

Reducing poverty or repeating mistakes?

A civil society critique of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers



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The views presented in this report do not necessarily reflect those of the Swedish organisations behind the report.

An electronic version of the report is also available in Spanish, French and Portuguese. Please contact one of the above organisations.

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Foreword

We, the four Swedish organisations behind this report, have a long history of working with development issues in different ways and contexts. Diakonia, Church of Sweden Aid and Save the Children Sweden co-operate with and give support to partner organisations in many countries around the world. Within this vast network of partner organisations there is a broad spectrum of experiences and knowledge of the different development challenges facing the world today. Drawing on the experiences of partner organisations, we carry out advocacy work targeting decision makers on different levels and we work to raise awareness about complex global development challenges among different actors in society. The Swedish Jubilee Network, which focuses on debt and poverty eradication, is one common platform for the work carried out in Sweden.

One important aspect of our work is to link experiences of development problems at a local level to economic, social and political structures at a national and global level. Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS) are a very clear example of how local development challenges are inter-linked with structures and policy making at a national and global level.

Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), documents which present national Poverty Reduction Strategies, were introduced by the World Bank and the IMF in 1999 as a new tool for poverty reduction and a framework for debt relief and access to funding from multilateral and bilateral donors. Under this approach national governments develop their own national poverty reduction strategies, which are to be nationally owned through a process of broad based participation from, amongst others, civil society organisations.

Since the PRSP approach was launched there has been a lively debate on the challenges and opportunities connected to it. Partner organisations to Diakonia, Church of Sweden Aid and Save the Children Sweden have extensive experience of the PRSPs in their respective countries. Their experiences show that there are serious flaws in many of the present processes of elaborating and implementing PRSPs, as well as in the policy contents of the documents themselves.

Sweden has with its new policy, *Shared Responsibility: Sweden's Policy for Global Development*, presented by the government in 2003, committed itself to combat poverty. A coherent policy is to be formulated in which the overall goal is "to contribute to equitable and sustainable development in the world". The policy is to be based on "the perspectives of the poor". The international community has, with development goals such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), committed itself to poverty reduction. In view of such commitments made to combat poverty, partners' experiences of PRSPs are highly relevant. For policies to be successful the views of civil society organisations, representing people from all walks of life and with extensive experiences of poverty and work to combat poverty, must be taken into account.

With this report we wish to present our partners' perspectives and let partners speak for themselves from their experiences of the PRSPs. It is our hope that the views of and concrete suggestions on how the PRSP approach can be improved, as presented in this report, will be a valuable input to policy making and the broader work to combat poverty.

Church of Sweden Aid, Diakonia, Save the Children Sweden and The Swedish Jubilee Network

Abbreviations

CAS	Country Assistance Strategy
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
HIPC	Highly Indebted Poor Country Initiative
IFI	International Financial Institutions (World Bank and IMF)
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INGO	International Non-governmental Organisation
I-PRSP	Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NPRS	Cambodia's National Poverty Reduction Strategy
ODA	Official Development Aid
PRGF	Poverty Reduction Growth Facility
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
PRS	Poverty Reduction Strategy
PSIA	Poverty and Social Impact Assessment
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme

Executive Summary

In the last decade poverty reduction has become the buzzword of international development circles. In 1999, after growing public critique, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund moved away from Structural Adjustment Programmes, and adopted a new approach - Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). Under this new approach national governments are to develop their own national poverty reduction strategy as the basis for accessing lending and aid grants from international donors. One of the key elements of PRSP is 'national ownership'. For a PRSP to be nationally owned strategies are to be developed with broad-based participation from civil society.

This paper aims to summarise partner experiences, perspectives and positions on PRSPs. Partner organisations to the Church of Sweden Aid, Diakonia and Save the Children Sweden have extensive experience of participating in the PRSP approach. The paper is based on documentation provided by partner organisations from nine countries: Bolivia, Honduras, Nicaragua, Burkina Faso, Mozambique, Zambia, Vietnam, Cambodia and Bangladesh.

Partner critique of PRSPs is extensive and focuses on the roles played by and the capacities and commitment of governments, donors and civil society itself in relation to three different aspects of the PRSP: the process of developing PRSPs, their contents and the implementation and monitoring. A wide range of constructive recommendations are made by partner organisations to government, donors and civil society.

The paper will serve as a resource to the Swedish organisations in the development of their positions and advocacy work on PRSP in Sweden, as well as serving as a basis for further dialogue with partners and other relevant stakeholders.

PRSP Process

Partners have been deeply involved in working with the PRSP. The participation processes they have engaged in have been varied in scope and nature. Nonetheless many common issues are raised.

Lack of appropriate participatory frameworks

Partners express concern that the lack of appropriate institutional frameworks for participation has led to a widespread failure to facilitate broad based participation and poor quality participatory processes for those who can participate. This has negatively affected the quality of PRSP contents and national ownership and given undue power to IFIs and donors. Examples of the failure to facilitate broad based participation are:

- Lack of frameworks for the participation of women, children, young people, indigenous groups and rural communities and their consequent exclusion.
- The language used for the process has often excluded important government decision-makers, limited civil society participation, excluded rural and minority populations and given foreign donors an inordinate influence over the final outcome.
- Parliaments have been barely involved in the process undermining their role in national policy making. Some governments have been unwilling to hold meetings in opposition party areas. In other cases governments excluded critical voices from civil society.

Examples of poor quality participation processes for those who do participate:

- Most governments equated participation with consultation.
- Governments set consultation agendas often excluded civil society from discussions of economic policy.

- Rushed time frames prevented adequate preparation and hindered the identification of policy alternatives and the effective analysis of poverty effects of policy choices.
- Lack of access to information hindered effective participation.

Partner experience reveals a critical need to establish a clear framework for participation that defines guidelines and benchmarks for determining who is involved, at what stage, with what 'level' of participation and the methodology by which the process will take place.

Governments and civil society capacity and will

The quality of participatory processes has been constrained by limited governments and civil society capacity. Governments lack officials to focus on the PRSP and lack skills to run processes. They also suffer from poor communication and coordination systems and from difficulties in controlling and coordinating donors. Civil society lacks macro-economic analysis and policy making skills, personnel and financial resources and in some cases connections with grassroots. Capacity is however not the chief determinant of the quality of participatory process. Governments will to engage civil society in the PRSP has a crucial bearing on both process and outcomes. Likewise civil society's perception of governments affects its commitment to the process.

Country driven or donor driven?

The PRSP is an externally imposed requirement that governments must produce to access financing and which the World Bank has to approve. Partners consider it paradoxical to call this country-driven and feel that governments have chosen policies the IFIs will approve rather than making policy choices based on the views put forward by citizens and parliaments. IFIs have sometimes played extremely

inappropriate roles and have relied too heavily on visiting missions. There have been improvements in donor co-ordination and donors have encouraged participation but dominant and often poorly conducted donor roles have negatively affected the process and contents.

Civil society strategies and gains

Partners have been wary of being co-opted to legitimise pre-defined policy choices. Many feel their views were ignored or that the official participation process was deeply flawed. Civil society groups have developed strategies to counteract this including using parallel civil society processes to ensure an independent civil society input, true to their views and covering the full agenda of their concerns. Despite the many problems experienced and the capacity constraints still existing, participation in official and/or parallel civil society process has created some new political space for civil society and enabled civil society to strengthen skills and capabilities for future engagement in national policy making processes.

The above critique leads partners to make a wide variety of recommendations for governments, donors and civil society. Key recommendations include:

Recommendations for governments

- Involve civil society in designing participatory frameworks and agendas, and in developing benchmarks by which the quality of participation can be judged.
- Institutionalise participation through the establishment of a permanent framework for effective participation in each stage of the PRSP process.
- Fully involve parliaments and political parties.
- Use local languages and involve vulnerable and excluded groups such as children.

Recommendations for civil society

- Build relevant capacities in economic literacy, advocacy, education and research.
- Increase the connectedness of national, provincial and local level civil society and develop democratic practice within constituencies.
- Strengthen networking for effective participation
- Keep society well informed, build consciousness and involve the media.

Recommendations for donors

- Encourage governments to use participatory exercises at all levels and every stage.
- Encourage discussion of policy alternatives
- Provide adequate funding for participatory processes in ways which ensure civil society's continued independence.
- Reduce reliance on visiting missions and co-ordinate with other development partners.

PRSP Contents

Partner organisations are heavily critical of the policy contents of PRSPs for the following reasons.

World Bank/IMF influenced contents

Partners consider that PRSP contents reflect the dominance of IFI policy prescriptions instead of the priorities of the poor. Policies opposed by the poor (such as user fees for healthcare) are common, whilst policies the poor want are not included. The World Bank/IMF guidelines for writing the PRSP are considered to have strong neo-liberal assumptions resulting in neo-liberal policy recommendations. This, coupled with the need for IFI approval, gives the IFIs inordinate power over the contents of national PRSPs. Hence the policy matrices attached to the many national PRSPs differ little from one another.

Similarly the quality of poverty analysis in PRSPs is

considered to be poor and to be heavily influenced by the IFIs (which established the guidelines for the poverty evaluation). This weakness leads to sectoral and geographical shortcomings in the strategies and policies to reduce poverty.

Growth, not poverty reduction is the primary PRSP goal

Economic growth is the mainstay of PRSP strategies, whilst attending to poverty problems is subsidiary. They include little to no analysis of what kind of growth will reduce poverty. Potential negative social impacts of growth strategies are often not identified or addressed, redistribution strategies are absent and the trade-offs between issues are not analysed.

PRSP and PRGF: a reformulation of SAP policies

PRSP was introduced amidst growing critique of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) and the conditionalities attached to financing. Despite this the macro policy contents of PRSPs and Poverty Reduction and Growth Facilities (PRGFs) are in essence these same discredited structural adjustment policies, and the poverty impact of these policy choices is not discussed in PRSP documents. IFIs continue to be unwilling to seek or consider policy alternatives and continue to assume that structural adjustment policies automatically contribute to poverty reduction without thorough analysis of the likely poverty effect at country level. The promised reduction in conditionalities has not been forthcoming.

PRSPs, privatization and trade

Privatization is being promoted by the IFIs and implemented through many PRSPs despite strong opposition from the poor. Partners' past experience of privatization involves transfers from state to private monopolies, lower quality service delivery, higher

prices increasing costs for the poor, widening gaps between rich and poor and job losses. Partners want further privatizations to be placed on hold until full financial and social audits of previous privatizations are carried out and made public.

Likewise trade liberalization is included in many PRSP policy matrixes. However the PRSPs often fail to underscore the two-way character of trade, to outline policies to deal with the influx of imports caused by liberalization or to analyse what countries would lose by liberalizing trade and how vulnerable populations would be affected.

Avoidance of equity issues, lack of special measures for vulnerable groups

Partners consider that their national PRSPs have avoided equity issues. Land reform and its potential to contribute to poverty reduction is almost completely ignored despite extreme land inequality. Instead PRSPs push for land markets and the formalization of land ownership, which has the potential to worsen access to land for the poor. Corruption is likewise ignored. Women, children, indigenous groups and those infected or affected by HIV/AIDS are often disproportionately hit by the negative social impacts of economic policies. Despite this their situations are not considered neither are special measures targeted at them.

Flowing from above critique partners make many recommendations for governments, donors and civil society including the following:

Recommendations for governments

- Seek an alternative analytical framework to structural adjustment.
- Examine the expected effects of a range of policy options to help identify the policies likely to have

the greatest impact on poverty.

- Ensure consistency between economic and social policies to deal with poverty.

