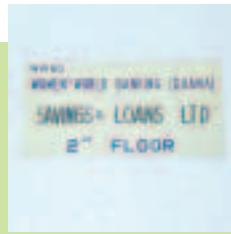


*VENRO Project »Prospects for 2015 –
Combating Poverty Requires Involvement«*



PRSP – Prospects and limits of civil society involvement

2015
in Dialogue

4

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Prospects and limits of
civil society involvement**

2015
in Dialogue

IMPRINT

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Introduction

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If there was such a thing as a competition for the successful distribution of acronyms, then PRSP would win it with flying colours. No other concept has played such a crucial role in development policy debates in industrialised and developing countries alike as the so-called Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers has. The World Bank and the IMF claim to associate a fundamental shift in perspective with this concept. While awarding loans to Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) depended on stringent economic policy conditions of structural adaptation up to mid-1999, putting poverty reduction strategies in place has since been an (additional) requirement for further remission of debts and concessionary loans on the part of the bi- and multilateral creditors. What is more, according to the provisions of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, the strategies themselves ought to develop in national self-responsibility and with civil society and private sector involvement. To what degree PRS processes follow the principles of ownership and participation is only one of the controversies between donors, indebted countries and civil society.

At the same time, the shift in perspective marks the failure of structural adaptation programmes of old provenance. Inside the Bank, it was heralded with a series of studies in the mid-nineties attesting the Bretton Woods Twins that they had not reached the goals they had set themselves in reducing international indebtedness and in combating poverty. Simultaneously, pressure was put on both of them by criticism on the part of civil society in the North and the South – which became manifest in the international Jubilee 2000 campaign – but also by the economic mainstream. Traditional recipes were of no use in triggering substantial economic growth or reducing poverty. Linking up poverty-oriented policies with substantial debt reduction, which started with the PRS process, is to point the way out of this cul-de-sac.

With the shift in perspective, development planning is experiencing an unexpected renaissance. Economic and social objectives are to be integrated, supplemented with structural and fiscal policy requirements and safeguarded by restructuring foreign indebtedness. Ideally, the PRSP is the outcome of a participatory joint effort made by all relevant actors (government, civil society, the private sector, donors). A planning tour de force of such magnitude ties down resources. In order to leave countries enough

time for overall planning, the IMF and the World Bank initially accept an Interim PRSP. Both institutions make a statement on this together with the Joint Staff Assessment, and their executive committees endorse the paper. If the PRSP or the Interim PRSP meets with approval, the HIPC has reached what is known as the Decision Point, and it is promised debt relief or further concessionary loans. The World Bank's Poverty Reduction Support Credits (PRSC) and funds from the International Monetary Fund's Poverty Reduction Growth Facility (PRGF) are to safeguard the necessary reforms, stimulate growth and reduce poverty. The country now has a year's time to implement the measures laid down in the PRSP. If the Bretton Woods Institutions then confirm successful implementation, the country reaches the so-called Completion Point, and debt relief cannot be withdrawn. From the donors' angle, the process character of the PRSPs is crucial. They are not intended to be rigid documents but rather to be periodically adapted to the changing conditions in the light of experience. To this end, the government of the debtor country submits a Progress Report every twelve months that sets new priorities should the need arise.

This is how things are intended to progress ideally. Now (November 2002), in the third year after this new concept was introduced, 19 countries have submitted a PRSP and a further 29 an Interim PRSP. Among the HIPC, six have reached the Completion Point and a further 20 the Decision Point. According to the World Bank, nominal debt remission in these countries is 13.34 billion US\$, corresponding to a net present value of 7.53 billion US\$. Thus these six countries have been relieved of around half of their debts nominally. This result is debatable. Some say the glass is half empty, and others say it is half full. The progression and result of the respective PRSP process are discussed at least as controversially.

Even adherence to the key principles of the PRS process – first and foremost a broad-based participation of civil society and the private sector at all operational levels – fails to be achieved in several countries. A number of PRS processes are limited to a case-by-case consultation of selected actors. And even if the PRS process does have a participatory approach in a certain country, this country will not be in the driver's seat on its own. For ultimately, it is the Executive Boards of the Bretton Woods



Millennium Development Goal No. 2:
Achieve universal primary education

Institutions that decide on the implementation of the poverty alleviation strategies. This mechanism also appears to defeat its own object, for the first PRSPs are showing that the old-style macroeconomic paradigms are not being abandoned. Rather, in many PRSPs, the measures to combat poverty are run in parallel to economic policy requirements of structural adjustment without the impact of this economic policy on the social sectors being analysed, let alone questioned. This coincides with a certain understanding of one's role in which, at best, state actors grant civil society a say in setting priorities in the social sectors of education, health or food. Within this »division of labour«, making decisions on economic policy priorities is reserved for the state actors.

However, frictional losses occur not only between civil society and state actors. The demand for participation and ownership also raises the question what role is ascribed to the legislative in the PRS process. Parliaments may fall behind as well when budget policy priorities are set. Against this background, it comes as no surprise that the PRS processes have been faced with criticism in all the countries affected. In spite of all their conceptual deficits, it should not be overlooked that these processes at least potentially open up the opportunity to achieve more effective poverty alleviation involving all relevant actors and sectors. Also, the results of these processes are subject to a periodical examination. Here, it is up to the civil society actors to establish new priorities in the PRS process.

And this really is a matter of urgency. For important cross-sector topics that are closely linked to combating poverty are only insufficiently addressed by several PRSPs. Gender issues, the interdependence of the environment and development, institution building and the development of a democratic system of laws are crucial to ensuring effective poverty alleviation. Against this background, a twofold challenge becomes apparent. While it is up to civil society actors to examine the strat-

egies prescribed within the framework of existing PRSPs with regard to their impact on poverty, the conceptual gaps the respective strategies bear have to be identified and bridged as quickly as possible.

