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Between grassroots and governments: Civil society experiences with the PRSPs. A study of local civil society response to the PRSPs

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## **DIIS Working Paper 2003:20**

### **Between Grassroots and Governments Civil Society Experiences with the PRSPs**

#### **A Study of Local Civil Society Response to the PRSPs**

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**September 2003**

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## **Abstract**

### **Between Grassroots and Governments**

The report focuses on civil society experience with locally identified priorities for poverty eradication, an area little examined and less discussed in the international debate on PRSP to date.

In the three N/S PRSP Programme countries, Honduras, Nicaragua and Zambia, civil society organisations have been involved in efforts to identify national as well as local priorities for poverty eradication. Taking the point of departure in involvement of CS with PRSP planning and monitoring at both levels, the paper presents a range of challenges and dilemmas for civil society in its efforts to combat poverty. Special attention is given to civil society initiatives and response to PRSP in provinces, districts and communities.

In the three countries civil society organisations carry out projects aimed at poverty eradication at local levels, some initiated in relation to PRSPs, some initiated regardless of and before initiation of the national PRSP process. Three areas stand out as critical for local CSOs: (i) Women's contributions must be regarded as an asset in poverty eradication, (ii) Focus on rural development – support to peasants and other small producers, (iii) Promotion of local production and local trade.

Major efforts of civil society organisations (and INGOs) have been directed upwards towards lobbying at national and international levels. While well justified, this focus advances the risk of neglecting local civil society initiatives in communities and districts. There is a need to support a process that encourages citizens and local civil society organisations to engage in a long-term commitment in municipalities and villages.

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## Abbreviations

AFRODAD:	African Forum and Network on Debt and Development
ASONOG:	Asociación de Organizaciones no Gubernamentales
CBO:	Community Based Organisation
CONPES:	Consejo Nacional de Planificación Económica y Social
CS:	Civil Society
CSO:	Civil Society Organisation
CC:	Coordinadora Civil
CCDJP:	Catholic Commission for Justice, Development and Peace
CCER:	Civil Coordinator for Emergency and Reconstruction
CSPR:	Civil Society for Poverty Reduction
ERCERP:	Estrategia Reforzada de Crecimiento Económico y Reducción de la Pobreza
EURODAD:	European Network on Debt and Development
ESAF:	Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility
FOSDEH:	Foro Social de la Deuda Externa de Honduras
GISN:	Grupo Incidencia Sur Norte
HIPC:	Highly Indebted Poor Country
IDA:	International Development Association
IMF:	International Monetary Fund
INGO:	International Non Governmental Organisation
IFI:	International Financial Institutions
I-PRSP:	Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
JCTR:	Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection
MTEF:	Medium Term Expenditure Framework
NGO:	Non Governmental Organisation
ODI:	Overseas Development Institute
PAF:	Poverty Action Fund
PEAP:	Poverty Eradication Action Plan
PPA:	Participatory Poverty Assessment
PR:	Poverty Reduction
PRSP:	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
PRSPcito:	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper for Municipalities of León Norte
PRGF:	Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility
SAP:	Structural Adjustment Programme
SAPRIN:	Structural Adjustment Participatory Review International Network
UNCTAD:	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP:	United Nations Development Programme
WB:	World Bank
WfC:	Women for Change

*For their part, the quasi-private service deliverers and civil society agencies are more than ever being comprehensively harmonised and 'partnered'. Their 1980s calls for more participation are not just happily mainstreamed, but mandatory.*

David Craig and Donald Porter, 2003b

*Subsequent to the approval of the enhanced HIPC, board of directions of the World Bank and IMF expressed their goal, "Let governments and the people be the owners of the PRSP". We do agree, but would like to point out, that you cannot make yourself the owner of a strategy without having influence in it. In workshops in León Norte we discussed: What is participation good for? To be listened to? To approve plans or to discuss plans? To be informed about what we have to do, or to inform others about what we want to do?*

Maria Teresa Velez, Mayor of El Jicaral, León Norte region, Nicaragua, 2000

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report focuses on CS experience with locally identified priorities for planning and implementation of PRSPs, an area little examined and less discussed in the international debate on PRSP to date.

In the PRSP process a standard approach by governments has been to hold a series of consultations at provincial and national levels. At these consultations representatives of civil society were invited to contribute inputs to analysing poverty and prioritising public actions. Depending on their assessment of the likely impact of participating in government-led processes, civil society organisations (CSOs) have established parallel processes. This has been the response in many countries. CS have organised independent workshops and consultations at various levels – at provincial, district, municipal and community level.

While CS' influence on official PRSPs in most countries has been limited, CSOs, through processes of dialogue as well as conflicts with governments, have gained valuable experiences, both in terms of reflections on their role as public actors and in terms of utilising or even expanding the political space for poverty reduction policy.

In the three N/S PRSP Programme countries, Honduras, Nicaragua and Zambia, CS coalitions have been involved in efforts to identify national as well as local priorities of PR policies. Taking the point of departure in involvement of CS with PRSP planning and monitoring at both levels, this paper presents a range of challenges and dilemmas for CS in their efforts to combat poverty. Special attention is given to CS initiatives for poverty eradication and response to PRSP in provinces, districts and communities.

Drawing up a range of policy options, discussing obstacles as well as opportunities for civil society, this paper aims to contribute to the current dialogue among CS actors in general, and N/S PRSP Programme allies in particular. The hope is that the paper will add critical perspectives to the exchange of experiences within and across countries – for mutual learning among all involved in poverty eradication efforts.

### **PRSPs – Pro-Poor Growth or Pro-Growth Poverty?**

A majority of assessments of the PRSP regard core parts of the approach sound. It is also found, though, that practice does not reflect the promise. One critical point is the reluctance to let the new process and players influence the underlying policies. Rigid adherence to a prescribed set of private sector focused policies is another. Moreover, neglect of key prerequisites such as intervention to address inequity and gender disparities, and conditions of rural populations in particular are seen to undermine both economic development and poverty reduction initiatives.

One of the intended benefits of PRSP is to introduce a consistent and coordinated approach to growth and poverty reduction. However, there is a significant disjuncture between the poverty reduction and social development strategies in the PRSP *and* their underlying macro-economic frameworks. The narrative of PRSP focuses on the importance of social safety nets and increased resource allocation to health and education, while the prescribed macroeconomic reforms remain undiscussed – in terms of previous failings or lessons learnt, in terms of consequences for the poor and marginalized groups, and with regard to sequencing of policies and the consideration of alternative options. As a result of this silence little change from previous economic reform initiatives is found.

While PRSPs are intended to promote ‘pro-poor growth’, CS actors are beginning to question what is in fact the meaning and implications of ‘pro-poor growth’. Do PRSPs contribute to reduction of poverty for the marginalized majorities? For example peasants, small-scale farmers, incl. women, groups dependent on the informal sector, the disabled, children headed households? Or do the macroeconomic parts of PRSPs imply increase – or even creation of additional poverty?

The growing sectors of market-based economic activity tend to be located within the urban economy, where the main agents of production are the urban elite. The urban and rural poor interface with those sectors of the economy only as producers and wage earners, at the lowest end of the production and marketing chain. This leaves poor urban and rural citizens with little choice of sharing in the opportunities provided by the market economy.

Against this background, to what extent can we speak about PRSPs entailing pro-poor growth? Much as the remedies in point, particularly promoted by the IMF, are monetary policies, privatisation, promotion of export crops at the expense of production for local consumption, integration in global markets at the expense of support to local markets and trade, neglect of rural development in favour of urban, etc.?

Will PRSPs benefit vulnerable groups such as displaced persons and refugees, female heads of households, widows, youth exposed to HIV (in particular girls)? Will prevailing gender inequalities be exacerbated through PRSPs – inter alia, by increasing the poverty load of those already marginalized, i.e. peasant women and subsistence farmers, single mothers in poor urban areas and AIDS-orphans?

These questions serve as guidance for assessments of CS’ response to PRSPs in the three countries, Honduras, Nicaragua and Zambia. To which extent are official PRSPs seen to address the needs of the majority of poor and marginalised? Whether developed as independent documents or as input to national PRSPs – to which extent and how do national and local/regional CS’ proposals aim to meet the needs of these groups?



## **The Role of Civil Society in PRSPs**

‘Country-driven’ and ‘participatory’ are two major principles of the PRSP approach. The principles of national ‘ownership’ and ‘participation’ of CS in devising and implementing PRSPs have been welcomed by most actors as an important innovation in international aid policy. However, the extent of praise has proved to be fully proportionate with the degree of confusion and contention that has accompanied the PRSP process in concerned countries.

While the IFIs have seen CS participation as a means to improve efficiency of government led policies, by and large CS has entered the PRSP process with the expectation of gaining a (new) voice in the policy-making of their country. In practice confusion, lack of clarity and power struggles have dominated decisions on the extent and at which stage of the process CS should take part, as well as on policy implications of CS participation.

CS engagement with government in policy processes has been increasing, and it is widely recognized that the PRSP process has brought with it an opportunity for this to occur. Nonetheless, the basis on which CS involvement is taking place is often unclear and contradictory. Guidelines on CS participation are few and vaguely formulated, and there is little discussion of which groups constitute legitimate participants in the process – and why. Inclusion in policy processes is unpredictable and largely based on non-formal relationships.

Hence, far from the consensual, apolitical process of participation envisaged in WB guidelines, the PRSP process to date has witnessed lengthy processes of initiated, at times disrupted, at times resumed government-CSO negotiations. The process has displayed power positioning within national PRSP commissions, exclusion of critical voices, antagonistic as well as consensual communication.

The global protest movement has pointed out how the writ of governments and citizens is ceded to the global level when it comes to defining local arrangements for politics, society and economics. While the substantive political and social costs of opportunities foregone are all born at the national and local levels.

Notwithstanding invocations by the WB of national ownership, and of PRSP as ‘no blue print’ for building a country’s PRS, the approach with the related conditionality for debt relief first and foremost appears to represent a wide-ranging integrative framework for global economic growth and poverty reduction.

Analyses and guidelines supporting the framework, as well as the language of IFI representatives and major multilateral and bilateral donor agencies suggest that the new PR policies go hand in hand with values of social inclusion: PRSPs aim at reflecting the voices of the poor, at participation of civil society actors, and at

integration of social service policies and safety net provisions to those most vulnerable and marginal.

All these are no longer principles reserved for CS, or donor agencies advocating human and social development. They are adopted by the IFIs, in particular the WB; they are well reflected and instrumentalised for the overall purpose of economic growth and poverty reduction. While communicated in universalised, apparently apolitical terms such as ‘voices of the poor’, ‘gender equality’, ‘partnership’ and ‘participation’ – the framework is deemed to find its shape within a specific local and national political economy. The asymmetries that characterize the terms have begun to show their face:

The majorities of the poor populations did not have their ‘voices’ heard during PRSP processes; in many cases ‘participation’ has been confined to carefully selected CSOs; the process has often been more exclusive than inclusive. Key civil actors, in particular women’s organisations have encountered difficulties in gaining access to the PRSP process. More often than not inequality and asymmetry is inherent in the ‘partnership’ – be it between IFIs or other donor agencies and recipient governments, between governments and CSOs, or between INGOs and national CSOs. Conflicts about economic resources, political influence, differing and at times contradictory understandings of key concepts and policy orientations, political power positioning, exclusion of parliamentarians and tribalism are common features.

While the PRSP framework emphasizes the plural and consensual rather than conflicting rationales of social inclusion, the experience of the PRSP formulation process has made the approach increasingly prone to accusations of being little trustworthy. It embodies a basic duplicity in dealing, with, on the one hand, ‘the poor’, who are to be ‘included’, and on the other hand, with the political economy of poverty and inequality, which according to many observers is not addressed, except through commitments to growth and plans for ‘inclusion’.

The degree and extent to which CS has engaged with the PRSP mirror this duplicity. While CSOs have found considerable limitations to their opportunities of influencing national PRSPs, at the same time, the very engagement with PRSP has paved new ways for CS and local and national government actors to enter and engage in public poverty agendas. Some of these are anticipated in the PRSP framework, others are evolving as results of political pressure and negotiations between CSOs and government during the PRSP process.

#### Limitations of CS Participation and Influence

Contrary to expectations of CS representatives, in the first round of PRSPs CSOs have seen their involvement reduced to being consulted and informed by government, rather than being invited to a democratic process of contributing to the design of the PRSPs.

CS’ reviews of the PRSP process are unanimous in concluding that opportunities in involving CS in national PR strategies are far from realised. Not only due to the

lack of political will of national governments, but also to systemic failures in the PRSP framework that have affected process as well as policies of national PRSPs. WB/IMF guidelines implicitly suggest that CS participation is confined to analysing extent and causes of poverty and monitoring implementation of programmes; little encouragement is given for including CS in dialogue on policy content.

CSOs have not been given the opportunity to participate in macroeconomic policy, neither in design nor in analysis. CS has been invited to comment on social sector policies, while the macro-economic and structural elements were seen as being out of their domain.

The ministerial appointing of CS for participation in the PRSP process led to a restriction of the number of CSOs to be engaged in the process. Little information about the PRSP has been provided to the general public. In some countries CSOs and INGOs have facilitated dissemination of popular versions of PRSPs.

By and large representatives of poor communities, especially in rural areas have not been included in the PRSP process. In some cases local CSOs, community leaders and/or local government officials have participated in workshops, PPAs or other activities, planned and initiated by CS coalitions or government.

The participatory role assigned to representatives of 'the poor' in the PRSP framework is based on conceptions of poor populations as basically victimized, as people in need of aid and development assistance, yet hailed by the WB as 'the true experts of poverty reduction'. These representational devices are particularly adept in silencing any sense of connection between their plight as losers in the wider political economy of access to capital, property and power and their expressed lacks, wants and vulnerabilities.

Time constraints are identified by both governments and CS as one of the most unsatisfactory elements of the PRSP process. To qualify for debt relief under the HIPC initiative a PRSP process must be successfully implemented for one year. This linkage with HIPC has pushed the pace of PRSPs, compromising their quality, hampering broad CS participation, and has delayed debt relief for a number of countries. There has been insufficient time for CSOs to consult with their constituencies, and key documents have been provided to local CSOs only in English, with no translation of information into indigenous languages.

Lack of political will on the part of governments to take cognisance of CS' inputs to PRSP has been a common experience; in particular in cases where CS provided policy input that would question or challenge government priorities and/or IFI requirements. In many cases CSO recommendations were not taken into account in the final versions of the PRSP. This has led to disappointment and triggered a certain 'participation fatigue' among CS actors.

A commonly held assessment concerns the limited or even lacking capacity of CS. Some IFIs representatives claim that CS would not have the skills required to engage in macroeconomic planning. While this may be true in a strictly economic-technical sense there seem to be other interests involved as well; even in cases where CS coalitions un-mistakenly have been able to provide such capacity their input was not acknowledged. Stressing the need for building capacity among CSOs is justified considering the complexity of the PRSP framework; there is, however, reason to further discuss what may be meant by 'capacity building', by whom and for which groups.

There is a risk inherent that PRSP as the new aid modality will take predominance at the cost of other crucial agendas. In the interest of advocacy/lobby of governments and IFIs, the engagement of CSOs on PRSP related agendas can lead to widening the gap between urban-based CSOs which are well trained and qualified to participate and those which are not, i.e. the poor majorities in rural and urban marginalized areas.

#### Enlargement of Political Space

The PRSP process has served as vehicle for opening up political space for CS, in particular in policy formulation. Some countries have witnessed improved cooperation between government and CS. Assessments recommend that governments, having finalised the first PRSPs, take steps to ensure that CS/government cooperation is maintained and institutionalised.

The multi-dimensional nature of poverty is now acknowledged throughout societies. This said stated policy and common wording often obscures contested political divergences between government, IFIs and CSOs on analyses of poverty and the policies suggested for poverty reduction.

CS involvement with PRSP has increased the numbers of CS actors who relate to public debate on poverty and PRSP policies. Social sector policies in PRSPs recognize the importance of access to basic services and the need to increase and protect spending on health, education, water and sanitation. The compatibility of this aim with the macro-economic framework is being questioned, though, by introduction of user-fees as part of cost-recovery or privatisation.

Whether government-, donor-, or CS-driven, in the first PRSP phase a broad range of experiences has been gained at local levels, and between national/local government and CSOs. Whether or how these carry potentials to materialise in viable local organising for PR is yet to be seen.

Well developed capabilities of CSOs and NGOs, local as well as national, have received less attention, yet, they are important, as CSOs represent a broad range of knowledge – from experiences of lobby/advocacy on economic, political and social issues to sector specific and thematic areas. This is true for CSOs that are already engaged in PRSP-related work, as well as for those not involved, but

which for years have been actively involved in efforts to combat poverty and inequality in their communities.

While such capabilities often relate to providing basic needs and service delivery, rather than to advocacy and lobby, attention to their potentials is well justified. Workshops and hearings at municipal and district levels give evidence that, once given the opportunity to articulate their priorities, CBOs and local CSOs are prepared to engage in local strategizing for poverty reduction.

### **National Civil Society Coalitions and the PRSP**

1. Economic, political history as well as socio-political culture differ at crucial points in Nicaragua and Honduras from that of Zambia. These differences in terms of context are reflected in the PRSP processes.

While critical to the overall conditions, such as for instance the linking of PRSP and HIPC, in Zambia the national CS coalition, CSPR joined the PRSP process, intending to participate in a cooperative spirit, with the aim of complementing government efforts.

In Nicaragua and Honduras Hurricane Mitch 1998 marked a new era with national coalitions emerging, such as Interforos in Honduras and CCER, later Coordinadora Civil, CC in Nicaragua. Both sought to promote CS involvement in formulating national plans for reconstruction. While emerging as strong CS voices in the post-Mitch era, they threatened what some see as weak governments, with some hostility characterizing relations. Negotiations in the PRSP process in the two countries were met with caution by both sides.

In order to opt for influence on national PRSPs CS coalitions in the countries presented national CS shadow reports. While CSPR in Zambia finds close to 80% of their input reflected in the Zambian PRSP, proposals of Interforos (including ASONOG and FOSDEH) and CC were not taken on board by government; all CSOs have continued to call upon governments and the IFIs to enter into dialogue on critical policy areas.

In Honduras and Nicaragua criticism of privatization of public companies, decentralisation of governance and debt relief are key issues, in Zambia gender inequality, dependence of donors and the struggle against HIV/AIDS.

2. Across countries, national CS coalitions share a series of recommendations for PR strategies. They have all taken on the role, ascribed in the PRSP framework, as CS actors with some representation among poor populations, and with special experience and attention to social policies (health, education, water & sanitation). At the same time they have criticised other aspects of that role, by consistently advocating for CS influence on the entire PRSP, including macroeconomic policies.

CSPR being slightly more positive to the official PRSP, all have warned against 'more of the same', in terms of continuation of planned interventions, lack of new analyses or prioritisation and disjuncture between policy proposals and budget allocations for PR. All have highlighted the failure of economic growth strategies of the PRSPs to address needs of poor rural and urban population.

Although priorities are born in diverse socio-economic, political and demographic settings national proposals of CS coalitions in the three countries show a range of similarities. Integral strategies for agrarian production and local industry is the high priority alternative, suggested in all countries: CSPR (Zambia) explicitly calls for an agricultural reform; Interforos/ FOSDEH (Honduras) focus on economic policies related to the microeconomic situation (SMEs contributing to the social sector), and like CC (Nicaragua) and CSPR (Zambia) they suggest increased support to small scale farmers, micro, small and medium producers and promotion of local investment.

3. By and large consensus on key concepts and perspectives of the PRSP is widespread in the international donor community. However, scepticism appears to be growing among CS actors, following the lack of will on the part of governments and IFIs to let CS suggestions influence policies.

CS in all three countries have emphasized the need to treat PRSPs as national development plans for the entire population, as opposed to government attempts to primarily adhere to HIPC-conditions. In the three countries national as well as local CSOs make considerable efforts to hold governments accountable to the PRSPs. Divergences of orientations are being un-covered currently with CS experiences of lack of political will of governments/IFIs to follow through policies with practice – be it in the form of inappropriate budget allocations (all countries), by disregarding needs of obvious poverty stricken areas (Nicaragua, Zambia) or by facing the dead-locks of missing debt relief, due to non-compliance with IMF' conditions (Honduras).

4. While CSOs in Nicaragua and Honduras have seen their participation in the PRSP reduced to being consulted by government, CS in Zambia had some more attention from government. In all the countries CS organised provincial, district or community level hearings, in order to include voices of citizens in the document. While the proposals collected from provinces, notwithstanding huge advocacy, CS efforts have had little impact on official PRSPs (Zambia partly representing an exception to the rule), the very opportunity of 'wide participatory dialogue throughout society', given with the WB' PRSP framework, has been conducive for opening up space for cross-country hearings to take place.

At local hearings a similar methodology has been applied in the three countries. Organised by national CSOs all workshops aimed to serve a duplex purpose: (i) to facilitate a process for local CS actors to define their own priorities, as input to the national PRSP, *and* (ii) to inform them on the basis of government or national CS PRSP-drafts. Thus workshops dealt with an ambiguous goal: while intending

to collect proposals, identified by local CS actors, at the same time CSO representatives facilitated the process by presenting defined areas or themes for PR (such as agriculture, health and HIV/AIDS, environment etc.). National CSOs entered the local scene communicating a duplex message: let us collect the priorities of local CS actors as they define them, however, at the same time we need to enable this process through information and empowerment.

From the documents available, it is not possible to fully assess to which extent CS facilitators have influenced local priorities as suggested at hearings, or whether priorities fully mirror concerns and proposals of citizens in the various districts and provinces. While hearings and workshops took place at provincial, district or municipal levels, they were arranged with the overall goal of influencing the national PRSPs.

This is reflected in the national CS PRSP shadow reports, which have all included summaries of priorities from the various districts and provinces. It appears that targeting the national PRSPs has been decisive in setting agendas and orientation of much PRSP engagement of CS.

