

Monitoring and evaluation of support for decentralisation and local governance A case study on Burkina Faso

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This case study is part of a series of publications to encourage debate on the options for monitoring and evaluating the impact of European support for decentralisation. It presents the results of interviews with actors involved in decentralisation and development cooperation in Burkina Faso.

Introduction

Partly because of the growing demand for information on the impact of aid, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is one of the main current concerns of the donor community. It is a particularly crucial and complex issue in the case of support for decentralisation and local governance – a new area of cooperation that has accounted for a large proportion of donor interventions since the early 1990s, when many African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries adopted a new raft of decentralisation policies. These were aimed at creating local governments with powers and resources of their own, as well as administrative, political and financial autonomy in managing local affairs.

The Cotonou Partnership Agreement, the new framework for ACP-EU cooperation over the next 20 years, reflects these changes in the institutional context of the ACP States. It recognises local government as a new actor of ACP-EU partnership and sees decentralisation as a strategic area for cooperation.

In accordance with the recommendations for decentralisation support made during a policy seminar in 2000, the ECDPM has launched an action-research programme on the subject of M&E, which is likely to form a major challenge for ACP-EU cooperation. The purpose of this programme is to encourage dialogue on the options for analysing the impact of European support for decentralisation and local governance, and on ways of capitalising more effectively on the experience gained with various tools of development cooperation.

This issue of *InBrief* sums up the results of the first case study carried out as part of this programme (Sebahara, 2004). It is based on interviews with actors involved in decentralisation and cooperation in Burkina Faso, and is divided into four parts:

- the current state of M&E of programmes in support of decentralisation in Burkina Faso, and the lessons to be learned from this;
- issues raised by the M&E of capacity development activities;
- new forms of support for local governance; and
- a menu of options and for strengthening M&E in support of decentralisation, including development co-operation in the framework of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement.

The context and the issues

The decentralisation process in Burkina Faso

The policy of decentralisation in Burkina Faso is based on the Constitution of 2 June 1991, under which local authorities were established, run by elected legislative bodies, and with their own legal personalities and financial resources. The reform was first implemented in February 1995, when the first municipal elections were held in 33 urban municipalities. New councils were elected in these municipalities in September 2000, and 16 new municipalities created at the same time. The country now has a total

of 49 urban municipalities. The legal framework for decentralisation that was adopted in 1998 also provides for an extension of decentralisation to rural areas.

From the outset, the formulation and implementation of decentralisation policy have received strong support from various partners, both bilateral and multilateral, as well as international NGOs. Capacity development relating to actors involved in decentralisation and local governance has accounted for a major part of donor interventions to date. Donors and their partners are now wondering what the impact has been after about ten years of support in this area. This is why we have chosen to focus on this specific aspect in this paper.

In this context of capacity development, it is interesting to discuss the monitoring and evaluation of international municipal cooperation. This appears to be thriving in Burkina Faso, judging by what certain municipalities have accomplished with the support of their partner authorities abroad. However, little information is available about the impact of this type of cooperation on capacity development relating to actors involved in local governance. This is mainly due to the decentralised nature of this type of cooperation, which generally takes the form of numerous isolated projects with few fixed monitoring procedures.

According to Peter Morgan, capacity development is a process by which individuals, groups and organisations improve their ability to perform their functions and achieve the results they wish to achieve

(P. Morgan, as quoted in D. Horton 2002: 3). For the purpose of this paper, the term 'capacity development' refers to training, literacy and consciousness-raising activities and study trips for actors involved in decentralisation (i.e. municipal councillors and officials, deconcentrated state agencies and civil-society organisations), with the aim of equipping them with the tools and skills they need to perform their tasks. Capacity development is a complex issue, since it includes several aspects (both technical and informational) and takes place at several levels (i.e. it affects individuals, groups, organisations and society as a whole).

Two theoretical M&E models

Monitoring is a continuous process of systematic information-gathering, based on indicators, to give the managers and stakeholders of a development activity an idea of what progress has been made, what goals have been achieved and how funds have been used (DAC 2002: 27-28).