The exchange of experience among the civil society actors in the North and the South plays a special role in this context. The multitude of communication channels between the North and the South provide the sounding-board for effective influence on the further implementation and modification of the PRSPs. The Portal »www.PRSP-Watch.de« of the Association of German Development NGOs (VENRO) is to contribute to this by informing the interested public, journalists, academics and those active in development co-operation about the status of the PRSP debate with regard to individual countries. This information programme is supplemented by the publication on hand. Gertrud Falk and Walter Eberlei analyse the extent and limits of participation in the ongoing PRS processes, while Birte Rodenberg assesses to what degree these processes can contribute to asserting gender interests. These cross-sector perspectives are complemented by a selection of country profiles. Here we would like to express our thanks for the effort the authors have made.

PRS processes bear risks as well as opportunities for the development process. Given the resources they tie down, their failure would spell a disaster. The route to achieving more coherence in development while adhering to the roles of the various actors involved would then be blocked for a long time. State, multilateral, private and civil society actors are well aware of these risks. It can only be hoped that they will be open to new types of co-operation and participation.

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Civil society involvement in PRS processes. The gap between claims and reality

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In last three years, processes have been initiated to develop and implement national strategies to combat poverty in the overwhelming majority of the poorest countries. Forty-eight countries have already prepared an Interim PRSP or a Full PRSP¹. While the governments frequently prepared the Interim PRSPs on their own, the civil societies were consulted in all these countries when it came to preparing the Full PRSPs. The IMF and the World Bank have not set any minimum standards for the involvement of societal actors but assess participation in relation to participatory practice so far in the countries involved. So, as would be expected, the range of participation varies considerably from country to country.

What effective participation requires

Effective participation plays an essential role in development. Certain requirements have to be met for participation to have an impact:

a) *Actors* have to be enabled to engage in policies. To this end, they require comprehensive and timely access to relevant information; sufficient resources; time and space to disseminate information, critically reflect draft policies and develop independent positions; material and legal prerequisites to engage in public debates.

b) In addition, it requires political rights. Basic *rights* such as freedom of speech, assembly and the press as well as the right to information have to be ensured, and the roles of the executive, legislative, judicative and civil society have to be clearly defined.

c) It requires democratic *legitimation*. While parliaments are legitimised via free elections, civil society obtains its legitimisation via a sensory function in which it creates a political audience by addressing problematic aspects of society. This basis of legitimisation can and should be supported and strengthened by various pillars, e.g. by the transparency of its own actions, networking and bolstering of a representative basis and internal democratisation.

d) In addition, political *structures* have to be created within which participation can take place. They above all include an open and comprehensive government information policy as well as the decentralisation of participatory processes and decisions.

Intensity of participation

Qualitatively, one can distinguish several levels of participation. The lowest one is to merely inform the population. At the next level, those responsible also consult the opinions of actors in society. In a further step, decisions are made jointly, and ultimately, at the highest level of participation, joint action is taken.

The characteristics of participation referred to here are a precondition for participation not merely remaining a nine-day wonder in the context of the PRS processes that is abandoned again once the PRSP has been prepared. In other words, what is needed is *institutionalised participation*, which can be defined as a structurally integrated and legitimised process based on law via which sufficiently qualified political actors can participate in designing development initiatives and control their implementation.

The scope for participation in the PRS processes

The scope for participation in the PRS processes so far is manifold and ranges from a minimum of information to institutionalised participation in the implementation of

1) Status of January 2003. For the sake of making this publication easier to read, we have omitted literary references. Some publications will be mentioned at the end. For the country examples, we also recommend the website www.prsp-watch.de the country profile contents of which were compiled and for which responsibility was assumed by Gertrud Falk and Walter Eberlei at the *Institut für Entwicklung und Frieden* (INEF, Duisburg). Several references are contained.

strategies and from weak legitimisation and enshrinement in law to a marked degree of these aspects. The following examples are to demonstrate this.

A low level of participation can be observed in the PRS process in *Niger*. A civil society at national level is still in the process of being established and lacks sufficient resources, experience and integration into (international) networks. Many NGOs have only emerged over the last few years. While NGO representatives have been granted a say in the management committees of the PRS process, their role in the overall process is hardly referred to.

The PRS process in *Rwanda* also bears a low level of institutionalisation, although it is strongly grassroots-oriented. It is based on traditional, decentralised participation methods. In the Rwandan PRS process, participation is directly linked to combating poverty, with the government implementing a decentralisation programme with the aid of which village communities are instructed to work out their own development strategies. However, civil society is excluded from participating in developing, implementing and monitoring national government programmes.

In *Tanzania*, the government has taken care to establish balanced gender and regional participation in the PRS workshops. Information on the PRSP has also been published in the local languages and disseminated throughout the country. Ahead of compilation of the Progress Report, several dialogue events on the assessment of the PRS process so far were held between the government and civil society actors at national level. Nevertheless, NGOs criticised the superficiality of consultation. Regarding factors limiting participation, they above all complained about schedules being too tight, insufficient conceptual clarity and lack of access to relevant documents. In their opinion, the PRSP lacks credibility because the key reforms in the areas of economics and structural adjustment were negotiated outside the PRS process. However, the government is integrating NGOs institutionally into the monitoring process.

In *Honduras*, too, civil society has entered the PRS process much more strongly than in Niger and Rwanda. A national NGO network conducted consultations on its own and achieved a quantitative extension of government consultation. In order to establish the participatory process institutionally, the government set up a consultation council in the context of the PRS process in which civil society is also represented. At local level, various institutions are planned to enhance civil society participation in the implementation phase and the follow-up process, such as development councils or neighbourhood committees. Nevertheless, like in Tanzania, NGOs accuse the government of not providing for any scope for civil society to influence the PRSP.

