
CHAPTER 9 Mali, Mauritania and São Tomé e Príncipe

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Like many other sub-Saharan African countries, Mali, Mauritania and São Tomé e Príncipe face a huge debt burden that severely constrains their development prospects. The weight imposed by debt servicing drains scarce fiscal resources that could most effectively be devoted to financing programmes to address the vast scale of deprivation affecting a large portion of their population.

By many estimates, these countries are among the world's poorest, a fact that renders their high indebtedness even more poignant. The bulk of their foreign debt is composed of public as well as private debt guaranteed by the state. Servicing this debt makes it virtually impossible to balance the budget or the balance-of-payments account, and leaves very few resources for discretionary spending.

In attempts to meet their debt-servicing obligations while simultaneously addressing national financial needs, the three governments have had to constantly negotiate with their lenders the rescheduling of their debt. Having benefited from the debt reduction measures implemented since 1996 by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Mali, Mauritania and São Tomé are now eligible for debt relief under the enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative, announced at a Group of Seven meeting in Cologne, Germany, in June 1999. Central to the enhanced HIPC Initiative is the requirement that countries prepare a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), which has to be endorsed by the Boards of the Bank and IMF before a debt reduction package can be approved. In addition to preparing a PRSP, countries need to establish a satisfactory track record of economic performance, normally over a period of three years, under the IMF's Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF).

The three countries became eligible for debt relief during 2000: Mauritania was approved in February, Mali in September, and São Tomé in December of that year. In order to qualify for the enhanced HIPC, the government of São Tomé e Príncipe first had to negotiate a three-year lending agreement with the Fund under the terms of its PRGF facility, which was approved in April 2000. By taking advantage of the debt relief conditions set by the enhanced HIPC initiative, Mali, Mauritania and São Tomé should be able to free resources for the financing of development

activities aimed at the reduction of poverty. However, to do so, they first need to have a full strategy in place, with clear and measurable targets as well as mechanisms for monitoring progress towards meeting them.

This chapter examines the experience, results and impact of the Poverty Strategies Initiative (PSI), a programme sponsored by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to assist countries like Mali, Mauritania and São Tomé e Príncipe in the preparation of national strategies and action plans against poverty. The first section presents a general overview of the socio-economic and political situation in each of the countries. Next the activities sponsored by UNDP in these countries are described. Section three analyses the extent to which PSI activities have built indigenous capacity for policy design and implementation. The fourth section examines the processes followed in each country for diagnosing poverty and elaborating policy for addressing it. The chapter concludes by summarising the main results of the PSI projects and suggesting a role for UN agencies in supporting countries in the PRSP exercise.

Social and economic background

Although each country has a markedly different historical legacy, all three share certain similarities that have limited their potential for development and impacted poverty. Despite their huge size, Mali and Mauritania share a harsh climate and physical environment characterised by the encroaching desert, which occupies the bulk of their territory. As a result, they each have an extremely low population density of 7.7 and 2.3 inhabitants per square kilometre, respectively. The archipelago of São Tomé e Príncipe, on the other hand, is characterised by geographic isolation and a high population density of 135 inhabitants per square kilometre.

Apart from their high level of indebtedness, the three countries also have weakly diversified economic bases. Despite its inhospitable land, Mali relies heavily on agriculture, which employs about 80 per cent of the active population and provides 42 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP). Cotton, the lease of cattle and, more recently, gold, provide the backbone of export revenues. Although agriculture and mining also play critical roles in Mauritania, its coastline permits deriving significant wealth from fishing and other maritime activities. However, because wealth is concentrated in the hands of a small elite, high levels of inequality persist. São Tomé, too, depends heavily on agriculture, notably cocoa and coffee production, although fishing, tourism and oil exploitation have also become important.

São Tomé e Príncipe experienced a negative growth rate of -1.1 between 1990 and 1998. Per capita income averages less than US\$270 annually, about one third of the economically active population is unemployed, and almost half of the population lives below the official poverty line of \$220. Mali's average income per capita of US\$250 per year (1998) makes it one of the world's poorest countries.

