



**CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION IN THE
POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY PAPER
(PRSP) PROCESS**

**A SYNTHESIS OF FIVE
STUDIES CONDUCTED IN
BURKINA FASO, MAURITANIA,
MOZAMBIQUE, TANZANIA
AND UGANDA
April 2002**

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Development**

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ADP	Aide Publique au Développement (Burkina Faso)
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
BWI	Bretton Woods Institution
CAS	Country Assistance Strategy (World Bank)
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EPRC	Economic Policy Research Centre (Uganda)
HIPC	Heavily Indebted Poor Country
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPRSP	Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
MISR	Makerere Institute of Social Research (Uganda)
MP	Member of Parliament
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NPES	National Poverty Eradication Strategy (Tanzania)
NRD	National Reference Document (Mauritania)
PARPA	Plano de Acção para Redução da Pobreza Absoluta (Mozambique)
PEAP	Poverty Eradication Action Plan (Uganda)
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
SAPRI	Structural Adjustment Participatory Review Initiative (Uganda)
TCDD	Tanzania Coalition on Debt and Development
UPPAP	Uganda Participatory Poverty Assessment Project
WTO	World Trade Organisation

Introduction

The Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) are a mechanism, designed by the World Bank and IMF, by which Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) can obtain debt relief under the HIPC initiative and become eligible for renewed financial support. The PRSP provides a framework for IMF lending and for the World Bank's Country Assistance Strategy (CAS), which covers the Bank's medium term business plan and its proposed lending options. The document should articulate the government's commitment to, and strategy for, poverty reduction i.e. how the government would utilise the savings created by debt reduction. A comprehensive PRSP includes poverty diagnostics based on good indicators of poverty.

Of the eight countries globally that have completed their PRSP, five are in sub Saharan Africa, partly reflecting the fact that the majority of the HIPC are found in this region. The five countries are Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Mozambique, Tanzania and Uganda.

From the early 1980s, the pressure was on almost all sub Saharan African countries to adopt International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank prescribed Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs). Although much of this pressure was external, coming from the Bretton Woods institutions themselves, national governments were also pushed in this direction by their own private sectors.

SAPs were supposed to orient the economies on which they were imposed towards the market but there have been casualties of this process at a number of levels due to the tendency of markets to strengthen the strong and further weaken the already weak. Within African countries, individual citizens have had reduced access to social services, small producers have lost access to markets because of the removal of state commodity marketing boards, and governments have been constrained both in terms of their overall political direction and their ability to determine particular sectoral policies. Globally, African countries have faced a marketplace in which they are by far the weakest players. On the whole, they do not have the productive capacity to make a meaningful dent on the market and they do not control the prices of what they do produce. Neither do these countries have the analytical or negotiating capacities required to deal with the institutions of the marketplace, particularly the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

Many African governments have stated that they were 'wrong' or 'naive' to adopt Structural Adjustment Policies in the first place and the World Bank and IMF, themselves, have conceded that the SAP model did not work for Africa. Structural Adjustment has led to a crisis in African countries characterised by increasingly divided societies, marginalisation of large sections of the population, civil and political unrest and, most dangerously, an unsustainable debt burden. The total debt of the sub Saharan region more than doubled (to US\$ 208 billion) between 1985 and 1998.

Having come this far, African countries now find themselves locked into a structure in which they must seek assistance in getting out of their crisis by calling on the very same institutions that offered them SAPs last time. The World Bank and IMF, in response to international pressure to grant debt relief to poor, third world countries, introduced the

HIPC initiative in 1996 and the ‘enhanced HIPC’, aimed at making debt relief faster, broader and deeper, in 1999. Within this context, those countries that qualify as ‘heavily indebted’ become eligible for debt relief on the completion and acceptance of their PRSP. The relief takes the combined form of some cancellation and some rescheduling.

In the words of the World Bank,

Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) describe a country's macroeconomic, structural and social policies and programs to promote growth and reduce poverty, as well as associated external financing needs. PRSPs are prepared by governments through a participatory process involving civil society and development partners, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

It is the second part of this statement that we are concerned with here. Studies have been conducted in Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Mozambique, Tanzania and Uganda to ascertain the level and quality of civil society participation in the formulation of the PRSP in each country, and the potential for continuing participation during the implementation and monitoring and evaluation phases. What follows is a comparative synthesis of the findings of these studies.

The Policy Context in the Five Countries

It should be noted, first of all, that the PRSP concept was not dropped from on high into a policy void. Poor people and poor countries recognise, though with varying degrees of political commitment, the need for poverty reduction. Thus, Mozambique's government policies and strategies since the late 1980s had been expressed in the Plano de Acção para Redução da Pobreza Absoluta (PARPA), Tanzania had adopted a National Poverty Eradication Strategy (NPES) in 1997, Uganda had a Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP), Burkina Faso had established its priorities under ‘Cadre Strategique da Lutte Contra la Pauvrete, and Mauritania had a series of National Reference Documents (NRDs) encompassing social, economic and other national issues.

In each case, these national processes became the basis of the country's PRSP, shifting focus and changing methodologies to meet the World Bank/IMF requirements. The relationship between pre-existing national poverty reduction initiatives and the PRSP process in each of the study countries is examined below.

NRDs – Mauritania

The National Reference Documents are broad in scope though, in the past, not necessarily based on extensive research. The PRSP is perceived as having taken over the role of the NRDs, on the basis of an analysis of the poverty situation in Mauritania that had never been undertaken before. The study notes that the PRSP places less emphasis on the informal sector of the economy and public sector investment than previous documents have done, concentrating instead on the (formal) private sector as the engine of economic growth.

PARPA – Mozambique

Delivered in 1999, PARPA was a plan of action developed out of a national household survey of living conditions (1996/7) and a poverty assessment (1999). It also drew on a number of earlier projects and initiatives, namely The Social Dimensions of Adjustment project (1989), the Office for the Support of Vulnerable Population Groups (1990), the Economic and Social Rehabilitation Programme and Poverty Alleviation Strategy (1990) and the Strategy for Poverty Reduction in Mozambique (1995).

