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The Denial of Politics in PRSP's Monitoring and Evaluation

Experiences From Rwanda

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Experiences From Rwanda

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ABSTRACT

The new development paradigm strongly reconfirms and redefines the importance of M&E because of some newly incorporated principles. First, increased value is attached to results-orientation, iterative learning and evidence-based policy-making. Realisation of these principles is conditional upon a strong and well-functioning M&E system. A second major principle is an increased role and responsibility for the national government in elaborating and managing the entire M&E system. At the same time, donors are expected to increasingly rely and align to national M&E systems and arrangements. So far, however, a narrowly confined ‘technocratic’ approach to M&E has been adopted, largely neglecting its institutional and political embeddedness. While the fact that politics are part and parcel of M&E has been acknowledged before in the context of projects and programmes, it seems that when moving to the sectoral and national level (where interests and stakeholders are multiplied) the interaction among ‘politics’ and ‘M&E’ is disregarded.

This paper elaborates a conceptual framework that furthers the understanding of the interlinkages among politics and M&E in a context of upwardly moving aid modalities. Bringing in case-study material from Rwanda, it argues that a narrow technocratic approach to M&E risks worsening political constraints and even undermines M&E’s technical soundness. Yet, there exist ways of escaping this downward spiral. ‘Smart’ M&E that acknowledges the institutional and political embeddedness of M&E has the leverage to stimulate public discussion, to bring more ‘sensitive’ issues into the bargaining area, to shift debates on a more factual basis and to eventually open up closed political opportunity structures.

RÉSUMÉ

Le nouveau paradigme du développement reconfirme et redéfinit solidement l'importance du « suivi et évaluation » (S&E) à cause de certains principes nouvellement incorporés. Tout d'abord une valeur croissante est attachée à l'orientation vers les résultats, l'apprentissage interactif et la politique basée sur l'évidence empirique. La réalisation de ces principes dépend d'un bon et solide fonctionnement du système S&E.

Un deuxième principe majeur est le rôle croissant et la responsabilité du gouvernement national dans l'élaboration et la gestion du système S&E tout entier. En même temps, les donateurs sont supposés à se baser et s'aligner de plus en plus sur les systèmes et les arrangements nationaux de S&E.

Jusqu'à présent ce n'est qu'une approche « technocratique » bien limitée qui a été adoptée, négligeant largement sa base institutionnelle et politique. Tandis que la politique fait partie intégrante du S&E, comme a été reconnu avant dans le contexte des projets et programmes, il apparaît que quand on passe au niveau sectoriel et national (où les intérêts et les stakeholders se multiplient), l'interaction entre « politique » et « S&E » est sous-estimée.

Cet article élabore une structure conceptuelle qui promeut la compréhension des liens entre 'politique' et 'S&E' dans un contexte de nouvelles modalités d'aide. L'étude du cas du Rwanda montre qu'une approche technocratique étroite du S&E contient le risque de détériorer les contraintes politiques et même de miner la solidité technique du S&E. Néanmoins, il existe des moyens d'échapper à cette spirale négative. Le S&E « intelligent » qui reconnaît la base institutionnelle et politique du S&E a la puissance de stimuler la discussion publique, de placer les débats sur une base plus objective et éventuellement d'ouvrir des structures politiques peu transparentes.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the 1990s a shift has taken place in the framework for international development cooperation. The basic principles of the new paradigm are rooted in the Comprehensive Development Framework (CDF) that emphasizes country ownership, long term and holistic vision, country-led partnership and results-orientation. They are most visibly operationalised in the context of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), a policy document produced by the recipient country that reflects its own development priorities. The country ownership of the policy document is awarded high value within the new approach and it is postulated that country ownership will bear many fruits such as increased commitment and accountability. PRSPs do not only deal with poverty and development in socio-economic terms, but include also more political topics, such as good governance. Once the PRSP is approved of, it provides the cornice for international donor engagement. New aid modes, such as sector and general budget support whereby donors support the government's budget at sector or overall level, twin this PRSP approach and adherence to it by donors. The reform agenda entailed by the new aid paradigm is most clearly endorsed through the 2005 Paris Declaration (see <http://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/monitoring>). Twelve indicators that are measured nationally enable to monitor recipient's and donor's progress towards more country ownership, alignment, harmonisation, managing for results and mutual accountability.

The new development paradigm both confirms but also redefines the importance of M&E because of some of the newly incorporated principles. First, increased value is attached to results-orientation, iterative learning and evidence-based policy-making. Realisation of these basic principles is conditional upon a strong and well-functioning M&E system. Second, not only learning and commitment but also accountability for poverty reduction stands central in the PRSP enterprise. Without independent information on implementation and progress, it is impossible to hold those responsible accountable. A third major principle of the new paradigm is an increased role and responsibility for the national governments in managing the entire M&E system. Donors are expected to dismantle their own 'parallel' M&E apparatus, to increasingly rely on and align to national M&E arrangements and systems (OECD, 2005). This new approach presents challenges to all stakeholders involved: national governments, national and international NGOs, but also to bi- and multilateral donors.

It seems that, in response to this new approach it had been itself pushing, the international donor community is adopting a fragmented approach to M&E. Firstly, there remains an over-emphasis on the input side^[1] (Public Finance Management), recently coupled with an upsurge of donor-steered data collection on Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Secondly, there is a focus on technical dimensions of recipient M&E systems (quality of statistical systems, quality of indicators and targets ('indicatorism')) at the detriment of the broader institutional and M&E policy issues. One crucial issue that is neglected is the fact that recipient M&E takes place in a socio-political and economic context in which different stakeholders have differing – at times even competing – interests. This is being reinforced by what some critics highlight as “the conception of the PRS approach as being based upon an unwarranted faith in a technocratic, depoliticised mode of governance” (Driscoll and Evans, 2005: 12 based on Craig and Porter, 2003).

[1] This was noted earlier by Bamberger (1989, 2000), Picciotto (2003), World Bank (OED)(2002).

The overall socio-political and economic context determines the power relations between (and within) the parties and institutions involved. Both power relations and interests influence key evaluation issues. The fact that politics are part and parcel of M&E has been acknowledged long before in the context of project and programme evaluation. Politics are present in project and programme evaluation in different ways and this deserves to be recognised (Weiss, 1970, 1987; Palumbo, 1987). First, evaluations are supposed to feed into decision-making and reports necessarily enter the political arena^[2]. Second, evaluations implicitly make political statements about legitimacy, utility and appropriateness of programmes or projects. Third, since projects or programmes are creatures of political decisions that remain subject to pressures during implementation, politics are inevitable during evaluation (Weiss, 1970). Evaluations can thus be used, ordered or directed for the express purpose of building a certain image of a programme or project (Palumbo, 1987). The third relationship between politics and evaluation is - potentially - the most negative one, when inspired by interests that may be contrary to genuine evaluation interests. Yet, not all political aspects of evaluation are to be understood negatively. For example, for utilisation-focused evaluations the usage is the driving force. Consequently the evaluator is encouraged to tie the evaluation into the specific political context and needs of the users (Patton, 1987; Chelimsky, 1987a, 1987b; Weiss, 1999). All three aspects of politics and evaluation will to some extent be dealt with in this paper, but the focus will lie with the third aspect: the relationship between interests of different stakeholders and M&E policy and practice. With the broadening of the scope of programmes, Weiss (1970) indicated that effects of politics of evaluation will reach the national level instead of being localised under bounded projects. One may indeed assume that politics of evaluation are all the more present when moving from programmes to the sectoral and national level^[3]; when stakeholders and interests are multiplied. Therefore it is evident that the way in which politics influence M&E in the contemporary development paradigm should be high on the research agenda.

The assessment framework developed in this paper furthers the understanding of the relationship between powers and interests at the national and international level and the overall M&E policy^[4]. On the basis of case study material from Rwanda, primarily collected during a mid-2006 field mission^[5], it identifies crucial elements in the politics of M&E and argues that persistent exclusion and denial of the importance and presence of political issues in M&E eventually risks undermining both M&E's functions of 'accountability' and 'feedback & learning'. Yet, politics and M&E can also be mutually reinforcing as M&E can be an instrument for advancing public debate; 'smart' technocratic M&E approaches can help opening up of closed political environments.

The assessment framework developed in section 2 will be the basis for the analysis of the Rwandan case in section 3. The central ideas of this paper are illustrated by it, yet they can be extrapolated to other settings. Section 4 discusses tangible measures that can be under-

[2] Although the relationship may not always be that straightforward, see Weiss (1999).

[3] See also Killick (2004: 5) who refers to the suggestion often made that *"the potential seriousness of the tensions among evidence on the one hand and preferences of politicians and incentive structures to which they are responding has been magnified by the trend within the new aid agenda for aid modalities to become more 'macro'-based."*

[4] In 2004 Kusek and Rist developed a readiness assessment to assess a country's organizational capacity and political willingness out of the same concern of too little attention for political, organisational and cultural elements in M&E. Our framework aims to identify the linkage between politics and M&E decisions rather than determining the readiness for M&E.

[5] Data was collected through personal interviews with individuals from diverse settings and through review of (grey) literature collected during the field mission. Previous missions of one of the co-authors enabled further to contextualize our findings.

taken to escape the political trap and even more to ensure mutual reinforcement of M&E and political analysis. These measures are more widely applicable and reach far beyond the context of Rwanda. The main conclusions are bundled in section 5.

2. M&E EMBEDDED IN A POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURE

Politics do play a role in M&E at project level where there are relatively limited interests and a limited number of stakeholders (Weiss, 1970). Sector policies and national poverty reduction policies have higher stakes, interests and number of stakeholders. Therefore M&E of PRSPs is expected to be influenced at least as much by politics as M&E of projects. The logic of the new aid paradigm puts the partner country in the driver's seat, also for monitoring and evaluation. With the national government at the wheel, national power relations and interests, shortly national politics, can be expected to play a very important role in all decisions that have to be taken for M&E. Measuring influence in decision-making processes is extremely difficult (Dahl, 1991). In addition, not only decision-making is determined by power relations and interests, but also non-decision-making. Decision-making processes often remain black boxes, yet describing processes, power relations and positions of interests and stakes substantially increase the likelihood of unveiling their nature (Huberts and Kleinneijenhuis, 1994; Huberts, 1994). At first sight, the non-exact science of understanding politics stands in sharp contrast with the technicalities of M&E. Yet, this paper demonstrates that 'politics' and 'technics' lie often much closer to one another than one may think from the outset. In the following section we link a number of established concepts into one overarching conceptual framework. The assessment scheme presented in section 2.4 (table 2) helps understanding both politics as well as the relationship between politics and M&E.

2.1. Political Opportunity Structure

Political Opportunity Structure (POS) (reproduced at the left-hand side of table 2) is a concept that has proven useful in political science. The POS refers to the political context in which stakeholders operate. Especially studies of interest groups have developed the notion and its understanding has evolved from a relatively stable to a more variable structure. Initially the POS was considered a static framework of institutional variables, relating to stable aspects of government structure such as the administrative structures or institutional entities (Tilly, 1978; Kitschelt, 1986). The recognition that these structures could influence the position and power of stakeholders in society was important as it implied that a change in these external conditions could have important consequences for stakeholders. Changes can e.g. open or conversely block actions undertaken by interest groups. Later, the POS theory evolved towards a more dynamic model sensitive to sudden events and/or social processes. A distinction can thus be made between relatively more stable, durable aspects of the POS (e.g. traditions, culture and institutions) and its more volatile aspects (e.g. national policies, discourse, turnover of power, shift in election outcomes) (McAdam, 1999; Tarrow, 1994). The demarcation between stable and volatile aspects may however not always be that clear. For example the overall economic situation of a country is rather stable: Rwanda will remain a developing country for many more years, but economic waves can be very unpredictable. For example periods of extreme draught and their economic impact are rather volatile. The POS of a country is thus in continuous evolution; this means that the opportunities for action and influence of stakeholders may also change

continuously – depending upon how quickly or slowly the POS evolves. The evolution of stable and volatile aspects will depend very much upon the interests and power of the political elite. But the political elite is not the only one influencing the POS. Meyer and Staggenborg (1996) have added an interesting dimension to the POS conception. They drew attention to the fact that the POS, especially the more volatile aspects, are also subject to change caused by all sorts of stakeholders in society, such as movements, activists, interest groups etcetera. They demonstrated that both movements and counter-movements can influence the POS. Consequently, organisations or more generally stakeholders, become components of each other's opportunity structure. Changing or influencing the POS is thus not the sanctuary of the political elite, all actors in society co-determine the POS by defending their own interests. Of course the action radius of non-state actors will highly depend upon the governmental organisation and structures. But the success of non-state actors, such as civil society or the donor community, will also depend upon the behaviour of other non-state actors. For example, when civil society organisations strive for the emancipation of women, donor's negligence of the issue or donor's support for this cause, influences deeply the chances of success of these organisations. Non-state actors can thus reinforce or jeopardise each other's causes. This is not only the case when they have mutual or opposed objectives in mind – such as peace organisations and guerrilla groups. Actors with different aims co-determine each other's POS too. For example HIV/aids organisations can be given such an overwhelming attention in society that little time and money is left for associations taking up the cause of other vulnerable groups. Non-state actors will also determine the positioning of the political elite and the way it chooses to defend its interests. When a government feels threatened in its existence by certain movements it may for example adopt restraining legislation, and this will influence the POS for all actors involved. This dynamic, interactionist conception of the POS with stable, volatile and stakeholders' elements (McAdam et al., 1996) will be key to our framework.

2.2. Politics of M&E

Only a well-functioning M&E system can uphold the principles of results-orientation, iterative learning, evidence-based policy-making and accountability. Learning and feedback are one set of functions of M&E. For learning to be effective (improving policy-making, but also more broadly feeding into broader change of opinions in society), M&E is necessarily 'uncomfortable', highlighting both negative and positive experiences.