Recommendations for civil society

- Advocate for an alternative development framework.
- Identify and promote good practices for poverty reduction.

Recommendations for donors

- Rethink structural adjustment policies and consider policy alternatives.
- Ensure the poverty effects of PRGF strategies are analysed and made consistent with the achievement of poverty objectives outlined in the PRSP.
- Assist in resolving external problems such as market access for developing countries.
- Specify the additional funds available so plans can be matched to resources.

PRSP Implementation and Monitoring

Many countries are now in the implementation phase of the PRSP. The implementation phase holds its own set of challenges. Some challenges have their roots in weak PRSP content, whilst others relate to the financing and yet others to practical problems in implementation systems or political will. Some partners consider the PRSP to be being poorly implemented or implemented to only a limited extent.

PRSP: A weak basis for implementation

It is the view of partners that in situations of limited resources, and where there is a conflict between economic growth, environmental protection and social development, it is vital that clear prioritisation is made on the basis of which policies will contribute most to poverty reduction. Partners consider that PRSP documents fail to provide this

prioritisation of policy and actions or to identify poverty effects of many policies. PRSP documents should also provide clear frameworks for implementation. PRSPs are however inadequately linked to other national planning tools such as the budget and do not identify the mechanisms for co-ordination of the strategy between central and local levels of government. PRSPs also fail to identify constraints for implementation (such as the capacity of decentralized authorities to implement) and how these will be overcome. Likewise, PRSPs do not provide a clear framework for monitoring and evaluation of the implementation. These weaknesses in content of the PRSP document hamper effective implementation and risk the failure of the strategies.

The financing gap

External financing is critical if PRSPs are to be anything more than words on paper. The insufficiency of debt relief coupled with inadequate development assistance and the unreliability of both debt relief and aid flows renders the planning and implementation of PRSPs extremely difficult.

The debt relief currently being supplied through HIPC is insufficient to enable the required levels of growth and reduce poverty. After receiving debt relief most HIPC countries will continue to have unsustainable external debt whilst increasing their internal debt. Yet donors continue to use the debt sustainability approach rather than working for debt cancellation.

Unpredictable aid transfers also lead to programmes not being implemented or damaging domestic borrowing. Uncertainty over and fluctuations in donor fulfillment of pledges renders planning extremely difficult, yet there are no sanctions on donors who default or delay payment.

Implementation in practice

There are many obstacles to effective implementation in practice. In the absence of clearly pre-defined priorities, the effective priority for implementation seem to be the macro reforms demanded by conditionalities, whilst pro-poor social and structural reforms are left behind. This is an effective de-prioritisation of pro-poor policy. Implementation levels of poverty-oriented aspects of the PRSP are considered by partners to be low, as a consequence of this deprioritisation and of government capacity constraints in service delivery and a lack of financing. Implementation is also hampered by poor information flows between levels of government, whilst monitoring is hampered by the poor availability of information on implementation. Methodological problems, a lack of follow up and political will provide further constraints.

Given the weaknesses in prioritization and implementation frameworks, public sector constraints, the lack of a clear monitoring system or appropriate indicators, and the financing gap, the successful implementation of PRSP strategies is in grave doubt.

Despite these many difficulties, partners find that engagement in the implementation/monitoring phase of the PRSP opens up new space to work together in new ways, an experience that will strengthen future contributions to policy formation processes.

Stemming from the above critique partners make a wide variety of recommendations for governments, civil society and donors. Key recommendations include the following:

Recommendations for governments

- Enable improved implementation by including

clear prioritisation, time-frames and divisions of responsibility and an analysis of public sector constraints and how these will be overcome in the PRSP.

- Relate effective prioritisation to budgetary constraints and scenarios.
- Involve civil society in the prioritisation of actions
- Work more closely with municipalities in developing and implementing strategies.

Recommendations for civil society

- Promote adequate and better organised local planning.
- Monitor implementation using methodologies such as expenditure tracking.
- Design rapid assessment tools to enable local organisations to conduct local poverty monitoring.

Recommendations for donors

- De-link PRSPs from the HIPC initiative and promote and provide debt cancellation.
- Move forward in building an integrated donor approach with budget support.
- Put pressure on governments to prioritise actions to be taken to avoid poorly prioritised resource dispersion.

Introduction

A BACKGROUND TO POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGIES (PRSPS)¹

In the late 1990s there was a global outcry over the devastating effects of poor country debt and over the failure of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) to reduce poverty.

In the 1980s and 1990s poor country governments hit by the debt crisis were required by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to implement SAPs in order for existing loans to be rescheduled and new loans/grants to be given. SAPs were packages of policy reforms that aimed to achieve macro-economic stability and export led growth, on the assumption that this would reduce poverty. SAPs typically included structural policy reforms such as the privatisation of state owned enterprises, removal of subsidies for domestic industry and agriculture and liberalisation of international trade through the reduction/removal of import duties. They also included monetary reforms such as currency devaluation, liberalisation of the financial sector, and tightened fiscal discipline through, for example, public sector wage cuts or introduction of user fees for health and education service.

However, after two decades of practising structural adjustment, the programmes came to be associated with limited economic growth, increased income inequalities and in some cases reduced access to health care and education for the ordinary population. Designed in Washington the programmes undermined national ownership of policy making, through adopting externally imposed policy reforms. In short SAPs did not deliver.

Under tremendous public pressure the World Bank and IMF were forced to rethink their ways of working. The alternative they developed was Poverty

Reduction Strategy Papers - PRSPs. In September 1999 the World Bank announced that governments hoping to receive concessional financing or debt relief would be required to develop their own Poverty Reduction Strategy in the form of a PRSP. Instead of macro-economic stability and growth being the sole focus, the aim of reducing poverty was to be put in the centre.

This nationally developed poverty strategy, once approved, would be the basis for future funding and assistance not only from the Bank and Fund, but also from bilateral donors such as the Swedish government. Development and implementation of a PRSP suddenly became the key to accessing international financing for development

A PRSP describes the macroeconomic, structural and social policies and programs which a country intends to follow in order to promote growth and reduce poverty and should be prepared by governments through a participatory process involving civil society and development partners, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

According to the World Bank PRSPs are to be based on five core principles:²

- Country driven and nationally 'owned' – involving broad based participation of civil society and the private sector in all operational steps.
- Results oriented, identifying desired outcomes that benefit the poor and planning the road to achieving these.
- Comprehensive, taking account of the multi-dimensional nature of poverty.
- Partnership oriented – involving coordinated participation of development partners (bi-lateral, multi-lateral and non-governmental)
- Based on a long term perspective.

¹ Information from the website: "Poverty Reduction strategies and PRSPs". Poverty Net. The World Bank Group. <http://www.worldbank.org/poverty/strategies/overview.htm> October 2003

² Ibid

Furthermore PRSP documents should include:³

- A description of the participatory process used, describing the format and outcome of consultations, the impact consultations had on the design of the strategy and a discussion of the role of civil society in the monitoring and implementation process.
- A poverty assessment, describing who the poor are and where they live and building on this an analysis of the constraints to faster growth and poverty reduction.
- Clear and costed priorities for macroeconomic, structural and social policies together with targets, indicators and an outline of systems for monitoring and evaluating progress.

The World Bank PRSP Sourcebook provides more detailed guidelines for the development of a PRSP.

In 1999 the development of a PRSP became a requirement for the granting of debt relief from the Highly Indebted Poor Country initiative II (HIPC II).⁴ Initially countries desperate to receive debt relief were faced either with delays in debt relief or with rushing the processes of poverty diagnostics, policy formulation and civil society participation in order to complete the PRSP quickly. In response to this problem the Interim PRSP (I-PRSP) was introduced. An I-PRSP is intended to be a 'road map' outlining both a country's existing poverty strategy and how the government will develop the full PRSP.

Currently, the completion of a PRSP, I-PRSP, or an annual PRSP/I-PRSP progress report approved by the Boards of the Bank and the Fund within the preceding 12 months is a condition for:

- HIPC countries to reach a decision or completion point to access debt relief.
- Approval of funding through the IMF's Poverty

Reduction and Growth Facility.⁵

- International Development Association (World Bank) concessional lending.⁶

PRSPs are also increasingly forming the basis of bi-lateral lending agreements.

At present 32 countries have completed a full PRSP. 7 countries have made eleven progress reports and 21 have completed I-PRSPs.⁷ These countries are to be found in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Many more countries are involved in the process but have not yet submitted a completed I-PRSP or PRSP.

Whilst PRSPs have been hailed as a radically new and positive development by many multi-lateral and bi-lateral donors, civil society groups in PRSP countries have been more critical, saying that in reality little has changed that will benefit the poor.

PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY OF THIS PAPER

This paper aims to provide information about the experiences, perspectives and positions of partner organisations of Diakonia, Church of Sweden Aid and Save the Children Sweden on the subject of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers. This information will serve as a resource to the Swedish organisations in the development of their positions and advocacy work on PRSP in Sweden, as well as serving as a basis for further dialogue with partners and other relevant stakeholders.

The paper is the result of a desk research exercise that aimed to identify key issues raised by partners in relation to PRSP, the positions partners are taking on those issues and where available the recommendations partners are making. Documentation from partner organisations involved in civil society PRSP work in the following nine countries

³ Ibid

⁴ The HIPC initiative is an agreement among official creditors to help the most heavily indebted countries to obtain debt relief. The principal objective is to bring the country's debt burden to sustainable levels. HIPC II is an enhanced and expanded HIPC initiative to provide more debt relief to more countries more quickly.

⁵ The PRGF is a conditionality linked financing instrument of the IMF. It replaces the Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility and should be based on a country's PRSP.

⁶ The International Development Association (IDA) provides "credits" to poor countries in the form of loans at zero interest with a 10 years grace period and maturities of 35-40 years.

⁷ "Steen Jørgensen, Director of Social Development, World Bank, Presentation given at North South Coalition-PPPR Seminar, 19 August 2003."

was used: Bolivia, Honduras, Nicaragua, Burkina Faso, Mozambique, Zambia, Vietnam, Cambodia and Bangladesh. These nine countries were selected for their wide geographical spread, range of experiences with PRSP and for links to relevant partner organisations in country. Sixteen partner organisations provided documentation of which ten are network organisations that together represent hundreds of civil society groups.

The paper gives an overall idea of the PRSP process and of concerns raised by partners, building generalizations from a broad reading exercise. It attempts to reflect the perspectives and positions of partners as presented in the documents they have produced and has been adapted in line with partner feedback on drafts.

The documentation used was provided by partners mainly via email and internet in April and May 2003, with the documents supplied covering research done in the years 2000-2003. Although strong emphasis is placed on documentation provided by partner organizations, in some countries this information was complemented by other civil society sources (see Sources). It is important to note that a varying quantity and quality of information was provided by partner organizations and that documentation from some sources was more up to date than from others. Therefore, the issues highlighted here may emphasize the concerns of some partners more than others, or reflect more the dynamics of one country than another. This said every effort has been made to maintain a balance and give a general picture.

The paper is structured in three main parts. The first looks at issues raised by partners in relation to the PRSP process (mainly related to participation),

the second looks at issues raised surrounding the contents of PRSPs and the third highlights issues regarding implementation and monitoring. Each of the three main sections looks firstly at partner experiences and positions, going on to provide a summary of partner recommendations on the topic. Where relevant, experiences from particular countries are given to highlight in practical terms the concerns identified by partners.

