



Civil society participation in the PRSP: the role of evidence and the impact on policy choices

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PPA Synthesis Study
October 2005

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Summary

This synthesis study looks at civil society's participation in the PRSP process. Most of the analyses written on the consultation processes of the first wave of PRSPs have been critical of their superficial nature. However, many civil society organisations (CSOs) did mobilise around PRSPs and, in many cases, had unprecedented access to the policy making process. Taking the examples of Bolivia and Tanzania, this paper looks in more detail at the evidence used by CSOs in the PRSP discussions and examines whether the arguments and recommendations made by CSOs were taken on board by the government and included in the final PRSP documents.

A number of common themes and issues emerged from the case studies. The paper concludes with some observations including that the PRSP offers an excellent opportunity for CSOs to engage in the policy process. For many CSOs, this was their first experience of advocacy work on policy issues and the process itself contributed to strengthening their capacities. However, this potential was often not fulfilled and many CSOs felt that their views and recommendations were not listened to or integrated into the final documents. While there are some examples of CSOs having an impact on policy choices, there is an over-riding sense that there is not much of a link between the consultations and the final documents and, furthermore, that many issues were not put on the table for discussion in the first place. The reasons for this are many but include the political nature of policy processes, the influence of donors and IFIs in the PRSP process and the limited capacity in many CSOs to conduct rigorous analysis on highly technical issues.

As the PRSP approach moves into its second and third waves, the interest in civil society's role in policy processes will increase. The PRSP does provide an excellent entry point into the policy process but there is work for CSOs to do to make sure that their contribution to the process will continue to improve. An important part of this will be for CSOs to invest the time and resources into carrying out thorough research at the local and national level to ensure that evidence-based advocacy work around the PRSP process is able to have a positive impact on the policy choices and content of the PRSP.

Introduction

Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) were formally endorsed by the Executive Boards of the World Bank and IMF in September 1999 as the mechanism for distributing HIPC (or debt relief) funds and as the basis for IFI concessional lending.¹ Since then, PRSPs have been on the agendas of around 70 low-income countries around the world and have stimulated much debate and some controversy. The PRSP approach was developed out of best practice on how to tackle poverty and includes some innovative practices; most significantly the requirement that the PRSP must be nationally owned and drawn up in consultation with national

¹ A fuller history of the PRSP approach is given in Christiansen, K. and Hovland, I. (2003)

stakeholders. This opening up of policy processes to new forms of participation resulted, in practice, in a variety of consultation processes, with civil society organisations (CSOs) – usually NGOs – as the main non-government actors, during the formulation phase of the full PRSP.

A great deal has been written on civil society's participation in the first round of PRSP processes.² The main criticism of the participation process in this first wave of PRSPs was that they were poorly conceived, very narrow (only certain issues – usually 'safe' social sectors - were open for discussion), exclusive (the governments decided who was invited) and rushed. In many countries, the processes were rushed because governments were in need of the debt relief funds linked to the PRSP but in other instances, governments were not interested in including civil society in policy discussions so did the minimal amount of consultation required.³ The general conclusion of most of this literature is that in the first round of PRSP formulation 'participation' consisted of rather superficial 'poverty diagnostic consultations' that did manage to contribute to expanding the definitions of poverty but, broadly speaking, were not able to alter the substance of policy choices.

To some extent the participation processes in the first round of PRSPs were superficial due to a lack of capacity in both the governments and CSOs. For some governments, this lack of capacity prevented them from conducting meaningful processes. It also hindered the possibilities of CSOs recommendations being translated into policies. For CSOs, a lack of capacity among some organisations to understand complex policy processes and economic arguments meant that they were unable to engage effectively in discussions. While many CSOs were able to present information on the negative impacts of government policies, many did not have the capacity to put forward viable alternatives.

However, the analyses on civil society's engagement in the PRSP highlight that many Southern CSOs *did* actively mobilise around the PRSP, either in the official consultations or in parallel CSO-led participation processes. Furthermore, a number of strong networks were formed specifically to engage in the PRSP process. For many CSOs in PRSP countries, this was their first experience of engaging directly with the policy process and it was viewed as an important opportunity to present evidence on the impact of existing policies on poverty and to influence the policy content of future national poverty reduction plans.

This synthesis study takes the examples of the PRSP processes in Bolivia and Tanzania. The paper looks at the consultation process itself and the types of evidence used by CSOs. A recent study by Pollard and Court (2004) looks at how CSOs use evidence to influence policy. The study argues that in order for the evidence to have an impact on the policy process, it must be relevant, appropriate and timely as well as valid, reliable, convincing to its audience and communicated in an effective way. The issue of what evidence was used by CSOs in PRSP consultations is not often discussed in commentaries on the process. This paper will set out the evidence used by some CSOs that participation in these PRSP processes in an attempt to understand the role of evidence in influencing the policy content of the PRSPs.

² See, for example, McGee et al (2002), Christian Aid (2001), ActionAid (2002) and Driscoll et al (2004)

³ One of the core principles of the PRSP approach is that the strategies should be partnership-oriented, involving coordinated participation of development partners (bilateral, multilateral, and non-governmental). However, the World Bank and IMF's Joint Staff Assessment - their signalling device that the PRSP produced provides a sound basis for concessional assistance – only briefly describes the participation process and does not assess the merits or failures of the participation which can act as a disincentive for governments to carry out extensive consultation processes.