Between 1990 and 1998, the GNP per capita average annual growth rate was estimated at 0.5 per cent, in part because of the ravages of recurrent civil war, which ended only in 1997, and contributed to the country's high unemployment. In Mauritania, where GNP per capita grew by a mere 1.1 per cent per annum between 1989 and 1999, the unemployment rate was estimated at 23 per cent in 1997 (UNDP 2000).

Given these factors, poverty abounds far beyond income parameters. In Mali, where a staggering 70 per cent of the population lives on less than \$1 per day, infant mortality claims 144 deaths for every thousand live births, and adult literacy amounts to only 38.2 per cent. Similar indicators characterise Mauritania, where the percentage of people under the national poverty line is 57 per cent (UNDP 2000). Although life expectancy in São Tomé e Príncipe is 64 years and infant mortality stands at 60 per 1000 live births, the negative growth rate throughout the 1990s offers little hope of bringing the vast majority out of poverty.

Existing poverty, combined with high levels of indebtedness and misallocations of the state budget, have impacted levels of national spending on health and education. In both Mali (1999) and São Tomé (1997) only 10 per cent of the national budget goes to health care, while in Mauritania the figure is a low 7.8 per cent (1997). The spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic could stretch under-funded systems to the breaking point.

As in most countries, poverty has pronounced gender and age dimensions. Malian women and children stand at greatest risk. Similarly, poverty in São Tomé e Príncipe particularly affects single mothers and their children, as well as the elderly. Another vulnerable group in both São Tomé and Mauritania is composed of people working in the informal sector. Although data are highly unreliable, it is estimated that as many as three out of five people in São Tomé work in such occupations. In Mauritania, just under half of the people involved in informal sector activities are poor.

Despite the dismal economic outlook, there are signs of hope in other areas. All three countries have re-established constitutional democratic regimes. Civil society — including unions, political parties and non-government organisations (NGOs) — has developed rapidly over recent years. In São Tomé and Príncipe, where multiparty elections took place in 1998, there were nearly one hundred community-based organisations, a blossoming particularly notable in the face of the lack of material institutional, financial and human capacity. In Mali, the military coup of 1991 that removed President Moussa Traoré from power cleared the way for reforms that have opened up possibilities for democratic change. Mauritania's adoption of a new constitution in 1991 was followed by institutional reforms that led to the establishment of a multiparty system, an independent press, presidential and congressional elections, and the establishment of republican institutions.

Tackling poverty

It has been argued that it is impossible to achieve any significant reduction of poverty in countries bypassed by economic growth. The programmes aimed at promoting socio-economic development implemented so far by governments and donors in Mali, Mauritania and São Tomé have generally failed to translate into concrete gains for their people. Given the severe constraints imposed by their limited natural endowments, these countries may have little choice but to invest in their people so as to lay the grounds for long-term development — rather than simply awaiting growth as a precondition of declines in poverty rates.

As one of the largest donors, UNDP has been involved in poverty reduction activities in these countries for many years. With their local funds, the UNDP offices have assisted their national partners in the formulation and implementation of a range of projects targeted at poor people. In recent years, UNDP has stepped up its involvement in poverty reduction and has increasingly shifted towards providing policy advice for the development of sector studies and programmes. The PSI programme reinforced this tendency by encouraging the UNDP offices to utilise a small amount of resources as an instrument for leveraging policy change. Such change should result from encouraging the design of national anti-poverty strategies and programmes under the leadership of the country's authorities.

In each country, PSI resources financed technical assistance for evaluations of existing programmes, compilations of poverty-related data and consultations with vulnerable groups — all of which should provide a basis for formulating nationally owned poverty reduction strategies. PSI activities aimed at building on what existed and vesting locally the analytical and policy work financed by the programme. National ownership, it was felt, was a necessary condition for achieving success in reforming policies in favour of poverty reduction. Without such ownership, it would be unlikely that national authorities would sustain their commitment to implementing the strategies and programmes developed. Establishing an institutional set-up with a clear mandate for coordinating, monitoring and evaluating public sector — and, in some cases, non-governmental — interventions against poverty was another key priority of the PSI programme.