The participatory process in *Bolivia* took up the already initiated National Dialogue, which had however already been boycotted by some powerful civil society

organisations owing to bad experiences with the government. In contrast, the Catholic Church and the Jubilee 2000 campaign in which it played a leading role engaged very strongly in the PRS process and organised an NGO network that independent observers regard as representative. However, in spite of civil society's high degree of organisation, it was critical of the ministries partly viewing the National Dialogue's significance as that of hearing civil society rather than as a forum to exchange information. What is new is the institutional establishment of a participatory approach in Bolivia via the law on the National Dialogue that was passed in July 2001. However, this legal framework had no impact on the first PRS phase.

So far, the PRS process in *Uganda* has maintained the highest degree of participation, and it has widely been attributed a model character. In the course of the process, the government came to appreciate the competent support of civil society organisations and has demonstrated an increasing readiness to work with them. Civil society has set up a task force to co-ordinate its PRS activities that has also been involved in preparing the official consultation concept. In the course of the PRS process, the *National Poverty Forum* has evolved in the context of which the government, donors and civil society actors hold controversial debates on topics relevant to poverty. Furthermore, civil society actors are working in the monitoring committee for the *Poverty Action Fund (PAF)*, which supervises the employment of funds released via debt relief or boosted via new concessionary development aid. In addition, political pressure exerted by civil society has resulted in a *Poverty Eradication Working Group* being set up in which the government and representatives of civil society jointly monitor poverty-oriented continuation of the sector plans and the budget.

All in all – and with due caution regarding difficulties with comparability – we can distinguish between

- a small number of countries with a comparatively high level of participation (e.g. Uganda),
- a larger group of countries with medium-level participation in which civil society actors have enjoyed significantly better opportunities to participate in comparison to earlier processes (e.g. Ethiopia, Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Gambia, Honduras, Kenya, Malawi, Mauritania, Mozambique, Zambia, Tanzania) and
- a group of countries with weak participation (e.g. Guinea, Niger, Rwanda).

Prospects and limits of participation

The examples described above demonstrate the opportunities participatory processes offer in the shape of strengthening civil society and democracy and show that these opportunities have been grasped by an active civil society in some countries. It remains to be seen what impact this is actually going to have on reducing poverty.

However, various limits of participation have also become apparent. For one thing, the new concept bears an inherent contradiction. While the PRSP countries themselves are to determine the poverty reduction strategy and the measures via as comprehensive as possible participation, it is the Executive Boards of the IMF and the World Bank who decide on the strategies and measures. The IMF in particular curtails any attempts to reflect alterations in macroeconomic framework data. To a large extent, the macroeconomic elements of the PRSP coincide with earlier IMF conditions. Second, there are limits in that governments did invite civil society to make statements but ultimately asserted their political perspectives independently of it (see e.g. criticism in Tanzania). The representativeness of participatory processes so far is also limited; e.g. NGOs from rural regions only play a peripheral role in them.

In many cases, civil society has proven to be too weakly organised to gain any significant influence. In the poorest countries in particular, civil society's degree of organisation is low, often being limited to a handful of NGOs and concentrated in the capital.

Insufficient on the part of civil society is a further obstacle to participation. In many countries, its organisations lack funding and technical prerequisites and operate virtually without networks. Moreover, many organisations focus very strongly on their conventional project activities rather than on prospects for political influence.

Outlook

In order to establish participatory processes on a long-term basis and see to it that they have an overall impact, a number of conditions have to be improved. First of all, the international PRSP decision-making procedures need reviewing. Both from a development policy and from a democracy and participation oriented angle, it is intolerable that the Executive Boards of the IMF and the World Bank (in which the industrialised countries determine policies owing to their capital-based majority of votes) should »approve« the PRSPs – or not. This practice so far denies the developing countries their right to self-determination. However, the complete elimination of conditions is no alternative. It would play into the hands of elites in several countries who are corrupt or are intent

on doing everything to stay in power and are encountered again and again. It would be conceivable to have an independent committee with equal representation of developing and industrialised countries (with the involvement of the respective country's civil society) decide on whether a strategy to combat poverty appears to be feasible and worthy of international support. On the basis of the decision taken by this committee, the bilateral and multilateral donors could then pledge their commitment to provide finance for programmes to combat poverty.

The governments of the countries in the South also have to provide more scope for participatory structures and promote a legal framework for them. In open cooperation with civil society, the capacity of the actors in society has to be strengthened step by step. This requires efforts on the part of civil society itself, too. For example, civil societies could improve their networking (see Uganda or Zambia) and focus more strongly on long-term political processes.

Gertrud Falk and Dr. Walter Eberlei, academic assistants at the Institut für Entwicklung und Frieden (INEF), Duisburg-Essen University

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PRSP as an opportunity to assert gender interests?

The criteria that PRSPs are supposed to meet not only include ensuring a broad participation of civil society but also considering the multidimensional structure of poverty. PRSPs are meant to be »comprehensive« in that they link up macroeconomic reform with social policy measures against the background of the respective country-specific analysis of poverty in society.

One of the central cross-sector topics referred to that have to be dealt with in the development and implementation process of PRSPs is the elimination of gender inequality, for poverty is not gender-neutral. The majority of the roughly 1.3 billion people living in extreme poverty are women. But they are not only affected more by poverty than men in quantitative terms. Rather, owing to their restricted political rights and less disposing and decision-making powers, they have fewer prospects of liberating themselves from poverty. On the other hand, particularly in poor households, they assume a key role in ensuring the survival of their families.

More recent political concepts of the international donor community reflect these insights and acknowledge that social imbalance and women's limited influence on decision-making processes in society prevent sustainable poverty reduction. If strategies to combat poverty are to be successful and result in broad-based economic growth, they have to analyse gender-related differences among conditions and interests when addressing poverty and consider them in all their fields of activity.

