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5B MAURITANIA

Theme: thematic and sector governance assessments – sector level diagnostics in Mauritania

This case study has been prepared by **Francesca Recanatini**, Senior economist, World Bank (frecanatini@worldbank.org)

1. Short summary

The sector-level diagnostic for Mauritania is a pilot exercise aimed at generating policy solutions for sector-specific governance challenges. The project began from the interest expressed by the Mauritanian transition government (following a coup in 2005 and subsequent transfer to civilian power in 2007) to address the serious governance failures in three priority sectors – transport, public construction and procurement. The diagnostic uses a multiple data gathering approach to assess the governance vulnerabilities. The approach combines (1) traditional research and in depth interviews with relevant stakeholders in the public and private sector, (2) the use of experience-based survey questionnaires to generate performance benchmarks and (3) information from project audits to more specifically identify leakages and oversight failures.

The main objective of the diagnostic exercise is to provide policy useful information while building local capacity. Thus, the World Bank management of the diagnostic is complemented by a high level of government and civil society participation. The diagnostic exercise also helps to produce locally vetted reform solutions through a participatory assessment and to build a coalition at the local level.

This exercise, while still on-going, can provide constructive lessons for many of the issues highlighted in the conference agenda. Principal among these are 1) the value of self assessment completed by clients as a complement to external donor-driven assessments 2) the value of empirical approaches as a means of benchmarking and a tool for concretizing accountability 3) how political economy assessments can be enhanced with the provision of such detailed information, by putting the right tools into the hands of governance champions, strengthening local advocacy groups and demand side governance 4) how action plan focused assessment serves both the signaling function – here is the location of the problem – as well as the solution finding function – here is how we can address it with concrete initiatives.

2. The story

Weak governance is an evident problem in Mauritania. Since the advent of military regimes in the late 1970s, the weaknesses in the public administration include bureaucratic inertia, lack of transparency and accountability in decision-making and inefficient management of human resources. The Mauritanian transition authorities, which came to power via a coup in August 2005, and their democratic successors (installed in April 2007) have shown strong commitment to improving governance. One of the key measures is the preparation of a National Anti-Corruption Strategy (NACS), with the help of a technical committee comprising representatives from a number of government agencies, civil society and donors.

This sector level diagnostic – in conjunction with a set of complementary activities – is designed to support the NACS and provide additional governance reform actions in the transport, public works and procurement areas.

Purposes and methodology

The goal of the sector diagnostic exercise is to evaluate the governance structure in three sectors; to map potential entry points for corruption; and to benchmark governance performance to support long term monitoring. The Bank provides extensive technical assistance but also prioritizes capacity building at the local level to develop within local counterparts the skill needed to replicate and expand such diagnostic techniques for longer term monitoring.

Though the process is managed by the World Bank, government and civil society contribute extensively in defining the direction and implementation of the diagnostic exercise. As the diagnostic exercise was requested by the government of Mauritania for its own policymaking activity, there is ownership of the process and its results. Further, the government chose the

target sectors to coincide with the broader government development goals, tied into ongoing efforts and national priorities. Government ministers are direct collaborators in the scoping of the diagnostic exercise – helping to frame the problems facing the sector.

At the same time the diagnostic exercise has endeavored to be comprehensive in getting information and perspectives from civil society organizations and the private firms that operate in the sectors under study.

All these stakeholders were present during the project's first scoping mission in November 2007 and participated in a series of focus groups. The project team met with all groups individually to assess their particular views and suggestions for improving governance in the transport sector. These views were incorporated into the approach and framework of the diagnostic exercise and in particular they informed the revision and development of the field survey questionnaires.

Furthermore, the relevant stakeholders – from government, civil society and private sector – participated in an action planning workshop on the final day of the mission to jointly discuss priority issues in the sector and come up with solutions that represented key stakeholder views and addressed core concerns. The Ministry of Finance hosted and participated in the workshop. Participants were able to voice their challenges and frustrations face to face with the government agencies involved in the sector. They also combined efforts to come up with concrete, specific steps to improve sector governance and were able to present these directly to the Ministry of Finance.

The sector level approach acknowledges the need for sector relevant solutions to governance challenges. It also acknowledges that the pharmaceutical industry, forestry, transport and water require different and tailored approaches. Therefore, the diagnostic combines three types of data gathering methods to create a comprehensive look at governance in the specific sector context:

- Research and in depth interviews with all relevant stakeholders to ascertain the structure and players in the relevant sectors and to acquire a detailed understanding of the sector production chain.
- A large scale survey using experience-based questionnaires. The survey targets private citizens, businesses and public officials. Quantitative, experience-based data from the surveys is used to draft a report on the state of governance in the sector, identify priority areas and construct numerical indicators to monitor agency-performance in key areas.
- Audits of past projects to gather information on real cost overruns, quality of work and perhaps prevalence of weak governance practices such as abuse of sole sourcing, lack of regular inspections, failure to verify work, instances of contractor reprimand etc.

Cooperation with other donors and domestic stakeholders

Currently the diagnostic is a Bank sponsored initiative without *formal* ties to other donors. However, this should not obscure the intensive collaboration and consultation which has been undertaken with the EC, a key partner to the government in the governance efforts in the Mauritanian transport sector. From the initial sector mapping to the first consultative field visit the Bank has kept close contact with local EC transport specialists and relied on them for their expert input into the framing of the diagnostic approach. The Bank is working closely with the local EC staff to fund and monitor specific interventions to improve governance in the transport sector (including funding of consultants to assist the transport ministry in bridging a significant capacity gap in their technical areas). UNDP conducted a

survey on public sector performance recently with a survey of public service users and public officials. This diagnostic exercise will seek to build on their work in relevant areas.