PARPA's completion coincided with the introduction of the PRSP initiative and, hence, Mozambique's PARPA was accepted by the World Bank as the country's Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (IPRSP). A major concern was to retain coherence with existing policy instruments such as the Food Security and Nutrition Strategy and the HIV/AIDS Strategy Plan. The process of developing PARPA was a partially participatory one, with sectoral consultations being held. These reached community level to a greater or lesser degree, depending on the nature of the particular sector, so that the policies of the education and health sectors were based more soundly on user community input than those in more technical or nationally oriented sectors, such as public works. It is envisaged that a more systematic and permanent consultation model will be brought in under the monitoring and evaluation of the PRSP process.

NPES – Tanzania

The NPES is one of a number of documents developed under Tanzania's development Vision 2025, along with the Tanzania Assistance Strategy, the National External Debt Strategy, and the Public Health and Expenditure Review. The NPES is the document that focuses on poverty eradication. It was adopted in 1997 and has been the subject of annual and multi-year public expenditure reviews. The Tanzania study stresses the fact that a poverty eradication policy was already in place and the PRSP represents a medium term strategy (2001-4) for the implementation of this policy.

PEAP – Uganda

The PEAP is a government framework for poverty eradication, developed in 1997 after two years of consultations with civil society organisations, among other stakeholders. CSOs lobbied successfully to be included in the Drafting Committee of the PEAP. They gathered inputs from their constituents, analysed these and presented their analysis to the Technical Committee of the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development that was responsible for developing the PEAP. The involvement of civil society in the formulation of the PEAP appears to have been a determining factor in the World Bank decision to accept this document as Uganda's PRSP.

The PRSP Process in the Five Countries

Despite the emphasis on civil society participation, the PRSP is a government led process. Hence, the first step for most countries was to set up, within existing government structures, some sort of steering or coordinating committee. In Mauritania, this took the form of an Interministerial Committee for the Fight Against Poverty, chaired by the Prime Minister and a Planning Committee, under the Minister of Economic Affairs and

Development, responsible for the follow up of the PRSP process. In Tanzania, a committee was formed to steer the process comprising twelve Ministers and the Governor of the Reserve Bank. Uganda and Mozambique began PRSP preparations in the context of government led initiatives that were already in progress.

Mozambique's PRSP process, therefore, was grounded in the substantial research and poverty assessment that had formed the basis of PARPA, as well as the experience gained from the implementation of a number of poverty reduction strategies throughout the 1990s.

However, the move from an IPRSP, which equated to the national poverty reduction initiative, to Mozambique's final PRSP called for a further process of revision and consultation. The consultations involved representatives of civil society, international partners and provincial government and used as their point of departure provincial poverty profiles, human development profiles and the original PARPA document. The results of these consultations were collated and discussed at a national seminar and the seminar report fed into the development of provincial plans of action. Discussions also began at this stage on the monitoring and evaluation aspects of the programme. A Technical Consultation Unit was formed within the Ministry of Planning and Finance to conduct and report on the final round of consultations. These were narrower in scale, taking place among 'invited partners' and aimed at harmonising the PARPA/PRSP vision, priorities and targets. They also covered social and economic policy implications, flow of information, issues of governance and the legal framework for the initiative.

As mentioned, Uganda's PEAP was based on two years of consultations among various stakeholders, including civil society organisations. However, as in the case of Mozambique, some further consultation work was required to turn the PEAP document into a fully fledged PRSP, although this work had already been envisaged as a necessary update of the PEAP.

What distinguishes the formulation of Uganda's PRSP is the very short timeframe in which it took place. This was a result of external pressure arising from the international perception that the HIPC initiative was not working and that few countries had benefited from it. Uganda, therefore, was needed as a showpiece by donors and had to get its PRSP finished within a period of less than six months. The task was led by a Technical Committee within the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, a government initiated Steering Committee comprising senior government officials, donor representatives, research institutions and civil society organisations, and a Civil Society Task Force. The process included:

- A consultative workshop attended by all stakeholders and discussion groups formed within the context of this workshop;
- A special workshop to introduce the PEAP/PRSP process to MPs;
- A series of consultation workshops with local government officials, run in parallel with consultations with grassroots groups that were run by civil society organisations; and
- Consultative Group meetings held in the capital.

It was supplemented by research input from the Uganda Participatory Poverty Assessment Project (UPPAP) of the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, The Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC) and the Makerere Institute of Social Research (MISR). Government also hired an international consultant to synthesise the information and issues and incorporate them into the PEAP/PRSP document.

The overall process of preparing the PRSP in Tanzania was coordinated by the Vice President's office. As well as the Steering Committee, a Technical Committee was formed, comprising officials from the Vice President's and Prime Minister's offices, the Planning Commission, the Bank of Tanzania, and the Ministries of Finance, Education, Health, Works, Community Development, Local Government, Agriculture, Water, Energy and Minerals, and Youth Development. It was coordinated by the Ministry of Finance and was given the specific task of preparing both the interim and final PRSP documents and organising national and zonal workshops.

Having prepared an IPRSP, the Technical Committee presented it at a consultative technical meeting to government, donor and civil society representatives.

Once the IPRSP was approved by Cabinet, work began on the drafting of the final PRSP with a series of zonal workshops aimed at soliciting views from grassroots stakeholders. Within each of the seven specified zones, every district was represented by four villagers, one District Councillor, one Town Councillor and one District Executive Director. Civil society representation was through five NGO representatives in each zone. An outside expert was used by the Technical Committee to assist in preparing a reference document which outlined workshop objectives, discussion guidelines and methodology. Some participatory methodologies, such as disaggregating discussion groups by gender, were used in the zonal workshops.