Mali achieved the greatest progress in meeting these goals. There, the government approached UNDP for assistance in evaluating a national programme for poverty reduction that had been in place since 1994. After conducting a series of sector and other diagnostic studies to assess achievements as well as gaps in the implementation of the programme, the evaluation concluded by pointing to a number of critical issues that had hampered the success of the government's actions. The most important ones referred to an imprecise definition of programme priorities, weak implementation capacity, inadequate financing for key programmes, and an absence of mechanisms for monitoring poverty and feeding back data to decision-makers.

In addition to this evaluation, UNDP joined with UNICEF and UNFPA to assist the Ministry of Economy and Planning and a team of six national experts in the preparation of a social sector expenditure review. The study, which was carried out in 1998, analysed trends in public finances for the period 1986-1996, paying particular attention to the share of the government's budget devoted to financing basic services in health, education, nutrition, water and sanitation. The review also covered aid flows to assess whether donors — as well as the government — were meeting the targets set by the so-called 20/20 Initiative (chapter 7, this volume). Determining the scope for inter- as well as intra-sectoral restructuring of public expenditures and aid flows in favour of basic social service provision was a key goal of the expenditure review.

A separate study conducted jointly with UNICEF focussed on street children, particularly in Bamako. Forced by poverty to abandon their schooling, many children end up living in the streets where they become particularly susceptible to infectious diseases and other risks (chapter 3, this volume). The study interviewed some of these children to gather information on their needs and characteristics as an input to the design of programmes specifically tailored to meet those needs. Still a fourth output of the PSI project in Mali analysed the policy and regulatory framework for engaging civil society and community organisations as partners in the fight against poverty.

All of the above studies and the evaluation served as inputs into the elaboration of Mali's *Stratégie Nationale de Lutte contre la Pauvreté* (SNLP) — the country's official anti-poverty policy. Completed in 1998, the SNLP is the result of a two-year long process of consultation and validation involving a broad range of national actors — with the support of the entire UN system in Mali. The intensely consultative process followed in the elaboration of the *Stratégie* has undoubtedly contributed to creating a strong sense of ownership among Malian officials, who regard the SNLP as a home-grown document that responds to the country's needs and priorities. During a mission conducted in late 1999, officials from IMF and the World Bank were presented with the SNLP as the government's framework for negotiating Mali's access to debt relief under the enhanced HIPC Initiative. The elaboration of a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) will therefore build upon the existing national strategy developed with assistance from UN agencies.

A similar project took place in Mauritania, where the government decided that it needed an evaluation of the national programme that had been implemented from 1992 to 1996 as the basis for a new anti-poverty programme. As in Mali, the evaluation noted a number of institutional lacunae that had obstructed coordination between public and non-public actions to address poverty.

The main outcome of the PSI project in Mauritania was the elaboration of a new government anti-poverty programme — the *Programme National de Lutte contre la*

Pauvreté (PNLCP), which provides guidance for the actions of the national authorities from 1998 to 2001. Unlike the previous programme, the new one specifies an institutional mechanism vested with the responsibility for coordinating the work on poverty in the country. Of particular importance in this respect was the creation of a *Commissariat des Droits de l'Homme et Lutte contre la Pauvreté* (CDHLP) with cabinet rank for the task of policy and programme coordination. Despite lingering doubts about the technical capacity of the *Commissariat* to perform these functions, a first step has been taken towards ensuring that poverty reduction receives a higher priority than in the past.

Mauritania's PNLCP has not only been used as a basis for discussions with the Bank and the Fund on the interim PRSP, approved in February 2000; it has also had a catalytic effect on the formulation of two essential projects in 1998. The first is the *Projet de promotion des initiatives locales*, which aims to develop micro-enterprises, build or rehabilitate schools and dispensaries, and improve the supply of drinking water. The second initiative is the establishment of a Social Fund for Poverty Reduction, which will provide grant funding for community infrastructure and equipment upon the submission of project proposals by local communities and non-governmental organisations.

