

An overview of NGO Participation in PRSPs

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On the recommendation of the CARE International Programme Working Group, CARE USA and UK recently commissioned a study of CARE's engagement with Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) processes.

This study aims to provide guidance to CARE country offices and members in how to most appropriately engage in PRSP processes, related policy engagement, and resulting funding opportunities, so as to most effectively contribute to poverty reduction based on lessons learnt and CARE's specific potential.

The work has been conducted in three stages: First, a basic guide was produced for CARE into the PRS approach in both its technical and political dimensions. Second, an overview paper was produced on experiences of civil society participation in PRS processes, including key challenges for international NGOs. As the final phase of the work, a report and accompanying training and guidance materials have been produced to map how CARE is currently engaging with PRS processes and help enhance future engagement.

Introduction

Participation has rapidly become something of a buzz-word for people and organisations engaged with PRSPs, whether internationally or at the country level. Beyond the rhetoric lie three important reasons why participation has gained such a prominent place in the PRSP approach:

- First, donors have come to acknowledge that past structural adjustment policies failed because of a lack of government commitment, or “ownership”. The fact that the country is now to produce its own PRSP is meant to increase such **national ownership**. Participation by local civil society (CS) is expected to broaden this ownership beyond the level of the government.^{1,2}
- Second, **pro-poor outcomes** are expected as a result of CS participation, on the strength of their proximity to the poor and their capacity to grasp the nature of poverty in the country and assess the impact of policies.
- Third, since governments worldwide are good at making promises but weaker in their delivery, donors are keen for CS to ‘follow the money’ and monitor a sustained and effective implementation of PRSPs, **holding governments to account** in ways that have consequences for their stay in power.

A fundamental innovation of the PRSP approach is that it challenges the traditional roles and responsibilities of main development agents - recipient governments, donors and civil society. Since the benefits of participation are not linear as many technical PRSP documents appear to suggest, there is a challenge for NGOs and all other stakeholders to capitalize on this new flexibility in roles that is emerging and ensure that the participation gamble pays off in the interests of poor people.

This paper attempts to provide an overview of NGO participation in PRSP processes to date. It concentrates on engagement in national PRS processes rather than international advocacy efforts directed at the World Bank, IMF and bilateral donors.

The term ‘NGO’ is used throughout to refer to development and humanitarian relief organisations and an attempt has been made to distinguish between local, national and international organisations. The term ‘civil society’ is used in a much broader sense that includes not only NGOs but also any indigenous civil society organisation such as trade unions, faith groups, social movements, political parties, academic and research institutes.

The paper is divided into three sections:

1. The first outlines a framework for analysing NGO participation in PRS processes based on the type of organisation, available opportunities, different levels of the process and stages in the cycle of the PRSP.

¹ Renard, R. & Molenaers, N. (2003) “Civil Society’s Participation in Rwanda’s Poverty Reduction Strategy” IDPM & UA Discussion Paper <http://www.eurodad.org/uploadstore/cms/docs/ParticipationinRwandaUA2003.pdf>.

² Godfrey, S. and Sheehy, T. (2000) “Civil Society Participation in Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs)” Report to the Department for International Development (DFID), London http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Pubs/files/cs_prsps.pdf.

2. The second section applies this framework to providing an overview of NGO participation in PRS processes thus far. It includes short case studies from Vietnam, Rwanda and Bolivia.
3. The final section attempts to draw some conclusions including key challenges for NGOs seeking to participate in PRSP processes into the future.

1. A framework for analysing NGO participation

There are four important determinants of NGO participation in PRS processes:

- **The type of NGO:** Different organisations will approach PRSP participation in different ways. For example, an NGO with a particular sectoral expertise may attempt to influence the technical quality of government policies whereas faith-based NGOs may have a stronger focus on empowering poor people and improving accountability.
- **The extent of participation:** NGOs might make a token mention of participation in their logical framework to keep donors happy or at the other extreme they could be working alongside government and making key decisions that affect national policy.
- **The level of the PRS cycle:** NGOs may engage with the PRS at national, regional or local levels. Alternatively, they may choose to address one sector or cross-cutting theme of the PRS such as education or environmental policy.
- **The stage of the PRS cycle:** This could be in the preliminary phases and involve the collection of data for a National Poverty Assessment, or it could be monitoring whether what has been agreed to in the PRSP is actually being implemented.

Clearly, the actions of governments and donors play an important role in shaping not only the extent of participation and the stage and level at which it can take place, but also the type of NGOs that exist in a given country. Government and donor decisions about NGO financing and political freedoms help to shape the NGO sector and its ability to participate in the PRSP process.

What types of NGOs participate in PRS processes?

NGOs are far from homogeneous, making it very difficult to classify them into workable categories, but the table on the following page outlines eight key characteristics to consider when attempting to understand a particular organisation and its likely participation in PRS processes.

