

**PARTICIPATION IN POVERTY REDUCTION
STRATEGIES:
A SYNTHESIS OF EXPERIENCE WITH
PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES TO POLICY
DESIGN, IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING**

IDS Working Paper 109

Rosemary McGee with Andy Norton

SUMMARY

The World Bank and International Monetary Fund recently endorsed the preparation and implementation of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) by borrower countries seeking to benefit from the enhanced HIPC (Highly Indebted Poor Countries) initiative. Civil society participation in the adoption and monitoring of the PRS is viewed as essential for their sustainability and effectiveness.

The purpose of this synthesis is to review the experience to date in applying participatory approaches to macro-level policy formulation, implementation and monitoring, with a view to supporting country-led facilitation of inclusive and high-quality participation in the PRS process. The participatory experiences reviewed are drawn from research initiatives, donors' country strategies, aid coordination processes, policy advocacy campaigns, institutional change processes, budgetary analysis and formulation, and citizens' monitoring mechanisms. Sections are organised around key themes which crystallised in the course of reviewing these experiences.

This synthesis is directed to a range of actors involved in PRSP processes. In the South, it aims to serve governments responsible for leading the process, and civil society organisations wishing to engage with it at various levels. In the North, it aims to guide and inspire bilateral and multilateral donor agencies, non-governmental development organisations and other civil society organisations seeking to play a supporting role as their Southern partners engage in national PRS processes.

The document outlines the significant challenges which must be overcome in the course of establishing participatory, sustainable, country-owned poverty reduction strategies. It testifies to the existence of many competent participation advocates and practitioners, and to a considerable wealth and depth of experience, on which governments can draw to overcome these challenges. It also highlights the need for a learning approach, and for State and donor agencies and many civil society organisations themselves to promote internal institutional changes, as the PRS process unfolds.

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SECTION 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Aims and scope

The World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) recently endorsed the preparation and implementation of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) by borrower countries seeking to benefit from the enhanced HIPC (Highly Indebted Poor Countries) Initiative.

[This] enhanced framework for poverty reduction [...] seeks to ensure a ‘robust link’ between debt relief and poverty reduction by making HIPC debt relief an integral part of broader efforts to implement outcome-oriented poverty reduction strategies using all available resources (World Bank website, 22 September 1999).

The framework is to be developed in the form of a poverty reduction strategy drawn up by government in cooperation with other actors.

This synthesis aims to assist development actors engaging in the PRSP process. By providing synthesised lessons and guidance, it aims to assist Southern governments responsible for leading PRSP processes, and civil society organisations (CSOs) wishing to engage with governments in formulating, implementing and monitoring these. By presenting relevant lessons and ideas to bilateral and multilateral donor agencies, civil society organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), both in the North and in country offices, it aims to help these play a supporting role as their Southern partners engage in national PRSP processes.

The materials we have drawn on are both primary and secondary, from a range of sources. Documentation from NGOs was drawn on for information on NGO-led activities and analysis of policies and performance of other actors (official agencies or governments) in respect of participatory approaches. Academic literature was consulted, particularly research reports documenting the policies and performance of governments and official agencies, or initiatives by civil society actors. World Bank literature providing background on Bank interaction with civil society was reviewed in the course of analysing civil society actors’ perspectives on this.

1.2 Structure of the synthesis

The synthesis is organised around six main sections, which took shape in the course of the review of all available relevant documentation. Apart from Section 2, each represents an area of experience. They are not mutually exclusive but are all interlinked to some extent, and are all necessary elements in the formulation, implementation or monitoring of a participatory poverty reduction strategy.

- Section 2 maps out the **process of a national Poverty Reduction Strategy** and identifies the entry-points for participation at its various stages.
- Section 3 identifies some of the tensions and dilemmas which arise in attempts to foster **country ownership** of, and through, participatory processes.

- Section 4 presents experience to date in relation to **information-sharing** and transparency for effective participation, and to the **participatory generation of information** for policy.
- Section 5 focuses on **influencing policy through the participatory process** itself, as opposed to the outputs of the process.
- Section 6 discusses a range of approaches to increasing the **accountability** of government and service providers to poor people.
- Section 7 is about the **quality and integrity** of participatory practice.

From each area of experience, a series of implications for the PRSP process are distilled and presented at the end of the respective section. A list of references at the back provides full details of all material reviewed.

1.3 Background and objectives

The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, once approved by World Bank and IMF, provides the basis for the tripartite agreement between these and the government. The PRSP model, although originally conceived of in the context of the HIPC debt relief initiative, is now envisaged as the centrepiece for policy dialogue in all countries receiving concessional lending flows from the World Bank and IMF. The IMF's facility for poor countries (formerly known as the Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility) has been renamed the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility. The PRSP is to replace the 'Policy Framework Paper' as the overarching document which outlines the policy directions and resource allocation frameworks for IMF and Bank lending in countries eligible for concessional assistance. It is envisaged as covering a three-year time frame.

The participation of civil society in poverty reduction strategies is viewed as essential for their sustainability and effectiveness:

Broad-based participation of civil society in the adoption and monitoring of the poverty reduction strategy tailored to country circumstances will enhance its sustained implementation. (www.worldbank.org)

A participatory approach is also conducive to building national ownership of the PRS. For poverty reduction strategies to be implemented in a sustained and effective manner they need to be nationally owned, rather than donor-driven. 'Country ownership of a poverty reduction strategy is paramount' (IMF website) – and 'country' refers not only to government but to a wide cross-section of non-government actors as well. A point on which international financial institutions and participation advocates in government and non-governmental sectors agree then, is that the process of preparing and implementing PRSPs, and monitoring their implementation, needs to be participatory and country-led.

The purpose of this paper is to review the experience in applying participatory approaches to policy processes at the macro level, with a view to informing country level facilitation of inclusive and high-quality

participation in the PRS process. The paper is intended for a broad audience, including the full range of potential actors in civil society and government, and donor agency staff.

In some countries there is ample experience in consulting with civil society representatives, incorporating their views into policy formulation, seeking feedback from them for monitoring purposes, or giving them more substantial roles in policy processes. In others there is very little. Ensuring that Poverty Reduction Strategies are high-quality participatory processes, involving representatives of civil society¹ in their design, implementation and monitoring, poses a challenge for the development community at large, North and South, official and non-governmental.

This synthesis of experience with participatory approaches for formulating, implementing and monitoring policy processes is a contribution to meeting that challenge. The World Bank and IMF, as the main architects of the PRSP concept, are currently rising to the challenge in their own ways, elaborating guidelines and building capacity among their staff.² The non-governmental sector is also actively seeking ways to engage with the PRS process, both at the level of global policy advocacy and on the ground in Southern countries (see for example, NGO Working Group on the World Bank/Kenya National Council of NGOs, 2000).

In the PRSP model the government is the principal agent, expected to activate the process, take the lead in designing and implementing the strategy, and be accountable to the population and to donors for delivering on commitments made therein. Government is also expected to engage with representatives of civil society at each stage of the process, so that the formulation stage is informed by each sector's priorities, implementation is made sustainable by the population's stake in it, and accountability is enhanced through progress monitoring by civil society actors. As a mainstream instrument of government policy the PRS will need to be led by the country's formal political leadership – without their commitment to its effectiveness and formal approval of its content it is unlikely to achieve its potential impact.

While the PRSP refers to the formal document presented to the boards of the IFIs for endorsement, in places this synthesis refers to the country's own process as the PRS (Poverty Reduction Strategy). This is in recognition that the formulation of a coherent country approach to poverty reduction did not necessarily start with the recent changes in Washington. A PRS has the capacity to focus a country's efforts on the reduction of poverty through numerous means, including the following:

- Establishing effective linkages between the targets and priorities set by the participatory process and the public resources allocated to support them.

¹ 'Civil society organisations [...] are business and non-governmental organisations [...]. They include academic and technical bodies, research initiatives, professional associations, business associations, religious bodies, labour unions, farmers' organisations, cooperatives, women's organisations, environmental protection organisations, minority rights organisations, and rural development organisations. Citizens, not government officials, manage CSOs.' (Development Bank Watchers' project 1998: 3).

² For further information, see the World Bank website at www/worldbank.org/poverty/strategies/index.htm.

- Establishing a comprehensive approach across government, leading to the mainstreaming of poverty reduction priorities throughout public service.
- Fostering common action between civil society actors committed to working to reduce poverty and public agencies.
- Enhancing the understanding of the causes and distribution of poverty and thereby strengthening collective approaches to tackling the key issues.
- Strengthening government accountability through elaboration of standards of service and entitlement which poor people can legitimately claim from public agencies.

Development NGOs³ have long voiced commitment to participatory approaches and have sought ways to apply them, with varying degrees of success (see, for example, ACORD 1991; Clark 1991; Nelson & Wright 1996; White 1996). When participatory approaches were adopted initially, the project framework was the dominant mode of development activity, so the focus was on promoting stakeholder participation in projects. Lately, policy advocacy has assumed increasing importance for NGOs in North and South, and the principles and techniques of participation are being tested in this new area of activity. Donor agencies too have recognised the importance of participation in development. In some the participatory agenda is still in its infancy (the IMF and multilateral development banks – see Scholte 1999; Tussie 1999). In others significant strides have been taken to mainstream participation policies and practices throughout their operations, and in some cases in their analytical and policy work (Aycrigg 1998; INTRAC 1998; Forster 1998; LaVoy 1998; Blackburn et al 1999). It is no doubt partly an indication of the success of participation mainstreaming efforts in the World Bank that country ownership and participation feature so centrally in the PRSP model.

A further indication of success is the abundance of experiences and lessons which can now be drawn on to help make PRSP processes participatory, as this synthesis shows. Relevant experiences of fostering participation in policy processes are found mainly in national and international NGOs and official donor agencies. There are also experiences to be found in developing country government institutions, albeit to a much lesser extent. This is on the one hand encouraging, given the lead role governments will take in PRSP processes. On the other hand, the paucity of government experience in promoting and facilitating participation in policy processes calls for rapid action to enhance their knowledge and capacity, if the potential for broad-based, national ownership of PRSPs, and for participation by civil society in their development and implementation, is to be realised.

³ Development NGOs are a sub-set of civil society organisations.

SECTION 2 PARTICIPATION IN THE PRS PROCESS

The following section examines the PRS process and the various forms of participation open to different actors at particular stages. A basic description of stages of the process is offered to help map out the possibilities for civil society engagement at different points. This should not be seen as a ‘blueprint’ for a PRSP, to be inflexibly applied. In countries where a government-led poverty strategy has been developed with considerable levels of dialogue and consultation, it would not make sense for donor agencies to promote the development of a new strategy. Rather, they and CSOs should try to identify the entry-points for participation in the existing strategy.

While mapping out a cycle is helpful for identifying opportunities for participation, it does not imply that a technocratic planning process takes precedence over either domestic political processes, or political action to influence and contest policy change. This is not the case, nor should it be. Nonetheless, it must be recognised that a major impetus behind the PRS process is the donor agencies’ desire to account for their actions against poverty reduction objectives, an imperative which calls for some form of planning framework for policy change.

2.1 The PRS cycle

A basic PRS cycle includes the stages of formulation, implementation and evaluation. The formulation stage is likely to include preparatory analytical work, the actual formulation of the formal PRS text and content, and the process of approval and legitimisation of the strategy. A full outline of the cycle is thus:

- Analytical or diagnostic work to prepare for PRS formulation (covering both analysis of poverty, and institutional and budget analyses)
- Formulation
- Approval
- Implementation
- Impact assessment or evaluation

Participatory approaches have a contribution to make at each stage, as shown in Box 1.

Box 1: What can participatory approaches add to the PRS?

Participatory practice can contribute to the PRS process in several ways and at each stage.

Analytical or diagnostic work:

- (i) Participatory research or consultative exercises: involving poor communities in analysing the nature, causes and dynamics of poverty, what their priorities for public action are and which institutions they see as effective. Participatory research for poverty assessment usually involves intermediary actors (research institutes, NGOs, service ministry and local government personnel). Participants need to be selected to provide a representative picture of livelihood conditions of the poor. The exercise is primarily a consultative one, but, arguably, the creation of relationships among the various actors affected by or engaged in the policy process is the most significant innovation of participatory poverty assessment.
- (ii) Participation of civil society actors in analytical and research processes on institutional frameworks and national and local government budgets: to contribute to identifying strategies and setting priorities.

Formulation of the strategy:

- (i) Joint formulation between civil society and government: formulation of the PRS can involve civil society specialists and advocates representing diverse groups from among the poor, as well as government technocrats and independent analysts. There will probably be little opportunity for direct involvement of poor people or community-level actors at this stage, although their interests can be represented by their intermediaries.
- (ii) Donors' participation in formulation is likely, although not necessarily desirable.

Approval:

- (i) Parliamentary approval: PRS needs to be approved by formal political structures within the country, as well as being approved at the global level by the World Bank and IMF to trigger debt relief and concessional loans. While under formulation, the PRS must pass through legitimate democratic political processes and ultimately attain formal ratification by elected political representatives.
- (ii) Public approval: given the stress placed on civil society engagement with the PRS process, it is vital to the PRS's credibility and implementation that civil society itself holds a well-publicised national dialogue around the PRS process which culminates in its public endorsement of the final product.
- (iii) Donor agencies will need their Boards to approve programmes associated with the PRS, but these approval processes do not need to proceed in step with the country process.

Implementation:

- (i) Negotiating roles, responsibilities and entitlements at the local level: the PRS can only provide a framework for empowerment if people in poor communities are clear about what they can and cannot expect from public agencies, and can make claims according to their expectations. Thus the negotiation and communication of roles, responsibilities and entitlements relating to the PRS are crucial. These local-level negotiations will, of course, occur against a backdrop of all the normal structures of local development and government and must iterate with them rather than supplant or contradict them.
- (ii) Monitoring the effectiveness of policy measures: participatory approaches can be used to test the effectiveness of policy changes by monitoring the changes actually experienced by local level actors, against the implementation of policy goals.
- (iii) Citizens' monitoring of outcomes: citizens can be directly involved in formulating and monitoring local budget, and in monitoring service delivery, and holding service providers and local government to account.

Impact assessment or evaluation:

In addition to the monitoring of PRS implementation, there may also be an attempt to evaluate the PRS retrospectively and synthesise lessons from it to inform future policy. During PRS evaluation, participatory approaches can contribute through gathering perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the PRS experience from actors at multiple levels, including community, 'street-level bureaucrats', local government staff, civil society representatives, politicians and central government technocrats. The perceptions of these actors on the PRS process, content and outcomes can be fed into formal processes for assessing policy change and impact.

2.2 Who can participate?

The actors with the greatest stakes in the PRS process are probably the government and the poor. A number of other actors will have a stake or potential involvement, however, in some cases as representatives of other parties' interests, or as conduits of information. Altogether, stakeholders might include:

- People in poor communities and their associations
- Central government
- Local-level government personnel
- Civil society organisations representing poor sectors (e.g. Church leaders, trades' or farmers' unions, traditional authorities, development NGOs)
- Academic researchers and analysts
- Politicians and political parties
- The communications media
- Donor agencies
- The non-poor

For most of these, some form of participation will be appropriate. Management and leadership of the PRS process would normally be in the hands of officials from central government agencies. Local government will be directly involved to varying extents, depending on how decentralised the system is in a given country; CSOs will be involved as intermediaries representing the voices of the poor; analysts and academics as sources of expertise and experience; politicians and parties as the political representatives of the poor and non-poor alike; the poor as the main potential beneficiaries, whose voices need to be amplified by participatory processes; and the media as information-brokers. For a few (e.g. the non-poor, donors), direct participation may not be appropriate, but the PRS process overall should take account of their stake and seek to build their commitment to the process, or at least to ensure that they are not alienated by the process to the point of obstructing it.

Within the categories of actors outlined above, processes of selection are likely to take place. These will be necessary for a variety of reasons. Many civil society organisations have no brief to promote the interests of the poor in the formulation of national policy. NGOs, membership associations and advocacy groups will need to be selected according to appropriate criteria derived from the objectives of the participatory process, for example:

- Building broad legitimacy for the PRS;
- Engaging partners whose active support will be necessary for PRS implementation;
- Ensuring a full range of appropriate skills and understandings are brought to bear on PRS preparation;

- Improving the quality of understanding of deprivation, its causes, and the effectiveness of policy options in addressing it;
- Mediating conflicts which arise in the process of consultation and formulation of poverty reduction strategy.

It is to be hoped that the governance of the PRS process will make transparent the judgements made on who should participate, and the criteria which lie behind them, and allow open debate on these issues.

2.3 What sort of participation is possible, at which stage?

The nature of participation of different groups in the PRS process is likely to vary considerably. The basic 'ladder of participation' used by the World Bank and others (Narayan 1995; ODA 1995; Centre for Rural Development and Training 1998), spells out the following levels or intensities of participation in projects:

- Information-sharing
- Consultation
- Joint decision-making
- Initiation and control by stakeholders

Adapting this typology to the case of the PRS, it is possible to map out which kind of participation might be possible and appropriate at which stage of the process, and which actors might partake of it. This is an exercise which should be done at country level, in the light of the particular configuration of actors at national and local level, their capacity, the degree to which the country's political and social context are conducive to civil society engagement with government, and other factors. Here we restrict ourselves to giving some illustrative examples.

Information-sharing should happen throughout. The media obviously have a key role to play here as conduits, but the precise nature of their role and their capacity to fill it are not self-evident. The media's job of disseminating information is only possible if the information is made available to them in the first place, by those directly involved in the PRS process. The government, as convenor, is responsible for providing the level and quality of information needed for informed participation to occur. This will require efforts to enhance public understanding of policy and budget formulation processes. Civil society representatives, analysts and politicians will also have messages to share through the media. In the interests of creating a climate for public engagement with the process, a detailed initial information brief should spell out to the public at large what the PRS is, what purpose it serves, the preparatory process proposed by Government, and where the entry-points for civil society involvement are. The poor and their representatives will need to share information in the preparatory analytical or diagnostic stage. Ongoing sharing of information is critical to effective process monitoring, and to ex-post evaluation.

Consultation opportunities will arise throughout analysis and strategy development. The boundaries between it and joint decision-making may be blurry in some cases; an important difference between them is that

consultation does not imply any obligation to incorporate into the final product all perspectives expressed. In analytical and diagnostic work, the poor can be consulted through exercises led by researchers, central and local government personnel, NGO staff and other representatives of civil society. For institutional and budget analysis, government can consult academics and civil society analysts on appropriate strategies and priorities; and researchers can consult poor communities about their perspectives on institutions and their priorities for public action.

Throughout the formulation stage, the civil society representatives selected to participate directly should be consulting those they represent, to ensure their representation is authentic. Before approving the PRS, parliamentarians should consult with constituencies and party membership. Public endorsement of the PRS by civil society should be based on a CSO-led ongoing consultation around the planned process and drafts of the PRS. Donors should consult with partners in-country (government or NGOs) on the design of programmes to support the PRS, the approval of which adds to the viability and legitimacy of the strategy. Consultation with service users on the performance of providers, and with policy beneficiaries on the appropriateness and effectiveness of policy measures, should form the basis for monitoring implementation and for ex-post evaluation.

