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Ownership, Leadership and Accountability for Poverty Reduction



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by

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CONTENTS

Acronyms	v
1. INTRODUCTION	vii
2. LEADERSHIP WILLINGNESS TO LEAD THE PRS IMPLEMENTATION	1
2.1 Political accountability	1
2.2 Administrative accountability	2
2.3 Financial accountability	2
2.4 Legal/constitutional accountability	2
2.5 Professional accountability	2
2.6 External accountability	3
3. THE PRS PROCESS AS A RESOURCE ALLOCATION MECHANISM	6
3.1 Structural Adjustment Programmes	6
3.2 Introduction of PRSPs	6
4. PARTICIPATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY	8
4.1 Organized social and political groups	8
4.1 Parliaments and the PRS	10
4.2 PRS and decentralization	11
5. THE AFRICAN UNION, NEPAD AND POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGIES	13
5.1 NEPAD at the regional and national levels	14
5.2 NEPAD and APRM	14
6. CONCLUSION	15
REFERENCES	16

Acronyms

AfDB	African Development Bank
APCI	African Productive Capacity Initiative
APRM	African Peer Review Mechanism
AU	African Union
CAMI	Conference of African Ministers of Industry
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CSSDCA	Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa
ECA	Economic Commission for Africa
ERSWEC	Economic Recovery Strategy for Wealth and Employment Creation (Kenya)
HIPC	Highly Indebted Poor Country Initiative
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MEGS	Malawi Economic Growth Strategy
MTEF	Medium-Term Expenditure Framework
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NSGRP	National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty (Tanzania)
PAF	Poverty Action Fund (Uganda)
PARPA	Action Plan for the Reduction of Absolute Poverty (Mozambique)
PPA	Participatory Poverty Assessment
PRS	Poverty Reduction Strategy
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
SDPRP	Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Policy (Ethiopia)
PEAP	Poverty Eradication Action Plan
PER	Public Expenditure Review
SADC	Southern African Development Community
RISDP	Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan/SADC
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
URT	United Republic of Tanzania
WAEMU	West African Economic and Monetary Union

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the adoption of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), a total of 60 countries from all over the world have been pursuing the strategy in an effort to combat poverty. Some of the countries are now in the process of reviewing past experiences and embarking on the second generation of PRSPs. These include Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Malawi, Mozambique Tanzania and, in the case of Uganda, third-generation PRSPs. During the past few years, the PRS approach has been gaining momentum not only as a country's long-term strategy for development but also as an operational instrument for attaining the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The adoption of a PRS by a country demanded serious commitment in words and deeds. Unlike earlier initiatives, whereby declarations of intent and signing of agreements were at times followed by stalling, backtracking and inertia, PRS adoption was anchored by five basic principles and process requirements and was also inextricably linked to concessional World Bank lending, Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) debt relief, and came under the watchful eyes of many bilateral donors.

Hence, the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) process had to be:

- Country-driven, including broad-based involvement of civil society;
- Results-oriented, giving priority to pro-poor outcomes;
- Comprehensive by addressing the holistic nature of poverty, its causes and panaceas;
- In partnership with all stakeholders and donors, particularly the IMF and the World Bank; and finally
- Of a long-term perspective¹.

It is not an exaggeration to say that the above pre-conditions were almost revolutionary in their requirements: that the initiative be country-led, inclusive, maximizing participation within the country, and between the country and international community, giving preference to pro-poor concerns and outcomes (even if the poor were not in charge) by addressing the root causes of poverty in a long-term perspective.

The requirements of participation, broad-based involvement of civil society and consensus - building potentially posed a serious challenge to some African polities. As shown in the recent seminal study by the Economic Commission for Africa², most African polities are gradually emerging from varying forms of monopolistic politics and are at various stages of building pluralist, representative democracies anchored by political parties. Parties are meant to be the middlemen or agents between the citizen (elector) and the representative, the nation and parliament. Through parliament, parties are supposed to challenge governments, develop alternative policy options and ultimately dislodge the party in power.

However, in line with pluralist theories, the PRS required that interest groups and civil society organizations effectively supplement the role of political parties³. It may be argued that interest groups allow individuals to be more effective by forming a critical mass, aggregating and articulating interests. They facilitate a competitive distribution of power in society, and encourage bargaining and consensus - building, etc. According to Dahl, Truman and others⁴, what determines public policy is actually the net effect of the pressures of interest groups, which are usually so many and balanced that no single one wields excessive power.

Democratic decision-making is thus secured by polyarchy. The PRS essentially saw a world of interest groups, together with parties, the government, donors and others, coming together for talking, negotiating and forging a consensus. There was a belief that only by bringing interest groups and civil society organizations (CSOs) to the table, could the pro-poor agenda reign supreme in public policy discourse and resource allocation.

To be sure, the above did not simply come out of the blue. PRSs were based on past experiences with the Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs). Yet the basic principles, process conditionalities, and their underlying assumptions posed serious difficulties with their complexities of comprehension, and implementation.

1 IMF 2003 p.1; WB 2003.

2 ECA, 2004.

3 Dahl, 1971; De Tocqueville, 1945; Truman, 1951.

4 Ibid.

What did “country-ownership” mean and how could it be operationalized? Would the leadership be willing to take the lead, commit the political capital and the time needed to make PRSs a success? Could the requirements for participation and consensus be handled within the existing institutional arrangements? Was there willingness to create sufficient political space for civil society and other stakeholders to input meaningfully in the process?

Was there an adequate ensemble of institutions to generate sustained support and interest in the PRS process, mobilize support and submit demands from the grassroots, and effectively manage the entire process in a holistic manner? Could the power wielders be held accountable? Finally, to what extent have parallel processes at the continental level, especially the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), influenced the PRS in terms of providing critical support through technical advice, resources, etc.

The next section addresses leadership willingness to own and lead the implementation of the PRS, while Section three assesses the extent to which the PRS as a resource allocation mechanism has been the “only game in town”. Section four discusses the role of civil society, political parties, Parliament, and sub-national governments, in the quest for participation and accountability. Section five shifts attention to the African Union’s NEPAD plan and its role in the PRS. Section six concludes the paper.

