PARLIAMENT SUPPORT PROJECT

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Performance Monitoring Plan Design:

A Retrospective Analysis

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Background

The Parliamentary Support Project supports USAID's Strategic Objective 13: "Improved Government Responsiveness to Citizens."[1] More specifically, the Project has been carrying out Intermediate Result 13.1: "National Enabling Environment Improved: Strengthening Parliamentary Process." The Project was designed to fulfill this task by assisting the Parliament in three areas (or "sub-IRs"):

- Sub-IR 13.1.1: Parliamentary committees strengthened (*Volet* A);
- Sub-IR 13.1.2: Specialized budget expertise developed within parliament (*Volet* B);
- Sub-IR 13.1.3: Advocacy efforts before parliament strengthened (*Volet* C).

The sub-IRs constitute what the Project refers to as "*volets*," each of which features 3 or 4 "performance indicators" intended to help evaluate the progress made by the Project in the target areas. Performance indicators are calculated and reported in the Performance Monitoring Plan (PMP), which is appended to the Project's annual reports. A fourth *volet*, "Volet D: Cross-Cutting Activities," was also adopted by the Project as a catch-all for its efforts to improve the parliamentary institution. No indicators were developed for Volet D, which includes cross-cutting infrastructure support, and it is not monitored in the PMP,[2] but its activities are reported in each quarterly and annual report.

The Project's PMP indicators read as follows:

Volet A: Parliamentary Committees Strengthened

A-1: Increase in the number of substantive voted amendments in the four target committees

- **A-2:** Increase in the number and quality of bills proposed by MPs.
- **A-3:** Improvements in the structure and form of committee reports

[1] See USAID/Morocco. "Strategic Objective 13: *Improved Government Responsiveness to Citizens."* September 30, 2008.

[2] The nature of the activities undertaken in this *volet* are not conducive to assessment through a tool like a PMP, as most activities involve providing equipment.

Volet B: Specialized Budget Expertise Developed Within Parliament

- **B-4:** Increase in the number of parliamentary staff (including interns) with specialized budgetary skills and responsibilities.
- **B-5:** Increase in the number of recorded requests by the Finance Committees in both chambers for specialized information pertaining to the budget process, the fiscal impact of legislation, or executive oversight.
- **B-6:** Increase in the number of committee initiatives designed to conduct oversight on the government on budgetary and financial issues.
- **B-7:** Increase in the number of adopted amendments to the budget bill.

Volet C: Advocacy Efforts Before Parliament Strengthened

- **C-8:** Increases in the number of parliamentary advocacy initiatives by targeted CSOs.
- **C-9:** Percent increase in the "Index of CSO Perceptions of Parliamentary Interactions."
- **C-10:** Increase in the "Index of CSO Advocacy Capacity."

Introduction

- The PMP is an important mechanism for determining project performance. Often maligned in the field of democracy and governance (DG) because of its simplified quantifications of complex phenomena, PMPs offer what can be some of the only quantitative evidence to support changes that can be seen and felt in the behavior of a target constituency. In turn, this data can help justify the efforts of program implementers. Performance indicators may only describe a particular aspect of a broader trend, but they offer essential support for developments – or the lack thereof – that can be elusive.

- Several design issues, many of which are particularly common to PMPs in the DG sector, provide formidable challenges to the creation of indicators that demonstrate the causal linkage between a project's work and changes in its implementation environment. In the case of DG, as USAID's *Handbook of Democracy and Governance Program Indicators* states, "Perhaps because a democracy… is composed of dynamic processes which are highly variable, it is a difficult concept to dissect and determine the causes behind it."[3] Moreover, projects that attempt to influence such dynamic processes do so in partnership with other local and international organizations and institutions. As a consequence, attributing causality for changes in, say, a parliament's behavior to a project is a precarious task.

[3] USAID. 1998. "Handbook of Democracy and Governance Program Indicators," p. 3. Available at: http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/democracy_and_governance/publications/dgtpindx.html

- Still, performance monitoring is an essential element of any project, as it can help improve project effectiveness and provide a means of ensuring accountability. The information reported in indicators can also offer insight into the processes at work in an implementation environment, and provide important color to implementers' initiatives. Used responsibly, a PMP can describe selected pieces of a project's relationship with its environment, project implementation, and provide the analyst with enough information to permit her to make her own determinations as to the question of attribution.