The project conducted a mission in November 2007 to Mauritania which met with a broad and comprehensive range of transport sector stakeholders. This included meetings with the ministers and technical staff of all related government agencies to discuss governance challenges and ongoing efforts to address them. Representatives of transport unions in the private sector and civil society groups were also consulted. There were three focus groups held to review the mission's findings and elicit feedback on the Bank's assessment of the sector vulnerabilities and plans for the survey phase of the diagnostic. Participation was high and the Ministries of Transport, Public Works and Finance were all in attendance to discuss ways forward with business people and civil society.

The final stakeholders' workshop on 15 November 2007 yielded a set of sector priorities and action plans drawn up by the mixed group of civil society, private and public sector/government representatives. The workshop was a full day event which included private transport and road construction firms of large and small size, director-level representatives of several transport related government agencies, leaders of civil society groups, the EC/EU, and the Bank.

These action plans were the result of deliberations amongst the various groups and the convergence of opinion on several pointed disagreements. Agreed conclusions were presented by the groups themselves before the representative of the Minister of Finance in full transparency before the uncensored stakeholder gathering. Further, stakeholders were able to follow up the presentations with additional comments and questions regarding implementation, cost and timeframes. The office of the Minister of Finance hosted the event and was present throughout. The workshop concluded with the commitment of the government representative to take the stakeholders' ideas and action plans into consideration in drafting the government's transport sector policy.

The larger diagnostic will aim to expand and scale-up this process of analysis, deliberation and action planning. Following the gathering of the survey data, the findings will be presented publicly in a series of national and regional workshops where civil society, private sector and local government will be invited to view and discuss the baseline data. These workshops will also be a forum for multi-level, transparent discussion of sector reform priorities and an opportunity for all participants to have input into the drafting of a national-level transport sector action plan.

The participation of the key ministries in the dissemination process and the associated workshops will provide natural uptake for the action plans where the government can see not only what is recommended but also what is politically feasible across the stakeholder groups. Stakeholders in turn will be part of a participatory policy process and be informed as to what options and political resources are available to the government. This should facilitate their follow up and advocacy in reform efforts.

Comments and suggestions from the series of workshops will be aggregated and used to draft a national action plan for reform in the transport sector.

Immediate results of the GA, actual usage and dissemination of findings

The diagnostic is still in process. However the plan is to release the findings to government, civil society and donor partners. The findings of the first component have already been presented to the government, the private sector and civil society for their feedback. This is the approach that will be used for remaining data gathering exercises. The specific meeting notes and individual data will be protected – to ensure confidentiality of responses – but the aggregated lessons will be available to both public and private sector stakeholders.

3. Tensions and lessons

Some of the issues emerging from this sector related governance assessment process relate to:

- Territorialization of the target sector which created tension between donors. Alleviated in part through open discussion and the drive to find ready receptors for one donor's plans within the others.
- The importance of complementarity
- Ownership: Stressing country leadership so that ownership is transferred from donor to country client. Because this work is the result of a direct request from the country leadership and the sectors of study are determined by the country in line with domestic policy objectives the process is infused with country ownership at the inception. The Bank is engaging in this work in order to feed a stated need of the government for policymaking input. In addition, all components of the work are done in partnership with the Ministry of Finance and the line ministries of the relevant government agencies (Transport, Public Works) and involve their direct participation in the sector mapping, issue identification, instrument review and data gathering, (this includes the fact that workers in these ministries will participate in the survey process as respondents and all ministries will participate in the dissemination activities.)
- Domestic stakeholders did try to use one donor to pressure another. Alleviated again through open participation. Stakeholders attend events in which all donors are working together to reduce the space for such activity.

Some of the early lessons coming out of the assessment processes relate to the importance of:

- Promoting transparency and participatory policy making
- Promoting locally driven and locally determined processes as a means of building demand side support for governance reform. Creating foundations for longer term monitoring that can be independent of donor involvement. (The data itself will create a basis for advocacy, from which local private sector and civil society groups can draw data driven support for the need for reform and further can benchmark the success of any actions. The workshops in the planning and dissemination phases put private sector and civil society groups face to face with the government agencies responsible for reforms permitting these groups to enhance advocacy, participate on policy formation and to establish networks of contact between one another to facilitate longer term and broader based action.)
- Complementing standardized cross country assessment approaches with context (country and sector) specific tools to address challenges so that the results point to specific solutions in specific agencies, sectors, provinces etc.
- The value of *self* assessment. Having data come from in-country citizens, enterprises and public officials can help to deflect criticism of "outsider" evaluations and fortifies the position of local governance champions.

This case may also illustrate the need for a mix of approaches and the value of multi-pronged and complementary practices. We hope to show the value of (1) context specific assessment for action planning, (2) experience based assessment and quantitative benchmarking, (3) gearing assessments to serve both the signaling function – here is the location of the problem – as well as the solution finding function – here is how we can address it with concrete initiatives.

There is evidence from Mauritania that open discussion between donors can create cooperative space where previously there had been deadlock.