2. LEADERSHIP WILLINGNESS TO LEAD THE PRS IMPLEMENTATION

One key lesson that has emerged from the many decades of struggling to reduce poverty and achieve development is the incontrovertible fact that policies and programmes that are owned by people and their governments stand better chances of success. Policies that originate from society and whose content reflects popular assessment, aspirations and needs, are more likely to be successfully implemented. Such ownership guarantees a deep appreciation and commitment to the policies as well as their better understanding. When accompanied by participation, ownership also improves chances of success through an injection of historically derived practical realities in the policies and programmes as they reflect the local material realities.

Active committed leadership is also necessary for programme/policy success. To lead means to show the way through thought, words and deeds as it involves a deep commitment by the leader to a mission and followers accept that commitment. Leadership here is an essentially political process in which contested values are identified, articulated, and allocated. Like power, leadership is relational, purposeful and collective, sharing with power the central function of achieving a purpose. But the reach and domain of leadership is more limited than that of power. Leaders do not obliterate their followers' motives even if they wish to do so.

In the final analysis, all leaders are actual or potential power wielders but not all power wielders are leaders. Leadership's vital ingredients are power and trust. These are key to ensuring that correct decisions are made and implemented. More importantly, they ensure that implementation "stays the course" even if difficulties develop. It also ensures that the necessary sacrifices involved in postponing today's consumption for tomorrow's savings and investments are made and accepted peacefully by the people and government.

Finally, accountability of such leadership ensures the maintenance of the primacy of the "public interest" at all times. Such accountability, when part of a system of evaluation, helps to maintain critical feedbacks to improve implementation and initiate adjustments where necessary. Accountability has many dimensions. These may be summed up in six categories or types:

- Political accountability;
- Administrative (or bureaucratic) accountability;
- Financial accountability;
- Legal constitutional accountability;
- Professional accountability; and
- External accountability (or accountability of external agencies).

Table 1 provides a summary of the major concerns of these six types of accountability. The summary indicates the typical enforcement agents and accountability-enforcing institutions.

2.1 POLITICAL ACCOUNTABILITY

In its broad sense, political accountability is used to refer to all forms of accountability relating to state institutions. It is "political" in the sense that it is "public" since state institutions deal with "public affairs". In this wide sense, all the six types of accountability listed above could be subsumed under political accountability simply in the sense of public accountability. However, this would deny us analytical advantage. It is more fruitful to use a narrower definition of political accountability so as to keep the other types (or sub-types) distinct, for emphasizing their criticality for good governance in general and poverty reduction in particular.

In its narrow sense, political accountability refers to appropriateness of public policies and programmes; appropriateness of the policy-making process itself; judging political actors, for example, during elections (electoral accountability) and assessing public choices generally. In the real world of politics and governance, political accountability is also extended to include a moral sense (moral accountability), namely judging political acts and public figures on the basis of prevailing normative standards in the polity and society. Each society has its own sense of what constitutes public morality whether or not this is provided in a formal (or legal) code of conduct.

The actors (both individual and institutional) expected to be politically accountable, are those involved in making important public choices (i.e. formulating major national policies and/or taking decisions of wide consequences). The leading enforcement agents for political accountability include the following:

- Citizens as electors and as critics;
- Civil associations;
- Mass media;
- Opposition parties;
- The Parliament and its committees;
- Judicial bodies (courts);
- Religious bodies;
- Ethics commissions;
- Human rights commissions; and
- Anti-corruption organizations.

2.2 ADMINISTRATIVE ACCOUNTABILITY

Administrative accountability is often used in a bureaucratic and public sense. The bureaucratic sense refers to concerns with functional expediency and procedural correctness of actions, usually with the superior on the power hierarchy holding the subordinates accountable. This internal accountability does not have to go public. The public sense relates to how administrative actions affect citizens; and this means aggrieved citizens must have avenues for getting redress. The enforcement institutions for administrative accountability include ombudsmen, administrative courts or tribunals, disciplinary courts, and ordinary courts of law (where criminal actions are involved).

2.3 FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Financial accountability relates to proper use of public money by public officials as well as enforcement of norms of austerity, efficiency and propriety. Enforcement institutions include:

- Accounting offices;
- Controller and Auditor-General;
- Financial, accounting and auditing bodies (statutory and private); and
- Public procurement bodies (e.g. central and regional Tender Boards).

2.4 LEGAL/CONSTITUTIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Legal/constitutional accountability is concerned with monitoring the observance of legal rules and evaluating the concordance of legislative acts and constitutional rules and provisions. Enforcement institutions include:

- Statutory and independent law associations;
- Judicial bodies;
- Constitutional courts; and
- The Parliament - when it sits as an impeachment court for charges relating to infringement of the law and the constitution.

2.5 PROFESSIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Professional accountability relates to the ethical standards of professional individuals as well as professional organizations. Enforcement institutions include:

- Professional associations (e.g. medical, academic, legal, financial, etc);
- Statutory professional ethics commissions/organizations;
- Disciplinary committees, tribunals and courts; and

- Various professional associations, although these mostly offer uncoordinated assistance as coherent programmes seem to be lacking.

2.6 EXTERNAL ACCOUNTABILITY

External accountability refers to the transparency or otherwise of the actions of external donors and other external agents. In particular, it focuses on transparency of transactions between donors and governments and between donors and CSOs.