The paper then goes on to explore the impact CSOs had on influencing the policy content of the PRSPs in Bolivia and Tanzania. Assessing this impact is very difficult and is often limited by a number of different factors. This paper focuses on the views of the CSO members interviewed and presents their opinions on whether the final PRSP document represented their views and recommendations and what impact they felt they had on policy choices made in the PRSP. There are obvious limitations in judging the impact CSOs had on influencing the content of PRSPs on the basis of what these organisations say about themselves. It is unlikely that CSOs will completely dismiss their role in, and influence on, the process and also openly critique their own capacities to engage in some of the more substantive topics. However, there is still scope to gain valuable insights based on CSOs' perceptions of their influence on the policy process. Recognising the limitation indicated above, this paper asks whether there is anything to be learnt about how CSOs went about making policy recommendations. Did this mobilisation of civil society have any significant impacts on the PRSP and did they manage to change the course of policy choices within it?

Both Bolivia and Tanzania have revised their first PRSPs and are now about to start implementing their second strategy. The paper will also look at how the process has evolved between the first and second PRSPs and whether CSOs have managed to increase their impact on policy choices.

The case studies are based on published and grey literature on the PRSP processes in these two countries and interviews with members of CSOs that actively engaged in the PRSPs. These interviews aimed to get a better understanding of how CSOs used information to support their policy recommendations and what impact they felt they had had on the policy content of the PRSP.

Bolivia Case Study

The PRSP processes

Bolivia has a relatively strong and well organised civil society, including trade unions and social movements as well as NGOs. There is a long tradition of CSOs mobilising to demand change and of the government making concessions to CSOs in order to quell the social unrest and stay in power.⁴ Prior to the first PRSP process in Bolivia, the Government had made attempts to institutionalise participation in policy making, which included the Law of Popular Participation introduced in 1995, which aimed to include civil society in the budget process by bringing the national process to the municipal level. The Government initiated a National Dialogue (ND) in 1997 to have a public discussion on 'Bolivia towards the XXI century'. Following this, the Government designed the ND linked to the PRSP in July and August 2000.

The ND in 2000 and was set against a backdrop of political instability which had the main political parties in a gridlock and CSOs protesting in the streets. Some CSOs felt that the social protests in September 2000 were an illustration of the ND's failure to fulfil its potential and address the concerns of people.⁵ This social unrest diverted the Government's attention away from the ND which meant that less time and effort was given to each consultation.

⁴ Interview with Sophia Garavito

⁵ Interview with Tom Kruse

The consultations at the municipal level focused on very concrete questions concerning issues for poverty reduction, distribution and control of potential debt relief resources. For those CSOs that did participate in the ND⁶, there were some positive outcomes of the ND: there was greater co-ordination of CSOs; there were some popular discussions on some policy issues and a few concessions on policy content (see below).

The ND is often perceived in a positive light, particularly by the IFIs. It is often quoted as a good example of civil society participation in the policy process with information about the process, such as that 66% of the participants in the National Workshop were CSO representatives, often highlighted (World Bank Group, 2005). However, this positive reading of the process is not shared by many of the CSOs involved. A general criticism was that the ND was too narrow, had a very tight time frame and was exclusive. CSOs were not given enough notice of consultations, each meeting was too rushed to allow genuine participation, the consultations were held in Spanish (not the first language of indigenous groups) and some of the official documents were initially distributed in English (Christian Aid, 2001). Another main criticism of the consultation process was that CSOs were not given the opportunity to discuss macro-economic issues and that discussions were kept to how the HIPC funds would be spent in selected sectors.

Church-led CSOs, anticipating these limitations, organised a parallel consultation process. The Jubilee Forum (JF) was an initiative of the Catholic Church (which had been remotely involved in the ND but had declined the Government's offer to co-ordinate the ND) and Jubilee 2000. It was funded by donors and International NGOs (INGOs) and involved CSOs, including several religious organisations as well as the Catholic Church. The format for the Jubilee Forum was intended specifically to enable discussions on the overall structural causes of poverty.

The Jubilee Forum was also subject to criticisms, mainly from other CSOs who felt it relied too heavily on the church's own structures and that the church was too close to the state (Christian Aid, 2002). However, the conclusions and recommendations from the Jubilee Forum were passed to the Government for inclusion in the PRSP. CSO input from the Jubilee Forum was also able to integrate with the official dialogue by the JF having two seats in the departmental dialogue tables in the ND. By then, however, many of those that had participated in the Jubilee Forum were quite cynical about the extent to which their recommendations would be included in the final document.

The completed PRSP or *Estrategia Boliviana de Reduccion de la Pobreza* (EBRD) was discussed with civil society representatives at a workshop called *Gobierno Escuchai* or 'the Government listens'. This discussion did not result in many changes to the document (ISS, 2003).

As with the first PRSP, the revision of the PRSP in 2003 was also set against a backdrop of social unrest which led to a long delay in the process. During 2003, violent protest led to a change of President and forced restructuring of the government and its budget⁷. The social unrest and protests were focused on the Government's policies, particularly on the hydrocarbon and extractive resources

⁶ Some CSOs, including the confederation of *campesinos* and trade unions, were sceptical about the Government's commitment to engaging with civil society and so refused to take part in the ND.

⁷ Booth and Piron, 2004

industries, which were seen as driven more by US foreign policy than by the priorities of the population⁸.

Prior to the social unrest in 2003, the President (that would soon be replaced) had already begun to focus the discussions on the second PRSP on production and commodity chains; issues that had been raised by CSOs as seriously lacking in the first PRSP. This concern survived the change of President in 2003, and may have been reinforced by the upheavals of that year. As a result, the revised PRSP was focused on these issues and the consultation was targeted on the municipal governments and small producer organisations and did not involve participation from the same wide range of organisations. However, without the incentive of reaching completion point and accessing HIPC funds, both Government and CSOs were less interested in the PRSP and focused their attention on broader national issues.⁹

Nevertheless, some CSOs did participate in the ND and made recommendations to the Government. The National Confederation of Rural, Indigenous and Native Women of Bolivia was included as a member of the National Board of Directors of the Dialogue and was also active in the 'pre-dialogue' stage and carried out consultations with women to produce recommendations on having an integrated approach to the productive sector that would be beneficial to women.¹⁰ CIOEC, a CSO that analyses trade issues, actively engaged with small producer organisations, some of which were very knowledgeable on trade issues, to formulate recommendations on Bolivia's trade policies. The information and recommendations gathered at these consultations were fed into the PRSP process.