5. In the PRSP formulation process as well as in efforts to monitor implementation, advocacy has been directed mainly *upwards* towards governments, IFIs and other donor agencies. There is a risk that focusing attention on national and international PRSP agendas CS unwillingly allow IFIs and other donor agencies to set the main agenda for poverty eradication in their countries – be it through the policy agenda, or by diverting key CS attention to upwards advocacy.

Furthermore, it entails the risk that the well trained, educated and mainly urban-based CSOs overlook, or even distance themselves from needs and priorities of the poor majorities of the population. This risk prevails, given existing structural inequalities in countries between the smaller, comparably privileged social groups and the marginalized majorities, living in the rural areas and in poor urban townships.

However, once hearings and consultations have taken place at local level, they appear to be triggering new political processes. All three countries witness not only increased awareness on poverty eradication as an issue for popular engagement, but also a certain amount of popular mobilisation. Participation in CS workshops at local levels have led to new political demands on government and IFIs, and raised expectations that attention to the voices and concerns of local CSOs and citizens be maintained.

A wide range of monitoring initiatives evolving in the wake of PRSPs aim to ensure implementation at local levels. Initiatives studied appear to have the potential to begin a process of CS re-directing attention *downwards* towards local CSOs, communities and local government.

## Local Civil Society Response to PRSPs

The report gives accounts from CS coalitions' initiatives to identify local priorities for PRSP, both such that have been carried out during the PRSP formulation process and initiatives aimed at monitoring implementation. The accounts are based on desk studies of national and regional documents available in the three countries, interviews in Lusaka, Zambia, with locally engaged CSO representatives, as well as on personal communication with representatives of the N/S PRSP Programme in the countries.

In *Honduras* Interforos (including ASONOG and FOSDEH) prepared its own national proposal for PRSP, as well as five regional documents, based on input from CSOs at regional levels: *Aguán, Copán, Lempira, Ocotepeque and Olancho*. A wide range of monitoring and training initiatives are currently on-going outside the capital Tegucigalpa. One of these took place in *San Pedro Sula*, supported by Interforos, ASONOG-Occidente and FOSDEH.

As in Nicaragua CSOs in Honduras have continued to work for sub-nationally based PRSPs and for community involvement in determining local government expenditure.

From *Nicaragua* two initiatives are studied: in four municipalities in *Achuapa, El Jicaral, El Sauce* and *Santa Rosa del Peñón*, community leaders, local politicians, CSOs and the INGO Ibis entered cooperation in what ended up as a PRSP for the region *León Norte* (locally named the *PRSPcito*). The *Coordinadora Civil* took the 'PRSP 7 municipalities monitoring initiative' in *Malpaisillo, Dipilto, Camoapa, Pueblo Nuevo, Puerto Cabezas, San Ramón and Telpaneca*. While the former dates back to efforts of CS and local governments to include proposals of the León Norte region in the national PRSP, the latter comprises a series of initiatives developed in response to a limited attention to the PRSP on the part of ministries at municipal and departmental levels.

In *Zambia* 'Provincial Poverty Hearings' were conducted by local CSPR member organisations in four of Zambia's most poverty stricken provinces: *North Western, Western, Luapula and Eastern*. The results are compiled in four reports aiming to provide input to the national PRSP. CSPR together with local CSOs has continued to draw the attention to the need of making urban and rural communities benefit from the PRSP, for instance by drafting a series of monitoring initiatives at district level.

### Local Priorities

Whether carried out with the purpose of providing input to the PRSP formulation process, or as initiatives aimed at monitoring implementation of PRSPs, CS actors in villages, municipalities, districts and provinces share the basic goal of attracting attention to their needs as citizens, living far from and outside the realm of political influence.



Notwithstanding country differences related to economic, social, cultural and political history, citizens in the three countries share a range of needs and wishes. Six key areas of concern stand out:

1. Women's role in poverty eradication – crucial for sustainable solutions
2. Agrarian reforms – focus on agriculture and rural development
3. Local production – local trade
4. Children and youth – gender inequalities be accounted for
5. Decentralisation – increased resources and local investments
6. Calls to national CSOs – incorporate local priorities in national development plans

1. Women's role in poverty eradication: While by and large national CSOs respond to gender inequality and poverty by highlighting the need to address women's subordination, local priorities focus also on women's capabilities. Women carry main responsibilities as producers, farmers and traders but also as mothers, caretakers and community planners, hence, their experiences are crucial in the design of local poverty eradication plans. Local proposals suggest that women's experiences and contributions are regarded as an asset in terms of poverty eradication.

2. Agrarian reforms: At all local consultations participants call for assistance to peasants, micro, small and medium size producers, and informal market operators, for years neglected by government as well as by bilateral donors. It is proposed that long-term agrarian reforms are designed with the main goal of ensuring food security for the majority of populations in the countries.

3. Local production: A series of proposals aim to promote local production, to improve establishing of micro business and create opportunities for local marketing. Suggesting direct interventions to small farmers and producers, to local production, to promotion of production for food security and local trade rather than for export are policy options that basically challenge prevailing policies of national governments, as well as approaches taken by IFIs and bilateral donors.

4. Children and youth: Local priorities targeted at children and youth are distinguishing between needs of girls and boys, young women and men, to a greater extent than do national CS shadow reports. Local proposals appear to reflect citizens' experiences that poverty in families, nutrition, children health, risks of HIV/AIDS and opportunities for education are closely interrelated.

5. Decentralisation: Not the least demands for agrarian reforms in favour of women, other peasants and small producers lead local CSOs to suggest decentralisation of governance. In all countries CS calls for upgrading of institutional capacities of municipalities or districts, as well as for establishing regular dialogue meetings with the local civil society. Existing local resources are

to be (better) utilised, and public and private investment in a given area be made according to its potential.

6. Calls to national CSOs: Scepticism towards national government is widespread whereby local CSOs have called into question whether resources for poverty reduction will 'get down to' the people and the areas that need them. This experience further strengthens the calls to national CSOs to ensure that local priorities are incorporated in national PRSP proposals. In Zambia local CSOs raised particular questions with national CSOs in order to enhance the participatory process and ensure that more citizens, including those living in the remotest districts are included in poverty reduction efforts. In Honduras local CSOs strongly advocated for inclusion of local/regional PRSPs in national government plans, while in Nicaragua the four municipalities of the León Norte region presented their own PRSP, the PRSPcito, independently of the national CSO, CC.

#### Local Initiatives – General Conclusions

In all countries local priorities indicate that citizens and local CSOs participating in workshops and hearings carry - yet unutilised - resources in terms of a commitment to involve themselves further in solutions appropriate to local needs. Proposals also suggest that the many local priorities, listed in regional reports and/or in annexes to national CS shadow reports, carry potentials for more elaborated locally based PR strategies. Finally, several proposals are aimed at national decision-makers, with the purpose of calling for local priorities to be accounted for in the national PRS, i.e. in planning as well as in implementation.

In the three countries CSOs carry out their own projects aimed at poverty eradication at local levels, some initiated in relation to PRSPs, some initiated by CSOs regardless of and before initiation of the national PRSP process.

Notwithstanding intentions of both local and national CSOs to make sure that advocacy efforts are 'downwards' accountable, it appears that in some cases CS at local levels are less actively involved on a continuous basis. Affected also by widespread lack of economic and human resources in districts and municipalities, as a result, until now much of the efforts and energy invested at local level during the PRSP process has been left unutilised.

Major efforts of CSOs (and INGOs) to date have been directed upwards towards lobbying at national and international levels. While well justified, this focus advances the risk of disappointing local expectations of citizens and CSOs to carry out initiatives in communities and districts. Consequently there is a need to support a process that encourages citizens and local CSOs to engage in a long-term commitment, including continuous mobilisation in municipalities and villages.

This points to a critical dilemma facing CS. While engaging at local levels in order to gain broad and local level participation, let alone provide grassroots' input to

the national PRSPs, CSOs, along with INGOs working in solidarity and support, tend to direct efforts mainly towards the goal of lobbying at national level.

Given the predominance of the IFIs and other external donors in the PRSP process, there is a risk that CSOs at national as well as local levels are led to give priority to advocacy at the expense of the service delivery elements of their engagement, much as the former is mainly concentrated at national level while the latter takes place within local settings.

This trend is exacerbated by the role played by bilateral donors. Increasingly aid is channelled to supporting budgets of recipient governments, rather than to programmes and projects aimed at basic needs and 'service delivery'. A simplified conception of the role of CS appears to accompany this development. While separating 'service delivery' from 'advocacy' roles donors fail to appreciate the realities in which NGOs/CSOs benefit from the synergy arising from playing both roles simultaneously.

### **Ways Forward**

Having met at workshops during the PRSP formulation process, at initiatives aimed at monitoring implementation of PRSPs, or in efforts to draft alternative policies for local PRSPs, civil society actors in villages, municipalities, districts and provinces appear to have engaged themselves with remarkable enthusiasm. A social and political mobilisation has taken place whereby citizens and local CSOs expressed strong commitment to being part of continued efforts to combat poverty in their home area.

As the majority of local initiatives were arranged with the purpose of providing input to national PRSPs, local policy proposals (except for the PRSPcito and monitoring initiatives in Honduras and Nicaragua) have not been drafted with the explicit goal of setting up specific strategies for municipalities, or as district level or regional poverty reduction policies. It does appear, though, that potentials to develop more elaborated local strategies exist.

Such potentials are embedded in the many local priorities set up at hearings and workshops. While there is outspoken dissatisfaction with efforts of central government there is a richness of ideas among citizens on how to overcome poverty. A considerable amount of unutilised resources exist. In Honduras and Nicaragua CSOs realised the opportunities of forming alliances across municipalities, materialising in suggestions to begin create regional strategies for poverty eradication. Local CSOs in Zambia work with community based organisations in a series of districts in order to increase civil society influence on local government.

One major challenge ahead obviously relates to the question: How to sustain the local popular mobilisation? How to build on ideas and engagement of citizens while at the same time build capacity within local civil society to further elaborate strategies and advocacy initiatives towards governments?

Notwithstanding the critical issue of whether resources will be allocated for poverty reduction in local settings (or not), these questions call for continuous reflection and consideration among CSOs.

Whether working on alternative policies as the GISN in Nicaragua, or advocating for close monitoring of PRSP implementation at local levels as in Honduras and Zambia, CSOs are involved in a diversity of capacity building and advocacy skills training initiatives. A common understanding is that local CSOs must be sensitised and provided with relevant advocacy tools and information about the PRSP and related issues.

It appears, though, that such training might benefit, and even in some cases be best approached, by involving CSOs who are already actively involved in development programmes and advocacy within communities and districts. Church groups, women organisations and other NGOs working on long-term 'service delivery' projects are in many cases well rooted in towns and villages.

They have a thorough knowledge of needs and constraints as well as of social and productive resources within communities. Building upon the confidence they share among citizens appears to be a constructive way of supporting a continued and active engagement in local poverty eradication efforts.

A way of paying due respect to the richness of ideas and solutions, continuously being developed and tried out in villages, communities and towns throughout the countries.

## **I Introduction – N/S Coalition PRSP Programme Research**

The North/South Coalition PRSP Programme is a co-operation between Ibis, MS (Mellemfolkeligt Samvirke), DanChurchAid and IIS, Institute for International Studies, Department for Development Research. The four Danish organisations have joined forces in the N/S PRSP Programme, entering in cooperation with a range of civil society organisations in Honduras, Nicaragua and Zambia. The main purpose is to strengthen civil society in their active participation and influence on local, national and international processes on poverty reduction and PRSP.<sup>1</sup>

Within the first phase of the programme the IIS researcher is due to write up a 'research-based overview' of civil society (CS) experiences with PRSPs. The overview focuses on CS experience with locally identified priorities for planning and implementation of PRSPs – an area little examined and to date less discussed in the international debate on PRSP.

In the PRSP process a standard approach by governments has been to hold a series of consultations at provincial and national level to which representatives of civil society were invited to contribute inputs to analysing poverty and prioritising public actions. Depending on their assessment of the likely impact of participating in government-led processes, civil society organisations (CSOs) have established parallel processes. This has been the response in many countries. CS have organised independent and parallel workshops and consultations at various levels – at provincial, district, municipality or community level.

While CS' influence on official PRSPs in most countries has been limited, CSOs – through processes of dialogue as well as contest with governments – have gained valuable experiences, both in terms of reflections on their role as public actors and in terms of utilising or even expanding the political space for poverty reduction policy.

A majority of assessments of the PRSP regard core parts of the approach sound. It is also found, though, that practice does not reflect the promise. A critical point is the reluctance to let the new process and players influence the underlying policies; rigid adherence to a prescribed set of private sector focused policies is another. Moreover, neglect of key pre-requisites such as intervention to address inequity, gender inequalities and conditions of rural populations in particular are seen to undermine both economic development and poverty reduction initiatives.

One of the intended benefits of PRSP was to introduce a coordinated approach to growth and poverty reduction. There is a significant disjuncture between the poverty reduction and social development strategies in the PRSP *and* their underlying macro-economic frameworks. The narrative of PRSPs focuses on the

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<sup>1</sup> The N/S PRSP Programme is funded by Danida; Phase 1, June 2002- October 2003. Programme description at [www.north-south.dk](http://www.north-south.dk)

importance of social safety nets and increased resource allocation to health and education, while the prescribed macroeconomic reforms remain largely un-discussed.

Hence, while PRSPs are intended to promote 'pro-poor growth', CS actors are beginning to call in question what is in fact the perspectives and implications of 'pro-poor growth'. Do PRSPs contribute to reduction of poverty for peasants, small scale farmers, incl. women, groups dependent on the informal sector, children headed households? Or do the macroeconomic parts of PRSPs imply increase – or even creation of additional poverty?

Will PRSPs benefit vulnerable groups such as female heads of households, AIDS-orphans, youth exposed to HIV (girls in particular), disabled, widows, etc.? Will prevailing gender inequalities be exacerbated through PRSPs as a result of suggested economic and social policies – inter alia, by increasing the poverty load of those already marginalised, i.e. peasant women and subsistence farmers, single mothers in poor urban areas?

These questions serve as guidance when assessing civil society's response to PRSPs. To which extent are official PRSPs seen to address needs of the majority of the poor and marginalised? Whether developed as independent documents or as input to national PRSPs – to which extent and how do national and local/regional CS' proposals aim to meet needs of these groups?

In the three N/S PRSP Programme countries, Honduras, Nicaragua and Zambia, CS organisations have been involved in efforts to identify local priorities of PR policies. There are indications of ongoing initiatives that may prove conducive to continued efforts to address critical needs of poor citizens. Articulations of the marginalisation of major groups of citizens (esp. in rural and urban areas) seem to be on the increase, and CS involvement in PRSP processes has triggered formations of new organising: networks of CBOs, NGOs and CSOs, cooperation between local government and CS, etc. that point to potentials for re-vitalising local productivity and other resources for poverty reduction.

Whether or how these carry potentials to materialise in viable local organising for PR is yet to be seen. Critical to this will be not only how these relate to national PRSPs; but also whether and how the new forms of local organising are able to utilise the political space created through the PRSP process.

Taking the point of departure in involvement of CS with PRSP planning and monitoring at local and national levels, the paper presents a range of challenges and dilemmas for CS in efforts to combat poverty. Accounts from other countries are included to qualify assessments on general as well as country-specific prerequisites for policy articulations.

Drawing up a range of policy options, discussing obstacles as well as opportunities for civil society, the paper aims to contribute to dialogue among CS

partners of the N/S PRSP Programme. The hope is that the paper will contribute to qualifying and exchange of experiences within and across countries – for mutual learning among all involved in poverty eradication efforts.

## **II Poverty Reduction Policies of IFIs**

### **PRSP Framework**

Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) describe a country's macroeconomic, structural and social policies and programs to promote growth and reduce poverty, as well as associated external financing needs. PRSPs are prepared by governments through a participatory process involving civil society and development partners, including the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). (WB, 2002c, official definition)

Adopted in 1999, the PRSP is the WB and IMF's joint framework for national poverty reduction strategies in 79 low-income countries eligible to borrow from the International Development Association (IDA). The stated objective of the PRSP is to help governments develop more effective strategies to fight poverty (IMF and IDA, 1999). The WB has produced a PRSP Sourcebook (World Bank 2001d) of more than one thousand pages, written by more than fifty specialists – in itself affirming the almost endless intricacies inherent in the PRSPs. Yet, put on a simple form (WB, 2002a) PRSPs should be:

- country driven – involving broad based participation by civil society and the private sector in all operational steps;
- results oriented – focusing on outcomes that will benefit the poor;
- comprehensive in recognizing the multidimensional nature of poverty;
- partnership-oriented – involving coordinated participation of development partners (bilateral, multilateral, and non-governmental);
- based on a long-term perspective for poverty reduction.

Moreover, it is envisaged that PRSPs will become a framework for other donor assistance and the basis for concessional lending (IMF and IDA, 1999). While conditions for loans are drawn from the PRSP the mechanism for which IMF loans are released is the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF), replacing the Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility (ESAF), related to the SAPs.

Apart from enabling countries to access IMF and WB loans, PRSPs are linked to the Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) initiative, a programme created in 1996 and modified in 1999 (HIPC II) to provide reduction of the foreign debt of some 40 poor countries. The HIPC initiative is administered by the WB and IMF (WB, 2002b). The PRSPs set out how resources saved through debt relief will be spent on poverty reduction within a framework consisting of 'sound macroeconomic policies and good governance'. (Potter, 2000: 28).

In order to reach what is known as the 'decision point' to gain partial debt relief through the initiative, countries need a PRSP or Interim-PRSP (I-PRSP) to be agreed with the IMF and WB. To enjoy the full amount of debt relief for which the countries are eligible ('completion point'), their agreed PRSP or I-PRSP need to



have been successfully implemented for at least one year. (Marshall and Woodroffe, 2001: 5).

Government's PRSP is expected to develop a comprehensive understanding of poverty and its causes. It should propose actions that have the greatest impact on reducing poverty and provide 'appropriate targets, indicators and systems for monitoring and evaluating progress (...) [through] participatory mechanisms' (WB, 2002a). Governments, in consultation with other stakeholders, diagnose, describe poverty conditions in a country and present medium-term action plans to reduce poverty and generate more rapid economic growth. Governments are encouraged to build on any existing national poverty reduction strategies in the preparation of a PRS. (World Bank-CS 2000-2001: 9)

The WB emphasizes that there is no blueprint for building a country's poverty reduction strategy; instead it '...should reflect a country's individual circumstances and characteristics' (WB, 2002a). Given the time required to produce a full PRSP and the desire by HIPC's to receive debt relief as soon as possible, most countries (including Honduras, Nicaragua and Zambia) have opted to meet their first deadline ('decision point') by preparing an I-PRSP. This document, introduced to avoid delays in receiving assistance, must include a stocktaking of the country's current poverty reduction strategy and lay out a 'road-map of how the country is going to develop its full PRSP'. (WB, 2002b).

The I-PRSP differs from the PRSP in that participation, while suggested, is not required (IMF and IDA, 2000b: 9) whereas the full PRSP involves broader and deeper participation, a so called Participation Action Plan and a detailed report on consultations; this should include the major themes discussed and the impacts of consultation on the contents of the PRSP. (Nelson, 2002: 20).

Participation by civil society is a key element of the PRSP approach, distinguishing it from former initiatives. According to the WB participatory processes or civic engagement in the poverty reduction process allows countries to begin exchanging information with other stakeholders and thereby '...increase transparency of their decision making. This in turn will improve government accountability to the people and, as a result, increase the overall governance and economic efficiency of development activities'. (Tikare et al., WB Sourcebook, 2001:3) It is further expected that participation will help bring about the good governance that was absent in SAPs, attributing to their failings.

### **PRSP for 'Pro-Poor Growth' – Assessments and Hypotheses**

With the birth of the new millennium the world witnessed a general agreement, at global as well as national levels that the gap between the affluence of a small minority and the pervasive poverty in the majority of the world's populations was unacceptable. Apart from the World Bank and the IMF, the UN, DAC, the regional development banks, FAO, IFAD as well as major donor countries such as UK, Canada, the Netherlands and the Nordic countries have poverty reduction as the

primary mission of their aid assistance. Also developing countries set poverty alleviation as the primary development goal.<sup>2</sup>

At the UN Social Summit in Copenhagen 1995 and later at the UN Millennium Summit in New York June 2000 the international community committed itself to halve extreme poverty by 2015. Commitments to reduce poverty are not new, though; they have informed the agendas of the UN, international agencies and governments for more than two decades. What is new today is the prioritization of poverty reduction as the primary mission of development programmes.

The launch of debt relief under the HIPC Initiative led to calls for the resources freed through debt relief to be channelled into poverty reduction and this created an additional important momentum for change.

In order to alleviate the negative impacts of policy reform on the poor, PRSP is intended to be based on the four principles:

- \* broad-based growth
- \* investment in human/social capital
- \* good governance, and
- \* increased 'safety nets'.

A majority of assessments of the PRSP process regard core concepts of the approach sound. However, it is also found that practice does not reflect the promise. A critical point is the reluctance to let the new process and players influence the underlying policies; rigid adherence to a prescribed set of private sector focused policies is another. Neglect of key pre-requisites such as intervention to address inequity, and conditions of rural populations in particular are seen to undermine both economic development and poverty reduction initiatives.

### Contradictions and Inconsistencies

To a large extent, civil society has welcomed the opportunities created by growing international recognition of their critical role in ensuring the success of poverty reduction programs. However, a key message from civil society says that 'opportunities' are as yet unrealised, due to systemic failures in the PRSP framework.

The fostering of country ownership, a key objective of the framework, has already been undermined by early PRSP experiences, and fears that the PRSP would be just another layer of conditionality on top of the ESAF have not been vanquished. In many countries the PRSP process has been contradictory to the concept of ownership. While the PRSP advocates accountable government, current politics and practice determine that accountability remains directed 'upward' towards donors rather than 'downward' towards the people.

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<sup>2</sup> 69% of all developing countries have explicit poverty plans or have incorporated poverty alleviation into their national plans, UNDP Report 2000.