The IMF and the World Bank adopt both this understanding of an extended definition of poverty that is not based solely on income and the strategy of Gender Mainstreaming in their PRSP concept. Unlike with previous World Bank programmes aimed primarily at raising the productivity of women for the market economy, independent measures are to be supported now to boost skills, assert rights and promote equal opportunities.² Nevertheless, there is no fundamental paradigm shift that would advance gender equality to the level of an independent or even priority development goal of their multilateral policies. Rather, women's rights are part of a larger calculation: gender disparities impede a country's growth and economic development and therefore represent an obstacle to poverty reduction.

In this sense and in the sense of the concept of ownership, which advocates a sustainable implementation of

national strategies to combat poverty by ensuring a broad-based consideration and participation of *all* groups in society and civil society, PRSPs also have to be engendered if they are to be effective. In order that gender justice can enter the PRSPs as well the World Bank has compiled an extensive chapter on gender in the PRSP Handbook. It provides detailed guidelines on considering gender aspects in *each* phase and in *all* areas of a PRSP (poverty analysis, strategy development, implementation and monitoring as well as participation).³

However, addressing social imbalances is no longer an issue of correct political guidelines, for hard copies of well-formulated, sophisticated demands have been submitted by organisations ranging from the World Bank through the OECD to the bilateral donors. What is lacking, however, is practical implementation, i.e. in particular a decision-relevant participation of women's and gender-sensitive organisations.

Conceptual weaknesses

With regard to the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, the World Bank and NGOs agree in comparative analyses of Interim und Full PRSPs that gender aspects have increasingly been addressed in the course of the PRSP-process. However, it is above all *gender needs* that are referred to, i.e. access to basic services in the sectors of education and health. For example, measures to raise the rates of children starting school are pointed to frequent-

2) Cf. the World Bank survey: Engendering development through gender equality in rights, resources and voice, 2001.

3) The chapter on gender of the Source Book (Bamberger et al., 2001) is one of the most frequently downloaded documents of the World Bank's PRSP Website. However, just like other chapters in the handbook, it is regarded as too technocratic and of too little relevance to practice by the PRSP countries. In addition, in its extensive social science poverty alleviation backup programme, the World Bank presents itself as a learning organisation that – at least theoretically – is increasingly addressing unequal distribution of affluence, justice and power and developing methodical instruments or concepts to reduce social imbalance. (see www.worldbank.org/poverty/inequal/index.htm und Social Analysis Sourcebook, 2002).

ly. There are only few references to *strategic interests* to improve the legal situation of women. For example, the Ghanaian PRSP recommends measures to prevent violence and land reform.

Basically however, three conceptual weaknesses crystallise:

- The poverty diagnoses, which are generally insufficiently differentiated, leave even more to be desired in terms of gender aspects.

In some cases, for example in Ghana, *Participatory Poverty Assessments* (PPAs) are carried out ahead of measures at district level, and gender-disaggregated data is collected, for example to document time poverty among women. Trends are broken down according to women and men and contain important statements on power relations within the individual households. Nevertheless, they are not taken up in the PRSPs and therefore not translated into long-term strategies. This shows that participation and the development of strategies are dealt with as two independent processes, so that any participation of the stakeholder groups remains without effect.

- There is no true implementation of the gender approach (see Box), for apart from a few exceptions (e.g. Rwanda, Tanzania), PRSPs do little more than integrate stereotype Women in Development (WID) measures in combating poverty. Better access to microcredits and local technology and educational and training measures for those working in the informal sector may be important for poor women, but they are not sufficient (when it – also – comes) to breaking down hierarchical structures in gender relations. In the area of reproductive health care, which is central to poverty reduction, men are not integrated as a target group in AIDS prevention.
- Possible influence on the macroeconomic framework is a central issue when it comes to linking up gender-balanced social policy with poverty-reducing structural reforms. However, the national frame for economic policy is generally presented as »gender-neutral«. Gender impact analyses of stabilisation and privatisation policies are given just as little reference as the conventional dualism between a growth-oriented market economy and unpaid reproductive labour (carried out mostly by women), is questioned.

Between corrections and cosmetics: gender in PRSPs

The differences in quality among PRSPs with regard to consideration of the gender issue are closely related to

how the papers developed and the influence of those forces campaigning for an *engendering* of PRSPs.

However, doesn't engendering as a result of certain civil society actors effectively participating in the process simultaneously imply that a process of ownership has taken place via a wide participation of representative women's organisations in the country? For owing to the pressure exerted on the HIPC's to fulfil the conditions of gender as a cross-cutting task as well as increasing criticism levelled at the Interim PRSPs by women's political organisations in the respective countries, gender experts have been commissioned in some countries to advise the national reporting team. One positive aspect of this procedure is that gender interests are not only addressed in the traditional, basic-needs-oriented areas such as »health care for pregnant women, mothers and infants« but that they are also being introduced in areas that normally ignore gender, such as »labour and employment promotion«, as the example of the Rwandan PRSP demonstrates.

If the principle of ownership is taken seriously, then *what* ultimately stands in a paper is not of predominant importance but rather how it came to enter the paper or how the strategies are developed and implemented. Gender relations are complex, and they are rooted in all areas of society. They can only be changed by society itself changing. With regard to the unequal gender relations, the greatest potential the PRSPs bear is to promote broad-based participatory processes and active ownership. As useful as support of committees in charge of the drawing up process by external experts financed mainly by international donor organisations such as the World Bank or UNDP may be, its impact will remain limited as long as consultation continues to be a once-off, technocratic process.

The process of engendering PRSPs can only be feasible if it is embedded in the respective current civil society or gender-related policy debates of a country.