Evaluation is the systematic, objective assessment of a current or completed project, programme or policy, of the way in which it was conceived and implemented, and of the results it achieved. The purpose is to determine the relevance of its goals, the degree to which these goals have been accomplished, its efficiency in terms of development, its effectiveness, its impact and its sustainability. Evaluation is intended to provide credible, useful information that will enable the lessons learned from practical experience to be incorporated into beneficiaries' and donors' decision-making processes. The term 'evaluation' also means a process that is as systematic and objective as possible and enables the value and implications of a planned, ongoing or completed development activity to be determined.

There are two basic M&E models: conventional and participatory. The difference lies not so much in what is monitored and evaluated as in the questions 'Who performs the monitoring and evaluation?', 'How are the various actors represented?' and 'How do they secure their interests?' (Guit and Gaventa, 1998).

Conventional M&E

Conventional forms of M&E are most commonly adopted by development agencies and their partners in order to evaluate projects. Outside experts are called in to assess performance on the basis of predefined indicators, using standardised procedures and tools.

Although there are various types of conventional M&E, development actors are becoming increasingly aware of its limitations, particularly when it comes to capacity development. Conventional M&E is felt to be too rigid and hierarchical ('top-down'), focusing solely on quantitative data and favouring a linear approach which fails to take account of change. Some local actors even see it as a tool for controlling the use of funds and justifying expenditure.

By acknowledging the limitations of conventional M&E, one can devise new approaches, especially participatory ones.

Participatory M&E

Participatory M&E is based on four key principles: participation, negotiation, learning and flexibility. It offers new approaches to management and learning that take account of change. It is a new model which involves radically rethinking the theory and practice of M&E, by asking who initiates and pilots the process and who learns and benefits from the results.

Lessons to be learned

A number of lessons may be learned from an analysis of M&E policies and practices relating to capacity development in Burkina Faso

The M&E tools used by most donors and their partners in Burkina Faso focus on activities and the use of funds, rather than the impact of activities. Yet what matters here is not that certain activities are

performed, but that capacity is actually built up, i.e. the impact of the activities. This is true of most of the M&E tools used, especially half-yearly and annual activity reports, auditors' reports, external evaluations, mid-term reviews and ex-post evaluations.

M&E practices serve more than one purpose. Interviews with actors revealed that M&E has three key objectives. To begin with, M&E strategies make it possible to account for and provide evidence of performance to both donors and superiors. Second, they make it possible to learn from experience. They thus perform a steering function by allowing project and programme goals, activities or strategies to be adjusted. Finally, they encourage better coordination among donors. Mid-term and final reviews of projects in support of decentralisation provide an opportunity for consultations among donors. The experts who plan or evaluate the interventions meet all the donors involved, first individually and then jointly, during general feedback sessions. It is important to capitalise on the positive experience gained by the Donor Group (comprising Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands and Switzerland) partnering Burkina Faso's National Commission on Decentralisation in harmonising M&E procedures and indicators, and holding joint evaluations. The experience has clearly demonstrated the value of such practices (Sebahara 2000, 2004).

It is also important to be aware of the limitations of conventional M&E of capacity development support. To begin with, capacity development is measured at several levels: individual, organisational, institutional and societal. Secondly, M&E of capacity development activities must be performed in stages. It is a process whose impact can be determined only gradually.

Box 1: Features of conventional and participatory M&E

	Conventional M&E	Participatory M&E
Actors planning and directing the process	Managers and/or outside experts	Local populations, project staff, managers and other project partners, backed up by a facilitator
Roles of primary beneficiaries	Providing information	Drawing up and adapting methods, gathering and analysing data, sharing results and turning them into action
Way of measuring results	Quantitative indicators, often defined from outside	Indicators defined by the actors themselves; plenty of qualitative indicators
Approach	Predefined and rigid	Flexible

Source: Guijt and Gaventa 1998: 2.

Most actors involved in capacity development make insufficient use of the results of conventional M&E. There are two main reasons for this: (a) a failure to publish the evaluation reports and limited distribution of these reports among people other than those directly involved in financing and running the projects (which does not encourage the exchange of information); (b) feedback is often organised in such a way that the project beneficiaries do not have access to the findings of evaluations.