Limited local capacities and a changing political environment have conspired against achieving similar progress in developing anti-poverty policy in São Tomé e Príncipe. On the basis of a representative sample of different categories of vulnerable groups located in various zones of the country, the PSI project financed a series of 'consultations' aimed at identifying their needs and gathering proposals for addressing them. A team of Belgian experts provided the technical know-how, and trained local staff in the use of participatory research methodology to enable them to conduct similar exercises in the future. As an additional input into the formulation of policy, the project also assisted in the compilation and consolidation of all data sources relating to poverty in São Tomé.

The next phase of the PSI project involved the elaboration of a strategic outline for poverty reduction, the *Cadre Stratégique de Lutte contre la Pauvreté*. The document is very succinct, and does not provide specifics on such important issues as the financing requirements, the implementation modalities or the institutional mechanisms required for managing and coordinating poverty reduction activities. It is possible that what the country needed most at that time was simply a framework document outlining a few policy priorities as a basis for a discussion with national authorities and a means of raising awareness about poverty. Clearly, the document could not have served as an instrument for guiding the implementation of anti-poverty actions.

At the time, São Tomé was embarking upon negotiations for an IMF loan and has since been approved for debt relief under the terms of the enhanced HIPC

Initiative. Given this context, the work sponsored by UNDP could provide the basis for the negotiations with the lending institutions. Much work is needed, however, before the government of São Tomé has a national anti-poverty strategy with clearly defined targets and concrete mechanisms for implementing the actions required.

Capacity development

Neither Mali's SNLP nor Mauritania's PNLCP or São Tomé's *Cadre Stratégique de Lutte contre la Pauvreté* constitutes an umbrella poverty reduction programme separate from and encompassing all other government actions. They are primarily strategic frameworks that seek to enhance coherence and coordination among the various macroeconomic and sectoral policy instruments implemented in each country, as well as to align the actions of the donor community behind nationally defined poverty reduction targets. Mali's *Stratégie Nationale*, for example, builds upon a range of sector-specific policies including a gender component (*Plan National d'Action pour la Promotion de la Femme 1996-2000*), an education component (*Programme Décennal de Développement de l'Education 1998-2007*), as well as additional components on health (*Programme Décennal de Développement Sanitaire et Social 1998-2007*), environment (*Plan National d'Action Environnementale*), and food security (*Plan d'Action National sur l'Alimentation et la Nutrition*). Similar components exist in Mauritania, and are being developed in São Tomé e Príncipe.

Because each of the anti-poverty strategies was conceived as a cross-sectoral instrument, these countries faced the need to develop adequate coordination mechanisms that could ensure a proper alignment of all governmental and donor interventions with the poverty reduction targets set in the strategies. For the same reasons, they had to establish nationwide systems for regular gathering and analysis of poverty data so as to enable a systematic monitoring of progress in meeting those targets.

Although the PSI projects were not primarily capacity-building exercises, they still made some contributions towards establishing the technical and institutional foundations for policy implementation. This was perhaps most prominent in relation to improving poverty-related data collection. In Mali particularly, and to a lesser extent in the other two countries, there is a great diversity of survey instruments and data sources on poverty. Harmonising existing socio-economic data so as to permit an adequate analysis and monitoring of poverty is a problem that hampers the development of policy. Solving this problem requires setting up a well-integrated system that collects data from various sources throughout the country.

Steps in this direction have been taken in all three countries. In Mali, assistance from UNDP had led to the creation of an *Observatoire du Développement Humain et Lutte contre la Pauvreté* in 1996. Staff from the *Observatoire* was involved in the PSI project, specifically in gathering and analysing data on poverty that fed into the

elaboration of the SNLP. This participation strengthened the technical capacity of the experts from the *Observatoire*, and their expertise can now be put to good use with the decision to implement a Poverty Analysis and Monitoring Information System (*Système d'Information pour le Suivi et l'Analyse de la Pauvreté*, or SISAP) as one of the cornerstones of the PRSP.