The PRSP Process: Perspectives and positions

The majority of the partner documents surveyed had a strong focus on participation in the formulation stage of the PRSP process. Whilst the processes partners engaged in were very varied in nature and scope, there are clear commonalities in the issues being raised by partners and partners make a wide range of recommendations to tackle these issues which are presented at the end of this section.

KEY ISSUE 1: LACK OF APPROPRIATE PARTICIPATORY FRAMEWORKS

The lack of appropriate institutional frameworks for participation has led both to widespread failure to facilitate broad based participation and poor quality participatory processes for those who can participate. This weakness in process has deeply affected both the quality of PRSP contents and national ownership. Partners' experience of participation in PRSPs has shown that there is a need to establish a clear framework for participation that defines guidelines and benchmarks for determining who is involved, at what stage and with what 'level of participation', and for the methodology by which the process will take place. This applies not only to the formulation of PRSPs, but also to the implementation, monitoring and review stages.

Failure to facilitate broad based participation

A wide variety of weaknesses have been evident in the participatory processes used for the formulation of PRSPs. In all case studies there has been a general failure to directly involve poor people and a clear and appropriate framework for participation did not exist. The key problem is one of weak representation, which has affected the credibility and outcomes of the PRSP process as well as the commitment of stakeholders to implementing the PRSP. The following key areas of weakness were identified by partners in relation to representation:

Exclusion of vulnerable groups

In most cases, a specific framework for womens', childrens' and youth participation has been absent. As a result, PRSPs contain few specific strategies to benefit these groups, little to no analysis of the impact of proposed policies on them and rarely contain measures to protect them from negative effects of policy implementation. Children in poverty and children with special needs are particularly left out of discussions despite children forming the majority population in many countries. In several cases, a quota for womens' representation did not exist affecting the gender strategies and objectives within the PRS. Similarly in some cases such as Bolivia, the lack of a good participation framework meant that the process failed to address the specific requirements of indigenous people's participation and traditional structures were not related to or used in the ongoing PRSP process.⁸

Language exclusion

A key determinant of the failure to facilitate broad-based participation has been the languages used for participatory processes and PRSP documents. Language has been an important barrier in most of the countries studied, due to the language diversity characterising these countries. The choice of language has excluded important decision-makers, limited civil society participation, excluded rural and minority populations, imposed foreign ways of thinking, and given foreign donors an inordinate amount of power to influence the final outcome.

In countries like Nicaragua and Cambodia, the Poverty Reduction Strategies were first produced in English despite English not being the language of government. As a result, in Cambodia the plans were analysed and discussed by foreigners while most Cambodians (including government officials)

⁸ CHRISTIAN AID, "Participating in Dialogue? The Estrategia Boliviana de Reducción de la Pobreza" January 2002

were not able to access them at all and only began to be included when Khmer was made the main language of discourse.⁹ The lack of translation into local languages, for example in Bolivia and Mozambique, limited the participation of important communities. The issue of language barriers demonstrates how the needs of international donors and the interests of ethnic majorities have been allowed to dominate the development of the participation framework, affecting both the PRSP process, content and the potential for successful implementation.

Rural exclusion

The quality of participation was affected by the very limited geographical scope of consultations. In many cases rural communities have been systematically excluded from participation not only through language exclusion, but also through the lack of physical access to the process. In Mozambique, for example, consultations were held mainly in the provincial capitals.¹⁰

'Political' and parliamentary exclusion

In many countries (for example Nicaragua and Honduras) parliaments have been barely involved in the process of formulating and approving a PRSP. This undermines the role of parliaments in national policy-making and could lead to civil society participation in policy processes being seen as a means to bypass parliaments and a threat to democracy. Geo-political exclusion also occurred, for example in Mozambique, where the government was unwilling to hold meetings in areas under opposition party control.¹¹ Partners in Honduras expressed that it is important to have the commitment of all political parties to prepare a thoroughly discussed country paper. This will make the PRSP a politi-

cally sustainable effort that will not be affected by the change of incumbent political party.¹²

More subtle 'political' exclusion has also occurred towards civil society. In some cases, governments themselves selected which civil society groups to invite to participate. With participation arranged in this manner there is a grave risk that critical voices will be excluded, limiting the scope of policy debate. In Burkina Faso, for example, the government handpicked those it would consult among ruling party affiliated trade unions (and the like) and sometimes those invited were not the most knowledgeable on the subjects being discussed. A small number of participants tended to dominate formal and informal contributions and it was felt that civil society participation could have been strengthened by better quality representation.¹³

Another type of political exclusion is illustrated in Vietnam, where the lack of a clear legal framework for local civil society organizations (CSOs) hindered participation. Although CSOs can operate and there have recently been legal initiatives to allow the formation of the equivalent of local charities, CSOs lack full recognition or a shared understanding of their role. According to documents received, a clear participation framework and understanding of the respective roles of government and civil society might help to create a better environment for civil society participation.

All of the above excluding factors have been criticized by partners and have contributed to the general failure of PRSP processes to facilitate broad-based participation.

⁹ NGO Forum on Cambodia on behalf of the Asian NGO Coalition (ANGOC) for the East Asia Pacific Regional NGO Working Group on the World Bank. "Rapid Assessment of the PRSP Process in Cambodia: Two Banks, Two Processes, Two Documents" September 2001

¹⁰ AFRODAD "Civil society Participation in the PRSP Process. A Case for Mozambique" 2002

¹¹ Ibid

¹² FOSDEH (Social Forum of External Debt and Development of Honduras) "Process and Experience For the Preparation of a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper in Honduras" Honduras, October 2001

¹³ AFRODAD "Comparative Analysis of Five African Countries with Completed PRSP" (Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Mozambique, Tanzania and Uganda) 2002.

And; AFRODAD "Civil society Participation in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) Process. As Synthesis of Five Studies Conducted in Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Mozambique, Tanzania and Uganda" April 2002

Poor quality participatory processes for those who do participate

Most partners have expressed frustration that the methodology used in participatory processes is very poor. These frustrations appear to stem from the following factors.

Lack of common understanding of participation

A basic problem facing civil society has been a lack of an agreed understanding of the nature and level of participation civil society should have. Most governments appear to have equated participation with consultation and consequently civil society involvement has been mainly in the form of consultations, rather than more in depth forms such as joint agenda setting or decision-making. With some exceptions (such as Zambia), the participation of civil society organizations during the process has been restricted to commenting on drafts and attending national/provincial workshops. In Honduras consultations with CSOs took place after the official PRS document was concluded, without having organized prior meetings to reach consensus about the strategy's conception and scope or to establish shared objectives and goals.¹⁴ Connected to this lack of common understanding/expectations, some partners express frustration over a lack of feedback to participants to inform them of which proposals will/will not be included and why, and the lack of opportunity to discuss the final draft.¹⁵

Exclusion from certain policy arenas

governments' lack of flexibility and openness to discuss a broad agenda has also undermined effective participation. Some partners have noted that agendas for civil society consultations were set by government / international actors without prior consultation, constraining civil society ability to take up the issues of most pertinence to them.¹⁶ go-

vernments have often (though not universally) excluded civil society from discussions of economic policy, limiting discussions to social elements of poverty reduction policy. Furthermore, contents of macro-economic policies contained in World Bank Country Assistance Strategy (CAS) and Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF) have not been subject to public debate. In some countries these and other factors have led to frustration and conflict between civil society groups and government and the setting up of parallel processes (eg Honduras).

Rushed time frames

A common point from partners in all the countries surveyed is that the time frames for the development of the PRSP were too short and too rigid, undermining deeper forms of participation and better results. A general complaint has been the lack of time in the workshops to discuss the drafts in any detail and the time allocated to consultations in general. This reveals a lack of understanding of the need of civil society to consult its base and to prepare adequately in order for participation to be of value. Rushed processes may also have impaired the carrying out of thorough poverty analyses, the identification of policy alternatives and the evaluation of the poverty effects of policy choices. This rigidity was in part caused by the linkage of the PRSP to debt relief via the Heavily Indebted Poor Country Initiative (HIPC), relief which governments understandably wished to obtain as soon as possible. Thus donor requirements contributed to poor quality participation and outputs.

Access to information

Access to information has been a key barrier to the operation of effective participation processes. Information access has been constrained not only by language barriers, but by a lack of a clear framework

¹⁴ EICP- ESPACIO DE INCIDENCIA CONTRA LA POBREZA. "Plan of Action 2003-2005" August 2003

¹⁵ CHRISTIAN AID, "Participating in Dialogue? The Estrategia Boliviana de Reducción de la Pobreza" January 2002

¹⁶ Ibid

defining the channels through which information will flow, the timetable for this and the obligations of the various parties to facilitate this. In Burkina Faso, for example, there were frequent complaints from civil society that they did not receive appropriate information in time, leading to a fairly low number of formal contributions from civil society.¹⁷ The rigid time frames for PRSP development have exacerbated this problem.

Privileged access for the private sector

The way in which participation processes were organized in some cases enabled private sector participation to dominate. In Bolivia, the private sector had privileged access to sectoral working groups whilst non-private sector civil society groups were excluded from this space, where the main decisions were taken.¹⁸ This made it easier for the private sector to express and drive its agenda. In Mozambique, a distinction was made between civil society groups and private sector ones, benefiting the latter who were better organized and able to dominate the later rounds of consultations.¹⁹

Although some countries are trying to address these problems, (for example Bolivia through the Law of Popular Participation), changes appear to remain formal and lacking in substance.

KEY ISSUE 2: GOVERNMENT AND CIVIL SOCIETY CAPACITY: CONSTRAINTS TO EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION AND QUALITY CONTENT

Participation processes have put the spotlight on the knowledge, skill and resource constraints facing both governments and civil societies, constraints that have contributed to the poor participatory processes outlined above.

Government capacity constraints

There is often a lack of officials who can focus their work on the PRSP. Governments have many simultaneous processes and issues to address whilst having limited financial resources and skilled personnel. Government officials often lack skills to run meaningful processes of participatory dialogue with civil society and therefore the organization of the consultation process was poor (eg Honduras).²⁰

In addition there is often poor communication and coordination both within and between ministries and between national and provincial levels of planning (eg Cambodia).²¹ These factors lead to a lack of clear connection between the PRSP and other development plans, and severely affect the ability of government to successfully plan and implement the PRSP.

Some governments have experienced difficulty in controlling and coordinating donors as Cambodian experience shows.²² This imbalance of power between government and donors is also a general constraint to national ownership.

Governments also face financial constraints in the funding of participatory processes.

Civil society constraints

In the case of civil society, the main constraints faced are a lack of knowledge capacity, a lack of connection to the grassroots, and personnel and financial constraints. In many countries civil society is young, especially at the provincial / local level, a factor which contributes to these constraints.

Many CSOs lack macro-economic analysis, policy-making skills and an understanding of public

¹⁷ AFRODAD "Comparative Analysis of Five African Countries with Completed PRSP" (Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Mozambique, Tanzania and Uganda) 2002. And; AFRODAD "Civil society Participation in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) Process. As Synthesis of Five Studies Conducted in Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Mozambique, Tanzania and Uganda" April 2002

¹⁸ CEDLA Rosell, Pablo "Dialogo Nacional 2000: Dialogo sobre Pobreza o Pobreza de un Dialogo?" No 1. Noviembre 2000

¹⁹ AFRODAD "Civil society Participation in the PRSP Process. A Case for Mozambique" 2002

²⁰ TROCAIRE "PRSPs – Policy & Practice in Honduras and Nicaragua" Trocaire's Contribution to the World Bank/IMF PRSP review process, January 2002

²¹ NGO Forum on Cambodia on behalf of the Asian NGO Coalition (ANGOC) for the East Asia Pacific Regional NGO Working Group on the World Bank. "Rapid Assessment of the PRSP Process in Cambodia: Two Banks, Two Processes, Two Documents" September 2001

²² NGO Forum on Cambodia on behalf of the Asian NGO Coalition (ANGOC) for the East Asia Pacific Regional NGO Working Group on the World Bank. "Rapid Assessment of the PRSP Process in Cambodia: Two Banks, Two Processes, Two Documents" September 2001

expenditure management. In this situation civil society organisations and individuals can face problems in providing valuable feedback and sometimes feel intimidated in the context of large workshops. This has hampered civil society ability to formulate and suggest realistic pro-poor policy alternatives.