The evidence used

The main evidence that CSOs brought to the consultations (both the ND and the Jubilee Forum) was experiential evidence.¹¹ For many CSOs, the consultation process was seen as an opportunity to strengthen experiential evidence by drawing on other sources of information, including research-based evidence produced by larger NGOs and think tanks, and putting individual experiences into a broader context. By linking experiential evidence to other pieces of research and analysis, CSOs felt that they would be able to fully understand the impact policies had on the lives of people living in poverty.

In both PRSP processes, some research institutes were involved but often these institutes were commissioned by the Government to undertake studies on specific issues. These studies were usually only for Government use and not circulated to CSOs in the consultations. Nevertheless, in both PRSP processes, large NGOs and think-tanks based in La Paz had the capacity to undertake research which was used in the ND and JF in the first PRSP and the targeted ND in the second. These organisations were able to find and draw on official information on the budget, public expenditure and policy plans held by the National Statistical Office and other ministries and from research produced by INGOs or international research institutes to produce their own research-based evidence. The NGOs that were able to produce research-based evidence were not, however, entirely representative and tended to

⁸ *ibid*

⁹ Those interested in the second PRSP process were the organisations that would receive funding (the local municipalities and small producer organisations) and bilateral donors who see the PRSP as a tool to guarantee their investment.

¹⁰ Interview with Oscar Bazoberry

¹¹ Information and knowledge acquired by individuals through personal experience or gathered by CSOs through their experience of working in poor areas and seeing, at first hand, the daily lives of poor people.

have a narrow social base (i.e. urban and professional). This raises the issue of whether this research, often focused on national or top-level policy issues, is relevant to smaller, grassroots organisations concerned with local or micro issues.

Box 1: CEDLA¹²

The Centre for Labour and Agricultural Development (CEDLA) has been actively engaged in the PRSP process in Bolivia since 2000. It undertakes research and links this to strengthening CSOs (particularly labour and indigenous groups) to influence public policies. CEDLA did not participate directly in the ND or JF but they produced papers that were written in an accessible way and fed to the organisations participating in the ND and Jubilee Forum. This included research on the HIPC initiative and its links to the PRSP process and it highlighted emerging issues. It also conducted research on macro-economic issues¹³, despite this not being an area open for discussion in the Government's consultations. CEDLA continues to look at macro-economic issues; specifically the behaviour of the economy in Bolivia and the impact of the HIPC initiative on the population.

CEDLA also played an advocacy role during the PRSP processes and pushed the Government for public discussions on various topics. It engaged directly with the World Bank and IMF and presented its research on the Bolivian economy and the impact the Government's policies were having on the poor. CEDLA undertook initiatives to raise public awareness of the PRSP through national level workshops and media campaigns.

What impact did CSOs have on the policy content?

CSOs were generally critical of how the conclusions and recommendations that emerged from the first PRSP's consultation process were taken on board by the Government. CSOs and academics observing the first PRSP consider the impact CSO recommendations had on policies as being negligible. Furthermore, issues that had been agreed in the consultations were often changed in the final document without general consensus. This is a result of the lack of a clear link between the consultation processes and the creation of the PRSP document. A report produced by CEDLA after consultations with social, labour and small farmers' organisations highlighted that these organisations were sceptical throughout that process that the Government was listening to their views or taking them on board.

During the consultations, CSOs had criticised the orientation of the policies in the first PRSP towards the social sectors – or 'poverty reduction by access to services' as some CSOs called it. Despite CSOs' statements that this resulted in weaknesses in other vital areas including employment, productivity and income distribution, this was not addressed in the first PRSP. However, these issues came to be the focus of the second PRSP which could mean that CSO arguments and recommendations in this process had a delayed influence on the policy content of the PRSP.

¹² Interview with Gustavo Luna

¹³ This research included a study looking at the links between the new PRSP and the old structural adjustment instruments of the World Bank and IMF. They focused their analysis on how the new debt relief would be used and on the conditionalities placed on public policies by the IFIs (including the role of the PRGF).

Throughout the consultations, the Government was inflexible about discussing macro-economic policies. This was partly because the Government saw the PRSP as specifically a strategy for determining how debt relief funds would be spent rather than a strategy for all the Government's business¹⁴ and partly because discussions on macro-economic policies were held in private with the IFIs and linked to their lending documents (PRSC and PRGF). This caused obvious frustrations among CSOs who felt that the Government's commitments to adhere to the IFI's conditionalities had a direct impact on discussions on the HIPC funds.

There were some positive outcomes to the consultation process and some of the recommendations from the JF were incorporated into the first PRSP. The most significant was the Social Control Mechanism (SCM), proposed by CSOs, as a tool for civil society to monitor the allocation and implementation of the HIPC funds and to participate in the drawing-up, follow-up evaluation and reformulation of the PRSP. Although the SCM only monitors the use of debt relief funds, the two sections of civil society most involved in the SCM, Jubilee 2000 and the Catholic Church, have been pushing for the SCM's role to be expanded to include all the Government's public spending.¹⁵

CSOs involved in the consultations also carried out research on the consultation process and highlighted issues, including lack of inclusion of vulnerable groups in the discussions. The Government received their findings well and expressed commitment to strengthen future consultation processes. In addition, the Government institutionalised the ND through the *Ley del Dialogo* of 2000, and it is now required that the Government undertakes a ND every three years.