The diversity of approaches to M&E and of the ways in which they are used by donors lends credence to their partners' belief that the purpose of evaluation is to control and penalise them, rather than provide a learning opportunity for all those involved. It is therefore important to encourage a positive view of evaluation.

Challenges emerging from present M&E practices in relation to capacity development support

M&E of interventions designed to support the capacity development of actors involved in decentralisation and local governance faces the following methodological, political, institutional and financial challenges:

- *The problems of identifying causal relationships between variables that can explain the impact of a given intervention.* It is difficult to determine with any accuracy what role a specific project or programme has played in the changes that have occurred, since several interventions often take place at the same time.
- *The scarcity of tested evaluation methods and practical guidance for participatory evaluation in this field of cooperation.* Capacity development activities are intangible investments, and participatory approaches are needed in order to evaluate them. However, an examination of M&E practices reveals a variety of approaches which are supposedly participatory, but in fact are not. To be more precise, they are participatory only when it comes to implementation, but seldom as regards decision-making. Certain 'participatory' practices thus merely serve to rubber-stamp decisions that have already been taken.
- *The negative perception of evaluation by certain actors involved in decentralisation and cooperation, who see it above all as a way for their superiors, the government and donors to control and penalise them.* Some actors simply do not believe that

evaluation can be a tool for learning and for improving performance. They dread evaluations, and make no attempt to follow up on the findings. Moreover, according to those interviewed, the way in which evaluations are performed depends on the evaluators' skills.

- *The high cost of conducting surveys.* In-depth analyses of the impact of projects require a considerable input in terms of staffing and financial resources. However, due to over-ambitious project objectives, managers of decentralisation and local governance projects tend to find themselves in a situation where far more needs to be done than the available resources will allow for. M&E is then often given a low priority when implementing decentralisation programmes.
- *Rigid management procedures* for donor-backed projects and programmes do not encourage M&E. According to practitioners, this rigidity of procedures often prevents beneficiaries from taking initiatives in response to evaluation findings. Moreover, it is, for instance, generally accepted that time should be taken to explain evaluation findings to beneficiaries so that they can subsequently follow them up, but in practice this time often seems to be lacking.
- Finally, *the essentially political nature of decentralisation* – which is, after all, a considerable novelty for government – is also a major problem. This raises the question of how evaluations affect political decision-making processes.

Actors of development co-operation in Burkina Faso agree, that these six challenges need to be addressed in order to strengthen M&E practices.

New forms of support for local governance

This third section presents several examples of innovation to illustrate the efforts made by some development actors to adapt to the country's new institutional framework. Such experiences are valuable for two reasons:

- they allow lessons to be learned from interventions in support of capacity development, and
- they make it possible to determine the extent to which M&E has been taken into account.

They thus highlight the process whereby existing modes of cooperation (specifically, international cooperation between local

authorities) are being adapted and new approaches are emerging in response to new needs.

International municipal cooperation

International municipal cooperation is a form of development cooperation that brings together local authorities in the North and South. Partnerships are established between authorities without necessarily involving the national governments in question. Since the first municipal councils were set up in Burkina Faso in 1995, municipal councillors have attempted to exploit the opportunities for cooperation between local authorities to promote the development of their own municipalities. The proliferation of twinning and cooperation agreements and the strengthening of existing partnerships are evidence of this.

Most of the activities performed in this connection are projects. These are usually isolated activities embracing many different aspects of local development. However, thought is now being given to ways of structuring these activities more effectively so as to take account of changes in the institutional context resulting from the establishment of autonomous local authorities. Indeed, a number of initiatives have already been taken along these lines. Capacity development is thus increasingly regarded as an essential factor in ensuring that these activities have a lasting impact.