Table 1: Major Types of Accountability and Enforcement Agents

Types of Accountability	Concerns itself with:	Primary Enforcement Agents/Institutions
1. Political Accountability	<p>a) Broad sense: appropriateness of behaviour and performance of public officials and institutions in respect of role performance and quality of outputs.</p> <p>b) Narrow sense: appropriateness of public policies and programmes; policy-making processes; judging political actors (e.g. in elections); assessing public choices generally.</p> <p>c) Moral sense: judging political acts on the basis of prevailing normative standards in the society.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizens as electors and as critics. • Civil associations • Mass media • Opposition parties • Parliaments and their committees • Judicial bodies/courts • Religious bodies • Ethics commissions • Human rights commissions • Anti-corruption organizations.
2. Administrative Accountability	<p>a) Bureaucratic sense: expediency and procedural correctness of bureaucratic acts (with the superior holding the inferior accountable);</p> <p>b) Public sense: how administrative actions affect citizens</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ombudsmen • Administrative courts or tribunals • Disciplinary committees • Courts of law
3. Legal -Constitutional Accountability	<p>a) Legal sense: monitoring the observance of legal rules</p> <p>b) Constitutional sense: evaluating the concordance of legislative acts and constitutional rules.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statutory and independent law associations • Judicial bodies (e.g. high court) • Constitutional courts • Parliament as an impeachment body
4. Financial Accountability	<p>a) Proper use of public money by public officials</p> <p>b) Enforcement of norms of austerity, efficiency and propriety</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accounting offices • Controller and auditor-general • Financial, accounting and auditing bodies (statutory and private) • Public procurement bodies (e.g. central tender boards)
5. Professional Accountability	Watching over the ethical standards of professionals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional associations (e.g. medical, academic, legal, financial etc) • Ethics commissions • Disciplinary committees, tribunals and courts
6. External Accountability	<p>a) Transparency of actions of donors and other external agents generally;</p> <p>b) Transparency of transactions between donors and the government and between donors and civic organizations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None

It is fair to note that so far, the PRS process conditionalities addressed political conditionality in the broad sense only, even though political conditionality in the 'narrow sense' would have been more appropriate.

Experiences in terms of leadership and accountability of the PRS process within African countries differ widely. At one extreme, some of the countries have demonstrated little willingness and commitment to the PRS, focusing on completing documents acceptable to the Boards of World Bank and IMF and gaining access to resources. In such cases, the PRS framework was taken as is and adopted with little innovation. There was little or no attempt at articulation with other ongoing programmes. The major motive was to do the minimum necessary to gain access to HIPC funds.

In one country, an evaluation team noted that 'political commitment is expected to wither beyond access to debt-relief resources'. A review team in another country noted, "there is a degree of political distance between the current administration, and the PRSP ... this distance as (is) a critical factor in the waning of the PRS as the driving force on the policy horizon despite the "heat" that surrounded its formulation"⁵. In some countries, while there was political commitment to poverty reduction, it did not mean that it was to be pursued through the PRS. Support for poverty reduction did not automatically translate into support for the PRS.

At the other extreme, several countries have demonstrated a remarkable willingness and commitment to the PRS. The PRS programme has been implemented vigorously, and its focus broadened from document preparation and endorsement to implementation. As will be shown below, in some countries, the PRS has been mainstreamed and linked to prior or ongoing work in poverty reduction.

In Kenya, the new NARC Government, upon coming to power, integrated its election manifesto with the results of PRSP consultations, and came up with the Economic Recovery Strategy for Wealth and Employment Creation (ERSWEC). The Ethiopian Government prepared the Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Policy (SDPRP) and is now embarking on the second-generation Plan for Accelerated and Sustainable Development to End Poverty. In Mozambique, the Action Plan for the Reduction of Absolute Poverty (PARPA) 2001-2005 was based on previous Governmental plans and the Interim PRSP (PARPA 2000-2004). In Uganda, the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP), which became the country's PRSP, was prepared way back in 1997.

In all these and other cases, there was an effort to domesticate and indigenize the PRSP, to imbue reflective local context and conditions. In Sierra Leone, for example, a country emerging from a devastating civil war, the first-generation PRS not only targeted poverty but also aimed at "rebuilding security, governance and human rights". Its full-fledged PRSP, launched in early 2005, has three pillars:

- Promoting good governance, security and peace;
- Promoting pro-poor sustainable growth for food security and job creation; and
- Promoting human development".

The PRSP is fully cognizant of and reflects the country's concrete material realities, which it seeks to address. Such countries have sustained dialogue with donors and civil society. Many countries fall in between these two extremes. Below we discuss some of the reasons for this variation.

There are several reasons for the above noted responses and their variation. One of the key determining variables has been a country's prior commitment to economic reforms and to a working dialogue with donors. In countries where the leadership had made the critical decision to abandon the policies of the past and whole-heartedly embrace economic reforms, commitment to the PRS has tended to be high.

Countries that have committed themselves to macro economic and structural reforms including liberalization of the economy, elimination of physical and fiscal barriers, abandonment of protectionism, and encouragement of foreign investment and trade, have generally been welcoming to the PRS. Those that are still hesitant, holding onto the State as a critical player in the market place, and who are hesitant to pursue privatization, have been less welcoming to the PRS initiative.

Politics has also been a critical variable. In countries where the leadership has been willing to expend its political capital, to stand up and stare-down its opponents regarding the PRS, willingness and commitment has been very high. In such countries, the PRS has been mainstreamed into the political lexicon. A review of PRS in Uganda notes that the political leadership "promotes PRS as a political project – to promote national unity. As a result, technocrats at the Ministry of Finance have adopted the PRS as "a technocratic project of State building", while it has also become an international donor project for measurable poverty reduction.

⁵ Folscher, 2004.

In such countries, the PRS has been integrated into the national aspirations and successfully presented as a homegrown solution to endemic poverty, hunger and disease. Its appeal has been broadened into a win-win solution set for all the country's sectors and groups.

The next two factors are negative and explain lack of willingness and commitment. One revolves around the issue of ownership and donor conditionality. Although the PRS explicitly solicits for country ownership, there are those who resent the lingering control that the World Bank and IMF retain through the imbedded right of approval of the PRS documents that they receive. Although policy conditionality is abandoned in principle under PRS, the substitute, process conditionality, is just as unacceptable.

A commentator noted that in Malawi, there is greater political commitment to the Malawi Economic Growth Strategy (MEGS) than there is to the Malawi PRS. He added that the MPRS is "viewed as a donor-imposed strategy". He notes further that several commentators "believe that the MPRS is dead and buried"⁶.

Certainly, requirements for broader participation and involvement of civil society have sometimes been perceived as unacceptable interference in the internal processes of governance of the country. In some cases, this has even been seen as unconstitutional, because, under representative democracy, the party that wins the elections believes that it has won the right to make and implement policies. It may not feel obliged to consult CSOs, let alone donors.

Others are of the view that civil society should engage itself at lower levels and not try to influence policy at the national level. One study concludes that the Government of Ethiopia believes that civil society should engage at the community and *woreda* (district) levels, should confine itself to service delivery to reduce poverty; and not get preoccupied with or try to influence policy at higher levels⁷.