The human and capital resources in countries did not allow for a locally owned process that would meet the time and content requirements of the IFIs. Countries with little experience of integrating sectoral planning with macro-economic policies (such as Mali, Rwanda and Mozambique) required substantial external assistance, which predominantly came from the IFIs with assistance from other donors<sup>3</sup>. Further, the need for IFI endorsement, prior to funds being approved has led to self-censorship on the part of national governments anxious to conform to IFI expectations.

One of the intended benefits of PRSP was to introduce a comprehensive and coordinated approach to growth and poverty reduction. There is a significant disjuncture between the poverty reduction and social development strategies in the PRSP *and* their underlying macro-economic frameworks. The narrative of PRSPs focuses on the importance of social safety nets and increased resource allocation to health and education, while the prescribed macroeconomic reforms remain largely un-discussed.

Un-discussed in terms of previous failings or lessons learnt, un-discussed with regard to their effect on the poor and marginalized groups, and un-discussed with regard to their sequencing and the consideration of alternative options. As a result of this silence little change from previous economic reform initiatives is found.

Increased budget allocation toward social development is essential. Beyond debt-relief however, the question of how increased spending on the social sector can be financed is not made explicit in the majority of PRSPs, leaving the determination of policies for reducing government expenditure and increasing revenue, in most cases to donor conditionality documents – in other words, well beyond the reach of civil society participation.

The disjuncture between the strategies outlined in the PRSP and the conditionalities within the PRGF policy matrix have led some to conclude that the PRSP framework is simply a mega condition that enables the WB and the IMF to involve themselves in areas that are clearly outside of their mandate and expertise.<sup>4</sup> Beyond macroeconomic policy, the traditional domain of the IMF, the PRSP's emphasis on 'good governance' has now brought the whole national plan for poverty reduction under the 'endorsement' of the WB/IMF. Charles Abugre: 'The function of endorsing or vetoing national strategies [...] erodes the sovereignty of borrowing governments.'<sup>5</sup>

#### PRSP – Different from SAP?

Although the IFIs have not conducted a comprehensive analysis of the effects of structural adjustment, a growing body of evidence (including studies by

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<sup>3</sup> ODI, 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Malaluan, C., Joy C. and Guttal, S., 2002.

<sup>5</sup> News and Notices for IMF and World Bank Watchers, Fall 2000.

UNCTAD<sup>6</sup>) questions the applicability of the structural reform models to developing country contexts. A 5-year study by SAPRIN<sup>7</sup> examining the impact of macro-economic and structural reforms in ten countries shows a great deal of consistency of policy impact across countries. The key findings are:

*Privatization* contributed to increasing inequality and unemployment with a loss of services to poorer, more remote areas, a lack of transparency, benefits flowed primarily to large foreign companies and did not increase the real rate of growth.

*Liberalisation* measures led to increased unemployment and underemployment and reduced wages, working conditions and job security. SME's suffered from lack of market opportunities and access to credit. Growth rates were not accelerated. Benefits were concentrated to large and or foreign firms, and to a narrow range of products/industries with typically negative impacts on women, equity and the environment.

*Monetary policies* worsened inequalities through the removal of subsidies and price controls on basic goods; salary freezes and redundancies effected public sector workers, and the poor were hit hardest by the introduction of fees for basic healthcare and education.

*Currency devaluation and export promotion* led to food insecurity, heavy dependence in imported products and high vulnerability to external shocks, outweighing the limited benefits of increased trade in a small range of products.

Analyses of completed PRSPs indicates a replication/extension of these fundamentals of SAPs. The difference with PRSP policies is the increased provision of social safety nets and increased budget allocations to health and education. The introduction of user-fees however, calls in question the compatibility of this aim with the macro-economic framework. Although some countries have included measures to ensure free access for the poor, past schemes have demonstrated that this approach is inadequate to ensure access to basic services for the poor.

Across countries and regions the market-based approach is reliant on private sector development, trade and investment for rapid growth, with little acknowledgement of international market realities, past performance or previous industry responses to policy reforms. The absence of a strategic approach to rural as well as to local industry development is significant.

Craig & Porter draw the conclusion that PRSPs entail '...reliance on the rule of law, and on formal rather than substantive economic categories and analysis.' This has 'consistently tipped the playing field in favour of market and political forces with most power to exploit the domains secured by those legal frameworks and agreements.' (Craig & Porter, 2003b:6) International economic laws can benefit both rich and poor but, in the absence of other political pressures, they will tend for many reasons to favour the strong over the weak.

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<sup>6</sup> UNCTAD, 2001 and 2002.

<sup>7</sup> SAPRIN, 2002.

### Pro-Poor Growth?

PRSPs are intended to promote 'pro-poor growth' Do they? What is in fact the meaning and implications of 'pro-poor growth'? Do PRSPs contribute to reduction of poverty for peasants, small scale farmers, incl. women, groups dependent on the informal sector, children headed households? Or do the macroeconomic parts of PRSPs imply increase – or even creation of additional poverty?

Taking cognisance of prevailing structural inequities, there are reasons for caution. As noted by Sobhan: 'Within the prevailing property structures of society, the rural poor in particular remain disconnected from the more dynamic sectors of the market, particularly where there is scope for benefiting from the opportunities provided by globalisation.

The fast growing sectors of economic activity tend to be located within the urban economy, where the principal agents of production tend to be the urban elite, who own the corporate assets which underwrite the faster growing sectors of the economy. Even in the export-oriented rural economy, in those areas linked with the more dynamic agro-processing sector, a major part of the profits, in the chain of value addition, accrue to those classes who control corporate wealth.

The rural poor, therefore, interface with the dynamic sectors of the economy only as producers and wage earners, at the lowest end of the production and marketing chain, where they sell their produce and labour under severely adverse conditions. This leaves the rural poor with little opportunity for sharing in the opportunities provided by the market economy for value addition to their labours.' (Sobhan, 2002:6)

Against this background, to which extent is growth pro-poor? To which extent can we speak about pro-poor growth when the remedies in point, particularly promoted by the IMF, are: monetary policies and privatisation, promotion of export crops at the expense of production for local consumption, integration in global markets at the expense of support to local markets and trade, negligence of rural development in favour of urban, etc.?

Will PRSPs benefit vulnerable groups such as female heads of households, AIDS-orphans, youth exposed to HIV (girls in particular), disabled, widows, etc.? Will prevailing gender inequalities be exacerbated through PRSPs as a result of suggested economic and social policies – inter alia, by increasing the poverty load of those already marginalised, i.e. peasant women and subsistence farmers, single mothers in poor urban areas?

These questions serve as guidance when assessing civil society's response to PRSPs. To which extent are official PRSPs seen to address needs of the majority of the poor and marginalised? Whether developed as independent documents or as input to national PRSPs – to which extent and how do national and local/regional CS' proposals aim to meet needs of these groups?

### III Civil Society – Participation in Policies

#### Principles and understanding of role of CS in PRSPs

‘Country-driven’ and ‘participatory’ are two major principles of the PRSP approach. ‘Country-driven’ – to ensure that a PRSP is ‘owned’ and managed by a country as opposed to a plan imposed by externals, such as the WB or the IMF. ‘Participatory’ – as all ‘stakeholders should participate in formulation and implementation’ (WB Dec 10, 1999).

From the outset national government is the key stakeholder who is obliged to ‘consult with’ other stakeholders. The promotion of national PR strategies is to be done through a “wide participatory dialogue within government and throughout society”. The WB regards participation processes important “because they foster ownership of effective policies, which are more likely to be implemented. Additionally, civil society participation can bring specialized or local knowledge to the drafting process by bringing in the opinions and priorities of the poor, which, in turn, improve the quality of policy-making. Participation also broadens public understanding and support of policy reforms, while increasing transparency and public understanding of government processes.” (World Bank-CS 2000-2001: 9)

#### Assessments of Civil Society Involvement

Researchers and policy-makers’ assessments to date have put the main emphasis on the involvement of CSOs in *policy formulation*.<sup>8</sup> Analyses have particularly focused on the formulation of PRSPs and the limitations of PRSP ‘stakeholder consultations’.<sup>9</sup> The work has focused mainly on developments at *national* level, even though there is some discussion of how the CSOs relate to civil society in a wider sense and at different levels.<sup>10</sup>

The principles of national ‘ownership’ and ‘participation’ of CS in devising and implementing PRSPs have been welcomed by most actors as an important innovation in international aid policy. However, the extent of hailing has proved to be fully proportionate with the degree of confusion and contest that accompanied the PRSP process in concerned countries.

While the IFIs have seen CS participation as a means to improve efficiency of government led policies, by and large CS has entered the PRSP process with the expectation to gain (new) voice in the policy-making of their country. In practice

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<sup>8</sup> This chapter draws on a range of assessments of CS’ participation in the PRSPs – research studies, independent consultant reviews as well as NGO and CS’ own review reports and programme presentations.

<sup>9</sup> Godfrey and Sheehy, 2000; McGee and Norton, 2000; McGee et al., 2002; A broad range of reviews by INGOs and other international networks, see for collection of literature [www.eurodad.org](http://www.eurodad.org)

<sup>10</sup> Lister & Nyamugasira, 2003; Gould and Ojanen, 2003; Malaluan, Joy and Guttal, 2002; Painter, 2002; Walan, 2002; Bertelsen and Jensen, 2001.

confusion, lack of clarity and power struggles have dominated decisions on extent, at which stage of the process CS should take part, as well as on policy implications of CS participation.

CSO engagement with government in policy processes has been increasing, and it is widely recognized that the PRSP process has brought with it an opening of space for this to occur. Nonetheless, although CS involvement is organised through structured processes, the basis on which it takes place is often unclear and contradictory.

Guidelines are few and vaguely formulated (WB Sourcebook, 2001; World Bank-CS 2000-2001), and in most cases there is little discussion or analysis of which groups constitute legitimate participants in the process – and why. Inclusion in policy processes is unpredictable and largely based on non-formal relationships; according to observers in some countries civil society relate with the state on the basis of clientelism or patronage (Lister and Nyamugasira, 2003; Gould and Ojanen, 2003).

Hence, far from the consensual, apolitical process of participation, envisaged in the WB PRSP Sourcebook and other guidelines (World Bank 2001d, World Bank-CS 2000-2001) the PRSP process to date has witnessed lengthy processes of initiated, at times disrupted, at times resumed government-CSO negotiations. Similarly, the process has witnessed power positioning within national PRSP commissions, exclusion of critical voices, antagonistic as well as consensual communication, etc.

The global protest movement<sup>11</sup> has made clear how the writ of governments and citizens is generally ceded to the *global* level when it comes to defining local arrangements for politics, society and economics. While the substantive political and social costs of opportunities foregone are all born at the *national* and *local* levels (Craig & Porter, 2003b). Notwithstanding invocations by the World Bank of national ownership, and of PRSP as ‘no blue print’ for building a country’s poverty reduction strategy, it appears that the approach with the related conditionality for debt relief represents a wide-ranging integrative framework for global economic growth and poverty reduction.

Analyses and guidelines supporting the framework (as well as the language of IFI representatives, major donor agencies, such as the UNDP, UNHRC and key bilateral donors) suggest that the new poverty reduction policies go hand in hand with *values of social inclusion*: PRSPs aim at reflecting the voices of the poor, at participation of civil society actors, and at integration of social service policies and safety net provisions to those most vulnerable and marginal.

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<sup>11</sup> For statements representing the movement, see World Social Forum, [www.forumsocialmundial.org.br](http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br), the South based networks Focus on the Global South, [www.focusweb.org](http://www.focusweb.org) and Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), [www.dawn.org.fj](http://www.dawn.org.fj)

All these are no longer reserved for CS, or donors advocating human and social development. They are adopted by the IFIs (the World Bank in particular); they are well reflected and instrumentalised for the overall purpose of economic growth and poverty reduction.

The social inclusions might signal a global triumph of the normative technical over the contested political, the latter appearing to be contained within local institutions with devolved powers for service delivery (Craig & Porter 2003b:6). While communicated in universalized, apparently apolitical terms such as ‘voices of the poor’, ‘gender equality’, ‘partnership’ and ‘participation’ – all of this is deemed to find its shape within a specific local and national political economy. The asymmetries that characterize these terms have begun to show their face. When applied in a national context the somewhat illusory neutrality, attached to the technical catchwords, is being unravelled:

The majorities of the poor populations did not have their ‘voice’ heard during PRSP processes; in many cases ‘participation’ has been confined to carefully selected CSOs, hence, the process has often been more exclusive than inclusive. Key civil actors, in particular women’s organisations have encountered difficulties in gaining access to the PRSP process<sup>12</sup>. More often than not inequality and asymmetry is inherent in the ‘partnership’ – be it between IFIs or other donor agencies and recipient governments, between governments and CSOs, or between INGOs and national CSOs. Conflicts about economic resources, political influence, differing and at times contradictory understandings and perceptions of key concepts and policy orientations, political power positioning, exclusion of parliamentarians and tribalism are common features.

While the PRSP framework emphasizes the plural and consensual rather than conflicting rationales of social inclusion, the experience of the PRSP formulation process has made the approach increasingly prone to accusations of being mere “spin and deceit”. It embodies a basic duplicity in dealing, with, on the one hand, ‘the poor’ – who are to be ‘included’ – and on the other hand, with the political economy of poverty and inequality – which according to many observers is not addressed, except through commitments to growth and plans for ‘inclusion’. PRSP has fuelled the international criticism on PRSP as ideological, exclusive, morally totalising and obscuring of substantive structural social difference (Craig and Porter, 2003a; Gomes et al., 2002a and 2002b; Malaluan, Joy and Guttal, 2002).

The values of inclusion, as well as appeals to consensus, participation and partnership have proved to draw in potential critics, including local and national CSOs, deeply devoted to poverty eradication in their societies. Yet these ‘imagined inclusions’<sup>13</sup> are bounded by the technical limitations – not so much on what can be discussed, but on what can have an effect on the strategy. Examples are many

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<sup>12</sup> Bradshaw and Linneker, 12/2002; Zuckermann and Garrett, 2003; Whitehead, 2003; Possing, 2003; Gender and Development Network 2002.

<sup>13</sup> This term is used by Craig & Porter 2003a:54, borrowing from Levitas, 1998.



that critique is either muted, stunted or co-opted. The degree and extent to which CSOs have engaged with the PRSP appear to mirror the dilemma.<sup>14</sup>

While CSOs have found considerable limitations to their opportunities of influencing national PRSPs, at the same time, the very engagement with the PRSP policy option has paved new ways for CS and local and national government actors to enter and engage in public poverty agendas. Some of these were anticipated in the PRSP framework, others are evolving as results of political pressure, negotiations and dialogue between CSOs and government during the PRSP process. The following two sections reflect and discuss these findings – those of ‘limited participation’ as well as those of new ways and opportunities.

### **Limited Civil Society Participation**

#### **Participation as Consultation**

- In the first round of PRSPs CS participation in general has been limited to consultation, leaving involved CSOs with un-satisfied expectations to play a far more active role, both in terms of participation in policy-formulation and with the aim of influencing policy content and processes.
- CS’ reviews of the PRSP process, assessments of international consultants and independent researchers are unanimous in conclusions that opportunities in involving CS in national PR strategies are far from realised, not only due to lack of political will of national governments, but also to systemic failures in the PRSP framework that have affected process as well as policies of national PR strategies.
- WB/IMF guidelines implicitly suggest that CS participation is confined to analysing extent and causes of poverty and monitoring implementation of programmes. In the documents little encouragement is found for including CS in dialogue on policy content.<sup>15</sup>
- In the overwhelming majority of countries governments and IFIs have regarded CSOs participation a means to efficiency of implementation of programmes rather than as an opportunity for the broader society to influence content and direction of PR strategies.
- This has been against expectations of CS representatives. CSOs have seen their involvement reduced to being consulted and informed by government, rather than being invited to influence and contribute to designing PRSPs.
- All reviews found that – notwithstanding seeking access or influence – CSOs have not been given the opportunity to participate in macroeconomic

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<sup>14</sup> Examples are numerous: NGOs advocating land rights finding their challenges to unequal distributions of property set aside in favour of invitations to participate in land administration projects. Activists protesting ‘honour killings’ and violence against women are met with offers to engage in ‘family protection’ ventures. Civil actors concerned with currency market reforms and the withdrawal of newly privatised banks from rural areas find themselves slated as potential contractors in micro-credit schemes (Bradshaw & Linneker, 8/2002:9; Malaluan, Joy and Guttal, 2002; Craig and Porter 2003 b: 6).

<sup>15</sup> [www.worldbank.org/poverty/psia/userguide.htm](http://www.worldbank.org/poverty/psia/userguide.htm);  
[www.brettonwoodsproject.org/topic/adjustment/](http://www.brettonwoodsproject.org/topic/adjustment/)

policy, neither in design nor in analysis; information has been withheld, CS was excluded from consultations or not invited to dialogue with governments/IFIs. CS has been invited to make commentary on social sector budgets, while the macro-economic and structural elements were seen as being out of their domain.<sup>16</sup>

- A commonly held view is that participatory processes have been little more than public relations exercises in many countries. One analyst describes the participatory process within PRSPs as the IFIs move to get “national governments to do their bidding for them.” (Abruge in News and Views for IMF and Bank Watchers, 2001)

#### Inclusion and Exclusion of Civil Society Organisations

- By and large CS representatives have been appointed by governments, i.e. Ministries of Finance who have led the process in most countries (emphasizing the primary role of budget allocation, fiscal, monetary and other structural macroeconomic policies in the PRSP).
- In most cases the ministerial appointing of CS for participation in the PRSP process led to a restriction of the number of CSOs and NGOs to be engaged in the process.
- Little information about the PRSP has been provided to the general public. In some countries CSOs (Zambia) and INGOs (Tanzania) have facilitated dissemination of popular versions of PRSPs.
- Some reviews raise the issue whether, or to which extent the mostly urban-based CS coalitions are representative of the poor, to some extent questioning their legitimacy as advocates for poverty reduction. (McGee, et al., 2002)
- By and large representatives of poor communities, especially in rural areas have not been included in the PRSP process. In some cases local CSOs, community leaders and/or local government officials have participated in workshops, Participatory Poverty Assessments or other activities, planned and initiated by CS coalitions or government (Honduras, Nicaragua, Zambia, Uganda, Rwanda, Bolivia)
- The participatory role assigned to representatives of ‘the poor’ in the PRSP framework is based on conceptions of poor populations as basically victimized, as people in need of aid and development assistance, yet hailed as ‘the true experts of poverty reduction’ (World Bank, 2000).
- The feature of victimizing the poor is analysed by Craig & Porter: “The surveying and participatory techniques (...) have as their first purpose to shape up the poor and vulnerable as willing and responsible partners in their own progress, as potential providers of service in the resolution of problems firmly placed at their feet as theirs to resolve. (...) [O]nly aspectual attention is given to the ways in which the poor are capable of political

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<sup>16</sup> The Kenyan IPRSP process is illustrative: whilst there was extensive participation from civil society groups on poverty analysis and policy options, a parallel process, examining macro-economic and structural issues was underway, which excluded civil society groups. (Gomes et al., 2002)

organisation, through for example trade unions, political parties or protest against cabals of the police, judiciary or landed elite to challenge wider dispositions of privilege. (...) [T]heir 'participation' in a much more limited range of civil society agencies, funeral groups, self-help and service associations for water, health or schooling is highlighted in positive terms. Yet these representational devices are particularly adept in silencing any sense of connection between their plight as losers in the wider political economy of access to capital, property and power and their expressed lacks, wants and vulnerabilities." (Craig & Porter, 2003b:5)

#### Time and Language – Constraints for Civil Society

- Time constraints have been identified by both governments and civil society as one of the most unsatisfactory elements of the PRSP process. In order to qualify for debt relief under the HIPC initiative a PRSP process must be successfully implemented for one year. This linkage with HIPC has pushed the pace of PRSPs, compromising their quality, hampering broad CS participation, and has delayed debt relief for a number of countries.
- The human and capital resources in many countries did not allow for a locally owned process that would meet the time and content requirements of the IFIs; IFI staff playing major roles in drafting of PRSPs, in some reviews named 'Mission Creep' – as to underline the contradiction to the principle of national ownership. (Gomes et al., 2002b)
- Invitations to CS to participate in the PRSP process have often been received late in the process.
- Time pressures have often led to ludicrously hurried participatory processes (in Ethiopia 100 districts were 'consulted' in a few weeks). Problems of the availability of documents and information have been widespread, and often drafts of the PRSP have been presented for civil society comment at the eleventh hour. Civil society has been invited to meetings at short notice, and asked to comment on lengthy reports tabled on the day. These practices contribute to a participatory process as mere consultation; time constraints themselves implied that no room was left for content changes in the PRSP, such that could have otherwise been based on results evolving from the a broader involvement of citizens and CSOs.
- There has been insufficient time for CSOs to consult with their constituencies.
- CSOs were not given time was to prepare alternative strategies.
- Key documents have been provided to local civil society groups only in English, with no translation of information into indigenous languages. In 2003, two years after launching the Rwanda PRSP, there is no translation into Kirwanda (K.Christiansen, ODI, in personal communication, 2003).

#### Influence of Civil Society on Policy Content

- Limitations or, at times lack of will, on the part of governments to take cognisance of CS' inputs to PRSP; in particular this is true in cases where CS provided alternative policies, i.e. that would question or challenge government priorities and/or IFI requirements. In many cases CSO

recommendations were not taken into account in the final versions of the PRSP (Nicaragua, Honduras ao.).