However, these positive outcomes did not satisfy most CSOs and CEDLA, together with seven other networks of CSOs and individual CSOs, signed a document saying they did not approve of the PRSP and openly criticised the policies contained in the document. This petition did not have any impact on the Government or on other development partners. In fact, the Joint Boards of the World Bank and IMF accelerated the HIPC process so that Bolivia would reach HIPC Completion Point even quicker.

As with the first PRSP process, the consultations in the second process failed to debate the growth dynamic of the Bolivian economy or stabilisation policies, which would have involved discussions about Bolivia's membership in the WTO and its liberalisation policies. CSOs felt that the discussions were too narrow and based on some dubious assumptions; one assumption being that to get broad-based growth, and therefore poverty reduction, it is important to get small producers into commodity chains, particularly export commodity chains. But this assumes free trade agreements, especially with the US.¹⁶ However, when this issue was raised in the ND, the CSOs involved were informed by the Government that these issues were not open for discussion in the consultation.

Similarly, CSOs were informed that they were not able to discuss the role of the state in stabilising the economy in Bolivia or the IFI conditionalities to which the Government had agreed. The result was that the PRSP document focused on policies narrowly related to the productive sectors, some of which had been

¹⁴ HIPC funds make up roughly \$18 million while the general public budget is roughly \$600 million. Interview with Gustavo Luna

¹⁵ Interview with Gustavo Luna

¹⁶ Interview with Tom Kruse

recommended by CSOs at the consultations but CSOs remained critical that broader issues on macro-economic policies and trade were omitted from the final draft.

Selected factors that contributed to the success / failure of this impact

Changing policies and policy making processes is a slow process and civil society's impact on this process is often difficult to determine. In the case of Bolivia, this change has been incremental partly because the Government's commitment was not always there and also because the State, and its ability to formulate and implement policy, is weak. The PRSP process institutionalised some aspects of good policy making but there are elements of the PRSP approach that further weakened the State's capacity to formulate policies that reflect the wishes of the people. The first being that the poverty reduction policies in the PRSP were always seen as being in line with the sanctioned understanding of poverty reduction constructed by the IFIs (prior to PRSPs), rather than policies devised or endorsed by informed national stakeholders. Another aspect of the process that potentially had a negative impact on the State was that the consultation processes short-circuited the legislative branch of the Government and detached the PRSP process from the 'normal' democratic activities of the State.

The national dialogues in 1997 and 2000 created big expectations among the population. The Government was not able to meet these expectations and, according to some commentators, this ended up exacerbating the social unrest and political tension that were already surfacing (ISS, 2003). Although the answer to this is not to avoid national consultations, this does raise the issue that governments need manage the expectations of those who take part in consultations in order to avoid disappointment, disengagement and social unrest.

While there are some capacity issues for CSOs in Bolivia, there are a number of large NGOs that are able to undertake thorough research and either disseminate it to smaller CSOs or feed it directly into the Government.¹⁷ In general, CSOs are very good at criticising policies and also demanding the full picture from the Government. However, a general weakness among CSOs in Bolivia is their ability to provide alternative policies. While some of these larger NGOs are able to put forward alternative policy choices, the majority of smaller, grassroots organisations do not yet have the capacity to turn queries or disagreement into credible and viable policy proposals. This highlights a need within Bolivia for local level think-tanks to work with mass membership national organisations to strengthen their capacity to propose policy choices.¹⁸

Tanzania Case Study

The PRSP processes

Prior to the first PRSP, CSOs in Tanzania had some experience doing policy analysis and advocacy work and of being involved in consultation processes for national strategies (Vision 2025, Tanzania Assistance Strategies, National Poverty Eradication Strategy, 1997). The PRSP consultation process was led by the Government of Tanzania although it was at a round table organised by the Tanzanian Social and Economic Trust (TASOET), Tanzanian Coalition on Debt and

¹⁷ CEDLA has introduced a Public Budget Programme which discusses information on the budget with labour and grassroots organisations and discuss possible alternative policies that they then present to the government. Interview with Gustavo Luna

¹⁸ Interview with Sophia Garavito

Development (TCDD) and Oxfam Tanzania in January 2000 that the structure for civil society participation was developed. The consultation process included Zonal Workshops in seven zones covering all regions of Tanzania. At each workshop, civil society was represented by five NGOs (with one representative from each organisation). The discussions at these workshops focused mainly on the nature of poverty in Tanzania.

The participation process produced the usual criticisms: rushed timetable, poor information sharing, superficial consultations and a lack of clarity from the Government on the consultation process and its objectives. To a great extent, this was due to the Government's interest in accessing HIPC funds which resulted in a very limited time-frame given to preparing the PRSP document.

While the scope and depth of the consultation process was very limited, there were some coalition organisations that were formed to engage in the PRSP process, such as the TCDD. As with the Bolivian example, CSOs developed their own parallel consultation processes. The CSOs involved in this parallel process produced a comprehensive document with an analysis of the nature of poverty in Tanzania and sector specific policy recommendations. The recommendations from these working groups were fed into the government via sympathetic officials and disseminated more widely through media campaigns.

Once the PRSP had been finalised, CSOs, together with donors, produced *Tanzania without poverty: a plain-language guide to the PRSP* which was distributed to people throughout Tanzania. The guide includes a history of policy making in Tanzania, PRSP policies and targets and a glossary on economic and policy terms.

The consultation process for the second PRSP contrasts significantly with the first. The Government was keen to ensure that the revision process was nationally owned and demonstrated this by re-naming the PRSP the 'Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy' or *Mkukuta* in Swahili. CSOs were actively included in the revision process and contributed to meetings, committees and working groups. The review process took roughly one year. The government provided the roadmap for the process and this time took more time to ensure that civil society's participation was as full as possible. For the Government-led consultations, fifteen stakeholder groups were identified and invited to participate in discussions. These included trade unions, NGOs, business groups, church-based group etc. Network organisations (NGO Policy Forum - NPF, TCDD, and Tanzania Gender Networking Programme - TGNP) were actively involved in co-ordinating their members at the national and district levels to participate in the consultations.