In spite of the significant role that governmental and non-governmental donor organisations play in integrating cross-sector topics such as gender, AIDS or sustainability, gender issues are neither »export issues« of western feminists nor are they a donor's issue. Rather they represent independent debates of African, Latin American or Asian contexts with a distinct regional character.

Participation instead of transformation?

Generally, effective participation of women and women's organisations in the PRS process is confronted with the same structural problems that are encountered by other civil society groups representing interests and by NGOs (see article by Eberlei/Falk). For example, women's organisations also complain about time pressure and lack



Women's microfinance initiative
in Ghana

of transparency in the participatory process. Quite often, however, scepticism towards participation in a PRS process and tension overshadowing the necessary dialogue between NGOs and the government tend to be much greater among feminist organisations and women's networks than among »mixed« organisations. Especially in many countries of Africa and Latin America, women's organisations regard PRSPs as a revised edition of the old structural adjustment programmes that resulted in a »feminisation of poverty« in the (nineteen hundred) eighties via measures to privatise basic services and in the elimination of government social services. Now they fear that the participatory processes will result in the government harnessing their active participation to legitimise and develop growth-oriented structural adjustment programmes in another guise instead of participating in the implementation of social policy reforms.

There is indeed no lack of pleasant-sounding declarations of intent to take up gender in the papers and integrate representatives of gender interests into the processes. In reality, however, the forms of participatory action are often limited to discussion and consultation procedures. More far-reaching influence, e.g. at the harmonisation workshops, generally presents itself for women's organisations in those cases in which the participatory process is characterised by a politically active civil society and dedicated debt relief initiatives. In Ghana, for example, dogged criticism levelled at Ghana's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (GPRS) by the feminist lobbying organisation *Netright* resulted in an official workshop on engendering the PRSP being initiated that was funded by the World Bank. Criticism voiced here immediately entered the following GPRS draft and resulted in measures to prevent domestic violence being established as well as recommendations on legal reform aimed at better powers of disposal of resources (land ownership) for women.

Although it should be welcomed that these strategic gender interests are increasingly entering PRSPs, the procedures to improve the processes are problematic. Ultimately, they amount to a tightrope walk between correction and cosmetics, with the core content of strategies to combat poverty, the macroeconomic framework concept, remaining untouched. However, bridging the gap between declarations of intent in favour of women and gender-balanced practice in development policies requires that not only forms of participation but also decision-relevant *forms of co-determination* be established for all areas of a PRSP.

Gender-sensitive budget initiatives are seen as a new hope for macropolitical influence on finance and economic policy from a gender angle. The successful initiatives carried out in a large number of African countries that analyse the gender impacts of both expenditure and income policies of government budgets are increasingly gaining significance when it comes to asserting socially balanced and poverty-oriented priorities in the Medium Term Expenditure Frameworks (MTEF) and Public Expenditure Reviews.

After the Tanzanian Gender Networking Programme (TGNP) had succeeded in committing all ministries and authorities to gender-sensitive budgeting with its lobbying and monitoring activities in 2000, the government integrated it into its country's PRS process. State actors were sensitised to gender perspectives in all PRSP-relevant sectors in clear-cut training programmes, while the gender networks involved in the PRS process were offered further training with regard to the macroeconomic context in order to boost their economic literacy. In spite of the Tanzanian Government's readiness to conduct comprehensive gender mainstreaming in the national PRSP, hardly any gender-specific analyses were integrated into the macroeconomic framework chapter.

► What are gender interests?

The term »gender« refers to socially and culturally created roles and to the relations between women and men. Since the 1990s, the *Gender Approach* (Gender and Development, GAD) has emerged from the approach of promoting women and integrating women into development (Women in Development, WID). Setting out from inequality between the sexes, the gender relations are at the focus of attention that have evolved from a specific historical, economic, political and cultural context. The key strategy for a comprehensive participation of both sexes in a society's development process is *gender mainstreaming*. This integration of a gender-differentiating approach into all phases of a project is also referred to for short as *engendering*.

The most important tool in engendering policy processes is the *gender analysis*, from which gender priorities are deduced for development projects. A distinction is made between practical needs and strategic interests. Whereas practical needs aim at the immediate but also long-term securing of survival, e.g. at access to water, seed, credit and health care, strategic interests focus on structural improvements in the living conditions. The latter include the right to have a say in matters and decision-making powers, attested land ownership rights and access to social security systems.

It is this combination of two hitherto separate areas of knowledge – gender analysis, which informs about gender inequality, and knowledge of a country's economic and finance policy – that lends so much significance to the gender-balanced budget initiatives for the PRS process (and makes them increasingly attractive for the donors). However, political expectations both of the initiatives and the instruments should not be raised too much, for their influence is only limited.

In addition to the typical balancing act that all non-governmental lobbying organisations have to perform when representing the interests of civil society in the limited scope of action to co-operate with national and supranational institutions, a lack of access to economically relevant topics in their own ranks impedes the efforts of the gender budget initiatives and other women's policy organisations with a macropolitical agenda. Both the Tanzanian gender network and the Ghanaian NGO GERA (Gender and Economic Reforms in Africa) complain of lacking capacities and even widespread disinterest among the women's NGOs and critical civil society as far as linking up the thematic areas of gender and macroeconomics and politically reshaping the latter is concerned.

Ultimately, the political framework conditions are crucial to asserting law and poverty oriented gender interests in PRSPs. No concept and no political instrument can substitute the political determination of the institutions in charge of implementing gender equality and asserting women's human rights. But this determination can also be influenced, and from the gender perspective, this is where the democratisation potential of PRSPs lies. Here, disseminating knowledge at different levels and forging stronger alliances between the North and the South are aspects that play a key role.