In many countries networks of NGOs are not well established in every province and links between the national, provincial and local levels are not fully developed. In many cases CSOs lack of legitimacy in terms of representing and being accountable to constituencies of poor people, and thus their representative character has been questioned, (for example in Bolivia).²³ Furthermore this has created scenarios, as in Bolivia, where CSOs acted competitively, disputing amongst themselves on who held the 'real' representation of the grassroots voice.²⁴ Finally, there are also practical constraints such as a shortage of personnel and of financial resources, making it difficult for civil society to be heavily involved in PRSP issues. In Zambia, for example, the lack of resources severely limited the involvement of the churches in the PRSP.²⁵

KEY ISSUE 3: THE PERCEPTIONS AND WILLINGNESS OF PARTICIPANTS

A comparison of the experiences of partners indicates that capacity is neither the only nor the chief determinant of the quality of a participatory PRSP process. The levels of government and civil society commitment to the process, together with their perceptions of one another are extremely important factors, influencing both the process and outcomes.

Government will to engage civil society in the PRSP has a crucial bearing on both process and

content. Some partners (eg in Honduras) consider that their governments have engaged in participatory processes merely to please the donors with no real commitment to taking civil society views into account.²⁶ Other partners (eg in Zambia) consider their governments to have taken the process seriously and to have taken many civil society views on board.²⁷ In Bolivia, the multi-stakeholder consultation to build the EBPR (PRSP) was made a political priority for the government and because of this, it brought some significant policy change (e.g. Bolivia's resources will now be allocated according to positive discrimination criteria).²⁸ In Vietnam the government has a strong commitment to equity, which has contributed greatly to poverty reduction, but there is no legal framework for CSOs.

In addition, the perception civil society has of government and the way in which civil society groups have traditionally related to the government affect civil society ownership and commitment to the strategy. In Bolivia, despite the high level of government commitment, people found it hard to believe that a strategy devised by the state will actually reduce poverty, given that the government has been incapable of steering the country towards long-term economic growth or of addressing economic crises successfully in the past.²⁹ In several of the cases studied, civil society lacked confidence in the government. This lack of government credibility coupled with the perception/reality that donors determine policies anyway, undermines the potential for truly broad based and nationally owned PRSP processes and papers.

These two factors affect the extent to which civil society is engaged and to which civil society views

²³ CEDLA. Aguirre, Alvaro; Espada, Juan Luis "Problemas de la Estrategia para la Reducción de la Pobreza" No 3 Febrero 2001

²⁴ CHRISTIAN AID, "Participating in Dialogue? The Estrategia Boliviana de Reducción de la Pobreza" January 2002

²⁵ THE ECONOMIC JUSTICE NETWORK OF FOCCSIA. "The extent to which the churches and more specifically the Church Councils were involved in drawing up and executing the PRSP's" July 2003

²⁶ FOSDEH (Social Forum of External Debt and Development of Honduras) "Process and Experience For the Preparation of a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper in Honduras" Honduras, October 2001

²⁷ Mpepo, P. Besinatti, CSPP "Engagement of civil Society in the Zambian PRSP Process Formulation, Implementation and Monitoring" Presented at a ZCTU/FES Workshop on General Orientation to the PRS and the Zambian PRSP Process. Lusaka, Thursday March 27 2003

²⁸ CHRISTIAN AID, "Participating in Dialogue? The Estrategia Boliviana de Reducción de la Pobreza" January 2002

²⁹ CEDLA. Aguirre, Alvaro; Espada, Juan Luis "Problemas de la Estrategia para la Reducción de la Pobreza" No 3 Febrero 2001

are incorporated. It appears that the higher the level of trust and the higher the level of government commitment, the more civil society views seem to be incorporated in the PRSP.

In some countries partners experienced additional obstacles to positive engagement in the form of problematic relationships between CSOs, with different levels of willingness, competitive interests and an inability to reach agreement over common interests being experienced. In Bolivia, the different solutions proposed by different civil society participants to solve common problems demonstrated the individualistic approach CSOs still had, and showed how their diverse interests have prevented them from realizing their full potential power and political influence.³⁰

KEY ISSUE 4:

COUNTRY DRIVEN OR DONOR DRIVEN?

There is a general perception amongst partners that the process has been mainly donor rather than country driven. The PRSP is an externally imposed requirement that governments are obliged to produce in order to access debt relief and concessional financing, and must be approved by the World Bank. Partners therefore consider it paradoxical to refer to PRSPs as country-driven.

In most countries, partners felt that people within civil society and government had inadequate opportunity to read or understand the plans so far, much less 'drive' or exercise influence over them. In Vietnam, many government officials could not read the draft documents as they were initially written in English, clearly being targeted at generating external (donor/INGO) rather than Vietnamese input. Partners in Nicaragua and Honduras consider that their governments paid greater attention

to the views of the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and donors than those of citizens and parliaments, choosing policies the IFIs will approve rather than the policies citizens want.³¹

Donors have, however, sometimes played helpful roles and PRSPs have provided development partners an opportunity for increased coordination. For example, during Bolivia's National Dialogue 2000 international cooperation agencies played an important role in encouraging civil society participation. Meanwhile, in Central America donors have been successful in using Mitch structures to coordinate actions and to continue dialogue around PRSP. Whilst increased donor coordination and donor encouragement of participation are positive outcomes, the basic ownership problems of the PRSP framework remain and it is clear that the dominant and often poorly conducted role played by donors greatly affects both the processes and the content (see section 2) of PRSPs.

KEY ISSUE 5: PRAGMATIC STRATEGIES: PARALLEL CIVIL SOCIETY PROCESSES

Some partners had concerns that government would co-opt civil society, using them to legitimize/rubber-stamp pre-defined policy choices that civil society is opposed to. It is also clear that many partners feel that their views were ignored and/or that the official framework for participation was deeply flawed. These factors led partner organizations (as part of national civil society) to consider how to work with PRSP.

In Zambia and Honduras partners chose to hold parallel civil society processes although the relationship between the parallel and official processes differed markedly between the two countries. In Zambia the government and civil society processes were highly

³⁰ Ideas expressed both in CEDLA Rosell, Pablo "Dialogo Nacional 2000: Dialogo sobre Pobreza o Pobreza de un Dialogo?" No 1. Noviembre 2000. And in CHRISTIAN AID, "Participating in Dialogue? The Estrategia Boliviana de Reducción de la Pobreza" January 2002

³¹ FOSDEH (Social Forum of External Debt and Development of Honduras) "Process and Experience For the Preparation of a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper in Honduras" Honduras, October 2001 and TROCAIRE "PRSPS – Policy & Practice in Honduras and Nicaragua" Trocaire's Contribution to the World Bank/IMF PRSP review process, January 2002

collaborative whilst in Honduras the processes relating to one another in a more conflictual manner.

In the case of Zambia, civil society participated both in the governmental process and in a process organized by civil society itself. The Zambian government invited civil society to be part of the formulation process by participating in the PRSP Working Groups and Provincial Poverty Consultations. However prior to this, the government had formulated an I-PRSP with no notable stakeholder involvement. Civil society therefore faced the challenge of not merely rubber-stamping the views already put together but of providing an independent perspective. In addition it was felt that a broader forum was needed to achieve a better quality input. Civil society therefore initiated its own consultative process including consultative groups and a 'National Forum for civil society' resulting in the document "A PRSP for Zambia - A civil society Perspective", which was handed to the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development. This document provided a useful benchmark by which to judge the official PRSP and assess the extent to which civil society input was taken on board. Although initially perceived by some government representatives as a duplication of efforts or a challenge to the government, the civil society consultative process became a vital source of complementary information for the government and civil society felt that government took on board many of the recommendations they had made.³²

In Honduras negative features characterized the official processes; the government and international actors set the agenda for discussions, limiting their scope in a way unacceptable to civil society;

recommendations from civil society organizations were not taken into account; there was no space provided to discuss the final draft and no feedback to participants informing them of which of their proposals would be included and why. Given these frustrations and conflicts INTERFOROS initiated a process to generate a civil society PRSP. When the government presented the final version of the official PRSP, INTERFOROS concluded that it did not incorporate key proposals from civil society and stated publicly that they did not endorse it.³³

KEY ISSUE 6: INCREASED POLITICAL SPACE AND INCREASED CAPACITY

Despite the many obstacles named above, civil society has gained some increased political space through engagement in official and/or parallel PRSP processes. PRSPs have provided marginalized groups from civil society with an opportunity to participate with other partners and to develop more skills in their interaction with government.³⁴

Civil society has been able to increase its capacity in terms of improved networking. For example the PRSP led civil society in Zambia to unite, forming a new and vigorous network, and has shown them that if organized the government can take them seriously.³⁵

Involvement in the PRSP process has also, to varying extents, given civil society groups an increased understanding of national policy making processes and policy issues, an increased network of contacts with government and an increased national profile, all of which may contribute to more effective advocacy work in future, in turn aiding the development of a culture of transparency and accountability.

³² THE ECONOMIC JUSTICE NETWORK OF FOCCSIA. "The extent to which the churches and more specifically the Church Councils were involved in drawing up and executing the PRSP's" July 2003.

³³ FOSDEH (Social Forum of External Debt and Development of Honduras) "Process and Experience For the Preparation of a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper in Honduras" Honduras, October 2001

³⁴ AFRODAD "Africa's Experience with the PRSP Content and Process. (Draft Report)" Synthesis Report for 10 African Countries: Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Uganda, Tanzania, Malawi, Mozambique, Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda and Zambia) 2003

³⁵ Mpepo, P. Besinoti, CSPP "Engagement of civil Society in the Zambian PRSP Process Formulation, Implementation and Monitoring" Presented at a ZCTU/FES Workshop on General Orientation to the PRS and the Zambian PRSP Process. Lusaka, Thursday March 27 2003

The PRSP Process: Recommendations

Partners present a wide range of recommendations for governments, civil society and donors in relation to PRSP processes and participation issues in particular.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNMENTS

In relation to PRSP processes governments should:

- Encourage participatory exercises at all levels and create opportunities for and strengthen NGO involvement in every stage of the process.
- Institutionalize participation through the establishment of a permanent framework for effective participation in each stage of the PRSP process.
- Involve civil society in designing participatory frameworks and agendas.
- Provide a clear and generous timetable for PRSP formulation, in order that provincial/municipal authorities and civil society have an opportunity to understand and contribute to the process and plan their participation effectively.
- Ensure full and timely access to information for all stakeholders.
- Fully involve parliaments and political parties.
- Ensure effective inter and intra-ministerial and national-provincial communication and cooperation on developing the PRSP to enable effective implementation.
- Involve vulnerable and excluded groups in appropriate ways.
- Use local languages and appropriate forms for all substantive information and discussions.
- Ensure feedback to participants.
- Enable broad-based civil society input, and where relevant stop 'hand-picking' participants.
- Encourage the discussion of policy alternatives and allow participatory dialogue to transform the development paradigm.
- Include a section on the quality of participation in the PRSP, which identifies steps to further

improve this.