The Government also commissioned CSOs to design and disseminate leaflets to all the population asking them their opinion on the past performance of the PRSP, what improvements they suggested and what they wanted improved in the next 5 years. NPF was actively involved in distributing these leaflets and contributed their own resources as they wanted to ensure they reached rural areas.

One of the main topics discussed at these consultations was the review process itself. The stakeholder groups had the opportunity to critically go through the roadmap and made changes to include greater civil society participation. CSOs were also given the opportunity to discuss the content of the revised document and a number of representatives from CSOs were involved in sector working groups or groups discussing issue specific policies to be included in the PRSP. The NPF completed comments on the second PRSP that was submitted to the government.

Also, one NGO representative was part of the drafting team and provided an entry point for CSOs to raise concerns or recommendations.

The evidence used

As in Bolivia, the main evidence used in the limited consultations in the first process was experiential evidence. The intention was that this would be systematised and complemented by a Participatory Poverty Assessment commissioned by the Government in 1999 and conducted by CSOs. However, the Government only published the full PPA in late 2003/early 2004, long after the consultation process for the first PRSP. Nevertheless, the process of conducting the PPA informed CSOs of the priority issues that should be raised with the Government. Undertaking PPAs was also written into the monitoring and evaluation framework as a monitoring mechanism and data-gathering exercise to inform future PRSP revisions.

During the preparation of the PRSP, CSOs expressed concern that the poverty assessment was based on data sets from the 1991/92 Household Budget Survey and in response, a new Household Budget survey was conducted in 2000/01. This Household Budget Survey, Human Development Reports and the information gathered through the PPA process provided evidence for CSOs to argue about the real incidence of poverty and the impact of government policies and spending on poverty reduction.

For the consultations around the revision process, CSOs were able to read the Annual Progress Reports prepared by the Government on the progress made in implementing the PRSP. Some CSOs, such as TCDD, were involved in monitoring the PRSP implementation in specific sectors and were able to use this information in the revision process. National research institutes such as REPOA and larger NGOs conducted their own primary research and prepared their own progress reports to present at the consultations. These organisations also conducted research on specific issues that had emerged from the first PRSP and presented their findings to the Government in the various fora open to them: Poverty Policy Weeks and Public Expenditure Reviews (PER). Similarly, a census conducted in 2002 was used by CSOs to back up their arguments and recommendations in the review process.

As mentioned above, the Government distributed leaflets across the country to draw out views from the whole populations. However, a lack of capacity within the government to analyse the leaflets and consolidate the findings into a report has meant that CSOs have not been able to see the results of this survey, nor has it been used to inform the content of the second PRSP. In reaction to this, some network organisations asked their members similar questions in order to formulate their recommendations for the revised PRSP.

What impact did CSOs have on the policy content?

The general feeling held by CSOs on the first PRSP is that they did not really have any impact on the policy content of the strategy and that the document does not reflect civil society's perspectives or inputs in a meaningful way. The rushed consultation process was restricted to 'safe' areas and CSOs were not permitted to take part in economic decision making. But even in the areas that were discussed, CSOs produced no shifts in the direction of the Government's policies. Similarly, officials in the Government have claimed that the PRSP as a whole showed very little change in the policy content with respect to previous policies.¹⁹ A study on the PRSP

¹⁹ McGee et al, 2001

process in Tanzania sums this up by saying that “the social and ideological foundations of the PRS are narrow, representing the views of a small, homogenous ‘iron triangle’ of transnational professionals based in key Government ministries and donor agencies in Dar es Salaam” (Gould and Ojanen, 2003:7).

One area where CSOs did have an impact was in raising public awareness of the PRSP across the country. As mentioned above, CSOs produced popular materials on the PRSP²⁰ and distributed them across the country. In some areas the popular version was used by local government officials as the strategy document to be implemented. CSOs also produced television and radio information programmes on the PRSP.

As in Bolivia, it is possible to argue that the consultation process for the first PRSP did have some delayed impact on policies. The first consultation process gave CSOs an opportunity to raise issues of concern that then became public issues for debate over the intervening years between the first and second PRSPs. For example, a priority issues raised by CSOs was the affordability of user fees in the education and health sectors. The Government’s policy did not change in the first PRSP but the issue remained on the table and continued to be discussed among CSOs. TCDD undertook research on cost-sharing in the education and health sector and showed that people in rural areas were not able to afford user fees in these sectors. In January 2002, the government abolished user fees in primary education, with support from the World Bank, although there are still associated costs such as books and uniforms.²¹ There is still concern that exemption schemes for the extreme poor in both health and education are still not reaching those in greatest need (CHER, 2002). This policy change can not be entirely attributed to CSO lobbying as other factors were clearly contributory, but CSOs made sure the issue got placed, and remained, on the table for discussion. These gradual changes to policies meant that the implementation of the first PRSP exceeded expectations based on what looked like a poor strategy on paper (Trocaire, 2004a).

In the second PRSP process, it is possible to see clearer links between issues raised by CSOs and the content of the revised strategy. Some organisations involved in the revision process produced a shadow PRSP and presented it to the government. The shadow document was received well and CSOs feel that many of their recommendations were included in the draft of the revised PRSP.²²

In general, the second PRSP has more emphasis on broad based development based on equity (including gender equity) and is based on priority outcomes, not priority sectors. These issues were included in the CSOs’ shadow document which used the findings of a recent APR to show that there was a growing disparity between economic growth and the welfare of the population. They also managed to have an input in each of the three main pillars the PRSP: in the Growth and Income Poverty pillar, CSOs managed to ensure there was a focus on employment and livelihoods and revised policies on land rights; in the Social Wellbeing pillar, there is now a special focus on children and HIV/Aids (although CSOs felt strongly that it should be part of Growth and Income Poverty pillar) and a specific section on gender (rather than having is mainstreamed across the document) and; the Governance pillar, TGNP campaigned for the inclusion of policies to tackle domestic violence.