Apart from learning, M&E also has an accountability function. When results are not met or policies not implemented as promised this may have implications for the politicians that engaged to deliver. This holding accountable is one of the cornerstones of democratic societies. An adequate M&E system has to provide the necessary elements to check whether promises were lived up to. When this is not the case, political elites can be confronted with counterfactual evidence. In a next period, leaders will have to strengthen or reorient policies and their implementation, or relinquish power because of their failure to deliver. It has to be clear, though, that M&E cannot just be about accountability. Little progress will be made with accountability without learning. A change in power – the strongest application of accountability – will not automatically lead to policy improvement. Learning from failures, but also from successes – what works and what does not – is crucial to progress.

Those involved or subjected to M&E often experience the exercise as a punishing event (see e.g. Taut and Brauns, 2003), people and institutions are scared by M&E because of the negative implications it may have for their personal careers or the survival of their institu-

tions. This limited, accountability-oriented perception narrows down the potential contributions of M&E. Whereas personal fears for accountability can be understood one would think that the learning aspect offers nothing but positive offspring for a government as it may only contribute to strengthen governmental policies. However, certain governments may not be eager to learn from evidence. When less is known about what works and what doesn't, political leaders maintain more room for manoeuvre to pick and choose strategic decisions (see also Centre for Global Development, 2006).

Whereas a well-committed government may welcome constructive learning elements, less committed governments may have an interest in shielding off information on certain policies. A sound M&E system counters this shielding off: it unveils all sorts of information, wanted and unwanted, beautiful and ugly. In spite of the inherent tensions between 'political elites' and 'M&E information', most attention in developing a water-tight M&E system goes to technical matters: creating a strong statistical office, installing a good data collection and management information systems, strengthening mechanisms for sound analyses, checking upon budgets, creating tracking systems etcetera. The hypothesis of this paper challenges the purely technocratic character of M&E and postulates that politics heavily intrude into M&E systems. Many decisions have to be taken in the development of M&E systems. Decision-making is by definition a political matter; therefore it is interesting to see who takes what type of decision or attitude in the M&E framework of a country and how they are intermingled with interests and power positions. Four fields of M&E decision-making are distinguished in the conceptual framework reproduced below (see right-hand side of table 2); i.e. i) the institutional set-up; ii) capacity; iii) identification of indicators and targets and iv) feedback.

Firstly, the institutional set-up is determined by many sub-questions such as the legal M&E framework, the mandate, the flow of information, the coordination, support and central oversight, the place of the statistical office, the role of non-state actors and the relationship between the executive and legislative, between the line and central ministries, the central and decentralised levels. The second field is that of M&E capacity: are capacities present, who receives training, on what issues? When a lack of capacity is not remedied it has of course implications for the M&E system and its functioning. The third field is the one of determining indicators and targets: what are the type, number and quality of surveys, which indicators are chosen; what are the levels of disaggregation and which targets are set? Finally, deciding upon feedback of M&E is important for its functioning and the fulfilment of its two objectives: accountability and learning. Feedback has two dimensions, not only the distribution of M&E results is important; also its usage and integration deserves specific attention: what is the linkage between policy-making, planning, budgeting and M&E, which stakeholders do what with which results, who has access to what type of results, what are the barriers and the incentives to distribute and use results?

While ideal answers can be invented for each one of these questions, each country has to formulate and define the grid and principles of its own system. No country has the perfect M&E system that may serve as a blueprint for all others. Nevertheless some basic principles have to be upheld in order to avoid inhibiting the system. One such important principle is independence. Data and analysis should not be biased; if biased, they lose their function for learning and accountability. The institution implementing should thus not be the one evaluating; no one can be forced to self-incrimination. Some mechanisms can be used to increase the likelihood of independence, such as locating the evaluation function at a different level than the implementa-

tion (e.g. more centralised with an immediate feedback loop to parliament) and installing additional checks and balances (e.g. additional surveys by external actors). While these elements could be umbrella-ed under sound technocratic governance, our paper will demonstrate that technocratic and political governance are – in practice – not as neatly divided as in theory. When the various decisions in the four M&E fields are to be taken, politics, interests and powers, play a role.

2.3. Stakeholders in Developing Countries

Who takes the M&E decisions and what are the interests at stake? Decision taking is not a one dimensional enterprise; decisions often result from complex constellations in which many stakeholders strive for the assurance of their interests. To what degree they can influence decision-making or non-decision-making has to be put in perspective of the POS in which they operate. The number of stakeholders and thus also the POS, is different in developing countries and western societies. Donors and international NGO's are important stakeholders with interests of their own in highly aid-dependent developing countries, such as Rwanda.

In short, four categories of stakeholders can be distinguished in developing countries: i) the national authorities of the partner country with its various components (the executive, the legislative, Auditor General etcetera). These different national stakeholders may have discordant interests and cannot be considered as one homogeneous group; ii) national civil society (which is not a homogeneous group either, it comprises NGOs, churches, research institutes, beneficiary groups etcetera); iii) the international donor community and iv) international NGOs (or more broadly the international civil society).

In terms of M&E accountability and learning each of these groups has its own interests (Bamberger, 1991); the extent to which they are able to make their interests heard largely depends upon the POS. First, within the new development paradigm, the national government is put in the M&E driver's seat. International donors are encouraged to use and support increasingly the national system as developed by the national authorities. A government committed to poverty reduction will consequently be eager to learn about its own policies in order to improve future decision-making. When additionally the government is very open and strongly democratic it will encourage accountability. However, a government not committed to poverty reduction has an interest in shielding off the non-effectiveness or negative externalities of its policies as it may lead to critical questioning of the government. Authoritarian regimes are unlikely to stimulate the accountability aspect of M&E, this may directly jeopardise their power position^[6]. In addition, the lack of information on the effects of policies widens their room for manoeuvre in deciding upon the direction of policies. The actions undertaken by governments to curtail critical analysis and insight may range from overt forms of repression and blunt human rights abuses (such as no freedom of speech and arbitrary detentions) to more covert forms. Institutions can be impeded to function autonomously for example by dissolution; parliamentary power can be curtailed; autonomous organisations (such as the Auditor General's Office) can be captured, guided or infiltrated by a government agency (cooptation). At times governmental interference can be very subtle in the form of coordination or monitoring. It implies centralised organisational functioning which may lead to over-centralised decision-making, bureaucratic delay and

[6] As indicated by Gordillo and Andersson (2004: 309), *"the more dramatic the power asymmetries among actors – that is the more power the political elites possess relative to the power of citizens and their political opposition and other actors – the weaker the incentive is for such an elite to transform established M&E programmes into an instrument for more public sector accountability"*.

suffocation of initiative. Parallel to this stands government monitoring of independent actors by due registration, compulsory reporting etcetera^[7].

Second, civil society organisations, both national and international, are mostly praised because they strive for the public interest as opposed to private interests. The aims and goals of many organisations confirm their orientation towards the general interest. Civil society is helping to improve public spending by ensuring and checking to what extent the poor benefit from it. It has therefore both a sincere interest in learning and accountability. When national policies do not further the public interest of poverty reduction, M&E evidence can provide them with information on what could work or indicate why certain policies have not worked. This can guide them in their activities (learning), for example in advocating improved policies. In addition M&E evidence provides them with the necessary information to hold those responsible accountable. Politicians or government personnel that cannot deliver or perform badly can consequently be asked to be replaced or step up performance. This accountability is especially important for national civil society; it contributes to the downward accountability of the government to its citizens. However, apart from the public interest – such as poverty reduction or the protection of human rights – civil society organisations have also more “private” interests such as the survival of the organisation. They will avoid organisational kamikaze. Furthermore, personal careers and ambitions of personnel can also play a role in organisational behaviour.

Third, donors have their vested interests in a partner country. Given their large financial involvement in aid-dependent countries the learning interest of donors can be expected to be of the same level as that of a sincerely committed government. In terms of accountability a distinction can be made between upward accountability and accountability to the home constituency. Upward accountability is the accountability of the national recipient government to the donors: what is done with the different types of assistance? Depending upon the type of assistance, ranging from projects, to programmes, to sector support, to general budget support, the degree of upward accountability can differ as will be demonstrated below. In addition, donor agencies can themselves be held accountable by their own constituencies for the assistance delivered to a particular partner country. Why are certain decisions made; how effective is aid delivery; what is the impact on the ground? M&E, conducted by the national government and by the donors (i.e. donor agencies as well as independent evaluation offices in the donor country) themselves, provide them with input for this process in their home countries. Upward and ‘home accountability’ are not necessarily smoothly reconcilable. Upward accountability puts a donor agency in the assessor position, while it is the assessed in ‘home accountability’. Assessing and being assessed may lead to schizophrenic tensions. This mix of interests, even within groups of stakeholders, is likely to turn technical M&E processes into true politics of M&E.

[7] Bratton (1989) distinguishes among dissolution, cooptation, coordination and monitoring.

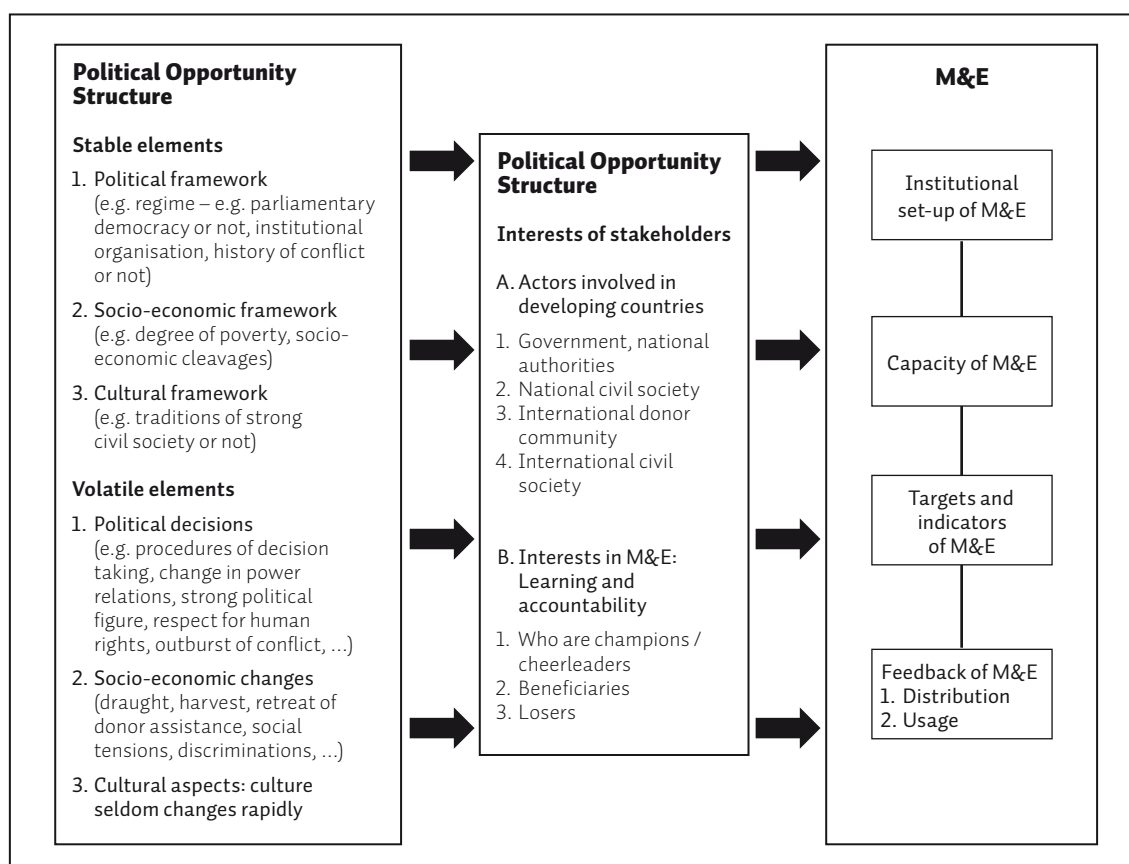
Table 1. Potentially competing M&E interests of stakeholders in developing countries

Stakeholders \ Interests	National authorities	Civil society (national and international)	International donor agencies
Committed to M&E in light of inclusive poverty reduction	Learning: policy improvement – better poverty reduction Open to upward and downward accountability	Public interests: – poverty reduction – downward accountability	– Learning – Upward accountability – Open to home accountability
Not committed to M&E in light of inclusive poverty reduction	Willingness to remain in power Increasing one's discretionary power	Organisational survival; private careers, ...	Shielding off home accountability: defending donor agency's policies and interventions at any cost

Source: Authors' compilation

2.4. Assessment Framework for the Politics of M&E

The conceptual framework reproduced in box 2 below ties together the various building blocks described above. In the following sections, it will serve as guidance for the analysis of the politics of M&E in the particular case of Rwanda.

Table 2. The Politics of M&E: An Assessment framework

3. MONITORING AND EVALUATION IN RWANDA

The small land-locked country Rwanda in central Africa is most known because of the awful events of 1994. During the genocide an estimated number of about 800.000 Tutsi and moderate Hutu were slaughtered. It left the country with a dark legacy, extremely difficult to overcome. In addition to the huge loss of life, the country was left with a dysfunctional state apparatus, a shattered social fabric and thousand hills of trauma. Further, old problems of widespread poverty, population expansion, and land shortage – while agriculture constitutes the core of Rwandan economy – keep on haunting the country. Despite these difficulties Rwanda has reached macro-economic stability of which the fulfilment of IMF conditions is proof. Rwanda's ruling party (RPF, Rwandese Patriotic Front) is increasingly strengthening its Public Finance Management (PFM) and it scores well on fighting corruption (see e.g; Amis et al., 2005: 6; Purcell et al., 2006). The 1994 events had an enormous negative impact upon poverty. In 2001 about half of Rwanda's population was living below 1 \$ a day (World Development Indicators Database 2006). The GDP per capita (constant 2000 US \$) fell from 287 US \$ in 1993 to 152 US \$ in 1994. There was a sharp increase of GDP/capita in 1995 to a level of 209 US \$ (growth rate of 37%), yet towards the end of the 1990s negative growth rates were again recorded (yearly growth rates of – 2% in 1998 and 1999). 2005 figures show a modest recovery of growth rates (3%) and an actual GDP/capita of 258 US \$, which is still below the 1993-level (World Development Indicators Database 2006).