- A commonly held assessment concerns the limited or even lacking capacity of CS. Some authors relate this to the allegations of IFIs that CS would not have the skills required to engage in macroeconomic planning. While this may be true in a strictly economic-technical sense there seem to be other interests involved as well, and even in cases where CS coalitions un-mistakenly were able to provide such capacity their input was not acknowledged. (Honduras)
- In some countries observers found a tendency that INGOs crowded out local and national CSOs or at least played a major role during the PRPS formulation process (Tanzania, Rwanda) (Gould and Ojanen, 2003, McGee et al., 2002).
- Stressing the need for building capacity among CSOs is justified considering the complexity and comprehensiveness of the PRSP framework. There is reason, though, to further examine and discuss what may be meant by 'capacity building', by whom and for which groups. Assessments give evidence that (on a variety of issues) CS and NGOs as well as INGOs are confronted with huge challenges in terms of making tactical as well as strategic choices as to which parts and processes they want to prioritise in the PRSP exercise – and with which political perspectives.
- There are reasons to draw attention to the risk inherent in the PRSP taking predominance of national policy agendas. In the interest of advocacy and lobby towards governments and IFIs, the engagement of CSOs in PRSP may contribute to widen the gap between those (urban-based CSOs) which are well trained and qualified to participate and those which are not (the poor majorities in rural and urban marginalised areas). 'Focus of the Global South' is concerned that some of the newly emerging CSOs have 'more to do with responding to opportunities created by the aid industry than with ensuring that the diverse interests of local peoples are adequately represented in national policy formulation.' (Malaluan, Joy and Guttal, 2002:6).

## **Enlargement of Political Space**

Recent assessments agree that the PRSP process has served as vehicle for opening up political space for CS, in particular in policy formulation. This chapter lines out main experiences and opens a discussion of CS opportunities of utilising the new openings.

What is poverty – and poverty reduction all about?

- The multi-dimensional nature of poverty is now acknowledged throughout societies. This said, stated policy often obscures contested political divergences. In many countries fundamental differences are found between government, IFIs and CSOs on conceptions, analyses of poverty and the policies suggested for poverty reduction. (McGee et al., 2002)

- Reviews indicate that CS involvement with PRSP has increased the numbers of CSOs, individuals, researchers etc. who relate to public debate on poverty and PRSP policies. (McGee, et. al, 2002; Walan, 2002; Booth et al., 2003) (See further chapter IV.)
- Social sector policies in PRSPs recognize the importance of access to basic services in poverty alleviation and the need to increase and protect spending on health education, water and sanitation to ensure coverage and quality. The introduction of user-fees as part of cost-recovery or privatization however, calls in question the compatibility of this aim with the macro-economic framework. In some countries (Uganda, Zambia) CS have been invited to participate in sectoral committees or task forces. CS have engaged actively in developing responses and inputs – in most cases they have not been taken on board in final PRSPs.
- The work already done may prove constructive, though: (i) as a basis for monitoring implementation and reviews of PRSPs, and (ii) CSOs have been mobilised for current and future public debate, including raising voices of critique and protest against privatization measures.

#### Enlargement of Political Space

- In the wake of introducing PRSPs on the political agenda in developing countries, opportunities for civil society participation in national policy planning have improved.
- In spite of limited collaboration (or even resistance) of governments/IFIs some countries have witnessed improved cooperation between government and CS. A range of assessments recommend that governments, having finalised the first PRSPs, take steps to ensure that CS/government cooperation is maintained and institutionalised. (Booth et al., 2003; Maxwell, 2003)
- Bilateral donors (government and INGOs) have been involved in PRSP processes, working with governments as well as with CS and NGOs. More than one is willing to take on facilitating roles between national actors, such as offering capacity building on monitoring PRSPs, etc. - DFID, IFAD, Nordic countries. (IFAD, 2002) Whether such engagement will be conducive to localisation of PR policies, i.e. to genuine national ownership of PRSPs, to increased democratization etc. depend on the national context, much as on flexibility in attitude and self perception of the role of donors, openness to local resources and initiatives, and on political perspectives of CS.
- In the PRSP process the standard approach by governments has been to hold a series of consultations at regional and national level to which 'representatives' of civil society were invited to contribute inputs to analysing poverty and prioritising public actions. Depending on their assessment of the likely impact of participating in government-led processes, CSOs have established parallel processes. May the political impact on official PRSPs in most countries be limited, there seems to be evidence that CSOs in many countries through political processes of dialogue and contest have gained new experiences, both in terms of reflection on their own role as public actors and in terms of utilizing or even

expanding existing political space (CCER 9/2001; Cranshaw, 2002; FOSDEH 2001; McGee et al., 2002; Mpepo, 2003; Wilks & Lefrancois, 2002)

- Some assessments are occupied with CS consultations (or investigations) at local levels (regional, provincial, district, community), in particular connected to preparations of PRSPs (poverty analyses, consultation on thematic priorities etc.). In most cases CS have chosen to organise independent and parallel workshops and consultations at various levels.
- Uganda is the one country where government organised workshops with local authorities, while CS at the same time, and in understanding with government, co-ordinated consultations in districts to collect grassroots priorities. In Rwanda the government made a strong effort to consult with ordinary people, and explicitly tried to include citizens in communities and households. Initiated as early as June 1999, in Bangladesh countrywide 'multi-stakeholder meetings' were organised by CS in order to set priorities and policy alternatives for 'realistic policy reforms'. Hence, by initiation of the PRSP in the country, CS – regardless of the IFI initiative – had already produced a set of Policy Briefs, covering all policy areas, key to poverty eradication. (Afrodad, 2002; Mc Gee et al., 2002; Centre for Policy Dialogue, 2003)
- While many assessments comment on the lack of policy capacity of CS, less common are assessments that draw the attention to well developed capabilities of CSOs and NGOs, local as well as national.<sup>17</sup> Yet these are important, because CSOs represent a broad range of knowledge – from experiences of lobby/advocacy on economic, political and social issues at local and national levels to sector specific and thematic areas. This is true for CSOs that are already engaged in PRSP-related work, as well as for those not involved, but who for years have been actively involved in efforts to combat poverty and inequality in their communities.
- While such capabilities may be related to providing basic needs and service delivery, rather than to advocacy and lobby, attention to their potentials is well justified. (Lister & Nyamugasira, 2003; Possing, S, 2000) Experience from workshops and hearings at municipal and district levels give evidence that CBOs and local CSOs – once given the opportunity to articulate their particular wants and priorities – are prepared to engage in local strategizing for poverty reduction.<sup>18</sup>
- Such experience is crucial, not the least with a view of future PRSP reviews and monitoring activities of CSOs at local levels. Such potentials of CS could be further specified, and the scope be expanded to include experiences of local community based organisations, lived experience and life-strategies of (female) members of poor rural and urban communities (CCJDP, Zambia) – all this in order not to divert attention from ongoing initiatives and resources among citizens.

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<sup>17</sup> The analyses referred to above is an outstanding exception (Craig & Porter, 2003b).

<sup>18</sup> See chapter IV.

- Whether government-, donor-, or CS-driven, a broad range of experiences has been gained at *local* levels (– and between national/local government and CSOs). The following Chapter IV gives an insight in some of the experiences, drawn from the first PRSP phase. Whether or how these carry potentials to materialise in viable local organising for PR is yet to be seen. Critical to this will be not only how these relate to national PRSPs; but also whether and how the new forms of organising are able to utilise the local and national political space created through the PRSP process.

## **IV Civil Society Initiatives – Between Government and Grassroots**

This chapter gives accounts of CS experience from N/S PRSP programme countries: Honduras, Nicaragua and Zambia. In all three countries CS coalitions have been involved in efforts to identify *local priorities* of PR policies.

In *Honduras* the CS-network, Interforos prepared its own national proposal for PRSP, as well as five regional documents, all based on input from CSOs at regional levels. In *Nicaragua* community leaders, local politicians and CSOs entered cooperation with four municipalities to develop a PRSP in the region León Norte. In the two Central American countries CSOs have continued to work for community involvement in determining local government expenditure.

In *Zambia* the coalition CSPR was involved in preparatory PRSP consultations in four provinces, including some of the poorest districts. CSOs have continued to draw the attention to the need of making urban and rural communities benefit from the PRSP, for instance by drafting a series of monitoring initiatives at district level.

Content-wise, in all three countries CS coalitions have engaged in PRSP work with the aim to ensure that national PR policies are designed to improve opportunities of the poor majorities of populations. How and to which extent have locally identified priorities for poverty reduction been translated into policies that carry the potential of addressing key needs and interests of the poor and marginalised majorities? Such questions are vital, and CS engagement on this matter is critical.

In general CS has met several constraints in efforts to make governments (and IFIs) take on board policies that would address inequality and redistribution of resources. Key findings by reviews and research on the PRSP process indicate that PRSPs do not address major and growing inequalities between rich and poor. In most cases redistribution policies are not formulated, and macro policy measures as well as sector policies have not (yet) proved effective in changing the 1980'es and 1990'es pattern of entrenching poverty and inequalities.

However, assessments of PRSP reviews also comprise cases whereby CS involvement in PRSP processes at local level has opened up new political opportunities. There are indications of ongoing initiatives that may prove conducive to continued efforts to address critical needs of poor citizens. Awareness of the marginalisation of major groups of citizens (esp. in rural and urban areas) seems to be on the increase, and in quite a few countries CS articulations in PRSP processes have triggered formations of new organising: networks of CBOs, NGOs and CSOs, cooperation between local government and CS, etc. that point to potentials for re-vitalising local productivity and other resources for poverty reduction.



Whether or how these carry potentials to materialise in viable local organising for PR is yet to be seen. Critical to this will be not only how these relate to national PRSPs; but also whether and how the new forms of organising are able to utilise the political space created through the PRSP process.

Samuel emphasizes the ambiguity involved in advocacy efforts of civil society. 'Advocacy means amplifying the voice. But the fundamental question facing activists is whose voice and for what purpose. Across the world large numbers of people are marginalized and unheard in the corridors of power. Advocacy can work to amplify their voices, however, this aspect of advocacy is often less understood or put in practice. Advocacy is more often perceived as a systematic process of influencing public policies.' (Samuel, J, 2002:1) While the latter is necessary it does not per se warrant a process that entails a space for the marginalized.

A 'people-centred advocacy' seeks to go beyond a state-centred approach to social change and politics. Shaped and led by the people, 'people-centred advocacy' wants to go beyond the idea of advocating on behalf of the marginalized. A mode of social and political action it aims at 'mobilising the *politics of the people* to ensure that the *politics of the state* is accountable, transparent, ethical and democratic.' (Samuel, J, 2002:2)

Will CS organising be able to maintain the local popular mobilisation created in the PRSP process? Will a people-centred advocacy emerge? And if so, how and to which extent will it be able to contribute to a re-vitalising of local social and economic resources (including those of the poor rural majorities)? What would it take for this to succeed? Are there options for strengthening of local and popular governance, or will local initiatives end up being contorted or limited by financing and management arrangements accompanying PRSPs? The latter being not at all unlikely, given IFI conditionalities as well as current administrative practices and political culture (corruption, mismanagement etc.) in many countries.

For obvious reasons these questions cannot be answered in this paper. But some insight of CS experiences from the three countries can be given, guided by the following questions:

- At which stage, and at which level have CSOs been involved in organising consultations, workshops or other meetings, related to the PRSP process? (provincial, district, municipality, community?)
- Which lessons have CS actors drawn from this particular engagement (positive, negative; critical issues)?
- Which are the main local priorities identified for poverty reduction (PR) (including definitions of poverty, proposed policies for PR)?
- Do identified strategies reflect priorities of the most marginalised groups of poor citizens (incl. (women) subsistence farmers, small enterprises, men, women, youth, girls and boys dependent on the informal sector?)

- Have proposed policies for PR been articulated to feed into a local PRSP (for instance as is the case in four municipalities in the region of León Norte in Nicaragua)? If so, which are the main results of these efforts? And which are future prospects?
- How and to which extent have locally identified priorities informed CS' input into national PRSPs? To which extent do national PRSPs build on potentials for PR within communities, districts and provinces? Main results? Positive and negative experiences?

## **Honduras**

### **Process**

As was the case in Nicaragua, Hurricane Mitch in October 1998 provoked one of the worst disasters in 200 years. Mitch proved important in the PRSP process in terms of its impact in highlighting increasing poverty and vulnerability in the two countries. And it marked a new era in civil society organisation with national coalitions emerging, such as Espacio Interforos in Honduras and Civil Coordinator for Emergency and Reconstruction (CCER) in Nicaragua.

These coalitions sought to promote civil society involvement in formulating the national plans for reconstruction by seeking to influence their respective governments as well as the wider donor community. The emergence of the coalitions and the strengthening of civil society's voice that came with them are important within the participatory context of the PRSP process.

As noted by Seppänen the PRSP process has played a key role in changing the mode of public policies formulation in Honduras: "...whereas in earlier times (up to 1998) policy formulation in Honduras was the exclusive domain of the two main parties and their closed circles of political and economic power, after Mitch policy formulation has been opened for wider participation of both domestic and transnational (and international) actors. (...) NGOs, INGOs and donors have occupied an important political space in the formulation of public policies, much beyond the traditional external influence typical of the "banana republic".

There is a seat for Honduran NGOs or other civil society organisations, (...) INGOs and donors at practically every table where public policies are formulated (sectoral policies, appointment committee of supreme court judges, appointment committee of the judges of Court of Auditors and in several "fora" for government-civil society deliberations and social auditing initiatives). The news is not that foreign ("external") actors sit at the tables of power in Honduras – that has been the historical legacy of the concessional state – but that political space has been opened to a new kind of actors, both domestic and transnational: bilateral donors, NGOs and INGOs." (Seppänen, 2003:18)

The widening of the political space beyond political parties and closed circles (including external influence) in it self carries potentials for increasing public transparency and wider popular participation. However, the same development

calls in question the notion of national ownership – or at least gives rise to deliberations on the respective roles played by domestic vis-à-vis donor and transnational organisations.

Researchers of the PRSP process in countries other than Honduras have similar observations, i.e. that the participatory imperative of the PRSP has introduced new configurations of power and transboundary formations.<sup>19</sup> In some cases these take the form of donors / INGOs dominating the public PRSP scene<sup>20</sup>, in others even a ‘crowding out’ of national actors has occurred.<sup>21</sup> And an increasing *blurring* of boundaries between externals and internals appears to be a general feature in PRSP countries reviewed (Gould and Ojanen, 2003; Lister and Nyamugasira, 2003; Craig and Porter, 2003b). While national, and especially local CSOs, seem to be aware to claim their autonomy vis-à-vis donors and INGOs<sup>22</sup>, it remains to be seen what will be the future implications of the new configurations for CS influence.

In Honduras the selection of national and local CSOs to be included in the PRSP policy formulation represents an issue of separate concern. The PRSP is promoted as a participatory process that involves national governments and the civil societies. However, as discussed above, a number of contradictions and tensions are inherent in the PRSP framework. The rather vague guidelines on participation imply that decisions rest with the national government, so that inclusion of civil society actors will depend on the quality of government-civil society relations, or on whether and how government is prepared to do this.

While a strong cohesive civil society voice emerged in the post-Mitch era, at the same time it threatened what local observers see as weak governments, and with some hostility characterizing relations. Negotiations around the PRSP process – in Honduras as well as in Nicaragua – were met with caution by both sides (Corner, P., 2002:117; Bertelsen and Jensen 2002:101). In Honduras efforts were made to include civil society organisations through the establishment of a permanent forum for discussions, the Commission for Civil Society Participation.

The members of this commission included not only non-governmental organisations but also local government and business interests, such as the Association of Municipalities of Honduras (AMHON) and the two main chambers

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<sup>19</sup> The term ‘transboundary’ is borrowed from Latham, R., 2001.

<sup>20</sup> As has been the case for instance in Rwanda (McGee et al., 2002; Painter, 2002).

<sup>21</sup> Gould and Ojanen have this conclusion on the analysis of the Tanzania PRSP: “The dominance of the public policy arena by a narrow corps of transnational development professionals occludes the possibility of deepening democratic oversight of measures for national development. At the same time, the sites and structures of policy implementation are overseen by a de facto single-party political establishment driven by clientelist relations and procedures. In this context, public assets allocated for the reduction of poverty are highly susceptible to fungibility and abuse as the local politico-administrative elite can distribute resources among themselves via weakly regulated mechanisms of direct expenditure and subcontracting.” (Gould and Ojanen, 2003:6)

<sup>22</sup> This is my personal experience from cooperation with CS partner organisations of the N/S PRSP Programme in Honduras, Nicaragua and Zambia 2002-2003.

of commerce (San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa) along with civil society organisations including church-related Interforos. Along with their partner organisation, FOSDEH (Foro Social de la Deuda Externa de Honduras, Social Forum on External Debt and Development in Honduras) Interforos withdrew from the commission during the preparation of the PRSP in April 2001. They found that the commission was not taking account of their inputs, none of their proposals from consultations with CS had been incorporated in the April 2001 draft PRSP, and the commission had not been operating in a transparent way. As a result the organisations rejected the official PRSP (FOSDEH, 2001; Honduras Bishops Conference, 2001; Catholic Relief Services, 2001).

Already at an early stage, a parallel civil society PRSP process began. In the commission Interforos criticised the poverty analysis methodology applied by government. Moreover, the network did not find their points of views taken into consideration, and June-August 2000 Interforos with its CS network organised a series of regional meetings in order to prepare an independent PRSP, later presented to the government (December 2000). March 2001 the government informed CS that it would submit a draft PRSP in a timely manner to allow CSOs to make comments.

However, no PRSP copy was provided to CS prior to its adoption by government. Similarly the PRGF was not shared with CS before negotiated with the IFIs. When presented to the CS – one day before consultation with IFIs – documents were in English only, hence, there was no opportunity to provide translations into Spanish. Revising the draft PRSP, Interforos concluded that key proposals of CS were not incorporated, neither did the document honour the agreement to include disagreements with CSOs in annexes.

At a 700 participants meeting April 2001 the government presented the final version, announcing that no more debates were needed. Interforos made known to donors and IMF/WB that it was not able to endorse the PRSP, and urged the presidential candidates<sup>23</sup> to deny their support to the document (Seppänen, 2003:6-7).

Some observers note that organised CSOs posed a threat to the government and protected private-interests groups because they have the opportunity to expose mismanagement and corruption (Corner, P., 2002:117). While Interforos by leaving the commission refused to play by the rules of the government, representatives of the government indicated that the withdrawal was a way of putting pressure on government (Bertelsen and Jensen 2002:101). These events underlined what had come to develop into a somewhat antagonistic relation between government and Interforos.

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<sup>23</sup> Elections were due late 2001.

## Policies

To prepare the independent CS PRSP, Interforos joined forces with ASONOG (Asociación de Organizaciones no Gubernamentales, Association of Non-Governmental Organisations) and organised a series of regional workshops whereby local organisations were trained to be able to present their suggestions; as a result five regional reports were compiled and later included in the CS paper, *Estrategia de combate a la pobreza* (Espacio INTERFOROS, 2001).

*Estrategia de combate..* takes its point of departure in the fact that more than tree million of Honduras' six million inhabitants are dispossessed of their productive potentials<sup>24</sup>. The paper presents itself as an alternative by emphasizing the exclusivity of the economic model of the official PRSP, the inequality in terms of distribution of wealth and the exclusion of human collectivities in the social and political system.

Key suggestions of *Estrategia de combate..* are concerned with *economic policies related to the microeconomics*, such as defining a set of medium and long-term macroeconomic policies closely related to the microeconomic situation of Honduras: i.e. one which is oriented to reduce the vulnerability of the country to environmental and social threats, as well as to external financial setbacks. It emphasizes a productive development policy that offers more growth opportunities to small and medium enterprises, especially those that are part of the social sector of the economy.

In general the government PRSP is criticised for being short-term, and giving priority to macroeconomic policies, especially public finances and tax reforms while disregarding micro-economic initiatives that would benefit small and medium sized as well as large Honduran companies – such that provide employment for the majority of the population. The conditions of design of PRSPs set by the IMF are seen to distort investment so that international franchises will be more attractive to Honduran companies.

Not unlike in Nicaragua<sup>25</sup>, the *privatization of public companies* has been subject to CS criticism and massive popular protests. Corruption being predominant in the processes, it has entailed the transfer of a state monopoly into a private monopoly resulting in higher prices for consumers and without improvement in the quality of service. The IMF has promoted the privatization of Hondutel, the Honduran telecommunications company, a policy not regarded economically justified since the company has the potential to be the most profitable telecommunications provider in Central America; e.g. it covered a considerable part of the government's fiscal deficit in 2001.

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<sup>24</sup> The informal sector concentrates 67%-70% of the employed population, representing app. 2.3 million people. The agricultural sector is the main source of employment (35%), especially for men. Some women have had opportunities in this sector (6%), though they find more employment opportunities in urban areas (FOSDEH, 2002).

<sup>25</sup> See chapter IV, p. 34.

A system that would support farmers' *cooperatives and small producers' entry into the formal market*, promote their access to credit and savings banks and ensure land titles is suggested. These plans are supported by proposals favouring *agricultural reforms, decentralisation of government control* and devolving power to municipalities – particularly visible in the reports from the five regions (Espacia INTERFOROS, 2000:74-84, Anexos: Propuesta de la Sociedad Civil del Aguán, de Copán, etc.)

*Burning Issue: Debt Relief.* In the period after the IFI approval of the Honduran PRSP (October 2001), the public debate on key issues has continued. In particular FOSDEH has been vocal in continuous efforts to induce a national debate on poverty reduction. The debate has been fuelled by still pending negotiations between the government and the IMF on the review of the PRGF. An agreement has not yet been signed, mainly due to the non-compliance of Honduras with the IMF macro-economic conditions, including the inability to increase revenues, exports and imports, and overspending in the public sector. This means that debt to the IFIs will not be relieved before a new agreement is signed.

“Which path should the country follow: radical reforms or fiscal survival?” This is a key question, raised by FOSDEH (FOSDEH, 2002:3) and asked by civil society actors throughout the country. Scepticism is widespread, as it is unlikely that the financial situation of the country will change significantly in the short term. The consequences are severe: debt relief is postponed even further as Honduras is not expected to reach Completion Point until 2004, and the country cannot obtain loans from other donors until agreement is reached with the IMF. Consequently, debt relief in particular and the IFI' conditionalities in general have become a major issue, widely debated in monitoring efforts of CS, not only at national level, but also in PRSP monitoring initiatives at municipal and regional levels.