Joint decision-making is possible at some points of the PRS process. It implies some right to negotiate the content of the strategy. Strong actors (for example, trade unions, or the national Church hierarchy) can have a determining influence on content. In the case of weaker actors, they can at least wield as a sanction the withdrawal of their stamp of legitimacy from the process. At formulation stage, there is scope for civil society analysts and representatives of the poor to make decisions jointly with government about priority actions and how to finance them. At approval stage, civil society's decision of whether to ratify the outcome or not may prove influential in formal parliamentary ratification. During implementation, in negotiating roles, responsibilities and entitlements of civil society in relation to the PRS, decisions will be made jointly between civil society and government actors; and the joint definition of performance standards for service provision, budgetary transparency and financial management will be a central aspect of implementation. In joint decision-making different actors always have different levels of authority and control; and the operation of these is not always transparent or vested in formal positions. In a situation where country actors have all the formal authority but are heavily dependent on donor resources, staff from donor agencies may be in a position to dominate the PRS diagnostic and formulation process.

'Initiation by stakeholders' is a term more suited to the project context than to policy, which by definition is initiated by the state, at least formally. The ultimate control over the PRS in-country lies with politicians and with international actors, who formally approve the strategy. However, there are opportunities at limited but significant points in the PRS process for **civil society initiatives to influence** decision-making and, once decisions are made, to strengthen accountability by **monitoring** the delivery and quality of policy. The degree of citizens' control might be considerable at the point when public endorsement of the PRS is needed. Citizens' groups are also able to initiate citizens' juries and citizen-led monitoring and evaluation processes and, within a

framework agreed with the authorities, to control the performance of central and local government and service providers.

The discussions of the PRS process and planning cycle above have clear echoes of the 'project cycle'. Underlying this approach are several assumptions which civil society may regard as technocratic and questionable. Key questions which could be asked are:

- Will central government staff regulate the process fairly, including the interests of all key groups among the poor?
- How will conflicts and differences of views, priorities and perspectives be mediated and resolved in developing the PRS?
- Will the underlying objective of obtaining resources from donors influence the analysis and process, leading to a tendency to adopt priorities which are in line with orthodoxy in the donor community?
- To what extent can people in poor communities really participate in a process taking place on the scale of national policy? If intermediary structures take on the role of representing their interests and views, is this position based on any formal accountability to the constituencies for which they claim to speak?

It is difficult to see any answer to these questions, apart from affirming that the formal political system of the country concerned has to provide legitimacy and leadership in these areas. Capacity in the field of governance is therefore critical to an effective PRS process. Donor agencies need to strengthen their own understanding of this area in order to ensure that the effects of their interventions in the process strengthen, rather than undermine, government accountability to domestic constituencies. Within this broad field, however, it may be productive for donors to engage to enhance the capacity of poor and excluded groups to influence public policy and make claims on services. Donor agencies have a legitimate interest in promoting the goal of poverty reduction where this is fundamental to accountability to their own constituencies. They also need to be sensitive to the fact that public policy in partner countries has obligations to the non-poor as well as the poor.

2.4 Summary and implications for PRS

For ease of identifying entry-points for participation in the PRS and planning how to make the process participatory, it may be helpful to think of the PRS as a cycle comprising the following stages: preparatory analytical or diagnostic work; formulation; approval; implementation; impact assessment or evaluation. Such a planning framework is offered only as a descriptive aid to planning participation, not as a blueprint. The PRS process will take place against a backdrop of the normal political and budgetary cycles of the respective country, and should iterate with them. At each stage, participatory approaches can add something to the process.

- Stakeholders will probably include central government, local-level government, personnel, civil society organisations representing poor sectors (e.g. Church leaders, trades' or farmers' unions, traditional

authorities, development NGOs), academic researchers and analysts, politicians and political parties, the communications media, people in poor communities, donor agencies, the non-poor. For most of these some form of participation will be appropriate, in many cases via spokespeople or representatives. This implies selection processes, the criteria for which will have to reflect the objectives of the participatory process.

- Using one of the participation typologies available (e.g. that which distinguishes four levels – information-sharing; consultation; joint decision-making; initiation and control by stakeholders) it is possible to map out at the country level what kind of engagement, for whom, with what degree of authority, control and influence, the process can offer.
- Central government is responsible for overall governance of the PRS process. Some governance challenges will be: how to regulate the process fairly and permit fair representation of all key groups among the poor; how to handle conflicting views; how to avoid undue influence by donors and creditors when setting priorities and developing the strategy; how to scale up the perspectives of poor people to this macro-policy level and guarantee legitimate, accountable intermediation of these.
- The interests of two groups who will not necessarily participate nonetheless need to be taken into account when developing the process: donors and the non-poor. Notwithstanding the central importance of country ownership, donors have a legitimate concern with linking their resources to poverty reduction; their commitment to the PRS is thus important. The non-poor also have a legitimate interest; building their commitment to the process from the outset will facilitate implementation and sustainability.

SECTION 3 PARADOXES OF OWNERSHIP

The experience reviewed in this synthesis is rich and diverse. It is also all we have to go on in terms of experience with participatory approaches to policy at this point. Much of it comes from initiatives to formulate donor assistance strategies with the involvement of country governments and civil society; donor-funded participatory poverty assessment exercises; or NGO engagement with multilateral donors over governance issues and development priorities. The PRS process differs from these in a way which is fundamentally important to efforts to promote participation. More than any other development partnership framework so far – more than the Comprehensive Development Framework (CDF)⁴, much more than the Country Assistance Strategy (CAS)⁵ –, it is to be owned by the country. The major lesson about country-level ownership drawn from recent work on participation in the policy arena is that ‘a central facet of the ownership debate is the need for Southern *country* rather than simply Southern *government* ownership’ (Richmond & McGee 1999: 7). These issues present a series of paradoxes for external actors like donors and technical advisors, who aim to support the PRS process.

3.1 Country ownership of a Washington concept

The PRSP model was conceived by the multilaterals – albeit with significant inputs from civil society organisations⁶ – yet intended to be owned by borrower countries. Something similar happened with the CDF, in which countries are meant to be ‘in the driver’s seat and set the course’ (James Wolfensohn, cited in Wood 1999c). The fact that while the CDF was still being piloted the multilaterals conceived yet another new overarching framework for development has generated scepticism in some quarters about how sincere the multilaterals’ commitment to ownership is. An NGO critique (Wood 1999b: 6) suggests that while national *ownership* is desirable, national *leadership* is a more realistic expectation. In support of this charge, it points out that Southern governments were only brought into the PRSP preparations late in the process.

3.1.1 Country ownership means home-grown strategies

Country ownership of poverty reduction strategies means that there can be no ideal-type poverty reduction strategy. Uganda’s Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP)⁷ is frequently cited as a good example of a national poverty reduction strategy, and held up as a model. The process followed in developing the PEAP, undertaking

⁴ The Comprehensive Development Framework is, in essence, a new approach to development proposed by the World Bank in 1998. The Bank describes it as ‘a holistic approach to development, applied over a 10 – 15 year timeframe, with the country in the driver’s seat and strong partnerships among donors, the private sector and civil society’ (World Bank website).

⁵ The Country Assistance Strategy is the World Bank document which sets out the Bank’s strategy for its operations in a given country.

⁶ (Christian Aid 1998a; Foster & Norton 1999; International Monetary Fund & International Development Association 1999; International Monetary Fund 1999a, 1999b; Lockwood 1999; Tumutegerize 1999; UNDP/Bureau for Development Policy 1998.)

⁷ See MFPEP (1997).

the Uganda Participatory Poverty Assessment Programme (UPPAP)⁸, and using these to fundamentally re-orient the course of planning and budgeting in Uganda towards poverty reduction objectives, reflects strong national ownership and ongoing learning by government and donors about how best to incorporate participation and consultation, as described below:

The MFPED (Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development) circulated a draft of the PEAP in November 1996 in the hope of eliciting opinion through extensive national debate and consultation with district authorities, line ministries, NGOs, academics, and donors. This process, leading to the production of the final draft a year later, not only engendered consensus in the development community over national poverty eradication goals, but helped to build a sense of ownership and commitment to poverty eradication policy across government ministries. Late in the process, however, the MFPED personnel responsible for the PEAP realized that the consultative process had been exclusively Kampala- and elite-based. In mid 1997, MFPED staff participating in a World Bank Country Assistance Strategy mission to Soroti and Kabale found that the PEAP priorities were not necessarily shared by the communities they consulted. Recognition of the importance of understanding local variations in poverty has prompted an exercise in participatory poverty assessment. The PEAP will be continuously revised in the light of findings from the UPPAP.

Source: Goetz & Jenkins (1999a: 13).

Thus, ownership was initially created among key figures influential in politics and institutional processes, and later extended to the public at large, both as electorate and as the main beneficiaries of poverty reduction policies and programmes. Subsequently, as noted in Section 5, findings from the Uganda PPA, and the capacity-building and attitude changes which resulted from bringing key actors into the process, have generated still wider ownership of the poverty reduction objective throughout the Ugandan public sector.

Without detracting from the PEAP's many merits, it should be noted, firstly, that this Government-led plan takes precisely the overarching, poverty-mainstreaming form envisaged for the PRS, and secondly, that the PEAP strategy itself reflects current poverty orthodoxy. There are countries which have made significant progress in reducing poverty without ever having developed this sort of overarching, mainstreamed, national poverty reduction strategy. Vietnam is a case in point:

Although there has been quite a lot of poverty analysis in Vietnam over the past five years, work on a common national poverty reduction strategy is very recent. During the last year an intensive process of poverty analysis was begun in Vietnam. During the next year(s) this will be taken forward to develop concrete anti-poverty programmes and pro-poor policy recommendations for specific sectors. [...] we are only at the beginning of this process [...] International development aid in Vietnam is a fairly recent

⁸ See UPPAP (2000)

phenomenon, with INGOs⁹ having arrived about ten years ago and the World Bank opening an office only in 1994.

Source: Joachim Theis, Save the Children Fund Vietnam, pers. comm.

Nonetheless, even in the absence of a macro-level strategy and strong donor presence, substantial poverty reduction has been achieved already. Far-reaching land reform implemented by government through the 1970s and 80s resulted in a very evenly-distributed asset base by the 1990s, when selective market reforms (the ‘Doi moi’) were conceived and introduced by government, with strong impact on poverty (Government of Vietnam et al 1999).

The case of Vietnam shows that an overarching strategy aiming explicitly at poverty reduction, developed by government with support from donors, along PRS lines, is not the only viable policy approach to poverty reduction. The contrast between Uganda and Vietnam suggests that a pluralist concept of the PRS is vital if the stress on ownership is not to prove merely rhetorical. An interesting test will be which criterion prevails – degree of country ownership or degree of policy orthodoxy – when countries produce nationally-owned strategies which, unlike the PEAP, do not incorporate all the elements of the poverty reduction approach favoured by the international financial institutions.

There are signs that the NGO community is already deeply wary about the depth of commitment to country ownership of the PRSP. Signalling the danger that the ‘enhanced donor coordination’ envisaged under the PRSP model actually means a convergence of the agendas of Bank, IMF and World Trade Organisation, the NGO Working Group on the World Bank noted at a recent meeting:

“[...] it is not clear how borrowing countries will be able to stick to their national development plans if these differ from the priorities of the three heavy-weight institutions. The data on poverty and poverty reduction affirm that inclusive and context-specific strategies are necessary in order to combat poverty effectively. Thus, as the multi-dimensional aspects of poverty are being better understood, poverty reduction strategies are under threat to fall prey to unidimensional macroeconomic prescriptions.” (NGO Working Group 1999).

3.1.2 Limits to the lessons from participatory CASs

Much of the World Bank’s experience in promoting participation in policy work (as distinct from projects) has been with CASs. Partly in response to in-country and international pressure groups, ‘since 1996, a great deal of effort has gone into giving ownership of the CAS to both the government and the people of the client country’, a recent Bank review claims (Tikare & Shah 1999: 1). The main objective of participation in the CAS, according to the same review, is ‘to obtain information from diverse sources and to consider a wide range of perspectives from various sectors of civil society, or stakeholders, in the formulation of the CAS’ (p.1). In the light of this,

⁹ International non-governmental organisations

‘giving ownership’ seems an exaggerated claim: it is perhaps more accurate to describe participatory CASs as an attempt by the Bank – the owner – to enhance the relevance and effectiveness of the CAS while also generating a *sense of shared ownership* among interested parties in country governments and civil society. It is incumbent on all parties involved to ensure that the same does not transpire for the PRSP.

In the same Bank review, country ownership – taken to mean a broad ownership shared by all sectors of society – is considered a vital ingredient for participatory CASs. Tools for promoting it are proposed (ibid: 9), but the sensitivities of attaining it are not underestimated:

‘If the participatory process is to succeed, [...] the government’s full support [is needed]. This is not easily achieved in cases where the government perceives that it is being coerced into ‘participating’ [...]. Because ‘triggers’ for disbursement are designed to limit lending if their conditions are not met, it is in the government’s best interests to do everything necessary to gain influence over setting the triggers.’ (ibid: 10)

While the review recommends basing the CAS draft on ‘the government’s domestic poverty alleviation plan’ (p.10), it cannot be assumed that the government will have one. Indeed, one of the hardest challenges facing governments is that many do not, and that in some countries the PRS process has to start from a low level of national priority or awareness about poverty reduction. Where this is the case, broad national commitment is enhanced by adopting measures and approaches which bring government and non-governmental actors face to face, better to understand each other’s contexts and priorities; and also by ensuring that the participatory process in question is well-integrated with existing decision-making cycles and structures, including parliamentary and budgetary processes (p.11).

3.2 What role for donors?

Conceding ownership to borrower countries implies conceding control over the PRS. Yet donors have legitimate concerns relating to use of debt relief funds, state responsiveness to poverty issues and accountability to citizens, which lead them to attempt to influence the process. That the PRS is a government framework, not a donors’ framework, makes donors’ supportive role more complex than merely sharing ownership of country assistance strategies which essentially belong to their funders. Ultimately it is governments who will be accountable to both their populations and donors for delivering on PRSP commitments.

3.2.1 An enabling role

In the PRSP preparation process governments will ostensibly take the lead on choosing whom they consult, deciding on which areas to seek advice from non-government sources, and defining poverty reduction targets and monitoring indicators. However, the issuing of guidance by donors on how to facilitate a participatory PRS process may raise doubts as to how much latitude governments actually have. While there are inputs the World Bank and bilaterals can usefully provide, in order to avoid violating the principles of ownership they need to

refrain from assuming the role of intermediaries standing between Southern governments and their national CSOs or poor populations. In a nationally-owned, participatory PRS process, the main facilitator is the government, the main participants are national civil society actors, and the World Bank, IMF and bilateral donors are another category of participants, albeit enabling participants who can put financial and human resources at the disposal of the facilitators.

3.2.2 Institutionalising participation in donor agencies

An overview of experience produced by IDS to assist the World Bank in mainstreaming participation in the CDF argues that for building partnership and ownership, changes in donors' policies approaches and behaviour is just as vital as changes within target countries (Blackburn et al 1999). The overview summarises steps already followed and outstanding needs identified by four donors in reviewing their own efforts to mainstream participation (Aycrigg 1998; Forster 1998; INTRAC 1998; LaVoy 1998). The CDF's central principles being ownership and partnership, the overview is concerned especially with how donors' participation mainstreaming efforts can enhance country ownership of national development programming and partnership between donors, country governments and civil society. These lessons are thus relevant both to donors in attempting to play a supporting role in PRS processes, and to country governments learning how to lead them. They are reproduced in summary form in Table 1.

The challenge for Bank staff in the context of participatory CASs is to retain a functional level of ownership of the process (Tikare & Shah 1999: 11–12). In the PRS context, the challenge for the Bank is to learn to provide optimal facilitation and support to the process *without* having any significant ownership of it.

3.3 Where there is little tradition of government-civil society engagement

Given that country ownership implies country control, the promotion of participatory approaches to the PRSP process by external actors in countries where government is not strongly committed to the participation of civil society, or to poverty reduction, requires sensitive handling.

3.3.1 Fostering broad-based ownership

Christian Aid's report on civil society participation in aid coordination argues for the coordination of aid to be undertaken in-country, driven by country-led programming and budgeting processes rather than donor ones, and shared between government and non-government actors (Richmond & McGee 1999). It acknowledges, however, that there are complexities involved in attaining such broad-based country ownership of aid coordination.

Table 1: steps taken and needs identified by four donors for mainstreaming primary stakeholder participation

	DFID	GTZ	USAID	World Bank
‘OWNERSHIP’				
Participation in project cycle	More flexible use of logframe and PRA	More flexible use of logframe and PRA Need for wider debate on meaning of participation	‘Customer focus’ ‘Customer service plans’	Need for more comprehensive and flexible project design approach
Human resource development	Secondments, job swaps, shadowing, distance learning Personnel continuity	Team learning Organisational learning Personnel continuity	50+ Participation Forum Sessions to raise awareness	Immersion training Optimum use of communications technology
‘PARTNERSHIP’				
Management frameworks	PCM too ‘front-loaded’ and consultant-dependent Longer consultations with primary and secondary stakeholders	PCM too ‘front-loaded’ and consultant-dependent Longer consultations with primary and secondary stakeholders More ‘open orientation’ phases	Piloting of ‘strategic objective’ approach Longer consultations with primary and secondary stakeholders	Country Assistance Strategies – better feedback and more systematic consultations; more integration with PPAs
Types of programmes	Longer time frames Increased inter-institutional collaboration, especially between donors Focus on sectoral investment programmes (SIPs)	Longer time frames Increased inter-institutional collaboration, especially between donors Support for ‘enabling’ frameworks such as democratic decentralisation	Longer time frames Increased inter-institutional collaboration, especially between donors New Partnerships Initiative	Longer time frames Increased inter-institutional collaboration, especially between donors CDF

Source: Blackburn, Chambers & Gaventa (1999): 15, drawing on INTRAC (1998), Forster (1998), LaVoy (1998), Aycrigg (1998).

The case of PRSs is at least as complex. With donors increasingly rewarding aid-recipients which commit themselves to poverty reduction, competition exists in some countries between governments whose pro-poor credentials and connections with poor communities are weak, and NGOs whose credentials as representatives of the poor’s interests may be more convincing. Furthermore, the concept of PRS as a vehicle for channelling debt relief into poverty reduction arises partly out of suspicions – or evidence – of improbity and corruption among governments, often fuelled or substantiated by in-country NGOs. A watchdog function is being assumed by

NGOs, in some cases foisted upon them by donors, which may prove crucial to reducing corruption, but is likely to be detrimental in some countries to government-NGO relations and counter-productive to efforts to cultivate their shared ownership of national PRSs.

Cases can be cited where NGOs, Bank and government have collaborated in national aid programming exercises but diverge in their opinions as to the success of the ‘participatory exercise’ or degree of ‘ownership’ achieved. One example is the National Dialogue and CDF pilot in Bolivia; another is the 1998 Mozambican Consultative Group meeting (Christian Aid 1999; Wood 1999c). Critical commentary on the CDF suggests that poor handling of relationships among key actors in some countries is leading to missed opportunities for improving government-civil society relations. The NGO Working Group comments:

While the PRSP suggests an equal space for civil society actors to participate in national poverty reduction and development processes, experience from pilot countries implementing the Comprehensive Development Framework [...] suggests that the Bank is not serious about civil society participation. According to various NGOs, the CDF appears to be serving more as a tool for coordination among donors (NGO Working Group 1999)

with relationships between governments and their private sectors and civil societies assuming secondary importance (Wood 1999c).

Whatever the state of relations between government and civil society, the endorsement of the PRS by civil society, even though it is not a legal or procedural requirement, might nonetheless be a necessary condition for the strategy to be implementable. While external actors cannot forge good relations between government and civil society where they do not exist – especially not while proclaiming commitment to country ownership of the process – they can at least avoid hindering the development of relationships. Each country context needs to be read carefully, and behaviour and approaches developed accordingly. In some cases this might entail refraining from mediating between government and civil society and allowing them to come together without donor tutelage. In others it might mean engaging directly with civil society; in others it might mean opening up spaces for interaction between civil society and government.