The reports of the zonal workshops were returned to the Technical Committee which drew on them in the formulation of the initial draft of the PRSP. Other background papers, such as the Vision 2025, the Tanzania Assistance Strategy, the NPES (1997), the National External Debt Strategy and the Public Expenditure Review, as well as a number of sector specific studies, were used as background to the PRSP. The draft then went through the following process:

- 1 A consultative meeting with the donor community, including a joint IMF/World Bank mission;
- 2 Briefing of and consultation with MPs;
- 3 A national workshop of 25 participants including Permanent Secretaries, Regional Commissioners, representatives of multilateral and bilateral donors, private sector representatives, media and representatives of NGOs; and
- 4 A retreat workshop for Regional Administrative Secretaries (who would be responsible for implementation).

At the end of this process, the final draft of the PRSP was presented to and approved by Cabinet.

Unusually, the PRSP in Mauritania was launched with an awareness campaign, thus opening the process up to stakeholders who might not have known about it otherwise and enabling them to take a proactive role in ensuring they were involved.

As noted above, the process in Mauritania was led by an Interministerial Committee. It was coordinated by the Minister of Economic Affairs and Development and the Human Rights Commission, with support, at the technical level, from technical representatives of government ministries and twelve Technical Theme Groups. The Theme Groups included civil society and donor representation. In addition, a Donor Committee was set up.

The PRSP then went through the following process:

- Four inter-regional seminars (encompassing the thirteen districts in the country) which involved elected representatives of NGOs and other civil society organisations as well as other development partners;
- A meeting between members of the General Assembly, MPs, Mayors, NGOs, trade unions, development partners and individuals recognised for their involvement in poverty alleviation;
- A further series of inter-regional seminars; and
- Submission to Parliament for approval.

Mauritania has also undertaken the first evaluation of its PRSP which became the subject of further inter-regional seminars.

All members of government in Burkina Faso were already well aware of the importance of focusing every strategy on the reduction of poverty. In order to begin the PRSP process, an interministerial committee was formed involving research and planning experts. This committee prepared a draft PRSP. This draft was first presented to:

- 1 The two chambers of Parliament (as the representatives of the people) and to the governmental Economic and Social Council;
- 2 Development partners in two meetings, the first of which was also open to MPs;
- 3 Civil society in two workshops, held in regional centres, at which they had an opportunity to discuss the draft with the Drafting Committee.

Members of the Drafting Committee attended all the meetings and workshops to ensure that the contributions made were incorporated into the final draft of the PRSP.

Key Concepts and Issues in the PRSP Process

Poverty

Even academics and international bodies, such as the UN and the Bretton Woods institutions are not agreed on a definition of 'poverty'. At a national level, some of the studies also identify it as a term that is contentious, noting that the concept used has implications for programme design and choice of strategies. Mozambique's PARPA, for instance, uses consumption per capita, correlated to access to non consumables, as an

indicator of wellbeing (or otherwise). However, this has been shown to be unreliable in at least two ways:

- 1 NGO personnel have pointed out discrepancies between their field experience of increased hardship in rural areas and macroeconomic indications of economic growth, suggesting the limits of quantitative measures of qualitative experience; and
- 2 Poverty tends to take on different forms in different areas e.g. Niassa province suffers from a severe lack of infrastructure and services but tends to be rated as less poor than other provinces because of the relatively good availability of food.

This highlights the need for involvement of civil society at the very earliest stage of defining what is being discussed when issues of ‘poverty’ and ‘poverty reduction’ are broached. It is noted in the Tanzanian study that a “notion of poverty based on appreciation of cultural diversity is important as it will bring into the play ground the diversified notions, interpretations and therefore approaches...to eradicate poverty”.

Civil Society

Civil society can be perceived as a space. While for civil society to be well organised makes it more accessible and easier to tap, there might also be a threat to the very nature of civil society in institutionalising or bureaucratising it.

How ‘civil society’ is perceived has a bearing on government-civil society relationships. Civil society exists at a number of levels, including the grassroots, the media, academia and national and local level NGOs, each of which has different types of expertise. It is necessary to take on board the experience and views of the grassroots but this is not the limit of civil society participation. The intellectual and analytical capacity that exists in African countries should not be ignored.

In the experience of Burkina Faso, a national strategy, which dated back many years and had been formulated on the basis of very broad, grassroots civil society consultation (with 10 000 peasants), became the basis of the country’s SAP and was later incorporated into the PRSP. However, the process towards the PRSP saw further consultation with a “civil society created by the government” i.e. the government hand picked those it would consult from among ruling party affiliated trade unions and the like.

Civil society possesses certain capacities, such as its knowledge base, level of awareness and information, intellectual and analytical skills, human resource skills and material resources. These are complemented by particular qualities, including commitment, creativity and inventiveness, and willingness to share information.

There are a number of other concepts, which form part of the PRSP guidelines that warrant further discussion. These are:

- 1 ‘Country driven and ownership’;
- 2 ‘Participation’;
- 3 ‘Comprehensiveness’;
- 4 ‘Two way information flow promotion’; and

5 'Accountability'.

Country Driven, Ownership

According to the World Bank and IMF, PRSPs should be country driven i.e. with governments leading the process and broad based participation in the adoption and monitoring of the resulting strategy. That the process should be 'country driven' implies ownership by states or governments. That it should also encompass 'participation' implies that there should be ownership by civil society as well.

Ownership by states and governments is determined by their relations with the Bretton Woods institutions and the extent to which they trust governments to define and implement their own processes. Attempts to impose models of civil society participation can bypass or undermine the role of governments as leaders in national decision making and determination of appropriate policy. As the Uganda study notes,

...the insistence by the IMF and World Bank on civil society participation could in fact worsen the situation. Countries could be denied access to much-needed aid resources if they fail to build a government-civil society partnership. Alternatively, governments could be encouraged to coerce their civil societies into endorsing the country's PRSP in situations where there has been no dialogue.