There is concern that intentions to increase tax revenue will translate as an increase in taxes for the poorer sectors of the population while the wealthier sector will continue to enjoy reduced tax. The idea of decreasing import taxes<sup>26</sup> is blamed for its negative impact on government revenues, and for increasing the disadvantages of Honduran producers in trying to compete with subsidized imports, especially from the USA.

Furthermore, CS has criticized the lack of attention of the government and the IMF, to other issues of crucial importance to the economic situation of the country, such as *migration and emigration*, de facto Honduras' main export product. More than US\$ 800 million enters Honduras annually in remittances from Hondurans living abroad. This figure represents app. 80% of the total amount of debt relief available to Honduras over the next 15 years, and over three

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<sup>26</sup> This measure forms part of the Central American Free Trade Agreement, CAFTA being negotiated between Central American countries and other Latin American countries and between Central American countries and the United States.

times what the country receives in new loans every year (FOSDEH, 2002:6; Cornally, 2002:4).

With a view of the scope of PRSP implementation, there are major differences between the official PRSP and the CS' *Estrategia de combate*.. While the official concentrates PR efforts in 80 of the 297 municipalities of Honduras, the latter calls for *regional strategies* to eradicate poverty throughout the country (Espacio INTERFOROS, 2001, 2001b; FOSDEH, 2002:17). In 2002 and 2003 Honduras has witnessed a range of initiatives whereby CSOs are engaged in advocacy and monitoring related to national development plans (just as CSOs in other countries beyond the Decision Point). Moreover, and in line with the idea of taking policy efforts down to regional levels, national as well as local CSOs are widely involved in drafting monitoring and action plans to ensure that local development priorities are accounted for.

### **Sub-National Poverty Reduction Strategies – an Option for Civil Society?**

#### **Preparation of PRSP – Five Regional Workshops**

As noticed Interforos organised a series of regional workshops in five regions in order to prepare the national response to the PRPS, the *Estrategia de combate*.. Participants were local Interforos representatives, trade unions, churches, community leaders, popular organisations, including small farmers' associations and local development committees of Aguán, Copán, Lempira, Ocotepeque and Olancho regions.

Basically the overall message from regional meetings reads: 'It will help solve problems of poverty, and more people will benefit, if we build alliances within the municipality and in the region.' (Espacia INTERFOROS, 2000:74-84, Anexos: Propuesta de la Sociedad Civil del Aguán, de Copán, etc.; Espacia INTERFOROS, 2000b:36 (popular version)). The message is in accordance with the key suggestions of the *Estrategia de combate*.. to define policies closely related to the microeconomic opportunities for SMEs and small farmers, involving agricultural reforms and de facto decentralisation and devolving of power to municipalities.

It goes beyond the scope of this paper to evaluate whether the emphasis on the local engagement has been raised as an independent voice by *local* CSOs at regional workshops, or whether it has been suggested and promoted by *national* representatives of Interforos, ASONOG or FOSDEH – or whether both holds true. The message is visible in annexes, covering the proposals from the five regional meetings, and it is suggested in the popular version as well. With the proviso of having had no possibility to undertake further examinations in Honduras, it appears, though, that participating local CSOs as well as national CS coordinators share the same goal.

As for the five regional reports, priorities listed appear to mirror interests of local CSOs. At the same time they support those informing the national strategies<sup>27</sup> (Espacia INTERFOROS, 2000:74-84). Aguán have a range of economic, political and rights-based proposals for an agrarian reform ‘to be appropriate to an integrated development in the region, including special attention to ethnic groups of the population.’ The reform is to be further supported by proposals for upgrading ‘institutional capacities’ of municipalities and establishing regular dialogue meetings with the local civil society, both with the aim of ensuring a ‘de-politization’ of civil services.

Copán suggests ‘a genuine civic participation that takes into consideration ethnic groups and women of urban and rural areas’, ‘access to land and technical and saving assistance; actions against corruption and equity in distribution of wealth’. And ‘in order to fulfil the proposals an operational strategy must ensure that local and regional participation be integrated..’. Lempira suggests ‘Health care be decentralised to regions, including appropriate funding’ and ‘stimulate development for medium, small and micro enterprises’.

Ocotepeque calls for inclusion into the range of zones to be covered by the PRSP – by creation of a regional PR fund, supervised by CS and local government to ensure transparency. It is underlined that ‘Local NGOS and government are those who have the knowledge and trust of the municipalities, (...) hence they should be taken account of with respect to existing and future initiatives and programmes’. Olancho calls for irrigation projects for particular disfavoured zones and proposes ‘a national small farmers’ financial system to ensure that beneficiaries will be the producers, not financial institutions or intermediates’.

It applies to all proposals from the regional workshops that the process during which they have been drafted served a *duplex* purpose; that is of training local CSOs to be able to present their suggestions *and* submitting proposals from CS at regional level to be included in the PRSP. A FOSDEH review recalls that: “Interforos starts the process to prepare instruments where civil society organisations could assess the causes, consequences, policies, measures, programs and projects to consult with their grassroots” and “[Interforos] Organizes regional workshops to outline a PRSP from civil society.” (FOSDEH, 2001:6/7). From the documents available for this paper, it cannot be assessed to which extent priorities have been influenced by national CS coordinators/facilitators, or whether they mirror genuine concerns and proposals of citizens in the five regions.

However, all statements, including examples noted here, seem to indicate that citizens and CSOs participating in the workshops carry - yet unutilised? – resources in terms of commitment to involve themselves further in solutions appropriate to local needs. Proposals referred to here also suggest that the many local priorities, listed in the regional annexes of *Estrategia de combate..* carry

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<sup>27</sup> Going beyond the scope of this paper, a comprehensive analysis of all priorities listed has not been undertaken, let alone an in-depth examination of the origins of the various proposals.



potentials for more elaborated locally based PR strategies. Finally, several proposals are aimed at national decision-makers – with the purpose of calling for local priorities to be accounted for in the national PRS, i.e. in planning as well as in implementation.

### **Monitoring PRSP – the San Pedro Sula Workshop**

As noticed above, already during the PRSP preparation process Interforos and FOSDEH advocated for PRS to be founded in local proposals in order to obtain sustainable eradication of poverty, hence the call for *regional strategies* (Espacio INTERFOROS, 2001, 2001b; FOSDEH, 2002:17). Taking note of the many monitoring initiatives currently taking place at municipal and regional levels in Honduras<sup>28</sup> it appears that the call of the national coalitions is echoed in a certain level of popular mobilisation.

While parts of the national CSO coalitions, in particular FOSDEH, are strongly involved in national and international advocacy efforts, directed towards national government and the IFIs, others are engaging themselves in monitoring and training initiatives outside the capital Tegucigalpa. One of the initiatives took place in San Pedro Sula, February 2003, supported by Interforos, ASONOG-Occidente and FOSDEH.<sup>29</sup>

The workshop brought together representatives of local CSOs from villages, municipalities, associations of municipalities ('mancomunidades') and regions of major parts of Honduras: local farmers' associations, cooperatives, women producers' organisations, fishermen, NGOs working for children's rights, trade unions and churches. Presentations by national and local CSO representatives, from various regions were followed by working group sessions. The workshop decided to follow up with future sessions in order to prepare joint action plans for continuous regional PRSP efforts.

Results of the workshop indicate that participants raised agendas and suggestions for local as well as national action, some of which adding new concerns to those of the *Estrategia de combate...*, let alone to the official PRSP. Examples include:

- Lack of active and systematic incorporation of key sectors, such as ethnic groups, women, children, youth and elders in the PRSP
- Lack of attention to women's issues in the national PRSP
- Dissatisfaction that the PRSP was not discussed at community level (comunidades)
- PRSP is linked to HIPC funds
- High levels of corruption

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<sup>28</sup> FOSDEH, 2002; N/S PRSP Programme Update, May-June 2003

<sup>29</sup> The initiative was supported by Danish and Swedish INGOs: DanChurchAid, Ibis and Diakonia (as part of the Danish N/S PRPS Programme and the Swedish PPPR. A comprehensive report of the workshop was published using ICT-technologies (CD and Power point) for dissemination of results, Proyecto Escandinavo ERP, 2003.

- Government responds more to political party interests than to needs of the population
- Poor coordination among CSOs
- Difficulties in connecting technical and participatory elements in the PRSP

While in general suggestions reflect a certain popular distance to the national PRSP process, the latter two statements deserve special attention. They are exceptional in referring to divisions within the CSO that have occurred during the PRSP process. Divergences and conflicts within Interforos, following a range of different lines (church based/secular, urban/rural orientation etc.) appear to have been hampering efforts of individuals as well as organisations involved.<sup>30</sup>

Seppänen examined the particular dynamics of civic activism within the context of PRS in Honduras. She found that “A conspicuous – and as it seems, a very Honduran – feature in the dynamics of civic activism appeared (...) that in the medium and long run effectively prevents (prevented) civic society coalition. For civic activists who do not have a university level education and who do not share the class distinction markers and language of the Honduran urban educated middle and upper middle classes, it is almost impossible to make themselves heard by the “civil society” actors organised in and around NGOs in the capital city; these discard the former as having a “low cultural level”, thus not being able to present “proposals”. The conflict between technocratic, university educated, capital city based NGO actors with international connections and the departmental grassroots activists ended up in a division of Interforos, the most ambitious civic society coalition of Honduras. But perhaps this splitting into two of Interforos is a sign of an increasing independence of judgement of ordinary citizens, and a landmark in a changing political subjectivity, traditionally passive and submissive to paternalisms of different kind.” (Seppänen, 2003:5)

Notwithstanding explanations of the CS divisions, the results documented in the report from San Pedro Sula appear to support the latter conclusion. Encouraging coordination, participants seem to prefer cooperation for internal CS conflict and divisions. The workshop is interesting much as it gives evidence of a high level of popular mobilisation, characterized by positive expectations of participants. The reports express considerable confidence in political willingness and capabilities of both citizens, local CSOs as well as local government. Taking the PRSP for a valuable agenda<sup>31</sup>, participants issued a range of *‘principales facilitantes’*, i.e. conditions that are particular favourable or conducive for eradication of poverty.

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<sup>30</sup> Seppänen, 2003

<sup>31</sup> While this initiative (Proyecto Escandinavo, 2003 (San Pedro Sula)) aims at developing monitoring and advocacy strategies *based on the PRSP*, the Nicaraguan South North Advocacy Group, GISN developed an action plan with the aim of *changing the economic-policy approach of the official ERCERP*, (i.e. towards policies based on local capacities and potentials in favour of human development (GISN, 2003:10).

Examples include:

- Women are an asset in terms of poverty eradication, hence their involvement in elaboration of strategies must be ensured
- Need to create strategies based on particular features of each region (district, province)
- Need to involve a diversity of popular organisations
- Donors to support local CS
- Willingness of local government
- Socialisation of citizens – to become aware of potentials of common actions against poverty

The suggestion claiming ‘Women an asset in poverty eradication’ attracts special attention, in particular by emphasizing women’s capabilities. In mainstream development literature women’s lives are largely described as victimized – socially constructed conditions form substantial obstacles to fulfilment of women’s rights. In cases where national CS coalitions have taken gendered realities into consideration the strategies seek to highlight gender disparities and women’s *subordination*. The analyses emphasize how inequalities leave poor women in situations characterized by disadvantage, exclusion or lack of opportunities. Hence, strategies underline the need for initiatives in support of participation, empowerment and social inclusion of women, promoting access and resources for women and girls to enjoy basic social services, etc.

Compared to this the approach of the Honduran women NGOs stand out: they appear to suggest that women’s experiences from *within* their subordinate position must be regarded an *asset* in terms of poverty eradication. This means that, in order for PR strategies to be in accordance with needs of involved communities, women’s involvement should be encouraged. Women’s contributions seem to be called upon, not in the interest of mere participation, (adhering to general gender equality dimensions), but because incorporating women’s voices would add value to PR strategies. Women’s voices echo their experiences as producers, farmers, mothers, caretakers, victims of domestic violence, etc. – all crucial in the design of local poverty reduction plans.

On a similar ‘positive’ note, suggestions for future joint action appear to mirror the constructive spirit expressed in the ‘principales facilitantes’. Listed as ‘retos’, major challenges, they include (Proyecto Escandinavo 2003: ):

- Form alliances between CSOs, and between CS and government, at local as well as national levels
- Support strong participation of CS in formulation and implementation of local/regional PRSPs
- Advocacy for implementation of local/regional PRSPs; include local/regional projects in government plans; ensure resources are raised for their implementation.

Future (research) projects might want to further examine and follow these (and other) initiatives, with the aim of taking a closer look at background and prospects of the positive expectations inherent in the proposals. Such projects could help identifying further potentials for local resources to be released and supported.

## **Nicaragua**

### **Process**

In Nicaragua CCER is the key national CS actor in the PRSP process<sup>32</sup>. As noted above CCER emerged as a national level coordination of CSOs in the aftermath of the Hurricane Mitch October 1998. This disaster not only mobilised the government and international agencies in joint reconstruction efforts, more than 21 networks, representing 350 national NGOs, social movements, producer associations, unions, collectives and federations came together in CCER – aiming to respond to the needs of the population and to work to influence national reconstruction plans. (Bradshaw & Linneker, 8/2002:2)

Building upon participant organisations in efforts to develop alternative reconstruction plans, CCER gained considerable experience in policy formulation. By 1999, the time of introducing the PRSP process in Nicaragua, CCER was a sufficiently ‘prominent’ coalition, prepared to shift agendas to become involved as a key CS actor in the process. When government chose to invite selected CSOs to the National Commission for Socio-Economic Planning, CONPES (Consejo Nacional de Planificación Económica Social, established after Mitch in 1998) members of CCER were appointed.

This step caused some discontent on the part of civil society, such as for instance Jubilee 2000 who found it less divisive had CSOs been allowed to nominate their own representatives. They also pointed out the social bias in participation of the poor sections of society, wondering “what do the co-operative leaders in Jalapa know of PRSP, indigenous people on the River Coco or the women workers in the Free Trade Zones or students, lorry drivers, teachers or construction workers.”<sup>33</sup>

Cooperation with the liberal Aleman government raised a series of dilemmas to CCER. The first government draft for approval as Interim PRPS was subject of concerns to the CCER; narrow poverty metrics and absence of policies on governance, gender, decentralisation, replication of current sector programme matrices were among issues raised for debate; moreover, except for members of the CONPES civil society had no access to the document.

‘Good governance’ was included in the draft, by some observers first of all due to pressure from donors. Disregarding continued efforts by CCER to influence the

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<sup>32</sup> Later, as a consequence of its engagement in the PRSP process, CCER changed its name into Coordinadora Civil, CC.

<sup>33</sup> Open letter from Jubilee 2000 Nicaragua, August 2000, quoted in Leen and O’Neill, 2002:5.

document, government submitted a IPRSP for approval to the WB and the IMF (July 2001). This happened unknown to the civil society, a step that did not contribute to improve relations between government and the CCER; these were already difficult, and hampered by comments by government representatives who challenged the rights of civil society to engage in 'political issues'. (Bradshaw & Linneker, 12/2002:17; Bertelsen and Jensen 2002: 99-100)

Further demands for consultations with CS were raised, and by the end of the year a range of CSOs, led by mayors of four municipalities sent in letters to the IFIs drawing the attention to the fact that the IPRSP due for approval would have no consent of local governments nor of CSOs.<sup>34</sup> As a result government agreed to engage in a limited consultation process (inviting selected guests).

CCER was challenged on its decision whether or not to participate in a PRSP process that would only allow negotiation among a document designed with little or no civil input - a result far from the expectations of CCER to participate in a joint definition and drafting of PRS for the country. The dilemma found its solution in the decision to continue dialoguing with government on the official PRSP, while at the same time instigating an independent civil society PRS process (CCER, 2001).

The latter was initiated (February-April 2001) as CCER hosted a series of 'consultations', covering all 16 departments of the country. "CSOs, social groups and communities" were invited to give their opinion the IPRSP<sup>35</sup>. Other meetings (Consultas sectoriales) were arranged around key themes, such as macroeconomic policies, governance etc. with government officials, representatives of youth and women NGOs, universities, the media, trade unions and international organisations.

## **Policies**

Based on this CCER compiled 'La Nicaragua que Queremos' ('The Nicaragua that we want', CCER, 2001). The document presents itself as a critical response to the PRSP.<sup>36</sup> While the latter is seen largely as a compendium of government programs that were already under implementation, the CCER document aims to offer a poverty reduction strategy affecting the roots and underlying causes of poverty. Based on the vision that human energies and potentials needed to generate wealth are underused, 'La Nicaragua que Queremos' regards development as an integral process, based on axes such as: social equality, social support networks,

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<sup>34</sup> Maria Teresa Velez, Mayor of El Jicaral – on behalf of four local governments in the León Norte region, Nicaragua, 2000, Letter to the President of the World Bank, Mr. James Wolfensohn and Managing Director of the IMF, Mr. Horst Köhler, Managua 7 December 2000.

<sup>35</sup> CCER 9/2001: 3. For lists of participants in all meetings see CCER, 2001, Anexo III.

<sup>36</sup> The final government PRSP, Estrategia Reforzada de Crecimiento Económico y Reducción de la Pobreza (referred to as ERCERP) was launched July 2001. Until to day the Nicaraguan PRSP covers the so called four pillars: (i) Broad-based economic growth and structural reform, (ii) Greater and better investment in human capital, (iii) Better protection for vulnerable groups and iv) Good governance and institutional development. Government of Nicaragua, 2001.

care for the environment, territorial integration, decentralization, local development and democratisation of every aspect of daily and social life. (CCER, 2001)

'La Nicaragua que Queremos' was published prior to the final PRSP in order to provide inputs to influence policies and strategies. These were not taken into account, though - by government justified by time constraints, and that the document would still be 'live'. Within CONPES CCER continued its efforts of dialoguing with government (CCER 9/2001). CCER identified a range of critical policy areas in order to "incorporate a fairer approach for the different policies of the strategy, taking into account the diversity of sectors and social groups who are traditionally not envisaged in development programs." (CCER 9/2001:1)

CCER is concerned that the perspectives for PR in ERCERP is based on economic growth incentives, rather than focusing on redistribution measures as mechanisms to poverty reduction. CCER calls in question the role of the private sector in providing goods and essential services for consumption and productive activities, and point to a range of policies that need state support - to address inequality, to achieve better income distribution and a more fair access to opportunities for poor sectors (\*CCER 9/2001:7/2)

*Privatization of public services*, in particular by large private enterprise and foreign investors has been underway since the 1990's, and it is further promoted in the ERCERP (with active support of the IMF). Privatization of all units of the National Electric Company, ENEL, as well of ENITEL, the Nicaraguan telephone company are ongoing. Both initiatives have provoked citizens to gather in massive protests against increasing of consumer prices and poor maintenance of services. CCER has emphasized how services required by poor citizens are not attractive in terms of financial returns, hence investments in electrification in rural areas should be managed by the state. However, this seems to have had little effect on government and the IMF who continued efforts to work for full privatisation of ENEL and ENITEL as part of an agreement on the Decision Point Document and the PRGF (critical for release of debt repayments).

*The economic growth strategy*, as lined out in the so called first pillar of the ERCERP (Broad-based economic growth and structural reform) is highlighted by the government (since January 2002 led by Bolanos), yet it has provoked widespread controversy within civil society. The strategy depends largely on 'the dynamism of the private sector' (Government of Nicaragua, 2001), including development of 7 clusters, i.e. adjoining groups of companies within the same sector and geographic location. For the purpose a so-called 'map of potentials' is laid out whereby clusters must be developed into large and medium sized urban centres, such that are seen to have already good potential. This as opposed to the lack of income and employment opportunities in rural areas, and to high costs of education, health, electricity, housing, drinking water in the isolated rural areas.

Critiques, including from CCER warned that this is more a strategy to attract foreign investment to Managua and other larger towns than to increase opportunities for small and medium sized Nicaraguan companies and promote broad-based, equitable economic growth.<sup>37</sup> The policies favour enterprises that do not have capacities of meeting a wide demand, while neglecting opportunities for micro and small size enterprises who are without access to services and resources. Promoting rural to urban migration will lead to rural depopulation, urban overpopulation and the ensuing social problems. Neglecting social investment in the poorest municipalities will reinforce prevailing patterns of poverty and inequality of opportunities – in disfavour of poor rural regions.

Alternatively CCER proposed an integral strategy for agrarian production and national industry, comprising a range of policies aimed at supporting the productive sector as a whole, that is, in urban as well as rural areas. Underlining that most of the poverty stricken population depend on the rural economy, concerted efforts should be made towards micro, small and medium size enterprises, while also setting up state development funds for financial and technological services to poor peasants. The main perspective is to recuperate the logic of a rural economy geared to guarantee food supplies' (CCER, 9/2001:12).

To improve access to land a 'land bank' is proposed, allocating land to poor women and men as well as establishing a body to regulate buying and selling of land. A prerequisite to this is legalization of land possession, with gender inequalities accounted for by elaborating title deeds with true legal rights.

To facilitate greater access to credits for small producers a development bank should be created, and financial institutions that provide 'small credits' should be strengthened. While ERCERP does plan to modify existing banking regulations in order to increase access to credit, CCER is sceptical noting the 34% decrease of funding to financial and agrarian services between the IPRSP (Aug. 2000) and the ERCERP (July 2001).

*Social policies and compensation funds.* CCER raises serious concerns about the social supplementary funds suggested in the ERCERP. Continued dependence of international cooperation or the HIPC funds make social services insufficient and far too vulnerable. CCER points out how goals and policies in ERRP are not met by programs to sustain them, while projects already being implemented are simply expected to carry on without further consideration and evaluation.