Finally, unwillingness and lack of commitment has often been the result of inability to act. Some countries have had the will, but have lacked the means to commitment and leadership in the PRS process. A weak political base, fragile political realities, weak institutions and unstable political and social conditions have all been contributory factors. In some of the countries emerging from conflict, having weak institutions, the leadership has either been preoccupied with basic structural problems, or has felt that the PRS would add to the problems rather than bring solutions. Wide-ranging consultations could open floodgates of complaints and agitation.

6 Chirwa, 2005.

7 Woldemariam, 2005.

3. THE PRS PROCESS AS A RESOURCE ALLOCATION MECHANISM

3.1 STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT PROGRAMMES

The introduction of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPS), which formed the core of the Washington Consensus beginning in the early 1980s, sounded a clear death knell for development planning in Africa. All African countries had adopted planning at independence, opting for a strong economic role for the State and designing comprehensive five-year plans to optimize their development potential and organize their efforts.

However, by the late 1970s, comprehensive long-range planning had been abandoned, or the plans were only alive on paper. Unrealistic expectations, unstable, conflict-inducing politics, faulty or non-costed choices, lack of resources, preference for projects and unfulfilled promises by donors, oil shocks and other macroeconomic circumstances had put an end to development planning as an on-going continuous process.

The SAPs were the last nail in the coffin, with their insistence on fiscal and monetary discipline, strict control of public expenditure including cash budgeting, devaluations, trade liberalization, privatization, downsizing of the State and tax reforms. After twenty years of a failed pursuit of the stabilization conditionality, the PRS opened up a small window for African people and governments to begin again to plan long-term and comprehensively.

Traditionally, planning and budgeting are the preserve of Ministries of Finance and Planning and these played a key role in PRS preparation in many countries, including in Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda. However, in some countries, the Office of the President or Vice-President coordinated the process as was the case in Eritrea, Sierra Leone and Tanzania, or the Prime Minister's Office as in Djibouti. In most cases, inter-Ministerial committees carried out much of the work, supported by Technical Teams.

However, successful PRSs needed to be extended beyond those core Ministries, both horizontally to line (sector) Ministries, and vertically to sub-national (or local) governments away from the capital city. In view of the short time frame for preparing the first-generation PRS documents, there was little opportunity for broadening the process to line Ministries and sub-national governments. Although the involvement of line Ministries could help deepen domestic ownership, it has been noted that "many countries have yet to do this systematically"⁸.

In some countries, links were developed in line Ministries and sectoral programmes were identified as priority areas under the PRSP, such as education and health. Consequently, sectoral programmes were placed under a one-strategy umbrella, as Ministries were requested to rank their programmes on the basis of their poverty impact. However, even in such cases, while sectoral strategies were brought under one umbrella, individual sectoral strategies were not changed substantially. Indeed, in many PRSs, sector profiling left a lot to be desired. Still, the process could be a first step towards cross-sectoral planning.

The focus on priority areas has had a downside. Non-priority sector Ministries have felt unfairly excluded on the basis of the dubious decision that they have "low poverty reduction impact". Accordingly, they have felt no obligation to participate in the PRS process.

3.2 INTRODUCTION OF PRSPS

Within the core Ministries of Finance and Planning, at the time of introduction of the PRSPs, some countries had in fact already made substantial progress in reforming and improving decision-making and institutional processes regarding planning and resource allocation. Public Expenditure Reviews (PER) had been developed and mainstreamed into government machinery. The Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) and the Budget Framework were also up and running. The PRS was developed alongside these existing frameworks without strong linkages to any of them.

PRSP expenditure priorities could therefore not be translated into priorities in the budget. The lack of linkages has also led to confusion, undermined ownership and PRS operational relevance⁹. In some countries, the PRS was a duplicate of already existing documents. There is, therefore, a need to develop a single approach and common principles, so as to avoid the situation of multi-programmes, multi-budgets and multi-projects.

8 WB 2004: 16.

9 WB 2004 b. 15.

Preparation of the second-generation PRS is already learning from past experience. Attempts are underway in some countries to institutionalize key PRSP principles and to consolidate them into a national development plan that can attract full government backing from all Ministries and from the population. Every effort needs to be made to ensure that the second-generation PRSPs are more than simply a compilation of projects for donor funding. The PRS needs to be developed into a national framework that does not leave anything out.

First, the three-year life span needs to be extended to at least five years as some countries have already done, including Tanzania, Uganda, Ethiopia and Kenya. Second, attempts also need to be made to link the PRS to the Budget. This will allow prioritization of the strategies and alignment of policy decisions with budget allocations. Finally, PRSPs need to be aligned with existing efforts to achieve the MDGs.

4. PARTICIPATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

One of the basic prerequisites for joining the PRS world was to ensure that the process was country-driven, with broad-based participation of civil society and other relevant stakeholders. What has been the level and depth of participation by civil society, political parties and Parliaments? To what extent has such participation enhanced accountability and national ownership? This section examines the process and dynamics of participation in the design, implementation and monitoring of the PRS.

The involvement of Parliament, decentralized local governments and organized social and political groups is examined and lessons are drawn. The objective is to establish the extent to which such participatory consultations have enhanced national PRS ownership, leadership, and accountability.

4.1 ORGANIZED SOCIAL AND POLITICAL GROUPS

In the PRS design, the participation of organized social and political groups is regarded as a key strategy for promoting country ownership and domestic accountability. The effectiveness of this broad-based participation depends largely on how open, pluralist and competitive a political system is. In the first round of PRSs in many countries, the involvement of civil society, political parties and other relevant groups such as private sector and trade unions was rather limited. Only a few of them were selectively invited to consultative workshops where they sometimes received only limited background information regarding the PRS.

Participatory structures were formed on an *ad hoc* basis without clearly established mechanisms for collaboration among various stakeholders, government and donors. Some CSOs were able to organize themselves and even formed umbrella organizations for the purpose but they did this in a hurried, *ad hoc* manner, as part of the already structured process.

The PRS process was tightly compressed into a six-month timeframe in order to meet the submission timelines. This further hindered expanded participation. In addition, CSO views and inputs were sometimes not adequately reflected in the final PRS document. In Tanzania, for instance, a study by Gould and Ojanen points out that “the drafters of the official PRS document patently ignored the CSO input, nor is it mentioned as an element in the consultations feeding into the formulation of the PRSP”¹⁰. The same was experienced in other countries.