3.4 Summary and implications for PRS process

In summary, efforts are needed to ensure broad-based country ownership of PRSs. Ownership, like empowerment, cannot be given. Donors can help to create and maintain conditions conducive to national ownership, including the necessary revisions of their own policies and practices, and a flexible interpretation of the PRSP model according to country circumstances. Governments and civil society need to assume the new roles and responsibilities country ownership implies.

- The PRSP model is being applied to a range of countries with widely variant histories, institutional arrangements and policy approaches in respect of both poverty reduction and public participation. This diversity implies that no ‘blueprint for a PRSP’ can be devised, but that each national PRS must start where the country is at, in terms of poverty reduction strategy, participatory experience, and capacity and legitimacy of civil society. No single model can be considered ‘best practice’ to be followed by all: such replication is neither possible nor desirable for all countries.
- Country diversity implies, at one end of the spectrum, fostering innovative and challenging initiatives in countries already at the cutting edge of participatory practice; and at the other, accepting that the mere opening up of spaces for public information and consultation on poverty policy issues, for countries with no tradition of this, constitutes significant progress in the right direction.
- Nurturing collaborative relationships between government and civil society is a slow and in some cases a delicate process. This sort of advance in governance is an essential ingredient of development, an end in itself as well as a means to getting the PRSP in place. It therefore merits time and care, and recognition as a substantive form of progress. In some contexts it should be treated as an aim to be met as part of – rather than as a precondition to commencing work on – the PRS.
- Country ownership implies country accountability for the PRS. This needs to be based on legitimate political structures in-country.

SECTION 4 INFORMING AND BEING INFORMED

This section presents experience to date in relation to information-sharing and transparency for effective participation, and to the participatory generation of information for policy. It reveals the role of ‘upwards’ information flows, from the poor to state institutions, in providing accurate pictures of poverty and informing policy choices as to appropriate responses; and of ‘downwards’ information flows in creating awareness about processes and entitlements and thus permitting informed participation by the public.

‘Poor people have a long-overlooked capacity to contribute to the analysis of poverty – and without their insights we know only part of the reality of poverty, its causes, and the survival strategies of the poor’ (Robb 1999: xii, on Participatory Poverty Assessments).

‘Armed with [...] understanding people can become more knowledgeable about their rights, confident in asserting them when they are not being realised, and able to find the appropriate channels [...] through which to claim what they are entitled to receive’ (Pigou et al 1998:4, reporting people’s perceptions of the South African Bill of Rights).

‘[...] the sharing of information is key to any consultative exercise’ (Clark & Dorschel 1998: 1, on World Bank CASs)

The three citations above are all about information. The first is about the generation of information at the level of poor communities, to feed into national-level poverty reduction policy and make it better informed. The second is about the vital role of general public communication in a democracy, and the third is about the provision of information to prospective ‘participants’ in consultative processes to enable them to participate in a meaningful way. Experience shows that several kinds of information flow – ‘upwards’ and ‘downwards’, as well as ‘horizontal’, among networks and alliances – are essential in participatory policy processes for poverty reduction. This section synthesises learning to date.

4.1 Upward information flows: from people to policy-makers

In the context of the PRS, policy-makers’ need for a supply of good poverty information is self-evident. Information about the extent and depth of poverty among a population; the regions, demographic or occupational groups most affected by it; and the nature of their privations, is a vital input in the design of appropriate policy responses. Furthermore, periodic updating of this information – poverty monitoring – is required if poverty reduction strategies are to be relevant and effective over the medium and long term.¹⁰

¹⁰ Monitoring is also needed if government is to be accountable for delivering on its poverty reduction commitments. See Section 6 on accountability.

4.1.1 The contribution of Participatory Poverty Assessments¹¹

Much has been written since the early 1990s on the scope offered by participatory research for informing anti-poverty policy.¹² This literature emerged in the wake of the first experiments in Participatory Poverty Assessments (PPAs). As participatory approaches to poverty assessment and policy research have spread both in latitude – to many countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America – and in size and scope, their legitimacy has grown. From the start, two distinct but compatible cases have been made for them: one stressing the benefits of participatory poverty research in terms of more and better information, the other stressing the right of the poor to participate in defining and analysing the phenomenon and processes of poverty as these affect them. More recently, as PPAs come of age, a third case – also compatible – has developed, which stresses the opportunities inherent in the PPA process itself to open up spaces in which poor people’s perspectives can influence policy-makers’ perspectives and practices (see Section 5). Here we focus on the first case: that participatory approaches to poverty assessment can increase the breadth, quality and relevance of information at policy-makers’ disposal, thus contributing to the formulation of more effective poverty reduction strategies.¹³

The ‘better information’ case for a participatory approach to poverty assessment was well stated in one of the first and seminal documents on the topic:

National debates on poverty tend to be conducted in terms of material deprivation as measured by income, consumption or expenditure. Such measures have the advantage of enabling comparison between individuals or households, and are the basis of much description, analysis and policy prescription about poverty and its relation to national development. However, they are also subject to well-known limitations. It is difficult, for example, with such methods to capture the complex distributional aspects of poverty, or to be certain of having defined the appropriate social unit or units of consumption [...].

Anthropological studies of poverty have shown that people’s own conceptions of disadvantage often differ markedly from those of outsiders. For example, considerable value is often attached to non-economic criteria such as independence, mobility, security and self-respect. Participatory approaches to poverty assessment should be capable of identifying and exploring such local ways of perceiving well-being and livelihood security. Experience has shown that such perceptions emphasise qualitative dimensions of poverty, disadvantage and vulnerability which are poorly represented in conventional approaches to ‘measuring’ poverty’.

Source: Norton & Francis (1992: 13)

¹¹ ‘Participatory Poverty Assessment’ describes a programme of participatory research – and in some cases other activities – which aims to bring the voices of the poor into policy dialogue about poverty and measures to reduce it. For further information see Holland with Blackburn, eds (1998); Norton & Francis (1992).

¹² See, for example, Norton & Francis (1992); Norton & Stephens (1995); Booth et al (1998); Carvalho & White (1997); Holland with Blackburn (1998); Booth et al (1998); Robb (1999).

¹³ The third case is also covered in depth in this synthesis, in Section 6.

The multiple facets, complex distributional aspects and dynamic nature of poverty revealed through qualitative and participatory techniques have policy implications, in the sense that different problems require different policy responses. When poverty is seen through the lens of participatory research, the spectrum of policies impinging on it looks far wider. Hence, while policy-makers dispose of a wider range of relevant policy measures for combating it, they are also faced with a far more complex challenge.

PPA findings most relevant to policy-makers have been identified as the phenomenon of vulnerability, the seasonality of poverty, the isolation of rural communities, barriers blocking access to healthcare; differences in perceptions, realities and priorities between women and men; the value of safety nets in bad seasons and bad years to supplement coping strategies; and the importance to the poor of having multiple sources of food and income (IDS 1996: 3).

More recently, Robb (1999) illustrates that PPAs can disclose how particular social factors – gender, vulnerability, social exclusion on the basis of ethnicity, the prevalence of crime – shape people’s experiences of poverty and determine their priorities; and how such information can enlighten policy makers as to the most appropriate responses (p.22–23). The poor’s own explanations of the causes of poverty, and the dynamics of deprivation at levels other than the standard household unit (individual, intrahousehold, community) offer further clues as to the most effective policy correctives (ibid: 24) and permit the deployment of sharper policy instruments. Robb concludes:

PPAs are deepening the understanding and providing a dynamic picture of poverty. For example, all of the following insights have emerged from Zambia’s PPA: child-headed households, child labour, crime, violence, and prostitution as coping strategies; increased feelings of insecurity and lack of safety as an outcome of these strategies; seasonal fluctuations in sickness, rates of work, and access to food as triggers of greater vulnerability; and the impact of these new dimensions on people’s behaviour as individuals, as household members, and as part of a community (ibid: 25).

Several retrospective assessments of PPAs have drawn out the major practical lessons for PPA practitioners about how to do good PPA research (see especially Holland with Blackburn 1998). The main factors have been summarised by Robb (1999) and are reproduced below:

Box 2: Factors to consider at the community level to increase impact of the PPA

Research teams

- Develop trust between the research teams and communities
- Be aware of bad practice in participatory rural appraisals (PRAs). Facilitators need experience, skills in applying the tools, and the ability to hand over control.
- Training of teams takes at least two weeks to discuss the complexities of undertaking national-level policy analysis; match participatory tools with the research agenda; decide on methods of recording and reporting; create an initial framework for analysis of results; build up a team spirit; and discuss attitudes and behaviour. Experience has shown that compromising on training time leads to poor-quality research
- Teams should be aware of major policies linked to research agenda before going to the communities

Management of research teams

- Be aware of the difficulties in managing diverse research teams that often represent different ages, genders, and ethnic groups
- Research teams working with poor communities may experience some degree of trauma for which they are not prepared. Managers should understand that this outcome is possible. This is an emerging issue and more training is required for both field researchers and managers to find ways in which such outcomes can be better managed.

Research process

- Share information with communities on an ongoing basis
- Do not undermine community self-reliance
- Be aware of respondent fatigue and raising expectations. Many communities – especially those accessible from major cities – are the subject of excessive research
- Before initiating any study, review existing data and material pertaining to the area
- Identify credible, not just experienced, institutions to undertake research. Use existing NGO networks where appropriate to promote follow-up
- Allow for more flexibility in urban than in rural areas
- Link results of PPA with other institutions for follow-up
- Write clear site reports to disseminate to communities
- Recognise the limitations of the PPA. Participatory poverty research is not a methodology for empowerment

Methodologies

- Adapt the methodologies to the research agenda
- For greater community-level analysis and ownership, use PRA. Be aware of the dangers of rapidly scaling up PRA methods, which can undermine the quality of the research
- Avoid biases – triangulate data
- Quantify and record the number of people involved in the participatory research

Analysis and synthesis

- Understand the difficulties of drawing macro conclusions from micro analysis
- Present clear policy messages – do not present everything

Source: adapted from Robb (1999: 64–5)

As well as improving the reliability of poverty assessment, the information generated by participatory methods can be invaluable for designing participatory poverty assessment processes which will work. One dimension of poverty which only came to light through qualitative and participatory research (initially on gender dimensions of poverty and the impacts of structural adjustment on women in particular – see Elson 1995) is time poverty, or scarcity of work and leisure time which constrains poor people in their choices as to livelihood and other activities (Narayan et al, forthcoming; Brock 1999). This is obviously a dimension that anyone designing policies

and programmes intended to benefit the poor should take into account. But as well as enriching our understanding of what poverty is, time poverty has emerged as one of the major constraints on people's participation in projects and in policy processes. Mayoux (1995) points out that even where women's participation is not limited by their lack of the required skills and resources, 'participation can be time-consuming ... the additional time required for meetings and decision-making takes time away from production and thus has potential costs' (op cit: 247). Mosse (1995) notes the limitation on women's participation imposed by the fact that 'Organized PRAs [...] require the allocation of blocks of time away from field and house [...]' (op cit: 574). Researchers on the Uganda PPA found in an urban site that neither women nor men would not attend PPA sessions unless they were paid, in compensation for the earnings they were losing meanwhile (UPPAP team, pers. comm.). Payment for participants' time is increasingly recognised as a factor in raising the quality of participation (see Section 7). Since poor people allocate time on the basis of their own, rational, cost-benefit analysis, time poverty is likely to hamper participation in policy processes more than in projects, where potential benefits to participants will often appear more tangible, visible and direct.

Other 'intangible' dimensions of poverty revealed by participatory research to constrain participation include gendered constraints on women's mobility or public behaviour (Mosse 1995; Mayoux 1995; Welbourn 1991; UPPAP team, pers. comm.), fear of crime deterring people from attending sessions in the evenings or far from home; cynicism bred by unsatisfactory dealings with authorities or researchers in the past (McGee 1998). Such constraints need to be understood in a given context and taken into account in the design and management of participatory policy processes, for participation to be substantial and of a high quality.

4.1.2 The Structural Adjustment Participatory Review Initiative

Important as they are as a source of richer, more informative data for poverty reduction policy, PPAs are not the only kind of research which provides this. The Structural Adjustment Participatory Review Initiative (SAPRI) is a multi-stakeholder exercise, bringing together NGO, academic and World Bank personnel, in a programme of participatory research which seeks to gather evidence directly from specific demographic groups thought to have lost out disproportionately under structural adjustment programmes, and to issue recommendations for policy change. The critiquing of World Bank policy through SAPRI is only possible and plausible because it is based on research which is participatory, amplifying the voices of those negatively affected; and because it upholds certain agreed quality standards to which the Bank as a participant in the SAPRI team must have been party.

Although documentation on the SAPRI process, institutional arrangements and problems is available, little appears to have been published so far on SAPRI findings (an exception is Bretton Woods Update, December 1999). This might be due to any or all of the problems the World Bank has identified with SAPRI: the extensive costs (in time as well as money) of such a participatory and multi-stakeholder process; tensions around leadership and ownership; and methodological disagreements over what constitutes 'evidence' (Aycrigg 1998).

4.1.3 Monitoring poverty and policy

PPAs offer the scope for developing ongoing monitoring systems on the basis of periodic updating of the original PPA, possibly on a smaller scale or with a focus on a particular area (e.g. the capital city), sector (e.g. agriculture), population group (e.g. the elderly, orphans in AIDS-stricken countries, pastoralists) or dimension of poverty (e.g. insecurity, governance). Since the PPA is relatively young as yet, there are few examples of countries which have instituted them on a periodic basis for monitoring purposes. One exception is Zambia, where the national NGO and academic personnel who had carried out the PPA research (as well as numerous other participatory research projects) updated the PPA findings a year after the original PPA in order to monitor the effects on the poor of a new and drastic adjustment package (Participatory Assessment Group 1995). Subsequently, participatory poverty monitoring has become institutionalised, routinely conducted in conjunction with household survey methods for a more rounded picture of poverty (Booth et al 1998: 10).

In Uganda a key objective of the PPA is to monitor not only poverty trends but policy effectiveness and relevance on a sustained basis over the coming years. This strategy is already contributing to a review and refinement of the Poverty Eradication Action Plan, in an effort to maximise its effectiveness. If the national poverty reduction strategy is well-designed, participatory mapping of trends and priorities should reveal positive impact. If the strategy misses the point or has been outdated by changes in context, the mismatch between past policy focuses and the poor's immediate concerns should be revealed through participatory identification of priority policy areas. Although one of the UPPAP's great strengths is the extent of government ownership and participation in it, given the number of complaints from poor people about poor governance at the local level, it is recognised that policy monitoring may be best conducted by third parties with no connection to government – local and national NGOs – if respondents' and researchers' biases are to be avoided.

There is increasing interest in establishing poverty monitoring systems which combine participatory exercises with traditional household surveys, allowing one set of findings to complement or supplement the other or inform the process of conducting it. Carvalho & White (1997) examine 'the practice and the potential' for combining the quantitative and qualitative approaches to poverty measurement and analysis, and outline three ways of doing so: 'integrating quantitative and qualitative methodologies; examining, explaining, confirming, refuting and/or enriching information from one approach with that of the other; and merging the findings from the two approaches into one set of policy recommendations' (op cit: 16). Booth et al (1998) evaluate the relative merits of 'contextual' and 'non-contextual' methods¹⁴ and explore the potential offered by methodological complementarity for enriching the poverty profile – descriptions and understandings of the nature of poverty – and advancing more substantial causal explanations which can in turn generate better poverty

¹⁶ '{...} we try [...] to distinguish methods of data collection on a continuum from "contextual" to non-contextual [...]. Methods which are contextual [...] are those that attempt to capture a social phenomenon within its social, economic and cultural context. This includes obviously ethnographies and PRASs, but also survey-based longitudinal studies of single villages. On the other hand, any large-scale survey [...] will lie at the non-contextual end of this spectrum [...]. This is because [they are] designed precisely to collect information that is untainted by the particularities of the context in which it is collected' (Booth et al 1998: 11).

reduction strategies. Robb (1999) proposes an iterative cycle of poverty research, in which a first PPA raises research ‘hypotheses’ or questions for exploration via a standard household survey; the survey’s results test the robustness of the PPA results and influence the research questions and site selection for a subsequent PPA; this in turn sheds light on the survey’s results and raises new questions for testing in a later survey, et cetera (op cit: 10). The conclusion reached by Carvalho and White is shared by the other analysts:

[...] in most cases both approaches will generally be required to address different aspects of a problem and to answer questions which the other approach cannot answer *as well* or cannot answer *at all*. The need to build links between the two approaches cannot be overemphasised. (Carvalho & White 1997: 26, emphasis in original).

All these suggested combinations, as well as representing the best knowledge to date on methodological complementarity for poverty assessment, have the added advantage of observing the well-accepted principle of methodological triangulation, so central to participatory research (see Pretty 1995). This principle attaches ‘superior validity and reliability’ (Booth et al 1998: 5) to understandings of poverty which draw on data of different kinds, derived from a range of methods. Participatory research by itself derives much of its internal validity from triangulation between the various methods available; a combination of participatory with other methods is thus doubly rigorous in the sense that an approach already fortified by triangulation is then triangulated against another approach with different epistemological roots.

4.1.4 Participatory poverty research conducted outside of PPAs

Besides the participatory poverty assessments conducted with donor support for the explicit purpose of informing policy, there is a further body of experience with micro-level, non-policy-oriented participatory poverty research, which complements the policy-oriented participatory poverty research in unique ways. A recent synthesis is offered in Brock (1999), which was conducted as one component of the ‘Consultations with the Poor’ project¹⁵ and reviewed participatory assessments of illbeing and poverty undertaken outside of national, donor-supported PPAs. Although the sources reviewed consist of micro-level rather than national-level analysis and were not produced for policy purposes, many of the recurrent findings are highly relevant to policy processes. Brock acknowledges from the outset the challenges of integrating such research outputs with data generated through quantitative or macro-level approaches, but notes:

¹⁵ ‘Consultations with the Poor’ is a comparative study of poverty in 23 countries which has used participatory methods to examine poor people’s perceptions of poverty and illbeing, their priority problems, their perceptions of institutions, and their understanding of changing gender relations. The study was commissioned and managed by the World Bank, to inform the team that is writing the World Development Report 2000/1.

This collection of work repeatedly shows that, from the perspectives of the poor men, women and children, context-specific issues and their dynamics at the level of the household and the wider social networks in which it is embedded, are central both to the experience of poverty and to identifying and taking advantage of opportunities to leave it behind. This in itself provides a powerful argument for [...] finding ways to effectively use the kind of data presented here – which seeks to represent the issues from the point of view of poor people – to formulate and implement policy. This is not to suggest that macro level work is not important, but that micro level work is a part of the pattern of information about the causes and effects of poverty and illbeing that should not be ignored simply because it is not statistically representative or uniform (ibid: 7).

Thus, such micro-level research offers policy makers insights which are, firstly, relevant to the formulation and implementation of poverty reduction policy; and secondly, impossible to capture through research tools which pay less attention to micro-level social dynamics, context, and holistic analysis of problems. This second point may be illustrated with reference to the review's focus on the 'intangibles' involved in 'managing livelihoods at the household level' (pp.33–45). This section suggests that the intangible aspects of poverty and illbeing are better disclosed in this sort of research than in either orthodox household surveys or bigger-scale PPAs; are more amenable to policy solutions in some cases than in others (for example, crime and violence problems respond more readily to policy measures than gender-discriminatory behaviour within the household); and, if heard, possibly represent greater challenges for policy makers than do tangible aspects of poverty. Arguably, designing policies which impinge on power relations at the community, household or intra-household level is harder than designing a project or programme which increases people's control over tangibles alone; but may prove a more direct way to tackle poverty as described by people in these studies.