A poverty monitoring system similar to Mali's is being set up in Mauritania — although in this case, there were no specific contributions from the PSI project. In São Tomé, as mentioned earlier, the compilation of data on poverty and its consolidation into a single document may be considered an essential first step towards rationalising poverty information in the country. Indeed, this work proved its usefulness as soon as it was completed. The African Development Bank was able to build upon it when assisting in the creation of a unit to monitor poverty within the National Statistics Office.

In Mauritania, as well as in Mali, UNDP assistance also helped reinforce existing mechanisms for coordinating the planning and implementation of the government's anti-poverty policy. In Mauritania, a department within the Ministry of Planning that had received assistance from UNDP for managing the government's poverty reduction programme from 1992 to 1996 was transformed into the newly created *Commissariat des Droits de l'Homme et Lutte contre la Pauvreté* and given ministerial status. Its new mandate encompasses the oversight, coordination and monitoring of the national anti-poverty programme covering the period 1998-2001. Although the decision to establish the *Commissariat* cannot be attributed directly to the PSI project, the latter certainly did play a role in convincing the national authorities of the need for a high-level government structure capable of coordinating the actions of other ministries as well as non-governmental entities. The *Commissariat* is also responsible for coordinating external aid to Mauritania — a fact that may facilitate the mobilisation of donor resources to fill the financing gaps of the new poverty reduction programme.

PSI activities in Mali maintained close collaboration with the two committees created by the government to oversee, coordinate and monitor the implementation of the SNLP — the *Comité d'Orientation* and the *Comité National de Coordination et de Suivi*, respectively. The institutional framework in Mali seems to be further developed than in Mauritania, and definitely more so than in São Tomé e Príncipe. Both committees have a tripartite composition that encompasses members from the government, civil society, bilateral donors and specialised agencies. In addition, 30 focal points located in the technical ministries, as well as in the country's main non-governmental and trade union organisations, provide yet another layer of coordination and validation that may prove essential to the implementation of the SNLP.

In contrast to Mali and Mauritania, there are no such coordination mechanisms in place in São Tomé, where the main impetus for the elaboration of a national

policy against poverty came from donors rather than the government, which was facing presidential elections during the course of the PSI project. The Ministry of Finance has in the meantime assumed a lead role in the PRSP process. This seems a sensible choice, given the ministry's involvement in negotiating a PRGF loan from the IMF. To ensure proper coordination with other ministries, however, it may be advisable to establish an institutional framework that cuts across the respective jurisdictions and responsibilities of the various line ministries.

Consultation, ownership and partnerships

A truly national strategy requires ownership. Strategic priorities need to be chosen in consultation; actions proposed have to be validated; and efforts from all local partners must be summoned for implementing these priority actions. This is arguably the most important ingredient for ensuring the sustainability of policy decisions.

PSI activities set out to promote processes of local consultation in the elaboration of the respective national programmes and strategies in each of these countries. The expectation was that consultative processes would enhance local ownership, which in turn would establish the foundations for a balanced partnership between a country's authorities and its donors. The extent to which consultations took place, however, varied from one country to another.

Once again, Mali stands out as the most successful of these countries. The organisation of five regional seminars was one of the main contributions of the PSI project. High-level officials from the Ministry of Finance and specialists from the *Observatoire* conducted the seminars, which were held in the western city of Kayes, Sikasso in the south, Gao in the east, and Ségou and Mopti in the centre of Mali's vast territory. The seminars took place at different stages during the preparation of the *Stratégie Nationale* so as to garner the views of the local communities, authorities and non-governmental actors, validate the overall direction of the strategy and mobilise support for its subsequent implementation. Documents were translated into local languages and disseminated through the media and the written press. Inputs from these consultations were fed back into refining the policy thrust that the national strategy embodied, culminating in a national workshop at which the final document was presented to the public. Not surprisingly, the process followed in producing the SNLP has generated a strong sense of commitment from the entire spectrum of Malian society — and is highly regarded by all the actors involved.