Selective engagement of CSOs also restricted their meaningful participation in the PRS process. For instance, in many countries, governments had a great deal of influence in the selection of which CSOs should participate in the process. According to one study, in Uganda, critical groups such as the media, trade unions, and religious groups were excluded from the PRS consultations partly because “such institutions pose a threat to the Movement as alternative sources of views and organizing political views”¹¹.

In other countries such as Malawi and Zambia, the few selected CSOs were sidelined after the completion of the PRSP document, without further involvement in various technical committees for implementation and monitoring¹².

The limited involvement of CSOs in the design and implementation of the first-generation PRSs was due to a number of factors. Underdeveloped and controlled CSOs could not participate adequately despite the challenge of the conditionality. Also, in some countries, CSOs closely associated with opposition politics were deliberately excluded from participating in the PRS process¹³. More important was the prevalence of an executive-dominated model of policy-making in many countries, which made it difficult to adapt quickly to a participatory model of policy-making.

As a result, the process of preparing the PRSP tended to be heavily dominated by senior central government officials, consultants, and donor agencies. In many countries, the Ministries of Finance, Planning and Economic Development became the key players in the preparation and implementation of the PRS. Participation of organized groups in the first-generation PRS process did not greatly enhance state accountability towards its citizens. Rather, external accountability was emphasized at the expense of domestic accountability.

The involvement of organized groups was supposed to be extended to the monitoring and implementation stages, for enhancing accountability. However, in many countries, monitoring was based on studies and surveys. A multiplicity of entities was created in order to monitor various activities of the PRS. These entities comprised various stakeholders, including government bureaucrats, CSOs, private sector, trade unions, research institutions and donors. Such monitoring systems resulted in the production of household surveys, service delivery surveys, demographic and health surveys, tracking studies, and Participatory Poverty Assessments (PPAs), etc.

10 Gould and Ojanen, 2000, 48.

11 Piron and Norton, 2004: 24.

12 Chirwa, 2005; Folscher, 2004.

13 *Ibid.*

In practice, however, the effectiveness of these monitoring entities in enhancing accountability was rather problematic due to several factors, including:

- Lack of adequate capacity in poverty monitoring and poverty analysis;
- Poor development of indicators to monitor progress;
- Lack of coordination among entities;
- Poor dissemination of information collected; and
- Exclusion of various organized groups from the monitoring phase.

Overall, several studies have shown that monitoring and evaluation has been the least effective component in the first-generation PRS¹⁴. Whenever CSOs were actually involved in PRS formulation and prioritization, the same groups could not constitute the teams for PRS evaluation and monitoring so as to avoid a conflict of interests. This created tensions between the mutually exclusive roles perceived, of participating in policy formulation on the one hand, and acting as watchdogs and holding government officials to account on the other. This lessened the impact of the involvement of organized political and social groups in the first round of PRS. It did not result in enhanced enforcement of domestic accountability.

In terms of ownership of the PRSP, the selective engagement of CSOs did not promote PRS country ownership. In Tanzania, for instance, it became apparent to various stakeholders that the PRSP was actually not a homegrown idea but was largely a tool for debt relief eligibility. It was regarded as just another donor conditionality.

In Uganda, however, a sense of country ownership was enhanced not by the selective CSO engagement but by the fact that the national PEAP already pre-dated the adoption of the PRSP. It had been developed back in 1995 and finalized in 1997 as already noted. The 2000 PEAP was the true extension of the country's homegrown document.

In the preparation of the second round of PRSs, the form and modality of CSO involvement have greatly changed. There has been expanded CSO participation within a longer time frame. Several groups that were ignored in the first round have now been involved, including trade unions, the private sector, the disabled and other informal entities. In Tanzania, for instance, the successor to PRSPI has already been finalized and named the National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty (NSGRP) or in Swahili, 'Mkukuta'.

The NSGRP was adopted after a yearlong consultation process, which started in October 2003 with the Poverty Policy Week. This was followed by nationwide consultations. One questionnaire asked three questions: observed significant changes in relation to poverty in the last 3 years; main bottlenecks to poverty reduction; and recommendations on what factors must be incorporated in the future PRS.

A series of trainings for the facilitators were conducted. These facilitators were then deployed in various areas across the country to conduct district-level consultations. These district workshops consisted of district council secretariats, faith-based organizations, community-based organizations (CBOs), the private sector, trade unions, the informal sector and included the concerns of such groups as the aged, youth, women, persons with disabilities, persons living with HIV and AIDS, widows, and orphans. In addition, village-level consultations were conducted through the Village Assembly. The views were then consolidated into a regional report. Moreover, about 500,000 questionnaires were administered in various parts of the country¹⁵.

Another round of consultations was made on the first NSGRP draft. The National Workshop for both government officials and CSOs took place in September 2004. The Poverty Policy Week of November 2004, which gathered technocrats and CSO representatives, concluded the one-year consultation process. In Uganda, the 2003/2004 review process also turned out to be more open and carried out over a longer time scale¹⁶. The PRS approach has raised awareness of the value of civil society contributions to policy dialogue.

However, a number of challenges still remain. First, given their limited capacity in several countries, CSOs have not been able to provide alternative policy choices in the PRS design, implementation and monitoring. Government technocrats, consultants, and donors still dominate the process with weak CSO influence. Second, and related to the above, although CSO involvement is equated with peoples' involvement, many CSOs are largely urban-based, elite-led, working mostly for the poor rather than with the poor.

As a result, their participation in the PRS process can hardly be regarded as the participation of poor and rural communities. Unfortunately, by design, the PRS is structurally built to rely on the contributions of CSOs, which are mostly young, urban based and donor dependent. In filling this gap, some of the international NGOs have been very active in the PRS process in coalition with domestic CSOs. The question then is whose views do they represent?

14 Chirwa, 2005:6.

15 URT, 2005.

16 Piron and Norton, 2004: 23.

Ironically, CSO engagement in the PRS process may also have had a negative side effect on their institutional and functional capacity. Their involvement in the various structures of the PRS tends to take them away from their traditional role of activism in the policy-making process.