A common thread running through the findings reviewed here is the importance of institutions and their performance, the provision of information about entitlements to services and rights, and lack of equitable and affordable access to services (see also Section 6 below). It is a reasonable assumption that the poor's views of institutions and service delivery as reported in micro-level, anthropological research of the kind Brock reviews, will be more frank and comprehensive than those which emerge in national PPAs (always conducted by some sort of institution, even if only an NGO) or household surveys (generally conducted by state or supra-statal institutions, e.g. UN agencies). In the latter cases, findings on institutions and policy are likely to be biased by poor respondents' awareness of researchers' institutional connections: a form of 'courtesy bias' (Bulmer & Warwick 1993). Findings on these issues from micro-level, non-policy oriented research are thus worthy of policy-makers' attention.¹⁶

¹⁶ A similar case of 'courtesy bias' arises with research conducted by independent researchers, into a participatory process facilitated by an NGO relating to a government neighbourhood improvement scheme (Rydin & Sommers 1999). This found that people's participation was low as a result of their own, rational cost-benefit analyses of the value of participating. Such views were not revealed readily to the NGO project itself because of its central role in promoting participation.

Brock's conclusions point to the need to reverse the tendency for micro-level, non-policy oriented research findings to be marginalised in policy processes and the planning of poverty alleviation strategies. An additional conclusion we might draw, of particular relevance in PRS formulation, is that there are more ways of giving the poor voice in poverty diagnostics and monitoring than through district- or national-level PPAs and other large-scale participatory research studies. The identity and agency of researchers and facilitators matters in the process of seeking the poor's voices. Within the participatory research tradition agency and inter-personal dynamics are the subject of analysis and their possible consequences for findings are often explored explicitly, to avoid accidental bias; but even so, drawing on participatory researchers and facilitators from non-institutional, even non-NGO backgrounds, and on participatory exercises conducted at micro- as well as macro-level, may well offer access to a fuller understanding of problems, and more creative and effective responses to them.

On the micro-level participatory research, Brock concludes:

There is little here that is new information. [...] It sometimes seems that our enthusiasm to search for the new, to reach a different conclusion or find a fresh theory, is a way of distancing ourselves from the everyday realities of poverty and illbeing. A great deal of what the material reviewed in this report tells us is that what we have to learn is how to ask, to listen and then to act according to what we have heard (op cit: 63–4).

The history of PPAs seems to follow the course Brock charts: the early PPAs were remarkable for the new substantive insights they offered on the nature of poverty, whereas the 'second generation' PPAs (South Africa, Uganda, and others forthcoming) are less noteworthy for new findings than for fostering and enabling new institutional characteristics, protagonists, owners and processes. The lesson for PRSPs is that, while poverty information generated by participatory methods offers essential insights for forming a robust understanding of the nature, processes and variations of poverty, fresh participatory research might unearth less new information than new and more effective ways of applying the lessons of participatory assessment to policy formulation, implementation and monitoring, especially through the exploitation of the new spaces and relationships offered by the participatory research process.

4.2 Downwards information flows: from policy-makers and service providers to poor people and service users

The supply of information by decision-makers to prospective participants and interlocutors is a vital ingredient for enabling participation at all levels of policy process – to make constitutional democracy a reality, to allow advocacy organisations to perform their function of monitoring and influencing, and to make policy consultation exercises meaningful. Several studies and reports document failures at each of these levels to make the necessary information available, and highlight the futility of affording 'access' to people and organisations to participate in policy processes, when they do not command the necessary skills or capacity to exploit the opportunities such

access represents. Many argue that these cases do not constitute the promotion of participation, and that facilitation and enabling actions are essential complements to any declaration of ‘access’ to make it effective: ‘abstract rights without concrete mechanisms of access are meaningless’ (Pigou et al 1998: 83).

4.2.1 Awareness of rights

The importance of potential participants having a working understanding of the issues and entitlements at stake is illustrated by the example in Box 3 below.

Box 3: public perceptions of the state of realisation of human rights in South Africa

A research study was conducted on public perceptions of the state of realisation of human rights in South Africa, given the constitutional focus on socio-economic rights (Pigou et al 1998). Its most important finding was that:

[...] knowledge of the socio-economic clauses in the Bill of Rights as constitutionally-guaranteed rights, rather than as demands to be advanced and met in a political process, is poorly spread among the population [...]. Knowledge of abstract and constitutionally-guaranteed socio-economic rights is poor, but knowledge of specific policies that have a bearing on these rights is more widespread, though still limited. When a right is translated into a concrete policy that is widely advertised, implemented and monitored by a government department, people come to realise that right is theirs to claim.

Otherwise, they do not, so never claim it.

Source: Pigou et al (1998: v).

To allow meaningful public participation in debates about rights, the report continues, clear definitions of the state’s understanding of rights need to be established, challenged if necessary, and widely disseminated to clarify understanding of what can be expected of government and what cannot. This is state accountability at its broadest and most basic level.¹⁷

Many Northern advocacy NGOs have assumed a pivotal role in accessing information from decision-making institutions, sometimes through ingenious means, and disseminating it to associates located further from the global centres of power or enjoying less advanced communications technology than they. Others, going a step further, work to equip Southern partners with the technology they need to access this information themselves, without brokerage. The ‘Democratising Bretton Woods Institutions Reform Project’ of the Washington-based Center for Concern, for example, aims to strengthen and broaden the citizen networks that have access to high-quality information on the World Bank, IMF and World Trade Organisation, by creating a cascade-like dissemination mechanism via ‘lead regional partners’ and networks of local organisations in the South (Nelson 1999).

4.2.2 An essential ingredient for effective consultation or participation

In policy consultation processes where institutions and decision-makers invite scrutiny, consultation and/or participation by civil society, it is their duty to create a climate conducive to informed and critical public debate;

provide those invited with both the information they need to comprehend and analyse the process and be able to contribute to it; and give feedback to participants after the event, sharing the resulting documents, explaining the grounds on which contributions were incorporated or left out, and outlining follow-up plans.

The creation of a conducive climate for public debate is greatly aided by the development of an effective public communication strategy on the issue in question, using the mass media. Governments' use of these channels for information dissemination is improving gradually, but no faster than NGOs': in Bolivia CSO-sponsored television advertisements publicising issues of public interest have far outstripped state information dissemination efforts (Cowan Coventry, pers. comm.).

Noting that many attempts by civil society to participate in aid coordination fora are thwarted by lack of timely, accessible information, Richmond & McGee (1999) point out, citing Clark & Dorschel (1998: 1) that:

'the sharing of information is key to any consultative exercise' – in relevant languages and in sufficient time to prepare satisfactory input prior to the [event]. Without appropriate information, CSOs cannot make informed and analytical critiques of government and donor activities (p.19).

Of the cases of civil society 'participation' in Consultative Group meetings which Richmond & McGee discuss,

Mozambican CSOs were not provided with any information to prepare [for a Consultative Group meeting], putting them at an immediate disadvantage and making them feel they were not true participants. In Bolivia the World Bank and some other donors have consistently circulated consultation documents in English and, even where they are printed in the appropriate language, inaccessible and jargon-laden language can also prevent NGOs from offering informed critique (p.19).

Reviewing participation of primary stakeholders in World Bank CASs, Tandon & Cordeiro (1998) report similar findings in most of the nine countries they covered, with provision of feedback especially poor (p.16). Indeed, the question of proper information and communication has attracted attention in several reviews of participation in CASs, conducted both by the Bank and by critical outsiders,¹⁷ and is featured in the Bank's 'Consultations with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs): general guidelines for World Bank staff' (Edwards 1999).

Nonetheless, however efficiently the institution performs this duty of supplying the needed information, advocacy and campaigning actors will always seek information sources of their own, which will harbour less vested interests than the target institution in question and will offer the possibility of counter-views, triangulation and balanced assessment. Pigou et al (1998), for the case of the South African Bill of Rights, stress that it is not only information dissemination by state institutions which is needed, but also the existence of, and access by lay-

¹⁷ More specific issues and examples of the right to information on government programmes and service providers, are found in the Section 6, on accountability.

¹⁸ For example, Clark & Dorschel (1998); IBRD et al (1998); Boyd (1999); Tikare & Shah (1999).

people to, systems for data-collection and processing, for activists wishing to influence policy processes or monitor and evaluate their effectiveness (p.83).

Ensuring that the information supplied by decision-makers and institutions can actually be used by prospective participants involves spelling out terms and acronyms which will be unfamiliar to the uninitiated, giving institutional and process maps which explain details of the structure and functioning of target institutions and processes, and providing guidance as to where further information may be obtained or who the responsible units or contact persons are for a given issue. Demystification will be needed. This is an area in which NGOs have considerably greater experience than formal institutions (see Section 4.3 below).

4.2.3 At the interface between civil society and donors or governments

To permit constructive engagement with the public and the electorates they represent, bilateral donors and governments need proactive strategies for demystifying themselves too. Christian Aid in a recent study on the quality of UK aid to India (van Diesen 1998) found Indian respondents dissatisfied with DFID's transparency, accessibility and provision of information on its activities and programmes. It made the following recommendations, both broad and specific, to address this:

Box 4: recommendations on DFID's interface with Indian civil society

- One step towards improving DFID's interface with civil society is to hold broad-based consultations on the Country Strategy Paper currently under development. The consultations with international NGOs is welcome, but we feel that direct consultation with Indian NGOs, academics and other relevant elements of civil society is crucial both in terms of process and content.
- Another way to begin formalising relations between DFID and Indian civil society is to initiative broad-based consultations on the direction of British aid to India. These could be an outcome of the consultations on the new Country Strategy Paper and could be modelled on the example of the annual Development Policy Forum planned by DFID in Britain.
- A third and final suggestion is for the DFID office in India to create a single 'window' for its interaction with civil society beyond direct project partners. This 'window' could be the first contact point for people seeking to obtain information, people keen to provide input and ideas and organisations that want to submit proposals for funding.

Source: van Diesen (1998: 15)

In the same year DFID's consultation process on 'Strengthening DFID's support for civil society' concluded that:

Providing information should be an integral part of all DFID's work. This ensures that people [...] in poorer countries are informed of DFID policies and procedures and that DFID is more transparent about its structure, systems and staff. It is a prerequisite for all other types of engagement [with civil society] (DFID 1999: 4).

4.3 Sharing of information between civil society actors

Key strengths of the international community of development NGOs are their recognition of the power inherent in information and the importance of information flows; and their innovative approaches to sharing information horizontally, between northern and southern NGOs, and among NGOs in the same country or region.

4.3.1 *Demystifying institutions and official processes*

Good publications which demystify the Bank, IMF and multilateral development banks have been produced by lobbying and campaigning organisations.¹⁹ There are as yet few published documents which demystify for a readership of non-experts and concerned public the impenetrable workings of their own governments. Noteworthy exceptions are the publications of the Women's Budget Initiative (WBI) in South Africa (see Budlender 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999; Hurt & Budlender 1998), and of the Uganda Debt Network and Uganda Women's Network (1998). The WBI explains the competing needs for demystification presented by the post-apartheid situation in South Africa, which parallels the needs arising at local government level in many countries where decentralisation has outpaced capacity-building of local government actors:

[...] one of the strong motivations for our work is to allow greater participation in policy and budget debates. Here we think firstly of parliamentarians. We know that among the post-1994 public representatives, even in the national parliament there are many who do not even have a school-leaving certificate. When we think further to NGOs and community activists, there are many more who will not have the time, energy or skills to read the primary research reports. In order to address part of this audience, in 1998 we produced **Money Matters: Women and the government budget**. This book contains simplified 'translations' of selected chapters from [the WBI's previous publications] at a level which we hoped a second-language English speaker with ten years of education would understand (Budlender 1999).

The Uganda publication, aimed at civil society organisations, details the processes of budget formulation and allocation of public expenditure, and presents recommendations to government and CSOs on how a better-informed civil society can engage with these.

¹⁹ For example, Development Bank Watchers Project (1998), 'A Guide to influencing the World Bank's Country Assistance Strategies'; Ruthrauff (1997), 'An Introduction to the World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank and International Monetary Fund' and Ruthrauff (1998), 'Guidelines for Influencing the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank'; Bread for the World's 'News and Notices for World Bank Watchers' and Bretton Woods Project's 'Bretton Woods Update' which offer frequent and free digests of relevant information to civil society actors globally. Other examples from the Bretton Woods Project and associates include the published proceedings of a meeting at which the growth model beloved to the Bank and IMF was unpacked and critically analysed by a range of civil society and academic actors (Both Ends & Bretton Woods 1999), and an analysis of the Bank's Genuine Savings Indicator for non-experts (Everett & Wilks 1999).

4.3.2 Strengthening public claims on information

Whatever the paucity of published documentation, there are numerous processes under way which will expand the public's ability to claim the information necessary to participate in policy processes. Two examples are shown below of NGO-led capacity-building initiatives which stress the public's and CSOs' access to information for participation, in the Ugandan example in the national budget, and in the Malian example in monitoring the quality and uses of international aid.

Box 5: Budget Advocacy Workshop in Uganda

The Uganda Debt Network (UDN) conducted a workshop on budget advocacy for Network members organisations in October 1999. The Global Women in Politics (GWIP) Initiative of the Asia Foundation, and the Institute of Democracy in South Africa (IDASA) provided technical assistance. The activity brought together a complementary group of international experts including UDN's expertise in debt advocacy, GWIP's expertise in advocacy planning, training and constituency building, and IDASA's expertise in infusing national budgets with a gender perspective.

Participants were from 15 civil society organisations, including a women's network and resource centre, the Uganda Manufacturers' Association, the national NGO Forum, and National Farmers' association, and the National Organisation of Trade Unions. The workshop:

- Equipped participants with skills in advocacy and lobbying;
- Increased their knowledge of the policy environment;
- Identified key state actors in policy planning and formulation;
- Discussed and identified strategies to influence them;
- Identified potential issues around which to design advocacy campaigns;
- Developed advocacy strategies that combine constituency building, message development, and persuasive lobbying.

Source: Adapted from GWIP (1999) and Lisa Vene-Klasen, pers. comm.

Box 6: capacity-building for NGO monitoring of the quality of aid to Mali

Christian Aid's policy staff have been working on the quality of bilateral and multilateral aid since 1998, and have produced a series of case studies on aid quality over the past two years (on India, Ethiopia and Mozambique). It was felt that the direction of this work should shift towards capacity-building among partners to facilitate local processes of aid quality monitoring and advocacy. An opportunity to pursue this intention arose in Mali in 1999. A policy officer from Christian Aid worked with an African consultant and the local Christian Aid Field Officer in an assignment designed to build the capacity of Christian Aid's Malian partners in this regard.

The objectives of the assignment, which consisted of limited research and an advocacy capacity-strengthening workshop involving representatives from the partner organisations, were:

- To draw up a profile of the quality of aid to Mali;
- To raise awareness of partners about the quality of aid;
- To provide tools and skills to participating partners in the areas of collecting and analysing data on aid interventions and provide clues on how they could go about raising issues with concerned authorities about the quality of aid;
- To enlist partners' interest and commitment to participate in a national 'observatory' for monitoring the quality of aid and to work out the modality for its operation;
- To work out with partners the form and substance of future Christian Aid support and follow-up for the operation of the 'observatory' and to make concrete recommendations to Christian Aid on this.

Source: Alemayehu & van Diesen (1999)

4.4 Summary and implications for PRS process

In summary, from past experience with participation of civil society in policy processes it is clear that information must be viewed as a prime resource in two senses. Policy-makers need to ensure that they are better informed about realities other than their own if they are to design and manage effective participatory processes, and also need to complement traditional understandings of poverty with the sort of poverty information best disclosed through participatory research. The public and CSOs, on the other hand, need to be well-informed about the workings of policy institutions and processes to be able to engage with them, whether in collaborative or adversarial mode. Experiments in applying participatory research to policy issues offer decision-makers ways to be better informed; advocacy NGOs' significant experience leveraging access to information and spreading it through their networks, whether for advocacy purposes or to fuel participatory engagement with decision-makers, is both a strength for civil society as it seeks to engage with future policy processes, and a resource from which facilitators and participants in future processes can learn.

- Governments need to be well-informed about poverty and the poor, which means that they need the sort of information generated through participatory research as well as that from household surveys. Extensive experience with participatory research on poverty, and for policy purposes, now exists to demonstrate the power of such approaches to disclose hitherto unaddressed dimensions of poverty, and causal relations between people's social, geographic and economic circumstances, their poverty, and government policies.
- Governments need to recognise and address information-poverty. It is one dimension of poverty; it is also a constraint on any participatory, consultative or dialogue process between Government and civil society. Addressing the need to inform people about rights, entitlements, government policies and processes will enable participatory processes to happen, as well as contributing to the greater and more distant goal of empowering and improving the lives of poor people.
- Governments need to inform people about the PRS process, through broad public communications strategies using mass media. Not only does the initiation of a PRS process need to be announced and discussed, but a channel established for ongoing communication, whereby people are kept up to date on activities, progress and opportunities to provide feedback on the PRS.
- National and international NGOs have a wealth of experience in producing and sharing useable, accessible information about institutions and processes, to permit meaningful participation by non-experts and concerned citizens. This expertise could well be drawn on by governments needing to establish greater transparency and mutual understanding with civil society and the public at large, to enable participatory PRS processes to happen.

SECTION 5 INFLUENCING POLICY THROUGH PARTICIPATORY PROCESSES

Policy can be influenced by participatory processes themselves, as well as by the information they can generate. This section shows that the PPA has evolved since its inception, when its function was informational, into a sophisticated and complex process for influencing the formulation and monitoring of policy. The PPA exemplifies a collaborative relationship between government and civil society, with these parties working towards a common goal²⁰. A different model of policy influencing through participatory process is the more adversarial approach of campaigning and lobbying of government by non-governmental actors. This is illustrated here using selected examples of policy influencing by international and southern NGOs.

What all these participatory processes have in common is the objective of amplifying the poor's voice, to the level where it can be incorporated into policy negotiations and influence their direction.²¹

5.1 Policy influencing through Participatory Poverty Assessment processes

PPAs are now giving rise to a fast-growing secondary literature which analyses their strengths and weaknesses in relation to other research approaches. Much of this analysis remains at the level of the information PPAs produce.²² It is now recognised, however, that:

[...] PPAs have the potential both to give us a fuller understanding of poverty, and to make it more difficult for poverty to be ignored or sidelined by politicians and other decision makers (Booth et al 1998: 5).

In stating the case for participation in poverty assessment Booth et al assert that stakeholder involvement in the process, 'by helping to give the poor a voice, bringing new actors into the policy dialogue and encouraging those who decide priorities to engage actively with these discrepant perspectives, [...] alters the terms on which policy is decided' (ibid: 3).²³

²⁰ There are many other sorts of participatory process involving government, besides PPAs, some of which are covered in Section 6 on accountability. Others, beyond the scope of this synthesis, include focus groups and surveys of consumer satisfaction.

²¹ There is, of course, little point in the poor having voice if they still do not have influence; and influence is only possible if policy-making institutions are receptive to the voices they hear. The question of state responsiveness is beyond the scope of this paper, but the point merits noting.

²² See Section 4.