In Uganda, in fact, it has been civil society organisations that have pressed donors into providing 'basket' funding rather than dictating on a project-by-project basis how funds should be spent. This returns to the Government of Uganda the power to set its own national development priorities. In Mauritania, on the other hand the change from the emphasis of national poverty reduction initiatives on empowering the informal sector to the PRSP focus on the (formal) private sector as the engine of growth, has constrained the ability of the government to protect or promote a large section of its population, particularly those involved in the informal sector.

Ownership by civil society within a state is assured through its effective participation in the PRSP process. But Falck and Landfeld¹, in an assessment of the PRSP process in Mozambique, draw a distinction between 'ownership' and 'commitment' noting that good intentions at a higher level do not necessarily translate into desired actions at a lower level i.e. the levels of authority most likely to come into contact with civil society.

Participation

As noted above, 'participation' is linked to and determines ownership of processes by civil society within a state. It is dependent not just on the willingness of states to allow space for civil society voices but also on the amount of information to which they have access on a continuing basis. It was noted that Mauritania began its PRSP process with an awareness campaign but it is not clear how effective this was or for how long the government continued to make information available.

¹ Falck, H. and Landfeld, K. 2000 *The Poverty Reduction Strategy Process in Mozambique – a Preliminary Assessment* World Bank

‘Participation’ can be distinguished from other concepts such as ‘involvement’, ‘incorporation’ or ‘consultation’ by the fact that encompasses taking part in decision making.

The studies reflect quite different levels of participation in the processes of the five countries. In Uganda, civil society was involved at every stage and, was complemented by a parallel civil society process set up by (mainly international) NGOs. Ugandans were assured that their participation had been meaningful when they saw most of their inputs and recommendations incorporated into the final PEAP/PRSP report. Tanzanians on the other hand see themselves as having moved from the NPES structure, believed to have “strong government ownership and leadership” to the PRSP structure, which the report describes as indicating “foreign influence as the most significant factor”. Likewise, in Mozambique, it has been acknowledged by the international financial institutions and other sources that that the PRSP “builds strongly on the plans and strategies of the Government” under the PARPA. Thus civil society tends to be sidelined both ways.

The quality of participation is enhanced by other contributions besides those of local NGOs and CSOs. Parliament as an organ of the state, made up of the ‘elected’ representatives of the people should play a role. However, when Uganda’s Civil Society Task Force organised a workshop to introduce members of the Ugandan parliament to the PEAP/PRSP process, less than twenty of the 276 MPs attended. On a more positive note, the Uganda report notes the incorporation of findings from local research institutions into the PEAP/PRSP, stating that, “Such inputs widened the scope and definition of poverty and broadened the ownership of the PEAP.”

Just as poverty reduction strategies are ongoing, so participation needs also to be ensured into the future. The extent to which this occurs, however, is likely to be a function of the level and quality of participation in the planning stages. Thus, in Uganda, where there was quite some satisfaction with the amount of civil society’s participation in the formulation of the PRSP, Government has also made a commitment to make known all relevant information about public policies, budgetary policies and public expenditure. The Uganda Debt Network has already become involved in monitoring the Poverty Action Fund, a government mechanism for mobilisation of the savings from debt relief in priority areas for poverty alleviation. While the Mauritanian process took place much more firmly under government structures, there was some civil society involvement at every stage and civil society has also been involved, more recently, in the follow up process. The Tanzania report suggests inadequate participation of civil society in the PRSP process and there is no suggestion that CSOs expect to be involved in the implementation or, monitoring and evaluation stages.

Comprehensiveness

Within the terms of the PRSP, comprehensiveness implies taking account of the multi-dimensional nature of poverty. Multi-dimensionality needs to be recognised at the point of assessing poverty and its causes but it must also be a factor in the design of responses to poverty and the evaluation of such responses

The Tanzanian report demonstrates the linkages between the different manifestations of poverty when it describes the ‘poor’ in Tanzania as being any or all of the following: illiterate; with inadequate safe water supply; experiencing poor health services; belonging to the high mortality rate group; experiencing malnutrition; experiencing environmental degradation; unemployed; belonging to the low income bracket; and/or homeless. As the study observes, “the situation of poverty in Tanzania...is pervasive and deep rooted”. In Uganda, consultation with civil society groups brought forward employment issues which might otherwise have been considered a low priority. The Mozambican PRSP process included construction of a matrix of factors of poverty which allowed planners to begin prioritising the many issues and working towards solutions. This study also notes that,

A network of researchers, activists and organisations from civil society would create a web of relationships denoting specification at local level...diversified methodologies and experiences that...better serve poverty reduction objectives as regional asymmetries are also reduced and results are sensitive to what actually happens at local level.

In terms of responses, the Study from Mozambique focuses, among other sectors, on agriculture, outlining the many faceted response that would be appropriate in that sector. This would include access to credit, a policy for joint local development by local and national partners, warehouses for food and commercial products, an agroindustrial policy, compensation funds and a legal framework for new partnerships between family and commercial enterprises.

The Tanzanian study highlights the need for a “notion of poverty based on an appreciation of cultural diversity”, suggesting that this would introduce similarly diverse interpretations of poverty and approaches to dealing with it. The report argues that this would be more appropriate than the “uni-modal” way of thinking (as generally exemplified by the Bretton Woods Institutions).

Given the complexity of the poverty situation in all the study countries, it is suggested that monitoring of alleviation strategies needs to be based on both qualitative and quantitative approaches, with qualitative studies involving government research and study groups, academic institutions and other civil society organisations.

Promotion of Two Way Information Flow

Upward flows are needed to help policy-makers understand better the realities and perspectives of those living in poverty...Downward flows are needed to inform people of their rights and let them know what policies are being enacted on their behalf...To ensure good information flows, governments need to announce early on that a Poverty Reduction Strategy is being developed, explain the stages involved, and highlight where civil society can take part.²

Upward flows of information, as mentioned above, are a result of the consultation processes that form the basis of the five country studies. In that sense, the flow of

² www.ids.co.uk

information is as effective as the consultation process proves to be. The processes in each of the study countries are discussed below.