Some strong CSOs are members of the PRS sectoral working groups, PERs, Consultative Group Meetings, monitoring committees, etc. In the new NSGRP in Tanzania, for instance, CSOs are charged with the task of “building local capacity and empowering communities, mobilizing and enhancing community participation as well as community resources for poverty reduction”¹⁷.

However, in the process, the PRS itself sidelines CSOs. Indeed, they have become part of the government-donor cycle, and therefore lost their activist appeal of defending the interest of the poor and the underprivileged. Thus, while promoting CSO influence in policy formulation and implementation, the PRS process has also tended to undermine the activist character of CSOs in challenging the State and enforcing accountability.

The involvement of political groups, especially political parties, has also been seen as crucial in the PRS process. Overall, however, the involvement of political parties in most PRS countries was almost non-existent. Uganda, which is regarded as a successful model of PRS, is also a good example of lack of political party participation in the PRS process. Indeed, opposition political parties were not formally involved either through consultation workshops or technical committees. Nor did these parties press demands for their involvement.

It would seem that there are some structural limitations with regard to the engagement of opposition political parties in the PRS process. First, is the fact that the multi-party system in many of these countries is still in its infancy. According to the ECA 2005 African Governance Report, in many African countries, “political parties are weak, highly personalized, lacking internal democracy and without a good funding base”¹⁸. As a result, they are less effective in offering alternative viewpoints for society.

The second factor that hindered political party involvement is the traditional representative democracy model of policy formulation. Ideally, it is the party in power that is supposed to chart out its own developmental programme and plan of action. Political parties in the opposition are supposed to offer alternative policy agenda and programmes. The PRS philosophy of inviting every relevant actor to the table tended to contradict this traditional approach to policy formulation. Rather than building a culture of having policy alternatives and diversity of ideas, the PRS process undermined diversity by manufacturing consensus.

Thus, the involvement of political parties and politicians still remains a challenging issue to be addressed. The question then is, who owns the PRS? Is it the party in power, the government, the CSOs, political parties, the private sector, or the people? Who is to be held accountable for the fate of the PRS?

Overall, transforming the PRS from a tool primarily designed for government-donor-CSO collaboration in prioritization and administering of funds towards an accountability tool remains a formidable challenge. A key recommendation is to incorporate mechanisms of domestic accountability by empowering both citizens and other entities to hold government and its officials to account for their actions in poverty reduction programmes.

4.1 PARLIAMENTS AND THE PRS

In the first round of PRSs, involvement of Parliaments in the design, implementation and monitoring of PRSs was negligible. Parliament was not regarded as one of the key players in the process. This was largely due to the way the PRS approval process was structured along parallel systems specifically put in place for that purpose. These systems as a result, sidelined Parliament as a key player. The PRSP was regarded as a special instrument deserving special treatment and new forms of participatory structures were created with a different approval system instituted.

In many countries, it is the Cabinet that endorses policies and programmes and sends Bills to Parliament for enactment. Normally, the Cabinet receives various proposals from Ministries and Departments for consideration. Prior to sending their proposals to the Cabinet, respective Ministries are supposed to collect the views of relevant stakeholders on particular issues. In the case of Bills, Parliamentary Committees can conduct public hearings by involving various stakeholders before the Bill is enacted into law. In addition, the Cabinet can decide to gather the peoples' views through a White Paper or a Green Paper.

Views from Parliamentarians were sometimes hurriedly collected through workshops. In other countries, MPs were not involved at all. In Tanzania, for instance, a two-hour workshop was held to brief MPs about the PRSP and to gather their views about the already identified priority sectors. In many countries, the first-generation PRSPs were neither discussed nor endorsed by the Parliaments.

Currently, the involvement of Parliament is steadily increasing through the progress reviews of the PRS. In the consultations for the second round of PRSs, Parliaments are being regarded as key partners. Various steps have been taken to ensure this. Through organized seminars and workshops, Members of Parliament (MPs) are building their capacity to oversee, monitor and scrutinize PRS implementation as in Burkina Faso, Cameroon and Tanzania.

¹⁷ NSGRP, 2005: 55.

¹⁸ African Governance report, ECA, 2006: page 6.

There has also been direct involvement of MPs in the second-generation PRSs. In Tanzania, for instance, chairs of Parliamentary Standing Committees have been involved in various consultation meetings. Benin and Mozambique are cited as good examples in reporting on PRS implementation to Parliament. Similarly, Ethiopia is embarking on legislative reform to enhance parliamentary PRS oversight.

More direct involvement of MPs takes place in Ghana where a special Parliamentary Committee on Poverty Reduction has been formed to examine the context, focus and adequacy of the PRS and report to Parliament¹⁹. Other countries are now establishing a system of incorporating PRS priorities in the guidelines for the preparation of the Medium-Term and Annual Plans and the Budget.

Notwithstanding this progress, it is important to recognize that the effectiveness of parliamentary involvement depends largely on its role and status within the respective country's political system. Parliaments vary in relation to both decision-making power and popular perception of their importance. There are Parliaments that play a very active role in the formulation and enactment of legislation and those that endorse decisions made elsewhere. Others fall midway. Some legislatures are highly regarded by the citizenry and some are not, depending on the balance of power between the Executive, the Judiciary and Parliament, as well as the parliamentary composition.

In Uganda, for instance, parliamentary space to function is restricted by the no-party system, which leaves little room for meaningful inter-party debates for policy choices and alternatives. The Tanzanian Parliament operates with a clear cohesive ruling party majority with very few opposition MPs. By way of contrast, the Kenyan Parliament is normally highly competitive, representing a diverse array of parties and opinions.

There are variations in legislative procedures as well. For instance, whereas in Kenya, Uganda and Zambia all Committees to which Bills are committed have the power to make amendments thereto. In Tanzania, they cannot. According to the Standing Orders, Standing Committees in Tanzania have no power to amend the Bill, but may request the Minister or Member responsible for the Bill to make such amendments²⁰.

It is recommended that the involvement of Parliaments should take into account the variations across countries and the PRSs be designed accordingly. Also, further steps should be taken to mainstream the PRS process into the country's policy-making structures and institutions. Parliaments should be directly involved not only as an oversight body but also as an approval organ for the PRS document and the implementation and monitoring systems. Indeed, it is through such a process that opposition parties in Parliament can also participate in scrutinizing the PRS and offer policy criticism and alternatives.