- Apart from the issue of causality, PMP indicators must be selected with consideration for the context in which they are to be used. As in any experiment, hypotheses must be designed to target the intended constituencies and exclude intervening variables that could challenge our capacity to interpret the data. However, the availability of information may change from environment to environment and can place an important constraint on the type and scope of indicators that can be used. Indicators must also be collectable, and consistently so over time.

The Project's Indicators

- The Project's PMP indicators offer several potentially valuable statistics about the performance of the Project and of the Moroccan Parliament. These include indicators related to the number of bill proposals by members of Parliament (MPs) (A-2), the quantity of amendments to the yearly budget (B-6), and the number of committee oversight initiatives (B-6). Moreover, indicators that assess the quality of bill proposals by MPs (A-2) and the quality of committee reports (A-3) offer further insight into the Parliament's progress. Indexes of civil society organizations' (CSOs) perceptions of parliamentary interactions (C-9) and CSOs' advocacy capacity provide further information about the dynamics between these two crucial parts of the Moroccan political system. Given the opacity of the Moroccan Parliament, particularly when the Project was launched in 2005, most of the indicators are reasonably selected and offer as good an indication as any of the development of the institution during the period under consideration.

Describing Parliamentary Outputs

- The PMP is less successful at describing the Project's own contributions to the developments in parliamentary performance. In fact, the PMP is largely limited to describing the Parliament's outputs for *volet*s A and B. For *volet* C, the PMP describes the outputs and perceptions of CSOs. Yet, for all the *volets*, that the Project's inputs were sufficient to affect the outcome tested is always assumed in the hypotheses informing the indicators. For instance, the Project held a number of trainings that could lead to the improvements in the quality of legislative products (A-2) and committee reports (A-3), but information related to these trainings is not mentioned on the PMP.

- While in most instances such assumptions are not unfounded, they provide little sense of the scope of the Project's influence on the indicated results.[4] This is particularly troublesome because Project documents provide little insight into intervening, or confounding, variables that could simultaneously affect the reported statistics. Indicator A-1, which tracks the quantity of "substantive amendments" to bills coming before four targeted committees, is a case in point. The Project's inputs – including trainings in legislative drafting, events pertaining to some policy issues discussed before the targeted committees, consulting services, and independent research – could plausibly lead to increasing output of "substantive amendments" by the four committees. However, a host of other influences must also be considered. One such influence is the presentation of highly political bills before one or some of the committees, an infrequent event that can lead to significant increases in MPs' legislative activity.[5] Another is the specter of elections, which can have the reverse effect.[6] As the USAID/Morocco "Data Quality Assessment" recommends in several instances, without knowing more about the Project's inputs and potential confounding factors, our capacity to interpret the data is limited.[7]

Targeting

- For some indicators the intended constituency under observation may differ from the constituency that performs the activity of study in real life. This is the case of indicators A-1 and the first part of A-2, which were intended to show increases in the quantities of legislative products due to increases in committee staff capacity. But legislation is drafted in parliamentary groups. As is supported by

[4] In the case of *volet* C, this problem is prevalent for indicator C-9. Indicators C-8 and C-10 are better associated with the Project because they target CSOs that 1) work with the Project, and 2) would not – in most instances – have made the effort to lobby Parliament without the Project's assistance. However, all of these indicators could have benefited from a greater explanation of the Project's inputs on CSO advocacy.

[5] Aside from the finance bill, which must be ratified by the Finance Committees of both Chambers on a yearly basis, highly contentious bills are more often the exception, rather than the rule. On the occasion that such a bill, like the transportation law, does arrive in a given committee, it can provoke a degree of activity that does not typically characterize that committees' work. Thus, in the first half of FY09, the Project estimates that the Interior Committees made 411 "substantive voted amendments," almost 4-times the number of "substantive voted amendments" proposed by all 4 committees in an entire legislative year. During the FY08 legislative year, the Project estimates that the Interior Committees made 8 "substantive voted amendments."

[6] Because MPs are typically out preparing and campaigning during election season, their attention to legislative work tends to recede during these times.