Some non-income poverty indicators hint at moderately promising improvements in terms of MDGs such as primary school enrolment (which stood at 73% in 2004 as compared to 66% in 1990), gender equality in literacy rates (97.9 % in 2004 compared to 86.4% in 1990) and female seats held in parliament (49% in 2004 compared to 17% in 1990) (World Development Indicators Database 2006). In other areas (including e.g. infant and child mortality, primary school completion rates) challenges remain high (see also Republic of Rwanda and UN, 2003). In addition concerns are increasingly raised over issues of inequality (Evans et al, 2006; Purcell et al., 2006).

Since the 1994 genocide many more donors began actively supporting Rwanda. Rwanda is highly aid-dependent with an average of 20 % aid of the GNI between 1998-2004 (World Development Indicators Database 2006). In the immediate recovery period this was even substantially higher (with an average of 61% over the period 1994-1996). "Genocide guilt"^[8] seems to have fuelled financial generosity of international donors and "it opened the door to aid with a political dimension" (see Purcell et al., 2006: 17).

At the end of 2000 Rwanda's interim PRSP was endorsed by the WB and the IMF. The preparation and implementation of a full PRSP was conditional to the HIPC debt relief Rwanda obtained. The final PRSP – tying back to the national vision called "Vision 2020" – was approved in July 2002. Since its adoption, it provides the general framework for donor assistance in Rwanda. The PRSP dedicates a specific section to M&E and the organisation thereof in Rwanda. By mid-2006, Rwanda started preparing for the second round PRSP, namely the EDPRSP (ED standing for Economic Development). The Rwanda Development Partners Website describes the entire process and announces a final EDPRS to be published by May 2007 (see <http://www.devpartners.gov.rw>). However, as of December 2007 the document has not been released.

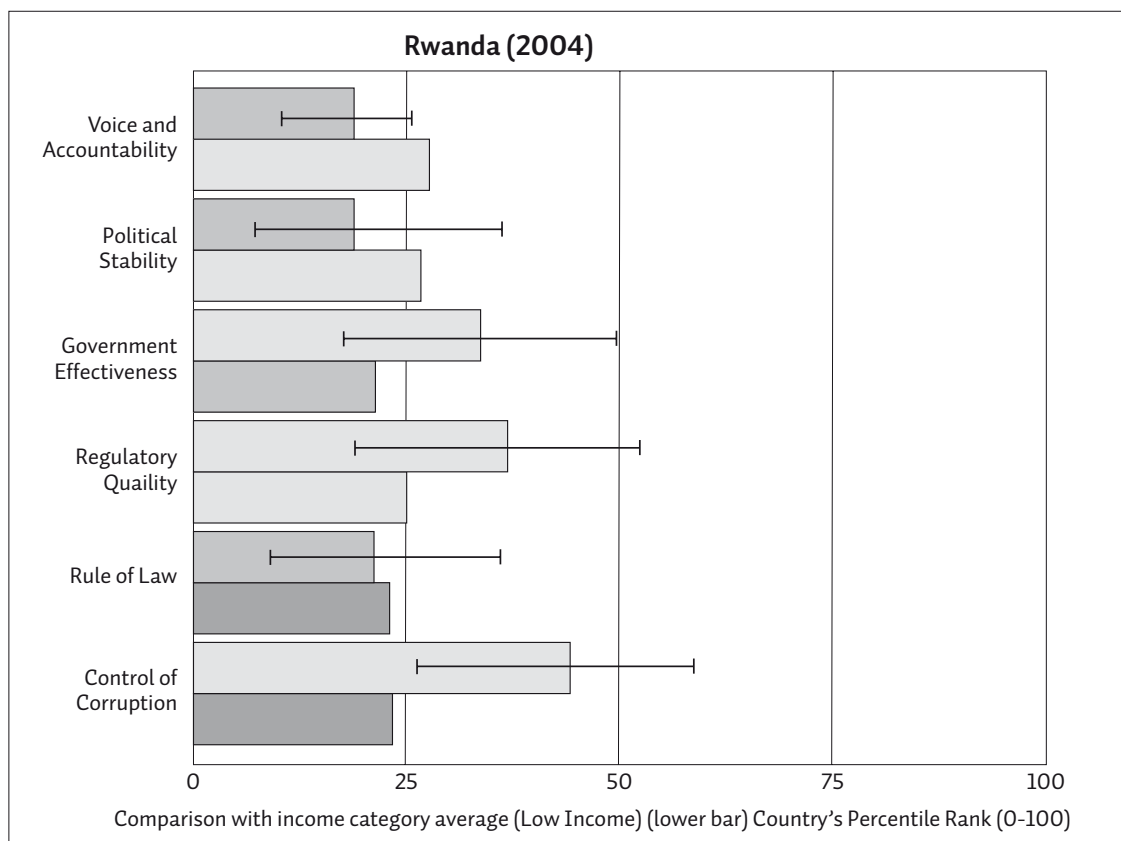
[8] In view of many, including the GoR, the genocide was at least partly the result of the failure of the international community to intervene (UN forces e.g. could have been given a broader mandate).

In addition to socio-economic problems, Rwanda had to face many political challenges. In the immediate aftermath of genocide, assistance and dealing with the genocide perpetrators were key items on the national political agenda. The bringing to justice is still going on. Since 2002 the gacaca tribunals with their lay judges deal with a large part of the genocide story. All communities are supposed to participate in these gacaca trials. Genocide and the 1994 war are thus still very vividly present in the day to day life of Rwandans; so are all the related social frictions. In 2003 the first democratic elections were held and Kagame was elected president. The elections have been announced as hallmark for the end of transition (see e.g. Purcell et al., 2006).

While the Rwandan regime scores particularly well on ‘technocratic governance’ such as strengthening the public finance management (PFM), fighting corruption, creating a functioning Tender Board etcetera, by contrast enthusiasm is to be dimmed when it concerns the more political issues. Therefore we refer to Rwanda as technocratically strong, yet politically weak. The governance indicators of Kaufmann, Kraay and Mastruzzi (2005) reflected in the table below, illustrate this well. The six categories they define are grouped as ‘governance’, yet in terms of content they comprise two very different aspects of governance. ‘Government effectiveness’, ‘regulatory quality’ and ‘control of corruption’ go back to technical matters more than ‘voice and accountability’, ‘political stability’ and ‘rule of law’. While Rwanda scores good on the more technocratic dimensions, it scores bad on the political ones (see table below in comparison with the group of low income countries). The latest 2006 updates of the same indicators (Kaufmann et al., 2007) show a more nuanced picture with in particular a much better rating on ‘political stability’ (from 5.3 percentile rank in 2002 to 27.4 percentile rank in 2006). Nevertheless, the gap among the achievements in terms of ‘technocratic governance’ and ‘political governance’ remains. Particularly striking in this respect is Rwanda’s sharply differentiated ranking on ‘control of corruption’ (55.8 percentile rank) and ‘voice and accountability’ (14.4 percentile rank).

Since donors tend to focus on the ‘technics’ of M&E, the weakness of a country’s political governance is not their major concern when talking about results, evaluation and follow up. Yet, in line with the framework developed above, we will demonstrate that weakness on political governance impacts directly upon M&E, its quality and usefulness. By denying this impact, the international donor community risks to undermine M&E in Rwanda.

Table 3. Governance indicators for Rwanda compared to its income group



Source: Kaufman, D., Kraay, A. and Mastruzzi, M. (2005) Governance Matters IV: Governance Indicators for 1996-2004
<http://www.worldbank.org/wbi/governance/pubs/govmatters4.html>

3.1. M&E Structure under Reform

The 2002 PRSP initiated an institutional M&E framework and key performance indicators. A Poverty Observatory (PO) was installed to act as the overall coordinator of the system. In the mean time, the PO has been abolished and the Development and Planning Unit has taken over the M&E oversight. In 2005 new changes are announced by a cabinet paper (MINECOFIN, 2005), which aims remedying the weak M&E institutionalisation. While the 2002 PRSP strongly emphasised monitoring at the expense of evaluation, the Cabinet Paper aims to improve the tracking and analysis of progress. It developed a logical flow for an M&E framework linking different levels (line ministries, decentralised units) to different tasks (setting targets, collecting data etc.). The framework is composed as a chain, which is to be fully integrated into the second PRSP (EDPRSP). Four years down the PRSP road little tangible progress has been made in terms of institutional set-up. Again and again a new structure, format, chain or flow is proposed. By mid-2006, the latest changes as proposed by the 2005 Cabinet Paper have not yet materialised.

Due to continuous reforms, things are never given a chance to mature, to be thought through practically, let alone to be implemented and tried out. The strength of a chain lies in its weakest link. Setting up coherent and well functioning M&E institutions has proven far from evident (see among others GTZ/BMZ, 2004; World Bank, 2003, 2005), even in countries where substantial improvements in sub-components such as statistical data capacities are made (World Bank, 2005). An M&E system is composed out of many actors with different responsibilities: line ministries, decentralised entities, statistical offices. During different M&E stages

– data collection, analysis, feedback – the need for coordination is high, but all the more problematic. Subsequent changes of the institutional M&E framework are often observed. Bamberger (1991) reports on experiences from South Asia where due to competition among agencies to control M&E and fears of units becoming too powerful and threatening, institutional arrangements never lasted for longer than three years. While this may not be surprising, the comprehensive nature of monitoring and evaluation in the context of the PRSP requires coordination and oversight. For Rwanda, the logical flow of the latest proposed reform makes sense, yet more seems needed to effectively deal with M&E's institutional weakness. Three elements deserve particular attention. First, the problematic vertical and horizontal integration; second the lack of institutional independence and third unclear mandates and relationships.

Horizontal integration refers to the relationship between the central and line ministries. Currently, line ministries operate relatively independently and most of them do not have M&E (including Management Information Systems) systems in place. Where such systems are operational, there are no clear-cut plans about how to integrate these into an overarching M&E framework. Central entities, such as the Rwandan MINECOFIN, do not seem powerful enough to take pro-active measures aiding the set-up of sound M&E (including MIS) at line ministry level as well as ensuring a minimal degree of integration (see also Amis et al., 2005). The lack of horizontal integration is particularly problematic as it hampers central oversight and control on the rigorousness of data and analysis. Usage of data for policy-making is consequently jeopardised. Implementing an improved integration will need more discipline on the side of line ministries (e.g. using uniform formats, establishing M&E departments), a more coercive mandate at central level as well as capacity building at line ministry level.

Decentralised entities play an important role in the new M&E framework and this will necessitate adequate vertical integration. Statistical flows of information require rigorous set-ups and treatment of data, implying discipline on the supply side. Such discipline is unlikely to occur automatically, without strong political support. Yet, in Rwanda such political support can be assured given the strong party structure present up to the lowest administrative level in the country. However, for the moment there is insufficient evidence to prove that there is strong political will to encourage local entities to collect the right data. Another problematic aspect is that local entities are considered as mere outposts for data collection (MINECOFIN, 2005). The new M&E framework as presented in the Cabinet Paper views local entities mainly as information collectors to feed into the national level. In case decentralisation is taken seriously there is also need for a reverse information stream and for analysis and feedback into local decision-making (Holvoet and Renard, 2007; Lucas et al., 2004). Decentralisation and M&E by local authorities are processes that should twin each other in terms of mandate and capacities; otherwise they risk being mutually undermining.

Second, independence and impartiality are crucial elements of M&E guidelines and standards^[9]. Independence can be furthered by the location of the units responsible for M&E: a unit close to the operational level may strengthen the level of feedback but it jeopardises M&E independence. Line ministries are for example charged with the identification of key performance indicators (KPI); no other and more impartial actors are included in this identification proc-

[9] Particularly relevant in the context of this research are the African Evaluation Guidelines which are a modified version of the Program Evaluation Standards (PES) based upon widespread discussion and consultation within the African Evaluation Association (AEA) (see Nairobi M&E Network et al., 2002).

ess. The Strategic Planning Unit (SPU) of MINECOFIN acts as a coordinator, yet it is not strongly anchored into the M&E framework or given an outspoken mandate that could improve the impartiality. The institutional framework does not take independent evaluation actors on board. Civil society is not given a formal role, neither is parliament. Similarly, no mention is made of independent research institutes or the Rwandan Evaluation Network. Donor representatives can have an independent say when participating to the joint sector reviews, but they are neither really part of the national M&E framework. The lack of independence is of special concern given the strong top-down control of the ruling party.

A final concern of the Rwandan M&E framework is that M&E mandates and relationships are very unclear (which hampers at the same time horizontal and vertical integration). Defining a well-functioning M&E system is not a one night's business. Defining and dividing responsibilities in a clear manner as well as establishing good relationships and information flows are key to it. Some examples may clarify. While the SPU considers itself the main M&E unit within MINECOFIN, not all its members agree upon its tasks. The division of labour among the SPU and the National Institute of Statistics (NIS) is e.g. not clear-cut. Data collection, which is currently given great importance, obviously falls under the responsibility of the NIS. But by mid-2006, it was for both the SPU and the NIS not entirely clear who should bring together and analyse information from country-wide M&E exercises such as the Household Living Conditions Survey (EICV), Demographic and Health Surveys, Sector Reviews and Annual Progress Reports (APR). Similar ambiguities arise when it comes to ensuring M&E capacities, ensuring flows of information (both horizontally and vertically), the relationship between monitoring information (provided by CEPEX^[10]) and evaluation, the roles of MINECOFIN^[11] and line ministries.

Governments committed to progress on poverty reduction have a sincere interest in a well-functioning and institutionalised M&E system. Neverending transitions wrapped into foggy mandate clouds can be very comfortable for less committed ones.