²³ That it can now be asserted that this particular application of participatory tools leads to empowerment of poor people through the route outlined by Booth et al (1998), helps to resolve a tension many participatory practitioners experience. This tension is between participation for instrumentalist purposes and participation for transforming and empowering purposes. In contrast to PRA, adopting participatory approaches to conduct poverty assessment is an extractive exercise rather than one which empowers the poor people involved. It implies 'a shift along this spectrum from process to product that forces the PRA community to re-examine the values underlying participatory approaches [...]. Participatory tools are put to use to enlighten policy rather than necessarily to empower local people' (Holland with Blackburn 1998: 3–4).

5.1.1 ‘Second-generation’ PPAs

While many PPAs have now been carried out,²⁴ it is only the most recent – ‘second generation PPAs’ – which have made this sort of policy influence an explicit objective, or documented the means by which learnings flow into policy processes.

Bringing together diverse teams of facilitators and researchers in innovative and longer-term processes, these ‘new generation’ PPAs open up spaces for engagement by local government officials and NGOs: the ‘street-level bureaucrats’ who play vital, often unacknowledged, roles in the shaping of policy on the ground [...]” (Cornwall, forthcoming).

Two prominent recent examples of PPAs influencing policy are those of Uganda and Vietnam. Designed to have a wider influence than merely generating better information, both are hence linked to other consultative and institutional processes – public and political accountability mechanisms, the budget cycle, administrative decentralisation, surveys, cross-sectoral poverty working groups. Boxes 7 and 8 below summarise these two experiences:

²⁴ According to Robb (1999), quoting Bank figures, 43 had been carried out by 1999. Other PPA practitioners and analysts would not term some of those counted therein as PPAs.

Box 7: budgeting for poverty reduction: Uganda's public sector responds to needs

Public sector programmes for poverty reduction can benefit enormously from participatory processes. A public debate on the allocation of public expenditure can help in developing a national consensus on the need for effective public action to reduce poverty. The process of establishing priorities gains legitimacy, and leads to better programme design.

Uganda has a clear vision of the public sector's role in poverty eradication, which is linked to a well developed process of consultation. The Poverty Eradication Action Plan involved wide consultation with individuals inside and outside government. Consultation has been extended directly to the poor via the Uganda Participatory Poverty Assessment Programme (UPPAP) which aims to institutionalise a participatory approach to poverty planning and monitoring that extends to the district level. DFID has played a leading role in supporting the UPPAP, and although the programme is in its formative stage, it is already helping to change government priorities and processes. Findings from the most recent poverty analysis have been incorporated into the 1999/00 Background to the Budget. A Poverty Working Group has also been set up comprising Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MFPED) officials, independent poverty analysts, donors, and civil society representatives. The working group intends appraising sectoral submissions for the 2000/01 budget for their focus on poverty. While work is still in progress, senior MFPED officials highlight important changes.

- Senior MFPED officials now have a better understanding of poverty and of the need to address it within an overall medium-term budgeting framework, and are eager to spread this knowledge more widely within government.
- Spending priorities are shifting, and are informed by having better consultation with the poor. Thus, expenditure on water and sanitation are set to increase in the 2000/01 budget, partly through additional funds to be secured from the enhanced HIPC initiative.
- In order that locally-specific priorities can be addressed, greater flexibility in providing conditional grant allocations to districts is being considered.
- The importance of the need for equalisation grants to assist poorer districts is being re-emphasised to reduce marginalisation and increase political stability.
- The importance of security (from insurgency, theft and/or violence) has been highlighted as a key poverty issue. The content of household surveys have been adjusted to capture additional information on this for policy development.
- The need for poverty monitoring systems which incorporate the findings of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies is more acutely recognised now.
- There is a clear recognition of the beneficial role that information (regarding rights, services, budgets, markets) can play in helping poor people to move out of poverty. Public accountability is thereby enhanced.

For this year's budget process, five themes are identified by the recently constituted Poverty Working Group, which stem from quantitative and participatory analysis that have been undertaken of various sectors – health, education, agriculture, water, and law and order.

- Benefiting the poorest 20% from sectoral allocations;
- Addressing specific concerns of women;
- Improving information regarding government policies, programmes and budgetary allocations;
- Addressing inequalities in access to services and opportunities across regions;
- Tackling poverty problems that require multi-sectoral responses, e.g. nutrition.

Source: Synthesis of ongoing work in Uganda, contributed by DFID.

Box 8: the Government of Vietnam and the PPAs: a process which takes participatory research beyond the final report

The outputs and benefits of the Vietnam PPAs go beyond the research documentation – four PPA site reports and a national synthesis report. This reflects the original objective of the PPAs, which were planned before the *Consultations with the Poor* exercise was initiated (see note below). The PPAs were carried out to inform the poverty debate within Vietnam and to complement statistical data in a new, national analysis of poverty.

The PPA research work was carried out by international organisations working in partnership with government in poverty alleviation at the grassroots level and, as such, the research was embedded in ongoing relationships and dialogue with local government. Linking this work to the national level through the Poverty Working Group (PWG) has provided an important opportunity to involve central government agencies in the analysis of poverty at a local level. The process has been powerful in demonstrating the value of opening up direct lines of communication with poor households in planning for poverty alleviation. Importantly, the process followed also means that research findings have an in-built link into government programming for poverty reduction and into policy making.

At a national level, the task of coordinating the PPAs fell to the World Bank on behalf of the PWG – the coalition of seven government ministries and eight donor and non-governmental organisations which was established to guide the drafting of the Vietnam Development Report (**Attacking Poverty**) for the Consultative Group meeting. There were many advantages of this arrangement. First, the PWG was actively involved and interested in the PPAs – the study agencies were members of the PWG and kept the PWG informed of progress. Government members of the PWG attended local-level PPA feedback sessions where findings were discussed and debated. At these workshops, it was clear to national government officials that local leaders who had lived in these areas their whole lives were endorsing the PPAs as fully reflecting the lives of the poor. Secondly, because the PWG was responsible for producing **Attacking Poverty** for the Consultative Group meeting, the PPA findings were fully incorporated into the discussions tabled at the CG. This attracted attention from policymakers at the very highest level and government requested donors at the CG to assist them in mainstreaming such techniques.

At a local level, each of the PPAs was carried out in partnership with local authorities. In some cases, this meant that local officials were trained in participatory techniques and took part in the training. In other areas, it meant that commune, district and provincial officials were closely involved in the planning and analysis stages, but not actually in conducting the field work. In all areas, however, it has meant that local authorities have been keenly interested in the PPA findings and have requested support in exploring ways of dealing with problems raised. At a local level, government buy-in to the PPA findings meant that these studies have a real chance of influencing decisions relevant to poor households. As an example, local officials in one of the Provinces are now lobbying for improved and more sustainable financial sector interventions that could provide services adapted to the needs of the poor on a sustainable basis.

The government has since further endorsed the PWG by requesting its assistance in developing a national poverty reduction strategy for the next five-year plan and ten-year strategy. The World Bank, UN and government coordinated a process of enlarging and reconstituting the PWG for 2000, with the aim of supporting and influencing the government initiatives currently in train.

Source: Based on material provided by Carrie Turk, World Bank Vietnam, prepared for **Consultations with the Poor** synthesis document²⁵; and by Ramesh Singh (Action Aid Vietnam). A further reference on the Vietnam PPA is World Bank 1999d.

5.1.2 Factors for PPAs to influence policy processes

Drawing on the World Bank's experience of conducting or supporting PPAs, Robb (1999) analyses how PPAs can influence policy, and summarises factors which need to be considered to increase their policy-influencing impact of PPAs. Although directed at Bank staff, some of her recommendations offer food for thought to governments needing to undertake a PPA, or civil society planning to engage with them in it.

²⁵ 'Consultations with the Poor' is a comparative study of poverty in 23 countries which has used participatory methods to examine poor people's perceptions of poverty and illbeing, their priority problems, their perceptions of institutions, and their understanding of changing gender relations. The study was commissioned and managed by the World Bank, to inform the team that is writing the World Development Report 2000/1.

Box 9: factors to consider at national level to increase the impact of PPAs

Understand the political environment:

- Undertake the PPA only after potential political implications have been thought through;
- Use the institutional, formal, personal and informal structures and networks and understand the impact they have on policy-makers [...].

Create a conducive policy environment if possible:

- Question the value of conducting a PPA where there is limited government support;
- Build dialogue to create a more open climate so that governments feel less threatened by the resulting data;
- Maintain a policy dialogue through continuous follow-up with various stakeholders;
- Use personal judgement and attune stakeholder involvement to the overall political, social, economic, and institutional environment in country. There is no blueprint approach to the timing of stakeholder inclusion in the policy dialogue.

Promote ownership:

- Include key policymakers from the beginning. Develop relationships with and understanding of key players;
- Consider publishing joint documents (World Bank and government) where appropriate;
- Know how to organise workshops with appropriate follow-up. Workshops are not the end of a process of participation. Final consensus might not be achieved so the documents should reflect the differing views. If people's views are not included, that should be explained. The quality and follow-up of workshops will affect that impact of the PPA and the relationship among participating stakeholders.

Strengthen the policy delivery framework:

- Identify a credible institution where participatory research could be analysed, coordinated and disseminated. Investigate provincial capacities;
- Work with institutions (universities, networks of social scientists, etc) already undertaking social research to ensure that research is not duplicated and the PPA becomes part of the body of social knowledge.

Source: adapted from Robb (1999: 54–5).

Reflecting on processes and lessons learnt in the main PPAs to date, Norton (1998) acknowledges that a PPA is not intrinsically participatory, being focused on a product (a particular, rich kind of poverty information) rather than on a process. Retrospective analysis of the Zambia PPA has recognised that ‘the primary objective of [it] was to give voice to the poor in a process of policy formulation rather than to enable the community to “own and use” information to develop action plans at the community level’ (op.cit: 144).

The emerging consensus amongst those involved is that the PPA creates a sounding-board for the poor in the policy debate, but that it is essentially an extractive process. This conceptualisation of the role of the PPA is often reflected in the relative emphasis given to product over process during the PPA. In-built constraints, often temporal and financial, mitigate against a more participatory approach, with implications for feedback into the community and continuing change at local level. In Zambia, the need to produce material and policy insights which could contribute to the overall poverty analysis resulted in severe time constraints. The entire PPA process, from research design, through training of the field teams, fieldwork, analysis and developing preliminary policy conclusions, had to be completed in four months. Following up on feedback and involvement of research in ongoing programmes was beyond the financial and time scope

of the South Africa PPA, weakening the principle of research being part of ongoing work. In Ghana, no financial or other allowance was made for revisiting the communities involved in the PPA (op cit: 146).

These shortcomings, easily identified with hindsight, are taken by Norton to reflect a lack of confidence in this new approach in its early days. ‘As confidence in the process grows [...], efforts should be made to ensure a minimum level of engagement both of primary and institutional stakeholders in the ongoing dialogue, whatever the constraints’ (op cit: 146). Box 10 demonstrates that these efforts have succeeded in the Uganda case. But the key lessons of this retrospective reflection are worth reproducing here, for the benefit of those designing future PPAs.

Box 10: the outcomes of PPAs can be considerably strengthened over the early examples by paying more attention to the following features:

- Negotiation of clear objectives early in the process;
- Training of research teams, especially in policy analysis using participatory research material;
- Better integration in national policy processes;
- More attention to integrating PPA results with other forms of policy research;
- More attention to verifying final results through cross-checking with community level participants.

Source: Norton (1997: 143)

Analysis of the UPPAP’s success in influencing policy (McClellan 1999) defines factors which are felt to be critical to its success, enumerating, among others, a set of factors comprising a conducive environment to poverty reduction; and a set of characteristics of the PPA process which maximise the scope for influencing policy. These are reproduced below, as design issues for consideration before embarking on a participatory poverty assessment exercise. There are, obviously, few countries which present all those factors listed as making up the conducive environment in Uganda, but the list outlines what other governments might aim for and illustrates how the nesting of a PPA within such an environment offers maximum policy influencing potential.

The speed with which UPPAP findings, released in draft in mid-1999, were taken up in crucial policy fora, was surprising, as illustrated by comparing a review based on field work in late 1998 (Goetz & Jenkins 1999a) with McClellan (1999). This was due in part to a concentrated attempt to synchronise the processing of results with key stages in the national budget and planning process (for example, the production by government of a semi-annual Poverty Status Report); and to start disseminating results as soon as they were available, in strategically selected fora, while continuing to work in parallel on refining and synthesising them for final publication.

Box 11: Utilising the PPA to influence policy

Conducive environment for poverty reduction

- Macro-economic stability;
- Established system of decentralised governance;
- Good governance;
- National vision for poverty reduction;
- Commitment to poverty reduction formalised in comprehensive strategy;
- Mechanisms for setting budgetary priorities in line with poverty reduction objectives;
- Commitment of government resources to poverty reduction;
- Poverty monitoring system in place.

Characteristics of the UPPAP process which maximise the scope for policy-influencing

- Ownership of the PPA by government;
- Location of the PPA process within government;
- Strategic methods of dissemination of PPA findings;
- Flexible, reflective mechanisms of policy review;
- Institutionalisation of consultations with the poor;
- Strategies to ensure sustainability of the PPA process.

Source: adapted from McClean (1999).

5.1.3 PPAs and community-level impacts

This synthesis has concentrated on how poverty-reducing impacts can result from the incorporation of findings and other, more experiential, outcomes into *national-level* processes. This begs a question about the scope of PPAs for catalysing community-led initiatives which advance poverty reduction objectives on the community's own terms at the local level. It has been suggested that the PPA process helps set the stage for *communities to initiate their own local processes* of transformation. Indeed, PPA researchers often leave research sites convinced that this kind of activism will ensue, as a consequence of the collective and individual analysis which has gone on. Rapport built with PPA teams, which may include local government officers and NGO activists; the sharing of information by PPA researchers about rights, entitlements and government policies and programmes; and the action plans – intended or not – which have developed out of PPA exercises. Yet hard evidence on sustained community initiatives arising out of PPAs remains scant and elusive. Few evaluations or assessments of PPAs exist to document evidence of this: one exception is Agyarko (1998) on Ghana, which documents a mixed picture. That few sustained success stories at community level are known, that some PPAs are still being designed with no attention to how community process might be developed and supported, and that others attempting to build this in are finding it a difficult principle to implement (e.g. UPPAP) ²⁶, suggests that

²⁶ A dissatisfaction that many of those involved have experienced with the 'Consultations with the Poor' is precisely this: that in designing the twenty-three PPAs no attention or resources were allocated to developing or supporting community-level activities catalysed by the PPA process. In the UPPAP, resources were allocated for supporting ongoing processes in the thirty-six research sites; but the money available is small compared to needs and expectations,

investigation is needed into what happened in PPA communities after the PPA. If constraints on sustaining the momentum catalysed by the PPA can be identified, this information will provide extremely useful inputs for government or non-government actors seeking to formulate and implement broad-based, national PRSs.

5.2 Participatory processes outside of government

While PPAs are the object of much current interest and will no doubt receive fresh impetus under the PRSP framework, they are but one in a range of ways for the poor and their representatives to influence policy processes. There are numerous other, more direct or more adversarial ways for civil society to influence government policy. From the perspective of civil society actors, engagement in PPAs is a way of working *with* the government (or in some cases, donors). Some of the examples reviewed in the next section, on accountability, are better described as working *outside* of government. Circumstances in a given country will dictate to what extent each of these strategies is advisable or feasible, and what the best combination might be for greatest impact on poverty. From the perspective of governments, a range of historic, political, sociological and other factors will determine whether spontaneous civil society activism is welcomed or repudiated in a particular country; but even in cases where there is little room for that, PPA research may be feasible, and if undertaken, will surely foster improvements in understanding between civil society and the state. Herein lies one of the greatest innovations of participatory policy processes: the face-to-face interaction of actors from very diverse backgrounds, occupations and socioeconomic classes, with little past exposure to each other's worlds, to pool their knowledge, influence and energy in a common purpose.

5.2.1 Policy influencing through NGO advocacy, campaigning and lobbying

The examples of participatory processes supported or spearheaded by NGOs which have sought to influence macro-level policy are myriad, although in general poorly documented. We include some here as a reminder that in some countries there is as yet only a weak basis for a collaborative relationship between civil society and government. In the worst cases, the collaboration represented by an ideal-type PPA is impossible and, where participatory processes have been used to influence policy, their 'participatory' quality has often lain not in bringing together civil society and government but in fostering participation of the poor in developing the NGO agenda and then forcing open high-level policy debates to admit poor people's voices. These forms, illustrated here with a tiny sample of the various different tactics and levels of advocacy,²⁷ are nonetheless a valid part of

and there are the inevitable problems of avoiding the creation of dependence, and containing communities' expectations.

²⁷ The sample, besides being tiny, is heavily influenced by the availability of written information about NGO advocacy initiatives. The fact that a call for inputs, sent out to NGO contacts, received little response, is an indication of the scarcity of time, facilities and capacity at the disposal of most advocacy NGOs for systematically documenting their activities. It also suggests that governments looking for national experience and expertise in participatory processes need to consider other forms of accessing it than through the written medium, because this is not representative of the experience which exists.

each country's national experience in participatory processes and offer a resource in terms of human expertise, lessons learnt and networks and relationships established, on which the PRS process can draw.

The three examples presented below represent different strategies for NGO-led policy influencing. The first, the closest to the collaborative relationship between NGOs and government working on a PPA together, is about changing policy through changing attitudes of government personnel. An international NGO, with support from the World Bank, worked to mainstream a participatory approach in a major government programme in order to enhance programme effectiveness and accountability, for the benefit of the poor population.

Box 12: introducing participatory strategies into Mongolia's National Poverty Alleviation Programme (NPAP)

Concerned that the NPAP would be designed in a top-down way, Save the Children Fund supported the NPAP to introduce participatory strategies throughout the entire programme, to allow projects to be designed and choices made at a local level. In collaboration with a World Bank-funded position, a combination of funds were prepared which allowed scope for local choice by county officials as well as permitting local people to apply for funds for their own locally conceived projects. Facilitators were trained to conduct PRA in order to identify appropriate projects. Shifts in power and changes in attitude had to take place. This included the relatively small changes in central, regional and county officials behaving in a more participatory manner, listening and learning, and much larger shifts in projects being conceived locally as a result of participatory assessments. Women, in particular, were supported to conceive ideas or simply apply for welfare support.

Important to the whole process was a belief by SCF and NPAP that the alternative to a participatory process was a non-participatory one, involving top-down decision-making and project design, and that this was unacceptable. Even though the agenda was ambitious and could not be expected to work everywhere, participatory principles applied to the whole programme. Staff of NPAP were made aware of its importance at different levels and in all activities. Key to the design and implementation were two agency personnel (SCF and World Bank) who understood the range of possible empowerment at different levels of the programme, the importance of social and political relations and whose own style of work was empowering. [...]

The programme has had tremendous difficulties, not least as a result of slow release of funds, changes in government, and fluctuations in donor support (in part as a result of visiting consultants with limited understanding of, and commitment to, participation). Nevertheless, in July 1997 the NPAP was one of only three out of sixty ministries and agencies rated as excellent by the government's assessment of administration and financial accountability. Impact assessments now reveal good targeting at the local level and the increasing involvement and empowerment of the marginalised [...].

Source: Harper (1997a).

The second example illustrates a campaigning strategy for altering a government policy position. In this classic, broad-based, national advocacy campaign, as in many successful advocacy campaigns, initially adversarial relations eventually gave way to collaboration between government and campaigners in implementing a revised policy.