- Undertake a comprehensive review of lessons learnt from the past participatory processes prior to the next dialogue.
- Assist in building the capacity of stakeholders including parliaments, civil society and the media.
- Seek training on how to organise and facilitate participatory processes.
- Actively involve the media to ensure that the public is kept aware of the progress and limitations of the PRSP process.
- Negotiate and develop benchmarks together with civil society by which the quality of participation can be judged.
- Establish explicit indicators to show the level of participation in the development of all components of the PRSP as well as that of linked documents related to public expenditure, trade policy and development related plans of line ministries.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

In relation to PRSP processes civil society should:

- Organise into structures and strengthen national and international networking for effective participation for example through an NGO focal point (eg Cambodia) or setting up a specific poverty reduction network (eg Zambia).
- Increase the connectedness of national, provincial and local level civil society and develop democratic practice within constituencies for more effective representation.
- Build relevant capacities around economic literacy, advocacy, education and research, to strengthen civil society positions.
- Keep society well informed and build the consciousness of constituencies around the ongoing issues on PRSP and the importance of participation.
- Actively involve the media, to ensure that the public is kept aware of the progress and limita-

tions of the PRSP process.

- Focus on identifying what policy research and analysis will be needed to influence the next round of strategic planning and develop consensus around key positions before the next round of strategic planning begins.
- Negotiate and develop benchmarks (together with government where possible) by which the quality of participation can be judged.
- Advocate for the establishment of an institutional framework for effective participation.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DONORS

Donors should:

- Introduce a section on the quality of participation to the PRSP framework and encourage comprehensive reviews of past processes.
- Encourage governments to use participatory exercises at all levels and create opportunities for NGO involvement at every stage and support the institutionalisation of participation.
- Provide adequate funding for participatory processes in ways which ensure civil society's continued independence.
- Expose genuinely good participation practices and support exchange programmes.
- Encourage, finance and assist in building the capacity
 - > of government to organise and facilitate participatory processes
 - > of all stakeholders to participate in policy formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation stages
 - > of media to enable effective communication with the public
- Ensure that technical assistance is strongly oriented towards capacity building to strengthen civil society and government to engage with each other.
- Direct capacity building resources to less profes-

sional, provincial level CSOs in order to achieve broad based participation.

- Ensure that technical assistants involved in strategic planning understand that the length and style of planning documents should be tailored to the capacity of the government officials, and that IFI staff should not draft/re-work the documents themselves.
- Coordinate with other development partners to avoid duplication and encourage synergetic relationships.
- Reduce the reliance on visiting missions and ensure such missions spend sufficient time in country to understand national conditions.
- Encourage the discussion of policy alternatives and allow participatory dialogue to transform the development paradigm.

PRSP Contents: Perspectives and positions

Partner organizations are critical of the contents of the PRSP for a wide range of reasons. Critically, many of the issues partners raise relate to the failure to learn lessons from the past. These lessons related to the failure to concretely realign policies to the poverty agenda, the failure to fundamentally alter the dominant role of donors, the continued implementation of failed policies associated with structural adjustment and the failure to draw lessons from past Poverty Reduction Strategies. For PRSPs to succeed in reducing poverty a radical shift in policy content is needed, as indicated by the partner recommendations which follow this section.

KEY ISSUE 1: WB/IMF INFLUENCED CONTENTS

Partners point out that a key problem with the PRSPs is that the World Bank and the IMF established the 'blueprint' for writing the PRSP and the guidelines for poverty evaluation. These guidelines have strong neo-liberal assumptions, which connect to neo-liberal policy recommendations. This centrally determined format, coupled with the need for IFI approval, conditionalities and the role played by IFI staff in national contexts give the IFIs implicit and inordinate power over the contents of national PRSPs. Thus whilst the national specifics in PRSP texts differ, the policy matrices attached to PRSPs converge in most major aspects.³⁶

Poor people's influence over the contents appears however to be extremely limited. Policies opposed by poor people such as privatisations, user fees for essential services, the removal of subsidies for basic agricultural inputs and the dismantling of government-run cooperatives are common in PRSPs, whilst policies such as land reform which poor people favour are not included. This said, some

pro-poor policy developments can be seen particularly in the social and sectoral policy arenas, such as abolition of user fees for primary education.

KEY ISSUE 2: POOR QUALITY POVERTY ANALYSIS

Some partners consider that the understanding of poverty and quality of poverty analysis contained in the PRSP is poor. Some PRSPs lack an analysis of the various dimensions of poverty whilst others provide an imprecise characterization of poverty, both conceptually and in the definition of indicators.³⁷

In addition, the understanding of poverty in PRSPs appears to be heavily influenced by the World Bank and IMF, who established the guidelines for the poverty evaluation. In the case of Cambodia, the dimensions of poverty described in the I-PRSP are exactly the same dimensions described in the World Bank Source Books on Poverty Reduction Strategies.³⁸ The poor quality of poverty analysis leads to sectoral and geographical shortcomings in the strategies and policies to reduce poverty, and to strategic investments not being identified.³⁹ In addition there has been a poor evaluation of the performance of previous national poverty reduction policies, meaning that lessons are not being drawn from past experiences.⁴⁰

KEY ISSUE 3: GROWTH, NOT POVERTY REDUCTION IS THE PRIMARY PRSP GOAL

Economic growth is the mainstay of PRSP strategies. According to the IMF, sustained poverty reduction is not possible without rapid growth. However, the negative social impacts of growth policies are not addressed and redistribution strategies are absent. As AFRODAD explains, what the IFIs outline as a requirement for sustainable poverty

³⁶ FOCUS ON THE GLOBAL SOUTH, Roy Chavez Maluan, Jenina and Guttal, Shalmali "Structural Adjustment on the Name of the Poor. The PRSP Experience in the Lao PDR, Cambodia and Vietnam" January 2002

³⁷ EICP- ESPACIO DE INCIDENCIA CONTRA LA POBREZA. "Plan of Action 2003-2005" August 2003

³⁸ NGO Forum on Cambodia on behalf of the Asian NGO Coalition (ANGOC) for the East Asia Pacific Regional NGO Working Group on the World Bank. "Rapid Assessment of the PRSP Process in Cambodia: Two Banks, Two Processes, Two Documents" September 2001

³⁹ This issue is explained in: TROCAIRE "PRSP Update, December 2002, Central America, Honduras and Nicaragua" December 2002

⁴⁰ NGO Forum on Cambodia on behalf of the Asian NGO Coalition (ANGOC) for the East Asia Pacific Regional NGO Working Group on the World Bank. "Rapid Assessment of the PRSP Process in Cambodia: Two Banks, Two Processes, Two Documents" September 2001

reduction (rapid growth, macroeconomic stability, structural reforms and social stability) is couched within a neoliberal framework that fails to capture the trade-offs between the issues.⁴¹

In practice, rapid growth has often meant environmental degradation, social disruption and rising inequality. In Cambodia for example, an over-emphasis on high economic growth may be problematic as long as adequate social regulations (e.g. minimum wage legislation, social security) and environmental regulations (e.g. pollution thresholds) are not included in the country's legal and institutional framework.⁴²

In the case of Vietnam, fast growth is the aim of the PRSP. The strategy does not establish clear linkages between growth measures and a pro-poor development strategy, and the document has failed to identify the potential social and economic impacts of the suggested growth package. Growth and anti-poverty measures seem to be developed independently, favouring growth. The I-PRSPs for Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia made no clear projections for poverty reduction. Hence, programs were ultimately directed towards achieving the highest possible growth, which is not necessarily the same as achieving the highest possible poverty reduction.⁴³

In general, PRSPs insist on growth as a pre-condition for and the main driver of poverty reduction. However, this assumption is highly debatable, given the way growth policies are currently implemented and the lack of focus on redistribution as a mechanism to promote growth or on equity issues.

Within the PRSP framework, attending to poverty

problems is subsidiary to economic growth, and social and environmental concerns are not adequately covered. Rather than creating social policy for poverty reduction in a structural approach, PRSP social policy aims to mitigate the negative impact of economic policies.

KEY ISSUE 4: PRSP AND PRGF: A REFORMULATION OF SAP POLICIES

Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), the precursor of PRSPs/the PRGF, were largely discredited worldwide and are strongly opposed by many partners, being associated with economic contraction, reduced access to health care and education, increased income inequality and increased poverty. PRSPs in many countries were built upon past poverty reduction strategies and have thus inherited a strong relation with SAPs. However, it was partly due to the growing critique of SAPs that PRSPs were introduced.

Partners find that the IFIs continue to be unwilling to seek or consider policy alternatives. Most worryingly, the IFIs continue to assume that structural adjustment policies automatically contribute to poverty reduction, without a thorough analysis of the likely poverty effect of SAP policies at the country level. For example, PRSPs fail to assess the effects of these policies on poverty in the short term, and on the national economy in the medium and long term, particularly regarding the effects on aggregate demand and the growth capacity of the nation's internal market.⁴⁴

Linked to this, PRSPs do not present a thorough investigation of the policy choices made in the attached matrices or in the PRGF (the conditionality based lending facility for the PRSP). Many of

⁴¹ AFRODAD "Africa's Experience with the PRSP Content and Process. (Draft Report)" Synthesis Report for 10 African Countries: Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Uganda, Tanzania, Malawi, Mozambique, Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda and Zambia) 2003

⁴² NGO Forum on Cambodia "A Rapid Comparison of the NGO Statement to the 2002 CG Meeting and the Final Draft of Cambodia's National Poverty Reduction Strategy" June 2003

⁴³ This is noted in: FOCUS ON THE GLOBAL SOUTH, Roy Chavez Maluan, Jenina and Guttal, Shalmali "Structural Adjustment on the Name of the Poor. The PRSP Experience in the Lao PDR, Cambodia and Vietnam" January 2002

⁴⁴ EICP- ESPACIO DE INCIDENCIA CONTRA LA POBREZA. "Plan of Action 2003-2005" August 2003

the controversial policies are contained within the PRGF rather than the PRSP itself, and partners consider it evident that PRSPs are in effect subordinate to PRGF agreements. Whilst there are a few notable cases where the PRSP allowed for an alternative policy prescription (for example the IFIs accepted the continued protection of cashew nuts in Mozambique and the abolition of school fees in Tanzania and health fees in Uganda) for most countries, PRSPs and PRGFs entail an uncritical continuation of past Structural Adjustment Policies.⁴⁵ This perception is strengthened by the fact that PRSPs are only approved when they contain macroeconomic policies acceptable to the IFIs (linked to conditionalities).

Civil society was often excluded from discussions of macro policy in the PRSP process. In addition, critical assessments of structural adjustment policies made by civil society during consultations were sometimes excluded from the final reports of those consultations. There is no participatory framework for civil society inclusion in PRGF negotiations. The continuing SAP policy content of the PRSP/PRGF has undermined civil society ownership. There is an urgent need to acknowledge the negative impact of recommended policies and increase the understanding of why countries like Bolivia, where structural adjustment policies have been closely followed, remains one of the region's poorest and underdeveloped countries.