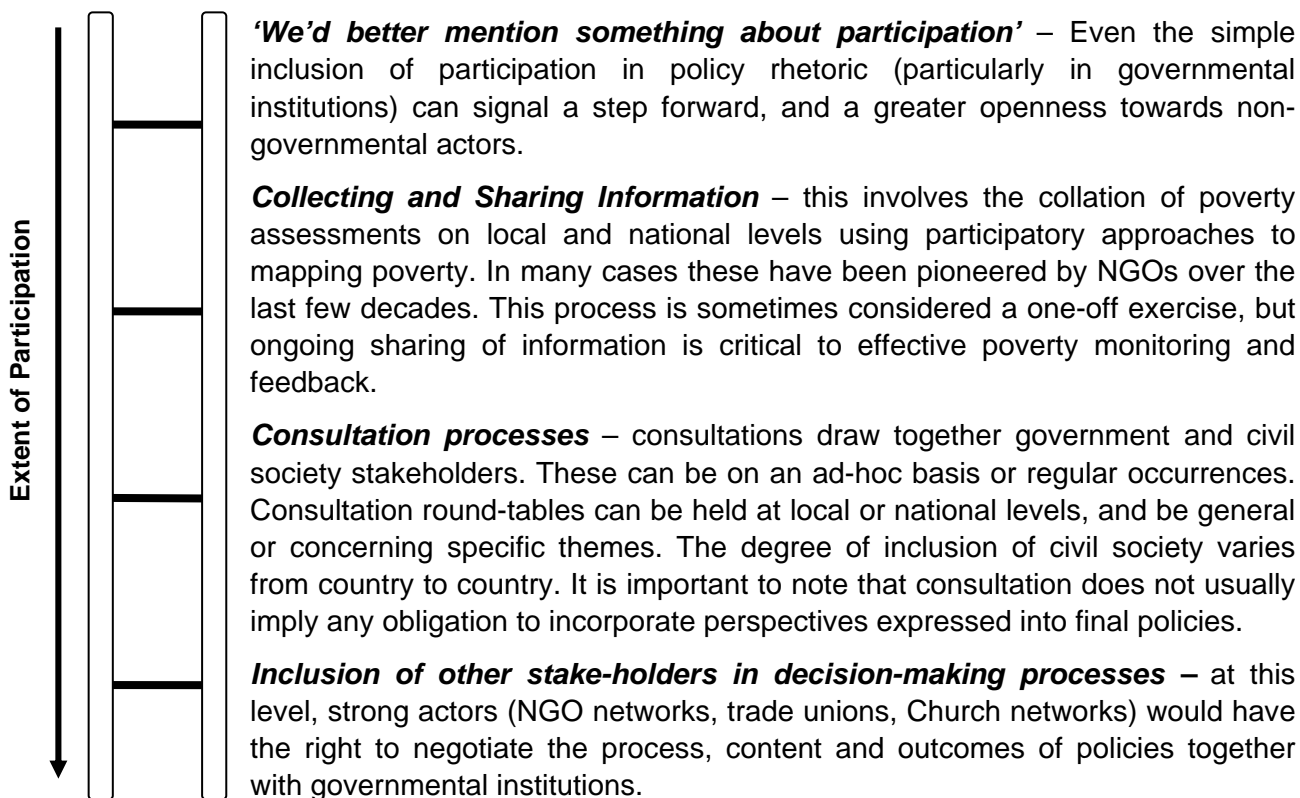
A recent review of CARE US's advocacy work used this framework to describe CARE as one of the world's largest relief and development agencies, highly decentralised with 70 country offices and heavily reliant on public-sector funding. The report went on to describe how traditionally CARE has emphasised its field operations in development and emergency response but is currently weighing up the implications of undertaking a more robust policy and advocacy role. These characteristics are important determinants of CARE as an organisation and its likely participation in PRS processes.

Table 1. Key characteristics of NGOs

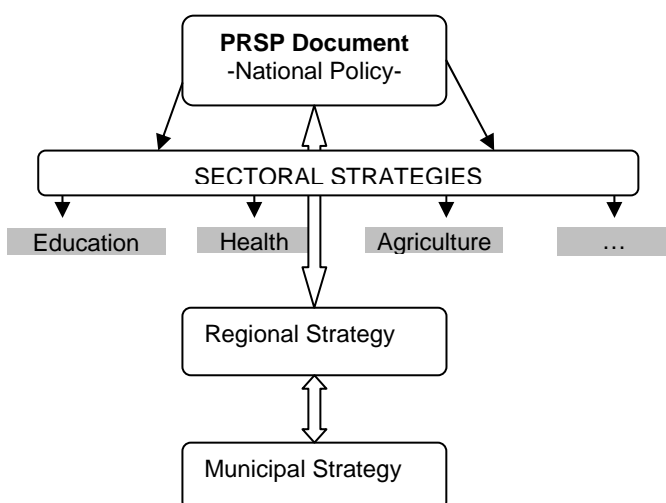
Staff values and Commitment	An NGO generally develops around a set of values that can shape the direction and priorities of its work: these can be faith, ethics, social justice or other values.
Types of work and level of expertise	Each NGO is involved in one or many areas of work, ranging from relief to development project work to advocacy. In some cases NGOs have evolved over the years from hands-on work to more indirect approaches (e.g. lobbying governments). Their levels of expertise can vary in each of these areas. The interaction within an NGO between different areas of work, for example between their policy work and project staff, could be quite separate or the one could be feeding into the other.
Accountability	To some extent, an NGO is generally accountable to government, donors, and beneficiaries. The order of priority given to these and the strength of these relationships distinguish one organisation from another.
Representativeness	An NGO will generally consider itself to represent a section of the population, i.e. the poor, a marginalised indigenous minority, poor women, etc. Its mechanisms of representation (direct or indirect) can vary enormously.
Scale	NGOs vary enormously in size from small, to intermediate, to large, national or international, or representing a number of related NGOs in a coalition or umbrella organisation.
Location	An NGO can be locally or internationally based, based in a 'northern' or 'southern' country, in a rural or urban context, etc..
Internal structure	NGOs vary enormously in their internal structure. Some have developed around a charismatic leader and remain hierarchical and centralised, others have a number of decentralised offices with a degree of autonomy, and some are active in project work while others work mainly in conjunction with local partners.
Sources of Income	This will also affect the work and direction of an NGO as well as its line of accountability (see above) depending on whether an NGO derives its income from government, bilateral donors, other NGOs or individual donors. Different sources of funding come with different degrees of conditionality.

To what extent do NGOs participate?

The nature of participation in PRSPs can range from the tokenistic to the meaningful and is usefully visualised as a 'ladder of participation'^{3,4}



At what level of the PRS process do NGOs participate?



The PRS process occurs at various levels. The PRSP is written at a national level yet should involve **local stakeholders**. NGOs can help this occur by influencing the content or the methodology used to complete the PRSP in a participatory way. For example a women's NGO might seek to ensure that women's specific needs were considered throughout the PRSP process by calling for the use of gender-sensitive methodology and the inclusion of gendered policies in the final document.

³ Centre for Rural Development and training 1998 'ICITRAP: training exercise for examining participatory approaches to project management', University of Wolverhampton.

⁴ Christiansen, K. (2003) 'From PRSPs to Budgets: The Challenges for Civil Society in Monitoring the Implementation of Poverty Reduction Strategies'.