[7] Other documents describing PMP strategy and methodology are similarly lacking in this area. MSI's "Data Quality Assessment Report" suggested that indicator A-1 "should be reported with a brief contextual analysis from the point of the view of the project," but MSI still suggested that the indicator measures the Project's contribution (p. 39). It is not clear how the MSI team made this judgment and I am not convinced that this indicator tells us very much about the Project.

Donna Merrill's 2005 consultancy and the analyst's own interviews, committee staffers play a very limited role in this area. Although these indicators could tell us something about the Parliament's level of activity and Project trainings (the Project trained parliamentary group staff and some MPs in areas that could affect these indicators), they give credit to the wrong constituencies.

Hypothesis Variation[8]

- In each of indicators A-1, the first part of A-2, and B-7, the same hypothesis is tested, specifically: that increasing the capacities of parliamentary staffers will lead to an increase in the quantity of some type of legislative product.[9] While the product type and specific target group may change slightly, the fundamental logic remains the same. If we accept the premise that improved capacities in the targeted groups should lead to an increasing quantity of legislative products, there is no reason to believe that the hypothesis, if accepted for one of these indicators, should not be accepted for all. Rather than repeating this test three times, perhaps another relationship or two could have been tested.[10]

Sampling

- The use of sampling is another area in which greater precision in data collection methods would lead to improvements in the indicators. Sampling was to be used in indicators A-2 and A-3 to select law proposals by MPs and committee reports for quality analyses. Because the population sizes of bill proposals and committee reports are too small to warrant random sampling, consistent and objective criteria for determining which products to analyze should have been established.

Hypothesis Complexity, Imprecise Definitions, & Their Impact on Data Collection

- The most common problem found in the Project's PMP indicators is the testing of complex hypotheses that feature imprecise or loosely worded definitions. For some indicators, this appears

[8] It is possible that this repetition occurred due to difficulties in finding other reliable outputs to test, but the analyst has not found documentation to support this theory.

[9] The target groups and product types for each of these indicators are as follows:

A-1: "voted amendments" by 4 "target" committees, which include the Interior and Finance Committees in both Chambers of Parliament;

A-2: MPs and staffers involved in legislative writing;

B-7: Amendments adopted to the budget bill. Although not explicitly stated in the indicator itself, Project documents suggest that the target groups are the Finance Committees in both Chambers of Parliament.

[10] Indicator B-7 relating to the budget bill, is the best of these 3 indicators. It is a yearly bill, so apples are compared to apples each year. Moreover, the Project has provided numerous inputs – trainings, independent research, the BAB – into this area. Although confounding variables exist, it is more likely that the Project would have affected this indicator than the others.

to be due to the desire of PMP designers to demonstrate the Project's impact by describing parliamentary and CSO outputs. For others, the temptation to explain the full scope of a result, as opposed to testing a more precise *indicator* of the result, seems to have contributed. In either case, the consequence is that the complexity of these indicators' definitions obscures our ability to interpret the reported statistics. For most of the indicators, this problem is also manifest in imprecise data collection methods. Indicators B-4 and B-7 are explained in longer form, while the basic issues with B-5, B-6, C-8, and C-9 are more briefly explained.

- ***B-4: Increase in the number of parliamentary staff (including interns) with specialized budgetary skills and responsibilities.***

Parliamentary staff and interns with "specialized budgetary skills and responsibilities" are defined as: "[staffers and interns] that have received training on budgetary issues, and/or staff having a significant role in providing research and analysis on the budgetary process or the fiscal impact of legislation."[11] The idea being tested is that "An increase in parliamentary staff, including interns, with specialized budgetary responsibilities will indicate that 1) Parliament is committed to developing internal resources for the budgetary and financial analysis, and 2) that Parliament has access to increased capacity for conducting budgetary and financial oversight."[12]

The complexity of this indicator poses an important challenge to its interpretation as an increase in the indicator leaves open 3 possible explanations: that more staffers were trained, that more staffers were given budgetary responsibilities, or that both events occurred. Without more precise information, one cannot determine which result to accept. If an increase in the number of staffers is due only to training, one would suppose that the Parliament has better access to budgetary capacity. However, if an increase in this indicator were due to an increase in staff with budget responsibilities, one might argue that the Parliament's increasing "commitment" is shown. Nor is it unreasonable to suggest that both results have occurred.