3.2. Champions but no cheerleaders^[12]

The national M&E framework in Rwanda suffers not only from continuously being under construction, but also from a lack of clear demand and incentives, despite the presence of some M&E champions. Championship, cheerleadership, demand and supply of M&E are inter-related, since champions have to trigger demand and supply in order to become cheerleaders spreading M&E nationally. As demand and supply are also very much related to interests of stakeholders for M&E (or sometimes more importantly, for non-M&E) this leads straight to politics of M&E. Several sources of demand and supply and potential candidates for champion- and cheerleadership can be identified in Rwanda. Despite the multiplicity of potential sources for demand and supply, the Rwandan context seems however far from a forceful demand-enabling environment.

[10] Le Bureau Central des Investissements Publics et des Finances Extérieures (CEPEX).

[11] In 2005, an External Finance Unit was created within MINECOFIN, it provides donors with a point of entry, as well as with guidance and leadership on how donors can better align to Government priorities (MINECOFIN, 2006). The division of labour between this unit and CEPEX is not clear-cut. The relationship e.g. between the EFU's Development Assistance Database (DAD), that is used to collect, track, analyse and plan for all flows of ODA and the CEPEX is not spelled out clearly.

[12] The notion of '*champions*' and '*cheerleaders*' has been used in World Bank (2000).

3.2.1. Government of Rwanda

Sincere commitment to the PRSP framework implies adherence to the results-based and iterative learning process. One may thus expect the Government of Rwanda (GOR) to be a first potential source for M&E demand. In practice, the GoR shows a keen interest in improving data collection, which is evident from the emphasis given to the NIS (see also OECD/DAC, 2007). It has resulted so far in an upsurge in data collection; both quantitative as well as qualitative. This stands in sharp contrast to a serious deficit in analysis (Amis et al., 2005: 10; Kanyarukiga et al., 2006; Mutebi et al., 2001: 35; Purcell et al., 2006). A noteworthy exception is the NIS 2007 Preliminary Poverty Update Report which is based on a comparison of results of the latest 2005/06 EICV (Enquête Intégrale sur les Conditions de Vie des Ménages) with those of EICV1 (2000/01). It provides for the first time a frank overview of changes in poverty and inequality, documenting that the unequal distribution of growth in combination with high initial levels of inequality have impaired the potential poverty reducing effect of the growth registered^[13] (NIS, 2006). At various places, different layers of disaggregation are included (gender, urban/rural, provinces). While this first post-genocide 'evaluative' initiative is laudable, identifying not only 'levels of outcomes' but also 'changes in outcomes', there are clearly major shortcomings when it comes to the analytical, evaluative quality of the exercise^[14]. The analysis does not include confounding factors to arrive at some measure of 'impact', it hardly probes into underlying reasons for (non)-or varied performance and neither does it distinguish between implementation failures and conceptual flaws in policies. Deficient analytical quality obviously puts into perspective the very fundamentals of evidence-based and iterative policy-making.

The GoR has proven to be forceful at various occasions, therefore we believe it has the technical capacity to create more incentives and encourage various actors to provide information and analysis about what is happening in the hills of Rwanda in terms of poverty reduction. But is there political will to do so? Some highly qualified Rwandans were hired by MINECOFIN, in the M&E department. With the financial support of donors (DFID), the SPU – M&E department – was well equipped and staff attractively remunerated (at least until mid-2006)^[15]. The capacities observed at various levels in Rwanda are at times impressive, particularly within central ministries. This leads to the questioning whether the often invoked capacity constraints also partly conceal a lack of political will^[16].

Thanks to the capacities present, the department harboured some true M&E champions. Yet, the enthusiasm remained largely within department circles and did not trickle down to the system as a whole or its components, the sector ministries or decentralised entities (see also Purcell et al., 2006). Indicative is the exercise of self-evaluation by the sector ministries, launched by SPU. All the sector departments had to assess their own M&E system on the basis of which improvements would have been suggested and implemented. This was supposed to contribute to the creation and stimulation of internal demand for M&E. On the basis of these evaluations key performance indicators (KPI) were to be identified by each sector. The exercise collapsed; the results were either very poor or the evaluation was not finished.

[13] This finding confirms cross-country empirical evidence and analysis for a broad range of developing countries provided in Ravallion (2007).

[14] The gap between data collection and analysis is similarly observed elsewhere (see Centre for Global Development, 2006).

[15] Kanyarukiga et al. (2006) consider the deteriorating staffing situation at MINECOFIN a major area of concern.

[16] GTZ/BMZ (2004) also observed this tension between actual capacity constraints and political will; yet its observation was not inspired by the case of Rwanda.

3.2.2. Parliament of Rwanda

In line with the principles of parliamentary democracy, parliament is supposed to act as interpellator to the national government. On paper at least, this should constitute a powerful demand for M&E. Yet, the Rwandan parliament is still in “a process of learning and consolidating its newly found autonomy” (Evans et al., 2006: 65). It currently only deals with summaries of M&E reports and little independent demand or supply can be expected from it in the short term^[17].

3.2.3. Auditor General

Since the 2003 Constitution (art.183-184), the Office of the Auditor General (OAG) is the supreme audit institution of Rwanda. In some countries the Auditor General plays an important role in evaluation. Apart from controlling and checking accounting and spending (financial audit), shedding a light upon efficiency and effectiveness (performance audit) forms part of the AG's mission. Although the office of the Office of the AG airs some criticism, it targets mainly the technical input level of the public sector (whether tender procedures were followed or not, procedures of recruitment etcetera). More critical issues such as the intermingling of the public and private sector in Rwanda are not scrutinised^[18]. Although performance auditing lies clearly within the mandate of the AG, there is currently no personnel to take up the auditing task from that perspective^[19], neither are the incentives to undertake thorough performance auditing present.

3.2.4. Civil society

Various sources for M&E demands and supply can lie outside the regime structures. Many of these outside actors can not only increase demand but may also offer interesting information and analysis on the achievements or shortcomings of national policies (supply side). The – in principle – independent character of non-state actors makes them particularly worthwhile.

Research institutes

Potentially important sources for M&E supply (and demand) are national research institutes and universities. Of course, capacities of universities and institutes have to be put in Rwandan perspective; the genocide targeted explicitly intellectuals and the National University of Rwanda (NUR) suffered severely in 1994. It takes time to rebuild institutes, to train people and even after 12 years one cannot expect the wounds to be entirely healed. At the same time one cannot but observe that Rwanda counts some well-trained people, also in its universities. In Kigali, universities and higher education centres have grown fast. Comparing this situation to other low-income countries, we find Rwanda not scoring particularly low in terms of available capacity. At two specific occasions, the University of Butare, in collaboration with OSSREA (Organisation for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa)^[20], conducted M&E

[17] Various parliamentary reports displayed a lack of independence and an acting for the RPF party cause. One of the most notable reports is the so-called 2004 Report on Divisionism (Commission Parlementaire, 2004).

[18] Similarly, in the Joint Evaluation of General Budget Support, Purcell et al. (2006: S9) indicate that “while corruption is generally perceived as not being a problem in Rwanda, risks of subtle forms of corruption, such as exclusion patterns and concentration of economic power, might be increasing”.

[19] In their Baseline Survey of Donor Harmonisation and Alignment in Rwanda, Amis et al. (2005: 7) noted that “the audit function [in its narrow ‘financial’ sense] is extremely weak in Rwanda, not the least because of a chronic shortage of auditors”.

[20] OSSREA is a membership driven research network based in Ethiopia. The Rwandan chapter of this network was created in 1999.

exercises oriented towards poverty reduction. In 2002 (between the interim and final PRSP) it published the results of the Poverty Reduction Policies Relevance Test and in February 2006 a report based on citizen report cards (CRC) – a grassroots participatory method of data collection. Poverty Reduction Policies Relevance Tests can be particularly useful as (ex-ante) appraisal tools assessing the degree to which envisaged policies are likely to contribute to poverty reduction; CRCs provide insights into citizens' appreciation of services provided. While both M&E exercises are highly laudable initiatives that are characterised by unprecedented levels of citizen participation (see also Evans et al., 2006), two critical notes deserve to be made. First, in terms of quality the two reports miss out on crucial linkages and layers of analysis. Data collected are not explicitly linked to specific policies and breakdowns to relevant social categories are absent. Potentially diverging responses and differential policy effects among income groups, regions, urban-rural and gender remain under-explored. Evidently this severely hampers the usefulness of research efforts for policy-making and evaluation.

A second remark regards constraints research institutes and universities face in terms of independency. It remains therefore unclear whether the aforementioned analytical shortcomings are due to a deficit in capacity or in independency. A mandatory system of obtaining authorisations is e.g. discouraging researchers to engage in sensitive topics such as land. Even more, this system also leads to a-priori selections – self-censorship^[21] – of research topics by researchers. Taken the history of the country into account, it is judged wiser not to touch upon certain issues in order to avoid tensions at local and central level. Self-censorship is quite an effective way to deal with potentially critical voices. Another technique to silence critical voices is co-opting individuals of institutes into party structures. The appointing practice by the GoR of for example the rector of the NUR is an illustration of the active use of this technique in Rwanda. Overwhelming critical researchers or professors with administrative or teaching activities or nominate them country representatives at international fora are more covert ways of cooptation or silencing applied. The combined effect of this all, results in little sound and critical M&E supply from Rwandan universities, institutes or research centres.

Non-governmental organisations

National and international NGOs are another important set of actors in civil society. While some representatives indicated that policy-making has become more participatory and inclusive since 2000 (see Evans et al., 2006; Purcell et al., 2006), NGOs have not been awarded a consistent and formal role in the monitoring and evaluation of the PRSP^[22]. In short, as Purcell et al. (2006: 52) point out: “overall, the policy process remains rather “top-down”, with major policy shifts prepared by a small high-powered executive task forces, limited consultation (including of International Partners) especially on potentially sensitive issues, and Cabinet approval marking an almost immediate start of implementation”. Furthermore, and particularly relevant in the context of this research, is the fact that “the top-down nature of the policy process puts limits on the experience feeding into learning and adaption; this is a government which is convinced that it knows what is best for its people” (Purcell et al., 2006: 55).

Participation or even consultation in Rwanda is indeed often understood as ‘persuasion’ and ‘consciousness-raising’ about what is best for the people (see also Pottier, 2006); in

[21] Mutebi et al. (2001: 15) refer to an editor-in-chief who indicated that newspapers practice self-censorship as “‘a survival mechanism’, given the fact that the public and the government are far from being tolerant towards ‘excessive criticism’ of the government during what is regarded a period of national healing”.

[22] See Renard and Molenaers (2003) on the participation of civil society in the first PRSP.

the words of a local administrative officer “once the people have understood they will agree”^[23]; end of the participation process. If civil society is to contribute to M&E, independence is important. Yet, several governmental actions and incidents have led to a restrained political climate and a serious curtailment of freedom of association and action for national and international NGOs (see also Jordaan, 2006). 2003 was particularly pernicious to the freedom of opinion and speech. In that year the opposition party Mouvement Démocratique Républicain (MDR) was banned and several civil society organisations – among which the leading human rights organisation Liprodhor – were bashed in a parliamentary report. The run-up period to the constitutional referendum and the local elections further narrowed down the room for criticism and freedom of speech. In 2004 a parliamentary report blamed several NGOs among which again Liprodhor, but also the Flemish umbrella NGO 11.11.11, for ‘divisionism’. The notion of ‘divisionism’ is (ab)used by the GoR at many occasions to silence all sorts and types of opposition and criticism. The GoR anxiously stresses the unity of all Rwandans, without distinctions such as ethnicity. Given the awful genocide history, divisionism is a strong and legitimate concern in the fight to genocide ideologies. Yet, its distorted use turns it into a muzzle. Add to this the very restrictive law on civil society organisations that stipulates that “associations have to apply yearly for a renewed recognition; that the Minister of Justice may suspend the activities of an organisation when she / he discretionally judges them a threat to the law, public order or good moral standards of the country” (Law N°20/2000) then the self-censoring attitude of civil society organisations starts to make sense, even for international NGOs. Reacting critically can jeopardise next year’s registration and puts thus in danger the presence and survival of an entire organisation and its jobs in the country^[24]. In addition to this ‘straight-jacket-like’ political opportunity structure, particular practices such as cooptation of associations are applied. The least one can say is that the Rwandan opportunity structure is not at all enabling critical voices of NGOs. According to interviewees from civil society organisations the Ministry of Local Affairs – responsible for the registration of NGOs – conveys a clear message to them that civil society organisations in Rwanda should be service deliverers, not critical watchdogs; they should be partners of government instead of opposing it (see also Evans et al., 2006: 64; Wyss, 2006).

In short, there is little room for advocacy NGOs and the few that are still active are heavily criticised as if they want to divide the country^[25]. There is also a tendency of the GoR to talk only with umbrella organisations, mainly for reasons of representation and manageability. Given the increasing number of ‘brief-case’ NGOs, the issue of ‘representativeness’ of NGOs and CSOs is certainly valid (see also Evans et al., 2006: 61). However, it also holds for umbrella organisations that tend to be located in Kigali, and who increasingly become alienated from the poor in rural areas, given the striking wealth differences among the capital and the countryside and the decreased accessibility of the capital for the rural poor^[26]. This climate – on top of cultural aspects of (self-)restraint – explains why there is little critical analysis and demand coming from national and international NGOs, even though the formal room for criticism may not be entirely inexistent. One respondent interestingly compared the position of NGOs in Rwanda to

[23] This type of ‘prejudicial’ and ‘infantilizing’ interaction between the state (often backed up by the aid system) and the rural population has been well discussed in Uvin (1998).

[24] Cordaid (2005: 16) highlights the disincentive ‘fear of reprisal’ has upon potentially independent actors of M&E demand and supply.

[25] LDGL (Ligue des Droits de l’Homme dans la région de Grands Lacs) criticised the latest (2006) local elections (see LDGL, 2006a, 2006b) and was therefore accused to be an organisation acting for those who wanted to jeopardise the local elections.