KEY ISSUE 5: PRSPS, THE PRGF AND CONDITIONALITIES

Before the formulation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, it was argued by Fund and Bank officials that once the PRSP was in place, the conditionalities for the enhanced HIPC would be drop-

ped and in their place would be put the nationally owned PRSP. This has not taken place. Whilst the PRSPs themselves are linked to a limited number of conditionalities, PRGF agreements continue to impose macro-economic policy conditionalities. AFRODAD's study of Tanzania found that the enhanced HIPC matrix for Tanzania contained 30 conditionalities of which 25 were from the PRGF and only 5 from the PRSP.⁴⁶ In addition PRSP and PRGF conditionalities are as externally imposed and enforced as ever, as Zambian experience demonstrates. After Zambian civil society strongly demanded a stop to the privatisation of the electrical corporation and a national bank, the President responded with a statement opposing any further privatisation. In response, the IMF country representative issued a statement warning Zambia she could lose US\$1 billion in HIPC debt relief if privatisation does not go ahead.⁴⁷

Macroeconomic policy formulation continues to be dominated by the conditions imposed by the IFIs through the PRGF, with the social development policies elaborated under PRSP remaining the poor relation.

KEY ISSUE 6: PRSP AND PRIVATISATION

Privatisations are heavily recommended by the IFIs, and are being implemented through many PRSPs and PRGFs, despite strong civil society calls for a change in this policy. Privatisations have been strongly questioned by partners, as the sale of public companies has been less than profitable in many countries and has brought a range of negative consequences. Far from contributing to the reduction of poverty, the privatisation of public services such as water and electricity has led to an increase in the cost of living and as the Zambian case illustrates, has created more poverty mainly through job

⁴⁵ AFRODAD 'Africa's Experience with the PRSP Content and Process. (Draft Report)' * Synthesis Report for 10 African Countries: Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Uganda, Tanzania, Malawi, Mozambique, Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda and Zambia) 2003

⁴⁶ AFRODAD 'Africa's Experience with the PRSP Content and Process. (Draft Report)' * Synthesis Report for 10 African Countries: Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Uganda, Tanzania, Malawi, Mozambique, Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda and Zambia) 2003

⁴⁷ Ibid

losses. Zambian civil society underlines that further privatisations should not occur before full and accountable financial and social audits of previous privatisations are carried out and made public.⁴⁸ In Mozambique, privatization has had a negative social impact and growth has not brought improvements in the life of the poor; on the contrary the division between poor and rich has increased and redistribution of profits remains weak.⁴⁹ Privatisations in Central America have led to massive popular criticism since the result has been the transfer from a state to a private monopoly with lower quality and higher prices.⁵⁰

KEY ISSUE 7: PRSP AND TRADE

Trade liberalisation and market access are a standard part of the structural adjustment package and are included in many PRSP policy matrices. This is the case in Vietnam where there is a heavy reliance on exports, especially of rice and other cash crops, as means of increasing incomes. The PRSP does not underscore the two-way character of trade and the policy matrices do not outline policies by which these countries can better deal with the influx of imports caused by liberalization. In the Asian countries, the PRSPs do not offer an analysis of what the countries would lose, or of how its more vulnerable populations would be affected by trade liberalization if such measures are put in place without first putting in place the necessary protections and supports to ensure security for local producers and consumers. In Vietnam, instead of supporting local and national food security, or even the potential to alleviate hunger through food self-sufficiency, the PRSP focuses on the production and export of crops.⁵¹ In Cambodia, although the trade policy is currently labelled as pro-poor, NGOs do

not yet see a positive correlation between the type of trade strategy proposed and the actual reduction of poverty in the country. The development of trade strategies must allow sufficient time for participatory poverty impact analysis and extensive consultation with the communities that would be most affected by these strategies. Trade policy will only be pro-poor if the pace, sequencing and distributional aspects of trade and economic policy reform are considered carefully.⁵²

KEY ISSUE 8: AVOIDANCE OF EQUITY ISSUES

Partners consider that key equity issues are avoided in the PRSP and that in general PRSPs have a low level of focus on equity issues. For example, land reform is almost completely ignored in many strategies, despite extreme inequality in land ownership and the potential for land reform to contribute to poverty reduction and despite the poor generally being in support of land redistribution and the lowering of land rents. Instead PRSPs push for the development of land markets and formalisation of land ownership, which in the context of extreme land inequality has the potential to worsen land access. In many cases, poverty problems are viewed as a problem of simply “lacking” without modifying the economic policies that can affect wealth production, distribution and income re-distribution. For instance, in Nicaragua, civil society initially rejected the government’s definition of poverty and criticised poverty-related statistics and indicators for being unrealistic and overly positive.⁵³ Furthermore, despite corruption being a key problem for equity and poverty reduction, in many PRSPs there is no acknowledgement of the impact of this issue on poverty and there are no specific plans to combat it.

⁴⁸ Jubilee-Zambia / Debt Project, by Mphuka, Chrispin “HIPC Study: The case of Zambia”. December 2002

⁴⁹ Mozambique Debt Group, “Position of the Mozambican Debt Group on the PRSP process”. March 2003

⁵⁰ Views from CSO, including FOSDEH contained in: TROCAIRE “PRSP Update, December 2002, Central America, Honduras and Nicaragua” December 2002

⁵¹ FOCUS ON THE GLOBAL SOUTH, Roy Chavez Maluan, Jenina and Guttal, Shalmali “Structural Adjustment on the Name of the Poor. The PRSP Experience in the Lao PDR, Cambodia and Vietnam” January 2002

⁵² Cooperation Committee for Cambodia, NGO Forum on Cambodia and Medicam “NGO Statement to the 2002 Consultative Group Meeting on Cambodia” Phnom Penh, 19-21 June, 2002

⁵³ TROCAIRE “PRSP Update, December 2002, Central America, Honduras and Nicaragua” December 2002

KEY ISSUE 9: LACK OF SPECIAL MEASURES FOR VULNERABLE GROUPS

“Vulnerability and marginalization are both causes and consequences of poverty, and poverty reduction is unlikely to be achieved unless the rights and the needs of these groups are taken into account”.⁵⁴ Vulnerable and marginalized groups such as women, children, indigenous groups, disabled persons and people who are infected or affected by HIV/AIDS require particular attention in policy development as they experience specific economic and social situations and are often disproportionately affected by the negative social impacts of economic policies.

Although most PRSPs make references to the importance of closing the gender gap, they usually lack a clear policy on how women can be integrated into development efforts and how they can contribute to poverty reduction. In Cambodia, although important steps to improve gender issues have been taken in the Final Draft of the NPRS and although problems such as violence against women and trafficking are recognized, concrete solutions in terms of legislation and policy measures to address these need further development.⁵⁵ In the case of Bangladesh, the target of the Bangladeshi PRSP is to “reduce the number of people living below the poverty line”. It is hugely symbolic that this target is not gender sensitive and does not take account of ways to adequately bridge gender gaps. The question of how the PRSP will mainstream and increase the pro-poor economic growth of women remains unanswered.⁵⁶ Women were not considered in the development of economic policy or rural growth policies, women's groups were not included in budget consultations, equal wages for women were not mentioned under

the initiative to enhance rural wages and differential measures were not taken.⁵⁷

Whilst PRSPs have increasingly recognized the social and economic threat posed by HIV/AIDS and although in countries like Cambodia progress is being made on key aspects of HIV/AIDS programming, clear strategies are still absent in many countries and there is a general need for constantly expand and upgrade the interventions in this field.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Ideas expressed both in CEDLA Rosell, Pablo “Diálogo Nacional 2000: Diálogo sobre Pobreza o Pobreza de un Diálogo?” No 1. Noviembre 2000. And in CHRISTIAN AID, “Participating in Dialogue? The Estrategia Boliviana de Reducción de la Pobreza” January 2002

⁵⁵ FOSDEH (Social Forum of External Debt and Development of Honduras) “Process and Experience For the Preparation of a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper in Honduras” Honduras, October 2001 and TROCAIRE “PRSPs – Policy & Practice in Honduras and Nicaragua” Trocaire’s Contribution to the World Bank/IMF PRSP review process, January 2002

⁵⁶ For the steps forward taken in this regard see: NGO Forum on Cambodia “A Rapid Comparison of the NGO Statement to the 2002 CG Meeting and the Final Draft of Cambodia’s National Poverty Reduction Strategy” June 2003

⁵⁷ STEPS TOWARDS DEVELOPMENT. “National Dialogue on Gender and the PRSP: Report and Recommendations”. November 26 2002

⁵⁸ M.M Akash “Brief Note on the PRSP Process on Bangladesh” Chairman of the People’s Empowerment Trust Cooperation Committee for Cambodia, NGO Forum on Cambodia and Medicam “NGO Statement to the 2002 Consultative Group Meeting on Cambodia” Phnom Penh, 19-21 June, 2002

PRSP Contents: Recommendations

Partners present a wide range of recommendations for government, civil society and donors in relation to the policy content of PRSPs.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNMENTS

Regarding the approach and the policy paradigm, governments should:

- The macroeconomic policy framework should place poverty reduction at the centre of the development targets.
- Seek an alternative analytical framework to SAPs and build alliances with other governments that seek these alternative policies.
- Include a full multi-dimensional analysis of poverty, with an analysis of how these dimensions are affected by growth, public policy, institutional frameworks and exogenous shocks, and of bottlenecks to growth and poverty reduction.
- In collaboration with civil society identify poverty objectives, then identify the policies and projects that stem from those objectives. National policies should respond to national needs.
- Examine the expected effects of a range of policy options, to help identify the policies likely to have the greatest impact on poverty (results-orientation). Incompatibilities between macroeconomic policies and poverty reduction should be studied and consistency between economic and social policies to deal with poverty introduced.
- Key issues such as land tenure, gender discrimination, the needs of indigenous people, disabled persons and the HIV-AIDS crisis should be given proper attention. This should include measures to monitor the impacts of policy prescriptions on these groups.
- Establish specific measures to ensure gender equality, to eliminate all forms of oppression against girls and to ensure women's participation. The document should address both the practical and strategic needs of women.
- Disaggregate poverty data by age and gender and include action plans for reducing childhood poverty. The views of children and young people should be taken seriously thus be reflected in the PRSP contents.
- Underline the human development approach emphasizing empowerment and the building of capabilities, especially amongst disadvantaged groups, in the belief that empowerment helps to broaden the economic base, resulting in higher, more sustainable rates of growth.
- Develop a long-term approach to poverty reduction, which allows for the building of capacities, especially at the lower levels of the decentralised structure.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

In relation PRSP policy content, civil society should:

- Agitate for an alternative development framework.
- Identify and promote good practices for poverty reduction.
- PRSPs are one of many government policy documents. When important issues cannot be included in the PRSPs framework, advocate for their inclusion in other relevant government documents.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DONORS

In relation to the policy environment for PRSPs, donors should:

- Rethink structural adjustment policies and consider policy alternatives.
- Strategies under PRGF should be made coherent with those strategies for the achievement of poverty objectives as set out under PRSP.
- Donors should specify the amount of additional resources available so that plans can be matched to resources.

- Expose genuinely good policy practices and support exchange programmes.
- Assist in resolving external problems such as market access by developing countries, promoting fair trade and demand that developed countries fulfil their Official Development Aid (ODA) quota.

PRSP Implementation and Monitoring: Perspectives and positions

Many countries are now in the implementation phase of the PRSP, which holds its own set of challenges. Some of these challenges have their roots in weak PRSP content, whilst others relate to the financing and yet others to practical problems in implementation systems or political will. Some partners consider the PRSP to be being poorly implemented or implemented to only a limited extent. Despite these many difficulties, partners find that engagement in the implementation/monitoring phase of the PRSP opens up new space to work together in new ways, an experience that will strengthen future contributions to policy formation processes. A wide range of partner recommendations for improvement to implementation and monitoring systems follow this section.