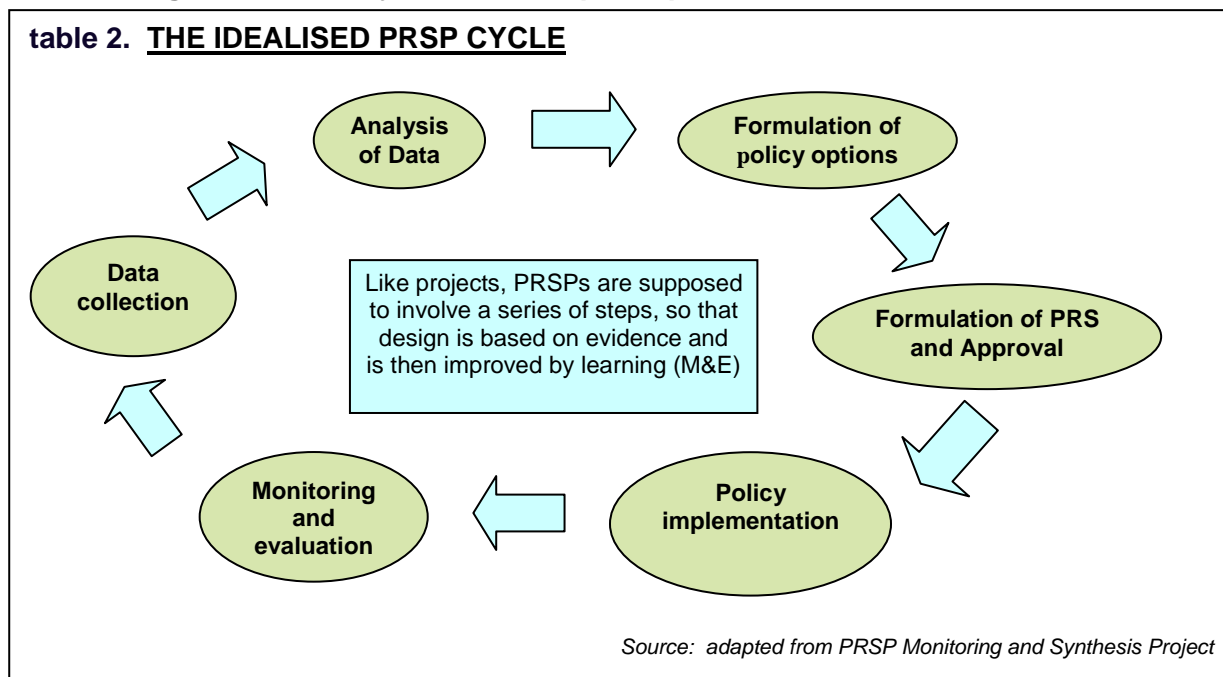
The PRSP document is supposed to provide an overarching direction and list of priorities for **sectoral strategies**. There is generally a need for this to be unpacked and translated into practical plans for action, with relevant budget and resource allocations. An NGO with particular technical expertise in a certain sector could be in a strong position to provide input at this level.

The PRSP should also lead the way for **regional and municipal poverty reduction strategies**. Where NGOs are working at this level they may have a role to play in formulating these, or in making their content accessible to people at community level and ensuring they have a voice in the process.

Clearly, there is also another level which is the **international** one. NGOs may choose to work together in international advocacy campaigns directed at improving World Bank, IMF and bilateral donor engagement in PRS processes. These efforts are not the primary focus of this paper.

These levels should ideally be linked in an iterative process where feedback from the implementation of sectoral, municipal and regional strategies is used to inform the national PRSP document as it is revised every 3-5 years, and to improve international support for the approach. NGOs have a vital role to play in realising this dynamic in practice.

At what stage in the PRS cycle do NGOs participate?



There are a number of entry-points for NGOs into the PRS cycle^{5,6}

⁵ McGee, R. and Norton, N. (2000) "Participation in Poverty Reduction Strategies: A Synthesis of Experience with Participatory Approaches to Policy Design, Monitoring and Implementation" IDS Working paper 109 <http://www.ids.ac.uk/ids/bookshop/wp/wp109.pdf>.

⁶ 'Quality participation in poverty reduction strategies Experiences from Malawi, Bolivia and Rwanda' Christian Aid (2002) <http://www.christian-aid.org.uk/indepth/0208qual/quality.htm>.

Collection of data

Participatory research involves poor communities in analysing the nature, causes and dynamics of poverty, and finding out what their priorities for public action are and which institutions they see as effective. Poverty research for poverty assessments usually involves intermediate actors such as research institutes, local and international NGOs, and local government personnel.

Analysis of data and policy options

Local research organisations will often be well-placed to undertake specific research and analysis of the results of PPAs. However it is important to ensure government departments are also involved fully in these activities, to ensure data collected meets their needs and to develop capacity and understanding inside government.

Formulation of the strategy

Participatory process

As NGOs often have experience of designing and implementing participatory processes with a wide range of stakeholders, they can play an important role in facilitating the process of defining the objectives, rules of engagement and methodologies to be used.

PRS formulation

Agenda-setting and policy formulation can involve civil society specialists and advocates representing diverse groups from among the poor as well as government technocrats and independent analysts. This should ideally take place during the formulation of the I-PRSP as well as the full PRSP, to avoid key decisions being pre-empted.

Accountability

Given the weaknesses of many political systems in poor countries, NGOs can play a vital role alongside parliaments in securing public endorsement of the final PRSP product. NGOs with advocacy experience and expertise can achieve this by facilitating public debate at all levels of the proposed policy options.

Implementation

Local and international NGOs, as well as faith groups already play a key role in the delivery of services to the poor. Their involvement in the PRSP process can encourage questioning and assessment of whether these services are effective in reaching the poor and meeting their needs, thus contributing to improvements in future service delivery. Over time, NGOs could also be contracted to deliver services on behalf of the government under the auspices of the PRSP.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Participatory approaches need to be identified that can be used to test the effectiveness of policies by monitoring the changes actually experienced by local level actors, against the implementation of policy goals. Citizens can be directly involved in formulating and monitoring local budget and in monitoring service delivery and holding service providers and local government to account. Findings gathered through participatory monitoring should of course be fed back into future policy-making processes in an iterative process.