[26] See NIS (2006) for an account of the wealth differences among the capital and the countryside.

the well-known image of chicken transported to the African markets, legs tied together. Upon arrival its owner can easily untie the legs; the animal will remain in the same, cramped position, unconscious of its regained freedom. Remarkably and indicative of the formal room of manoeuvre that does exist, national and international NGOs have joined forces in commenting on the 2004 APR^[27]. The comments were extremely relevant: no impact analysis of progress on poverty is provided, lack of smart indicators, the problem of the choice of the international language in Rwanda (English-French^[28]), lack of considering impacts on the poor of *prima facie* pro-environment measures^[29] and finally the governance discussion in the APR-report is not considered useful. The central message of questioning the pro-poor character of the PRSP policy does not seem to have made it to the central level. The civil society report was not taken up or embraced by the international community, which could have taken these legitimate concerns forward. Unfortunately enough this event seems to be only one symptom of the non-supportive donor behaviour for potentially critical voices. Delays in NGO report releases are e.g. rarely protested against. Critical reports are most often released with substantial delays or personnel being intimidated^[30]. By the time reports get out, interests have often waned and criticisms are presented as outdated. This is of course completely undermining M&E efforts even for international NGOs. In conclusion, the Rwandan opportunity structure does not really encourage civil society to take up the cheerleader mandate.

3.2.5. Donor community

Hope for strong M&E cheerleadership therefore must be vested in the international donor community. Donors indeed create demand for M&E. In first instance, demand is created on the basis of donor needs and donor accountability to its own constituencies. Only in second and limited instance, donors create demand for iterative learning processes of the partner country. At this stage, the particular constellation of donors present in Rwanda and their division deserves to be briefly clarified (see below for a more detailed discussion). Aid is marked by politics in Rwanda due to the national and regional context and the political and governance conditions in the country on which bi-lateral donors continue to have divergent opinions (see e.g. Purcell et al., 2006; Uvin, 2001). This has led to a major split between donors with on the one hand the like-minded donors giving general budget support (EC, UK, Sweden, WB and the African Development Bank) and on the other hand the non-budget support group. In general, members of the latter are more critical about the political evolutions in the country^[31] and the region^[32]; they adhere to 'older' types of instruments, ranging from limited project interventions to technical

[27] The comments produced and communicated to the GoR are based on meetings attended by 13 international and national organisations: CCOAIB, ADTS, CESTRAR, Centre Iwacu, CAURWA, Profemme Twese Hamwe, Trocaire, CARE International, AVSI, Concern World Wide, Oxfam GB, NPA and Africare (X, 2005).

[28] There is a serious language shift in Rwanda, in favour of English (spoken by the returnees) at the detriment of French as a second international language after Kinyarwanda which is spoken throughout the territory, if not by some returnees. This language bias prevents the largest part of the population and civil society to participate and even to stay informed. In fact, NGO staff and intellectuals up to the 1994 genocide used French as their second language. The important Anglophone donors reinforce this language bias, which eventually works (undeliberately) at the disadvantage of the poor (see also Kanyarukiga et al., 2006: 14, 41-42; Browne, 2007).

[29] Measures that have partly been justified on environmental grounds include the land reform policy (see Pottier, 2006: 520) and the abolishment of brickyards, a practice that is overwhelmingly dominated by the Twa, an ethnic group that is marginalised and has little experience with alternative economic activities.

[30] Some international NGOs (present in Rwanda) such as PRI (Penal Reform International) and ASF (Advocats Sans Frontières) have produced critical reports about the progress of *gacaca*; Swiss Peace brought out a critical piece on land. Yet these reports were never published or diffused without problems.

[31] Such as the poor human rights record, the extremely limited room for freedom of speech, the silencing of opposition, the (ab)use of the notion of divisionism etcetera.

[32] Such as Rwanda's involvement in the war in Congo.

assistance at sector level. Depending upon the type of support, donors create different types of M&E demand. This implies that they can play different roles in cheerleading M&E. Important non-budget donors are Belgium^[33], Germany, the Netherlands, USAID, Japan and Canada. Among them there are some minor variations in the use of the national M&E system. Some donors use CEPEX to a limited extent to monitor their projects – at times it is only seen as a reporting obligation, whereas others (e.g. USAID) do not use that national mechanism at all (see Amis et al., 2005; OECD/DAC, 2007). These donors all (even if to varying degrees) continue performing their own project or programme evaluations. They use that information, both for their own learning (it provides input for new projects and initiatives), and for their accountability to the home parliaments. This manner of conducting M&E is not in line with the Paris Declaration on Harmonisation and Alignment. M&E in the education sector is an exception to such one-sided donor M&E that has no clear connection to national systems. As will be demonstrated below, the education sector is most advanced in terms of M&E in Rwanda and several Joint Sector Reviews (JSR) have taken place. Under the strong leadership of DFID (budget support donor), non-budget support donors start to use these JSR in the education sector for their own M&E purposes, but that process has only just begun. In general, non-budget support donors are reluctant to use national M&E due to its poor quality, reliability and independence. By the same token, they don't provide many incentives and demands for a strong national M&E system. While changes are discernable, they are predominantly driven by learning and accountability questions that are directly related to their own interventions and they still do not feed back potentially interesting information into national M&E systems. Their desire to satisfy their own M&E demands makes them oblivious to the need to also build a nationally integrated M&E system.

Budget support donors embrace the logic of strengthening the national system and this makes them potential cheerleaders for a strong national M&E system. The paradox though is that, while Dfid, one of the most important BS donors, has invested a lot in building an education sector M&E system it has not given similar support to the elaboration of the overall central M&E system (see also Kanyarukiga et al., 2006: 41). Some donors indeed gave some technical assistance to MINECOFIN (Belgium, WB, Dfid) without however taking the national M&E cause really forward. Unlike in many other countries, there is for example no working group on M&E^[34]. The Development Partnership Framework^[35] is so far not focusing on a harmonised approach to M&E, even though this could be a huge step forward in harmonisation and alignment and cut back the M&E burden.

Indeed, as the political opportunity structure indicates, donors have their own interests in the partner country. These should not be hidden, but managed jointly with national needs for learning and accountability in order to reinforce M&E demand and supply. The accountability and learning needs of donors and the partner country need not be conceived of as

[33] The situation is gradually changing in the case of Belgium as it is increasingly moving towards sectoral budget support. Over the period 2006-2007 it has disbursed about 3.5 million € in the Joint Education Sector Support Program (JESS) and from 2008 onwards it plans to support both the educational and health sector through SBS (for an amount of 8 million € each). Belgium will also become the lead donor in the health sector.

[34] In other countries (e.g. Ethiopia) such working groups do exist, often chaired by UNDP. UNDP also often takes the lead in M&E capacity building. However, it does not do so in Rwanda.

[35] Rwanda is a harmonisation pilot for both the SPA and IMF initiatives (see for more information www.aidharmonisation.org). Donors have been regrouped under the 'Development Partners'; the GoR and the Development Partners have set up an ACHA (aid coordination and harmonisation) framework. There is a Development Partners Website (www.devpartners.gov.rw) which includes resources and information that may help improving and coordinating development activities.

conflicting, actually they are not. Obviously, if a government does not allow uncensored evidence to be produced – with both generation of positive and negative findings – from the ground and from several actors involved, iterative evidence-based learning and policy-making cannot be expected to function. One cannot but conclude that the lack of cheerleaders and clear demands is a very comfortable situation for the GoR as it limits the risk of unveiling flaws in its national poverty policy or its implementation. Yet, the undermining of M&E has an enormous impact upon the quality of government interventions in terms of relevance, effectiveness and impact and on the sustainability of the new aid paradigm in the long run.

3.3. Decentralisation: reform once again

Decentralisation is considered an instrument to increase effectiveness, accessibility, and accountability. In 2001 an important decentralisation and redrawing of the administrative map of Rwanda took place. The old communes were transformed into larger districts, comprising more and at times other sectors than before. A parallel process at cell level took place. In January 2006 a new reform was implemented. Again the number of districts and sectors was cut back by merging and regrouping old sectors and districts. Further the old eleven provinces were abolished and four new regions formed: the region of the South, the North, the East and the West. The capital of Kigali remains a separate entity. The latest reform caught many donors by surprise (see also Purcell et al., 2006) and some reacted hesitantly. But donor apprehensions cooled off rapidly; indeed decentralisation is a process that is generally encouraged by donors^[36]; why would it not be this time? The government of Rwanda presents the 2006 reform not as a true reform, but only as a step in a continuous process of decentralisation that started in 2001. It argues that this new step will further contribute to bringing services closer to the people (while it actually does the contrary) and, most importantly the administrative staff reform accompanying the process will increase substantially the capacities of the decentralised levels. This reform led to a severe reduction of staff at the ministries (central level) in order to engage them at decentralised level. The amount of money transferred to the districts increased substantially, making the decentralisation more real than before. In addition to the cash, each district was asked to develop a 'performance contract' ("contrats de performance"), a sort of action plan for 2006. These contracts were designed rather quickly and immediately after the local elections of early 2006. President Kagame held a ceremony to make these performance contracts more official and well-known. The GoR argues that nothing but good will spring from this new decentralisation. We argue that, although the increased means of districts are a positive step forward in terms of decentralisation, the process potentially has the side-effect of weakening monitoring and evaluation in Rwanda.

First of all, the 2006 decentralisation may be intended to increase capacities at local level, but in fact it destroyed previous capacity building initiatives at local level. Donors and international NGOs took the 2001 decentralisation at heart and set up several capacity building initiatives^[37]. These previous investments were disrupted and can mostly be considered lost when personnel and structures changed in 2006 (at a time that some of the programmes were still running). The staff transferred from the central level, do at times arrive, at times not. People

[36] See Steiner (2007) for an interesting overview and critical assessment of the relationship among 'decentralisation' and 'poverty reduction'.

[37] Initiatives include e.g. those of the Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden and the Dutch NGO SNV.

are often sent to districts they do not know^[38]. Others refuse to move to remote districts and prefer to look for alternative employment. Further, the large majority of district staff has to hold a university degree. While well-educated staff is laudable, experience deserves not to be completely overruled. In this way all institutional memory at sector and district level is swept out. This has its negative effects upon data collection and analysis (Elkins, 2006: 9). For the moment, M&E at decentralised level is back to its starting point. In line with the new M&E framework presented above local entities are expected to become important links in the M&E chain. The lack of proper vertical integration and clear divisions of responsibilities gives rise to a free M&E discourse as if local entities can organise M&E activities upon whichever issue they wish. The lack of capacity for data collection and particularly analysis in combination with a strong top-down party system leads to a far from free M&E practice at local level. Clearer divisions of tasks and responsibilities are needed to strengthen local M&E. Further, better-defined mandates and operational structures are required to improve vertical integration. Inexperienced personnel, at times unfamiliar with the region, are not enabling such vertical integration. The performance contracts (“contrats de performance”) can hardly be said to be evidence-based policy-making, even more, they incorporate non-realistic goals such as moving from 1% of improved toilets to 100%. The new administrative structure complicated using existing data, as did the time constraints. The question now is how these contracts will be used in the future. The ‘ceremonial’ attention given to these contracts by the President has led to a widespread awareness of their existence. They are said to contribute to the accountability of the local entities. While this may be true in theory, it is doubtful whether such an increased accountability for non-realistic performance contracts is a positive sign to the local entities, in casu the districts. When these contracts become instruments to judge district performance they risk leading to biased M&E at district level and undoubtedly results will be wrapped up more nicely than they nakedly are. When contract performance is evaluated at central level, its unrealistic character provides central authorities the perfect excuse to dismiss whomever they want. In a strong, hierarchical top-down party system as exists in Rwanda, arbitrariness is not to be excluded: the performance contracts risk serving as sham arguments of objectivity and accountability^[39].

Another problem with decentralisation in Rwanda and the increased powers of the districts is the inherent tension that exists between the national poverty reduction strategy (PRSP) and decentralisation^[40]. PRSP sets national targets owned by the central GoR and decentralised entities should work towards those targets. A genuine decentralisation implies entities that set targets themselves; these may not necessarily coincide with those of the national government. The summation of all district priorities does not automatically bring about the national targets. Two ways are possible to solve this tension. Either national target setting is a combination of top-down and bottom-up processes^[41] or it results from a ‘natural symbiosis’

[38] Several interviewees at ministerial level (returnees) acknowledged that they were totally ignorant about the situation outside Kigali. Positively, transference to the district-level might give them an opportunity to get first-hand information on rural realities and understand better rural population’s needs and incentives.

[39] Similarly, Gordillo and Andersson (2004: 310) argue that “in political regimes where incentives to share M&E information with actors outside the immediate sphere are low, M&E information is often used as a mechanism to exert top-down control, monitor and restrain their agents”.

[40] Driscoll and Evans (2005: 11, based on Holmes with Evans, 2003) note that decentralisation initiatives delegating new functions to weak institutions are rarely well integrated with the national PRS or budget process. The Rwandan GBS evaluation also points at “the challenge of making PGBS more relevant to decentralisation” (Purcell et al., 2006: 98).

[41] This is similar to the MTEF process with ceilings and guidelines from the national level but still a lot of room for manoeuvre for the local entities to adapt it to their specific situation. As Williamson and Dukundane (2006:1) put it,

between the central level and the districts. The type of regime can be determinant for the route taken. As discussed above, the participation record in Rwanda is poor. The strong party hierarchy, which can be felt down to the lowest level, facilitates coordination between the national and the local; it happens automatically. This 'natural symbiosis' however also sheds a critical light on the character of decentralisation in Rwanda. A more genuine decentralisation would, again, require a much more formalised system with clear-cut rules and division of responsibilities and systems of mediation in case of conflicting approaches at the various levels. This is completely lacking in Rwanda. The 'natural symbiosis' between the central and decentralised level is problematic in M&E terms as it fundamentally jeopardises independent M&E. When independence is missing, M&E risks becoming a shallow and formalistic exercise, incapable of contributing to sincere evidence-based learning – one of the PRSP cornerstones.