Moreover the CCER calls in question the welfarist approach taken by government aiming at increasing social spending to particularly vulnerable groups (such as

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<sup>37</sup> In a review report of the Nicaraguan PRSP process the Nordic embassies join the critiques by airing concern "that the cluster strategy is picking private sector winners and introducing distorting incentives, or re - allocating resources from areas where poverty is widespread to areas with development potential", Norwegian Embassy on the basis of comments from Finland, Denmark, Sweden and Norway, Follow up to the review of implementation of the PRSP Process – Report from Nicaragua.

special schooling and health programs for poor mothers). CCER's proposals aim to provide proper health care and education institutions to cover the entire population (such as improving basic health services, access to potable water, free and compulsory education at all levels, particularly in rural areas).

*Decentralisation of state investment and regulations.* While recognizing the assertions of ERCERP to promote local authorities to have an investment program of their own, CCER underlines the need to specify regulations: key proposals include improving information about local investments to the 'common person', decentralizing responsibilities as well as economic resources, allocating funds to promote small scale business, creating conditions for more investments aimed at rural areas (in departments as well as municipalities. All proposals should recognize "the need to orient public and private investment in a given territory according to its potential" (CCER, 9/2001:12).

State offices should be opened at regional, departmental and municipal levels in order to make information about budget execution available to the population, public council meetings should be encouraged and efficient implementation of a code of conduct for civil services.

## **Poverty Reduction Strategies – Regions and Municipalities**

### **National Strategies – Based on Local Priorities?**

CCER and its allies regards the policies, lined out in 'La Nicaragua que Queremos' "a report of opinions, points of view, reflections and recommendations made by the people who represented organizations of civil society, social groups and communities in the process of consultation and debate about the dimensions of poverty, its causes and the priorities for political actions." (CCER, 9/2001:3, Bradshaw & Linneker, 8/2002:8)

The document marks a change in terms of inclusionary participatory practices. Some observers note that compared to the commission of experts producing a document for wider consultation with coalition members as was the case with the CCER proposal for reconstruction after Mitch, the PRSP process was based on workshops across the country – aiming to include voices and visions of a wide range of citizens in the document. It appears that the opportunity of 'wide participatory dialogue throughout society' that was presented in the PRSP framework and welcomed by international civil society and development organisations has been conducive for opening up the space for this to take place.<sup>38</sup>

Interests of trade unions, youth groups, women and disabled persons are mirrored in the document, while detailed lists of policy proposals reflect the wide

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<sup>38</sup> As in Honduras this new political space has been occupied not only by national and local CSOs and NGOs, but also to a large extent by bilateral donors and INGOs. A similar pattern is found in Zambia where also multilateral donors, such as the UNDP continue to play a major role in PRSP monitoring efforts.



ranging priorities that were raised at departmental consultations. 'Revive adult education programs in rural and marginal urban zones', 'Create market and trade opportunities in favour of local produce without interference of intermediates', 'Establish re-forestation initiatives', 'Prioritize medical service for children in rural areas', 'Ensure that local production meet needs to ensure nutritious food supply for the rural population' (CCER 6 /2001: 70-113, Anexo II).

These are but few examples indicating that citizens and CSOs participating in the consultations cover unused resources in terms of commitment to issue solutions appropriate to local needs. This conclusion is comparable to CS experiences in Honduras.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, the many local priorities, listed in '...Queremos' seem to carry potentials for more elaborated locally based PR strategies - far more than was intended, let alone possible within the framework of a national CCER shadow PRSP report.

While the '...Queremos' objective clearly aims at influencing the official PRSP, it seems debatable to which extent "main policy recommendations [are] arising from the consultation process." (Bradshaw & Linneker, 8/2002: 8, CCER 9/2001:3). At all workshops the procedure took its point of departure in the government IPRSP while, as underlined by observers closely allied with CCER, at the same time "rather than merely presenting the government document for comment the aim was that participants constructed their own vision about the situation in their communities and the priorities and emphasis needed to resolve them." (EG 12/2002: 20) Short versions were presented to participants who were then asked to list poverty causes and draw up solutions for PR, in response to main IPRSP 'pillars' and themes. The lists were then later reflected in '...Queremos' and included as an annex.

While participants were 'participating' in the sense that they were asked to respond to 'pillars' and themes – introduced and designed by facilitating organisations, it does not appear that the results of the consultation can be seen as full and genuine expressions of local needs and priorities.

The departmental CCER workshops seem to have served a double, and to some extent an ambiguous goal: while aiming to facilitate a process whereby civil society actors would define their own priorities in order to influence the national PRSP (Bradshaw & Linneker 8/2002:7), at the same time CCER have felt obliged to do so by informing them on the basis of the government IPRSP. With the outspoken purpose "to empower those organisations so that they could put forward their own proposals" (CCER, 9/2001:3) CCER seems to enter the scene communicating the double message: let us collect priorities of civil society actors as they define them themselves, however, at the same time we need to enable this through empowerment.

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<sup>39</sup> See above pp. 27-32.

We have seen how a comparable procedure was applied by Interforos in Honduras, and this is unique for neither Nicaragua nor Honduras. A similar methodology has been adopted by CSOs in many countries (including Zambia). While hearings, consultations and workshops took place throughout the country, at regional, district or municipal levels, these meetings were arranged with the overall goal of influencing the national PRSPs. It appears that in itself this goal has become decisive in setting agenda and orientation of much PRSP engagement of civil society.

After finalising local consultation processes main activities have been concentrated at national level, whereby urban based NGO umbrella organisations or CS coalitions have continued efforts to influence government and IFIs. In Nicaragua CCER continued monitoring and advocacy efforts within CONPES, commenting on the ERCERP, the progress report of first year of implementation of the PRSP, etc.

Meanwhile, once consultations at local levels have taken place they appear to trigger new political processes. Nicaragua is one (of more) countries to witness not only increased awareness on poverty reduction as an issue for popular engagement, but also a certain amount of popular mobilisation. Participation in CS workshops at local levels have led to new political demands on government and IFIs, and raised expectations that attention to the voices and concerns of civil society actors be maintained.

### **Local Strategies – National Attention?**

Two such initiatives stand out and are further discussed below: *the PRSP of León Norte*, developed in the four municipalities Achuapa, El Jicaral, El Sauce and Santa Rosa del Peñón (León Norte), and less extensively *the CC PRSP 7 municipalities monitoring initiative* in Malpaisillo, Dipilto, Camoapa, Pueblo Nuevo, Puerto Cabezas, San Ramón and Telpaneca (M&S ERCERP)<sup>40</sup>. While the first dates back to the 2000 IPRSP process and efforts of CS and local governments to include proposals of the León Norte region in the Nicaraguan PRSP, the latter comprise a series of policy initiatives developed during 2002 by CS in response to a limited attention to ERCERP on the part of line ministries at municipal and departmental levels.

### **The PRSP of León Norte**

The León Norte initiative of developing a regional PRSP evolved in a process, independent to the consultations arranged by the CCER described earlier in this paper. It grew from the four municipalities and the initiative was taken regardless that neither formal nor informal links to the PRSP process existed by the time. As part of a WB financed project each of the four municipalities had been involved in a continuous process of working out development, municipal investment and action strategies. For the purpose Development Committees had been established, whose members were democratically elected citizens, local CSOs,

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<sup>40</sup> PRSP León Norte 2000; CC, IEN a.o., 2002.

institutions, municipal politicians and government representatives. The municipality planning efforts had been underway a couple of years as in 2000 at one stage participants gathered to compare their own ideas for development with the governments IPRSP and the macro-economic planning of the IFIs.

Supported by the Danish NGO Ibis<sup>41</sup> a series of workshops were arranged, whereby participants gave their inputs to analyses of poverty and development needs in the region; as a result participants in all municipalities realized that they did not find their realities represented in the IPRSP. The idea to try to work out a common PRSP for the León Norte region was born and the involved citizens agreed to ask mayors to take the lead in the process. The absence of the municipalities in the IPRSP was decisive for the local authorities to engage themselves in the initiative (Rasmussen 2000, PRSP León Norte, 2000).

In each of the four municipalities working groups were established to prepare local PRSP workshops: invited were not only development committee members, mayors and technical staff of the municipalities but also community leaders. Participants reflected on concepts of poverty, its main causes and alternatives to fight it, ending up with lists of Action Proposals. At a later gathering all participants met to revise the León Norte PRSP document, drafted by a group of facilitators from each municipality.

The final PRSP for León Norte (in Nicaragua called the 'PRSPcito') includes 'characteristics of each of the four municipalities', lining out demographic and economic patterns, highlighting development problems as well as 'principal potentials and resources' of each municipality (PRSP León Norte, 2000). The PRSPcito is remarkable by making clear distinctions not only between 'action proposals' that should be carried out at local, respectively at national and international levels, it also lines up actions according to short, medium and long term perspectives, and it includes detailed lists of 'alternatives'. Later the entire PRSPcito has been refined and further developed to serve the purpose of developing specific policy recommendations and further strengthen a regional integration of policies.<sup>42</sup>

Taking a closer look at policy options suggested in the PRSPcito we want to ask: Do identified strategies reflect priorities of the most marginalised groups of poor citizens (incl. (women) subsistence farmers, small enterprises, men, women and children dependent on informal sector?) And secondly, how and to which extent have locally identified priorities for poverty reduction been translated into policies that carry the potential of addressing key needs and interests of the poor and marginalised majorities?<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> The entire process was encouraged and supported by Ibis who was engaged in three of the four municipalities, working to add advocacy capacity building to local development projects.

<sup>42</sup> PRSP León Norte, 2002. An assessment of the revised document is not included in this paper.

<sup>43</sup> It goes beyond the scope of this paper to undertake a comprehensive analysis of all priorities listed, let alone to examine in-depth the origins of the various proposals. Action proposals listed are not prioritised in the PRSPcito, hence priorities are assessed as they appear in the listing.

The León Norte PRSP emphasizes that growth of poverty in the country is prevalent and the need to address its major causes. Hence, the thinking of economic development without paying attention to human development must be given up. Accordingly the action proposals are listed in what appears to be a prioritised order:

1. Social actions with emphasis on Human Development,
2. Production – Economy,
3. Social and Economic Infrastructure, and
4. Environment.

*Social actions with emphasis on Human Development* comprises a series of actions to improve basic health and education services, as well as proposals aimed at decentralisation, strengthening of accountability of local authorities towards community organisations and assignation of resources to sustain them.

Examples include:

On health and education:

- Improve the academic level of children in the rural sector.
- Support teachers in their moves to improve their salaries, so that they may have the opportunity to reach a higher professional level and a better education.
- Form a social movement to press the government and the National Assembly to fulfil what is established in the Constitution regarding primary and secondary education.
- Promote permanent education campaigns to ensure families only give birth to the children they can afford.
- Special attention to single mothers.

On decentralisation, strengthening of local resources and accountability:

- Ensure that activities decided in co ordination between the Community Organisation and other actors are fulfilled.
- The municipalities take the communities into account so they can make their own projects and employ their own labour forces.
- The local governments and the civil society demand that the government fulfil the law of financial transfer to the municipalities.
- Legalisation and strengthening of community organisation and commission, and assignation of resources to promote their sustainability.
- Make the municipal delegations of the Ministry of Education independent with sufficient support from the government.

Proposals listed under *Production – Economy* relate directly to a range of 'local causes' of poverty: Misuse and unjust distribution of existing resources, few opportunities for peasants to participate in the rural economy, credit politics that are not adjusted to conditions of the small producers, little appraisal of existing resources and lack of vision and fear of local investment. Included here is the gendered inequalities in distribution of and responsibility for work roles in the

family as well as lack of planning of the productive work of the family and minimal opportunities to gain access to credits due to lack of legal titles to land.

This identification of concerns towards present conditions of peasants, small producers and women are met with a series of priorities in support of utilisation of local resources and enhanced opportunities for local marketisation, such as:

- Support micro businesses and search for their funding
- Take political steps to create micro firms in the areas of cattle, traditional and non-traditional production, and to establish a development bank for the peasants in co operative institutions and NGOs.
- The producers must organise to sell and buy their agricultural products.
- Promote a municipal market with the presence of the producers.
- Form solidarity groups to obtain access to credit. Establish rural banks.
- Try to convince the World Bank and the IMF to make their credit policies more flexible, including the conditions for access.
- Broaden credit programs with low interest.
- Give incentives for national production.
- Initiate land legalisation programs for the peasants.
- Improve the co ordination between municipalities and state institutions regarding the program and project execution to distribute the resources justly.

The strong emphasis on strengthening the local economy is also mirrored in the sections on '*Social and Economic Infrastructure*' and '*Environment*'. Examples include:

- Form a follow up commission in charge of enforcing attendance of children of school age in classes. The commission should be composed of parents, courts, police, churches, the Ministry of Education and the local government.
- Encourage special programs of self construction of simple systems of potable water supply.
- Promote the installation of a telephone plant covering at least 50 subscribers in the municipalities of El Jicaral, Achuapa and Santa Rosa del Peñon.
- Encourage producers to devote themselves to modes of production that protect the environment.
- Plant trees in areas with forest potential.
- Reduce the commercialisation of wood, and apply the law for those who break it.

Focusing on small producers and peasants, on strengthening of local and resources and on schooling opportunities for children in the rural areas, these proposals appear to reflect participation of local CSOs and community leaders; moreover suggestions seem to have drawn upon synergies of parallel efforts in all

four municipalities, much as several proposals reflect needs to utilise existing opportunities in the region.

### Results and Prospects

The initiative has been unique in that participants did not confine themselves to draft a local PRSP, they also aimed at trying to influence the national PRSP. This has manifested itself in two ways: Mayors of the four municipalities at an early stage of the national PRSP process sent in letters to the IFIs in order to make them pay attention to the fact that the IPRSP due for approval would have no consent of local governments nor CSOs. The initiative is remarkable in the history of international advocacy towards the IFIs.<sup>44</sup>

As representatives of poor rural municipalities the León Norte initiative also managed to gain representation in the National Commission for Socio-Economic Planning, CONPES, receiving considerable attention in the general public of Nicaragua. At international level the initiative has obtained reputation as one among few local initiatives developed with the explicit aim of advocating regional concerns to be taken into account at national level by government and IFIs.

Recalling the limited success of CCER in its efforts to influence the official ERCERP the same holds true for efforts of the León Norte initiative within CONPES. However, the group continues its advocacy efforts, the latest within the GISN, Grupo Incidencia Sur Norte (South North Advocacy Group)<sup>45</sup>. The network is trying to influence the first review of the ERCERP, in particular focusing on policies on 'broad based economic growth', the so called 'first pillar' of the ERCERP. The group is critical to the perspective and is trying to formulate an alternative economy, one 'in the hands of poor people, based on transfer of technology, education and access to information' (NS PRSP Programme, Update May/June 2003).

In its Plan of Action<sup>46</sup> GISN explicitly calls for a constructive dialogue with government. While too early to assess whether this will be successful, the PRSPcito raises other questions. Considering the broad participation behind, and taking into account the strong local emphasis of the plan (i.e. the calls for raising awareness in communities of their own potential as well as strengthening local resources and accountability), the question remains: After finalising the PRSPcito – what happened within the four municipalities? Did efforts continue in terms of maintaining the broad attention and social mobilisation that had evolved during the process of producing the PRSPcito? Among the many action proposals, which initiatives have been taking, for instance towards broadening credit programs with low interest? Or to form groups to try establish rural banks?

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<sup>44</sup> Maria Teresa Velez, Mayor of El Jicaral – on behalf of four local governments in the León Norte region, Nicaragua, 2000.

<sup>45</sup> Grupo Incidencia Sur Norte, established early 2003, is a network including local CSOs, municipal representatives, CC and international development organisations, incl. Ibis.

<sup>46</sup> GISN, 2003:2.

According to Eva Rasmussen, adviser with the INGO Ibis, and from the outset strongly involved in the PRSPcito process, resources have been mainly directed towards monitoring and advocacy at national level. It appears that it has not been realistic to ensure maintenance of the popular mobilisation within the León Norte region. As a result, until now much of the efforts and energy invested during the PRSPcito process at local level has been left behind unutilised (Interview Rasmussen 2003).

This development points to one of the key critical dilemmas facing CSOs participating in the PRSP process in many countries. While engaging at *local levels* in order to gain broad and local level participation, let alone to provide 'grassroots's input to the national PRSPs, at the same time CSOs (along with INGOs working in solidarity and support of the CSOs) tend to end up directing efforts first and foremost towards the goal of lobbying at *national level*. Notwithstanding intentions and engagement of both local and national CSOs to make sure that advocacy efforts are 'downwards' accountable, it appears that civil society at local level are less actively involved at a continuous basis.<sup>47</sup>

In many countries CSOs run their own projects aimed at poverty reduction at local level – some initiated in relation to the PRSP, some initiated by CBOs regardless of and before initiation of the national PRSP process. Rather than actively supporting a process that would encourage citizens and local CSOs to engage in a long-term commitment, including continuous mobilisation in municipalities and 'comarcas' (villages, living areas), major efforts of CSOs have been directed towards the goal of lobbying at national level.

Lister & Nyamugasira consider how the 'new aid modalities' represented by the PRSPs are affecting the roles of CSOs. As donors are moving away from support for service delivery projects towards financial support for budgets of recipient governments a simplified conception of the role of CS is adopted. While separating 'service delivery' from 'advocacy' roles donors fail to appreciate the situation in which CSOs play several roles simultaneously, and the synergy that can be created between roles (Lister & Nyamugasira 2003).

Given the predominance of the IFIs and other external donors in conditioning and framing the PRSP process, obviously there is a risk that CSOs at both national and local levels are led to give priority to the advocacy parts at the expense of the service delivery parts of their engagement – much as the first is mainly concentrated at national level while the latter in most cases takes place within local settings.

The orientation towards the national is further supported by virtue of the political channels given and defined in the PRSP conditions. Craig & Porter note that globalisation in the form of PRSP depends on a progressive shift from informal to

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<sup>47</sup> See chapters on experiences of CSOs in Honduras and Zambia.

formal institutions (Craig & Porter 2003a:66).<sup>48</sup> As a general rule national ownership of PRSPs is equivalent with key ministries and policy-makers of the top political leadership, leaving some limited space for CS in national consultative commissions, such as for instance the CONPES in Nicaragua. As negotiations on PRSPs, the HIPC dividend, PRGF etc. take place at top government levels with IFI and donor government representatives, the attention of CSOs (and local government) will easily turn away from their constituencies, towards the national centre, from where resources are expected to flow.

### **Coordinadora Civil: 7 Municipalities Monitoring Initiative**

The CC PRSP monitoring project in 7 municipalities in Nicaragua is one example that this trend is not unequivocal.<sup>49</sup> In Malpaisillo, Dipilto, Camoapa, Pueblo Nuevo, Puerto Cabezas, San Ramón and Telpaneca CSOs realised that line ministries at municipality and departmental levels paid only scarce attention to the national PRSP, the ERCERP. In response a range of CSO decided to join forces in order to monitor the implementation of the ERCERP in their area. In three municipalities, San Ramón, Puerto Cabezas and Dipilto special pilot projects (Proyectos de Apoyo a la Implementación, PAI) were undertaken in order to support a process of taking policy to the stage of practically changing conditions.

Given the opportunity for the first time CSOs made the experience of organising in local development committees with the objective of drafting alternatives for the development of their municipality. It appears that the very initiative raised expectations and led to a political mobilisation of citizens in the project. A broad range of local CSOs have been involved with the purpose of trying to hold their local governments to account on the ERCERP. In each of the 7 municipalities a local CSO was appointed to take the lead in organising citizens monitoring activities. These include development organisations, women's and children's associations, social research institutions and municipal development committees.<sup>50</sup>

The idea was to respond to the limited information on the ERCERP not only within local line ministries, but also within the general public by providing populations of the municipalities with information and knowledge of

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<sup>48</sup> According to Craig & Porter this shift reinforces the displacement of the many locally attuned social norms and rules of conduct with formally specified, globally legible and legally binding norms and rules. The authors predict that the role of the state and the global governance in setting up and policing institutional frameworks for disciplining the local is likely to increase (Craig & Porter 2003a:66). Literature reviewing the PRSP process is increasingly occupied with the issue of 'institutional mainstreaming' in order to ensure national and local ownership in the implementation of the PRSPs, David Booth et al. 2003; Tony Killick et al., 2003; Simon Maxwell, 2003.

<sup>49</sup> See CC, IEN a.o., 2002.

<sup>50</sup> The following organisations are represented in the project: Asociación para el Desarrollo Municipal, ADM, Fundación para el Desarrollo de las Mujeres y la Niñez FUNDEMI, Instituto de Investigación Social INGES, Instituto de Promoción Humana, INPRHU, Instituto Mujer y Comunidad IMC, Instituto para el Desarrollo y la Democracia IPADE and Organización para el Desarrollo Económico y Social ODESAR. The project is facilitated by IEN with support of CC, Red Nicaragüense por la Democracia y el Desarrollo, GTZ, Oxfam and Catholic Relief Services.



opportunities and challenges laid down in the ERCERP. Particularly in the three PAI municipalities the aim was to undertake local poverty diagnoses, including setting up indicators for monitoring development plans of appointed line ministries at municipal level; in all municipalities these were developed with participation of local CSOs who organised to set priorities with the aim of seeing them implemented within a period of five years.

Especially in those three municipalities, San Ramón, Puerto Cabezas and Dipilto citizens entered the project with high expectations. According to the Second progress report (CC, IEN 2003:6) one main concern of citizens (in particular voiced by the women & children association, FUNDEMUNI and the development NGO, ODESAR) was that local capabilities (teachers, nurses etc.) of the municipalities were left unutilised as a result of public contracts and salaries being entered at departmental level. Along similar lines a widespread discontent was expressed that agricultural produce was kept the property of the Ministry of Agriculture, MAGFOR, so that farmers, instead of producing and trading for the benefit of the local economy, were left with no other choice than to buy and sell (seed, grain, chicken etc.) at central levels.