This point might come across as being 'nitpicky,' but the problematic demonstrated here is important given the data collection methods used in conjunction with the analyst's experiences working with the Moroccan Parliament. Just how much "training on budgetary issues" a staffer must have in order to be counted in the reported statistic is not defined. Determining which staffers have budgetary "responsibilities" is more easily done in theory than in practice. Project staffers are supposed to collect the data by "interviewing committee clerks," which can allow for the intrusion of inconsistencies in the

[11] USAID SO 13, p. A-32. It should be noted that the indicator uses different terminology than is used on the Project's PMP, as it excludes the term "skills." In fact, the researcher has not found a SUNY or USAID document that provides a definition for the indicator language that is used at present. However, because the idea of the term "skills" is included in this definition, the researcher has decided to use it.
[12] Ibid.

standards employed and the innocent bending of those standards by Project or parliamentary staff to improve results. Moreover, the data cannot be independently verified without going back to the committee clerks, who are unlikely to be able to retrospectively confirm the data. Given that, as discussed in my paper on the Moroccan Parliament in comparison to the IPU Indicators, the Parliament has not embraced many of the opportunities provided by the Project and the UNDP to advance its work in this and other policy areas, caution is justified in trying to interpret the Parliament's level of "commitment."[13] Without a more precise hypothesis and data collection procedure, it is difficult to interpret this indicator.

- ***B-7: Increase in the number of adopted amendments to the budget bill.***

Indicator B-7 exemplifies the imprecision in data collection and interpretation that can result from the overstretching of indicators or indicator definitions.[14] The purpose of this indicator is to "measure the Budget and Finance Committee's work to successfully influence the budget making and approval process."[15] Indicator B-7 is one of the Project's more interesting indicators because the budget bill has emerged as the most significant and contested piece of legislation that comes before both Chambers of Parliament on a yearly basis. Consequently, it could be as good and reliable a barometer of changes in the level of effort being put forth in Parliament as any.

However, as written and reported at present, the definition of this indicator does not prevent the inclusion in the data of amendments written and proposed by the Government.[16] To some extent, this appears to contradict the stated purpose of the indicator, as these amendments are not reflective of the work done only by the Finance Committees. Government amendments may reflect an executive imposition as neither committee has ever rejected a Government amendment. Or, they could also reflect the outcome of discussions and negotiations with committee members and other parliamentary leaders and bodies. It is plausible that increasing percentage of amendments adopted to the budget bill each year[17] is a consequence of the more open discussions that are taking place between the Government and Parliament on budget issues. Without a more precise analysis, it is difficult to

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[13] Caution is also warranted because the indicator definition incorporates a list of "responsibilities of the staff within parliament committees" that includes tasks that are not found in Donna Merrill's January 25, 2004 study (Deliverable 03: see page 6) on the role of committee clerks, and remain mostly outside the responsibilities of committee clerks according to my interviews conducted in 2008.

[14] Indicators B-5 and B-6 also exhibit varying degrees of definitional issues of this type.

[15] 2006 Report. (See bibliography for details)

[16] Whether the Government's amendments are included or not, the data still shows more than a doubling of the number of amendments proposed by Parliament, adopted by committee, and adopted to the budget bill.

[17] In the budget bills corresponding to the PMP, 33 percent and 20 percent of amendments passed by the committees, according to data taken from the committee reports, were proposed by the Government in FY08 and FY07, respectively. The Government did not propose any amendments to the budget bill in the baseline year (FY04), but it did in the preceding year.

ascertain if this phenomenon is a positive or negative outcome. As Project staff have suggested, a better way to go about reporting this indicator would be to report both figures.

- ***B-5: Increase in the number of recorded requests by the Finance Committees in both chambers for specialized information pertaining to the budget process, the fiscal impact of legislation, or executive oversight.***

- Definition: The purpose of tracking the "number of recorded requests by the Finance Committees" on budget issues is to "measure whether 'specialized budget expertise is developed within Parliament.'" It assumes that increased capacity will be demonstrated by the Finance Committees' "increasing... demand for more information."[18] This idea is plausible, but Project's inputs are not explained or tested, and other factors affecting the indicator are not discussed.
- Data Collection: The definition of "recorded requests" is seemingly all-inclusive, thus presenting a problem for understanding the significance of the data collected. If MPs are serious about obtaining information, it seems likely that they would ask either an oral or written question to the Ministry responsible.