Mauritania is the only country that mentions launching its PRSP process with an awareness campaign i.e. a downward flow of information to civil society to facilitate its involvement. Aside from this, Uganda is the only other country that mentions use of the media. Its Civil Society Task Force organised a media campaign around radio and television phone-in programmes in “which government officials were invited to respond to queries from the public and to explain the PRSP process”. Use of a ‘phone-in’ format allows for flow of information and issues both ways within a single programme. The Task Force also used the print media to publicise the process and invite contributions from the public.

Within the PARPA in Mozambique, use has been made of both traditional publicity materials, such as printed information packages, and a state owned website. However, the report also identifies challenges in information dissemination, one of which is the need to use local languages.

Beyond the flow of information between policy makers and civil society, McCarthy, in his assessment of the Mozambican PRSP process recommends information sharing between CSOs as a means of collective strengthening. The Tanzanian study lists the following four types of civil society organisations:

- 1 Service delivery organisations;
- 2 Policy analysis, advocacy and lobbying organisations;
- 3 Research organisations; and
- 4 Legal aid and human rights organisations.

Of these four, the last three are involved on some level in the production and dissemination of information. Civil society, therefore, has valuable experience to share in this regard.

Accountability

In a PRSP context, accountability means:

- ensuring that the process of drawing up the PRSP explicitly reflects the needs and priorities of the poor;
- establishing realistic mechanisms so that people can hold government and service providers answerable for the delivery of policies and goods, and for the spending of public funds;
- involving citizens directly in monitoring how PRSP strategies are being implemented, and whether anti-poverty commitments are being fulfilled.³

As mentioned earlier, the involvement of civil society in monitoring the PRSP process tends to be similar to their level of involvement in the original planning stages. Uganda,

³ www.ids.co.uk

where, of the five countries studied, civil society seems to have had the greatest opportunities for participation and the greatest capacity to use these, is also the country where civil society seems most satisfied that it will be involved in the monitoring stages of the PRSP and other macroeconomic policy processes. In Tanzania, a lack of accountability on the part of the donors, and sponsors of the PRSP has been identified, arising from the incapacity and lack of opportunity for civil society in that country to be involved. Where “donors have...gone ahead to take care of their own interests in their lending mechanisms” it is suggested that the PRSP becomes a “dormant paper”.

An analysis of the PRSP process in three African countries⁴ cites corruption in Mozambique as a possible reason that the PRSP might fail. Government corruption is also given as the reason for delays in disbursement of donor funds in Uganda under the ‘basket’ system requested by CSOs. The latter case suggests that civil society in Uganda does not perceive corruption to be such a threat to their welfare as those from outside do. In the final analysis it is a government’s accountability to its own people that is of primary importance.

Civil Society Participation in the PRSP Process

The level of involvement of civil society in the formulation of PRSPs seems to be a function of:

- The experience and preparedness of local NGOs, CSOs and individual members of civil society; and
- The willingness of governments to consult and take civil society views into account.

Civil Society Preparedness and Issues

The Burkina Faso report gives a detailed breakdown of the participation of all groups (civil society, local and central administration, development partners, political parties, private sector) in the process towards the formulation of the country’s PRSP and the level of their input. It is noted that CSOs in Burkina Faso are not very strong but that they put themselves out to take part in the PRSP process. Within the overall figures for civil society participation, women’s representation in the workshops was generally low, with only one out of seventeen civil society representatives in the Ouagadougou workshop being female. However, in one of the regional workshops, although only three or four women were officially invited from civil society, seven turned up and stayed to ensure that their voices were heard. In fact the quota for civil society participation in most of the workshops and meetings was exceeded.

Though there was some level of satisfaction with the actual presence of civil society representatives, the report gives a further analysis of the level of input of various participants, noting that formal and informal contributions to the meetings were usually dominated by only a few participants.

⁴ McCarthy, E. ‘Debt Relief in Africa: Is it Working? A Civil Society View: The Experience of Uganda, Tanzania and Mozambique’ in *Bread for the World* #6, June 2001

It was felt that civil society participation could have been strengthened by better quality representation. As noted, the government chose which sections of civil society it wanted to deal with. Sometimes, those invited were not the most knowledgeable on the subjects being discussed. This problem was exacerbated by the fact that the workshops each concentrated on particular themes.

The NGO sector in Mauritania is small and relatively underdeveloped. However, there is a national network of NGOs which was able to consolidate civil society strength and capacities and became the main facilitator of civil society participation in Mauritania's PRSP process. The major issues of concern to civil society were support to the informal sector and commodity pricing.

The consultation process towards the formulation of the PRSP in Mozambique used participatory methodologies, thus attempting to draw out the views of civil society. As noted earlier, the issues raised were put into a matrix in order to establish priorities. Priority issues were found to be investment in national human resources, employment and self employment, access to credit, infrastructure and basic services, promotion of agroindustry, protection of national industries, governance and the fight against corruption, bureaucracy, and decentralisation.

However, the Mozambique study draws a distinction between the 'private sector' and other 'civil society' groups, noting that the private sector, rather than civil society, dominated the later round of consultations due to the fact that they were better organised and had initiated their own series of meetings with the Ministry of Planning and Finance. Grupo Moçambicano da Dívida, which has been active around issues of debt relief/cancellation, also took the initiative to organise two meetings but the latter of these was held too late for the output to be considered in the PRSP document.

In Tanzania, the issues prioritised in the zonal workshops, which had at least some civil society involvement, were, firstly, access to basic education, followed by marketing systems for agricultural produce, unavailability of inputs and implements, inadequate extension services, access to basic health care, poor condition of rural roads and, access to safe water and sanitation. However, the Tanzania study notes that the participation of civil society in the PRSP process generally was typical of their participation in most government led processes i.e. they were not officially kept in the picture and, therefore, had to initiate their own parallel process. This they did, under the leadership of the Tanzania Coalition for Debt and Development (TCDD), developing a position paper on both the process and contents of the PRSP as well as continuing to lobby Government to open up to civil society perspectives. They did succeed in creating an opportunity for themselves to present this document within the context of the government process at a later date.

