

Monitoring Mechanisms of Social Safety Net (SSN) Programmes in the COMCEC Region

The Analytical study titled “Monitoring Mechanisms of Social Safety Net (SSN) Programmes in the COMCEC Region” has been commissioned by the COMCEC Coordination Office specifically for the 3rd Meeting of the COMCEC Poverty Alleviation Working Group, to be held on April 10th, 2014 in Ankara, with a view to enriching the discussions during the above-mentioned Meeting.

This study focuses on an area which has been often neglected by the literature: the establishment of strong and functioning monitoring systems within Social Safety Nets’ (SSN) Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) frameworks. Specifically, the study reviews the relevant literature on the topic, presents a conceptual framework to analyse supply and demand of monitoring data, maps existing monitoring systems for SSNs in the 57 COMCEC countries – including in-depth Case Studies in five countries –, and highlights best practices on how mechanisms could be improved in a harmonised way across the COMCEC region.

Monitoring systems are often ignored by the literature in favour of Evaluations, though a growing strand of evidence has been highlighting the importance of ongoing monitoring activities to enhance the effectiveness of Social Safety Nets. Specifically, monitoring systems are known to have five distinct sets of objectives (Shepherd, 2011): Improving programme design, Solving problems in programme implementation, Accountability within the government, Provision of public information for external accountability and Prioritising and budgeting.

In order to be effective, however, monitoring systems not only need to be well-structured and implemented (supply), they must also build demand for monitoring.

Overview of the Monitoring Mechanisms of SSN Programmes in the COMCEC Region

This section of the report presents the findings of the analysis of monitoring systems for specific SSNs in the 57 COMCEC countries.

Supply

When analysing indicators within monitoring frameworks and Programme Logframes, the key findings that emerged were:

- ✓ The frequent presence of indicators that were vague in their construction and not clearly linked to data sources.

- ✓ Frameworks that are incomplete in their scope.
- ✓ A missed opportunity in terms of indicators.
- ✓ Best practice in the development of indicators.

Regarding the establishment of data sources, a strong recent trend in the 57 Member Countries analysed was the creation of Management Information Systems (MIS) that could aid with programme monitoring and management. While many challenges were faced in setting these up and institutionalising their use for monitoring purposes (lack of adequate hardware, capacity, tailoring to monitoring needs etc.), these have had an important positive impact on overall monitoring practices. Regarding other sources, lack of effective triangulation was an issue.

To conclude, the set-up of institutional arrangements for monitoring was influenced by the complexity of the programme being monitored and the complexity of the overall Social Protection system in a given country.

Demand

The major findings identified by the study are the following:

- ✓ In countries where the overall policy framework supported performance-based and result-oriented management and budgeting – with sector plans feeding into a national development plan – it was more likely that SSNs had monitoring systems in place that could feed into government decision-making processes.
- ✓ In several countries, donor influence was cited as a driving factor that was pushing a ‘culture of accountability’;
- ✓ In many cases, SSN programmes were not being implemented through independent agencies, but through branches or departments within Ministries. In these cases especially, budget autonomy and staff capacity/availability was low, with negative consequences for monitoring;
- ✓ Regarding programme background, newer programmes paradoxically had better monitoring systems than long-established ones, partially due to donor support and partially to lack of willingness to change ‘legacy’ systems.
- ✓ A focus on capacity-building and training was often at its strongest when donor money or support allowed it (or where clear budget lines were set-up for this task).

- ✓ Incentives for monitoring – where they existed – were mostly focused around salary boosts, promotions and letters of motivation (carrots), rather than sticks or sermons.

Overall outcomes

Within the COMCEC region, information generated through monitoring had been used to improve programme implementation in just under a third of the cases analysed in this study, while a slightly lower proportion of countries were found to use the monitoring information for the improvement of programme design. In a quarter of the cases analysed, an accountability function could also be traced, though in almost all cases this was only 'internally' driven: aimed at higher levels of authority (central government, donors, etc.) rather than to citizens and civil society. As for prioritising funds and budgeting, this function was only explored in one sixth of countries – which is surprising, given how simple it would be to base budget decisions on monitoring data.

Recommendations and lessons learned

The key recommendations emerging from the study are summarised below for each framework area.

It is clear that these recommendations mainly apply to countries with less developed monitoring systems, though even some of the highly developed systems reviewed in this report could also benefit from some of the recommendations.

Supply

- ✓ Improve results frameworks.
- ✓ Improve design of indicators.
- ✓ Improving access to and triangulation between different data sources.
- ✓ Where possible, improve use of Programme MIS.
- ✓ Improving institutional arrangements for implementation of monitoring activities.

Demand

- ✓ Linking in to the wider policy framework.
- ✓ Increasing the implementing agency's capacity and political freedom and releasing budget constraints.
- ✓ Focus and clarify the objectives of the monitoring system.
- ✓ Invest on individuals' capacity and commitment through training and strong incentives.