The following section applies this framework to examine NGO participation in PRSP processes to date.

2. NGO participation in PRSP processes to date

Four years on from the formal adoption of the PRSP approach by the Boards of World Bank and IMF, thirty three countries have now produced a full PRSP, a further twenty four have interim PRSPs, and three countries have produced a revised PRSP. The initiative is moving from the formulation to the implementation stage in many countries and the model is being challenged and refined as real tensions and hurdles at ground level are being reported. There is a sense of NGOs taking stock of their experiences so far, adjusting their expectations of PRSPs accordingly, and looking ahead to meet challenges of PRSP implementation.

What types of NGO are getting involved?

Most of the NGOs engaging in PRS processes thus far fit into the following three groups:

- ***Small local and intermediate NGOs*** have been involved in data gathering for the PRSP, but poverty analysis has been left more to academics and research institutes. Small, local and intermediate NGOs have also engaged in information sharing and awareness-raising at the local level.
- ***Large, national NGOs based in the capital and other urban areas*** have participated in consultations about policy content of PRSPs. Rural NGOs have been much less active in PRSP processes.
- ***International NGOs*** have often provided the bridge between governments and donors on the one hand and national NGOs on the other, by taking on something of a sub-contracting role in relation to the above activities. They have also taken on key roles themselves where national civil society has been weak or where an authoritarian government has allowed only limited independence to local NGOs. International NGOs have also engaged in a limited amount of capacity building with local NGOs. For example, in Rwanda, Trocaire and Christian Aid have been trying to increase encouragement for the formation of a national NGO forum. And they have engaged in international advocacy efforts directed at improving World Bank, IMF and bilateral donor support for the approach.

Vietnam: NGOs in a one-party state

Vietnam has a top rating among developing countries for its poverty reduction during the 1990s. It also provides an example of effective institutional cooperation arrangements between the Government and other actors in developing the poverty reduction strategy. The role of International NGOs is particularly interesting in the context of this one-party state.

International NGOs in Vietnam occupy an unusual position. They are playing a direct role in the development of a comprehensive national poverty reduction strategy. Their good standing with the Government is based partly on commitments made by some of the most active agencies when Vietnam was still isolated by most western countries, and by their commitment to development over many years. The international NGOs have also been critically supportive of the poverty focus of the World Bank and official donors, and their involvement in the Poverty Working Group and in bringing the perspective of local partners into their work has made a particularly important contribution to this.

ActionAid Vietnam, Oxfam GB and Save the Children Fund (UK) carried out PPA research work in partnership with government to complement statistical data in a new, national analysis of poverty.⁷ This exemplary PPA exercise was embedded in ongoing relationships and dialogue with local government and brought into the policy debate input from a wide range of poor Vietnamese, and hundreds of decision makers at various levels of society – from local and provincial officials, mass organisations, and local Vietnamese professionals and NGO structures. The major strength of this exercise is that it has been translated into policy issues in a way that offers options and challenges to the Government, without being prescriptive. Its significance in policy terms is enhanced by its timing – providing potential input to the development of the next five-year plan for Vietnam.

The most important avenues for participation in Vietnam are local government structures and mass organisations, closely integrated with the Government and Party. These provide an effective delivery mechanism for welfare and credit programmes, and an important source of feedback on the impact of government programmes. Due to their alliance with Government their freedom to challenge GoV policies is limited. Independent local NGOs are new to Vietnam and the Government has been hesitant to involve them directly in its formal discussions with international partners. International NGOs to some extent have been able to mediate for these organisations and feed their views into the consultative structure of PPAs and the Poverty Working Group and reports have noted an increase in openness towards their mainstream involvement.

Malaluan, J., Guttal, S. (2002), McGee R., and Norton, (2000), Godfrey, S. and Sheehy, T. (2000)

What is the extent of NGO participation thus far?

Many NGOs have participated in **poverty mapping exercises and PPAs**. In fact, even where governments have been reluctant to accept NGOs as partners, they still recognise them as holders of useful information. This information that has been gathered has had an impact. In Rwanda for example diagnostic exercises carried out by NGOs were able to improve the definition of poverty in the Interim PRSP and PRSP and increase consideration for gender issues. The priority-ranking by poor communities in their PPA also directly informed policy prioritisation and budget allocations in the PRSP.

Many national and international NGOs are very involved in **circulating information**. In Bolivia for example a coalition of NGOs made considerable efforts to cascade information surrounding the PRSP process to the community level, through translating relevant documents into local languages and the use of mass-media. In the Gambia, a range from TV, radio and newspaper announcements to the use of popular song and drama were also used.⁸ Many Northern NGOs have assumed a pivotal role in accessing information for decision-making; others have aimed to equip Southern NGOs with technology needed to access information.

Consultation processes involving round-tables at local or national levels have occurred widely with varying degrees of openness to members of civil society. In consultations, NGOs have been expected to draw on their operational and advocacy experience and on their familiarity with poor communities and their needs. Some governments have actually contracted out the **facilitation of consultations** to civil society organisations. This was the case in Kenya, Bolivia, Gambia, and Uganda, where governments recognised civil society's stronger networks in poor rural areas and

⁷ Irungu, H. (2002) "Inclusive Circles Lost in Exclusive Circles" Action Aid Policy Brief. <http://www.worldbank.org/poverty/strategies/review/actionaid1.pdf>.

⁸ Booth, D. & Piron, L. (2003) "Politics and the PRSP approach: Bolivia Case Study" PRSP Monitoring and Synthesis Project, ODI, London.

superior experience in facilitating workshops. Some consultations have been general in scope, others have been organised along sectoral or thematic lines. In general, they have been the most productive where specific topics have been discussed. They have covered analytical and diagnostic work, institutional and budget analysis, and agenda-setting.

