

## Monitoring Country Visits

### Summary

#### Background

As part of the consultations on the refinement of the monitoring framework of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation (GPEDC), four country visits were undertaken by the OECD-UNDP Joint Support Team (JST). The purpose of these country visits was to obtain feedback on whether the revised framework serves the needs of countries in various contexts and to ensure that the proposed process will be feasible.

To that end, countries were selected to represent a broad diversity in terms of country context, including differences in common effectiveness structures, such as coordination mechanisms and information management systems, financing landscape and region. In chronological order, the countries visited were: Liberia, Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR), Mexico and Belarus.<sup>1</sup> The following is a summary of key findings from these country visits.

#### Overall key Messages

In each country, discussions were held with government officials from various relevant ministries and representatives of development partners, including civil society and the private sector. The proposed refinements to the monitoring framework were welcomed as they will reduce the reporting burden, maintain continuity across reporting years and ensure that the data collected remains relevant and useful. Overall, after reviewing the proposed refinements, partner country governments expressed willingness and readiness to take part in the 2018 monitoring round.

#### *Increased Relevance and Usefulness of the Monitoring Framework*

Government representatives expressed support for the stronger linkages to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the revised framework, as the GPEDC monitoring exercise is increasingly recognised as a valuable source of evidence for national monitoring of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Further, effectiveness is acknowledged as a key driver of

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<sup>1</sup> See GPEDC (2018). [Monitoring 2018: Selection criteria and methodology to carry out country testing](#). Paris/New York: GPEDC.

development results and monitoring progress in enhancing effectiveness is known as a necessary step in advancing in these efforts.

In this vein, governments in all four countries noted the usefulness of monitoring results to support domestic policy reforms and efforts to strengthen capacities to manage development co-operation, both as a recipient in the cases of Liberia, Lao PDR and Belarus, and as a dual-role country in the case of Mexico. Examples of this include establishing or strengthening development co-operation policies and strategies; reinvigorating inclusive, multi-stakeholder coordination structures; and revisiting transparency systems. Discussion of these issues led to important feedback on a number of GPEDC indicators.

Within discussions related to policy frameworks for mutual accountability, target-setting and assessments, the issue of coordination was raised. While all countries visited have formal coordination structures in some form, a common challenge cited was related to the ability of these structures to support open dialogue on development planning, implementation and monitoring & evaluation. Within this context, the GPEDC indicator on mutual accountability (indicator 7) was cited as a fundamental element of the overall monitoring framework. It was therefore suggested that this indicator be further revised to include an additional sub-element on the existence and quality of country-level partner coordination mechanisms.

Within discussion on transparency systems, a common challenge identified was related to limited availability of information on development co-operation at country level. Government-led management information systems (MIS) exist to some degree in all countries visited, providing important information to guide policy decisions and resource allocation. It was recognised that the quality of these systems and capacity to collect, analyse and share data varies from country to country and it was noted that GPEDC generation of evidence on availability of development co-operation information at country level through its indicator on transparency (indicator 4) – currently proposed as a complementary module – could provide an important entry point for dialogue with partners on the use of, and possible support to, country MIS. It was also noted that, for various reasons, information included in global reporting systems is easily usable for partner country governments, providing further rationale for the complementary module.

Specific considerations were raised related to the GPEDC indicators on multi-stakeholder dialogue – those on civil society enabling environment (indicator 2) and public-private dialogue (indicator 3). While most countries are willing and have the capacity to carry out the dialogue required to respond on these indicators, challenges exist. It was noted that in fragile settings, logistical support from partners to facilitate discussions, or otherwise a more flexible approach, may be required. Another challenge is engaging the private sector in these dialogues.

With regards to indicator 2, government representatives indicated a desire to limit the questions to those related to engagement with civil society, removing questions on political issues that may be better addressed through other existing assessments. In contrast, representatives of civil society organisations (CSOs) and development partners supported the inclusion of these sensitive issues. It was acknowledged that using the current approach a credible response will be difficult in closed societies and therefore

approaches to facilitate more accurate and neutral reporting were proposed. Despite these challenges, all stakeholders appreciated the ability of these indicators to provide an entry-point for dialogue.

It was noted that while the refinement of the monitoring framework to ensure its relevance and usefulness is welcomed, there is additional work required to address the concerns of upper middle-income countries (UMICs) with a dual role in development co-operation. With regards to the monitoring framework, this means exploring ways to measure and assess the effectiveness of technical assistance, which is a major component of South-South Co-operation (SSC). With regards to the monitoring process, this means allowing dual role countries to report as deemed relevant for their specific context.