- ***B-6: Increase in the number of committee initiatives designed to conduct oversight on the government on budgetary and financial issues.***

- Definition: The term "committee" usually refers to the 6 permanent committees in each chamber. However, the definition of "committee initiatives" includes oversight efforts with which these permanent committees have little involvement, such as the formation of fact-finding committees and "calling the Government for a public discussion on a specific issue in a plenary session." Project involvement is plausible for permanent committee initiatives, but less so for others. Explanations would help distill this issue.
- Data Collection: Same as above.

- ***C-8: Increases in the number of parliamentary advocacy initiatives by targeted CSOs.***

- Definition: The inclusion of the term "targeted" in the actual indicator language limits the number of CSOs included to those that are "supported" by the Project. Because many of the CSOs included were unlikely to have performed these initiatives without the Project's support, this indicator is more clearly related to the Project's outputs than the other indicators. Yet, according to its

[18] USAID SO 13, A-34.

definition, the purpose of the indicator is "… to measure CSOs capacity to interact with parliament, and parliamentary responsiveness to the CSOs."[19] Although this indicator may reveal something about the Project's capacity to encourage activity in the form of advocacy initiatives, it is less clear what this indicator would reveal about CSOs' capacities or parliamentary responsiveness. The Project's presence confounds whatever data trends could potentially demonstrate either of these two outcomes.

- Data Collection: "Advocacy initiatives" include: "letters sent to MPs, issue briefs, requests for meetings, roundtables with MPs facilitated by civil society leaders, awareness raising campaigns, media roundtables, establishment of coalitions, and other similar activities."[20] The expansiveness of this definition renders unclear whether a letter sent to an MP to request a meeting is to be counted as one or two "advocacy initiatives." While any increase in contact between CSOs and MPs is positive, in the Moroccan context, a more precise definition of "advocacy initiatives" would have been more revealing of CSO activity. It might have been possible to describe "advocacy campaigns" and treat each "wave" of the campaign – definitions of which can be found in the Social Movements Theory literature – as an "initiative."

➢ ***C-9: Percent increase in the "Index of CSO Perceptions of Parliamentary Interactions."***

- Definition: The indicator definition attempts to add another layer to the objective by suggesting that: "The changes in target CSOs perception… is a good indication on the project's success in supporting CSOs legislative/parliamentary interaction." While this indicator, with support from other quantitative and qualitative data, may help us understand the relationship between CSOs and the Parliament, it is less clear what the indicator's results could reveal about the Project. "Target institutions" are not defined in the indicator definition, but are mentioned in the data gathering instructions on the PMP indicator reference sheets, as are those working with the Project.
- Data Collection: Because "The list of CSOs [included in the index] changes every year," the Project lost the opportunity to measure CSOs' perceptions of Parliament over time. By not including CSOs that stopped working with the Parliament, the index could be discounting CSOs that are displeased with the results achieved by working with Parliament – since they were not polled after their initial funding, we cannot know.

Suggestions

The following suggestions can help inform future efforts to design PMPs in the Moroccan parliamentary context and other contexts:

[19] USAID SO 13, A-37.
[20] USAID SO 13, A-37.

Stating the Variables

- The most prevalent issues outlined in the analysis above have to do with the way data is reported. Each PMP should come with its hypotheses, independent variables, and dependent variables clearly stated. It should also discuss intervening variables that could potentially impact the outcome of a given indicator. While hypotheses are sometimes stated in the footnotes of the Project's PMP, many times they are not stated at all. More detailed information is available in the SUNY 2006 Report and USAID SO 13 Report series, but the PMP is often treated as a standalone document, and is reported as such. Without such information, our capacity to interpret the PMP data is limited. USAID/Morocco's "Data Quality Assessment" similarly recommends that the Project "provide contextual analysis to complement data" multiple times.