²⁰ The NPF produced popular versions in English and Swahili and are planning to produce a child-friendly version. These materials were commissioned by the Government, with donor funding. Interview with Hebron Mwakagenda.

²¹ Interview with Kagege, TCDD

²² This draft is currently with the parliament and has already been endorsed by the Cabinet

Selected factors that contributed to the success / failure of this impact

Tanzania's civil society came together and mobilised around the PRSP in a way that had not happened before. In 2000, 54 CSOs came together to work together on policy issues and large networks and coalitions were formed that continue to work on PRSP and related issues. However, there are still capacity issues among CSOs, especially for those advocacy organisations working to challenge the economic and public spending strategies and policies of the Government (Gould and Ojanen, 2003). The PRSP process strengthened the links between CSOs in the North and South and enabled greater information sharing. Northern CSOs influenced organisations in Tanzania to recognise the importance of engaging in policy processes, rather than remaining solely as service delivery organisations. CSOs now have a very different relationship with the Government and perform more of a watch-dog role on the Government and its policies.²³

Civil society is now experienced in engaging with the government in various fora, including the annual Poverty Policy Weeks and Public Expenditure Reviews (PER). The PER is convened by the Ministry of Finance and has working groups that include some civil society representatives. It is a significant policy space for CSOs and is a very important channel of influence for CSOs. However, the linkages between these existing national strategies and review mechanisms, and the PRSP are not strong (AFRODAD, 2002). CSOs' impact on policy processes would be more significant if the various strands of the policy and public spending process were joined up.

The impact civil society had on the PRSP process transformed dramatically between the first and second processes. There was an opening up of the political environment which created more space for civil society to engage with the Government and prompted the Government to include CSOs in determining the consultation process for the second PRSP.

There are a number of factors that caused the Government to shift its attitude towards CSOs and their involvement in policy making processes. One important factor was that CSOs had been frustrated by the first PRSP consultation process and so started demanding more space to engage in policy processes. Individuals within the Government saw the benefits of consulting with CSOs and encouraged more open dialogue on policy issues. There was also external support (and even pressure) from donors for the Government to open up to civil society participation and to become more transparent and accountable to its citizens. It is still not a perfect situation for CSOs wanting to engage in policy processes and some Government ministries remain very rigid about their attitude to CSOs.

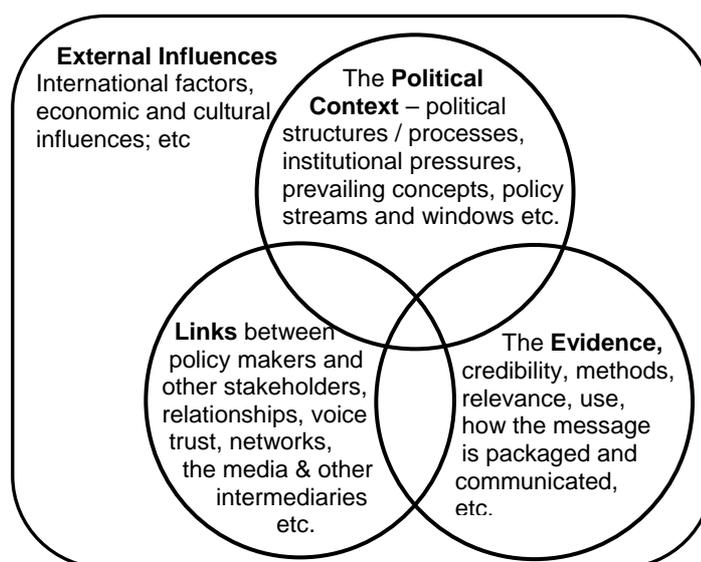
Influencing the macro framework remains a challenge and it is likely that it will remain stuck to an economic model endorsed by the IFIs. Macro-economic decisions are still held in private between the Government and the World Bank and IMF and information on the conditionalities and policies agreed in these discussions is not easily accessible for CSOs. There is, though, also the issue of capacity levels of national CSOs to analyse and engage in discussion on macro economic issues. However, on a positive note, the Government has initiated the Gender Budgeting Initiative (run by TGNP) which opens up the budget process to CSOs and does provide an opportunity for CSOs to influence macro-economic issues. Equally, as mentioned above, CSO involvement in Public Expenditure Reviews is also very important.

²³ Interview with Usu Mallya

Common issues and lessons learnt

This section will be organised around the Rapid Framework (see Figure 1). This framework has been developed to understand research-policy links. It sets out the various factors which inter-relate to promote (or hinder) the role of research in policy processes (Pollard and Court, 2004). The framework has been slightly modified to include a section specifically on the impact CSOs had on the PRSP process.

Figure 1: The Rapid Framework



Source: Pollard and Court, 2004

PRSP Specific Issues

The content isn't all – there are other parts of the policy process besides the final policies written in strategies. CSOs are able to influence the policy process in a number of different ways. Civil society efforts have helped to raise public awareness of the PRSP processes. Larger CSOs have worked to build the capacities of smaller CSOs which has broadened and diversified the actors that have participated in the consultations. CSOs have also contributed to identifying problems and agenda setting and have broadened the perspectives included in the PRSP. In general, the poverty diagnosis sections of PRSPs have gone beyond a narrow definition of poverty based on income-levels to a broader, multi-dimensional perspective based on the live experiences of poor people (this has been particularly successful where PPAs have been carried out). CSOs have also contributed to setting the terms of the engagement and improving the opportunities for civil society to participate, opening and widening the links into the policy process and monitoring implementation. In short, even where civil society has had not impact on the details of policies or resource allocation, they have contributed to strengthening the accountability channels between governments and citizens.