Many NGOs have felt that there was a serious **gap between the consultation process and the actual writing of the PRSP** which they saw as a closed-door process. They felt that their contributions were not reflected in final drafts, and that they were allowed no space for feedback. In Bolivia, and many African countries, NGOs and civil society in general felt excluded from the macroeconomic discussions, and that **macroeconomic policies were not negotiable**. Their role was confined to more technical issues and they were not able to express more radical opinions about the structural causes of poverty. Poor information flows, lack of time, and language barriers also proved to be **obstacles to quality participatory processes**. In Malawi, Mozambique and Rwanda, local NGOs reported that agendas and documents were not even disseminated before the meetings, preventing them from preparing comments properly.

There has also been frustration where distinctions were made arbitrarily between **which NGOs were invited to consultations and which were not**. Even in Uganda and Vietnam, which have been praised for their poverty reduction strategies, there has been criticism pointed at the governments for the lack of freedom NGOs have had to express their voice. They have been strictly bound within state-set parameters.

Despite some of the negativity surrounding civil society's real impact in affecting policy, there are case studies where participation and lobbying by **NGOs have successfully affected policy content**. Strong advocacy for certain themes – such as for gender inequality and HIV/AIDS to be treated as cross-cutting dimensions of poverty – was successful in Malawi and Kenya. Traditional agricultural policies appear to have been tempered by broader 'sustainable livelihood' perspectives as a result of civil society lobbying for this in Kenya, Zambia and Bolivia. In the Bolivia PRSP, small producers and the informal sector received recognition as sub-sectors requiring supportive policies to enhance their potential contribution to growth.

Examples of effective policy-influencing NGO work have occurred especially where NGOs have worked together. Interestingly, some of the larger NGOs have sought to model a **networking approach** internally within their organisation. Oxfam has built up a strong network among Oxfam programmes in countries engaged in PRSPs around the world. Christian Aid has also taken initiatives to spread experience between partners in PRSP countries (Mozambique, Bolivia, Malawi) and support these to document and analyse PRSP processes.⁹

International NGOs have also had an impact through **integrating participatory practices** into government-led PRSP processes. In Mongolia, for example, Save the Children worked alongside the national government to develop participatory practices to be integrated throughout the process.

⁹ McGee, R., Levene, J. & Hughes, A. (2001) "Assessing Participation in Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers: a Desk-Based Synthesis of Experience in sub-Saharan Africa" Institute of Development Studies, Sussex.

NGOs making participation a Rwandan word

The Rwandan PRSP is being implemented at a time when the scars of recent history are still fresh. Organised civil society is weak, distrust prevails within communities and many international donors and International NGOs are still focused on post-emergency rehabilitation projects. The political regime is very authoritarian yet offering competent governance and using aid successfully. The GoR recognises the PRS process as a vehicle for Rwanda to move towards economic and social development and reconciliation.

Participation has been strongly promoted in the Rwandan PRSP process. DFID funded a technical advisor from Action Aid India, an NGO renowned for its participatory practices, to design the participatory bottom-up approach of the Rwandan PRS. Subsequently, GoR has made a stronger effort to hear ordinary people's views, through Participatory Poverty Assessments, Policy Relevance Tests (to discuss the effectiveness of sectoral policies) and *ubudehe* approaches (based on traditional Rwandan practice values of problem-solving at community level). Priorities as ranked by communities participating in the PPA are covered in the PRSP and reflect a range of both sectoral (eg. agriculture, health and education) and thematic (eg. security and governance) issues. They include some very specific ones (the need for candles and fuel for oil lamps).

Both international and local NGOs have been largely operationally focused on rehabilitation and the provision of services in recent years. This is starting to change as donors shift their orientation from supporting civil society in relief and rehabilitation work towards more support for longer term development within the PRSP context. NGOs were actively engaged in facilitating the PPA process at community level and opportunities are opening up to be involved in budget monitoring and in implementing sectoral strategies. Earlier this year Trócaire hosted a budget workshop that officials from the Ministry of Finance conducted attended by local NGOs, INGOs and donors. The workshop covered the budget, the budgetary process and the opportunities for involvement by civil society. It provided a forum for pilot materials to be used by the Ministry of Finance in the Budget Monitoring Workshops. The GoR are supporting the establishment of a Rwandan Civil Society Budget Monitoring Group to be led by Profemme (an umbrella group of women's organisations).

NGOs have started to indicate their willingness to participate in the development of sectoral plans. CARE and MSF Belgium have taken a lead in organising the International NGOs interested in participating in the Health and Education Sector respectively, despite some mixed signals from donors in relation to participation by some NGOs (in relation to the Education Sector Plan it was felt that the stakeholder selection by the Ministry was adequately inclusive and more relevant). A key area of interest is to encourage the development of coalitions of civil society actors around issues to input into the sector strategies. Local NGOs have yet to develop coalitions/alliances around the proposed sector plans. International NGOs (particularly Christian Aid and Trocaire) have been trying to encourage the emergence of a National NGO Forum but this has proved difficult so far.

Civil society has on the whole not challenged the GoR's PRS by proposing alternatives, due to a lack of advocacy, policy and economic literacy skills. Similarly GoR's expectations of CS participation were based on consultation and only involved few INGOs at national and provincial levels. This is also starting to change. Trócaire has been involved in supporting Rwandan NGOs to get involved in advocacy for a number of years and has noted a significant development of partners' capacity in relation to advocacy over the past year. Trócaire recently approved funding for its first advocacy initiative directly related to the PRSP to support a local NGO in compiling poverty indicators for the Batwa (pygmy) population that are comparable to the indicators used in the PRSP to be used to influence policy development in favour of this marginalized community.¹⁰

Christian Aid 2002, Painter 2001, Zaman 2003, Gower, 2002, Trocaire Updates 2002/2003

At what level of the PRS process are NGOs engaging?

NGO participation at a **national level** has occurred predominantly where umbrella networks have campaigned vigorously, and generated sufficient momentum behind their campaigns to put real pressure on governments. The Malawi Economic Justice Network (MEJN), for instance, was formed to push for greater civil society involvement and succeeded in co-ordinating a broad and

¹⁰ Painter (2002) "Missing the Mark? Participation in the PRSP process in Rwanda" Christian Aid in-depth report <http://www.christian-aid.org.uk/indepth/0212rwanda/rwanda.htm>.

varied group of CSOs and pushing back the boundaries of participation to some extent. Before this, government inclusion of civil society had been very selective. MEJN has emerged as a significant force for participation in policy-making at both national and international level and reflects a strategic collaboration between the international NGO community (Oxfam in particular) and an in-country network.