- Irrespective of the quantity of our knowledge of a given institution, many lessons are likely to be learned during the implementation process. Incorporating these lessons into the PMP, whether directly on the page or appendices, may provide a more accurate depiction of the institution than the data itself.[21] Moreover, this would give implementers a chance to rebut data that they believe does not accurately portray their efforts.

Making Precise Indicator Definitions

- Because indicators are simply meant to indicate results, and not explain the entire result themselves, it is more useful for an indicator to be precise and exclusive. "Recorded requests" by Finance Committee members (B-5) could be limited to oral and/or written questions asked by Finance Committee members on finance issues. "Committee initiatives" aimed at conducting government oversight (B-6) could be limited to "permanent committees" in order to exclude fact-finding commissions, or it could be changed to "parliamentary initiatives" in order to include these commissions. By trying to capture all of a given phenomenon in single indicator, the data often becomes so distorted and difficult to interpret that it becomes irrelevant.

Grouping the Indicators

- Rather than treating each indicator as an independent piece of information, it could be helpful to treat them as groups. In DG, causality can rarely be demonstrated in a single indicator. A more plausible relationship between the Project's inputs and Parliament's outputs could be described by testing different aspects of the causal chain. For instance, in a given *volet*, one indicator could describe the Project's inputs, while a second could test an expected transaction or outcome, and a third could test an expected parliamentary product. For *volet* B, the indicators could read as such:

[21] The Project uses footnotes to explain some variables, but these are insufficient.

1. Number of MPs and staffers attending Project events on budget and fiscal issues, and average number of MPs and staffers attending Project events (lifetime).
    - This indicator gives us an idea of the size and scope of the Project's reach and whether or not the intended target audience(s) is/are benefiting.
    - In the appendix, the data could be disaggregated further and briefly analyzed.
2. Number of requests for budgetary information by MPs as expressed in oral and written questions.
    - Perhaps this could be limited to MPs on the Finance Committees.
    - If oral and written questions are not available, the indicator could be a count of the number of publically available studies and publically held events on budget matters that feature the Parliament as a primary target.
    - Another potential indicator could be the number of times Ministers are summoned to Parliament to discuss budgetary issues.
3. Number of amendments that are accepted by committee and amended to the yearly budget (disaggregated by those proposed by Parliament and those proposed by Government)
    - More information on why this is a decent indicator can be found on pages 6 and 7 above.

Explain Project Inputs

- Without understanding Project inputs, one cannot determine whether or not the results demonstrated in a PMP are attributable to a project. USAID's DG Indicators Handbook clearly states that indicators are not only to be used for monitoring a project's partners or environment, but that "… [project] managers should have in place the information needed to *monitor their programs* in an on-going fashion and thus make informed management decisions."[22] One underutilized way of gauging the Project's inputs is to make better use of participant lists. Participation lists have not been disaggregated in a manner to allow us to relate training inputs to parliamentary outcomes. In order for us to ascertain if the Project has provided enough inputs to have affected a given outcome, it would be useful to know the scope of involvement by the targeted groups vis-à-vis outcomes.

Examples of possible indicators include:

1. Number of MPs and staffers attending Project events on budget and fiscal issues, and average number of MPs and staffers attending Project events (lifetime).
2. Number of MPs and staffers attending Project events on budget and fiscal issues, number of MPs and staffers attending 3 or more Project events (lifetime), number of MPs and staffers attending 7 or more events (lifetime).
    - Selection of the number of events attended has been done somewhat arbitrary, but the point is to get an idea of the quantity of events targeted constituencies are attending. In

[22] Handbook, p. 9.

this way, a project can also detect which constituencies are more likely to attend events and determine how to appeal to them even more.

3. Average number of hours of trainings and events MPs and staffers attended.
    - Since events and trainings can be different lengths of time, they can be broken down into hours. From there, participation levels can be counted in any number of ways.

- Another way to address project inputs would be to provide a brief introduction to the indicators by *volet*, stating the quantity of products produced by the Project, the level of participation of targeted groups, and any other information that would help define the data provided in the PMP. This way, Projects would not have to waste precious indicator space understanding their own implementation efforts. Such introductions could be standardized in order to compare the inputs of different projects.

Bibliography

The primary documents referred to in order to complete this report include the following:

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