

## ACIR VALIDATION WORKSHOP IN TUNIS, 19-20 JANUARY 2012

### [FIELD] EXPERIENCES, CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNT

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During my 2010 and 2011 ACBF assignment to administer the ACI questionnaire to collect data for the ACIR, the following were the main challenges, findings and lessons learned.

#### CHALLENGES

In the second round of the ACI data collection of 2011, there were three principal challenges. The first and probably the main challenge was that **data is not easily accessible** to users due to delays in data compilation. Most institutions have a one or even two years lag of data compilation. Interestingly data is available but not disseminated on time for one reason or the other. One still has to be referred to head of the responsible department before data is released. This could indicate the need to strengthen capacity of the National Statistics Office and other data producing institutions. In some situations data is not in the format required in the questionnaire.

Secondly, **unavailability of key respondents** made the task tedious. As a data collector one has to be very patient to make sure that in the end data is acquired from a reliable source. In some instances, respondents are just not willing to share information to avoid the responsibility of disclosing information that could be viewed by some as a bad portrayal of the country on global stage.

I could cite an example of one institution which I had to visit more than three times just to meet a respondent who supposedly was the only one who could give me information. On all occasions I went and had been given an appointment, only to arrive and be told the respondent was in a meeting. In the end she agreed to have me send a scanned copy of the portion of questionnaire she needed to answer, but even then I had to sit down and write in detail what each question required.

Thirdly, there was an interesting challenge related to instances **where respondents were not willing to take the interview** with an excuse of having had experiences of data collectors on special assignments of the nature of ACBF making money at their expense. But this just required a little bit of convincing to make the respondent understand that it is to the benefit of the country and in either case someone has to collect the data.

On a positive note, there are institutions which are willing to take suggestions of indicators ACBF requires so they can take this into consideration when collecting data.

## LESSONS LEARNED

All in all, the questionnaire has on both occasions been well designed and not only that, also designed with a participatory approach to make sure all those who will administer the questionnaire and those who supervise the data collection are on the same wave length with an exception of a little hurdle of one section of the instrument which was modified when data collectors were already on the field.

Secondly it requires a committed and patient data collector to be able to get credible information. In addition to this, awareness of respondents about ACI report will make the exercise a lot easier.

### Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

On the issue of non achievement of the MDGs, indeed ACBF intervention could be of great assistance. The government of Lesotho has made efforts to attain MDGs. This is evident in all planning documents of the country, from the National Vision 2020, to short term planning strategies in government ministries. But these efforts have been hampered by lack of capacity, both human and institutional and a mechanism to making sure progress is monitored and evaluated.

To support Lesotho's efforts to reach MDGs, the government and the joint United Nations country team signed a five year agreement to establish a National Monitoring and Evaluation System to monitor progress on MDGs. It is worth noting that after signing of the agreement there was change of Principal Secretary in the Ministry of finance and Development, which is the implementing ministry - the government organ that manages the country's planning responsibility. And this change probably left the process without a champion. Establishment of this system experienced a major challenge of not being embraced by higher echelons of the government. This could have been because of either lack of appreciation of benefits of M&E or reluctance to what could have been perceived as a form of change management. It becomes evident that efforts to make the system work could not materialise due to lack of ownership by the government.

This was revealed in the findings of an M&E capacity assessment study<sup>1</sup> that was undertaken by the government in collaboration with UNDP in August/September 2009. This study came a little too late when the support from UNDP was coming to an end. On hindsight, this study should have been undertaken at the project inception stage to inform the design of the project in preparation for risks. The project was seen by many as over ambitious according to a recent evaluation.

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<sup>1</sup> Monitoring & evaluation and Statistical Capacity assessment Report 2009

The DevInfo component was going smoothly until it was interrupted by lack of funds to finish trainings. However training of all planning officers in government departments, who are key stakeholders, had benefitted from the trainings. Eight to ten ministries were earmarked for piloting implementing the National Monitoring and Evaluation System. The notion of taking the route of pilot approach came as a result of lack of funds. This also did not work as the initiative had not been embraced by the government. One of the fundamental flaws of the system was the down-up instead of up-down approach to establishing the system. The critical step of getting buy in by the government was overlooked and this no doubt affected the whole process.

Over and above this, the country does not have a mechanism to monitor progress towards achieving MDGs. This hinges on the lack of capacity that was revealed in the M&E and Statistical Capacity Assessment Study undertaken recently.

### **ACBF visibility**

The majority of respondents and Basotho nationals in general are completely oblivious to the existence of an organization called African Capacity Building Foundation. Only a handful of people are aware of the operations of the ACBF. These include some employees of the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning who benefited from the Macroeconomic Policy and Modelling Project supported by ACBF in 2008. The other organization is the Lesotho Council of Non-governmental Organization which is an umbrella organization of non government entities and civil society organizations. ACBF support for the latter is ongoing.

The rest of the people do not have a clue as to what ACBF is all about. During data collection I had to show the previous report to respondents to appeal to them to appreciate the importance of the information they are giving. To some this brought hesitation to give information, realizing the responsibility they are putting on themselves. This required a lot of convincing

### **WAY FORWARD**

My suggestion for encouraging use of the ACI report in Lesotho and enhancing ACBF's visibility would be ACBF's launch of the report in Lesotho, not necessarily in a major way, but in a manner that will make all quarters of Lesotho government aware of this exercise.

Secondly, ACBF could organize a mission to Lesotho with an objective of sensitizing people on the work of ACBF, I may not be aware if such an activity has been done before, but revisiting this idea could help make ACBF ACI initiative visible.

Regarding how ACBF could be of assistance to Lesotho, I would emphatically support the idea of resuscitating the establishment of a National Monitoring and Evaluation System (NMES) which was “abandoned” when UNDP supported staff left the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning. Without a mechanism to check whether Lesotho is moving backward or forward as we approach 2015, the hope of reaching the set targets remains unlikely. It has been an ongoing struggle for the country to meet annual Performance Assessment Framework targets. It cannot be over emphasized how critical it is for a country like Lesotho to have a functional M&E system.