Recommendations:

- A more effective division of labour is required among Women's and gender-oriented NGOs. Who is involved in gender surveys and evaluation of data for poverty analysis? Who is responsible for representation in the committees? How can the consultation processes between women's policy lobbying organisations represented in the PRSPs and the grassroots organisations be organised more effectively? How can embedding of (external) gender experts in local women's movements and their debates be improved?
- Women's NGOs ought to formulate a more urgent requirement for donor organisations: for further training in economic and finance policy issues and for promoting networking and working meetings in order to boost exchange of experiences at regional level.
- The links among NGOs between the North and the South should also be strengthened with a view to asserting gender interests. Northern NGOs in particular that are campaigning for international debt relief and insolvency procedures and initiatives that are critical of PRSPs calling for fundamental changes to the macroeconomic framework conditions only rarely adopt a gender perspective in their lobbying policies. Integrating the analyses of feminist networks in the South on the social impacts of neoliberal structural policy would mean putting the social policy demands of the lobbying organisations in the North in concrete terms. In addition, Southern NGOs would gain more voice in the participatory processes.

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Important but not sufficient:
better access to microcredit schemes for women

Civil society involvement in developing the PRSP – country examples

In the following, some country profiles are presented as examples (in shortened versions and without sources or links). The complete versions as well as further country profiles can be found on the Internet page www.prsp-watch.de.

14 | ► Bolivia

The government organised the participatory process in the framework of the National Dialogue and with the support of UNDP and bilateral donors (including Germany). However, owing to bad experiences, the National Dialogue was boycotted by major civil society organisations. At local level, roundtables dealt with the social agenda and participation in monitoring. At regional level, the government held workshops on the social and political agenda. Economic and political topics were discussed in three events staged at national level with the motto »The Government is Listening«. However, macroeconomic topics were only given marginal treatment. In order to institutionalise the participatory approach, Parliament passed the Law on the National Dialogue in July 2001. In monitoring, the government plans to have the Catholic Church participate as a monitoring body in the meetings of the supervisory boards at national and department level. The Vigilance Committee is to adopt the same role at local level.

In spite of its structural enshrinement, NGOs complained that the Ministries were partly only viewing the National Dialogue's significance as that of hearing civil society rather than as a forum to exchange information. Bolivian NGOs depended strongly on information from international partners.

Jubilee 2000 started a letter campaign to put pressure on the government to really involve civil society in the process. In addition, the network organised an independent participatory process in the framework of the National Forum the results of which were presented at the National Dialogue Workshop. The so-called »Seven NGO Network«, an umbrella organisation of approximately 200 NGOs, outlined its opposite standpoint to the PRSP in a letter to the government and recommended the IMF and the World Bank not to accept the PRSP.

The PRSP was drawn up by a committee headed by the Minister of Finance. Civil Society did not participate in this. In spite of the paper's being severely criticised by civil society, the IMF and the World Bank approved it in May 2001.

Statements

Bolivian NGOs did not feel that they were being sufficiently involved in the PRS process and criticised a lack of integration into the strategy's implementation and monitoring of the implementation phase. They also complained that local decision-makers were too influential in the regional round tables, that women and Indigenas were underrepresented, that methodology was poor and that the agenda was too rigid. Observers noted that the National Dialogue and the formulation of the PRSP had proceeded completely separated from one another and criticised that the topics defined as of a cross-sector nature, gender, Indigenas and environment, were either not being addressed at all or, if so, only marginally.

In spite of this criticism, Bolivian NGOs conceded that the participatory process was having an impact inside society that promoted democracy at local level. For example, Indigenas and smallholders were elected chairpersons of local councils, monitoring committees, etc. In addition, civil society's independent participatory process could be regarded as representative, offering a sound basis for the further process.

► Honduras

In the course of preparing the Interim PRSP, the government brought its draft version up for discussion at a national workshop in January 2000. A second meeting on conceptual issues and the evaluation of the poverty survey was held in February. From September to November 2000, a total of 30 workshops addressing the PRSP were held, 19 at regional level and 11 in the capital, Tegucigalpa. Urged by civil society, the number of regional workshops had been raised from 7 to 19. In terms of contents, the macroeconomic topics and gender aspects were absent in consultations.

In order to enshrine the participatory process constitutionally, the PRSP Consultative Council was set up that three representatives of civil society are to sit on too. At local level, various institutions are planned to boost participation in civil society in the implementation phase and the follow-up process, e.g. development councils, budget offices or neighbourhood committees.



Education and training:
pre-conditions for the eradication of poverty

Statements

While the government, the World Bank and the IMF refer to the participatory process as broad-based, the Honduran Bishops' Conference says that it is all on the surface. In addition, the NGO FOSDEH accuses the government of having the PRSP written by international experts.

Dissatisfied with the government's efforts to promote participation, INTERFOROS, an association of Honduran non-governmental organisations, organised an independent civil society process and submitted its results to the President as a civil society PRSP in December 2000.

► Kenya

The National Steering Committee, under the overall control of the Ministry of Finance and Planning, was responsible for the PRSP process. The Steering Committee comprised members of the government as well as selected representatives of the private sector and civil society.

Civil society was consulted for discussions on the first draft of the Interim PRSP in the spring of 2000. In the framework of a four-day National Consultation Forum, around 300 representatives of government, NGOs and science as well as women's groups, the media and the private sector engaged in the discussions. A summary of the first draft Interim PRSP was published in English and the local languages.

A broad-based participatory process took place from November 2000 to May 2001 in order to prepare the Full PRSP. A representative of civil society appointed by the Kenyan NGO Council also worked at the secretariat responsible for the process.

To work out the contents, eight sector working groups and nine thematic working groups were set up at national level. Except for the working groups on gender and governance, all thematic working groups were headed by representatives of civil society.

Consultations were held in all 70 districts. The funds required for this were allocated via seven grassroots organisations in the 70 districts which were thus also responsible for running the consultations. The results of the consultations at district level were passed on to the sector and thematic working groups at national level.