Progress through revisions – the first wave of PRSPs generally had limited participation and very little impact on the policy content. However, the process provided the opportunity to open a space for policy dialogue and enabled CSOs to analyse government policies. While the first PRSP was being implemented, it has been possible for CSOs to undertake research on the impact the policies in the strategy are having on lives of different sections of the populations. This research

has been used in the second PRSP processes and has meant that CSOs have been able to make stronger policy recommendations for the revised PRSP. Also, the process of conducting a PRSP has produced a general attitudinal change within the governments. As the cases of Bolivia and Tanzania show, the governments in the PRSP revision process recognised the added-value of civil society in-puts into the process and, therefore, were very keen to engage with CSOs.

The Political Context

Political nature of the policy process - this issue has emerged in a number of ways. The PRSP process has the potential for radically changing the accountability focus in low-income countries away from donor towards citizens. However, opening up the policy making process to civil society does affect the control governments have over the decisions made. Governments are often in a difficult position of needing to adhere to the pre-agreed commitments with donors and IFIs in order to access much needed debt relief, aid and concessional loans which does then constrain the extent to which borrowing-governments can allow for meaningful input from civil society (ActionAid, 2004).

Another example of the political nature is in the consultations themselves where certain groups remain excluded from the meetings (either by governments or by other CSOs) and the more powerful CSOs are able to monopolise the space. In many consultations, representatives from rural poor communities, rural women, peasant organisations and trade unions were, at time, excluded from the consultation process altogether.

Hidden topics, hidden spaces - as both the case studies above show, civil society had no impact on macro-economic policy choices. The degree of public accountability and participation is considerably reduced in the discussions over the IFIs' core loan instruments.²⁴ This makes it very difficult for CSOs taking part in consultations to analyse policies and make alternative recommendations without knowing the conditions their governments have committed in the loan documents (ActionAid, 2004).

In some PRSP countries, civil society did have an opportunity to discuss these issues which in turn enhanced the governments' negotiating power with the IFIs (McGee et al, 2002). In order for CSOs to have more opportunity to discuss macro-economic issues in the future, it is essential that the PRSP is embedded in the normal political process at the national level, particularly budgetary processes and parliamentary accountability mechanisms (Trocaire, 2004a). It is also important that CSOs participate in alternative policy forum, as seen in the Tanzania case study where CSOs engage in the Poverty Policy Weeks and Public Expenditure Reviews. However, if there is no space for civil society to discuss macro economic issues in the official PRSP consultations, then it may be that CSOs need to create alternative CSO-led public arenas to discuss alternative development policies and mobilise domestic support for them (ActionAid, 2004).

The Evidence

Complementary evidence – the grassroots experience, or experiential evidence, presented by CSOs at PRSP consultations suffers from being dismissed by technical

²⁴ World Bank's Country Assistance Strategy, the Government Letter of Intent, the IMF's Poverty Reduction Growth Facility, the Memorandum of the World Bank President and the Poverty Reduction Support Credits

officials as being partial and inaccurate. There appears to be a hierarchy of evidence with experiential evidence often relegated to the bottom of the ladder. However, experiences from the PRSP processes show that the experiential evidence was an important complement to the technical knowledge of government and donor officials; particularly in assessing the extent and character of poverty in countries (McGee et al, 2002).

Limited capacity for macro economic analysis - Many CSOs involved in PRSP processes were aware of their lack of experience and knowledge on macro economic issues. These limitations meant that many CSOs were not able to conduct rigorous analysis on policy or budget documents and propose realistic policy alternatives (McGee et al, 2002; Christian Aid, 2001). It was often the case that CSOs felt more comfortable discussing the 'soft policy' areas such as health and education, on which they had direct knowledge through their service delivery experience.

Future role of PSIA – the above two issues identify a need for CSOs to strengthen their influence over external donors, as well as governments. Poverty and Social Impact Analyses offer an opportunity for CSOs to conduct thorough research on the impact policies are likely to have on different sections of the populations. PSIAs are a strong tool for CSOs to use to back up the recommendations they make to their governments and to donors.

Links

The space did open up – general criticisms of the participation processes are that there was insufficient time and the participation was often unrepresentative. To some extent this was to do with the majority of civil society lacking in the capacity to contribute to PRSP consultations but it also highlights a lack of commitment by governments to communicate with the broader public in accessible forms (media, local languages etc) (Trocaire, 2004a). Despite this, the introduction of PRSPs did open up the space – however limited and imperfect - for civil society to engage in the policy processes. Various consultations conducted at the local, regional and national levels have allowed a variety of voices to be heard. An important factor that determines the success of the consultations is whether the policy 'spaces' are created by officials or by civil society actors themselves (McGee quoted in Bretton Woods Project, 2002), although, in the case of PRSPs, even where policy spaces were opened by civil society, barriers remain in translating these views into legitimate and feasible policy options and feeding these into the policy process.

Strengthening civil society and networks - as the case studies show, the PRSP processes strengthened individual CSOs. Through the PRSP process, a new role has emerged for CSOs and their participation in the first round of PRSPs has strengthened their capacity to engage in the policy process. The PRSP has also acted as a mobilising force for CSOs and has created links between organisations. For many CSOs that have previously focused on service delivery, networks have enabled them to join in with lobbying activities. There is evidence to show that CSOs had even more impact where they have joined together as networks and worked jointly to capitalise the entry points to the government and to have a positive impact on the policy choices.