The towns of Chambéry in France and Ouahigouya in Burkina Faso have played a pioneering role in this respect. The partnership between the two local authorities includes the following features:

- a wish to encourage consultation, coordination, role-sharing and synergy among councillors, local authority staff, deconcentrated state agencies, civil society actors, the private sector and Chambéry's partners;
- a multisectoral, multi-annual cooperation programme (i.e. covering five sectors, including institutional support for the municipal council), which has been in place since 1998;
- the use of M&E as a tool for capitalising on experience (see the plan of action published jointly by *Cités unies France* and *ENDA Tiers Monde* 2000);
- support for new forms of institution-building. This involves paying for the recruitment by the municipal council of qualified local personnel to strengthen the local authority's staff resources, and hence

enable it to carry out its tasks and exercise its powers effectively. The idea is for such technical assistance to be progressively funded from the municipal council budget. This policy encourages the municipal council to take its own responsibility and thus provides an incentive to build up result-oriented management systems and its own M&E capacity.

According to observers, the impact of this type of support has been 'considerable, in both material and educational terms. The municipal council is performing its role of monitoring and supervising building sites, and is collecting taxes and other forms of income in an increasingly systematic manner. The educational value of this approach lies in the gradual transfer of the financial responsibility for recruiting staff. In agreeing with the local authority that the latter should take progressive responsibility for staff salary costs, the partners have found a mechanism for gradually involving the local authority in the management of staff salaries.' (*Cités unies France and ENDA Tiers Monde* 1999: 31-32). This approach thus not only builds up the municipal council's capacity, but also encourages it to assume responsibility and become more accountable.

Municipal development units (MDUs)¹

MDUs are part of Burkina Faso's Development Programme for Medium-sized Towns, aimed at building up technical, financial and institutional capacity in ten towns and thus turning them into development hubs. Switzerland has provided support for this programme in Ouahigouya since 1992 and in Fada N'Gourma and Koudougou since 1997. The lessons learned here may be of value to actors involved in supporting local governance and undertaking M&E of capacity development among local authorities.

The type of support that Switzerland has provided for this programme is different from earlier, conventional interventions in this area. Commercial facilities (such as markets, bus stations and slaughterhouses) are basically regarded as resources of the local authority, since these facilities can generate funding which the authorities can then invest in economic and social development. *The focus is on local capacity development, using an action-research programme to help people acquire new skills and change their attitudes.* The MDUs run the projects on behalf of the municipal councils, as providers of local technical support (Swiss Development Agency 2002).

Three lessons regarding M&E of support for local governance may be learned from the

experience gained with MDUs and in monitoring and supervising the programme:

- *The importance of ensuring that actors adhere to M&E rules and practices.* M&E can work, and its conclusions and recommendations can be effectively followed up, only if its goals and principles are accepted by all those involved.
- *The importance of coordination.* The experience with Swiss cooperation in the three Burkina Faso towns underlines the adverse effect of the proliferation of uncoordinated interventions at local authority level. The Swiss Development Agency has stated that 'the provision of vast amounts of disjointed support does not encourage the optimum use of allocated funds (which are regarded as inexhaustible), or coherent action, or even a minimum of necessary coordination. The different criteria and procedures imposed by donors hamper any attempts to harmonise their procedures, and make it far more complicated for municipal authorities to monitor progress' (Swiss Development Agency 2002: 35, translation by the author). Actors involved in local authority development should be able to draw inspiration from recent examples of donor coordination and consultation, particularly with regard to the strategic plans for poverty reduction.
- *Recognition that many different actors and roles are involved at a local authority level.* When reforms are being implemented, certain tasks are performed simultaneously by actors at different levels of government. For instance, in a context, where the transfer of competencies, resources and decision-making powers from the national to the local level has not yet been completed, both national and local authorities may take initiatives in local development. This makes it difficult to determine who is responsible for M&E. Hence the importance of consultation frameworks and coordination between all those involved at a local authority level.

The above list of experiences is far from exhaustive. Other actors involved in cooperation are also adapting their activities to the new institutional framework that has emerged from decentralisation. An example is the Netherlands Development Organisation's (SNV) programme in support of decentralisation in Burkina Faso. In 2003, in an effort to become more 'customer-friendly' and pragmatic, the SNV decided to focus on assisting local authorities with multi-actor consultation and participatory planning. Thus, the SNV intends to facilitate dialogue between local authorities and other actors involved in local governance. In

order to help others to capitalise at a national level on the experiences gained at a local level, the SNV plans to work with the Directorate-General for Local Authorities at the Ministry of Local Administration and Decentralisation.