CSOs in Tanzania have some experience in policy formulation, having participated in the processes towards the Tanzania Assistance Strategy Paper, Vision 2025 and the National Poverty Eradication Strategy. Therefore, the question, the Tanzania study suggests, is not whether CSOs are involved but whether their involvement "has any measurable

significance in terms of inputs towards influencing the processes and contents of these policy documents”.

The government of Uganda took a decision to involve civil society in the PRSP process but, as the Uganda study points out, this decision was brought about by unyielding pressure from CSOs. They were able to apply this pressure on the basis of past experience in previous processes dating back to 1996, such as the Structural Adjustment Participatory Review Initiative (SAPRI) and the World Bank’s Country Assistance Strategy (CAS), as well as government sponsored national initiatives. Their proactive approach has earned CSOs the right to participate in the annual Consultative Group meetings held in Uganda. They were thus well prepared to take the opportunity for participation in the PRSP.

CSOs in Uganda participated both within the government framework for formulation of the PRSP and, where they felt it necessary, outside this process as well. Participation in the formal process was as a government initiated Civil Society Task Force, composed of international and national NGOs operating in Uganda, with the Uganda Debt Network becoming the lead agency for civil society participation. The Task Force became engaged in the reformulation of the PEAP into the PRSP. This Task Force also formed part of the Steering Committee that drove the whole process. Specific activities of the Task Force were:

- Running consultations with grassroots groups as a complementary initiative to a series of workshops with local government officials run by Government;
- A media campaign to disseminate information on the PRSP process and collect views from a wide cross section of society; and
- Consultations with special interest groups, such as those involved in conflict resolution and environmental issues, and other CSOs, such as the National Union of Trade Unions.

The consultations, indicated that civil society viewed employment creation as a priority concern along with mechanisms for civil society participation in monitoring of the programme. The results were presented to the Technical (drafting) Committee, which incorporated them into the PEAP/PRSP, notably including the whole section on participation and monitoring written by civil society.

Further civil society initiatives took place outside the activities of the Task Force and drew in contributions from over 200 other NGOs and community based organisations.

Government Attitudes to Civil Society

Civil society groups in Burkina Faso recognise the efforts of Government in getting the PRSP process together. The process was conducted in three stages, being information dissemination and sensitisation exercises, regional workshops, and national workshops.

However, there were frequent complaints from civil society representatives that they were unable to participate effectively because they were not advised of meetings or did not receive the appropriate terms of reference in time. This led to a fairly low number of

formal (written) contributions from civil society. A representative of an opposition political party makes the same complaint. Lack of translation facilities at the meetings also limited civil society participation.

While civil society in Mauritania is said to have been involved in policy processes in the past, the process under PRSP was more open and CSOs felt that their involvement had been more real than has been the case previously and that it had been at every stage from early preparations through to the evaluation. The study notes, however, that Government has recently put in place an institutional device to monitor development partners, civil society and donors.

McCarthy's assessment of the PRSP process in Mozambique points to a lacklustre attitude on the part of the Mozambican government, noting that the recovery from "a generation or more of paternalistic socialism" has not been completed and this has kept civil society in a state of "infancy". He further suggests that the government "conducted the consultation process as a requirement for debt relief rather than as an end in itself". The consultations, anyway, were very limited in their geographical scope and Government was unwilling to hold meetings in areas under opposition party control. Another study⁵ suggests problems with even deciding on a consultation process that would satisfy PRSP requirements or gathering the energy to go back through the (inconsistent) process it had already conducted in the formulation of PARPA.

Civil society argues that it should have been given the opportunity to fill these gaps. The picture created from data collected mainly around Maputo, and only in Portuguese, is distorted and could actually exacerbate existing problems. Enhanced participation of CSOs would have had the potential to draw in regional and rural perspectives.

Since the completion of the PARPA/PRSP there have been some attempts to improve the quality of future consultations, *viz*:

- NGOs, under Grupo Moçambicano da Dívida, held a two day seminar that brought together 75 participants from NGOs, Parliament, Government, the international financial institutions, the Central Bank of Mozambique and the press; and
- Government has put forward its consultation initiatives for 2002 and worked on a model for future consultations.

The Government of Mozambique states that the objective of its model is "to ensure appropriation of public policy by civil society". Both the civil society and government initiatives reflect the fact that the PARPA/PRSP in Mozambique is regarded as a "rolling plan" and it is expected that there will be continuing consultations, revision and updating.

The study on Mozambique also critiques the institutional framework, pointing out that the sector approach hampers private sector and civil society participation, operating as it does through government line ministries in which there is no mechanism for taking on board civil society recommendations.

⁵ Falck, H. and Landfald, K. 2000 *ibid*

The study from Tanzania reports that “Many of the civil society actors feel cheated by both the government and the donors, especially the World Bank.” The official PRSP process in Tanzania was entirely Government led with only cosmetic attempts to involve civil society and induce them to approve drafts prepared in advance by the Technical Committee. Even the Zonal Workshops, which were purportedly aimed at soliciting views from the grassroots, involved only 804 participants across the whole country and some of these were government employees (District Executive Directors). Though women make up the majority of the poor, only 22 percent of all participants were female. Following the Zonal Workshops, a draft PRSP was prepared but this was not brought back to civil society, even for ‘rubber stamping’.

This is seen to be fairly typical of government-civil society relations in Tanzania but the fact that the World Bank, being aware of inadequacies in the process used, went ahead and accepted Tanzania’s PRSP, is the cause of civil society’s frustration with donors.