### *Strengthening the Monitoring Process*

With regards to the monitoring process, government representatives highlighted the challenge of mobilising development partner engagement. In general, very few officials representing development partners at country level were aware of the aims of the GPEDC or the monitoring exercise, showing greater familiarity with the principles and survey of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. Nonetheless, following the country visits, a number of partners expressed willingness to engage in and support the process if requested by the government. This indicates that if adequate efforts are made to raise awareness of partners at country level of the monitoring process and its value-added, they will participate and use the results to inform policy dialogue with partner countries.

No other major process challenges were revealed. It was noted that the monitoring guidance and the various means of support provided by the GPEDC during past monitoring rounds were useful and should be retained in the upcoming monitoring round. Requests were made for increased training opportunities for technical staff (in addition to the training provided to national coordinators), step-by-step guidance on managing the process and more user-friendly reporting tools, including the necessity for translation of these tools into other languages. The benefit of in-country workshops to launch the monitoring process was discussed, with many stakeholders voicing the usefulness of these meetings to raise awareness of the process and its importance, including with development partners, as well as to provide an opportunity for discussion of technical aspects of the monitoring exercise.

Finally, the issue of the use of monitoring results at country level was discussed. As noted above, governments representatives noted the usefulness of monitoring results to support efforts to strengthen effectiveness. In this vein, many stakeholders referenced the country monitoring profiles as a welcome addition to the global progress report. However, it was requested that efforts be made to include additional analysis of observed trends and links to possible solutions, in order to make the profiles more actionable. Additionally, it was requested that further guidance be provided on good practices for taking forward the results at country level, drawing on the experience of countries that have done this successfully in the past.

## Liberia

Liberia is a member of the g7+, a group of countries in fragile or conflict-affected situations and is an active member of the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (IDPS). While the Government of Liberia has remained strongly committed to the effectiveness agenda, it was chosen for testing of the monitoring framework to ensure its feasibility in a country with reduced capacity to manage the exercise. Further, it provides an opportunity to explore whether further adaptation of the monitoring framework is necessary to respond to the needs of fragile and conflict-affected countries.

Representatives of the Government of Liberia expressed that they are ready and willing to engage in the upcoming monitoring round, noting that results will support current efforts to, among other things, improve coordination with development partners, strengthen aid management capacity and advance overall on implementation of the SDGs. Ostensibly, there is a sound coordination structure in place in Liberia. There is a Cooperating Partners Group (CPG) that meets to discuss strategic policy issues, as well as a number of Sector Working Groups (SWGs). While feedback from both government and partners on the SWGs was positive, the overarching mechanism does not seem to work in practice. There is also concern over coordination at the sub-national level. As such, it was suggested that it may be useful to include additional questions under the GPEDC mutual accountability indicator (indicator 7) on the quality of coordination mechanisms.

Another effectiveness challenge in the country is access to high-quality data on development co-operation. Given the limited capacity for data collection and management in the country, the government often relies on international data sources. There is an Aid Management Platform (AMP) but partners do not report to this system directly; instead the government provides partners with a template to be completed quarterly. Data is then manually transferred to the AMP. Development partners consulted noted that they do not receive the quarterly reports produced through this process unless requested. It was suggested that collecting information on the availability of country-level development co-operation through the GPEDC transparency indicator (indicator 4) would be useful given this country context and the for data to drive dialogue on development issues.

The government has encouraged partners to conduct an audit of public financial management systems to identify problems areas and provide guidance to the government on steps to take to ensure future use of these country systems. It was suggested to provide an opportunity for partners to explain non-use of country systems as part of the GPEDC use of country systems indicator (indicator 9b).

Government representatives noted that an aid policy is currently being developed. When discussing the policy, it was noted that the co-operation strategies of emerging partners are different than those of traditional donors. Southern partners often provide aid more directly, particularly with regards to infrastructure projects. In these cases, it is only the partner who decides the value of the project, with no way for the government to verify costs. Additionally, some emerging partners, including Arab donors, do not have a presence in country, which was noted as a reason for limited reporting to government on development activities. To address this, it was suggested that it would be useful for the monitoring

framework to be expanded to better respond to the specific circumstances and types of aid provided by emerging providers.

Officials from the national coordinating team noted that regional workshops, webinars and the virtual helpdesk were valuable during the 2016 monitoring round but that additional in-person training, beyond what is provided to the national coordinator, would be helpful. It was noted that during the previous monitoring round, a significant number of questions from other government units and from development partners were received during the data collection phase and that additional training provided to the entire coordinating team would help to ensure accurate and timely responses to these inquiries. Further, logistical support to facilitate multi-stakeholder dialogue was also requested.