In March 2001, a team comprising government officials and members of civil society and the private sector as well as representatives of the donors prepared the first draft of the Full PRSP in a one-week closed session. In March and June 2001, two national consultation fora were held in public to discuss the PRSP drafts.

Within civil society, the National Council of NGOs set up a working group on PRSP comprising representatives of 30 grassroots organisations that became civil society's chief mouthpiece. It formed a seven-member technical task force for support.

In the area of smallholder farming, smallholders and livestock breeders got organised and set up a »Pastoralist Strategy Group« with support from international NGOs and UNICEF in order to urge the government to adopt demands in the PRSP. They held independent consultations at community level, submitted the results to district and provincial level and were actively involved in press campaigns.

The Collaborative Centre for Gender & Development also held its own consultations with economic and civil society organisations at all levels and submitted a concept on gender and poverty reduction to the National Consultation Forum.

Statements

NGOs criticise structural shortcomings in the participatory process. They refer to frustration among members of the PRSP Secretariat owing to weak management capacities and lacking infrastructure. Also, they argue that the Collaborative Centre for Gender and Development has only identified low level of awareness of gender

issues among members of the government. At the same time, they attest the women's organisations only a modest capacity to raise women's issues at the national workshops. In spite of this criticism, the NGOs assessed the Kenyan participatory process as broad-based and open, and they accept that their positions are reflected in the participatory process.

Independent observers also attest civil society good work in terms of contents as well as successful lobbying and state that the government has displayed a relatively high degree of openness towards the participatory process. In some districts, better working relations have developed between NGOs and local government and government authorities thanks to the process. However, the observers criticise the tight schedule, which has impaired the quality of consultations. Also, they point out that documents were frequently only handed out immediately ahead of workshops, so that participants had no opportunity to look at them in detail. In spite of the broad-based participatory process, government officials had dominated developments. In some districts, women had not been given the opportunity to participate in consultations or had not been heard.

The World Bank and the IMF have attested Kenya a dynamic learning process in drawing up the Interim PRSP. Regarding contents, they see a threat of expectations being raised too high that cannot be fulfilled owing to financial and staff bottlenecks. In addition, they argue that the topic of governance has to be brought more to the centre of the strategy. However, it has been sharply criticised that the PRS process in Kenya threatens to fail owing to the stiff conditions imposed by the IMF.

► Rwanda

The government of Rwanda views the PRS process as closely linked to the conciliatory process following the civil war and political and financial decentralisation and therefore already designed the preparation of the Interim PRSP as a participatory process.

The Secretariat of the Poverty Reduction National Programme is responsible for the PRS process proper. In addition to ministry officials, two representatives of civil society are on its governing committee. The Participation Task Force designed the participatory process with support from an NGO representative from India.

Since no poverty surveys have been conducted in Rwanda so far, the PRS process was linked up with a Participatory Poverty Assessment. The *Ubudehe* method applied in this context represents a very grassroots-oriented bottom-up process in the framework of which village communities work out their own strategies. When these plans are evaluated at a higher administrative level, no further topics may be added. Regional development

plans based on them have to be handed back to the communities for relevance testing. Members of local NGOs were among those trained in participatory techniques for the interviews.

Consultations were above all held at national and prefecture level. The media were informed, and the draft PRSP was submitted to national and international NGOs with a request for comments.

In the further course of the process, the government directly linked up participation with its strategy to combat poverty. The local government ministry implemented a decentralisation programme at prefecture and community level with the aid of which village communities were instructed in working out their own development strategies.

Statements

In their reviews, academics arrive at the result that the government is making efforts to ensure broad-based participation and attempting to apply lessons learnt in the civil war. However, they point out that the response from NGOs, the private sector and the media is relatively low. Reasons for this are identified as a lack of competence in the fields of advocacy and economic policy. However, it is criticised that the draft PRSP has only been published in English. All in all, from an academic angle, the participatory approach is appraised as grassroots-oriented and attested a model character for other countries in post-conflict phases.

In contrast, NGOs criticise that the government has provided civil society with hardly any information and has almost exclusively integrated international NGOs into the process. They claim that hardly any Rwandan NGO or church organisation had even heard of PRSPs when the Interim PRSP was published. While the government is making a considerable effort to hear the »normal« population, the participation of organised groups has not been enshrined institutionally. Owing to an absence of autonomous civil society groups, there can be no mention of country ownership.

In the Joint Staff Assessment, the IMF and the World Bank stated that they were impressed with the process and ownership.

► Zambia

The Ministry of Finance and National Planning is in charge of the PRS process. It set up a PRSP Secretariat in which representatives of the Ministry of Community Development and Social Affairs as well as the Bank of Zambia are also working. The members of this secretariat were later on taken on by the newly created Department



Central America:
Awareness-raising is crucial for
participation of women

of Planning and Economic Management, which was set up towards the end of the PRS process. The Secretariat is headed by the Technical Committee, which has also worked out the strategy for combating poverty. Civil society is not represented in this governing body.

Civil society was integrated into the process to work out the second draft Interim PRSP but only participated minimally in this context. In the participatory process on the way to the Full PRSP, a seminar was initially started at national level for all stakeholder representatives at which further procedures were agreed. The most important result was the setting up of eight working groups in which respective members of the groups in society were represented. Within a period of six months, they worked out sector plans for poverty reduction. In parallel, experts gave lectures on important cross-sector topics and worked out strategies for them.

In May 2001, at provincial level, consultations were held in all nine districts with ten delegates from each district. First of all, the participants discussed various dimensions of poverty reduction. Then the results of the national working groups were submitted to them with the help of which they were to review the priorities they had set.