KEY ISSUE 1: PRSP – A WEAK BASIS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

One of the key aspects of a PRSP is that it should be results oriented: identifying the desired outcomes and planning the road to achieving these. PRSP documents should therefore provide a clear prioritisation of policy interventions and clear frameworks for implementation, should outline how the constraints facing implementation are to be overcome and should provide indicators and monitoring mechanisms by which the PRSP will be judged. Partners consider that national PRSPs often fail in these regards, with significant negative results for implementation.

Lack of prioritisation of policy and actions

The issues prioritised within PRSPs are strikingly similar across countries: education, health, agriculture, water and sanitation, economic infrastructure and the environment.⁵⁹ However within these broad issues, there is a failure to give guidance on priori-

ties, specifically where there is a conflict between economic growth, environmental protection and social development, or where there are competing sectoral claims on resources. The prioritisation process needs to identify a limited set of specific objectives, and then identify the policies and projects that stem from those objectives. Although the UN Millennium Development Goals provide a good starting point for defining those objectives, these need to be localized and revised to reflect priorities identified by the poor themselves. Much more work should be done in order to identify which policies will have the largest impact on poverty, and therefore should be the priorities for investment. In Honduras, partners consider that planning and prioritisation remains unclear and that the PRSP provides an unrealistic and impractical framework that does not allow priority projects arising at the local, municipal and departmental levels to be clearly channelled. They therefore consider that it is necessary to revise the strategy and the investment plan in order for resources not to be misused.⁶⁰

It is also important to target strategies towards those groups most in need. PRSP strategies fail to effectively target the poorest populations. Situations have been identified in Central America where the departments/provinces with the highest poverty indicators do not get a great share of debt relief resources. The task is not to add more to the already heavily packed policy agenda, but to prioritise key policy measures for immediate action and revise the methodologies used to target beneficiaries.⁶¹

Weak implementation frameworks and public sector constraints

PRSP documents are inadequately linked to other national planning tools such as the budget and there

⁵⁹ AFRODAD "Africa's Experience with the PRSP Content and Process. (Draft Report)" Synthesis Report for 10 African Countries: Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Uganda, Tanzania, Malawi, Mozambique, Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda and Zambia! 2003

⁶⁰ EICP- ESPACIO DE INCIDENCIA CONTRA LA POBREZA. "Plan of Action 2003-2005" August 2003 and "Comentarios de las Organizaciones No Gubernamentales (ONG's) Ante el consejo Consultivo de la ERP sobre el Informe de Avances y Actualización Estrategia de Reducción de Pobreza". Honduras

⁶¹ Explained in "Comentarios de las Organizaciones No Gubernamentales (ONG's) Ante el consejo Consultivo de la ERP sobre el Informe de Avances y Actualización Estrategia de Reducción de Pobreza" from Honduras and TROCAIRE "PRSPs – Policy & Practice in Honduras and Nicaragua" Trocaire's Contribution to the World Bank/IMF PRSP review process, January 2002

are weak linkages between budgeting and actual expenditure. Without these linkages, PRSPs will fail. Another key concern for implementation, and a weakness in almost all PRSPs, is coordination between central and local levels of governments. The capacity of decentralized authorities remains very weak in many countries increasing the risk of failure when PRSPs are in the implementation phase. The core of implementation work lies at the local level and strong and capable local governments are needed. This necessity does not seem to be seriously addressed in PRSPs. The contradictions between national-level planning and decentralized planning need to be addressed and local authority and municipal development plans need to be consistent and co-ordinated with the PRSP (and vice versa).

Partner experience in Honduras demonstrates that the decentralization process is not strong enough and that ministries act without coordination with local governments. The constraints that municipalities face in implementation are especially visible given that it is at municipal level that projects are being implemented.⁶²

In terms of public sector constraints, NGOs in Cambodia note three main impediments to efficient public sector service delivery: insufficient wages and allowances, rampant corruption and the unpredictable and irregular disbursement of funds.⁶³ Indeed the gap between budgeted funds and effective disbursement is undermining any gains from policy reforms and contributing to disillusionment among stakeholders.⁶⁴ Other concerns raised by partners are under-expenditure in the priority social sectors such as health and education, bureaucracy and insufficient/inefficient staff. These issues are

inadequately addressed in PRSPs. Tackling these problems needs to be given the highest priority, given that all other parts of the plan depend on them. There need to be clear strategies and indicators for public sector reform, salary reform, disbursement of funds and good governance.

Lack of clear monitoring system and indicators

Monitoring is extremely important given that good programmes have failed in the past due to lack of monitoring. In many countries the framework for monitoring the PRSP is weak and the parameters and mechanisms for civil society participation in monitoring are not well defined. In Southern Africa partners consider that the monitoring structures are not yet fully in place, and the elements to be monitored are not yet clear.⁶⁵ In Zambia, CSPR report that although government will work with individual civil society organizations in implementing some PRSP issues, it is not yet clear to what extent civil society will be engaged.⁶⁶ In Honduras civil society considers that the indicators used are unrealistic and too generalized to allow a true evaluation of poverty reduction; indicators should be broken down for sectors, genders and socio-economic groups.⁶⁷ In Nicaragua, civil society is concerned that the PRSP progress report does not facilitate an overall view of the portfolio of PRSP projects nor does it specify project locations or amount spent making it difficult for civil society to monitor implementation or evaluation so far.⁶⁸

Some partners have proposed strategies to create a better monitoring framework. In Nicaragua, Coordinadora Civil has proposed amongst other things that a special fund be created for HIPC debt relief in order to facilitate the monitoring of how resour-

⁶² "Comentarios de las Organizaciones No Gubernamentales (ONG's) Ante el consejo Consultivo de la ERP sobre el Informe de Avances y Actualización Estrategia de Reducción de Pobreza"

⁶³ NGO Forum on Cambodia "A Compilation of NGO and civil Society Comments on the Second Draft of Cambodia's National Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper" December 2002

⁶⁴ NGO Forum on Cambodia "A Rapid Comparison of the NGO Statement to the 2002 CG Meeting and the Final Draft of Cambodia's National Poverty Reduction Strategy" June 2003

⁶⁵ THE ECONOMIC JUSTICE NETWORK OF FOCCSIA. "The extent to which the churches and more specifically the Church Councils were involved in drawing up and executing the PRSPs" July 2003

⁶⁶ Mpepo, P. Besinati, CSPR "Engagement of civil Society in the Zambian PRSP Process Formulation, Implementation and Monitoring" Presented at a ZCTU/FES Workshop on General Orientation to the PRS and the Zambian PRSP Process. Lusaka, Thursday March 27 2003.

⁶⁷ EICP- ESPACIO DE INCIDENCIA CONTRA LA POBREZA. "Plan of Action 2003-2005" August 2003

⁶⁸ TROCAIRE "PRSP Update, December 2002, Central America, Honduras and Nicaragua" December 2002

ces are spent.⁶⁹ In Cambodia the NGO Forum considers that the use of Poverty and Social Impact Assessments (PSIA) of macro policies would provide a useful tool in monitoring and updating the plan in addition to the Annual Progress Reports on Implementation and that it would be useful if a variety of agencies carried out such assessments, so that the results could be compared and debated.⁷⁰ Partners also consider that monitoring should involve not just quantitative and qualitative surveys, but also direct reports from development workers and from poor people themselves.

KEY ISSUE 2: THE FINANCING GAP

Most countries face significant financing shortfalls for their poverty reduction strategies. The planning and implementation of PRSPs is being negatively affected by this lack of funding and by the difficulty of being able to predict the availability of donor funding. There is therefore a clear risk that PRSPs will remain strategies on paper alone due to the lack of financial resources. The funding crisis is caused by national economic constraints, external economic issues (such as declining terms of trade), the failure of donors to fulfil their pledges and the insufficiency of debt relief.

Debt relief is not enough

It is clear that the debt relief currently provided through HIPC is insufficient to enable the required levels of growth and sustainably reduce poverty. Yet donors continue to use the debt sustainability approach, rather than working for debt cancellation.

According to a recent IMF/World Bank status report on HIPC, after reaching completion point and receiving debt relief Zambia will still have an

unsustainable external debt burden and there is doubt whether its debt stock will ever be reduced significantly, since the government continues to contract new loans.⁷¹ As long as a country such as Zambia pays 130 million drawn per annum to service its debt, the PRSP will do very little to alleviate poverty.⁷²

The general picture is that most HIPC countries will continue to have unsustainable external debt whilst increasing their internal debt. The growth in domestic debt has a devastating effect on growth prospects for the economy since domestic borrowing by government crowds out private borrowing, thereby reducing the level of domestic private investments and affecting poverty reduction possibilities.

In countries facing economic crisis such as Bolivia, whilst HIPC was initially seen as a program to make debt more sustainable and increase resources for poverty reduction, it has simply become a way to diminish the negative consequences of the crisis.⁷³ Furthermore, the relief resources are not even enough to cover the effects of the crisis on the social services budgets.⁷⁴ In Nicaragua, concern has been expressed that the 2003 budget grants priority to the payment of the country's debt over spending on education and health.⁷⁵ Debt cancellation is urgently needed.

Budget dependence and unpredictable aid/debt relief flows

Most PRSPs depend not only on money saved from debt relief, but also on finances drawn from the national budget. Financial problems are exacerbated when these budgets are highly dependent on external sources of funding, as is the case in Uganda

⁶⁹ Ibid

⁷⁰ NGO Forum on Cambodia "A Compilation of NGO and civil Society Comments on the Second Draft of Cambodia's National Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper" December 2002

⁷¹ IMF and World Bank HIPC Status Report, September 2002 in Jubilee-Zambia / Debt Project, by Mphuka, Chrispin "HIPC Study: The case of Zambia". December 2002

⁷² THE ECONOMIC JUSTICE NETWORK OF FOCCSIA. "The extent to which the churches and more specifically the Church Councils were involved in drawing up and executing the PRSP's" July 2003.

⁷³ CEDLA, Proyecto Control Ciudadano, Boletín Trimestral "Los Tropiezos de la Estrategia Antipobreza", Noviembre 2001

⁷⁴ CEDLA, Escobar de Pabón Silvia "Condicionalidad Externa y Desarrollo. Evaluando la Estrategia Boliviana de Reducción de la Pobreza". No 5 Mayo 2002

⁷⁵ TROCAIRE "PRSP Update, December 2002, Central America, Honduras and Nicaragua" December 2002

where about 53% of the budget comes from external loans and grants.⁷⁶ Such high levels of donor financing are often not sustained, so governments are obliged to constantly revise their budgets and their PRSP targets.

This problem is exacerbated by the unpredictability of aid/debt relief transfers. Transfers are often delayed and sometimes not made at all. In countries such as Zambia, donors have failed to fulfil their pledges, mostly on the pretext that government is failing to meet conditionalities. In 2001, HIPC relief was delayed forcing the Zambian government to borrow domestically in order to service external debt.⁷⁷

The failure by donors to meet pledged funding translates into certain programs not being implemented. Uncertainty over and fluctuations in donor fulfilment of pledges, renders planning extremely difficult and hinders progress of poverty reduction efforts in the country. When a debtor defaults on debt service payments penalties are imposed, but when a donor defaults no negative sanctions are imposed on the donor.

Finally, both the World Bank and the IMF have criticized the fact that none of the first completed PRSPs include contingency plans for how to proceed in the event of financing shortfalls. In the context of financial uncertainty and constraints, prioritization of PRSP interventions becomes more crucial than ever.