During the process it appears that citizens became increasingly aware of the unutilised capabilities within the municipality, and that they would want to be able to build on local resources to improve living conditions of the families. This was seen as crucial in order for the ERPERP to be implemented in ways that would draw on the 'autonomous, local culture' (CC, IEN, 2003:12): Opportunities to develop trade at local markets within the municipality should be created; being a crosscutting issue in the ERCERP decentralisation should be taken to a point whereby ministries would be obliged to coordinate with local government (municipalities), in order to re-activate local productive and social resources.

#### New Opportunities – Local Mobilisation

Regardless whether proposals and indicators for monitoring the ERCERP suggested by CSOs in the 7 municipalities end up being successful, it appears that the initiative has had an impact in terms of political mobilisation: the project has increased awareness among citizens of the new opportunities of influencing development in their area. Given the initiative and facilitation of CC and IEN the 7 municipalities have been informed about challenges as well as opportunities of the ERCERP. They have been given a hitherto unseen chance to voice concerns, raise demands to local and central government and try to gain influence by setting and presenting their own goals and priorities.

While given this as an opportunity 'from above' rather than as political rights won through local contests<sup>51</sup>, local CSOs working to improve living conditions in the

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<sup>51</sup> In the 21st century economy, the PRSPs represent a neo-liberal model of what I would call 'forced societal development'. It marks a critical difference to the history of western liberal democracies. Economic and social welfare programmes in the North are the results of capitalist development of the 19th and 20th century whereby first labour and farmers movements, later women's organisations gathered in struggling for their rights.

municipalities took the opportunity of making use of the new political space. The local CSOs did not find their realities in accordance with key goals of the ERCERP, such as those on privatisation and the 'pillar one' on economic growth, yet in their response to the plan they chose to make use of the new opportunities. They did so in order to promote the re-vitalising of what they see as potentials for human development and unutilised local capabilities and resources.

While CC and other CSOs in Nicaragua at national level continue to face huge obstacles in terms of influencing government and IFI decisions on the PRSP, PRGF etc., it appears that once the ERCERP exists, at local levels citizens are prepared to take the opportunity not only of working to hold governments accountable, but also to gain 'new land' in terms of organising for improved accordance between initiatives of civil society and those of local government. *The León Norte initiative* as well as the *CC PRSP monitoring project in 7 municipalities* seem to have triggered a local mobilisation that, given conducive economic policies and institutional reforms, carry potentials for a re-vitalising of social and productive resources inherent in the population.

## **Zambia**

### **Process**

During the 1990's a vibrant civil society had been on its toes documenting the detrimental impact of Structural Adjustment Programmes on daily lives of millions of Zambian families. Exposing itself to continuous threats from government, CSOs and NGOs such as Catholic Commission for Justice, Development and Peace (CCJDP), Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR), the Jubilee 2000 campaign and Women for Change raised their voice against the ever increasing poverty and hardship resulting of the SAPs.

Liberalisation of agricultural produce prices and introduction of user fees on health services and schooling hit hard on the Zambian population; the majorities, i.e. women in poor urban areas and small scale women farmers suffered severe setbacks in their opportunities to feed their families. With HIV/AIDS making the life expectancy at birth fall from 54 years (mid-80's) to 37 years (2003) and the number of child-headed households increase to close to 75.000,<sup>52</sup> a large number of NGOs have been struggling to support those hardest hit – through service delivery in community development projects as well as through advocacy and lobbying at national and international levels.

The introduction of PRSP in Zambia marked a new era of government policies towards civil society. Civil society was invited to join working groups, established by Ministry of Finance and Economic Development to prepare the PRSP. Like in other countries this posed a challenge to civic activism. After thorough debate and deliberations as to whether or not to engage in the process, in October 2000 CSPR (Civil Society for Poverty Reduction), a broad coalition of NGOs and CSOs,

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<sup>52</sup> Social Watch, 2003

was established with the purpose to provide 'effective civil society input to the PRSP'. (Mpepo, 2003:2).

"What began as a debate among civil society whether to be engaged in the PRSP or not, with the fear that coming from the IMF and World Bank it could well be just another form of a Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), ended in active civil society participation to try and ensure that it does not end up in that way. Some civil society groups in some countries question the meaning of true civil society participation versus rubber stamping. This was definitely a concern for civil society in Zambia, which warranted an approach that would tone down this concern.

Practically, Zambia needed a good plan for reducing poverty. One formulated with the participation of various stakeholders. Further, the government needed to move away from a tradition of 'we know best' and engage with the people affected by the various faces of poverty. The PRSP provided an attempt to address these issues." (Mpepo, B. P., 2003:1)

In this statement the coordinator of CSPR, Besinati Mpepo expresses what proved to be the core approach taken by civil society in Zambia. Expectations arose that the government of newly elected L. Mwanawasa would be more open towards civil society than his predecessor J. Chiluba; and while cautious and critical to the overall conditions, such as the linking of PRSP and HIPC, CSPR along with its allies chose to join the process.<sup>53</sup> From the outset CSPR emphasized they wanted to participate in a cooperative spirit, with the aim of complementing government efforts and to ensure 'a much wider ownership than if civil society had not been part of the formulation'. (Mpepo, 2002:1, Mpepo in interview, 2003)<sup>54</sup>

Appreciating the invitation to join working groups, after a while CSPR realised the first of a series of limitations to participation. The invitation applied to only very few representatives of CS, leaving out the possibility to reflect the diverse views of a wide range of CS actors. Working groups appeared to be pre-defined by government covering eight thematic areas, largely focusing more on macroeconomic growth and governance issues than on poverty reduction.

In response CSPR identified ten thematic areas whereby most were similar to those of the government working groups<sup>55</sup>, yet with three areas added: HIV/AIDS,

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<sup>53</sup> Women for Change, a NGOs working with rural communities in Zambia and a vocal critic of IFI SAP policies in the country, is one of those critical to the Zambian government's commitment to poverty reduction as well as to the perspectives of the PRSP. 'We said we will participate along with other CSOs. But we know that the process is flawed. "To name is to own", and the PRSP was named by the WB and the IMF. If it is 'our process' then why are they naming it?' (Executive Director Emily Sikazwe, WfC in interview, 2003)

<sup>54</sup> During a short visit to Lusaka 9-19 March 2003 the author had the chance of meeting a range of CS actors, who had been involved in the PRSP process at national as well as district and provincial levels. See List of Persons Interviewed.

<sup>55</sup> Government working groups themes comprised: Agriculture, Governance, Mining, Health, Tourism, Industry, Macroeconomics and Education, while CSPR areas were: Growth, Agriculture and Food Security, Health and HIV/AIDS, Education, Youth and Child Development, Governance,

Gender and Environment. The latter were given a different attention by CSPR who feared that 'taken as cross cutting issues in the government process, [they] risked being given less attention over time.' (Mpepo, 2003:2). To prepare inputs 'Civil Society Consultative Groups' were arranged for each thematic area, involving CS actors working within the area and drawing upon individuals with special expertise, including researchers of University of Zambia.

CS was invited by government to also participate in each of nine teams going to undertake provincial poverty consultations' in all of Zambia's provinces. With just one CS representative in each team CSPR found that the consultations did not allow for broader, let alone for grassroots participation.

Against these backgrounds CSPR decided to conduct its own consultative process. While maintaining the cooperative goal of providing a civil society input into the Zambian PRSP, the coalition wanted to bring on board more civil society groups than were represented in government-led initiatives.

A 'National Forum for Civil Society 's Input to the PRSP' was held in March 2002 to bring in views of a range of CS actors at which occasion position papers lining out the various themes chosen for PR policies were formulated. In order to 'deepen the views from the communities in the process and as such' (Mpepo, 2003:2), 'Provincial Poverty Hearings' were conducted in four of Zambia's most poverty stricken provinces: North Western, Western, Luapula and Eastern May 2001. The results of the workshops were compiled in reports, one from each province, aiming to provide input to the PRSP. (CSPR, Provincial Reports, 2001)

In July 2001 CSPR launched its shadow report 'PRSP for Zambia - A Civil Society Perspective' by officially handing it over to the then Ministry of Finance and Economic Development. This was timely to allow for the civil society's PRPS input to serve the purpose of complementing the governments' first draft PRSP (launched September 2001; final version, September 2002). When later invited to review the draft PRSP, CS arranged another National Forum, this time 'for civil society 's response to the first draft PRSP'.

Although 'there was some room left for improvement, especially in sharpening its priorities' CS felt 'that a good deal of its concerns had been reflected in the draft'. (Mpepo, 2003:3). This view has been confirmed in interviews with representatives of CSOs and NGOs who were involved in the process. When asked to compare the CSPR document with the government PRSP, representatives expressed that 80-90% of the CSPS document found its way to the PRSP. In all cases this was formulated with remarkable signs of pride (Venkatesh Seshamani, Alick Lungu, Kasote Singogo in interviews 2003).

It appears that the PRSP process has contributed to improve relations between government and civil society. At least with some parts of government, CS is

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Mining, Macroeconomics, Tourism, Employment and Sustainable Livelihoods, Environment and Gender. (Republic of Zambia, 2002; CSPR, 2001)

regarded a serious player with something to offer. CS have managed to utilise the political space opened with the PRPS, not the least by bringing the analysis and organisational capacities of civic actors forward to the political scene.

This is not to say, though, that CS does not meet resistance. While enthusiasm is predominant in reflections on the role of CS in the PRSP formulation process, a certain disappointment has begun to show. 'Civil society has its concerns at the pace in which implementation is being done and questions the levels of government commitment to PRSP implementation as reflected in the budget.' (Mpepo, 2003:3). It is remarkable that repeated calls by CCJDP and CSPR to induce public debate on follow-up on the PRSP have evoked little engagement among politicians, i.e. government Movement for Multiparty Democracy, MMD party as well as the opposition.

At several occasions CS has spoken out in order to ensure sequencing and convergence between the PRSP and the national budget (2002 and 2003). CS is worried that the 2003 budget sets aside half the amount targeted for poverty reduction in 2002.<sup>56</sup> However, in a political climate influenced by power positioning and tribalism, attempts of civil society to raise debates on implementation of the PRSP are met with criticism and allegations of advocating along party lines – hence, diverting attention away from substantial issues of poverty reduction.

While CS has been strengthened and further mobilised during the PRSP process the same cannot be said about parliamentarians and the political parties. On the contrary, widespread lack of knowledge and commitment to engage with the PRSP is reported by local observers. Against this background it comes as no surprise that one civil society actor (heavily engaged in lobbying for improved access to low interest credit for rural women farmers) has this prediction on who to run for government at the next presidential elections. "There is no doubt in my mind that persons from the civil society are going to enter the scene" (Singogo, Kasote, Director, Zambia Investment Centre, in interview 2003).

## **Policies**

As policy papers the Zambian PRSP and the CSPR document are in accordance in vital areas.<sup>57</sup> It appears that most CS actors share the view that the PRSP forms a good basis for poverty reduction in the country and that most of its policy statements are sound. While sharing major goals such as for instance sustained economic growth and employment, increased focus on agricultural development and earmarking /equity in resources to health and education, the differences are found in (i) the perspectives set out for poverty reduction and especially (ii) prioritisation and allocation of resources.

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<sup>56</sup> Adding to the scepticism regarding the political will of government, according to one observer only 10% of the amount for PR in the 2002 budget was spent on the purpose. (Matabishi in interview, 2003)

<sup>57</sup> Not only did inputs from CSPR inform considerable parts of the PRSP, the PRSP and the CSPR document were edited by the same person, Dr. John Chileshe, Economist at University of Zambia.

With a reference to the fear that government engagement in the PRSP is mainly influenced by the interest of obtaining debt relief, the CSPR document stresses that PRSP must be seen 'not simply as a process for soliciting funds to immediately meet the challenge of poverty reduction, but rather as a more fundamental process for long-term development planning.' (CSPR, 2003:1)

This long-term perspective is underlined by the approach informing analyses and policies of the document: short-term steps must be guided by the fundamental question: What would Zambia look like in the next decade if we really do move toward poverty reduction? (CSPR, 2001: 1) Related to this prospect, CSPR regards poverty 'as an ethical and moral issue as it erodes on human dignity and our fight is therefore not to merely reduce the incidence of poverty, but to eradicate it!' (CSPR, 2003:1/2).

While both papers consider poverty a multidimensional phenomenon (income, access to health and education, as well as to decision-making), CSPR adds vulnerability (to natural disasters, economic shocks etc.) and debt per capita (higher than income per capita) to the list. In a paper presenting the Zambian PRSP, prepared for the Economic Commission for Africa CSPR-member Venkatesh Seshamani draws attention to the need of further elaborating and specifying the poverty analysis. From a strategic perspective 'hidden (intra-household) and cumulative deprivation' are aspects that should be considered: for instance, an adult who is illiterate, unemployed and who is HIV positive would undergo far greater sufferings than an adult who experiences only one of these forms of deprivations. (Seshamani, 2002:8)

With respect to *macroeconomic framework and strategies* the accordance between CSPR and government is remarkable. In comments on the PRSP CSPR acknowledges that it reflects a macroeconomic framework that would be compatible with the goal of systematic poverty reduction. (Chileshe/Mpepo in interviews 2003). It is commended that the PRSP recognizes that 'in order for growth to translate into poverty reduction, it has to be broad-based and contribute to a reduction in the high levels of inequality that characterize income and asset distribution in Zambia. (...) Hence, the document recognizes the importance of growth with redistribution as the appropriate strategy.' (Seshamani, 2002:9)

Reporting to the ECA one year after the official launch of the PRSP, Seshamani notices that 'The document does not propose any radical alteration of the macroeconomic regime that has been in place over the past several years. Stabilization continues to be one of the prime objectives and the basic policies of SAP are still valid for the realization of this objective. However, what has been suggested is a more cautious implementation of the policies.' (Seshamani, 2002:9)

What is referred to here is the fact that the PRSP-budget allocates 2/3 of the budget to sectors considered critical to poverty reduction: Roads, Health, Agriculture and Education (prioritised range) (Republic of Zambia, 2002:130). While acknowledging the amount allocated, CSPR finds the shares allocated Water & Sanitation, social safety nets as well as HIV/AIDS, Gender and Environment inadequate. (CSPR, 2001; Seshamani, 2002:10) The example of Water & Sanitation is illustrative: In an interview Seshamani repeated the concern of CSPR that by treating water and sanitation as a component of infrastructure development, the PRSP has robbed it of its significance as a social good, a principal component for human development, just like education and health. (Seshamani in interview, 2003)

Unlike current international trends of mainstreaming 'gender equality' into all development policies, CSPR deliberately issued a separate chapter on 'Gender' in the CSPR' shadow report. Thus, taking a critical stand to efforts of mainstreaming gender, CSPR found that on the basis of an analysis of gender disparities in Zambia, 'if left unattended to quickly, comprehensively and in a co-ordinated manner (...) the country will remain in poverty.' (CSPR, 2001: 63; Seshamani, 2002: 13) Asked to elaborate on the difference between the approach taken by government and that of CSPR, Mr. Alick Lungu (of CCDJP) in an interview emphasized that 'the issue of gender inequality is far too critical for us in this country, we cannot leave it with being presented only as a 'cross cutting issue' (Alick Lungu in interview, 2003).

CSPR appreciates that the PRSP recognizes *agricultural development* as the main engine of growth (since it provides the best opportunities for enhancing the livelihoods of the poor). However, the government is warned that the high levels of poverty in Zambia cannot be brought down solely by the trickle-down effect from growth. Hence, complementary measures must be provided 'that directly target the poor and shield them against the adverse impacts of economic reforms and other internal and external factors.' (Seshamaini, 2002:5; CSPR, 2001:73)

It is commended that the PRSP address needs of rural as well as the urban poor (those mainly dependent of the informal sector) – envisaging provision of credit as well as market and technological information. However, according to CSPR the PRSP is not sufficiently clear as to how the various measures suggested are going to be implemented in order to ensure a pro-poor focus. For instance, it is suggested to increase the volume of credit at affordable rates. 'But the amount allocated is not stated and nor is there any indicator to monitor credit allocation.' (Seshamani, 2002:12)

Similarly for measures on health, education and social safety nets, CSPR calls for specified guarantees: '(...) what is the guarantee that it is the poor who will benefit therefrom?' (Seshamani, 2002:12) At this point CSPR finds that there is room for considerable improvement. The 'poverty focus' of the PRSP should be improved in terms of strengthening resource allocations, action plans and indicators in the various sectors.' (Seshamani, 2002:12).

At this point CSPR is in line with other CS critics that find the PRSP a 'rather ambitious development agenda [that] may be questioned, both from a financial perspective and from a human resource perspective.' Michelo Hansungule of Women for Change regrets that it 'is not clear how the government is to procure the resources it proposes (...) the document has a weak financing plan and lacks a realistic time frame.' (Hansungule, 2003:3)

While budget allocations for implementation of the PRSP attract major attention within CS, Seshamani adds a wider perspective to these efforts. Warning of the great dependence on donors to finance almost all of the PRSP, he emphasizes that 'most of the existing revenue during the PRSP period (2002-2004, SP) would be committed to running government with hardly any room for spending on PRSP programmes beyond those that are already running. This is a key reason why donor funding is paramount.' (Seshamani, 2002:11)

### **Poverty Reduction – As Seen From The Provinces**

Critical advice towards government initiatives for poverty reduction has been voiced from yet another corner. 'The government should consult local people on development issues and respect the priorities set by citizens', reads a major recommendation, taken from one of the four provincial hearings, conducted by CSPR during PRSP preparations.

Going through the chapter 12 of the CSPR shadow report, added to provide insight in hearings, it is remarkable how major proposals express a strong criticism on failure of prevailing policies to 'identify community needs' and an urge to ensure that initiatives related to the PRSP 'are consulted with the people'. (CSPR, 2001: 235). Accordingly 'democratic decision-making at all levels', decentralisation of governance institutions and measures against corruption and nepotism are high among priorities.

Reviewing the four reports from the provincial hearings gives evidence that input and priorities from these are reflected and represented comprehensively in the CSPR document. That is, they are listed and discussed in the document's last chapter 12. The question may be raised to which extent the local priorities have informed the national policies suggested in the main document. In an interview, the editor dr. John Chileshe explained how major parts of the CSPR document, covering all ten key policy areas, were finalised before, and only later, the four provincial reports were edited and added to the report as one separate chapter: 'Poverty Reduction – Provincial Perspectives'.

The chapter indicates a substantive local commitment to poverty reduction throughout districts. Moreover, it proves that among local priorities listed, many relate to national concerns, such as the need of agricultural policy reforms or increased HIV/AIDS prevention. By reporting separately, though, the document



tends to reproduce a notion that subsumes local priorities under national policies.

Further, it leads to asking whether the stated goal of CSPR (complementing the official PRSP) became a priority to the extent that it would influence policy formulation at the expense of valuable local experience. Were CS actors in Zambia exposed to an experience, similar to what was found in Honduras and Nicaragua? Did the goal of influencing national PRSPs become decisive – and prior – in setting agendas and orientation of CS' engagement with PRSP?

While major efforts of CSPR have been made at national level other initiatives serve to modifying this picture. A series of policy papers, produced by CSPR for purposes of monitoring the implementation of the PRSP<sup>58</sup>, draw heavily on priorities and policy recommendations suggested at the provincial hearings. Plans are underway for advocacy and monitoring of PRSP in selected provinces.<sup>59</sup> And organisations continue to work in communities, dioceses and districts: CSOs such as CCDJP, NGOCC, Zambia Land Alliance and Women for Change are involved, some embarking on mobilisation for PRSP monitoring in districts, others in current efforts to support communities in a variety of development projects.

### **Western, Eastern, Luapula and North Western**

In each of the four provinces selected to be consulted for input to the PRSP, locally based CSOs (ZAW, Zambia Alliance of Women in Western, NGOCC in North Western, etc.) invited app. 50 persons. Women arrived in larger numbers than men, in some cases 60% were women. Participants were representatives of marketer's associations, peasant farmers, women's organisations, churches, traditional leaders, CSOs and local government civil servants.

In all provinces the workshops were conducted in the local Zambian languages. Facilitators represented CSPR member organisations (ZAW, NGOCC, Zambia Investment Centre and PAM, Programme Against Malnutrition). Working in groups participants were presented to the ten key areas identified by CSPR, and encouraged to give their contributions to each. To guide the process one of the key questions to participants was: 'What would you like to see achieved within this theme for it to have an impact on poverty reduction?'

Going through the reports it is felt that participants are strongly motivated to contribute in their districts. In all provinces, though, they are in agreement that the task is immense. Hunger, disease, widespread illiteracy, and high death rates are making up the order of the day in the communities. Obstacles to change are found in poor government policies on health, education and agriculture, absence of infrastructure and political interference in the running of development projects.

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<sup>58</sup> The Consultative Group Meeting 7 July 2002, Molungushi Conference centre was attended by representatives of government, donors and civil society.

<sup>59</sup> Mphuka C., 2003: 31-32.

*Health and Education* are regarded critical areas for improvement. In both sectors services are cut and infrastructure dilapidated, resulting in inadequate staffing and equipment. With the HIV/AIDS pandemic affecting more than 20% of all citizens, women more than men and leaving increasing numbers of children without their parents, a range of proposals are calling for support to coordinate health and education policies:

- Emphasis on prevention rather than cure system
- Interventions targeting the 15-24 years old, men and women in accordance with their particular needs
- Intensification of the awareness campaign on HIV/AIDS in farming communities (schools, churches, government)
- Strengthen village health committees (nutrition, prevention)
- Encourage girls education
- Children of poor families be considered for bursary awards unconditionally
- Subsidy or at least affordable school fees

In a response to these priorities CSPR has later called upon government and donor agencies to increase and guarantee allocations to health & education. In particular donors should concentrate on all sub-sectors of education, not only basic education; and rather than on specialised programmes emphasis should be placed on basic health care (Zambia Civil Society, 2002a)

Highest among priorities from provinces are *policy reforms in agriculture and food security*. Reports are concerned about prevailing detrimental policies, including overly expensive farming inputs, poor financial capacity of farmers, environmental degradation and poor marketing policy for agricultural products.

