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## **Steering Committee Meeting**

**1–2 July 2003**

**Reference Group Report on the PARIS21 Evaluation by OPM**

## Reference Group Report<sup>1</sup> on the PARIS21 Evaluation by OPM

1. At the meeting held at the World Bank in Washington on March 10, 2003, the Reference Group (RG) selected the Oxford Policy Management Group (OPM) out of a group of three bidders to carry out the PARIS 21 Evaluation. As time for the preparation of the bid was short, and in view of several comments made by the RG, OPM was requested to prepare an approach paper which would outline in more details the methodology to be followed. It was, in particular, requested to address in some detail the issue of the selection of countries and interviewees, noting that it will be important to give relatively more emphasis to those countries that have been involved in PARIS21 for the longest. It was also noted that paragraph 4.3 of the terms of reference asks the consultants to include a review of the governance arrangement for PARIS21, including issue such as location and role of the Secretariat. The approach paper was to indicate how the consultants would propose to address governance issues.
  2. The approach paper was delivered on March 31<sup>st</sup> under the title “Inception Report”. It stated that the evaluation would proceed on the basis of recall-based interviews, regarding changes in thinking and intentions and that “great care has to be taken to reach cautious and objective judgment as to the extent of influence that PARIS21 activity may have had on the apparent changes in thinking and intention.” The selection of countries issue was dealt with through the selection of workshop participants. On-the-ground interviews were envisaged in the following countries: Bolivia, Peru and possibly El Salvador in Latin America, Senegal, Cameroon and possibly Mauritania in Western/Central Africa, and South Africa, Zambia and Kenya in Eastern/Southern Africa. Kenya would be covered by the attendance of an evaluation team member at a meeting of UN ECA’s Committee on Development Information (CODI) in Addis Ababa where Kenya was expected to be well represented. In the case of Asia, it was proposed to email questions to the country teams from two or three countries; emails were also to be sent to additional African countries. Telephone calls could also follow emails in appropriate cases.
  3. The selection of interviewees includes categories other than workshop participants:
    - PARIS21 members from the private and non-governmental sector (email)
    - Regional Bodies with interest in statistics (email)
    - Task team Convenors (face-to-face interviews)
    - Members of the Consortium and of the Steering Committee (past and present) through direct interviews, email or telephone
    - Potential Financial Supporters, mainly by telephone and e-mail
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Two questionnaires were developed for workshop participants, one for policy-makers, and one for statisticians. One questionnaire was developed for each of the other five categories listed above.

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<sup>1</sup> approved as of June 28<sup>th</sup>, 5.30 p.m. (Paris time), by Misha Belkindas, Keith Mackay, Mary Strode, W. Haven North, Hasan Abu-Libdeh, and Pierre Spitz.

The inception paper listed very pertinent questions to be addressed in the evaluation report, under nine headings: relevance – efficiency – effectiveness – initial effects – partnership – sustainability – overall assessment – governance – future directions.

It also provided indicators of “believed actual or incipient impacts on aspects such as the following:

- Increase in government resources devoted to statistics
- Progress in developing strategic plan for statistics
- Better dissemination of existing information
- Stronger producer-use dialogue
- New statistical initiatives to meet PRSP needs
- Improved application of external support
- Trends, if available, in statistical capacity indicators

The Reference Group commended OPM for the excellence of its inception report which captured very well the essential features of PARIS21, the major issues at stake, as well as the way to approach them. The only observation was about the completely open nature of the questions asked in the 7 questionnaires. It was recommended to consider ratings in order to give quantitative support to the analysis.

4. A draft evaluation report was submitted to the RG for review and discussion during a video conference organized on 11<sup>th</sup> June in Paris (at OECD) and linking RG members present in Paris and Washington. The RG made recommendations for improving the report. These comments were partially taken into account in the second draft which has been circulated to the Steering Committee. It is to be regretted that the second draft was sent without a cover note explaining the main changes and that the detailed changes were not made with a software coloring additions and deletions, forcing the reviewers to look out for them para by para and sentence by sentence.

5. It appears, in retrospect, that the TORs, and the inception paper elaborating on them, were too ambitious in relation with the time and resources available to OPM. Confronted with this situation, OPM seems to have made choices to privilege an orientation towards the future, an option certainly useful for the Steering Committee, without fully making the case for the relevance, “uniqueness” and usefulness of PARIS21, as the interviews conducted convinced the evaluators of these characteristics. Such choices might have been unconscious. If they were deliberate it would have been better to make them explicit in the report. The insufficient documentation of the evaluation approach which was actually followed somewhat weakens the reported findings. It also leads to sometimes blurring the line between perceptions of the interviewees and opinions of the evaluators. The evaluation instrument is, in spite of requests from the RG, still not described fully, the reader having to refer to the inception paper which, by its very nature is conjectural. As an example, factual information about which countries have been visited is still missing; the reasons to choose them, as requested by the RG in the March 10 meeting, are not elaborated upon; as far as the selection of interviewees is concerned, it is mentioned that they include members of 7 out of the 19 African delegations which attended PARIS21 first two regional workshops, a selection “constrained by logistic factors”, on which the RG would have liked more explanations as constraints suggest an ideal, which is not described. Three of these countries are said to have had a subsequent substantial contact with PARIS21

while three other countries have had very little further involvement (para 51). This difference is not further exploited in the rest of the text. The RG would have liked also to see a more systematic comparative treatment of the perceptions of producers and users, as well as more details and elaboration on the responses rates said to be ranging from 5 to 75%, while it is left to the reader to get the absolute number of responses from Annex D, by adding manually the e-mail responses (signaled by an E after the name of the persons) and get a sense of the basis on which assessments are built. The total e-mail responses seem to amount only to 35, out of which 5 were complemented by face-to-face interviews and 1 by telephone interview. All this factual information and the attendant analysis could, however, be easily incorporated in the final report along with verbatim comments from persons interviewed in the different categories, eventually with differing opinions. This will not change its main thrust and recommendations but will give them a firmer ground.

6. The RG recommends also to give more attention in the final report to the following issues:

- A fuller elaboration with rationale and implications of the relevance, “uniqueness” and usefulness of PARIS21
- The relative roles of national and regional workshops, as the enthusiasm noted for regional workshop has to be put in perspective, given the generally welcomed opportunities to travel abroad and the constraints to deal with sensitive national issues in a regional meeting
- A more rigorous approach to the M&E of PARIS 21 regional and national workshops, following the WBI approach (participant reactions/participant learning/subsequent utilization of knowledge gained and networks established)
- Statisticians/policy makers relationship,
- itself linked to the level of priority to be given to PRSP countries,
- priority further linked to the trade-off between short-term needs of MDG and PRSP indicators vs. long-term capacity building and to the role of the UN System vis-à-vis PARIS21.
- The evaluation finding that improving ministry MISs should be the primary focus for PRSP countries
- The appropriate balance in PARIS21’s future workplan between technical work and building awareness/demand among users of statistics

7. In spite of its reservations about the lack of sufficient explicit evidence to support the conclusions and recommendations made, the RG expresses its confidence in the report, given the known professionalism of the evaluators, further demonstrated in the Inception Report, even if time and resources have not allowed to fulfill entirely what it promised. As for the recommendations it is to the Steering Committee to review them, the role of the RG being confined to the methodological aspects.