4.2 PRS AND DECENTRALIZATION

In the first round of PRSs, the involvement of decentralized local governments was rather limited. Regarded as the focus of grassroots participation, local government authorities were expected to provide inputs into the PRS design, implementation and monitoring. In practice, however, decentralized local government structures have been playing a key role in the PRS process largely as implementers of the document, rather than as contributors to it. As the implementers of priority sectors, local government institutional and managerial capacity has become a key element in pro-poor service delivery. Local governments receive conditional grants from central government in order to deliver basic social services as identified in the priority sectors.

In Uganda, for instance, the PEAP seems to be well known at the district level as a result of the Poverty Action Fund (PAF), which is the most important source of funds for the district. Indeed, three-quarters of PAF funds are spent in the districts²¹. It is during the preparation of the second round of PRSs that local government structures have been involved in varied degree in different countries. Through the consultation process, some views and inputs from local government have been incorporated into the second PRS. In Tanzania for instance, local councils at various levels including the village assembly were involved in providing their inputs to second generation PRSs.

However, there are challenges and tradeoffs. The central government pro-poor resource allocations to local councils have resulted in a multiplicity of funding schemes leading to complexity and inefficiency. In Tanzania for instance, there are six sectoral recurrent local government allocation schemes, one for each of five pro-poor priority areas, which include education, health, water, roads and agriculture. In addition, there is a common Health Basket Fund and the Primary Education Development Program (PEDP). Proliferation of budget norms, standards and conditionalities tend to enhance central government control over the local resources allocation process, further undermining local ownership²².

At the same time, many local councils lack the capacity to manage the pro-poor resources efficiently, that are allocated to them through PRS grants. In addition, mechanisms for accountability are still very weak. For instance, Pro-Poor Expenditure Tracking studies in Tanzania have indicated that there is poor flow of financial information from the central government to local authorities with regards to expenditure as per the approved budget.

19 World Bank and IMF Report, 2004.

20 Makinda et al., 2004:16-21.

21 Piron and Norton, 2004: p. 28.

22 URT, 2004: p. 9.

As a result, local councils do decide to re-prioritize some of the funding, contrary to the exchequer issue notifications. This gives room for misappropriation of funds. In fact, local government authorities can pass the blame for poor/inadequate local government services to the central government.

Finally, the system of conditional grants for priority areas tends to restrict local government flexibility and ownership. There is an urgent need to enhance both administrative and technical capacity to manage PRS activities. Instruments and mechanisms of local accountability should be firmly established.

5. THE AFRICAN UNION, NEPAD AND POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGIES

The African Union (AU) was launched at the Inaugural Summit held in Durban, from 28 June to 10 July 2002. The birth of the AU originated from an obvious need for Africa to respond adequately to the demanding challenges posed by the 21st century. Among the principal AU objectives are acceleration of the political and socio-economic integration of the continent, and promotion of democratic principles and good governance.

AU operationalization is interconnected with implementation of the programmes of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). In many ways, NEPAD is the AU mandated programme of action. AU leaders adopted it, as it was taking shape, before the birth of the AU. The meeting of African Heads of States in Abuja, Nigeria in October 2001 had already adopted the NEPAD initiative²³.

The primary objectives of NEPAD are to:

- Accelerate the eradication of poverty in Africa and the inequality between Africa and the developed world;
- Place African countries, both individually and collectively, on a path of sustainable growth and development;
- Halt the marginalization of Africa in the globalization process; and
- Accelerate the empowerment of women²⁴.

NEPAD supporters argue that it is a vision, a policy framework, a new way of doing things; it is more than a compilation of projects²⁵. It focuses on four key issues:

- Conflict resolution including peace support operations;
- Political and corporate governance including the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM);
- Wealth creation with agriculture as the key entry point; and
- Continent-wide infrastructure development in such areas as ICT, energy, transport, and shared water basins.

NEPAD's goals resonate with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), in particular for reducing the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by half by 2015. The specific objectives of NEPAD as far as poverty reduction is concerned are to:

- Provide focused leadership by prioritizing poverty reduction in all its programmes, priorities and national macroeconomic and sectoral policies;
- Give special attention to the reduction of poverty among women; and
- Ensure empowerment of the poor in poverty reduction initiatives at the multilateral level, such as the Comprehensive Development Framework of the World Bank and to the PRS approach linked to the HIPC debt relief initiative²⁶.

NEPAD's success is envisaged as anchored on being "owned by the African peoples united in their diversity"²⁷. Yet, its objectives in the area of poverty reduction are to be largely achieved through working with the World Bank, the IMF, the African Development Bank (AfDB), and UN agencies.

In terms of real operationalization, in July 2004, the AU Heads of States Summit adopted the African Productive Capacity Initiative (APCI) as the NEPAD component in sustainable industrial development. The APCI is a comprehensive framework aimed at developing industrial capacities through regional integration. It is jointly promoted by the Conference of African Ministers of Industry (CAMI) and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO). Operationalization of APCI is viewed as one of the viable means of reducing poverty in Africa²⁸.

²³ NEPAD: SA website.

²⁴ Mokoena, 2003.

²⁵ Nkuhlu, 2005.

²⁶ (NEPAD, 2001).

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ NEPAD, 2004.

5.1 NEPAD AT THE REGIONAL AND NATIONAL LEVELS

It can be generalized that, so far, no concrete effort has been made to develop uniform structures at the regional or country levels. The result is that some countries have made some strides in “domesticating” NEPAD while others have lagged behind. In West Africa, Togo has established a focal point within its Ministry of Economy, Finance and Privatization with responsibility for monitoring the implementation of NEPAD. Kenya was the first country to set up a national NEPAD Steering Committee and a semi-autonomous national NEPAD Secretariat. At the October 2003 NEPAD Eastern Africa Summit Kenya was given the mandate to serve as the Regional Coordinator of NEPAD in Eastern Africa.