3.4. Best practices in education

The M&E practices in education are rightly referred to as 'best practices' in Rwanda (see e.g. Evans et al., 2006; Hayman, 2007; MINECOFIN, 2006; OECD/DAC, 2007; Purcell et al., 2006). Although the process may not yet be optimal, the progress made the final years is promising. In 2003 a sector plan for education was developed, followed by a corresponding budget plan and a Joint Sector Review at the end of that year. In the 2005 JSR not only expenditures were reported against, but also linkages between the plan, budget and MTEF were established. In 2006 a fourth JSR in education took place (MINEDUC, 2006a). Although linking expenditures to results and outcomes remains problematic, a great evolution has taken place within the sector from 2003 to 2006. Dfid is the lead donor in education and plays an important role in the organisation of the joint sector reviews. The Dfid support to education corresponds to its approach of engaging into programmes that underpin the effectiveness of BS. The GoR remains in the driver's seat of the JSRs, determining the indicators and topics discussed, which is obviously good in terms of ownership. The focus of Dfid assistance lies in getting procedures right and strengthening them. In that regard progress has been made on Key Performance Indicators (KPI). The indicator matrices for education have been revised and improved to move beyond activities to sub-sector achievements. Yet, even after revision, indicators are not fully adhered to and the KPIs are not routinely monitored. The GoR has taken lines of the matrix out and has added others in. The inconsequent use of KPI has curtailed the JSR somewhat to an instrument measuring what is going on, instead of what progress is being made. The ad hoc reporting on indicators still needs to evolve into a continuous and coherent process.

Another field where improvement is still underway is the horizontal integration. MINECOFIN is not truly supporting the education sector in conducting JSRs, the feeding in of the JSRs into the Annual Progress Report (APR) is similarly weak as is the cross-fertilization of good practice in education towards other line ministries.

One of the threats to the current process of JSR in education springs from the divide between GBS donors and non-budget support donors. A crucial element in a JSR is the data used in the review. The wider and more diverse the range of sources and data, the more comprehensive and reliable the review becomes (see also GTZ/BMZ, 2004). Given the larger engagement of BS donors in the process, a lot of project information falls outside the scope of the review. Although the JSR is not restricted to donors providing BS, the open door policy does not seduce

"Marrying a bottom up planning process with top down national sector policies".

many project donors to come fully on board and they are not actively encouraged to do so^[42]. NGO projects face the same threshold. Project information can shed an additional light upon many matters because of the field experience and knowledge they harbour. Moreover projects and programmes may often be considered ‘pilots’, focusing on specific innovative activities or vulnerable groups. Characteristic of BS donors is that they often do not engage any longer at local level, which bars them from local knowledge and implementation realities on the ground^[43]. Furthermore, the Management Information System (MIS) is weak and gives at best a picture of actual users. It does not provide information on the ones that currently remain out. An optimal JSR would thus take all initiatives in the sector on board in order to maximise the exercise (see also Kanyarukiga et al., 2006). Some projects have indeed been taken on board during certain reviews, such as the Belgian School Management project (VVOB). The project has been judged an interesting pilot and school management has now been integrated in the sector plan. Yet, this type of integration seems rather exceptional and depending upon personal linkages and lead donor appreciation of particular projects. Without the systematic integration of project information into sector evaluations and weak government MIS, sector reviews risk becoming somewhat disconnected from the realities in the field (see also the example below). For both budget supporters and non-budget supporters there are incentives towards a better integration. Budget supporters would get reality-checks from the field and information from non-budget supporters would at least be used beyond project level. Participation into the JSR process would provide them increased insight into the sector wherein they are funding particular projects, programmes or target populations. If they gain trust in the process, it could eventually convince them to abandon part of the repetitious and burdensome project M&E exercises and to perform a better ex-ante identification of those M&E activities that are worthwhile beyond the specific project level.

Government ownership over the JSR in education is rightly applauded (see a.o. Purcell et al., 2006); there is a need for a strong lead. Such strong ownership needs of course to coincide with a system of checks and balances without which strong owner- and leadership may derail. As discussed above donors have the highest potential in Rwanda’s POS to provide some sort of checks and balances. Donors are on board within the cluster (sector working group) framework and the JSR; even more, Dfid as the lead donor plays an important role in the process. We observed a sincere concern with the ‘process’, yet it mainly regards rather formal and technical process aspects, while there is a relative neglect of matters of ‘substance’. Substantial concerns in Rwanda regard, more often than not, politically related issues; that is most probably why many donors shy away from them. But ignoring politically sensitive issues in evaluations or reviews fundamentally affects the process to the point that it not only becomes oblivious of political flows but also technically incorrect. The following example illustrates the point we make. Secondary enrolment has been on the rise during the PRSP period (MINEDUC, 2006b), but there is still a large dropout during and after primary education^[44] (World Development Indicators Database, 2006). Yet, little information on the pupils in secondary school is made

[42] Referring to interviews with donor agencies, Hayman (2007: 376) highlights that “smaller donors to the sector, such as France, Belgium and Germany often feel excluded from discussions”.

[43] In their evaluation of the 2000-2005 Dfid Country programme of Rwanda, Kanyarukiga et al. (2006: 41) explicitly indicate “that Dfid Rwanda is very strongly oriented at central agencies; it is distant from other important players in line ministries and local government and insufficiently informed about implementation realities on the ground.”

[44] Net school enrolment at primary education level has gone up from 66% in 1990 to 73% in 2006; the primary completion rate (% of relevant age group) has gone down from 45.3% in 1990 to 37.4% in 2004 (World Development Indicators Database, 2006).

available. Disaggregated information on for example social categories (gender, region, ...) and income quintiles of the students may provide relevant information that can feed into the (secondary) education policy of the GoR. While the JSR does not provide this type of information, disaggregated data – for example for income groups, have been collected during household surveys (EICV). The existing surveys are however largely under-analysed and cross-readings between sectors and these surveys remains marginal so far^[45],^[46] (see also Kanyarukiga et al., 2006: 21).

When crucial information is lacking, it affects the quality and methodological correctness of the review. While certain data are gathered in other surveys – such as the EICV – other, even more politically sensitive information, is not collected at all. Since 1998 a fund for the survivors of the genocide has been called into existence, the FARG^[47] (Fonds d'Assistance aux Rescapés du Génocide). The FARG assists, amongst others, survivors who want to enter secondary school by paying school fees for these children. In the hills of Rwanda, the fund causes discontent, as many non-survivors (Hutu) cannot afford to go to school, whereas survivors (Tutsi) can go to secondary school – thanks to the FARG. The animosity caused by the FARG is well-known to all those living in the country for a while (Rombouts, 2004). Linking the high dropout rate with the FARG seems therefore evident, at the very least interesting. Given Rwanda's history it would be particularly unwise for donors to support an education system that leads to an obvious ethnic bias. The concern over the existing horizontal inequalities (HI)^[48] and how the government is handling them is at least legitimate^[49]. Brown and Stewart (2007) identify at least three instrumental reasons: HI impact negatively on poverty reduction targets, economic efficiency and they can be a source of violent conflict. Yet donors – mainly BS donors – are not convinced. In interviews with the lead donor, this particular issue was dismissed as a minor problem, which will disappear automatically in some years as it is believed that the FARG will be dissolved. Such “minor side issues” do not affect the larger procedural picture they want to focus on. Yet, when this type of information is not integrated and handled upon through corrective policy measures it obviously jeopardises projected outputs (‘increased and particularly indiscriminate access’) and undermines the achievement of goals (‘universal primary (secondary) education’) set by the government itself. Moreover, exclusive education policies will in the long run not lead to inclusive poverty reduction. Uneven access to secondary education affects uneven access to higher education. As the 2006 decentralisation policy determines that almost all staff at decentralised level has to have a university degree this will indirectly impact upon the social administrative structures of the country and its functioning^[50]. The FARG is a sensitive

[45] The 2006 JSR even acknowledged this lacuna and referred to the awaited results of the EICV2. The latter household survey results are available since the beginning of 2007; it is however too soon to assess to what extent the education sector has actually seized on the new opportunities for cross-reading and analysis.

[46] Better alignment between sector and central databases might also aid the elaboration of “results chains” and reduce the problem of ‘missing middle’ indicators.

[47] The information for this specific example is based not only on the 2006 field mission to Rwanda, but on data from the field gathered by one of the authors during previous missions in Rwanda. More details on the FARG and the social problems it causes can be found in H. Rombouts (2004: 395–402). It must be clear that the authors do *not* argue that the FARG would be an unjustified type of assistance to survivors.

[48] Stewart (2006: 2) defines horizontal inequalities (HI) as “(social, economic and political) inequalities among groups with shared identities – identities formed by religion, ethnic ties or racial affiliations, or other salient ways that bind groups of people together”. HI are often an important element behind mobilization for conflict.

[49] Similarly, Hayman (2007: 378) refers to the fact that pro-poor strategies were absent in the draft Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) update for the period 2005–2010.

[50] The easier access of Tutsi children to secondary schooling, and subsequently higher education and participation in Rwanda's economic, social and political life may also add to, what current critics label as a process of increasing ‘Tutsification’ (see Reyntjens, 2004; Uvin, 2001; Wyss, 2006).

subject in Rwandan society because of its direct link to the genocide, and its ethnic overtone – a social reality the GoR officially wants to get rid off and along whose lines no data is disaggregated^[51]. It is absolutely politically incorrect to talk about Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda, even though they remain relevant concepts in Rwandan society. We argue though that shying away from political sensitive issues may lead to false pictures, with nice results at aggregate levels covering up distortions at disaggregated levels (see Ravallion, 2006, 2007; Stewart, 2006). We do however not suggest that donors have to walk around like elephants in a porcelain house. In a country like Rwanda, bluntly ignoring the political context – for example by requesting to list up ethnicities – is not only completely unacceptable; it constitutes a true killing assumption to donor action. In section four, we argue that acceptable ways to tackle ‘political’ sensitive issues do exist. Yet, so far donors were not brave enough to use the room of manoeuvre they do have and are politically indulgent (Browne, 2007; Uvin, 2001).

3.5. Donors’ boomerang play

The international donor group in Rwanda is a divided community with budget supporters and others; friendly donors and others; donors strong in policy dialogue and others; francophone and Anglophone-oriented donors (see also Browne, 2007; Purcell et al., 2006; Uvin, 2001). The donor divide impacts both upon the collaboration among donors and between donors and the GoR.

3.5.1. Leap of faith

For the Rwandan GBS one cannot but conclude that the starting point was a-typical. Providing GBS to Rwanda was a political decision (see also Purcell et al., 2006) and not, as often in other countries, resulting from a gradual process moving from sector support or established sector programmes towards the central level. In Rwanda, strong sector programmes with amongst others established M&E systems were not yet present. Budget support was a leap of faith^[52]; faith in the willingness and competence of the GoR. This leads e.g. to the situation in which the EC conditions for sector budget support – including an ex-ante assessment on seven areas amongst which M&E^[53] – are not yet fulfilled (even not for the education sector) while the EC provides GBS (see also Purcell et al., 2006). This indicates that donors – including GBS donors – are somehow aware of the embryonic stages the sector M&E systems are in.

From the perspective of the GoR, the fact that substantial amounts of general budget support can be generated, even if conditions for sectoral BS are not satisfied, makes investment in evaluative exercises and ‘knowledge’ even more counterproductive. As Pritchett (2002:268) puts it: “if a program can already generate sufficient support to be adequately funded then knowledge is a danger”.

While we do not argue for a rooting of GBS in SBS, we do believe that the political character of the engagement and the a-typical kick off position implies somehow that GBS in Rwanda cannot be applied in the same way as in countries where the sectoral building blocks were present. Neglecting the divergence in take-off positions risks to reduce GBS to a quicksand

[51] The absence of data on groups’ economic, social and political positions is relatively common in countries where the importance of HI is not acknowledged (see Stewart, 2006).

[52] Some authors maintain that some support to Rwanda goes even beyond a leap of faith, see Marriage (2006).

[53] See EC (February 2003) for an overview of the guidelines for support to sector programmes. M&E issues are captured under the 3rd issue (‘MTEF for the sector’, see p. 81-85), within the 4th area (‘accountability and public expenditure management system’, see p. 85-87) and most visibly in the 6th (‘performance monitoring and client consultation mechanism’, see p. 90-93).

operation^[54]; hardly sustainable in the long run. In general, differing conditions at entry need to lead to a different type of GBS and donor involvement, such as better follow up and capacity building at sector level, at the same time stimulating the involvement of central ministries (M&E coordination unit) in this process (in order not to distort the incentives towards alignment to the central level)^[55]. Yet, we found this twin-track approach of involvement at sectoral and central ministry level not to be the case in Rwanda, except for the Dfid involvement in the education sector^[56].

3.5.2. Cracked donor front

An Aid Coordination, Harmonisation and Alignment (ACHA) framework has been developed. MINECOFIN is central to it and the Development Partners Coordination Group (DPCG) functions within this framework. It is the highest-level coordination structure in Rwanda, drawing its membership from government representatives and heads of cooperation in bi- and multilateral agencies (MINECOFIN, 2006). This forum facilitates coordination and harmonisation. Yet, development partners do not share the same vision; there is no donor front (Browne, 2007).

The BS-donor group is strong in Rwanda and non-BS donors consider the flow of information between them and the BS-group very difficult. The BS-donors work a lot together as well as with the Rwandan government – there is a specific Budget Support Harmonisation Group (MINECOFIN, 2006). Non-budget support donors are not involved in WB or IMF missions; they do not formally participate in the Joint Review of Budget Support. No institutional formats exist for exchange of information or reports; personal connections often compensate for this. On the other hand BS-donors are often not aware of programmes, projects or reports from non-BS donors. The type of information both groups receive seems to differ substantially and so does the interpretation given to it. While BS-donors are very lenient towards the GoR, INGO are most often extremely critical, at least behind closed doors, and non-budget support donors feel caught in the middle. The GoR is a strong actor and is indeed often backed – or at least not questioned by the friendly BS donors^[57]. Non-BS-donors feel overruled by this united front. Their critical findings or concerns are often rejected as anecdotic and therefore invalid. Until now, a caricature of projects has often been drawn in a simple juxtaposition of projects and budget support. Obviously, projects can be much richer than the traditional project formats and new aid modalities are no panacea (Booth, 2005: 6). Instead of a dichotomy, a continuum of instruments is available. In addition, projects or more generally local presence may provide grassroot information and insight, imperceptible for Kigali headquarters. Donors indicate that MINALOC wants donors out at local level. Being barred from local and grassroot insight serves of course well a government that aims to uphold the Kigali window dressing. The donor divide strengthens the GoR in its power play up to an unhealthy level. Whereas a strong government is undoubtedly laudable, checks and balances remain crucial. These are currently completely lacking because of the cracks in the donor front.