Bolivia: should NGOs work with or next to government?

Bolivia was one of the first countries in February 2000 to write its PRSP in order to access international debt relief.¹¹ Bolivia still suffers from endemic corruption and the government lacks legitimacy due to its coalition structure but it has been consistently committed to participation and decentralisation. In 2000, a National Dialogue (ND) was held to feed into the PRSP. This was a government-led, countrywide consultation process involving municipal, departmental and national level government structures, civil society, business and international actors. Round table discussions were most successful at municipal level, because the issues discussed were focused around very concrete questions concerning the priority populations and issues for poverty reduction, distribution and control of potential debt relief resources. International co-operation agencies were extremely involved in the Dialogue process and played an important role in encouraging and funding civil society participation. Some of the outcomes of the ND brought real policy change, for example for the first time Bolivia's resources will be allocated to favour the poorest municipalities.

Although in many ways the National Dialogue 2000 was a positive participatory process, it remained extremely limited and exclusive. Bolivia has a diverse and forceful civil society. Despite divisions within and between social movements and NGOs, CS organised an independent consultation process (the *Foro Nacional Jubileo 2000*) which ran parallel to the National Dialogue but was eventually able to feed into the official Dialogue at departmental and national levels. This process built on existing decentralisation mechanisms and succeeded in facilitating greater representation of poor people than occurred in the formal National Dialogue. It was set-up by the Catholic Church and involved many CSOs including trade unions, university, women, environmental and human rights groups. The format of the Jubilee Forum was intended specifically to enable discussions on the overall structural causes of poverty, as opposed to dividing up the discussions into political, social and economic, as in the National Dialogue. Donors and INGOs were active in providing funding, guidance and capacity-building support CS participation. Oxfam GB worked to inform CSOs about the PRS process and enable them to influence it, as well as broadening their knowledge and building capacity for policy analysis. A Christian Aid policy briefing recommends that information should be communicated in local languages, using media forms that are appropriate to each community.

The ND was devalued by the fact that its outcomes were only permitted limited policy impact. Many of the civil society representatives who took part felt disappointed with the EBRP, as they felt the first draft bore little relation to the recommendations coming from the Dialogue process. Its content only shifted to some degree later on, in response to an outcry from international donors and civil society groups. One significant CS contribution to the Dialogue was the emphasis on the need for a civil society Social Control Mechanism to monitor expenditure of funds and to participate in the drawing-up, follow-up evaluation and reformulation of the PRSP. Oxfam GB is working towards strengthening existing local monitoring organisations at the municipal level, where decisions on HIPC funds are taken. It is also strengthening organisations working on resource allocation and budget transparency.

The Bolivian example highlights the two-way links between PRSP processes and their political context. Many critics claim that the widespread popular protests and the Dialogue were intricately linked, as these processes had begun to generate expectations that were not then met. Indigenous groups in particular felt excluded and sought other routes to assert their demands. One such route was the ballot box. In 2003, a prominent figure amongst indigenous coca farmers in Bolivia – Evo Morales – secured striking electoral success with his Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) political party. This gave Bolivia, a country of indigenous peoples, its first legislature with a definite indigenous majority.

If this was clearly a positive outcome for Bolivia, there were also more difficult ones. Two large outbreaks of protest occurred in Bolivia in February and November 2003. Each one was unprecedented in its violence and political ramifications. The February event led to a restructuring of the government and the budget and the October disturbances

¹¹ "Participating in Dialogue?: The Estrategia Boliviana de Reducción de la Pobreza" Christian Aid policy briefing (2002) <http://www.christian-aid.org.uk/indepth/0204part/bolivia.pdf>

resulted in over 60 deaths and a new President committed to governing without political parties. In each case, Morales and the MAS party played a prominent role.

This is the context in which the National Dialogue II is being organised. The government has stated that it hopes to give focus to the consultations by focusing the policy debate around the constraints on a limited number of 'productive chains' identified as having particular export potential and strong employment effects. The hope is to generate not just a new document but a set of enforceable 'compacts' – agreements to undertake specific actions – between branches of government and private and NGO actors. Since October, it has also been agreed to include in an expanded Dialogue agenda two of the principle demands of MAS, the holding of a referendum on the export of gas to the USA and the convening of a constituent assembly. Whether the Dialogue will be able to bridge the gap between the radical expectations of indigenous groups and the government's focus on a feasible policy agenda remains to be seen, but the direction of change does appear to be a positive one.

Christian Aid (2002), McGee (2002), Booth (2003)

The Bolivia case study provides an example of NGOs taking the PRSP to the regional **and municipal levels**. They mobilised poor stakeholders, in order that the official plan to hold participatory debates at these levels was not only an idea but a meaningful reality.

In other cases, NGOs have capitalised on their technical expertise in more specific areas and contributed to **sectoral strategies**. In Rwanda (see above) CARE took the lead in organising international NGOs who were interested in participating in developing strategic plans in the Health sector. There are many other similar examples elsewhere. In Uganda, NGOs were influential in giving impetus to a major push for Universal Primary Education. NGOs in Mozambique were instrumental in making local communities aware of the threat of land reforms. Their subsequent campaign for the law to be revised was largely successful. The Women's Budget Institute based in South Africa brought together NGOs to provide expertise and undertake research according to their particular sectors in order to engage in debate at national level and influence policy.

At what stage in the PRS cycle are NGOs engaging?

Some examples of NGO participation in the earlier stages of the cycle have been given in the previous sections. NGO expertise in carrying out poverty assessments has been channelled into PRSP data collection; they have also shared information and raised awareness, and participated in consultations about policy content.