At the regional level, ECA and the regional economic communities, especially the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU), have integrated the priorities and objectives of NEPAD into their respective programmes. In Southern Africa, a meeting of senior Southern African Development Community (SADC) officials and the NEPAD Secretariat, held in Grand Baie, Mauritius, 7-8 August 2004, recommended that NEPAD should assist SADC in strengthening capacity at both national and regional levels.

In this context, the SADC Secretariat should, as a matter of urgency, seek assistance for establishment of a NEPAD desk. The meeting also noted that the SADC Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) and NEPAD were very similar in objectives, underlying principles, priority/focal areas. Therefore, the RISDP should be seen in part as a NEPAD programme for SADC.

5.2 NEPAD AND APRM

During the Sixth Summit of the Heads of State and Government implementation Committee of NEPAD, African leaders agreed on a framework for a peer review mechanism aimed at tackling obstacles to growth and development on the continent. The framework is aimed at encouraging and building responsible leadership on the continent, and involves voluntary self-assessment, constructive dialogue and the sharing of common experiences. As of May 2005, 24 countries had acceded to the APRM²⁹. Accession entails “undertaking to submit to periodic peer reviews, as well as to facilitate such reviews, and to be guided by agreed parameters for good political governance and good economic and corporate governance”³⁰.

Some of the APRM socio-economic development indicators include alignment to NEPAD principles and priorities; efforts dedicated to poverty eradication; extent to which small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs) are being promoted and developed; and effectiveness of constitutional, legal, policy and budgetary provisions for gender equality, just to mention a few³¹. The reviews to be undertaken under the authority of the Mechanism are expected to be technically competent, credible and free of political manipulation. The Memorandum of Understanding on APRM, which was approved on 9 March 2003 as an accession instrument, commits participating member States to contribute to funding the APRM.

The APRM was scheduled to kick off in 2003 with two or three pilot reviews. By 2005, Ghana, Kenya, Mauritius, Nigeria, Rwanda, and South Africa had completed or were about to complete the APRM process. However, preliminary evaluation of the whole APR process, which is essentially voluntary, suggests that, as sovereign entities, African countries should not be duty bound to follow any prescribed ruling by any other State. Also, the acceptance of APRM recommendations is up to the States being reviewed.

Some pundits have questioned the relationship between the peer review process of the Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa (CSSDCA) that is under AU auspices, and the APRM under NEPAD. The CSSDCA/AU peer review differs from the NEPAD peer review in that the former enjoys the support of almost all-53 African States that are members of the AU except Morocco. It is to be noted that there is convergence and complementarity between CSSDCA objectives and those of NEPAD, as well as areas of overlaps and duplication that need to be addressed³².

Others have criticized NEPAD’s emphasis on economic growth as the means to poverty reduction. The emphasis on the rate of growth and its sustainability without due considerations about the pattern of the growth is seen as a major weakness of NEPAD. Noted further is the absence of a mechanism for linking a country’s PRSP to the NEPAD programme. Moreover, the NEPAD framework has not clearly established how macro and sectoral interventions will incorporate and translate into poverty reduction outcomes.

While acknowledging development as a people-owned process, critics charge that the same “people” were not involved in the very process that brought NEPAD into existence. People “participated” after consultations between the African leaders, donors and the private sector. Most people were not representatively or institutionally consulted, but were instead asked to “join in” the effort³³.

29 These countries are: Algeria, Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda, Senegal, Uganda, Gabon, Mauritius, Mali, Tanzania, Zambia, Sierra Leone and South Africa

30 APRM, 2001.

31 Kanbur, 2004.

32 Mathoho, 2004.

33 Tandon, 2002.

There is need for more formalized African capacity to plan Africa's exit from poverty. NEPAD is well placed to play this role. However, it needs to respond to those who see it as emerging from and working within the paradigms of the Washington Consensus³⁴.

Strong ownership, effective and imaginative leadership and accountability do not just happen. They are the result of a country's and a continent's history, political and social systems and culture. These in turn are complex and sensitive issues that must be dealt with still. This is because they provide the necessary context within which ownership, leadership and accountability can live or die.

6. CONCLUSION

PRSs, while a necessary and welcome change from SAPs, pose complex conceptual and implementation challenges. Experience shows varying degrees of willingness and commitment to the PRSs. This in turn has been shown to be partly a result of a country's political economy. In those countries where the leadership has a strong political base and a high degree of legitimacy, willingness to lead has been forthcoming. PRSs have also been well accepted in countries where the leadership is already converted to the virtues of economic liberalization and a free market economy. The PRS approach and conditionalities have thus been inextricably interwoven into the national political and ideological lexicon and sold to the population.

Given the short time involved, the preparation of PRSPs rarely went beyond the core Ministries of Finance and Development Planning. Line Ministries and sectoral programmes were not adequately involved. Indeed, even within the core Ministries the PRS became a parallel process unlinked to other ongoing processes such as the PER and the MTEF. There were also no links developed between the PRS and the Budget. This has weakened ownership, led to confusion and diluted the overall impact of the strategy. PRS principles need to be developed and mainstreamed into a credible, workable national plan. Backward and forward linkages also have to be developed between all the planning instruments (i.e. PRS, PER, MTEF) and the Budget.

Organized social and political groups have had limited input into the PRS process, although some CSOs have been beneficiaries of PRS "fast track" democracy. However, their involvement has been critical in lending legitimacy to the PRS process and they have assisted in deepening national ownership, despite limitations of time frames, unclear structures of participation, limited resources including expertise and organizational back up, and inadequate experience.

The second-generation PRSs are already addressing many of the above issues. Political parties and Parliaments are also becoming more central in the PRS process. This is because the process sidestepped these two core institutions of representative democracy, relying instead on the "fast track" anchored on CSOs. Adjustments are already being made and need to be strengthened to bring about a convergence of the two tracks. This will maximize peoples' participation and improve the quality of policies and programmes.

While sub-national (local) governments have emerged as critical players in PRS implementation, their involvement in the preparation of the document remains rather limited. Mechanisms need to be developed to tap their full potential in articulating the interests and priorities of people at the grassroots, district level.

Finally, AU and NEPAD have had a positive impact on PRSs through their emphasis on the importance of good governance, democracy and the rule of law. While limited efforts have been made so far to institutionalize NEPAD at regional and country level, its basic objectives resonate with those of the PRS and the MDGs.

34 Tandon, 2005.

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