[54] Sound sector strategies and operational apparatus (planning, budgeting, M&E) are essential for successful implementation and results on the ground, as well as for improving the quality of PRS over time (Driscoll and Evans, 2005).

[55] One way to ensure that different stakeholders are involved in this process is through strong sectoral working groups (see e.g. the case of education).

[56] Kanyarukiga et al. (2006: 39) indicate that the decision of Dfid to engage at sectoral level has generated the allegation of “making a backwards step”. They consider the involvement at the sectoral level beneficial as it o.a. “helps to establish a closer link between resources and result”.

[57] See Marriage (2006) for the case of Dfid.

3.5.3. Hands off “Independence”

One of the issues that is extremely difficult to discuss is the lack of independence. As discussed above independency is highly problematic in Rwanda. The room for independent research, evaluation or monitoring is rather narrow: civil society has its hands tied, institutes are restrained or restrain themselves, local authorities are controlled from above and local participation is often understood as consciousness-raising. This situation hampers the application of the PRSP logic and paradigm that incorporates the need for independent M&E as source for evidence-based learning. A lack of voice and corresponding accountability weakens M&E. Rwanda has jumped into the PRSP process while building a strong civil society and incorporating participation is a slow process. Yet a process approach implies progress and it is undeniable that the key paradigm conditions are still fundamentally problematic at the eve of the second PRSP. When the process conditions are not fulfilled, the process cannot be assumed to unfold well and reach its expected outcomes. The international donor community is ambiguous when it concerns the lack of independence. On the one hand it is fully aware and shares the concern, understanding its undermining effects. On the other hand action is completely lacking. While donors provide funding to NGOs (national and international) and uphold a discourse of ‘furthering an enabling environment’ for civil society, on the ground, in Rwanda, there is not much evidence to this effect^[58]. They also do little cross-reading between the information they get from civil society and their own donor involvement. The EU for example financially supports several NGOs – full stop. There is no follow up of their findings or the difficulties they meet. Some donors explicitly state that the GoR is their partner; therefore they argue they cannot act against it^[59]. They claim that sensitive issues, such as the lack of independency, are discussed with the GoR; they are integrated in the policy dialogue (see e.g. Purcell et al., 2006). As demonstrated below, we strongly believe that sensitive matters cannot be dealt with aggressively or disrespectfully. Yet, when policy dialogue is chosen as the way to deal with it, the effectiveness of the instrument deserves to be followed up. Otherwise the powerful instrument of policy dialogue risks to be reduced to mere discourse. We found donors not to take themselves or the GoR serious enough as such follow up is not undertaken. “Mutual accountability” is one of the new code words in the Memoranda of Understanding. Mutual accountability provides every reason to do serious follow up, also of policy dialogues. One of the strongest capacities of the GoR is its discourse, but practice should tag along discourse. While the GoR finds that aid is made dependent upon too many political conditionalities, nothing seems less true^[60]. Dialogue remains the key word in all donor instances and withdrawal is never seriously considered and this while the overwhelming lack of independence is even affecting donors own room for independent M&E. Memoranda of Understanding of several donors or budget support performance criteria embrace improved democracy and government accountability. But the sole incident that led to a delay of DFID’s disbursement (Piron, L. and de Renzio, P., 2005: 22 and 34) and a delay in renewing Sida’s engagements,

[58] The Belgian Embassy has funded a project of CCOAIB to do PRSP monitoring and evaluation at local level, through the member organisations of CCOAIB. This M&E support for national NGOs is constructive in itself, yet the outcomes run a high risk of being compromised by the complete lack of room for independent M&E. It is almost a killing assumption to the entire enterprise.

[59] In their evaluation of the 2000-2005 Rwanda Country Programme, Kanyarukiga et al. (2006: 41) refer to “some respondents perceiving Dfid as being ‘a close friend of government that does not like civil society’”. Kanyarukiga et al. (2006: vii) indicate that “while Dfid has good access to decision-makers and top-management in government, contacts and relationships with civil society, the private sector and rural settings have been much less well developed”. They consider this “a major challenge to Dfid Rwanda, particularly in a context of decentralised service delivery”.

[60] For example, donors have even “maintained high levels of assistance after it became known that the new regime was actively perpetrating rebellion across the border in the Congo on a scale which went beyond mere self-defence” (Browne, 2007: 17). On the limited enforcement of conditionalities in general, see Mokoro Ltd. (2005).

were the military threats of Rwanda with regard to the DRC in 2004. Serious domestic political concerns – such as disappearances, unlawful detentions, arbitrary arrests, the overruling of the opposition party, false accusations – have never affected aid or disbursements^[61]. This ‘hands off’ policy is largely shared by both budget-support and non-budget-support-donors. For example USAID encountered huge problems with a civic education programme; it was ‘simply’ closed down without any further effect. Donors easily (or voluntarily) downsize their ambitions due to the Rwandan political opportunity structure.

3.5.4. Hands off land

Land is an extremely important topic in Rwanda. The absence of a sound framework at MINITERE to follow up and eventually include evaluative analysis of the new land policy and law is worrisome. Although the new land law is still far from complete, monitoring and evaluative exercises, e.g. type ‘ex-ante Poverty and Social Impact Analysis (PSIA)’ should already be taken on board from the beginning onwards. This is all the more true for a policy of such an importance to the country. After a long period of debate, the new land law^[62] was adopted mid 2005^[63]. However, the land law creates almost as many lacunae as it tries to answer. While some matters, including the land commissions and bureaus which will have important roles in monitoring and reporting, have over time been legislated through decrees, many more decrees will be necessary before adequate implementation is possible and before the rule of law can govern land issues in the country. Not only land shortage, but also the particular history of Rwanda determines the complexity of the land issue. It is intertwined with several waves of refugees leaving and returning to the country, such as during and after the 1994 genocide. Land tenure and entitlements are vigorously debated in the hills of Rwanda. Land tenure is critical for survival, but also for the country’s and individuals’ economic position. The high need, the limited availability and the many alternating holders of land will most certainly lead to conflicts. The question is how many and intense they will be; how they will be channelled and solved. Several awareness-raising campaigns have given local authorities some understanding of the land law, which they seem to have started implementing. Given that many crucial decrees are still lacking, the land law implementation limps along. Since no sound M&E system is elaborated, follow up and evaluation becomes almost impossible at a later stage. Dfid currently runs a project with on the one hand a local study – which has to provide input for the many decrees to be adopted – and on the other hand decree drafters. It is remarkable that Dfid takes, again, the lead in this important domain, while other donors seem surprisingly reluctant. Yet, all donors share the awareness of the importance and delicacy of land in Rwanda. Dfid’s engagement with land is constructive, yet it is doubtful whether such a limited investment of time and energy can adequately address such a complex set of issues.

The combination of a lacking M&E path and the sole involvement of a friendly donor, not too critical of government’s dealing with sensitive issues such as old and new refugees, victims, survivors status^[64], political affiliations or intertwined private and public sectors sheds

[61] The Netherlands included a conditionality with regard to human rights and gacaca: the Netherlands will halt all assistance to the gacaca tribunals when its lay judges will have the competence to pronounce death sentences. Belgium applies a similar, yet non-written, conditionality to its gacaca assistance.

[62] Its full name is the Organic Law determining the use and management of land in Rwanda (N° 08/2005 of July 14th 2005).

[63] It was accepted by parliament on the 14th of July 2005 and published on September 15th 2005 by the Official Gazette of the Republic of Rwanda.

[64] For the social interpretation of these various notions, see Mamdani (2001).

a cumbersome light on the future land policy. These sensitive complexities are unlikely to be mapped when there is no demand to do so. While ‘wrong’ and ‘right’ debates may add little constructively, differing perspectives enrich and strengthen M&E and ultimately policy and practice. Protectorates and fences are unlikely to contribute to evidence-based poverty reduction and inclusive^[65] poverty policies.

Apart from donors, NGOs are also absent as M&E actors (see also Wyss, 2006). LandNet was an active network during the development of the land policy^[66], but it is now paralysed. Its relationship with Minitere seriously deteriorated on the basis of a seemingly disproportionate reaction over the organisation of a conference. Also internally the network has more or less collapsed. For the moment, LandNet is not on top of things, so M&E can hardly be expected from it. This may, again, well serve those who do not want critical voices or watchdogs on the implementation of the land policy.

3.5.5. Hands off!

Not only land and independence are sensitive issues, equally sensitive are arbitrary detentions, accusations of divisionism, disappearances, enrichment of the capital and its elite, inequalities, the genocide, the gacaca tribunals, the (non-)prosecution of RPF members, forged elections, uneven access to resources, abuses of local elites, the solidarity camps^[67] etcetera. Both donors and the GoR prefer not to talk about these issues too loudly. The political opportunity structure of Rwanda is not only about the GoR, but it is – as discussed above – codetermined by the presence of the international community in the country. Donors have their interests too in a partner country. Not only the GoR of Rwanda wants to convince bystanders that it is doing well, donors have a similar stake to display success, the success of the development enterprise. That is what they will be accounted for. From that point of view, the not-too-critical approach becomes understandable. Donors have an interest to demonstrate that things go well (see e.g. Marriage, 2006). Even more, the lack of an open critical approach can be justifiable on the condition that the diplomatic way it is dealt with pays off, at least at some stage. The donor divide reinforces the self-sanctioning of donors in Rwanda. Non-budget support donors feel often marginalized, not taken seriously. This is – understandably – extremely frustrating and somehow they want to become part of the real donor life. Limiting the wind upfront may be a way to at least ease relationships with the high ranked players^[68]. Apart from the institutional point of view of development agencies, individual interest may also play a role in the hands off policy. Unlike NGOs, development agencies have to obey stricter rules of courtesy and diplomacy; inconsiderate jams may be judged unfit for the development career. The tag ‘undiplomatic’ will undoubtedly harm many individual careers within development agencies. Often, the noise made by donors fluctuates highly along the presence or departure of individuals.

[65] See Ansoms and Holvoet (2007) on the degree of gender-responsiveness of the new land policy and related law.

[66] LandNet, created in September 2000 and comprising a mix of local and international NGOs, is the Rwanda chapter of LandNet East Africa (see Palmer, 2000). It has provided inputs, such as diagnostics and analysis of land and poverty, into the dialogue on land policy and law.

[67] These solidarity camps received those released from prison (i.e. those that confessed in the context of the genocide) over a period of two months to facilitate their integration in the community. In these camps people were (re-)educated, amongst others on the history of Rwanda and the genocide. For more see Penal Reform International (2004).

[68] Some of our interviewees indicated that this donor behavior instigates a downward spiral whereby a decreasing political environment goes hand in hand with increasing BS and trust.

Donors will not be able until the end of times to ignore these crucial issues. They will return one day because policies that ignore the thorniest issues in society will not reach the poverty reduction goals. This means that – when the boomerang returns gently – policies will need to be revised. More unpleasant will be the day these issues backfire in the donor face. While donors prefer to stick to the technics of M&E at macro and input level, politics are carving down the limping system from within.

4. ESCAPING THE TRAP

A distinction can be made between economic development and political development. However, instead of representing two clear-cut categories, both should be considered as extremes of a continuum. In between economic development (e.g. macro-economic growth) and political development (multi-party system, open culture of debate) lies a large grey zone of mixed fields; fields where economic and political development are interlinked. Whereas the GoR demonstrates a high willingness when it comes to economic growth, it shows little sincere engagement for political progress. We argue that for the cause of poverty reduction, the ends of the continuum should not be the main focus of development agencies. They should rather try to move to the more challenging but crucial field of ‘in-between’ easy debatable economic growth on the one hand and untouchable political development issues on the other hand^[69]. One of the key issues that reside within the ‘challenging in-between’ area is e.g. the degree of ‘inclusiveness/exclusiveness’ of economic development.

In what follows we argue that ‘smart M&E’ offers a powerful entry point for opening up the ‘in-between’. It however necessitates a broadening of the fairly narrow and shallow approach towards M&E that is currently adopted, which emphasizes monitoring, inputs and data collection, while at the same time largely neglecting evaluative analysis, substance and its political “embeddedness”. In the previous sections we have shown how within this restricted vision upon M&E Rwanda is not doing too badly, on the contrary. Yet, we have also unveiled how the political opportunity structure heavily impinges upon various dimensions of M&E: its institutional set-up, its capacity, the choice of indicators and feedback. While the current ‘narrow’, ‘technocratic’ approach to M&E may be conceived ‘political neutral’ and the only one that is feasible, we have argued that politics are all around. A fragmentary M&E approach risks worsening political constraints and may even put into perspective its overall technical soundness. It strengthens the monopoly of government M&E supply, lowers further down voice and accountability, hides and reinforces flaws in policies, which are particularly pernicious when they perpetuate existing exclusionary practices. Inversely, ‘smart M&E’ acknowledges first and foremost the political and institutional embeddedness of M&E and adheres to the potential leverage of M&E on inclusive poverty reduction and the POS. It fully taps the role M&E could play in exploiting the ‘in-between’, bringing more ‘sensitive’ issues into the bargaining area and unveiling ‘conceptual flaws’. In practice ‘smart M&E’ involves more emphasis on evaluative exercises, disaggregation, triangulation of data sources, the learning function of M&E and changing incentives for ‘independent’ actors at the M&E supply & demand side (lower costs and increasing benefits of data collection, analysis and usage). When assessing a country’s M&E system in the context of alignment efforts, it involves the adoption of diagnosis schemes that move beyond PFM and

[69] Gordillo and Andersson (2004: 318) however argue that “attitudes towards evaluation are unlikely to change without successively strengthening the institutions for equitable political participation and downward accountability”.

data collection and put M&E within the context of a country's political opportunity structure. In what follows we focus on some of these 'smart techniques' and indicate how donors could better use the marginal room they do have.