In addition to this, NGO participation in **poverty monitoring** is attracting a lot of attention and encouragement by donors as PRSPs move into the implementation phase. There are widespread examples of local, national and international NGOs moving into monitoring roles. Christian Aid officers in Mali carried out a project to build the capacity of their Malian partners in monitoring aid quality. Uganda's Debt Network is helping combat corruption in Uganda through engaging in a budget monitoring process. In some cases governments are promoting the involvement of civil society in monitoring and setting up appropriate institutions, for example the Government of Mozambique invited CSOs to develop plans for monitoring implementation.¹²

¹² Driscoll, R. & Evans, A. (2003) PRS Implementation Review for DfID.

In other cases, networks of NGOs are creating their own ***informal channels to monitor PRS implementation***, as in the case in the Civil Society for Poverty Reduction network in Zambia which includes 36 civil society organisations and the 'Red de Desarrollo Local' in Nicaragua which is a network of local development NGOs, funded by GTZ and Oxfam and piloting a social auditing methodology. Civil society capacity for policy advocacy and economic literacy has developed in Tanzania, Zambia, Lesotho, Uganda and Bolivia among other countries. In Malawi and Bolivia there are efforts by the main civil society coalitions to build grassroots capacity for influencing policy locally.

Concern has been expressed by some NGOs that by moving into watchdog roles, they may compromise recently strengthened relationships with governments that allow for greater policy influencing. This is just one example of the tensions inherent in the changing roles NGOs have taken on through the PRSP initiative.

What are the particular challenges the approach presents for international NGOs?

PRS processes have forced many INGOs to question ***the basis for their own legitimacy*** as players in what are supposed to be country-owned processes of poverty reduction. Key questions include the extent to which INGOs actually represent the interests of poor people, the lines of accountability to beneficiaries as opposed to donors, and the implications of these questions for their own international governance and organisational structures.

These problems have tangible effects on the PRS process such as a general bias towards elites. Much NGO participation is led by middle-class technocrats, who have much in common with their counterparts in government and donor organisations. This makes consensus fairly easy to achieve but it is rarely a consensus that is informed by poor people. For example, in Malawi a large meeting was held to start the PRS process, attended by more than 500 development professionals. Key causes of poverty were identified and the second most important was recorded as 'laziness of the poor'. That this should be agreed in a country where many rural women work 14-hour days illustrates the importance of class bias and the need for INGOs to guard against it.

Box X Where did the questioning come from?

Even before the PRS approach was formally adopted by the Boards of the World Bank and IMF, many researchers had begun to question the legitimacy and effectiveness of NGOs. To trace early debates on these questions, see:

- Edwards, Michael and David Hulme (ed) (1995) "Non-Governmental Organisations – Performance and Accountability: Beyond the Magic Bullet." Save the Children Fund, UK. *Beyond the Magic Bullet* presents a detailed view of issues concerning NGO performance and accountability, and how these processes are being altered by changing roles and funding arrangements. The book first provides the conceptual framework for the case studies in its second half, with analysis of accountability, the value of formal evaluation, linear thinking and NGO governance. The second half of the book contains a series of case studies from different regions that describe and analyse what happens to NGO and GRO performance and accountability under varying conditions.
- Ridell, Roger and Mark Robinson. (1995) "Non-Governmental Organizations and Rural

Poverty Alleviation.” Oxford University Press, London. The book contributes towards filling in the information gap on the impact of NGO aid. With the presentation of sixteen case studies undertaken by a team of evaluations in Bangladesh, India, Uganda and Zimbabwe, the book attempts to discuss the general question of effectiveness of NGOs in contributing to poverty reduction. Overall, while the book concludes that NGOs can make a contribution to alleviating poverty, it highlights that this contribution is limited both in terms of impact on development and increase in income.

ActionAid offers an interesting example of an INGO which has begun to address legitimacy questions in constructive and innovative ways. The organisation has revamped its Board of Trustees to include people with specialist knowledge of poverty reduction and experience of working in developing countries, not just people who have good connections in the UK for fundraising and networking purposes. There have also been moves to relocate the leadership of many functions ranging from the programmatic to advocacy and campaigns out from Europe and into regions where country offices are located. As with all processes of managing change, this has not been an easy transition. Difficult questions have been opened up around perceived unequal treatment by the organisation of national and international staff. There have also been practical challenges of connecting regional offices into donor and media debates about poverty which often take place in London, and of recruiting staff with appropriate skills and experience when they are in short supply in developing countries. Despite these difficulties, important progress has been made in clarifying the value-added ActionAid can bring, improving the links between staff and poor people, and building a structure which enhances accountability to recipients.

3. Conclusions

NGO experiences of engaging with PRSP processes to date have been something of a mixed bag.

On the positive side, NGOs have been able to apply their extensive knowledge of poverty to influencing government policies through the provision of improved data and advocacy for pro-poor policy options. They have also been able to link poor citizens into government processes through sharing information, raising awareness and helping to shape government-led participatory processes. In the process, many NGOs have acquired new skills, forged networks with like-minded organisations, and improved their own access to government circles.

On the negative side, many NGOs are feeling somewhat bruised by their experiences of participating in PRSP processes. Their concerns were not always taken seriously by governments or reflected in the final documents. Some did not even secure a place at the discussion table because their views did not coincide with those of the government or donor community. Macroeconomic and other structural issues were not adequately addressed in many discussions and participatory processes were often handled haphazardly.

These experiences highlight a number of challenges for international NGOs seeking to maintain and enhance their participation in PRSP processes:

- **Changing skills management.** Many INGOs are making the transition from service-delivery to influencing government policy in favour of poor people. This calls for new skills that can bridge the gap between practice and policy. Key gaps include policy analysis, public communications and media, networking and campaigning, lobbying and advocacy. The gaps are not always matched by new funds to fill them, forcing INGOs to look at innovative ways to develop capacity within existing resource constraints.
- **Addressing structural obstacles.** Many INGOs have historically focused on social sector projects which did not seek to transform the structural dimensions of poverty, but rather to mitigate its impacts. Those that did engage in advocacy often focused on drawing attention to problems rather than formulating solutions. INGOs are now having to decide what constructive contribution they can make to discussions about big questions such as macroeconomics and trade and whether their added value lies in sectoral expertise instead.
- **Putting our own house in order.** PRS processes have forced many INGOs to question the basis for their own legitimacy. Do they have a right to represent poor peoples' interests in national policy processes? To whom are they accountable? What are the implications of being representative for their own internal governance and organisational structures? Difficult questions that have been side-stepped for too long are now coming to the fore and demanding attention.