The Uganda study notes that government commitment to the consultations in that country was an essential factor. Government:

- Facilitated a consultation process in which civil society was meaningfully involved;
- Provided CSOs with necessary information, including the draft PEAP/PRSP
- Ensured that a substantial amount of the output of the consultation process was included in the final document;
- Made CSOs full members of the National Task Force so that they were able to attend all meetings;
- Facilitated constant contact between the Civil Society Task Force and the Technical Team that drafted the PRSP; and
- Allowed CSOs to determine the agenda and methodology of the consultations with communities.

The study identifies this as “a very important milestone in changing government-civil society relationships in Africa”.

Constraints

Capacity

By definition, the countries undertaking PRSPs are both ‘heavily indebted’ and ‘poor’. It is, therefore, inevitable that they will be severely constrained in their capacity to carry out a comprehensive, participatory consultation exercise with all the requirements in terms of personnel/expertise, transport, communications, documentation and so on that this entails. Although civil society, if called on to do so, can add on to government efforts, it is also true that (at least national) CSOs and NGOs in a poor country are unlikely to be very well resourced either.

The Mauritania study calls for investment around the PRSP process itself as a means of carrying out not only the consultation process but also the poverty reduction efforts that are supposed to follow. The country finds itself in an unstable economic situation with

markets for its two leading products, iron and fish, threatened and concedes that it will need substantial financial and capacity building assistance to simultaneously meet the objectives of economic growth and poverty reduction.

Participants in Mozambique noted that a number of organisational factors hampered their making a meaningful input. These included a lack of documentation, particularly documents translated into local languages, and infrastructural factors such as Mozambique's difficult communications and poor road network.

In both Tanzania and Uganda, the perception of CSOs is that they are capable of and prepared to take part in the policy making processes in their country. In fact, their participation would be a way of overcoming some of the constraints faced by their governments. CSOs often work with the grassroots and have bases and contacts on the ground that governments are unable to establish. In Uganda, CSOs were able to complement the efforts of Government, with Government approval, through the operation of the Civil Society Task Force. Their efforts led to the production of a much richer PRSP and a perception among Ugandans that the process had been satisfactorily participatory. Given the level of Government tolerance, CSOs and NGOs were also able, where they saw the need, to organise their own consultative initiatives and have the results of these considered in the drafting of the PRSP.

CSOs in Uganda acknowledge that they had their own capacity constraints including insufficient staff, at either national or local level, qualified to engage donors and policy makers in dialogue on macroeconomic policy issues. However, they felt that they had much to gain by taking the opportunity offered to participate in the PRSP.

Tanzanian CSOs feel that they had the capacity to play a similar role in their country's PRSP but were not given the opportunity. The Tanzania study finds that "the final PRSP document does not demonstrate the civil society perspective and inputs in any meaningful way". Thus, the Tanzanian government missed what may have been its best chance to add value to its own efforts to meet the requirements of the PRSP (although the whole process is undermined by the fact that the World Bank accepted the strategy as presented anyway).

Time

Debt relief is, of course, a very attractive prospect to a country that is heavily indebted and trying, within that context, to overcome problems of poverty. For instance, among the countries studied, Mauritania stands to have its debt reduced by 50 percent and Tanzania by 54 percent (over twenty years). The desire to get the PRSP completed so that debt relief can be applied inevitably creates time pressures that are likely to undermine the quality of the process itself. As noted above, the PRSPs are developed in conditions marked by financial, infrastructural and other capacity constraints anyway. The imposition of, sometimes severe, time constraints on this situation can only make matters worse.

In every case, the pressure was on for the PRSP to be completed as quickly as possible although Mauritania notes a long delay between their being accorded HIPC status and the launching of the PRSP process.

Participatory approaches are, by their very nature, long winded as well as expensive. In Burkina Faso, it was found that the prevailing situation did not allow for a truly participatory approach and there was insufficient time to reconcile the findings from civil society consultations with those from other sources.

Time constraints in Mozambique meant that many potentially valuable inputs did not make it into the PRSP. By the time that civil society groups came to the realisation that the consultation process was not going to be adequate and began organising their own parallel series of meetings, it was already too late. The first of the two civil society meetings did feed into the PRSP but those who were only able to attend the second meeting, after the PRSP had already been finalised, did not have an input. This included academics working on gender and land tenure issues. It is generally agreed among CSOs that the consultations in Mozambique were not enough and not broad enough.

Tanzania spent ten months on the preparation of its PRSP. This is not a lot of time anyway but the major problem the study highlights is the fact that, of this period, only two days was devoted to consultations that had any civil society participation. The study suggests that this might be justified on the grounds that emerging democracies tend to have weak civil societies that are unable to offer effective support to policy processes. However, one could as easily argue the opposite, that the weakness of civil society is the rationale for allowing more time for such processes to be completed meaningfully.

Of the five countries, Uganda came under the most pressure to complete its PRSP urgently. As in the other countries, there was great internal urgency to qualify for debt relief but this was compounded by external pressure from donors who needed a successful example of a country benefiting from the enhanced HIPC initiative to show off at the spring meetings of the Bretton Woods institutions in 2000. As a result, the PEAP process, in which civil society had been meaningfully involved, became constricted into a six month PRSP process from which they found themselves, to some extent, squeezed out. The study notes that, “The few meetings that took place between the [IMF/World Bank] missions and CSOs were almost like verification meetings to find out the level of civil society participation and the quality of inputs.” The subtext to this is that, had CSOs indicated that their level of participation had not been satisfactory, they would have jeopardised their country’s qualification for much needed debt relief.

Best Practices and Lessons Learnt

- Mauritania launched its PRSP process with an awareness campaign so that civil society was aware that the PRSP existed, knew what it was all about and was, therefore, prepared to participate in its formulation.

