented mainly on issues related to governance, education, and health and nutrition. The alliances and partnerships forged through the PRSP process have laid the groundwork for a country-driven, operationally focused PRSP.

Impact on the ground

• Increased participation of NGOs and civil society: A good shared information base and effective knowledge transfer facilitated the active participation of NGOs in the preparation of the PRSP. This was done in large part through the demystification of the development process, where joint learning was critical to understanding the complexity of the choices being offered. An internet cyber forum open to all NGOs, the press and mayors, proved to be a cost-effective and dynamic forum for discussion and dissemination.

• Reduced adaptation gap: According to the Bank’s Africa Client Survey, Mauritania has one of the smallest adaptation gaps in terms of adapting knowledge to country needs. The relationship that has developed between the various players in the PRSP process has facilitated significant knowledge sharing and learning in the country’s development process.

Critical success factors

• Facilitating a truly client-driven process: The Mauritanians took the lead to manage contributions from and discussions with donors. World Bank staff acted primarily as enablers, maintaining open channels of communication and offering global experience and expertise, to help develop a country-owned development strategy.

• Pre-PRSP support from the government: This came in the form of a Human Rights, Poverty Alleviation and Integration Commission, which helped the government deal with both economic and human rights issues. Linked directly to the Offices of the President and Prime Minister, it was provided sufficient autonomy to run its business and reach the poorest much quicker than other ministries—its budget was made directly available and the Commissioner was authorized to appoint staff. This was a clear signal to the international community that the government was serious about reforms linked to poverty reduction.
• **High-level ownership and buy-in to the PRSP process:** This was facilitated through various integrative and participatory approaches. The President and Prime Minister publicly recognized the importance of poverty reduction and pushed the government to set realistic goals. Additionally they also authorized the formation of an inter-ministerial committee. This committee was headed by the Prime Minister and included other top-tier officials in order to generate consensus on the direction and agenda of the PRSP process and objectives.

• **Government officials were invited to participate in informal meetings with the Bank’s Board:** In an effort to break down traditional barriers to communication, key government officials were involved in a presentation followed by a discussion prior to the PRSP going to the Board. This allowed for a more direct exchange of information and knowledge, allowing the country team to serve as the knowledge brokers.

• **Poverty data sets facilitated PRSP formulation.** Mauritania’s PRSP was based on a thorough analysis of the poverty situation in the country, which was helped by two surveys conducted in 1990 and 1996, very similar to household Living Standard Measurement Surveys. Based on these data sets, the government formulated poverty reduction strategies for the periods 1994–98 and 1998–2001. The usefulness of these two surveys facilitated another budgetary allocation to finance another LSM-type survey for the year 2000. The first PRSP Implementation Progress Report, which was completed in March 2002, was actually an update of the PRSP, based on both the new data set and on the lessons learned from one year of PRSP implementation.

**Effective learning and knowledge sharing practices initiated by the client**

• A map on how to go about discussions and consultations after the PRSP;

• Thematic Groups: covered various aspects of the PRSP strategy (growth, pro-poor growth, health, education, governance, etc) and were open to civil society groups, universities and donors, providing a forum for discussing concerns and issues;

• Regional meetings and a national conference without Bank participation to avoid ‘contamination’ of the process and outcomes; and

• Synopsis of the PRSP document disseminated in local languages to the public.

This Infobrief was prepared by Mohamed Lemrabott (Director of Studies and Planning at the Human Rights, Poverty Alleviation and Integration Commission, Government of Mauritania) and Aisha Rahman Khan, consultant, Debriefing Program, Africa Region, World Bank. It is based on Mauritania’s PRSP progress reports as well as debriefings conducted by the Debriefing Program of the Africa Region. Debriefings referenced include Mohamed Lemrabott and Hasan Tuluy (former Country Director for Mauritania at the World Bank).

Persons accessing the Bank’s external website can get more information by clicking on Topics in Development, then on Poverty and then on Poverty Reduction Strategies. Bank staff can access this information by clicking on Topics, then on Poverty and then on Poverty Reduction Strategies.