Box 13: The 'Campanha Terra' in Mozambique

The transition to a market economy in Mozambique from the late 1980s led to a national land policy in 1996. This policy promised to strengthen tenure security for poor farmers but also established the government's right to transfer land from the state to foreign citizens. The Bill sparked a lively national debate, and over the next two years the land issue became a major preoccupation for local civil society, the government and the international community. Several aspects of the draft legislation were problematic for small farmers. When a parliamentary debate on the law started, farmers led a march on parliament to protest that their proposed amendments should be considered, and to resolve land conflicts in rural areas. Other voices expressed concerns about the implications for the rural poor, arguing that the new legislation, by giving the state exclusive authority to allocate land for commercial exploitation, might endanger rather than strengthen access to and ownership of land by the smallholder subsector.

Initially, civil society assembled around principles that were defined in the negative: 'We do not want anybody to be without land, we do not want access to land to be determined by income and we do not want the family sector confined to marginal areas'. Opposition to the Land Bill coalesced around the 'campanha terra' – a coalition of over 150 civil rights organisations, farmers' associations and women's movements, as well as church groups, trade unions, academics and lawyers. Interestingly, many local organisations involved in the 'campanha terra' received financial support from bilateral donors and foreign NGOs, which is indicative of international civil society's deep concern with the land issue in Mozambique.

The 'campanha terra' had three phases. In the first phase the NGOs took the debate to rural communities, where they informed farmers about the draft land law, and collected reactions which they reported back to the Inter-ministerial Commission on land in Maputo. A wide variety of information dissemination media were used, including national and provincial seminars, and farmers' workshops; posters, pamphlets and a **Manual to Better Understanding of the New Land Law** in Portuguese and local languages, as well as comic books for the illiterate; theatre productions, local radio broadcasts, audio cassettes and video programmes.

Those involved found that smallholders did not want privatisation of land, but did want registration of communal land. Women's groups argued strongly for women's rights to land to be recognised in the Land Law (the first draft did not consider gender aspects at all), in keeping with the 1990 Constitution which recognises the equality of women and men. In the second phase, therefore, the 'campanha terra' sought to influence the revision of the legislation, and the campaign's major achievements can be seen in the amendments that were included in the revision. The 1997 Land Law formalises tenure security for smallholders and enshrines women's rights to own and inherit land. It also involves communities in mediating conflicts over land, and protects smallholders against the granting of concessions to investors in areas already under cultivation. This is not intended to discourage foreign investors, but it does ensure that smallholders are not disadvantaged because they have no title deeds to their family's land – their rights to this land can be established simply by oral testimony supported by the local community.

Following the successful campaign to revise the law, the third phase aimed to assist smallholders and the government in pilot registration of communal land and the issuing of title deeds. Additional information was also disseminated about the relationship between traditional, customary and legal rights to land, and about women's rights. Civil society organisations are currently engaged in sensitising men about giving land rights to women – a gender sensitive change in the law is unlikely to be implemented immediately with no resistance in traditional rural societies – and in assisting communities with conflict resolution around land disputes.

The land issue in Mozambique is an example of a populist campaign which achieved unprecedented success, in terms of a national government consulting the people and reacting constructively to civil society inputs. According to a prominent writer on Mozambique, 'The Land Law might have been the most significant anti-poverty action taken by this government'.

Source: Adapted from Greeley & Devereux (1999).

The third example is of civil society actors opting to support a government-led participatory process but subject to their own conditions.

Box 14: Civil society negotiates with government over participatory PRS in Bolivia

In Bolivia, the vehicle envisaged by government for civil society to participate in the PRSP is the second National Dialogue, a government-led consultation process in which selected civil society representatives are invited to take part.

The Catholic Church was among those civil society representatives invited by the government to constitute the Steering Committee for the National Dialogue. The Church has been active in promoting the Jubilee 2000 campaign for debt relief in Bolivia, and had already planned a series of participatory dialogues on poverty and debt around the country, in which grassroots perspectives would be brought together and fed upwards to the national policy level. The Church therefore declined the government's invitation to help steer the National Dialogue. Although it will contribute to the National Dialogue, the Church's main contribution to a participatory PRS will be through promoting this alternative dialogue.

NGOs responded to the government's invitation to participate in the second National Dialogue by proposing to government a series of conditions for their engagement, and publicising these conditions widely. They only accepted the invitation once the government agreed to these.

Source: draws on Wood (1999a, 1999b & 1999c) and Cowan Coventry (pers. comm.).

5.3 Summary and implications for the PRS process

There is then, a range of strategies for influencing policy using participatory processes. Who participates and how will vary according to strategy and to context. The contemporary Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA) represents a collaborative relationship between government, civil society and other partners in a research process wherein research findings and additional outcomes can transform decision-makers' attitudes and practices, and policies themselves. In a very different approach, NGO campaigns against national or international policy amplify the voices of grassroots actors, to change positions by monitoring policy or performance, challenging policy-makers, or enlightening them by exposing them to unfamiliar perspectives and bringing them face to face with those their policies affect. In each case, the exercise of gathering and amplifying the poor's voice is a necessary but not sufficient condition for policy influence: responsiveness on the side of the state is also necessary.

- A good PPA process is worth far more than the qualitative information it can generate, as clearly shown by past PPA experience. A well-designed PPA process can itself serve as a vehicle for sustained policy-influencing, with poverty-reducing and empowering impacts. Extracting the full potential from a PPA process means designing it with due attention to the objective of policy and attitude transformation; implementing it without haste and with care to maximise learning opportunities and fruitful linkages between people and between processes; and monitoring its impacts on policy direction and effectiveness. Key ingredients for success appear to be government ownership of, and commitment to, a PPA; and the construction of relationships between government and civil society actors in the PPA process.
- Where PPAs have been undertaken already, follow-up investigation into their impact in researched communities would shed light on what stops communities from implementing their own solutions to poverty and related problems.

- Civil society in almost every country harbours some experience of participatory processes for policy change which will be a resource for government and other actors to draw on in preparing and undertaking a participatory PRS process. Where these experiences are little known or have taken place at local rather than macro level, international and national NGOs may be able to assist government in identifying the relevant people and processes – a step which in some contexts will constitute an important advance in government-civil society collaboration. The search must go wider than documentation, since most of such experience is not documented.
- While weak rapport or hostile relations between government and civil society in some countries need to be addressed in the course of developing a participatory PRS, they also enjoin realism in planning the process. In some contexts a PPA-style exercise would achieve little beyond its merely informational function because the preconditions for significant policy impact do not obtain. In such cases, civil society lobbying government for a more inclusive attitude to the PRS process may be the maximum form of policy influencing which can be hoped for in the short term, and should be duly supported by external actors promoting a participatory approach.
- Unless the voice of the poor – gathered or amplified by participatory processes such as those described – is fed into a receptive institutional context and accompanied by transformations in attitude, relationships, and spaces for interaction between policy-makers and the public, no sustained improvement will be secured.

SECTION 6 ACCOUNTING TO THE POOR

Participatory approaches have been used in the fields of governance and policy to enhance the accountability of state institutions and service providers to citizens and users. Mechanisms for securing accountability are particularly beneficial to the poor, given their relatively weak voice as voters or purchasers and users of services. PRSs will need to address accountability to the poor in three main respects: ensuring at the formulation stage that the PRS reflects the needs and priorities of the poor; ensuring during implementation that mechanisms are developed and enforced whereby the poor can contain corruption and hold government and service providers accountable for delivery of policies and goods; and building into the design the continuous monitoring by poor people of the fulfilment of PRS commitments more broadly.

A different argument for a strong focus on accountability in PRSs is that enabling the poor to demand and secure accountability is an objective in itself. While participation in budgets or service monitoring can deliver to the poor tangible benefits such as a more gender-equitable allocation of national resources, or effective access to a minimum health care package, it also delivers important intangible benefits, in terms of assertiveness and empowerment, which ensue from the action of calling a government, service-delivery NGO or firm to account for its performance. If it is accepted that powerlessness and social inferiority in the face of officialdom are themselves dimensions of poverty (as Brock 1999 strongly implies it should be – see Section 4), then empowerment resulting from participation in accountability initiatives counts as poverty reduction, and the development of accountability mechanisms by pro-poor governments is an end in itself.

Here we review two relevant areas of experience in securing accountability: citizen participation in budgetary processes, and citizen monitoring of service providers and local government. Given the nature of the task, as mentioned in Section 4 for participatory poverty monitoring, non-state actors need to play a central role in it. The experiences we have synthesised are mostly initiated by non-governmental advocacy organisations or research centres, with varying degrees of interaction with officials and institutions. Some cases, however, receive significant support from state programmes and institutions or even originate in them, and many non-government initiatives rely on performance standards established by government in efforts to improve their own accountability.

6.1 Participatory budgeting

Participatory budgeting describes the process in which citizens engage in debate and consultation to contribute to defining the balance of expenditures, investments, priorities and uses for state resources. So far, apart from a few well-known examples (the Women's Budget Initiative [WBI] in South Africa, for example) it is a relatively little explored area of participatory policy influencing, due in part to the dominant attitude among policy-makers that ordinary people 'shouldn't meddle in these matters' and to ordinary people's perceptions that such topics are too technical for them (Budlender 1999: 1). A motivating force behind the WBI is that the budget is the most important policy instrument of any government because, without resources to implement it, policy is only words

(Budlender 1999). Zie Gariyo, of the Uganda Debt Network, which has combated corruption in Uganda through engaging in a budget monitoring process, argues that unless people understand how the budgetary process works, how money is allocated, where it goes and for what purpose, an anti-corruption initiative is only a ‘feeble moral plea to folks who don’t yet respond to ethics in government’ (Lisa Vene Klasen, pers.comm.).

6.1.1 Some examples of participatory budgets

As a tool for poverty reduction, the direct participation of ‘beneficiaries’ has been found to permit more effective targeting of spending to areas and groups of greatest need. It can also be a useful tool for communication and advocacy, providing a focal point for sectors of the population to raise government’s awareness of their needs. In the Brazilian case described below, the process ‘cut the chains and bureaucratic barriers separating society from the state’, and provided a ‘positive tension’ between direct participatory democracy and representative democracy (UNESCO 1999). Sixty per cent of citizens of the state were found to be aware of the participatory budget process and millions of people participated, across all levels. The initiative was judged to break the ‘tradition of the political relationship based on the exchange of favours between the public power and the citizen’, which inculcates passivity; and to foster an active and mobilised citizenry (ibid).

Box 15: Participatory budgeting, Porto Alegre, Brazil

Local budgeting has been participatory in Porto Alegre since 1989, introduced by the city administration. It involves checking that the previous year’s budget has been implemented according to policy; and bringing together people from different geographical areas and interest groups to define investment and expenditure priorities for the forthcoming budget, based on objective criteria accepted by all the community.

A Regional and Thematic Delegate Forum and Municipal Council of Government Plan and Budget have been formed, made up of two government representatives (observers with no voting right), councillors and their elected substitutes from regions and thematic groupings, plus representatives of the Municipal Employee Association and Union of Inhabitants’ Associations. The mandate of councillors is one year, revocable at any time. Council coordinates and organises the process of conceiving the budget and investment plan and later checks execution, by holding weekly meetings where they debate plans and make links with the Executive.

The city is divided into sections according to geographic, social and community organisational aspects, to account for the difference in needs and organisational capacity of richer and poorer areas. Five groupings each cover a major policy issue (e.g. transport and traffic; health and social care). Two mass assemblies are held per annum (one to check the previous year’s budget, one to identify priorities and elect representatives for decisions over the forthcoming budget), following smaller meetings by theme and region to discuss priorities.

The final budget and investment plan (according to each region’s priorities, population, relative poverty and service levels) are drawn up, subject to approval by Municipal Council. The Executive sends the proposal to Municipal Town Councillors, and intense negotiation ensues over allocations. As a result some amendments are made, but no alteration to the global structure of the budget. The overall structure is respected and protected because it is seen to have emerged from a true process of political and social representation.

Source: <http://www.unesco.org/most/southa13.html>

Further examples of participatory budgeting can be found at the website www.internationalbudget.org

A second, and much-cited, example of successful participatory budgeting is the Women’s Budget Initiative in South Africa. This differs from the Brazilian example in that it operates at the national rather than the district

level, and focuses on correcting a specific dimension of political, social and economic disadvantage: gender inequality. Its basic premise is that by disaggregating the outputs of the budget process it is possible to ensure greater efficiency by targeting expenditures better, and also to monitor the equity of allocation, rendering the whole budget more democratic.

Box 16: South Africa's Women's Budget Initiative (WBI)

In 1995 the civil society WBI began to analyse South Africa's budget for its impact on different groups by gender.

Outside of government, the initiative analyses whether the budget addresses women's needs and makes adequate provision (financial and other) for implementing gender-sensitive policy. It seeks to identify indicators to measure whether resources are used effectively in reaching intended targets/goals (output/outcome indicators). It looks both at revenue and expenditure, taking on board the limited nature of financial resources available, and where it highlights a need for greater budgetary allocation in a particular area, this is balanced by identifying potential savings from expenditure which it sees as subverting gender equity. The initiative started small, with analysis in the first year of expenditure in six key sectors, identified for their close relationship to women's issues and for being policy areas to which women could easily relate.

Within a year, a parallel initiative for a gender analysis of the budget *within government* was launched. The Select Committee on Finance has a special hearing on women, at which the WBI and other organisations made presentations. The research is launched three days before Budget Day and presented to key stakeholders, parliamentarians, media, NGO and others, through plenary presentations and group discussions of sectoral findings.

The WBI began as an alliance of new parliamentarians (in the post-apartheid context, after 1994) and two NGOs with background in policy analysis. The roles and relationships of those involved are critical to its success:

- NGOs provide the expertise and time necessary to collect information, undertake research, produce analysis;
- Parliamentarians provide access to information, focus in terms of salient political issues and a strong advocacy voice, without which the analysis might have gathered dust or circulated only among a closed circle of gender activists;
- Government – the strong policy link implies that such initiatives are most successful when they are collaborative ventures between staff policy, budget, information management systems and gender units (though even in the WBI's case, such extensive intra-governmental collaboration seldom occurs). Government is expected to provide information, report honestly on what it is doing, what it hopes do and what difficulties it is experiencing in achieving its aims.

Analysis is undertaken by researchers from a range of NGOs, academic institutions and elsewhere. They are chosen for their knowledge of particular sectors and of gender issues. Researchers are supported by a reference group. These are parliamentarians, government officials, NGO members and others chosen for their knowledge of a sector, but often too busy to do analysis themselves. They provide information and insights while themselves learning to combine sectoral, gender and budget analysis. Researchers and reference groups change every year, in order to draw in the widest possible range of experience and reach out to a wider range of people. This has inspired initiatives concerning disaggregation by other interest groups (children, rural people, disabled, poor). There is a conscious effort to extend the network involved, using a snowballing technique for identifying reference group members.

A Gender Budget manual has been produced for government officials. Since 1998 the analysis has been disseminated through materials written in accessible, popular language, including simplified translations of key sections (for maximum accessibility, these were aimed at readers with just ten years of education and who speak English as a second language). Materials have been developed for workshops and training events.²⁸

Source: Adapted from Budlender (1996, 1998)

Further examples of participatory budgeting can be found at the website www.internationalbudget.org.

²⁸ The WBI is having a spread effect in Africa. An initiative modelled on it is developing in Uganda, led by Uganda Debt Network (pers. comm. Lisa Vene-Klasen, Asia Foundation).

6.1.2 Factors for effective participatory budget initiatives

Before citizens or CSOs can participate in budgetary processes, they need to understand them and have sufficient and appropriate information about them. There is exciting exploratory work going on in a number of countries on analysing the budget process, its transparency and the openings for participation which it affords. Two major centres of work in this area are the International Budget Project (of the Centre on Budget and Public Policy, Washington DC) and IDASA (Institute for Democracy in South Africa). IDASA recently conducted pilot research on fiscal and budget transparency in South Africa (Folscher et al 1999). The study generated a set of recommendations to the South African Government on the roles and procedures of legislative and executive, regulatory frameworks and information dissemination. On the basis of this South Africa pilot study, IDASA's Budget Information Service and the International Budget Project are now planning a three-country civil society research project in Africa on fiscal transparency and participation in the budget process. The aim of the research is 'to make government more transparent and to build a more credible platform for the involvement of civil society in budgetary policy-making and decisions'. A secondary outcome will be enhanced fiscal literacy and capacity for budget research among the partner organisations involved in the project in Ghana, Kenya and Nigeria, and a heightened awareness in those countries of what constitutes acceptable standards of governance.²⁹

Governments are showing growing interest in analysing their own budgets and budgetary processes from the perspective of particular groups of the population, most commonly from a gender perspective. In the mid-1990s the Commonwealth Secretariat commenced a pioneering cross-country initiative to integrate gender issues into national budgetary policies and procedures (see Elson 1996a and 1996b). Some more recent examples are those initiated in Namibia (Stark & de Vylder 1998) and Tanzania (United Republic of Tanzania 1999).³⁰

A further determinant of success concerns the mix of government and non-government actors involved. These two examples of participatory budgets are led by different sectors of society. The Porto Alegre case, led by district (state) government and working at the district level, is able to involve and coordinate a large proportion of the population who, in turn, provide the pressure for accountability from local government. The WBI, initially a non-governmental venture, relied on the cooperative interaction of NGOs with central government to bring about change, and hopes to involve ever wider sectors of the population as it proceeds. This strategy of working with government from outside it has the advantage of engaging government in gender sensitive work, moving it beyond a rhetorical commitment to implementation. Conversely, a similar programme in Australia was less successful because it failed to involve actors *outside* government, thus limiting possibilities for ownership and sustainability, let alone popular empowerment through participation – an experience which counsels a widely participatory approach. There are, then, trade-offs to consider in terms of the scale of the initiative, breadth and depth of participation, and working closer to or further from government.

²⁹ There are many more organisations around the world which conduct budgetary analysis and provide training to organisations wanting to engage with budget processes. See International Budget Project's website: www.internationalbudget.org.

The Brazilian case reveals the opportunities offered by fiscal decentralisation, since this permits a direct accountability relationship to develop between citizens and local government. The South African case demonstrates the importance of political openness, including a commitment on the government's part to clean up corruption and pursue greater transparency and more open communication with civil society. It also proves the value of involving a key group of reformers or 'champions', drawn from key ministries, where they can provide access to information and help channel citizen advocacy to strategic targets within government; and also from parliament, where they can influence political debate and culture, and publicise findings. Both experiences indicate that citizen-government relations can be improved by a greater understanding by citizens of the limits to available resources and the multiple claims on them. Both also reinforce the message that since policy is only as good as its outcomes, and since outcomes are dependent on resources, budgetary processes at local and central government level are a nerve centre for efforts by citizens to influence policy.

6.2 Citizen monitoring

Citizen monitoring refers to processes of accountability in the arena of local government and service provision. In this area too, accountability questions arise, firstly about whose priorities are reflected in the supply of services or performance of local government; and secondly, about the fulfilment of commitments made and performance standards underwritten by the government or provider. In many cases of citizen monitoring of the quality of local governance or service provision the objective is to improve the quality of life of the poor, either indirectly through stamping out corruption, or directly through improving their access to essential goods and services and responsive, effective governance.³¹

6.2.1 Empowerment through citizen monitoring

An interesting approach to participatory, grassroots citizen monitoring is the Community-based Monitoring, Learning and Action in the United States. This method not only offers the opportunity for tracking and monitoring government decision-making but also involves constituencies in research, systematically building power and capacity to bring about significant change and facilitating in-depth learning by large numbers of people on the issues which concern them (Parachini & Mott 1997: 10). One example of this approach in operation is outlined in Box 17.