Another noted challenge was obtaining timely feedback from development partners and CSOs. It was noted that it would be helpful to have a partner focal point to collect input from these stakeholder groups and to share the overall task of coordinating the process in country.

Government representatives noted that the text included in the country profile was in some cases too strong. Similarly, civil society representatives indicated that the text was too positive with regard to the civil society enabling environment. While the production of profiles is welcomed, there must be a way for country-level stakeholders to provide input into these documents before publication. Additionally, more focus and support related to the use of results was requested, including providing additional analysis in the country profile, as well as guidance on holding a country-level forum to discuss results and a way forward.

### **Lao People's Democratic Republic**

The Government of Lao PDR has been an active member of the GPEDC community, participating in past monitoring rounds, as well as providing extensive feedback on the monitoring framework to ensure its relevance and usefulness. Lao PDR was selected for testing of the monitoring framework to ensure previously received feedback has been addressed.

Implementation of the effectiveness agenda is a political priority in Lao PDR. In 2016, the government and its development partners endorsed a new ten-year framework for development co-operation, the Vientiane Declaration on Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (2016-2015). The Vientiane Declaration is accompanied by a Country Action Plan, which provides specific action areas, indicators and targets, as well as highlighting responsible for partners and data sources. Several of these indicators are drawn from the GPEDC monitoring framework, which is also referenced as a source of evidence in a number of areas.

This reference to the GPEDC monitoring framework highlights its relevance at country level, a message that was reiterated by government officials. However, despite the localisation of Global Partnership monitoring framework and exercise, it was noted that the planned timing of this round posed challenges. It was suggested that it may be beneficial to have more flexible timing for Global Partnership monitoring,

including not requiring all countries to report in the same year but rather on a rotating basis, which will allow countries to better integrate the monitoring exercise with existing national processes, as well as benefit from greater attention and support from the Joint Support Team

Also related to process, it was noted that a key challenge during the 2016 monitoring round was mobilising the participation of development partners. It was requested that additional assistance from the Global Partnership be provided to encourage partners at the headquarters level to reach out to their country level presences in advance of the monitoring round. It was also noted that it would be helpful if each partner designated a single focal point for the exercise to participate in data collection and coordination throughout the process.

With regards to guidance and training, it was requested that step-by-step guidance on managing the process be provided. While the appeal of regional training events was understood, it was noted that because these events include only one representative for each participating country, it was often difficult to ensure all officials involved in the data collection were adequately prepared to fulfil their role. It was suggested that to ensure relevant political buy-in for the process – from both government and partners – and to ensure the technical aspects of the exercise are understood, one-day training workshops in country would provide substantially more benefit.

To ensure appropriate follow-up on the results of the monitoring exercise, including facilitating dialogue on addressing remaining challenges, it was suggested that the country profiles, which are a welcome addition to the global progress report, provide increased analysis of trends and, if possible, an indication of solutions that have been implemented.

Representatives of civil society in the country noted challenges in the operating environment and the limited reflection of these obstacles in the monitoring results because data collection for the GPEDC civil society indicator (indicator 2) is led by government. While partners have an opportunity to respond to government responses, given that these relationships can sometimes be strained, this does not provide an adequate way to engage on this issue. It was requested that CSOs be able to respond to the questionnaire and submit it to the GPEDC independently. While scores for government and civil society would often be different, the scale of difference may give an important indication of the realities of the operating environment.

Discussion with private sector representatives confirmed that the GPEDC private sector engagement indicator (indicator 3) reflects key aspects of the public-private relationship, including the scope of the dialogue, inclusiveness, balanced participation and results. However, it was noted that a significant challenge in the area of private sector engagement is varied capacity across government ministries. As such, it was suggested that additional data be collected on which sector ministries are more able to engage with the private sector. Private sector representatives also noted that, while they are invited to participate in government development planning processes, this space has provided limited room for open dialogue. Given this constraint, it was suggested that assessing the quality of participation in partner coordination mechanisms be further assessed.

In line with the strong focus on effectiveness in the country, government officials noted that the GPEDC mutual accountability indicator (indicator 7) should be given increased prominence in the framework, making it a cornerstone of the monitoring process. It was suggested that the indicator methodology could be further enhanced by assessing the existence and quality of coordination mechanisms that support a country's mutual accountability framework.

It was noted by government representatives that the link between the GPEDC gender indicator (indicator 8) and effectiveness was not clear. With regards to gender, it was suggested that the GPEDC explore how to better mainstream gender throughout the monitoring framework, where relevant.