- **Confronting the cash flow:** The PRSP approach is founded in a state-led model of development which, if successful, could fundamentally alter the funding environment for INGOs. Whereas previously many donors used INGOs and projects to deliver essential services, now many are turning to budget support, SWAPs and state-led service delivery. INGOs need to take a hard look at future funding scenarios and decide where their competitive advantage lies.
- **Clarifying added value:** Implicit in PRS processes is a model of partnership between governments, national civil society organisations and donors. This is forcing many INGOs to evaluate whether they can add value to the approach and in precisely which ways. Options might include service delivery under the auspices of a national PRS, feeding in lessons from practice to improve the content of PRSPs, or using their links with donors to engage in international advocacy around the PRS approach.

The next paper in this series examines the implications of these challenges for CARE.

Further Reading

PRSP General	
The World Bank PRSP Document Library.	http://poverty.worldbank.org/prsp/
The PRSP Sourcebook is a useful resource, with chapters on Participation and the major sectoral issues. The gender chapter is particularly good.*	http://www.worldbank.org/poverty/strategies/sourcons.htm
Eurodad's 'PRSP Updates'.	http://www.eurodad.org/workareas/default.aspx?id=92
PRSP Monitoring & Synthesis Project.	http://www.prpsynthesis.org/
PRSP Participation...	
The Participation and Civic Engagement Group of the World Bank.*	http://www.worldbank.org/participation/PRSP.P.htm
The Institute for Development Studies. *	http://www.ids.ac.uk/ids/particip/index.html
McGee, R., Levene, J. & Hughes, A. (2001) " Assessing Participation in Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers: a Desk-Based Synthesis of Experience in sub-Saharan Africa " Institute of Development Studies, Sussex.*	http://www.worldbank.org/poverty/strategies/review/ids1.pdf
" Ignoring the experts: poor people's exclusion from poverty reduction strategies " Christian Aid Policy Briefing, London (2001).*	http://www.christianaid.org.uk/indepth/0110prsp/prsp.htm
Songco, D. " Accountability To The Poor: Experiences in Civic Engagements in Public Expenditure Management " The Participation Group and Civic Engagement Group of the World Bank, Washington DC.*	www.worldbank.org/participation/web/webfiles/cepemsynthesis.htm www.worldbank.org/participation/web/webfiles/cepem.htm
Godfrey, S. & Sheehy, T. (2000) " Civil Society Participation in Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) " Report to the Department for International Development (DfID), London.	http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Pubs/files/cs_prsps.pdf

* Sourced from "Influencing Poverty Reduction Strategies: A Guide" Oxfam, London (2002), online at http://www.oxfam.org.uk/what_we_do/issues/democracy_rights/prsp_guide.htm.

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Irungu, H. (2002) “Inclusive Circles Lost in Exclusive Circles” Action Aid, London Policy Brief.	http://www.worldbank.org/poverty/strategies/review/actionaid1.pdf
McGee, R. and Norton, N. (2000) “Participation in Poverty Reduction Strategies: A Synthesis of Experience with Participatory Approaches to Policy Design, Monitoring and Implementation” Institute of Development Studies, Sussex, Working paper 109.	http://www.ids.ac.uk/ids/bookshop/wp/wp109.pdf
Booth, D. & Piron, L. (2003) “Politics and the PRSP approach: Bolivia Case Study” PRSP Monitoring and Synthesis Project, ODI, London.	
‘Quality participation in poverty reduction strategies Experiences from Malawi, Bolivia and Rwanda’ Christian Aid (2002).	http://www.christian-aid.org.uk/indepth/0208qual/quality.htm
Painter (2002) “Missing the Mark? Participation in the PRSP process in Rwanda” Christian Aid in-depth report.	http://www.christian-aid.org.uk/indepth/0212rwanda/rwanda.htm
Centre for Rural Development and training 1998 ‘ICITRAP: training exercise for examining participatory approaches to project management’, University of Wolverhampton.	
Christian Aid (2001) ‘Ignoring the experts: Poor people’s exclusion from poverty reduction strategies’ Christian Aid policy Briefing prepared in partnership with INESC, Rede Brasil, Mozambique Debt Group, LINK, CEDLA, UNITAS.	http://www.christian-aid.org.uk/indepth/0110prsp/prsp.htm http://www.worldbank.org/poverty/strategies/review/christianaid1.pdf
Malaluan, J. & Guttal, S. (2002) “Structural Adjustment in the Name of the Poor: The PRSP Experience in the Lao PDR, Cambodia and Vietnam” Focus on the Global South, Bangkok.	http://www.eurodad.org/uploadstore/cms/docs/StructuralAdjustmentintheNameofthePoor.pdf

<p>“Participating in Dialogue?: The Estrategia Boliviana de Reducción de la Pobreza” Christian Aid policy briefing (2002).</p>	<p>http://www.christian-aid.org.uk/indepth/0204part/bolivia.pdf</p>
<p>Politics...</p>	
<p>Trocaire's August update on key events related to official poverty reduction policies in Honduras: Cornally, J. (2003) “PRSP Update: Honduras” Trocaire, Co. Kildare.</p>	<p>http://www.eurodad.org/uploadstore/cms/docs/HondurasUpdateAugust03.doc</p>
<p>Christiansen, K. & Hovland, I. (2003) “The PRSP Initiative: Multilateral Policy Change and the Role of Research” ODI, London, Working Paper 216.</p>	<p>http://www.odi.org.uk/pppg/publications/working_papers/216.html</p>
<p>Christiansen, K. (2003) ‘From PRSPs to Budgets: The Challenges for Civil Society in Monitoring the Implementation of Poverty Reduction Strategies’ ODI, London.</p>	<p>http://www.odi.org.uk/PPPG/activities/country_level/prsp_civil/index.html</p>
<p>Piron, L. and Evans, I., et al. (2004) ‘PRSPs and politics.’ (forthcoming)</p>	<p>www.prpsynthesis.org</p>