³¹ The term 'social auditing', as well as describing a specific organisational development approach, is used broadly by some to refer to a whole range methods for helping organisations and institutions improve their social impacts, including some of those covered here. New Economics Foundation, for example, counts budgetary analysis, report cards and Right-to-Information activities as forms of social auditing (New Economics Foundation 1998).

Box 17: Community-based Monitoring, Learning and Action

The USA Empowerment Zone/Enterprise Community Learning Initiative

The EZ/EC Learning Initiative (LI), launched in 1995, is intended to monitor and measure the impact of the federal EZ/EC programme, document its lessons for community development and provide a national assessment for federal officials.

The monitoring is carried out by a cross-section of residents organised into a 'learning team'. The team members decide which local goals of the EZ/EC programme are most important to them, and assess how well these goals are being achieved. The LI seeks to build the knowledge and capacity of the learning teams to do monitoring and then helps them analyse and report on their findings and conclusions to local EZ/EC administrators and the federal government.

An informal assessment of this still ongoing process finds that the Initiative has significantly affected the relational dynamics, decision making and/or outcomes in many of the targeted communities, changing them for the better from what could have been anticipated if the community 'power structures' had been left to their own devices. The keys to this are seen as the work and very presence of the local learning teams and coordinators, backstopped by project staff and regional researchers. On a substantive level, it is reported that the teams have produced timely and in some cases ground-breaking information and analysis useful to EZ/EC decision-makers.

Source: Parachini & Mott (1997).

The system of community monitoring described here goes further than PPAs in delivering community empowerment as well as policy-relevant information (see Sections 4 and 5). It recognises explicitly the political nature of the impact assessment task, provides a grassroots perspective with the explicit objective of challenging large-scale government programmes and resource management procedures. It is not only an effective form of participatory accounting, but is empowering of participants. One limitation of this sort of approach is its prohibitive cost, given the high levels of technical assistance and coordination required, which effectively precludes its adoption in the South when substantial donor or government funding is not available. A further limitation to the strategy of using the public as 'messengers' to policy-makers is that conflicts arise when findings reflect negatively on local officials' work, leading to a tendency for officials to blame the messenger (ibid: 23).

6.2.2 Report cards

A cheaper and quicker method for holding service providers to account is that of 'Report Cards', an approach which has spread rapidly in India. Initiated by the Public Affairs Centre in Bangalore, this approach surveys the quality of public services and gathers citizens' proposals for improvements, using the market research technique of systematic sampling of all sectors of the population in a given area. The resulting 'report card' is presented to the service provider, with the aim of catalysing improvements in line with citizen demands. It is also widely publicised in the press, ostensibly to disseminate the information and educate citizens about civic rights and responsibilities but with the incidental effect of shaming poor performers.

Judged as a participatory process and in contrast to Community-based Monitoring, Learning and Action, the main limitation of report cards is the low level of citizen participation in setting the agenda, debating the issues and presenting or acting on findings. This reduces to a minimum the degree of empowerment afforded, and makes the ownership and sustainability of the initiative fragile. On the other hand, it provides a means for

accountability in contexts where people do not want or cannot commit themselves to full ‘participation’, with its time-costs and implications of long-term involvement, but are happy to provide this sort of market-research response and have it mediated and fed back to service providers or local government on their behalf.

6.2.3 Citizens’ access to information

The report card approach takes it as given that citizens have both access to the information they need to assess their satisfaction with services or government; and also that these will respond once users’ dissatisfaction has been expressed (Goetz & Jenkins 1999b). Goetz and Jenkins argue that the struggle for the right to information in India provides a much more effective means of holding officials to account, because it combines the quest for the necessary ingredient – information – with civic associations actually taking on themselves the task of exposing misdeeds and directly challenging the diversion of funds (op cit: 14).

Box 18: The Right-to-Information Movement in India

In Rajasthan, an activist group, Mazdoor Kishan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS), have introduced a process of ‘participatory auditing’ as a way of ordinary people seeking and using their right to information in collective fashion. Public hearings are held, in which detailed accounts derived from official expenditure records and other supporting documentation are read aloud to assembled villagers. The meetings are organised independently and presided over by a panel of respected people from within and outside the area. Officials are invited to hear local people giving testimonies, which highlight discrepancies between official records and their own experiences (as labourers on public work projects, applicants for means-tested anti-poverty schemes, consumers in ration shops, etc).

The activity of MKSS has led to the exposure of misdeeds of local politicians, private contractors, government engineers, leading, in a number of cases, to voluntary restitution. In broader terms, they have increased pressure at a regional and national level to grant the right to information, which could have implications for similar holding of local governments to account elsewhere in India. The strength of the movement is seen to be the result of the route through which people arrived at the decision to assert that information was theirs by right; the catalysing of an almost entirely bottom-up grass-roots pressure through conscientisation and public performance.

Source: Goetz & Jenkins (1999b).

This approach too has its limitations. Its highly confrontational style is simply not possible in contexts characterised by political repression or insecurity for civil activists. In many parts of the world where NGOs have assumed the function of service delivery on the state’s behalf, they will be unwilling to expose themselves by promoting or participating in such an initiative. The right-to-information movement does, however, illustrate the importance of government provision of information as an enabling factor for participatory accountability mechanisms to develop and operate; and also the potential for even grassroots activist groups to mobilise communities to demand and secure accountability from local government and service providers.

6.3 How participatory is this accounting?

The accountability mechanisms reviewed rest on varying degrees of participation and interaction of different actors. The WBI and Report Card methods are led by NGOs and other civil society groups which interact closely and in a non-confrontational, collaborative manner with government, only attempting to ‘educate’ and

mobilise community members on salient issues at a later stage or as a by-product. At the other end of the spectrum, the activities of the Community-based Monitoring, Learning and Action and of the Right-to-Information movement cast NGOs in a pivotal role throughout, in catalysing grassroots activism which progressively assumes the task of holding government to account, largely in a confrontational or challenging manner. This range of roles and interactions is summarised in the matrix below. The roles assigned to community members denote different levels of participation and degrees of potential empowerment.

Table 2

	Demands made or roles assigned to citizens	Role of intermediary organisation (NGO/CSO)	Degree of learning for government	Type of citizen participation	Level of citizen empowerment
Participatory Budgeting (e.g. Brazil)	Medium choosing and feeding priorities to representatives	Medium representatives from relevant CS equal partners to citizens	Medium - high challenged to adopt measures or explain why not	Delegated power	Medium
Disaggregated Citizen's Budget (e.g. WBI in South Africa)	Low information subsequently disseminated	High responsibility for research, advocacy, dissemination	High process of learning also taking place in government	Informing	Medium
Report Cards (e.g. India, Public Affairs Centre)	Low response to survey	Medium - high taking of survey, advocacy	Low presentation of findings, little to force adopt	Consultation	Low
Community-based Monitoring Learning and Action (e.g. USA)	High issue identification, research and advocacy by citizens	Medium support and training role, non-directive (decreasing over time)	Medium - high high level pressure, forces rethink citizen capabilities and needs	Delegated power	High
Right-to-Information Movements (e.g. India, MKSS)	High action taken by citizens	Medium mobilising role (decreasing over time)	High high exposure and pressure account for acts	Citizen control	High

6.4 Summary and implications for PRS process

The various strengths of these approaches make them suitable for use at different stages and in different arenas of participatory policy work. For the PRS process, the examples of participatory budgeting illustrate how research and advocacy – on various dimensions of poverty, or the conditions of one particular population group – conducted by civil society at local, regional and national levels can be fed upwards to the national level and

incorporated there. They also offer insights on how to draw in citizens at the local level, even into a government-led process. The on-going nature of both these strategies is an example of continued assessment and feedback as to how far government strategy is being fulfilled and is meeting both its own objectives and people's needs. At the local level, the experience of the Learning Initiative in the USA suggests methods of instituting accountability mechanisms at the grassroots, which operate increasingly independently of their NGO mobilisers and trainers.

- Experiences to date in participatory mechanisms for accountability demonstrate the mutual advantage to government and civil society of working collaboratively to enhance the relevance and performance of policies and services. Parties involved in PRS processes might aspire to the same mutually advantageous cooperative approaches.
- Spanning from local to national level, the experience to date offer models for poverty-sensitive budget formulation (WBI in South Africa) and civil society acting as watchdog in budgetary processes (Brazil, South Africa, Uganda). The analytical role adopted by the WBI and the watchdog role (both retrospective and ongoing) adopted by citizens' groups in Brazil would both constitute important contributions of civil society to the PRS process, in sharpening the focus on poor and otherwise marginalised people and in ensuring that debt relief is used efficiently, transparently and for the purpose for which it is intended.
- Citizens will need their capacity built in analysis of budgets and service provision to help inform the PRS at formulation stage. The capacity-building carried out as an integral and essential part of several of the initiatives reviewed offers models for the PRS formulation process: manuals, training workshops bringing together a mixture of actors from different areas of civil society and government, semi-permanent 'learning teams' initially under the tutelage of NGOs with advocacy expertise.
- For PRS implementation, the most salient lesson from the experiences reviewed is the need for citizen access to information, which has been achieved mainly through the involvement of information-brokers (parliamentarians, government officials) who are well-disposed and committed to a participatory process.
- For participatory budget or service monitoring to work, governments and service providers have to be receptive to the findings and feedback generated. PRSs thus need to include the establishment of agreements between citizens and government which bind the latter (both in its own right and as the regulator of service provision) to take action in response to them.
- Besides information provision to the parties directly involved, a wider information dissemination strategy is also critical to success. It raises general awareness, heightens the visibility of the issues at stake and creates a constituency for accountability-strengthening measures. Examples the PRS could draw on include large public meetings, the use of the press, and the publication of materials on the process in simplified language.
- Government is accountable to both citizens and donors for delivering on the PRS. To avoid undermining efforts by Southern governments and civil society to establish and operate their own systems and cultures of accountability, donors need to 'hand over' both responsibility for, and ownership of, accountability and

redirect their efforts to supporting capacity-building and information dissemination of the types mentioned above.

SECTION 7 ENSURING QUALITY IN PARTICIPATION

The extension of participatory approaches into the field of policy is relatively recent, so attention has focussed so far on entry points and applications in this new domain. However, participatory approaches have suddenly become a requisite component of PRSs, for these to obtain international financial institutions' approval. Making participation mandatory at this level and linking the flow of debt relief to it, raises the question of what standard of participation is acceptable. The development of quality standards becomes urgent.

This section deals first with some overarching procedural issues which emerge repeatedly as affecting the quality of engagement between civil society and government or donors. Progress to date in developing appropriate standards for gauging and monitoring quality in participatory policy processes is then reported, and the areas where capacity needs to be built are identified. Secondary sources are supplemented here by ideas and proposals on quality issues which arose in the workshop on 'Participation in PRSs' held at IDS on 22–23 February 2000.

7.1 Participation: authentic, representative and inclusive?

Guidelines and checklists for effective participation, pointers to best participatory practice and analysis of bad practice, whether focusing on policy or project contexts, are remarkably unanimous on certain points. The procedures followed by the convening institution(s) are often lacking in a number of respects, leading to a participation which is sub-optimal at least from the viewpoint of CSOs involved. What tends to go wrong with procedures can be summarised in Box 19.

7.1.1 *Authenticity of participation*

Many critiques of participation in project work have used the 'participation ladder', in various forms,³² to argue that the terms 'participation' and 'participatory' are used too loosely, often referring to information-sharing or consultation, which offer less popular involvement and at a lower intensity than does genuine 'participation'.

Reviews of World Bank CASs, and our knowledge of other donors' assistance strategies, suggest that civil society 'participation' in them rarely extends beyond information-sharing and consultation to shared agenda-setting, decision-making or any kind of empowerment for participants. Also, 'participation' is rarely evident in any but the middle stages of the initiative (commenting on a first draft, or contributing ideas as to focal areas), never in the agenda-setting or final drafting stages, or in monitoring and evaluating the policy's implementation. In most examples covered by the Bank's own retrospective reviews of CASs,³³ 'participation' tends to cease as soon as the published CAS is sent to those who commented on the first draft – if indeed the final product is ever shared with them at all. Both these facts constitute limits on the extent and quality of participation.

³² Often the Bank's schema of 'Intensity of Participation' is cited (see World Bank 1996). Others frequently used are Arnstein's (1969) one developed for Northern countries; and the 'Typology of participation: how people participate in development programmes and projects' developed by Pretty (1995).

³³ (IBRD et al 1998; Tikare & Shah 1999) and critical reviews (Tandon & Cordeiro 1998).

Box 19: What tends to go wrong with procedures

Expectations:

- Insufficient transparency on part of institution(s) as to their expectations and parameters of process;
- Insufficient attention to investigating CSOs' expectations and reconciling these with expectations of institution(s);
- Lack of clarity over who is accountable for the process and its outputs.

Timing:

- Insufficient notice given to CSOs of pending events or processes;
- Insufficient time allowed for genuine consultation or participatory process to occur.

Information:

- Not disseminated widely enough or in appropriate languages, styles or formats;
- Not disseminated in good time for CSO representatives to prepare their inputs, including consulting with constituencies;
- Not enough access to alternative, impartial analysis, produced by actors other than the principal institution(s) involved;
- Inadequate attention by institutions to provision of feedback to CSOs on what happened to their inputs – on what basis these were/were not included.

Representation:

- Participation is usually by invitation, and invitation by criteria which are not transparent nor devised on the basis of close knowledge of civil society in country;
- Those elements of the population which are hardest to reach – the poorest, furthest from capital city etc – are rarely represented.

Follow-up:

- Insufficient provision made for conducting follow-up with CSOs involved;
- Failure to take into account likelihood of changes in government etc which could threaten sustainability of process.

Sources: Coventry (1999), Richmond & McGee (1999), World Bank website (Guidelines and Good Practice for Civil Society Consultations), Tandon & Cordeiro (1998), Clark & Dorschel (1998).

Reviewing how DFID country strategy papers (CSPs) can become a better tool for poverty reduction, Booth & White (1999) note that although the CSP guidance notes require that poor people's perspective be incorporated in the analysis of poverty therein and the resulting strategy, most CSPs reviewed mention only consultations with government. While information on DFID priorities was shared with civil society (among other stakeholders) in several of the cases reviewed, only exceptionally was civil society participation significant, or sustained throughout the CSP process. In no instance was a role given to civil society – or indeed to government – in monitoring or evaluating the impact of the CSP.³⁴

Analysis of the extent and quality of participation by civil society in aid coordination fora similarly identifies a low degree of access for CSOs at the most significant stages of the process, where any access has been granted at all, and suggests it would be better termed consultation or information-sharing than participation (Richmond & McGee 1999).

³⁴ The authors suggest that this is due to the fact that no outcome targets are set at all, nor are ways for anyone – even DFID – to track them if specified.

The question of authenticity of ‘participation’ is intimately linked to access issues – whether participants have access to relevant information, in a suitably tailored form and appropriate languages; whether they are supplied with or at least enabled to seek contact with key actors (e.g. through government or donor NGO units or civil society liaison officers). It is also closely linked to issues of organisational capacity of NGOs and CSOs, especially availability of time; of the right mix of staff with the necessary skills activities as diverse as policy analysis, document drafting, negotiation, community mobilisation, financial accounting; and of networks of like-minded organisations to add influence and share tasks. Time is required to put these factors in place where they do not exist. Availability of sufficient time, and adoption of an unhurried approach by facilitators and participants, are also perhaps the most often cited weak points in experiences of participatory policy processes to date, and those which contribute most directly to making a travesty of ‘participation’ (Tandon & Cordeiro 1998; Richmond & McGee 1999).

7.1.2 Who is included, who do they represent, and how can one know?

Questions have been raised about whether all who should have been included were; and whether those participating as intermediaries were really representative of those for whom they claimed to speak. This issue is more complex than it appears. Those negatively affected by a policy or programme have stakes, as well as the prospective beneficiaries. In the case of participation in poverty reduction policy, the non-poor have a stake as well as the poor, and will probably want less rather than more resources to be channelled to the poor. Hence the critical importance of the governance of the governance of the PRS process, discussed in Section 2. A further complication is that it is often practically impossible for *all* stakeholders to participate, and representatives must be selected to speak on their behalf. Selection of intermediaries has to be based on either special skills (academics etc), or their credentials as representatives of the interests of poor and socially excluded groups.

This raises obvious questions about how to know whether a CSO or NGO is representative or not. The NGO Working Group on the World Bank, reviewing participatory CASs (Tandon & Cordeiro 1998: 15–16), points out the need for convenors of the participatory process to be fully transparent about the stakeholders consulted. Broad-based ownership obviously requires that those participating are seen by the wider public as legitimate representatives.

Richmond & McGee (1999), investigating civil society participation in aid coordination fora, encountered a significant scepticism about CSO representativity among the donor staff interviewed. They strongly urge development NGOs to attend to the question of their own representativity and relationships, on the one hand by clarifying their links to poor communities, and on the other by coordinating and work-sharing with other civil society actors at the level of national NGO networks (*op cit*). National NGO networks have a vital role to play here, in developing representativity criteria for their membership; encouraging and facilitating members to keep open communication channels with grassroots groups, the public at large and other civil society actors; and playing a validating function. The time question arises here: convenors must provide adequate time for

representatives to hold negotiations with their constituents, to reach consensus or common positions from which to develop representative and legitimate messages and input them at opportune moments in the process.

Some self-selection inevitably operates; and the right not to participate needs to be respected (Richmond & McGee 1999). Even when the boundaries for inclusion are wide – or perhaps *because* they are wide and no effort is made to compensate biases existing in society at large – there are always groups in the population whose voices are heard less clearly or not at all, unless special measures are taken to privilege them. This excerpt highlights some of them: the less literate, those not fluent in the *lingua franca* or major European Languages; elderly people; rural people.

In urban Bolivia, migrants from rural areas who have work in the construction sector discussed the construction workers' syndicate: 'We distrust the syndicate leaders because they have their arrangements with the bosses [...]. As we are from the fields, and sometimes we can't talk Spanish, they easily take advantage of us [...]. The language barrier in Bolivia is mirrored by a literacy barrier in Ghana: '[...] bank staff acknowledge the vast number of illiterate older men farmers who are [...] not aware of the agriculture input marketing credit system [...].' A more general absence of information in Tanzania has implications for the success of decentralised local government and its relations to central government. This information gap translates into resistance to paying taxes and non-participation in local government self-help projects [...] some villagers were unaware of the existence of district council budgets and of their legal requirement to contribute to them (Brock 1999: 56).

A vital yet often neglected aspect of being inclusive in participatory processes is choosing with care when and where meetings and events will be held, and at what level of protocol and formality. Richmond and McGee (1999) note that

the plush surroundings of one of Mozambique's top hotels were unfamiliar and intimidating for many CSOs invited to the [Consultative Group meeting], especially the most representative grassroots groups, such as farmers' associations and community groups (op cit: 17).

Pre-set, full workshop or meeting agendas were also identified in that study to effectively exclude the views of even those who are physically present at the event.

7.1.3 Gender biases in 'participatory' processes

Gender biases limit the extent that women can effectively participate in policy reviews or processes. This point is illustrated by Helen Wangusa, participant at a meeting of the World Bank External Gender Consultative Group who, in discussion on participatory CASs, pointed out that:

[...] many women's groups are not aware of what the CAS is. A real participatory process requires a long lead-time to prepare women's organisations through workshops, particularly at the local level. Women's organisations need a greater clarity on the CAS process, who can participate and the role of different groups. A key issue is whether women will be able to see the final CAS document. Referring to SAPRI, [...] it is difficult for many women's organisations to be actively involved as the research methods are very complex and technical and consequently there are only a limited number of women who can participate. The debates are too technical and difficult to transfer back to the country level. There is a need to focus more on unorthodox methods such as participant observation and oral history [...] (World Bank External Gender Consultative Group 1997: 18).