In October 2001, the first draft of the PRSP was discussed at a three-day national conference in Lusaka. Representatives of all groups involved in the process took part in this conference. The national conference reached agreement that the general thrust of the PRSP was acceptable. According to the NGOs, 80 percent of the NRO Forum input was reflected in the first draft PRSP. All critical points raised at the conference were passed on to the sector working groups, reviewed by them and then taken up in the final draft.

In the main, NGO input for the draft PRSP of October 2001 is contained in a strategy paper submitted by civil society in the summer of 2001. This paper had been drawn up under the overall control of the NGO network

Civil Society for Poverty Reduction (CSPR), which had been set up previously in order to boost the presence of civil society in the PRSP consultations. It held its own consultations and fed policy papers into the official process. The Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection co-ordinates NGO activities.

Statements

All in all, both the NGOs and independent observers complain of an insufficient flow of information. NGOs have not received all the important documents and information from the government. Some information was only made accessible to them via the World Bank or its partner organisations. Neither were documents translated into the local languages or published as simplified versions. The representatives of civil society were given only one day's time to countercheck the first draft PRSP ahead of a National Workshop. Some even regarded this as a success since they had originally merely been supposed to do a spell-check. Participation did not reach beyond consultation.

Trade unions are critical of the process having been carried out too fast, so that the lower levels of administration could not become involved. All in all, civil society's capacities had been too limited to ensure effective participation.

Summing up, independent observers state that the government has hardly any relations to civil society and has been repressive towards independent and human rights organisations. Nevertheless, in the context of the PRS process, it did make positive steps towards civil society.

Only the IMF and the World Bank attest Zambia an intensive participatory process in their Joint Staff Assessment.



Mission not accomplished:
Failed project in Zambia

► Uganda

Civil society's participation is co-ordinated by the Civil Society Task Force (CSOTF) set up for this purpose which was involved in working out the consultation concept. It is headed by the Uganda Debt Network (UDN) and consists of national and international NGOs, church organisations and research institutions. The contents its activities cover are the topics of the PRS process Sector Working Groups. In addition, the National Poverty Forum has evolved from the UPPAP (Uganda Participatory Poverty Assessment Project) in the framework of which the government, donors and civil society actors discuss poverty-relevant topics controversially.

In the course of the process, the government has learnt to appreciate civil society's competent support and has opened up further. The CSOTF played a crucial role in running eight regional workshops and held independent consultations on the topics of the sector working groups. It fed the results into the official PRSP process. In the course of the regional workshops, the government informed the public at large via a broad-based media campaign.

Civil society actors are also involved in the governing body of the Poverty Action Fund (PAF), which monitors the employment of funds released via debt relief. In addition, political pressure resulted in the setting up of the Poverty Eradication Working Group, in which government and civil society representatives jointly monitor the continuation of the sector plans and the budget.

In March 2000, Uganda was the first country to submit its PRSP. The Paper was approved by the World Bank and the IMF in the same month. In accordance with the requirements of the IMF and the World Bank, Uganda compiled its first Progress Report in February 2001.

Statements

From the angle of observers, the government's opening up for civil society input has resulted in a decentralised process and a comparatively wide acceptance of the PRS process. At national level, structures have been created to continue the participatory process that raise civil society's influence on political decisions. This is why the Ugandan participatory process has widely been attributed a model character.

The VENRO Project »Perspektive 2015«

In order to contribute to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), internationally agreed at the UN Millennium Summit in the autumn of 2000 and supported by the Federal Government's »Aktionsprogramm 2015« (Program of Action 2015), VENRO launched the project »Perspektive 2015 – Armutsbekämpfung braucht Beteiligung« (Prospects for 2015 – Combating poverty requires participation) in the autumn of 2001. This project is chiefly aimed at improving the level of information among the German public regarding the goals of halving poverty and socially and environmentally sustainable development related to 2015. Here, particular emphasis is placed on reporting on current developments at international level (above all the UN, the World Bank and the EU) as well as on initiatives run by the NGOs. Also, the project has set itself the target of urging the objectives that are described in the Federal Government's Action Program – usually only in a general and vague form – to be put into practice and of contributing to conceptual advancement.

The project consists of four components:

1) The *Project Website* »www.2015.venro.org«, which is constantly provided with new texts and up-to-date information in addition to containing the basic aspects of the MDGs.

2) The *Website* »www.prsp-watch.de« compiled in cooperation with the Institute for Development and Peace (INEF), which provides basic information on the compilation and implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers/PRSP launched in the context of the 1999 Cologne G7/G8 Summit's debt cancellation initiative. At present, 53 country profiles (from »Äthiopien« to »Zentralafrikanische Republik«; English summaries under preparation) are available that contain the contents of the (preliminary or final) PRSP and civil society's involvement in the PRS process.

3) The *Newsletter* »2015 aktuell«, which appears once a month and provides news on the international debate and NGO activities concerning the MDGs on three to four pages an issue. The newsletter (only in German) can be subscribed to online via the two project websites.

4) The *publication series* »2015 im Gespräch / 2015 in Dialogue«, which offers a collection of policy and lobbying papers on the various fields of combating poverty. These papers are also on the Website »www.2015.venro.org«. The titles of the publications issued so far are:

- No. 1: »Armut bekämpfen – Gerechtigkeit schaffen. Folgerungen aus der internationalen und nationalen Debatte über Armutsbekämpfung für die deutsche Entwicklungspolitik«
- No. 2: »Development Needs Financing – How Financing for Development Can Contribute to Reaching the 2015 Goals«
- No. 3: »Globale Armut – Europas Verantwortung. Ein Vorschlag zur Reform der EU-Entwicklungszusammenarbeit« (German version of the BOND paper »Tackling Poverty – a proposal for European Union aid reform«)
- No. 4: »PRSP – Prospects and limits of civil society involvement«
- No. 5: »Trade – A driving force in combating poverty? Development perspectives regarding the WTO Doha Round«

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