KEY ISSUE 3: IMPLEMENTATION IN PRACTICE

Given the weaknesses in prioritization and implementation frameworks, public sector constraints, the lack of a clear monitoring system and appropriate indicators, and the financing gap, the successful implementation of PRSP strategies is in grave

doubt. Partner experience of implementation in practice testifies to the problems being experienced.

Poor prioritisation in practice

In a context where priorities for implementation are not clearly defined, the nature of conditionalities leads to the implementation of conditionality-linked macro-policy interventions being prioritised, whilst pro-poor social and structural policy interventions are often delayed. This is an effective de-prioritisation of pro-poor policy.

As expected given the PRSP contents there is continuing critique of the lack of priority given to wealth redistribution. In Honduras, for example, fiscal interventions aimed at accessing a deal with the IMF have been prioritised through the fiscal reform of 2000, with negative consequences for small and medium sized businesses and for unemployment and poverty levels. According to the government the latest fiscal reform “Ley de Equidad Tributaria” (Fiscal equity law) is aimed at helping to close the gap between rich and poor, however, partners argue that equity remains a merely formality and that no real measures are being taking to redistribute wealth.⁷⁸

Low implementation levels

As mentioned above pro-poor structural and social policy elements are often lagging behind in implementation. Partners consider the level of implementation of the poverty-oriented aspects of the PRSP to be low. This is due to a number of factors such as capacity constraints, a lack of financing and the non-prioritisation of poverty expenditures in the context of the finance gap (eg Zambia). These capacity issues are exacerbated by a lack of political will. In Nicaragua, the implementation of actions has been delayed, affecting the motivation of the social actors involved and the population in general

⁷⁶ Data from Mutume, Gumisai, “A New Anti-Poverty Remedy for Africa? Adjustment policies weaken PRSP goals, critics, charge” Africa Recovery Vol 16, No4. February 2003

⁷⁷ Jubilee-Zambia / Debt Project, by Mphuka, Chrispin “HIPC Study: The case of Zambia”. December 2002

⁷⁸ “Comentarios de las Organizaciones No Gubernamentales (ONG’s) Ante el consejo Consultivo de la ERP sobre el Informe de Avances y Actualización Estrategia de Reducción de Pobreza”. Honduras

and undermining the credibility of the strategy.⁷⁹ As long as the PRSP's are not implemented and people do not see improvement in their lives, the PRSP will mean very little to them.⁸⁰ "The benchmark to evaluate success or failure of the reform programs must be what happens to the most vulnerable groups."⁸¹

Lack of information and awareness

For municipalities and provinces to be actively involved in implementation they require information about the strategies to be implemented. Equally, no effective monitoring by civil society (or government) can be carried out when organized, transparent, reliable and updated public information is lacking.

In Nicaragua, a general critique has been the lack of awareness and appropriation of the PRSP at the decentralized level of the relevant ministries, which has negatively affected the implementation of projects. It has been difficult to coordinate different issues of implementation since relevant ministries do not have representatives at the local level. An evaluation of implementation in 7 municipalities⁸² concluded that although the level of knowledge and appropriation of the strategy varies between municipalities, in general a lack of knowledge has been an obstacle affecting the involvement of local authorities. However the study also concluded that positive attitudes towards information sharing had been promoted.

Methodological constraints

Methodological constraints relating to the allocation of funds have been noted by partners. In Bolivia, for example, a detailed analysis of the distribution of debt relief resources to the different

municipalities reveals that the departments with the highest poverty indicators will not get a significant share of these resources. This is explained by the methodology used, which placed greater importance on the population size than on actual needs, affecting the assignment of resources to poor and small municipalities. Municipalities with disperse populations and high levels of subsistence agriculture should be prioritized. If this situation is not changed, in the long term the country will face greater depopulation in the rural areas.⁸³

Failure to use local capacities

Partners in Nicaragua feel that the strategy is not taking advantage of local capacities.⁸⁴ For example the hiring of personnel to implement programs and projects is being done at the departmental level, instead of giving opportunities to the residents of the municipalities. Similarly, products that could be bought at the local markets are being provided from the central level undermining a potential avenue for local development.

Lack of political will, lack of follow up

In Honduras, consultancy work was done to develop a gender approach for the formulation of public policies and for operative and budget planning. However, once the consultancy was over the issues were not taken forward.⁸⁵ This highlights a lack of continuity of policies, the misuse of resources and the lack of political commitment to the topic.

KEY ISSUE 4: NEW SPACE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

A positive outcome is that the implementation phase has opened up space for local actors to work together in new ways around poverty and deve-

⁷⁹ Proyecto Fomento de la Participación de la Sociedad Civil en el Monitoreo, Seguimiento y Retroalimentación de la ERCERP (ADM, FUNDEMUNI, INGES, INPRHU, IMC, IPADE, ODESAR) "Segundo Informe de Avance M&S ERCERP en los 7 municipios de seguimiento" Nicaragua, Abril 2003

⁸⁰ THE ECONOMIC JUSTICE NETWORK OF FOCCSIA. "The extent to which the churches and more specifically the Church Councils were involved in drawing up and executing the PRSPs" July 2003

⁸¹ Cooperation Committee for Cambodia, NGO Forum on Cambodia and Medicam " NGO Statement to the 2002 Consultative Group Meeting on Cambodia" Phnom Penh, 19-21 June, 2002

⁸² Done under the project " Proyecto Fomento de la Participación de la Sociedad Civil en el Monitoreo, Seguimiento y Retroalimentación de la ERCERP (ADM, FUNDEMUNI, INGES, INPRHU, IMC, IPADE, ODESAR) Nicaragua, Abril 2003. The municipalities included are: Malpaisillo, Dipilto, Camoapa, Pueblo Nuevo, Puerto Cabezas, San Ramon and Telpaneca

⁸³ From the article: CEDLA, Proyecto Control Ciudadano. Boletín Trimestral "Los Tropiezos de la Estrategia Antipobreza", Noviembre 2001

⁸⁴ "Proyecto Fomento de la Participación de la Sociedad Civil en el Monitoreo, Seguimiento y Retroalimentación de la ERCERP (ADM, FUNDEMUNI, INGES, INPRHU, IMC, IPADE, ODESAR) Nicaragua, Abril 2003

⁸⁵ "Comentarios de las Organizaciones No Gubernamentales (ONG's) Ante el consejo Consultivo de la ERP sobre el Informe de Avances y Actualización Estrategia de Reducción de Pobreza". Honduras

lopment issues. In the municipalities studied in Nicaragua, monitoring of the implementation has for the first time given space to members of the community organized under the Municipal Development Committees to propose alternatives for the development of their own municipalities. It has also resulted in participative poverty assessments, which have allowed the various social actors to identify the main poverty problems and vulnerabilities (including cultural, ecological and environmental aspects) and to evaluate the factors that could contribute to reducing poverty levels in their municipality.⁸⁶ Some of the proposals that have come up through working on the implementation of specific ERCERP (PRSP) projects provide a useful basis for proposals that could in future be integrated in Local Development Plans.

⁸⁶ Proyecto Fomento de la Participación de la Sociedad Civil en el Monitoreo, Seguimiento y Retroalimentación de la ERCERP (ADM, FUNDEMUNI, INGES, INPRHU, IMC, IPADE, ODESAR) Nicaragua, Abril 2003.

PRSP Implementation and Monitoring: Recommendations

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNMENT

Aspects to include in the PRSP document in order to aid the implementation processes:

- In collaboration with civil society, prioritise policies and projects recognizing limited funding levels and necessary trade-offs in ministry allocations.
- Ensure that budgeting implications of the plan are very clear with actions prioritised.
- Include an analysis of key public sector constraints and how these will be overcome.
- Link the PRSP to other national and provincial planning tools (eg national budget, sectoral strategies). Improve the consistency of national and local development plans.
- Work to elaborate and specify acceptable indicators and clear monitoring mechanisms. Unemployment rates should be an important indicator of the advances and failures in the PRS.
- Develop and include clear timeframes and clear divisions of responsibility.
- Develop an integrated approach to poverty reduction including not only a sectoral approach but also a territorial approach.

Recommendations for governments regarding PRSP implementation:

- Institutional mechanisms should be strengthened by establishing Poverty Focal Points coordinated with other agencies.
- Ministries should work more closely with the staff and people of the municipalities in the development and implementation of strategies, as the local people know the local realities.
- Ministries should have an increased presence in municipalities and follow up processes at municipal level.
- Promote adequate and better organized local planning.
- Local capacity and markets should be properly used

in the implementation of projects. Public expenditure should be used to promote local growth through using local markets and human resources, instead of bringing materials from central level. This will be a concrete action for poverty reduction.

- Increase information dissemination so that all involved sectors can have the knowledge necessary and can become more involved in identifying solutions.
- Improve information systems to allow cross-learning: actions taken in one region should be known about by all relevant social organizations so that efforts will not be duplicated.
- Strengthen public expenditure review and budgetary mechanisms and ensure adequate allocation of funds and a timely and transparent disbursement schedule.
- Develop complete and updated databases of the all projects related to poverty reduction.

Recommendations for governments regarding PRSP monitoring:

- Increase information dissemination to the public and all involved sectors in local languages, using both electronic and print media in order that implementers and beneficiaries can have the knowledge necessary and become more involved in identifying solutions.
- Ex ante and ex post poverty and social impact assessments are needed.
- (Nicaragua) Institutionalize the monitoring processes developed in municipalities so that the tools gained through this experience can be used to follow up and monitor future policies developed by the central government, the local authorities or civil society organizations.
- The findings of the monitoring of implementation of projects should be disseminated among the implementers and beneficiaries.

Recommendations for governments regarding the financing gap:

- Debt Relief is not enough! Get organized internally and together with other governments to advocate for debt cancellation.
- Advocate for the de-linking of PRSPs from the HIPC initiative.
- Relate effective prioritization to budgetary constraints and scenarios.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

In relation to PRSP implementation and monitoring civil society should:

- Strong civil society groups should be identified to work as an independent watchdog and monitor the process of PRSP development and implementation. NGOs may need to consider new ways of organizing themselves to enable them to work more effectively with inter-sectoral and inter-ministerial government bodies, particularly in terms of promoting an integrated approach to cross-cutting issues.
- Promote adequate and better organized local planning.
- Design rapid assessment tools (in cooperation with the government) to enable local organisations to conduct local poverty monitoring to evaluate the impact of the strategy on their local community.
- Develop additional poverty reduction indicators to complement those in the national PRSP. Additional indicators may involve disaggregating macro-indicators according to wealth, gender, geographic location, economic sector and/or other sectors of particular concern.
- Monitor implementation through a variety of methodologies such as Expenditure Tracking and Poverty Monitoring.
- The findings of the monitoring of implementa-

tion of projects should be disseminated among the implementers and beneficiaries.

- Well established NGOs located in the main cities should build strong links with NGOs and other development actors in the provinces so that they can help raise issues regarding implementation and assist with monitoring at the national level.
- NGOs need to establish and maintain or strengthen clear and open lines of communication with the relevant line ministries.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DONORS

In relation to PRSP implementation and monitoring donors should:

- De-link PRSPs from the HIPC initiative.
- Promote and provide debt cancellation.
- Put pressure on governments to prioritize, to reach consensus on the actions to be taken in the different municipalities, to avoid poorly prioritized resource dispersion and duplication of efforts.
- Move forward in building an integrated approach. Budget support is better than supporting specific projects with uncertain long-term impact and continuity.
- Donors must ensure that their funds are having a positive impact on the poor and the vulnerable, that they are not fueling corruption, and that they do not violate the rights of project-affected communities.

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