External Influences

The international participation agenda - The external influence, particularly from the IFIs and some bilateral donors, in opening up the policy process to civil society is significant. The PRSP approach started out as a donor driven initiative which had

practical aims of ensuring that debt relief funds and concessional loans would be spent on poverty reduction policies. It also had grand plans to strengthen national ownership and, thereby, domestic accountability and governance structures. Much has been written about the inherent tension in the PRSP approach between it being a donor driven initiative which advocates a certain package of policy reforms whilst simultaneously emphasising the need for PRSPs to be country driven and owned by all citizens.²⁵

Role of International Civil Society - a number of INGOs actively supported their partners in the South to engage in PRSPs. These organisations have produced training materials, supported national research initiatives, consolidated research and disseminated examples of good-practice.²⁶

Pre-agreed starting point – before entering into discussions with governments on poverty reduction policies, many CSOs perceive (often quite legitimately) that questions on poverty and the policy responses have long been agreed by the IFIs and other donors in the international sphere and are just applied to each country. This means that more abstract questions on ‘why is there poverty in our country’, ‘how did we get to where we are now’ and ‘what sustains this poverty’ – discussion that could challenge the current orthodoxy - are not discussed in PRSP consultations.

IFI and donor opinions and decisions are based on research commissioned or undertaken by IFI staff. Although there are some cases of national research institutes or individual researchers participating in this research (ESRF in Tanzania for example), this is not typical. This is in part due to limited national research capacity in PRSP countries which means that an important role for IFIs and donors is to spend time and resources on building national research capacity to be able to undertake quality research to inform policy.

Conclusion

The case studies of Bolivia and Tanzania shows that the PRSP process offers an excellent opportunity for CSOs to engage in discussions with governments on policy choices. However, the realities of the process have, in general, shown that this potential was not fulfilled.

As the case studies demonstrate, CSOs involved in the PRSP processes used a range of evidence to back up their arguments and recommendations. The most common form of evidence used was experiential evidence which, in some cases, complemented the more technical knowledge of government and donor officials. There are also examples of larger NGOs and research institutes producing rigorous research based evidence that was fed into PRSP consultations. However, how this evidence is received or used by governments is a highly political matter and is determined by a range of domestic and external factors.

That being so, there are incidences where CSOs did affect the policy choices and PRSP content, particularly on issues such as employment (Bolivia), exclusion, marginalisation and gender (Tanzania). However, these were quite small gains and

²⁵ See, for example, Oxfam (2004)

²⁶ Including a CD Rom produced by Trocaire (2004) with documents and tools for civil society engaging on issues of economic justice and PRSPs. Oxfam (2002) produced a guide to influencing PRSPs which includes an introduction to the increasing opportunities for civil society to participate in policy formulation and implementation. It also goes through the policy process and gives advice on how CSOs can maximise their influence on policy content and how they can affectively monitor PRSPs.

the general feeling in both these case studies, and in other PRSP countries, is that the recommendations made at consultations “disappeared into a ‘black box’ where Ministry of Finance officials equipped with donor-supported technical assistance and budgetary information not available to the public write a plan which little reflects their [CSOs] inputs” (McGee, 2002:15). This is not too surprising when taken together with another observation on PRSP processes which states that there is remarkable consistency between policies put forward in PRSPs across the world and that most of these policies are very similar to the previous structural adjustment programmes (Bread for the World, 2002).

As the case studies of the PRSP processes in Bolivia and Tanzania demonstrate, there is a general reluctance by governments to open the discussion to cover macro economic policy choices and these issues remain outside the spaces open to civil society participation. In both countries, the parallel CSO-led consultations produced critical assessments of the governments’ macro economic and debt policies but these were not discussed in the official consultations. To a degree this is a consequence of the central role the IFIs play in low-income countries over macro economic decisions. However, it may be too easy to conclude that donors and governments ignore arguments from CSOs because they are only interested in preserving their own interests, rather than critically assessing the quality and viability of the recommendations raised by CSOs.

In both cases, civil society was strengthened and able to engage more effectively in the policy process. While there are still capacity issues for many CSOs, the emergence of networks has enabled smaller, less experienced CSOs to learn from bigger organisations. International NGOs have also contributed to strengthening CSOs to engage in policy discussions. However, for civil society’s engagement with, and impact on, the policy process to continue to improve, CSOs need to invest in “grassroots-based and national-level policy monitoring and analysis (quantitative and qualitative), in order to ensure evidence-based advocacy can be carried out” (De Barra, 2004:34).

The issue of what evidence civil society uses when engaging in policy processes is a growing area of interest. World Vision conducted a study in Bolivia and Zambia which looks more deeply at the nature of civil society’s involvement in the PRSP and at the impact this engagement had on policy change. This study was managed by World Vision partners but carried out by independent researchers. It is likely that this issue will continue to provoke debate and further research in countries undertaking their second, third and future iterations of the PRSP.

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Annex 2: List of Interviews

Many thanks to the following people who contributed their time to share their views:

NAME	ORGANISATION	DATE
BOLIVIA		
Oscar Bazoberry and Coraly Salazar	CIPCA	11 April 2005
Ann Chaplin	Independent	4 April 2005
Tom Kruse	Independent / CEDLA	29 April 2005
Gustavo Luna	CEDLA	23 March 2005
TANZANIA		
Usu Mallya	Tanzania Gender Networking Programme	27 April 2005
Hebron Mwakagenda	The Leadership Forum	31 March 2005
Christopher Mwakasege	Tanzanian Social and Economic Trust	2 May 2005
Kajege	Tanzanian Coalition on Debt and Development	20 April 2005
UK		
Sophia Garavito	Christian Aid	29 March 2005
Jennie Richmond	DFID (formerly Christian Aid)	10 February 2005
Fletcher Tembo	World Vision	21 March 2005