The establishment of coordination mechanisms open to the participation of various actors gave further impetus to the sense of ownership emanating from the elaboration of the SNLP. By a decree of 1999, the government created the *Comité de Coordination et de Suivi* and the *Comité d'Orientation* for the steering and monitoring of the national strategy. Representatives from government, civil society and the donor community sit on both committees, which meet regularly to review the

status of discussions with lending institutions as well as the implementation of SNLP priorities. As mentioned earlier, Mali has also instituted a system of focal points in each ministry, whose mission is to mobilise and coordinate the actions of all the relevant departments so that they conform to the goals established in the SNLP. At the local level, moreover, non-governmental organisations act as an interface between government authorities and the community in support of specific programmes.

Strong national ownership has provided a solid foundation for a partnership between Mali and its external donors. As a result of the social sector expenditure review sponsored by UNDP, UNICEF and UNFPA, the Ministry of Finance has set ambitious targets for budgetary allocations for primary education and health care, and identified financing gaps that Mali's donors could assist in meeting. The resources that the government is in a position to mobilise for the SNLP amount to only half of its financial requirements; without financial assistance from donors, the poverty reduction targets contained in the SNLP will not be achieved.

For this reason, Mali's aid consortium convened a Round Table meeting in September 1998 to review the recently completed SNLP and to pledge financial support for the government's plans. The 1998 Round Table was also the occasion for discussing a reform of the aid system so as to improve the targeting of external resources to support Mali's national priorities, most prominently the implementation of the SNLP.

PSI activities in São Tomé e Príncipe set out to promote a consultative process similar to that of Mali. The country, however, was in the midst of elections that ushered in a multi-party system — and this context proved much less conducive to a broad-based public debate on poverty. Nonetheless, UNDP sponsored five public events to discuss the content of the *Cadre Stratégique de Lutte contre la Pauvreté*. Four district workshops took place initially (three in São Tomé and one in Príncipe), culminating in a national seminar with the participation of government, civil society and donor representatives.

The results of the PSI project, it is claimed, have informed the formulation of policy both for the short- and medium-term. They were used, for instance, in the Public Investment Programme and the *Plan d'Actions Prioritaires 2000-2002*, as well as for São Tomé's Strategic Options for the year 2005, a document outlining a series of mid-term macroeconomic and sector priorities for the country. The government also presented the *Cadre Stratégique* to the IMF when negotiating a PRGF package prior to qualifying for HIPC debt assistance in December 2000. It is far from clear, however, that the activities carried out under the PSI project have enjoyed the same degree of local ownership that they have in Mali. Because of a lack of indigenous capacity, external experts were responsible for most project activities, even though some training of local personnel took place. The congressional elections of

1998, moreover, limited the involvement of government officials in critical phases of the project. These two factors combined to curtail prospects for vesting the policy process initiated by UNDP in the local context.

In Mauritania, too, the process of preparing the *Programme National de Lutte contre la Pauvreté* seems to have been less inclusive than in Mali. Some consultations took place during its preparation, and a national workshop gave all partners (central government, civil society, community group, and bilateral and multilateral donors) an opportunity to debate the programme prior to its finalisation. .

The government of Mauritania feels strong ownership of the PNLCP, which it used as the basis for the interim PRSP — and the *Commissariat* is fully committed to implementing the tasks it has been called upon to perform. Indeed, the country's donors have acknowledged the government's efforts by pledging financial support to the programme at the Third Consultative Group for Mauritania, which was held in March 1998. Further support came forth with the Bank's and the Fund's approval of Mauritania's qualification for debt relief in February 2000.

Nevertheless, the PNLCP lacks an institutional framework such as the one established in Mali for the SNLP. Despite the government's firm commitment, implementation capacities seem limited, coordination of policies set by the various line ministries inadequate, and systems for monitoring poverty underdeveloped. As in São Tomé and even Mali, these are clearly critical entry points for any future assistance from development organisations to these as well as other sub-Saharan African countries.