Options for strengthening M&E in support of decentralisation and local governance

An analysis of M&E policies and practices in relation to support for decentralisation and local governance in Burkina Faso reveals just how complex these reform processes are. This applies also to new modes of cooperation that are designed to reflect the new institutional framework. There are also many challenges to be overcome.

The following conclusion identifies some options for addressing these challenges. They are divided into two parts:

- new strategies for supporting local governance, and
- recommendations to encourage M&E of support for capacity development.

New strategies for supporting local governance

Take fuller account of the local cultural and institutional context

All interventions are carried out in a specific context that greatly affects their impact. There are many institutional actors involved and numerous issues to be taken into account (Sebahara 2000). The experience with the Swiss programme for three medium-sized towns in Burkina Faso through MDUs is similar to that gained with most local interventions. It suggests '(a) that sufficient resources should be deployed to ensure adequate prior knowledge of the context, and (b) that, as a corollary, key aspects of the local context should be taken into account in formulating the action strategy' (Swiss Development Agency 2002: 41).

It is important to avoid regarding resistance to change as merely obstructive. Instead, it should be seen as an attempt by the local context to protect itself from potentially adverse effects.

Adapt support for local governance to national strategy

Local development cannot be divorced from its regional and national context. It is there-

fore important to link with national authorities and take fully account of the national strategy when designing measures in support of local governance. Such an embedded approach has at least three advantages:

- it makes it easier for deconcentrated state agencies to provide technical support to local authorities,
- it encourages synergy between local authority development policies and sector-wide policies formulated and implemented by central government, and
- it encourages local and national authorities to capitalise on, and share, relevant experiences.

Enhance negotiation and consultation between actors

Negotiation and regular consultation between actors are critical to the success of support for local governance, as they enable the actors to agree both on goals and on ways and means of attaining them. They may also help strengthen actors' organisational and institutional capacities and hence their capacity to monitor and evaluate support for local governance.

Encourage transparency and accountability

Many different actors are involved in local governance, some of whom pursue different goals. It is important, in the interests of all concerned, to cultivate a sense of responsibility among them all. Creating mechanisms that make those in charge more accountable for what they do and that enable the public to obtain clear information from them may make it easier to follow up on action taken by local actors.

M&E of support for local governance is a vital first step in getting actors to assume greater responsibility, as it encourages people to examine not only whether activities have been performed, but also what their impact has been on local living standards.

Finally, these various factors demonstrate that M&E and developing capacity for M&E are complementary and mutually reinforcing.

Recommendations to encourage M&E of support for capacity development

Capacity development, and institution-building in general, are highly complex matters. Interviews with people working in this field in Burkina Faso generated a number of proposals aimed at encouraging relevant, effective action in this area:

- *A national capacity development policy must be put in place for actors involved in decentralisation.* The creation of a frame of reference for the training of municipal councillors and officials would make it possible to clarify the goals and identify the resources and strategies that are needed in order to attain them. It is important to distinguish between the basic training of local authority staff and the continuing professional development of councillors and other local actors.
- *M&E must become an integral part of national capacity development policy.* According to those interviewed, M&E can only receive the attention it deserves if it is an integral part of the action plans drawn up by agencies involved in decentralisation. Experience shows that, unless M&E is given priority, it is likely to be snowed under by all the other needs that have to be met.
- *There should be more policy dialogue between donors and their partners.* Such dialogue should take place at different points, from the identification of needs to the evaluation of interventions. This would enable evaluation to be seen as something more than simply a tool for controlling or penalising people. It would encourage the various actors to learn from practical experience and results. Financial cooperation would thus be backed up by technical assistance in the form of training.
- *Statistical and process indicators should be combined.* Realistic, relevant M&E of support for capacity development depends on a combination of two complementary approaches: one using statistical indicators (e.g. the number of people attending training courses or the number of seminars held), which make it possible to check whether activities have been carried out, and another using process indicators. The latter are harder to devise, since they involve more abstract, qualitative and multidimensional factors. However, in-depth studies enable processes of change to be understood using indicators devised on a case-by-case basis.
- *Conventional M&E and participatory M&E should be used in combination with each other.* There are two main types of M&E strategies (see Box 1), each of which sheds light on different aspects of intervention or the way in which actors perform. Since capacity development is such a complex matter, conventional and participatory M&E tools should be used alongside each other, so as to measure the impact of support. The essential purpose of M&E must always be to encourage learning from experience and so make activities, projects and programmes more effective.

