Monitoring Nigeria’s debt relief gains

In 2005 Nigeria negotiated debt relief off the back of key economic and political reforms taking place in the country. But fears were expressed as to whether savings from the deal would be well-used to benefit people and not misspent or embezzled.

The Office of the Senior Special Assistant to the President on the Millennium Development Goals (OSSAP-MDGs) was therefore charged with establishing a credible monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework that would track and report on just how debt relief gains were spent.

**Nigerian concerns about debt relief**

Under the settlement with the Paris Club, the Nigerian Government entered an agreement under which they would ‘buy back’ a portion of the country’s debt with net payments to creditors amounting to US$12 billion. This generated controversy - Nigerians wanted to know what they had got for their money and were keen to see how the arrangement would work to make a difference in their lives.

Clearly monitoring and evaluation would play a key role in assuaging these fears and showing that Nigeria was making best use of debt relief.

**Putting M&E in place**

Unfortunately the monitoring and evaluation systems already in place in government systems in Nigeria were not robust. Government M&E was largely under-funded, incoherent and under-used. This meant that a trusted monitoring and evaluation mechanism needed to be set up.

To do this, OSSAP-MDGs undertook study tours to two countries which had made appreciable progress in public expenditure reforms – Tanzania and Chile. It brought together a host of development partners to provide technical and financial support. The Office also engaged with key stakeholders such as the Ministry of Finance to ensure better coordination and harmonisation of outputs that would enable robust feedback to improve public expenditure.

**The results-based framework in action**

The mechanism that was created was designed to capture the outputs, outcomes and impacts of debt-relief spending. It not only tagged items in the budget but physically monitored implementation results and outcomes. It provided a robust feedback mechanism on all aspects of the service delivery chain.

Under the framework, private sector technical consultants and civil society organisations provided independent feedback on the implementation of government projects and their impacts on the lives of the poor.

**Monitoring the Government – a Nigerian innovation**

The M&E scheme was truly innovative. Never before had the Nigerian Government subjected itself to such close scrutiny by the private sector. And the private sector had never confronted the questions now being asked of them. The process challenged civil society to engage with Government more closely than ever before.

**Better understanding through M&E**

As the scheme progressed, there was a greater understanding of the rationale for the programme. Government became increasingly appreciative of the benefits of monitoring and evaluation. In fact, many ministries became so interested that they set up M&E for their own projects. As time has gone on, the organisation and methods used for MDG M&E have been refined.
The M&E initiative has enabled Government to demonstrate to Nigerian citizens and the international community that debt relief has not been squandered.

and an interactive web portal now allows for real-time reporting between the national coordinating consultants and professionals in the field.

**Stirrings at the grassroots**

Nigeria’s M&E reports have provided a unique insight into the workings of the Government. Both successes and challenges have been highlighted. For example, the reports tell of the citizens of Yardoma in Katsina State, who are now treated in a village health centre rather than trekking to the next town. Similarly, the reports also express the frustration of the people of Owode community in Ogun State whose health centre project was abandoned before completion.

**Getting to grips with failures**

Where projects have failed, OSSAP-MDGs has worked with relevant partners to resolve the challenges to project completion. It has also reported on non-performing ‘ministries, departments and agencies’ to the Presidential Committee on MDGs. Finally, feedback has enabled adjustment of debt-relief investments over time to ensure they are targeted to the most effective interventions.

**M&E is a success**

The M&E initiative has enabled Government to demonstrate to Nigerian citizens and the international community that debt relief has not been squandered. As a result, the initiative has been lauded by ministries, agencies, the National Assembly, development partners and the general public. It has given the President the evidence required to reform government structures for the better.

**Going forward**

There is still work to do. Ensuring government projects impact on communities in the longer term requires detailed knowledge of the use and quality of government projects over time. This is the next frontier for OSSAP-MDGs and the Nigerian Government.

The result of this work also formed the basis on which Nigeria’s Vision 20:2020 M&E framework, coordinated by the National Planning Commission, was developed.