Independent of a specific indicator discussion, it was noted that participation in the 2016 monitoring round included mostly traditional development partners. Given the significant proportion of co-operation received in Lao PDR from emerging providers in the region, including China, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam, it was suggested that the GPEDC explore ways in which to capture SSC in the framework, as well as ways in which to incentivise the participation of these partners.

## **Mexico**

Mexico is an UMIC with a dual role in development cooperation. The country provides co-operation, primarily through technical assistance, to many countries in the Latin America and Caribbean region. During the 2016 monitoring round, Mexico undertook a customised monitoring exercise that better responded to its needs. Given efforts to ensure the monitoring framework is relevant for all country contexts, Mexico was selected for testing to determine how refinements have responded to its concerns.

The GPEDC monitoring exercise is recognised by the Government of Mexico as a vital component of its national SDG reporting exercise. While the government is committed to undertaking an adapted version of the monitoring exercise as part of the 2018 round, discussions indicated that the GPEDC monitoring framework is still not entirely relevant for the Mexican context. Specifically, in reviewing the refined monitoring framework with government representatives, it was noted that the relevance of indicators to the Mexican context is uneven.

From a recipient perspective, indicators that refer to traditional official development assistance effectiveness issues – those related to predictability, use of country systems and untied aid – are becoming less relevant. However, indicators related to the effectiveness of development generally – those related alignment and multi-stakeholder engagement – are increasingly important. From a provider perspective, it was noted that technical assistance, which is the largest portion of SSC, is poorly captured by the current indicator methodologies. This indicates that a customised approach to GPEDC monitoring in UMIC countries with a dual role in development co-operation is needed. The monitoring guidance should therefore be adjusted to explicitly allow dual-role countries to participate in the monitoring process in a way that reflects the distinct provider-recipient context.

In light of these challenges, follow-up, to be undertaken with the support of the JST, will determine which GPEDC indicators will be monitored by Mexico as part of the 2018 round. Through this exercise, an indication will also be given on which indicators are deemed most relevant for UMICs that have a dual role in development co-operation. This information will serve as a starting point for the development of a proposal on the measurement of the effectiveness of SSC.

## **Belarus**

Belarus is an UMIC with an evolving development co-operation landscape. While the country is advanced in many areas, it still faces a number of persistent effectiveness challenges. It was selected as test country to serve as an example of relevance of the monitoring framework for UMICs participating in the monitoring exercise as a recipient country.

The Government of Belarus is strongly committed to the GPEDC monitoring exercise at both the political and technical levels. After reflection on the 2016 monitoring process, it was noted that there were no major issues that would prohibit participation in future monitoring rounds, specifically remarking that the monitoring guidance provided in the past was clear and easy to follow. However, the user-friendly questionnaires proposed for the 2018 monitoring round were welcomed as a way to further ease the process and reduce the overall time commitment required.

With regards to the content of the monitoring framework, development partners in Belarus raised issues with the use of indicators drawn from country-owned results frameworks, specifically citing challenges with involvement in government planning processes and the quality of government indicators. Another notable issue related to the use of government indicators was the attribution of results, with development partners concerned that multiple stakeholders claiming progress towards identical indicators would jeopardise the credibility of their reporting.

Another key issue area discussed was related to monitoring of the civil society enabling environment in the country. While the government highlighted an effective environment in which civil society can engage and participate in national development processes, development partners, including representatives of civil society, disagreed with this portrayal. It was noted that CSOs can only officially operate following registration with the government and that organisations working in more contentious issue areas may be restricted from registration and therefore can only work informally. Further, all funding for CSOs is allocated by the government. As such, the involvement of organisations working with government support in national development processes is strong. However, for many other organisations, significant challenges remain in this area. Within this context, development partners were hesitant to endorse the GPEDC civil society indicator (indicator 2) if it could not provide an accurate representation of the challenges faced in this area.

A key process challenge noted was the significant difficulty in mobilising development partners to participate in the monitoring process. It was requested that the GPEDC provide coordination support in reaching out to development partners, as well as in providing guidance and sensitisation tools to incentivise various stakeholder groups to engage in the effectiveness agenda.

A second process challenge raised was not having the monitoring materials translated into Russian. To participate in the 2016 monitoring round, the national coordinating team translated questionnaires into Russian before sharing with relevant government officials and then translated received responses into English before final submission. This made the process lengthy, costly and cumbersome. It was therefore strongly suggested that the GPEDC provide reporting tools, and if possible guidance, translated into the official UN languages used by countries participating in the monitoring exercise.