The incidental discrimination women experience in all power relationships (whether within their households or in civic engagement with powerful public institutions) requires special capacity-building and procedural measures if these voices – likely to express distinctive gendered experiences of marginalisation or deprivation – are to be included.

Claims that these voices are disclosed by PPA-type approaches have been challenged recently: Cornwall (forthcoming), reviewing PPAs from the perspective of their scope to deepen understandings of gender and poverty issue, reminds us that while PRA *can* be used to enhance the agency and voice of poor women,

a focus on gender is not implicit in the methodology, nor is it often an explicit element of PRA practice. Where gender has been paid attention, it is often through a deliberate emphasis on difference [...] or through the use of other tools alongside PRA, such as gender analysis [...] (op cit: no page).

Facilitation which pays no attention to the participatory process itself, or to how the process is affected by the researchers' agency and by power differences between participants, will tend to silence women's voices or lead to their being represented only at a superficial level, with no consequences for policy.

In relation to PRSPs, advice has been issued by the World Bank's Gender Team (Poverty Reduction and Social Development Group) on how to 'engender' PRSPs in Africa. It stresses that this question of integration – itself a participation issue – needs to be approached on at least three different levels in the PRS process:

Box 20: Levels at which gender needs to be addressed in the PRSP process

- Analysis: in analysing the gender dimensions of poverty and growth;
- Prioritisation: in determining criteria for prioritising some poverty reduction actions and relegating others; *and*
- Representation in participatory exercises – 'asking the women themselves': in identifying civil society participants in PRSP formulation, implementation and setting and tracking performance indicators.

Source: Adapted from World Bank (1999c).

7.2 Standards for quality in participation

Setting standards for quality in participation poses two challenges: what sort of benchmarks are needed to judge quality; and by what sort of process such benchmarks should be established.

Recommendations put to the World Bank by the NGO Working Group at the November 1998 international conference on 'Upscaling and Mainstreaming Participation of Primary Stakeholders' (Tandon 1998) argue strongly for the establishment and enforcement of minimum quality standards:

The first and perhaps the most important new generation issue for participation is to begin to set and enforce minimum quality standards. [...] Consultations have been attempted in different ways, but we have yet to have a minimum quality standards [sic] for information dissemination, for consultation, for duration of consultations, for types of capacity-building that needs to be done to enable consultation (p 3).

Others are also pursuing quality standards for participation. The UK Participation Group, has held electronic discussions on the need for them, and proposes a hallmark to be awarded to qualifying institutions or organisations; and new mechanisms for participants to appraise participation exercises (Richard Adam, Partners for London Vision, pers. comm.). A set of tools for 'auditing' community participation in government-led initiatives has been developed, on the premise that the rules of the game are too often set from above, institutional cultures are rarely compatible with true participation, and communities often lack capacity for effective participation (Burns & Taylor 2000).

7.2.1 Which benchmarks are needed?

Quality standards and monitoring systems can be devised for assessing the process and its outputs. They must capture several dimensions, in recognition that the process produces effects on participants, as well as concrete outcomes such as better policy.

Focusing on benchmarks for enhancing participation in World Bank policy work, Tandon (1999) suggests three basic parameters for defining a 'minimum acceptable level of quality of participation in any World Bank policy work' (p.2): minimum acceptable standard of participation; minimum set of procedures to be adopted to assure acceptable quality; and minimum expected outcomes of quality participation in a given setting.

Box 21: Defining an acceptable quality of participation

Proposed minimum standard of participation

The issue of minimum acceptable standards for quality in participation is not easy. One approach would be to ensure that the weakest and most powerless group is enabled to participate in the policy formulation. This will ensure that the voices not normally heard are included.

Expected outcomes of quality in participation in policy work:

- Quality of the resulting policy: in terms of how equitable, far-sighted and sustainable its effects are;
- Inclusiveness: the hearing and inclusion in negotiations of all the different perspectives and priorities on a particular issue;
- Broad-based ownership: attainment of widespread ownership of and support for the policy in the country and throughout the population;
- Capacity-building: enhanced capacities of various stakeholder groups and public agencies to enable participation in future policy work (based on Tandon 1999 p.3).

Proposed procedures to be followed are:

- Stakeholder analysis to be conducted for that particular policy;
- Identification of key partners in each stakeholder group;
- Provision of full information to key partners on past policy in this field, its impact, need and rationale for new policy etc; and support to enhance capacity of key partners where necessary, to permit them to understand and utilise the information;
- Facilitated consultation and negotiation across different stakeholder groups to bring out diverse perspectives and priorities and attain agreement on the resolution of differences;
- A defined and publicised procedure for providing feedback to all key partners and supporting them in the fulfilment of their roles in subsequent implementation of the policy;
- Built-in monitoring procedure providing feedback to key partners periodically throughout the whole process.

Source: Adapted from Tandon (1999: 3–4).³⁵

Three sets of indicators of citizen participation are proposed by Morrissey (2000), writing about the US Empowerment zone/Enterprise Community Learning Initiatives.³⁶

Box 22: Indicators of citizen participation: lessons from learning teams in rural EZ/EC communities

- Process indicators, to gauge the level and quality of participation in the ongoing development process;
- Developmental indicators, to gauge the impact of participation on self-development and community capacity;
- Instrumental indicators, to gauge the impact of participation on policy or change.

This framework is useful in that it distinguishes indicators of participation (extent and quality) from the impacts of the project or policy in which stakeholders participate.

Source: Morrissey (2000: 59).

Burns and Taylor (2000), in their work on auditing community participation in partnerships between government and communities, suggest three focuses (in Box 23), around which they develop nineteen indicators.

³⁵ The application of these principles to the particular case of participatory CASs is annexed in the document.

³⁶ Also referred to in Section 6. See Parachini & Mott (1997).

Box 23: Focuses for auditing community participation

- The participation strategies adopted by the partnerships;
- The structure, culture and management of partners' own organisations and the extent to which these allow them to engage and respond (partners' capacity);
- The organisational and social capital within communities (communities' capacity).

Source: Burns & Taylor (2000).

The following set of 'ten pointers to good practice', used by a member of the UK Participation Group, serves as an aide-memoire, and could be adapted for application to particular contexts, or, for those seeking numerical indications, developed further with scores attached to each possible answer.

Box 24: Ten pointers for good practice, which have all been raised by community members in discussions on this issue

'Everyone likely to be affected by the issue knew the process was happening.'

'The initiating body (e.g. the council) discussed and agreed the objectives with local people, as early in the process as possible.'

'Everyone had an opportunity to take part, in ways that were appropriate to their personal circumstances.'

'Information and all documentation relevant to the process was freely available to all participants.'

'The aims and objectives were fully discussed; conflicts were made clear and resolved where possible.'

'The process was adequately resourced and did not rely on voluntary efforts to run it.'

'Independent advisors helped ensure that the process was open, and this was acknowledged by the people who took part.'

'All the inputs were taken into account.'

At the end of the process a final assessment of what had been agreed, and what had not, was presented for discussion and agreed.'

'People taking part agreed that it had been worth their time and effort. There was no evidence that any groups felt that they had been excluded from the process.'

Source: Church C. (forthcoming 2000).

What exactly Church's statements might mean in a given setting, what Morrissey's process, development and instrumental indicators might be, which indicators arise from Burns & Taylor's three focuses, and what level, 'depth' or 'intensity' of participation is an acceptable minimum for particular actors in a particular case, is obviously partly context-specific. Further development of the concept of minimum standards for quality participation might involve distinguishing between the various levels or intensities of participation named by some analysts (Arnstein 1969; World Bank 1996; ODA 1995; Narayan 1995; Centre for Rural Development and

Training 1998), specifying what sort of activity constitutes each and giving examples of which level or intensity of participation might be appropriate to various types of stakeholder in different contexts. Judgements are required on how transferable the existing ladders and typologies of participation are to the field of policy, as opposed to the field of projects, for which they were devised, and on how they could be appropriately adapted.

At a workshop on 'Participation in Poverty Reduction Strategies'³⁷ a framework was proposed for ensuring quality in participatory PRSs. Given the different levels of experience with participatory approaches to policy in PRS countries, the process should begin with an assessment of the country context, which will dictate what quality expectations are reasonable.

Box 25: Ensuring quality in participatory PRSs

Step 1: Analysis of country context

- Current policy context;
- Participation context (openness, experience);
- Stakeholders, potential players;
- Who is in a position to monitor quality?

Step 2: Quality questions to be asked

- a. Who participates?
 - Representativity?
 - Inclusivity?
 - b. Which level of participation?
 - Intensity?
 - Control?
 - Influence?
- etc (for all the various players)
- c. How is process facilitated?
 - Information provision?
 - Feedback mechanisms?
 - Means for reconciling diverse views?
 - Capacity-building?
 - Attitudes and behaviour of facilitators?
 - Methods of facilitation?
 - d. Where in the process?
 - Design phase?
 - Implementation?
 - Evaluation?
 - e. When do players participate?
 - 'Timelines' of procedures?
 - Duration/longevity of engagement?
 - Sustainability?

³⁷ This workshop was co-sponsored by IDS, the NGO Working Group on the World Bank, and the Social Development Department of the World Bank, and held at IDS on 22 – 23 February 2000.

- f. For what?
- Impact on participants?
 - Process accountability?
 - Impact on policy?
 - Impact on poverty?

Step 3: Feedback answers from questions into future design and management of PRS process

Source: 'Participation in Poverty Reduction Strategies' workshop, IDS, 22–23 February (2000).

7.2.2 How should benchmarks be set?

How quality standards or benchmarks are established is at least important as their scope and content. Clearly, the sort of process which best befits the task of developing quality standards for participation is a participatory process. 'A sense of ownership over a [participatory monitoring process] and the results is recognised to be essential' (Gaventa & Blauert 2000), implying that people involved in the participatory exercise should themselves set the quality criteria by which it is judged. Ownership issues notwithstanding, care is needed in selecting who will set indicators and apply them, because quality monitoring 'does not necessarily benefit the people directly and has opportunity costs in terms of [...] people's time which should not be undervalued' (McAllister & Vernooy 1999: 69).

Burns & Taylor (2000) identified their three focus areas (above) by deriving from research the key questions which need to be asked on quality in community participation. The indicators look more like questions than easily measurable characteristics (e.g. 'The extent to which localities are able to be different to each other'). For each indicator guidance is offered as to a reflective process for stakeholders to follow to reach conclusions, preferably with external facilitation (ibid).

Rydin and Sommer (1999) evaluate an experiment in the participatory setting of standards, in this case indicators of urban sustainability in a London location. The sustainability of their community is considered to be of interest to all local residents, yet it is found that people's participation in the setting of indicators for this dimension of their quality of life has been low, because their perceptions of costs and benefits were such as to inhibit their greater participation. The main problems impeding the smooth functioning of the project's bottom-up strategy have wider relevance than the individual project, applying to all indicator-setting programmes and, indeed, to public participation exercises as a whole:

- Problems of understanding;
- Lack of familiarity with the process;
- Problems of credibility and trust;
- Lack of certainty of benefits;
- Distribution of costs and benefits;
- Structure of benefits (adapted from Rydin & Sommer p. 3).

A series of recommendations for developing local indicators – whether of participation or other aspects of a change process – in participatory fashion are derived from this evaluation. Many of them are applicable for civil society and government to use in developing quality standards for participation in policy processes such as the PRS.

Box 26: Recommendations for enhancing effective public participation in developing local indicators

- Be clear and transparent throughout the process;
- Design and promote the process on the basis of an appraisal of the level of understanding and trust within the community;
- Focus on partners with appropriate skills and a high level of acceptance in the community;
- Make use of existing networks and knowledge;
- Foster the community's control over the process and benefits by delegating authority over the process (including funding) to the community where appropriate;
- With indicator selection, focus on issues where benefits occur at the local level and are visible;
- In order to highlight the benefits of indicators, develop, formalise and advertise the link to action;
- Keep the costs of participation low (by payment of expenses, short meetings, effective communication) and consider payment for participation (ibid: 3).

Source: Adapted from Rydin & Sommer (1999).

Quality in participatory PRSs was discussed at the 'Participation in Poverty Reduction Strategies' workshop. While it was agreed that certain broad quality principles could be established for participatory PRSs at a global level (regarding transparency, accountability, country ownership, commitment etc), a clear preference was expressed by Southern civil society representatives for PRS process monitoring to be negotiated, designed and conducted in-country, on an ongoing basis, by a mixed group of stakeholders from government and CSOs. The two-tiered approach allows for the diversity between countries, while ensuring that there are some non-negotiable starting points and preventing standards from being pushed down to the lowest common denominator acceptable to all parties.

7.3 Capacity-building needs for high-quality participation

To permit high-quality participation in policy processes, capacity-building of two kinds is needed. At a basic level, participants and facilitators both need an understanding of participatory approaches, leading facilitators (e.g. governments) need expertise in using them for policy purposes and intermediary facilitators (e.g. NGOs) need experience and skills in policy advocacy.

To permit judgements to be made about whether participatory processes are of an acceptable standard or not, facilitators also need to be able to lead open discussions on setting indicators, and must be open to critical judgements on their performance as facilitators. Here much depends on the attitudes and behaviour of key people involved, and access to PRA practitioners with experience of training in behaviour and attitudes may be helpful. Participants need to know how to judge the quality of the process in which they are being offered a role,

and to be supported by experienced participatory practitioners in attempts to identify ways in which questionable quality can be improved.

Since the spread of experience with participatory policy processes is so uneven, and resides so predominantly in the advocacy NGO community in particular countries, there is a strong case for sharing experience between NGO networks within and across countries, and for using NGOs to build the capacity of government personnel. Civil society actors are generally well aware of the synergies to be gained by networking and forming alliances within their own ranks, but may need financial and logistical support from donors or government to do so. Their capacity (in terms of time, personnel and know-how) for advocacy work is often limited, especially in sub-Saharan Africa where civil society or CSO advocacy is newer and less developed than elsewhere. In situations where prevailing power relations would make it inappropriate or impossible for a national CSO to train or sensitise government officials, international CSOs or southern CSOs from other countries in the region might be better placed to fill this role. Capacity-building by international CSOs can provide the crucial knowledge which allows Southern CSOs to benefit from openings available to them. A good example is the Center for Democratic Education's support to Guatemalan NGOs in influencing the Consultative Group process (Ruthrauff 1996).

An Advocacy Working Group comprising Northern NGOs and their counterparts in the Philippines has analysed capacity-building needs for advocacy purposes and how Northern NGOs could best supply them. Their list, directed to NGOs, highlights some capacity needs which are also likely to arise in the course of planning and undertaking participatory PRS processes, in both the non-governmental sector and the government.

Box 27: Specific recommendations for capacity-building for advocacy

- Enhance the framework for doing advocacy, especially analytical tools, sensitivity to constituents' behaviours and ideas, an actor- rather than structure-oriented approach, inclusiveness and conversance with the dynamics of power and policy processes;
- Integrate research and information management into advocacy, including access to information, information-sharing among allies, and analysis of information and context;
- Building capability to design and conduct policy-focused research;
- Developing market research skills to test public opinion and evaluate the impact of advocacy initiatives;
- Negotiation skills, including analysis of institutions and power relationships;
- Broadening linkages and networks;
- Strengthening the organisation and management of advocacy activities;
- Elevating the practice of advocacy to a discipline.

Source: Adapted from Co (1999).

Participants at the 'Participation in Poverty Reduction Strategies' workshop cited capacity limitations in government, donor agencies and civil society as one of the major challenges of developing participatory PRSs. Southern participants proposed this challenge be addressed by multi-stakeholder in-country 'learning teams', who would map out and define capacity-building needs, and where possible meet them drawing on in-country human

resources. Participants from the World Bank outlined proposals for a global action learning programme, with a country support facility, to hold an international design workshop, produce a regularly-updated Sourcebook and papers on salient issues, issue a regular newsletter on the fast-moving topic of PRSPs, set up a multi-stakeholder advisory group to help guide PRS processes.

7.4 Summary and implications for the PRS process

For the purposes of ensuring high-quality, participatory PRS processes, what is needed is a common understanding, shared by donors, governments and civil society, of what constitutes an acceptably participatory process. The examples shown above suggest that it is possible to develop basic principles to apply to PRS processes in general, which can be further elaborated and expanded as fitting in each country context.

- The task of developing basic general principles should be undertaken by a mixed and global group of representatives from governments, the non-governmental sector and donor agencies, with expertise in participatory approaches and in upholding quality standards;³⁸
- Further elaboration of the principles to suit individual country contexts should be done at country level by government and civil society, and will no doubt shed light on areas of practice, principles or procedure where enhanced capacity is required;
- Given the restrictions on the role of donors in PRSPs which is implied by the framework's strong focus on country ownership, it would be appropriate if donors concentrated their efforts to support the PRS process on responding to capacity-building needs identified in-country which cannot be funded or resourced nationally.

³⁸ It is hoped that this task can be furthered in follow-up work to the 'Participation in Poverty Reduction Strategies' workshop.

SECTION 8 CONCLUDING COMMENTS

It is hoped that this synthesis of experience will help actors involved in Poverty Reduction Strategies to move forward, achieving high-quality participatory processes. It is encouraging to see that there is so much relevant experience on which they can draw. On the other hand, the workshop on 'Participation in Poverty Reduction Strategies' held at IDS in February 2000 left no doubt as to the magnitude of the challenge.

A striking observation from the workshop was how little information was available so far for Southern actors, particularly but not only NGOs, even in countries already starting work on their PRSPs. Moreover, the information they had received was virtually all from one source: the World Bank. What NGO participants valued most about the workshop was the opportunity to learn more about what a PRSP is, and to hear from participants in other countries about common challenges and difficulties arising in the process. This Working Paper is a further contribution to filling that information gap.

The workshop also highlighted that the PRSP is a fast-moving target. Updating participants about the PRSP process at the World Bank, Bank staff themselves noted the speed of developments and the difficulties of keeping all actors informed and nurturing participatory processes in such a rapidly changing context. A strong message from the workshop was that the Bank should provide a short, regularly updated information bulletin to keep interested parties abreast of developments.

Anecdotal evidence shared at the workshop suggested that many country governments have little relevant experience, and that some need to start their participatory process at the level of building initial relationships with civil society. Capacity-building needs are many and diverse, and relate to spreading understanding of the technical activities making up the PRS, enhancing competence in applying participatory approaches to its various stages, and conducting process monitoring. Various models for meeting these capacity needs were proposed, with Southern NGO participants favouring country-led processes of identifying strengths and weaknesses and enhancing capacity as necessary, and Bank participants favouring a strong Bank involvement. An overall commitment emerged to promote multi-stakeholder, in-country PRS steering groups which would bring together Bank, bilateral donor, civil society and government actors.

This document testifies to the existence of many competent actors and to a great wealth and depth of experience of participation in policy processes, on which governments can draw to overcome the challenges noted above. It also points to the need for Governments to learn how to learn from non-governmental actors, and for state and donor agencies, and many civil society organisations themselves, to promote internal institutional change as the PRS process unfolds. Only if it delivers such changes in the approach of powerful national and international actors will the Poverty Reduction Strategy framework secure a part for the poor in the long-term development of their countries.

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