- Ugandan CSOs organised a campaign using print and electronic media to enhance the two way flow of information around the PRSP.
- Both Mauritania and Uganda tried to ensure the involvement of Parliament. This was not very successful in the case of Uganda but, in Mauritania, it was found to reinforce both the PRSP and other policy which it needed to be coherent with.
- Uganda also involved local research institutions, thus recognising and strengthening the multi layered nature of civil society and enriching the PRSP through contributions from all levels.
- Civil society organisations in Tanzania, Mozambique and Uganda set up parallel consultation processes to those being conducted by their governments. It should be noted that the success of these processes depended to a large degree on the amount of (at least moral) support they received from government.
- The Ugandan government considered civil society as a serious stakeholder in the PRSP and deliberately encouraged its participation. It backed up this belief by facilitating CSO participation through the inclusion of the Civil Society Task Force in the Steering Committee for the PRSP process. In addition, it ensured that CSOs had access to necessary documentation and information.
- Some civil society inputs were wholly incorporated into the PRSP in Uganda, thus strengthening the strategy itself and satisfying members of civil society that they did own the document.
- Mozambique and Uganda built into their PRSPs, and their nationally conceived strategies, mechanisms for continuing civil society involvement in revision and, evaluation and monitoring of the strategies.

Conclusion and Recommendations

PRSPs and the Government/Donor/Civil Society Relationship

On the face of it, the PRSP process does not have a lot of potential for transforming the partnership between African countries and their donor partners. Debt relief under the HIPC initiative comes, as with anything else from the Bretton Woods institutions, with requirements and conditions attached. In this case, the requirement is the completion of a PRSP according to certain rules, most notably participation of civil society. The relationship is still one of ‘if you want what we have to offer, you must do things our way’. At the global level, this reflects well entrenched power relations rather than anything that could be called ‘participatory’. In addition, the PRSPs that have been completed in Africa show the transfer of the content and process of national initiatives, such as the NPES, PARPA and PEAP, into the externally imposed PRSPs, thus lessening local ownership.

PRSPs have, perhaps, more potential for transforming relationships between governments and their people. The demand has already been made that governments involve civil

society in the formulation of PRSPs and governments have made some attempt to do so. Given the links between PRSPs and the national poverty reduction initiatives of the HIPC's, this has often led to greater civil society involvement in the latter as well. However, for this to be effective, both donors and governments have to be genuine in their stated desire for civil society participation. On the basis of the five country studies presented here, it is hard to say that either party was genuine in this desire. Governments, on the whole, seem to have done only what was necessary to 'scrape by' in qualifying for debt relief, indicating that this, rather than the development of civil society was always their priority. The donors, for their part, have accepted PRSPs in which the level of input from civil society was clearly very limited, indicating that their commitment to the notion of participation was also not that strong and that the PRSPs may have been nothing more than another bureaucratic stepping stone. As the Uganda study notes,

In fact the Bank and the Fund have with the PRSP turned a genuine demand by civil society on its head. Instead of allowing civil society in sub-Saharan Africa to set the conditions of engagement with their governments, the BWI's intervention may have disastrous consequences.

The PRSPs also have some potential to transform the relationship between civil society and donors but, in light of the quotation above, they would seem to be launching into this from a position of lack of faith. To drag civil society into a participatory process because that is the particular requirement of this programme might also not be very sustainable when the same civil society lives amid a plethora of other international arrangements from which they are totally excluded in terms of decision making. In addition, if it were genuine, a direct relationship between donors and civil society would carry a risk of undermining the role and autonomy of national governments. Governments (whatever their failings) represent the whole of a nation, while CSOs represent a range of sectional interests.

The least that the international financial institutions might do to demonstrate their commitment to the principle of participation is to pay for the process, which, by definition, the recipient countries cannot afford from their own resources, either as a grant or as a small, initial debt relief concession.

PRSPs as a Vehicle for Poverty Reduction and Solution to Debt

Two questions need to be asked in relation to PRSPs:

- 1 Are they the best vehicle for poverty reduction and/or the best solution to the debt situation of African countries; and
- 2 Are they better than, or do they add value to, already existing national poverty reduction initiatives?

In prescribing how savings from debt reduction are to be used, the HIPC initiative subscribes to the notion that African debt is entirely Africa's fault. It does not consider that:

- That the debt and the lenders might have been, on some level, immoral or unwise;

- That the debt is unpayable and that its repayment would, in any case, make little difference to the creditors: or
- The global forces that contributed to African countries needing loans in the first place.

Within this ‘charitable’ perspective there is no notion of cancelling the debt altogether, merely one of prescribing and rewarding ‘good behaviour’.

The guarantee of the effectiveness of the PRSPs should be extensive and high quality civil society participation at all levels but neither the donors themselves nor national governments have shown a consistent commitment to this principle.

The five country studies indicate that, while they may have had some small reinforcing effect, PRSP processes did not have the power to entrench meaningful civil society participation where it was not already well on its way to existing. Thus, in Uganda, where Government had already begun to recognise the role of civil society in policy making, a cooperative relationship was formed between these two players over the formulation of the country’s PRSP. But, in Tanzania, where government has been reluctant to involve civil society and civil society itself has largely been too weak to demand involvement, the PRSP process was ‘business as usual’ with civil society’s involvement being mostly cosmetic.

In this regard, then, there is little to show that the PRSPs are any better solution to the debt problem, or any better means of reducing poverty, than many of the national poverty reduction initiatives that have been developed in various African countries. In fact, the country studies suggest that, in most cases, there is very little difference between the two. The PRSPs, in the countries in sub Saharan Africa that have completed them, have tended to be an extension or slight elaboration of already existing policies. African countries have not waited to be told by donor institutions that they need poverty reduction strategies but have gone ahead and developed them on the basis of national priorities. Senior officials of the Mozambican government, quoted in the Mozambique study, describe the “IMF and World Bank as latecomers to poverty reduction focus”. In some cases, particularly that of Uganda, the PRSP’s actually placed time constraints on what would, under normal circumstances, have been a much longer process of consultation, thereby making the process less, rather than more, participatory.