Conclusions

Donor organisations and lending institutions finance a substantial portion of the development budgets of Mali, Mauritania and São Tomé e Príncipe — as well as many other poor countries in Africa and elsewhere. Lending institutions also exert strong influence over the terms under which these countries can access external resources to finance their development needs. Donors therefore can hold enormous sway over poor countries' policies — and put this influence to good use or, alternatively, aggravate existing problems if they do not coordinate their actions.

Often, the pursuit of differing, even conflicting, agendas by individual donors has stretched the already limited capacities of these countries beyond their ability to function. This problem is further compounded when those agendas impose certain requirements and timeframes that may conflict with the planning frameworks set by the countries themselves. For this reason, one of the greatest contributions donors can make is to provide the space in which nationally driven processes of policy formation can develop.

PSI activities were valuable in this regard. Particularly in Mali and Mauritania, they built upon existing policy initiatives, whose strengths and weaknesses they

helped evaluate as an input to the development of new policy. The PSI projects also sought to strengthen home-grown coordination mechanisms that could steer the policy process forward — and particularly in Mali, they endeavoured to foster nationwide consensus on the policy thrust put forward by the government.

Through public information campaigns (Mali and Mauritania), social mobilisation of vulnerable groups (Mali, São Tomé) and the organization of workshops and seminars with broad-based representation, PSI activities in all three countries helped create awareness of and commitment to the emerging national poverty reduction plans. The development of Mali's poverty reduction strategy took almost two years to complete. The end result was the *Stratégie Nationale de Lutte contre la Pauvreté*, a comprehensive document outlining eight priority areas that has provided the basis for Mali's interim PRSP and its qualification for debt relief under HIPC terms. The decision reached by the IMF and the World Bank in September 2000 to provide interim debt relief to the government of Mali will make it possible to release much-needed resources for essential programmes instead of repaying the debt. Further support from Mali's international lenders will be necessary, though, if the country is to come even close to addressing the vast scale of deprivation that affects as much as three-fourths of its population who survive on less than US\$ 1 per day.

While less inclusive in its formulation, Mauritania's new *Programme National de Lutte contre la Pauvreté* represents the continuation of government efforts initiated in 1992. Evaluating the government's actions during four years of implementing anti-poverty actions provided the foundation for the PNLCP, paving the way for the Bank's and the Fund's approval of a debt relief package for Mauritania in early 2000. As in Mali, therefore, the assistance provided by UNDP proved critical during the negotiations with the Bretton Woods institutions. The respective governments simply had to validate their existing poverty reduction programmes with the World Bank and IMF before they could become eligible for debt relief.

São Tomé differs from Mali and Mauritania in many respects. The country's socio-economic and political context, combined with its extremely limited base of indigenous expertise, made it extremely difficult to make great strides on the anti-poverty policy front. These constraints notwithstanding, the assistance provided by UNDP resulted in the adoption of a framework document, the *Cadre Stratégique de Lutte contre la Pauvreté*, which subsequently served as an input into the elaboration of São Tomé's interim PRSP. On this basis, the country was first able to successfully conclude negotiations for a PRGF loan from the IMF, and subsequently to qualify for HIPC assistance following World Bank and Fund decisions adopted in December 2000.

After all the preliminary work conducted in the three countries, UNDP must continue to support the respective governments in their negotiations with IMF and the World Bank over the design and implementation of national anti-poverty

strategies. Already in São Tomé, the government has requested UNDP assistance in the presentation of its case to the Bretton Woods institutions. In Mali and Mauritania, too, success in reducing poverty will depend on developing local capacities for policy analysis and implementation, including through the establishment of permanent poverty monitoring systems already in progress. Above all, the continued involvement of UN agencies, particularly those concerned with human development goals, will be critical to ensuring that macroeconomic agendas are fully consonant with the objective of poverty reduction set by the countries. ■

Notes

Mr. Sanon is a social development specialist who works as an independent consultant. He wishes to acknowledge the government and UNDP offices of Mali, Mauritania and São Tomé e Príncipe, as well as the staff of the former Social Development Division, UNDP, New York.