Box 2: The new features of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement

The Cotonou Partnership Agreement includes some new features which will necessitate changes in some of the procedures for managing ACP-EU relations. These include:

Recognition that many different actors are involved in cooperation. Unlike the Lomé Convention, the Cotonou Partnership Agreement recognises local authorities as actors in the ACP-EU partnership.

The principle of rolling programming. At the moment, only an approximate value has been attached to the EDF. The budget allocation will be reviewed by the European Commission in the light of the progress made in managing the state budget and in relation to social issues. The amount of funding allocated under the terms of the Agreement is therefore no longer final: it may be revised by the European Commission on the basis of mid-term or final reviews, in accordance with Article 57 of Appendix IV to the Cotonou Partnership Agreement. The focus here will be on the periods within which funds are used – an essentially performance-based approach.

Emerging new approaches to cooperation: (a) non-targeted budget support and (b) sector-wide approaches.

The implementation of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement coincides with the reform of European cooperation, aimed in particular at strengthening EU Delegations in partner countries by pursuing a devolution policy.

These new features will be accompanied by changes in the procedures for monitoring and managing the ACP-EU partnership. Evaluation will undoubtedly become more important. Its purpose will be to account not only for the use of resources by the preset time limits, but also for the results achieved. Hence the importance of identifying approaches and good practices that will prove useful for M&E purposes.

Source : Loquai 2001, Sébahara 2004

Suggestions for ACP-EU cooperation

The Cotonou Partnership Agreement is the new framework for ACP-EU cooperation over the next 20 years. Signed in June 2000 and in force since 1 April 2003, it reflects the changes in the institutional framework of the ACP States, particularly as a result of decentralisation (which has become a strategic area of cooperation) and the partnership role assigned to local authorities. This is why the European Union is doing more and more to support decentralisation and local governance and development in the ACP countries. Despite the growing demand for information on the impact of aid, those responsible for managing European aid have so far been given very few practical tools or tips for evaluating the impact of aid in this new area of cooperation. In fact, the lack of practical tools and relevant strategies for monitoring and evaluating the impact of aid is a widespread problem in the fields of capacity development and institution-building.

Various conclusions may be drawn from the case study in Burkina Faso that are relevant to a discussion of the implementation of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement and the M&E of support provided in this area. This new agreement has various new features (see Box 2) that will necessitate changes in the procedures for managing ACP-EU relations. I believe there are three relevant strategies in this area:

- *Encouraging a better distribution of responsibilities among the actors involved in local governance.* Coherent support for these actors will depend on their having a shared view of the goals they are seeking to attain, which is why consultation, negotiation and cooperation are so important. It is important that all actors acknowledge the local authorities as public institutions that are empowered to regulate local activities.
- *Adopting flexible, coherent strategies for formulating and implementing projects and programmes.* The societal processes and institutional changes now taking place at local level are complex and manifold.

Effective development policy management depends on an ability to adapt where necessary. The challenge will be to identify criteria that will enable programme managers to take whatever corrective action is needed. In this connection, the devolution process launched as part of the reform of the European Commission's foreign policy is a welcome development. Higher staffing levels and increased decision-making powers for EU Delegations may make it easier to manage development interventions locally. This involves a twofold challenge, for the European Commission will have to supervise two institutional reforms at once.

- *Responding to the challenges of M&E.* The new features in the Cotonou Partnership Agreement emphasise the importance of pragmatic aid management. Evaluation is thus set to become a key facet of ACP-EU cooperation. Hence the need to take account of the aforementioned strategies and recommendations on M&E in the light of the experience gained in Burkina Faso.

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Notes

1. In French: établissements publics communaux de développement (EPCD).

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