4.1. The power of Disaggregation and Evaluative Exercises

One of the key issues that reside within the 'in-between' area is the degree of 'inclusiveness/exclusiveness' of economic development. A powerful way to expose and avoid 'exclusive' policies is to disaggregate alongside relevant categories through the entire policy cycle. Disaggregation in impact analysis may e.g. unveil that policies impact differentially upon various groups of individuals. Conversely, categories as 'gender', 'age', 'ethnicity', 'geographical location' also determine take-off positions and the way individuals react to policy incentives. For policies to be effective different take-off positions of individuals need to be mapped and taken into account during policy-making, monitoring and evaluation (Prennushi et al., 2000). Using 'aggregates' instead tends to hide differences and while this may be comfortable in the short run, it unavoidably leads to "ecological fallacy"^[70] and ineffective policies and, it may, in the case of Rwanda, also lead to highly perverse effects.

Which categories are most relevant obviously varies from country to country. According to Prennushi et al. (2000:111) "the decision on the level of disaggregation of indicators is as important as the choice of indicators itself". The categories have to be acceptable of course. Urban-rural, income categories, gender and regions are internationally applied differentiations; it should therefore not be too difficult to include them in Rwandan M&E as well. While it is too early to judge the usage that will be made of the data collected, it is worth mentioning that the latest (December 2006) draft Poverty Update Report includes data disaggregated along these lines. With ethnicity things are different: it is officially banned and it is completely unacceptable to insert questions about ethnicity at the stage of data gathering. This does not mean that it cannot be brought into the picture in a 'smart' and technical way (see also Stewart, 2006). Instead of questioning secondary school children on their ethnicity – which is unacceptable – questions on types and origins of scholarships can hardly be considered unacceptable. This may provide crucial information, not only about the FARG but also about the general accessibility of secondary schools across ethnic groups.

While there is a general tendency in the context of PRSPs and GBS to focus on 'aggregates', there are also, within the realm of PRSPs, new evaluative exercises, such as the Poverty and Social Impact Analysis (PSIA) that aim at examining the likely poverty and social impact of reforms upon different groups in society, particularly focusing on the poor and most vulnerable (see World Bank, 2003). The importance of PSIA cannot be overemphasized in the context of countries that score well on input management and aggregate levels of economic development but that have potentially exclusionary poverty reduction policies and outcomes. Moreover, a principally correct policy can also be ineffective when factors prevent the transition from one level in the causal chain to another. By making the expected results chain explicit, PSIA helps in identifying (potentially killing) assumptions and risks, some of which might be political. This offers an opportunity to bring in the more sensitive political dimensions in the results chain.

[70] The ecological fallacy (a term first used by Robinson, 1950) is a threat to external validity that is often encountered in survey research designs. It consists in thinking that relationships observed for groups also necessarily hold for all individuals belonging to the group.

While the use of PSIA has been on the rise since 2002, including a pilot exercise in Rwanda (see Hanmer and Hendrie, 2002), various sources^[71] have pointed at the need for a more systematic usage and an exploration of the full potentials. In those cases where PSIA has been included, it has been disappointingly weak on social, political and institutional aspects of reforms. Furthermore, participation of local knowledge and experience has so far mainly been limited to data collection. Additionally, there is often a low degree of feedback in terms of information dissemination for accountability and integration of lessons-learned by policy-makers. A more in-depth involvement of the government M&E unit responsible for evaluative poverty analysis as well as local research institutes and local M&E networks in PSIA could contribute to a learning-by-doing capacity building of a country's M&E demand and supply side.

4.2. Emphasize the 'learning' function of M&E

The fundamentals of the new development paradigm deserve to be implemented more rigorously. The principles of results-orientation, iterative learning and evidence-based policy-making are among the pillars of the new framework. Without it, things get rather shaky. Donor practices in Rwanda demonstrate that M&E is more seen as a side obligation, almost an annoyance and not as one of the fundamentals. The negligence of M&E is general however and is reflected in many PRSPs and APRs (see Holvoet and Renard, 2007). M&E is clearly too often considered as a threat, not as a constructive contribution. M&E is about learning and accountability. M&E is of course also a gradual and learning process in itself. This is all the more true in closed political opportunity structures as accountability is almost by definition problematic in these societies. Therefore we argue that in states with a non-enabling political opportunity structure more emphasis could be put on learning instead of on accountability^[72]. However, the temporary downscaling of accountability can only be justified if learning is truly taken serious by all stakeholders involved. Both positive and negative elements are essential for learning. Exclusive effects of policies need to be unveiled. Side effects of well-intended policies have to be identified. Political elements are an integral part of society and need be taken into account when unravelling effects and impacts. Shutting them out will compromise learning for improved policy-making. When necessary, sincere learning has to lead to corrective actions. Therefore it is necessary for donor agencies to use the available room for manoeuvre in a smart way. Political dialogue without minimal standards and follow up fail the test of smartness. Each donor should make an analysis of what is, in the terminology of Bourdieu (1979), in the unreachable "doxa" – the set of taken-for-granted unquestionable assumptions and orthodoxies – but also of what can be pulled out, in which way. This is not only a kick off exercise but should be a continuous process. In Rwanda we observed too high a readiness with donors to accept the vast doxa, encompassing all issues smelling slightly political. By focusing on the forward-looking aspect of M&E in terms of improving policies and poverty reduction, M&E in compromised political opportunity structures may offer new opportunities. Putting the emphasis on learning and evidence-based policy-making would entail a more welcoming attitude towards data and analyses from independent M&E actors that provide insights into what works on the ground and what does not (see also Cordillo and Andersson, 2004: 318), as well as towards efforts of cross-reading between macro and micro-level data. This logical scenario stands in sharp contrast with the actual Rwandan

[71] See among others BMZ/GTZ (2004), Hayes (2005), Gomes and Lawson (2005).

[72] Similarly, Gordillo and Andersson (2004: 318) argue that "for policy lessons to lead to policy actions, evaluations need to be viewed less as a mechanism for control and more as a tool for learning, and public policy needs to be viewed less as final prescriptions and more as experiments".

situation where local analyses by independent sources are often hampered or laughed away as anecdotal and where so far macro-micro-linkages remain under-researched. Whereas donors obviously could play an important role in stimulating the learning function, even to the extent of drawing themselves conclusions from data at hand, it seems that so far they have substantially downscaled the accountability aspect, yet without the necessary compensation in terms of increased learning.

4.3. The power of ‘Diversity’ and ‘Triangulation’

As highlighted by GTZ/BMZ (2005), policy monitoring must be able to become uncomfortable in order to be effective. In order to guard against potential blockades, it is advisable not to rely on a single chain for the supply, analysis and dissemination of information. Furthermore, for the general sake of validity of M&E findings and conclusions, triangulation of data emanating from various sources is essential (see e.g. Cook and Campbell, 1979). In short, there should remain room for counter-analyses and divergent opinions; it is often surprise, critique and divergence that generated knowledge in the past (see also Easterly, 2006).

In the context of a JSR e.g. learning and accountability should be particularly stimulated through cross-reading among various sources of secondary data collection, including those generated by the government and other stakeholders (including donors, beneficiaries, NGOs, research institutes, M&E networks) as well as the confrontation with new rounds of primary data collection. As argued above, cross-reading among sectoral and central government sources could be improved in the Rwandan context. Triangulation of data collected at various levels of a sector intervention is similarly important. In particular, exchange of information from project donors collected at the level of individuals projects (often conceived as experiments or pilot projects) and overall sector data contributes to learning and accountability. Information at the project level provides interesting reality-checks for policy-makers as well as for budget support donors who increasingly focus on the aggregate picture; cut off from local realities on the ground. Conversely, by participating in a JSR, non-BS-donors get access to sectoral performance information and insights into issues at stake at the overall sectoral level, which allows them to contextualise their own project M&E.

In societies with closed POS, donors obviously have an important role in ensuring the presence and effective functioning of multiple channels of supply, analysis and dissemination of information.

4.4. Changing the incentive structure for independent M&E demand and supply

In the era of BS and particularly in societies with a weak political opportunity structure, the added value of independent M&E demand and supply actors and the need to take their contributions at heart, becomes all the more important. When the political opportunity structure does not correspond to the conditions of the new aid paradigm and the ideal circumstance for BS, policies stand high chances to derail. Yet, while BS-donors limit themselves more and more to headquarter offices in capitals, evidence about failures on the ground risks to go unnoticed (see also Kanyarukia et al., 2006). As Booth (2005: 5) points out: “The easy notion that donors only have to back off from demanding accountability for aid funds in order for domestic accountability to flower in its place is unrealistic and unhistorical”. Supporting an enabling environment for independent actors is thus not at all contrary to the partnership idea with the

government, at least not when it is sincerely engaging.

At several instances we highlighted that at this moment independent M&E demand and supply is largely deficient in Rwanda. For civil society organisations, research institutes, the auditor general, M&E networks, parliamentarians, etc. benefits of information generation, analysis and dissemination do not outweigh the costs. Given the features of the current POS, the international donor community is strongest and best placed to tackle problems of independency, access to clean data and analysis, free distribution of research results, etcetera. Donors should put more efforts in guaranteeing the production of reliable data and analysis and support organisations and institutes that could provide them, not with the purpose of creating opposition to power but as critical input to improve policy. This is not only to the interest of donors but also to the interest of the GoR if it is sincerely committed to poverty reduction, not to mention the interest of the Rwandan poor.

Currently, however, donors' support is limited to financial support of NGOs, CBOs or research institutes, even to the extent of disregarding the data and analysis that is provided with the funding. While there is no univocal evidence about the degree to which donors use data from (inter)national independent actors in their decisions about aid allocations, there are cases where donors have been strongly influenced by such data. Information on governance issues provided the Ugandan Debt Network e.g. has fed into the decision of Dfid to cut back its budget support to the Ugandan government (Cordaid, 2005: 31). Obviously, by merely using the data from independent sources, donors already increase benefits for independent M&E supply actors. They could also bring independent actors or at least the outcomes of their analysis in joint M&E exercises, such as the JRs or the JSRs.

Promoting networks among diverse independent M&E actors, and increasing in particular the 'analytical' capacity of local research institutes and NGOs is another means of changing the incentive structure. It is particularly the ownership of 'information analysis' rather than 'information' as such that generates 'power' (see also Robb, 1999). In the Rwandan context, 'twinning'^[73] or the creation of linkages beyond the national boundaries with international experts and research institutes might be another way of increasing the room of manoeuvre.

5. CONCLUSION

The realisation of the new aid paradigm's principles of results-based budgeting and management, iterative learning and evidence-based priority setting and policy-making is dependent upon the effective functioning of systems of information collection, analysis and feedback. Similarly, accountability for poverty reduction, which is central to the PRSP enterprise, is well-served by the establishment of a strong M&E system.

So far however, donors as well as recipients have adopted an overly fragmentary approach to M&E. The focus has overwhelmingly been on the way recipients handle inputs; on monitoring, at the detriment of evaluative analysis; on statistical data collection and methodological issues, at the detriment of the more systemic and institutional issues.

This paper has pointed at the fact that the ignorance of the political embeddedness of a country's M&E system is an important flaw in the PRSP programme theory. The fact that politics are part and parcel of M&E has been acknowledged long before in the context of projects and programme evaluation. One may assume that with the move towards the secto-

[73] 'Twinning' is the creation of collaboration between organisations with similar functions but with different levels of 'development'. See e.g. Cooper (1984) and Jones and Blunt (1999) for a more recent discussion on 'twinning'.

ral and national level, stakeholders and interests are multiplied and politics thus all the more present. Therefore it is evident that the way in which politics influence M&E in the contemporary development paradigm should be high on the research agenda.

While there have recently been some contributions that have pointed at the importance of taking a broader perspective on M&E^[74], so far there has been no research that explicitly identifies and explores the linkages between politics and M&E. This paper aims at filling this gap through combining insights from political theory and M&E theory and practice. The assessment framework established in this paper builds on the concept of Political Opportunity Structure (POS) and furthers the understanding of the relationship between powers and interests and various dimensions of M&E, including its institutional set-up, its capacity, its choice of indicators and its feedback. The central ideas of this paper are illustrated by case-study material from Rwanda, yet findings can be extrapolated to other settings.

The Rwandan case highlights that persistent exclusion and denial of the importance and presence of political issues in M&E risks undermining both M&E's functions of 'accountability' and 'feedback & learning'. While the current narrow and shallow approach towards M&E may be conceived 'political neutral' and the only one that is feasible, we have argued that a 'politics blind' approach may worsen political constraints and eventually even jeopardize M&E's technical soundness. It strengthens the monopoly of government M&E supply, lowers further down voice and accountability, hides and reinforces flaws in policies, which are particularly pernicious when they perpetuate existing exclusionary practices. Conversely, 'smart M&E' acknowledges the political and institutional embeddedness of M&E and adheres to the potential leverage of M&E on inclusive poverty reduction and POS. Smart M&E fully taps the role M&E could play in bringing more sensitive issues into the bargaining area, shifting debates on a more factual basis, unveiling impacts on the ground, disentangling deficient implementation from inherent conceptual flaws in policies, and discriminating between 'doing things right' and 'doing the right things'. Smart M&E at least encompasses more emphasis on evaluative exercises (type PSIA), disaggregation, triangulation of data sources. It underlines the learning function of M&E and seeks to change incentives for 'independent' actors of the M&E supply and demand side. When assessing a country's M&E system in the context of alignment efforts, it involves the adoption of diagnostic schemes (such as the Kusek and Rist readiness assessment or the WB-PREM diagnostic tool 'The Institutional Dimension of PRS Monitoring Systems') that move beyond PFM and data collection and put M&E within the context of a country's POS. It entails more donors that better use the marginal room they do have in the context of new aid modalities. Refraining from doing this may turn the Political Opportunity Structure into a killing assumption to the entire development enterprise under the PRSP framework.

[74] See e.g. Bedi et al. (2006), Kusek and Rist (2004).

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