Summing up proposals from the provinces CSPR calls for *long-term agricultural policy reforms*, such that would meet the needs of the majority of the population:

- Assistance to small-scale farmers
- Assistance to micro, small and medium enterprises
- Support to informal sector operators
- Women in the urban informal sector

Interventions should reflect that women, farmers as well as petty traders, are more likely to spend income generated on the entire household. A wide range of proposals are suggested; ranking highest in all provinces are:

- Reintroduction of subsidies on farming inputs
- Broadening opportunities for women to access loans and property ownership
- Abolition of user fees
- Improvement of agricultural marketing policies.

While at national level CSPR over and over again urges government to play a key role in regulating and coordinating agricultural support programmes, of greatest and particular concern to participants in the provinces appear to be the fate of *peasant farmers*. The CSPR document regrets prevailing ‘negative attitudes towards agriculture’ (CSPR, 2001:221), representatives of local CSOs specify: ‘Producing mainly for subsistence, for their families, peasant farmers are regarded ‘not important’. For some (political?) reason our province (North Western, SP) is not regarded an agricultural region. Yet there is an abundance of maize, ground nuts, pineapple... peasants are skilled and responsible farmers, yet they don’t have access to transport, and therefore little capacity to market their produce – or markets simply are non-existent.’ (Tafira, Matabishi in interviews, 2003).

To meet needs of peasant farmers, the provincial reports suggest that urgent action be taken in the following six areas:

- Establish credit facilities with minimal interest
- Encourage growing indigenous crops to cover local food security
- Utilise local production (cassava, pineapple, etc.) for local agro-processing industry
- Support marketing of local agricultural products
- Improve infrastructure (esp. roads) to help marketing across provinces
- Allocate arable land to peasants – property ownership for women.

Members of CSO’s who have been involved in the provincial hearings repeatedly reaffirmed these demands in interviews. ‘For villagers land is a critical concern, and this has not been included in the PRSP.’ ‘This country rely on the production peasant farmers, women in particular. Yet the Zambia PRSP is far too silent on this point – while at the same time favouring better off farmers, i.e. ‘outgrower schemes’ for less vulnerable commercial farmers.’ (Lipalile, M (UNZA), Tafira, L (ZAW), Macina H. (ZLA), Makaha, G (JCTR) in interviews, 2003).

More than one CSO representative emphasised that people in the rural communities are poor, especially in the sense that resources are not utilised; huge amounts of local produce are lost or left un-utilised in terms of further processing. As noticed for instance in North Western, an utmost fertile region and rich of natural resources, peasant farmers are not able to market their produce. ‘We would be able to produce enough to feed citizens throughout the country, provided that government was not biased in construction of infrastructure (roads and buildings). If people could go and sell their produce it would benefit the whole province.’ (Matabishi, in interview, 2003).

In what appears to be a recognition of the wider national interest in these priorities, raised in the North Western province, the CSPR document included as key recommendation to government: ‘Government should not be biased in favour of particular provinces in the construction of infrastructure’, and it should ensure

provision and maintenance of good road and communication networks. (CSPR, 2001: 242/247)

#### Poverty Reduction – An issue for Villagers?

Descriptions of workshop processes as well as priorities listed in the four reports from the provincial hearings give insights in strong commitment among participating CSOs. Interviews with representatives further add to the picture – NGOs and CSOs who have been actively involved in community development and advocacy at local levels, already before and regardless of the PRSP process, have opted to utilise the chance of raising local poverty concerns. Thus, seizing the opportunity to present local demands to the Zambian government it appears that participants were enthusiastic by the role opened to them in the process.

While some CS actors express deep concern about whether and to which extent the policies of the PRSP will indeed be implemented, CSOs involved in districts and provinces seem strongly committed to monitoring activities in order to hold government accountable. Policy proposals from the provinces indicate some potential for such activities, much as locally based CSPR member organisations have been mobilised in relation to the provincial hearings.

Participants in hearings suggest that poverty reduction committees be formed at community, district and provincial levels ‘to identify civil society’s input into implementation of the PRSP’. (CSPR, 2001:245) A range of initiatives should be decentralised, such as for instance ‘the system for the award of bursaries [to children coming from poor families]’. Further, ‘Community Development Departments in the provinces need to be restructured and given more funding’ and ‘Government should involve the community before undertaking any major project.’ (CSPR, 2001:247)

Hence, with policy proposals as well as commitment of CS in place in districts and provinces, it appears that the national CSPR have a fairly good basis for its approach to PRSP monitoring as one that ‘involves the communities affected by the different forms of poverty (...) CSPR will be paying particular attention to the way implementation is being done and who is actually benefiting from the PRSP programmes.’ (Mpepo 2003:4)

In order to meet this challenge, CSPR, and the civil society in Zambia in general, is faced with more than one constraint. The general public, and the rural population in particular are not informed about the PRSP. In that respect Zambia is no exception from what has proved to be the rule in other countries. At the time of the provincial hearings CSPR was aware that PRSP workshops did not cover all areas in the country, and that ‘workshops need to be replicated in the remotest parts of the province if the poverty battle is to be won.’ (CSPR, 2001: 219)

In 2003 CSPR facilitated the publishing of a popular version of the Zambian PRSP, *The Path Away From Poverty* and a pamphlet aimed at community leaders

(CSPR, 2003a,b). However, CSPR finds that 'Levels of sensitisation on the PRSP are still low' and 'if informed, more groups would have been part of the process.' (Mpepo, 2003, 4).

Whether 'information' and 'sensitisation' as such would present a solution appears to be in for further debate. At the hearing in Eastern Province participants raised a couple of critical questions, both relating to prevailing gaps between central resources and decision-making *and* the fate of the marginalized majorities: 'Experience has shown that resources for poverty reduction do not get down to people/areas/sectors that need it. What is CSPR going to do to address the problem?' And: 'Why is it that (...) workshops are confined to provincial capitals and cities? How do we capture information from remote areas, which are worse hit?'

In response local CSPR members asserted the role of CSPR 'to develop capacities of communities to (...) question on how government resources are used by putting their own monitoring and evaluation mechanisms at their own level.' They also recognised the need 'to enhance the participatory and consultative process by the local communities' and conduct workshops in 'remotest part of the province'. (CSPR, Provincial Reports (Eastern), 2001:2) While this is in accordance with current monitoring plans of CSPR, the question remains whether citizens in towns and villages find themselves represented by initiatives of CSOs.

Asked to assess the provincial poverty hearings from that perspective, representatives of involved CSOs found that the reports cover well the plans for PR shared by participants, and more than one underline 'how people have rich ideas, they know what is at stake in their communities and it is amazing how they talk about what will work in their province.' (Matabishi, Tafira, Singogo in interviews 2003)

While agreeing with her CSO allies Charity Musamba (JCTR) goes one step further in raising the question: 'Do we believe that poverty can be reduced by initiatives suggested by the poor themselves? Do we really believe it? We always listen to what the people from Lusaka, those on the top, are saying; there has been this process in the provinces where we heard what people are saying, but we tend to ignore it.'

According to Musamba CSOs in districts and provinces should not confine themselves to wait for initiatives taken by 'Lusaka', i.e. the national CSOs, such as CSPR or JCTR. She is concerned that 'people in the villages do not feel that we represent them' while at the same time 'they are those to know how to best fight poverty'. Local CSOs may lack some capacity in terms of advocacy and lobbying skills, however, as important is the need to listen to what people in villages have to say: 'When will you know how to make your poverty reduction plan – be it national or in the district – if you don't know what the ground is saying?' (Musamba in interview 2003)

A recent 'mapping exercise', contracted by CSPR, assessed the capacity of CS in terms of monitoring the PRSP (Mphuka, 2003). The consultant found that 'civil society groups are not well organised to conduct advocacy and monitoring. This is mainly because civil society focuses too much on implementing programmes, lack of information on the PRSP process and lack of forum where civil society can meet and strategise.' A major recommendation suggests that 'CSPR sensitises the provincial group on the PRSP process (...) distributing materials and also mobilising more groups to join in'. (Mphuka, 2003:31)

With a view of the challenge raised by Musamba (CSOs to increase openness to communities, refraining from too much or one-way national-to-local communication), it appears that the suggestion to build on 'Strong groups such as church groups, trade unions and some NGOs' (Mphuka, 2003:31) could represent a way forward. NGOs such as for instance CCDJP and WfC appear to be well rooted in dioceses and communities throughout provinces. They have the confidence of men and women in the villages and major parts of their efforts to strengthen communities are based on 'life strategies' of community members (Lungu in interview 2003, [www.ccjp.org.zm](http://www.ccjp.org.zm), [www.wfc.org.zm](http://www.wfc.org.zm)).

## **V Local Civil Society – Concerns and Priorities Across Countries**

Summing up accounts from CSO' initiatives to identify local priorities for PRS in the three countries Honduras, Nicaragua and Zambia, a series of common proposals stand out. Whether carried out with the purpose of providing input to the PRSP formulation process, or as initiatives aimed at monitoring implementation of PRSPs, CS actors in villages, municipalities, districts and provinces share the basic interest of attracting attention to their needs as citizens, living far from and outside the realm of political influence.

In all countries local priorities indicate that citizens and local CSOs participating in workshops and hearings carry - yet unutilised? – resources in terms of commitment to involve themselves further in solutions appropriate to local needs. Secondly proposals suggest that the many local priorities, listed in regional reports and/or in annexes to national CS shadow reports, carry potentials for more elaborate locally based PR strategies. Finally, several proposals are aimed at national decision-makers, with the purpose of calling for local priorities to be accounted for in the national PRS, i.e. in planning as well as in implementation.

Notwithstanding crucial country differences related to economic, social, cultural and political history, citizens in the three countries share a range of needs and wishes. Six key areas of concern stand out:

7. Women's role in poverty eradication – crucial for sustainable solutions
8. Agrarian reforms – focus on agriculture and rural development
9. Local production – local trade
10. Children and youth – gender inequalities be accounted for
11. Decentralisation – increased resources and local investments
12. Calls to national CSOs – incorporate local priorities in national development plans

### 1. Women's role in poverty eradication – crucial for sustainable solutions

At hearings and workshops women participated actively, in Zambia in some cases women outnumbered men in the provincial hearings (60% of participants were women) (CSPR, 2001:219). Local women's organisations were raising concerns and needs, critical to themselves, their families and communities. Participants suggested incorporating women's voices as their contribution would add value to PR strategies. Common demands include:

- Women's contributions must be regarded as an asset in poverty eradication
- Interventions should reflect that poor women farmers and petty traders are likely to spend income generated on the entire household. Poor women are particularly responsible in terms of repayment and utilisation of loans, hence, low interest credit schemes for small scale farmers and producers must be designed and provided accordingly
- Land legislation programs must ensure property ownership and allocation of arable land to women peasants

- Support to women in the urban informal sector
- Needs of single mothers deserve special attention
- Detrimental to poverty eradication, domestic violence must be prevented
- At community level systematic incorporation of concerns of key actors, such as ethnic groups, women, children, youth and elders must be ensured
- Abolition of user fees (schools, health services)
- Encouragement of girls' education

While by and large national CSOs respond to gender inequality and poverty by highlighting the need to address women's subordination, local priorities tend to focus also on women's capabilities. Local proposals suggest that the experiences women draw from within their subordinate position must be regarded as an asset in terms of poverty eradication.

Women carry dual responsibilities as producers, farmers and traders but also as mothers, caretakers and community planners, hence, their experiences are crucial in the design of local poverty eradication plans. Consequently, women's involvement should be encouraged in order for poverty eradication strategies to be in accordance with the needs of involved communities.

## 2. Agrarian reforms – focus on agriculture and rural development

Highest among local priorities in all three countries are concerns that the majorities of poverty stricken citizens depend on the rural economy, while at the same time the agriculture sector is characterised by economic neglect, misuse or unjust distribution of resources, disregard of peasants, particularly women farmers, and little opportunities for peasants and other small producers to participate in the rural economy. At all local consultations participants call for assistance to peasants, micro, small and medium size producers, and informal market operators, for years neglected by government as well as by bilateral donors.<sup>60</sup>

While participants in Zambia propose immediate and long-term policy reforms in agriculture and food security, integral strategies for agrarian production and national industry are suggested in Central America. Similar to local proposals in Zambian provinces, initiatives for an agrarian reform that is 'appropriate to an integrated development in the region' are found in Honduras. The proposals of the Nicaraguan PRSPcito on support of utilisation of local resources find their parallels in Honduras as well as in Zambia. A range of policy suggestions are common, some of which are especially emphasised by local CSOs in the various countries (marked in brackets):

- Existing resources of small scale farmers to be utilised to their potentials
- Encourage growing indigenous crops to cover local food security
- Reintroduction of subsidies on farming inputs (Zambia)

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<sup>60</sup> Similar concerns on disregard of rural populations and the agricultural sector are found in IFAD, 2002 and Nyamugasira & Rowden, 2002.



- Land reforms and land legislation programmes for peasants
- Ownership of land for women peasants, incl. title deeds with true legal rights (Zambia, Nicaragua)
- Land bank, allocating land to poor women and men (Nicaragua)
- Create strategies based on particular features of each province/region (Honduras)
- Create micro firms, traditional and non-traditional production (cattle), and establish a development bank for the peasants (Nicaragua)

In order to benefit farmers and other small producers, it is proposed that long-term agrarian reforms are designed with the main goal of ensuring food security for the majority of populations in the countries. To ensure economic support and sustainability of such reforms local proposals in all three countries have drafted credit and other policies in support of production and marketing of local produce.

### 3. Local production – local trade

In the three countries participants in local consultations are worried about the absence of opportunities for marketing of local produce, little appraisal of existing resources, apparent fear of local investment, and prevailing credit policies that are gender biased and not adjusted to conditions of small producers. A series of proposals aim to promote local production, to improve establishing of micro business and create opportunities for local marketing. The similarity in proposals across countries is remarkable, policy options especially emphasised by local CSOs in the various countries are marked in brackets:

- Support micro businesses, ensure their funding
- Producers organise to sell and buy their agricultural products
- Promotion of municipal and other local markets with the presence of the producers
- National small farmers' financial system, beneficiaries being producers, not financial institutions (Honduras)
- Solidarity groups to obtain access to credit. Establish rural banks (Nicaragua)
- Try to convince the IFIs to make their credit policies more flexible, including the conditions for access (Nicaragua)
- Establish credit programs with minimal or low interest rates, target women in particular
- Support marketing of local agricultural produce (Zambia)

Compared to national PRSPs in the three countries these proposals represent obvious alternatives. Suggesting that main poverty reduction policies direct interventions to small farmers and producers, to local production, to promotion of production for food security and local trade rather than for export are policy options that basically challenge prevailing policies of national governments, as well as approaches taken by IFIs and bilateral donors.

Implementation of policies that emphasize support to local production and trade has critical implications, not only for national economic development plans but also for future donor support. As particularly underlined by civil society in Zambia and Nicaragua, the latter calls for a thorough change of donor support – away from mainly funding priority sectors like health and education towards concerted cooperation on interventions benefiting the agriculture sector in general, and poor rural and informal sector women, peasants, micro and small producers in particular.<sup>61</sup>

#### 4. Children and youth – gender inequalities be accounted for

Children and youth, of both sexes are among those groups usually little heard and represented in development programmes. In all three countries CSOs in communities, municipalities and districts have voiced critical concern towards prospects of younger generations. Due to the HIV/AIDS pandemic children of poor families are particularly hard hit, adding dramatically to the increasing number of orphans. Poorly equipped schools and health services are targets for widespread criticism. Common proposals by local CSOs, especially women's organisations, include:

- Free and compulsory education at all levels, including in rural areas
- Improve academic level of children in rural areas (Nicaragua)
- Improve teachers' salaries, conducive to higher professional levels
- Utilise local capabilities, such as nurses and teachers as opposed to centralised public contracting (Nicaragua)
- Encourage girls education
- Basic health care services for all
- Interventions targeting prevention of HIV/AIDS among 15-24 years youth, girls and boys (Zambia)

Local priorities targeted at children and youth are distinguishing between needs of girls and boys, young women and men, to a greater extent than do national CS shadow reports. Local proposals appear to reflect citizens' experiences that poverty in families, nutrition, health of children, risks of HIV/AIDS and opportunities for education are closely interrelated.

#### 5. Decentralisation – increased resources and local investments

Calls for increased financial resources to districts and municipalities are unmistakable in all local priorities. With the invitation to participate in hearings and workshops during the PRSP formulating process local CSOs in the three countries have become increasingly aware of opportunities to engage in dialogue with local government. Issues crucial for daily life in communities and districts have been given the form of policy proposals, and in all cases the social

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<sup>61</sup> Centre for Policy Dialogue in Bangladesh has developed a series of proposals that can serve as inspiration for such interventions. Examples include investment in marketing cooperatives, and enabling of micro-credit organisations to graduate into corporate banks, owned by small producers. Sobhan, 2002: 6-18; [www.cpd-bangladesh.org](http://www.cpd-bangladesh.org)

mobilisation among CSOs have led to demands for decentralisation, increased public information about and influence on government initiatives.

Not the least demands for agrarian reforms in favour of women, other peasants and small producers lead local CSOs to suggest decentralisation of governance. In all countries CS calls for upgrading of institutional capacities of municipalities or districts, as well as for establishing regular dialogue meetings with the local civil society. In most cases local government is little informed about PRSPs, let alone equipped with appropriate financial and human resources. Key proposals include:

- Communities wish to develop their own projects and employ their own labour forces; accordingly, restructure community development departments in provinces, provide proper funding, encourage local investment
- Communities must be involved or heard before major projects are undertaken by local government
- Strengthen accountability of local authorities towards community organisations
- Implementation of PRSP should start from the grassroots (Zambia)
- Include municipalities in PRSP zones by establishing a regional PR fund, supervised by CS and local government (Honduras)
- Local NGOs and (in some cases local government) have the knowledge and trust of citizens, hence they should be heard in terms of choice of PR programmes
- National government must fulfil the law of financial transfer to the municipalities (Nicaragua)
- Legalisation of community organisation, and assignation of resources to promote their sustainability (Nicaragua)

In all countries CSOs call for respect for existing local productive and social resources. The 'richness' of ideas and solutions to poverty among citizens must be recognized. Hence, the proposal of decentralisation is argued through first of all to ensure that existing local resources are (better) utilised, and that public and private investment in a given area are made according to its potential.

#### 6. Calls to national CSOs – incorporate local priorities in national development plans

Wherever hearings and consultations have taken place at local level, they have triggered new political processes. All three countries witness not only increased awareness on poverty eradication as an issue for popular engagement, but also a certain amount of popular mobilisation. Scepticism towards national government is widespread whereby local CSOs have called into question whether resources for poverty reduction will 'get down to' the people and the areas that need them. This experience further strengthens the calls to national CSOs to ensure that local priorities are incorporated in national PRSP proposals.

On a similar note local CSOs are concerned that government responds more to political party interests than to needs of the population. This appears to translate into even stronger expectations that national CSOs take into account priorities set in districts and municipalities. From that perspective local CSOs in general, and in Honduras in particular, appeal to national CSOs to ensure coherence and coordination of advocacy efforts.

While criticism towards national governments relates to the way politics have been conducted in the countries also before PRSPs were introduced, the PRSP process has raised additional worries. In several cases members of local CSOs had difficulties in connecting the ‘technical’ and the participatory elements of the PRSP. Translating daily experience of living with poverty into perceptions and concepts that were applicable to PRSP methodologies and policy framework has been no easy task.

In Honduras local CSOs solved the problem by forming their own ‘technical commissions’ of common people drafting policy proposals (Mancomunidad Sur de Copán, 2002). In most cases local PRSP hearings have been organised with the duplex aim of informing about PRSPs as well as collecting local needs and priorities. We have seen how this methodology raises the question to which extent priorities were influenced by categories and agendas proposed by organisers, or whether proposals collected in full cover needs and priorities of participants.

In Zambia local CSOs raised particular questions to national CSOs in order to enhance the participatory process and ensure that more citizens, including those living in the remotest districts, are included in poverty reduction efforts. In Honduras local CSOs strongly advocated for inclusion of local/regional PRSPs in national government plans, while in Nicaragua the four municipalities of the León Norte region presented their own PRSP, the PRSPcito, independently of the national CSO, CC. Later CC and representatives of municipalities have joined forces in the GISN with the purpose of advocating for an alternative poverty eradication plan, based upon local priorities.

By and large, participation in CS workshops at local levels have led to new political demands on government, IFIs and bilateral donors, and raised expectations that attention to the voices and concerns of local CSOs and citizens be maintained.

### **Responding to Local Demands? Experiences from Uganda**

We have seen how demands for agrarian reforms in favour of women, other peasants and small producers led local CSOs to call for decentralisation of governance, accompanied by a series of demands for increased civil society influence on local poverty eradication policies. A key priority suggests that existing local resources are built on and (better) utilised, and that public and private investment in a given area are made according to its potential. In this chapter some of the challenges that relate to these suggestions are discussed.

Experiences from Uganda with decentralisation and channelling of PRSP funding to local levels serve as a case in point.

The drafting of Uganda's PRSP coincided with the revision of the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP), a government framework for poverty eradication, developed in 1997. Related to implementation of the PEAP the government co-ordinated the Uganda Participatory Poverty Assessment Project, results of which were later integrated as PPA in the PRSP (3/2000) – and widely recognized as a mirror of people's concerns with powerlessness, vulnerability and isolation. Civil society played a considerable role, inter alia by facilitating workshops in eight locations whereby broad constituencies of people were consulted and findings synthesized to feed into the government-led drafting of the PRSP.

Later, the PPA was linked to the MTEF, the budgetary complement to PRSP, in order to channel funding down to local levels. The results of PPAs served to make local poverty needs legible in terms of health, education, rural water and sanitation priorities, and instrumentally link these directly back to central planning levels. The PRSP-budget link ensures they are monetized as budget line items in the MTEF, from where direct, controlled transfers are orchestrated down to the local level, since 1998-99 through the Poverty Actions Fund (PAF).

The growth of the PAF has resulted in a dramatic increase in school attendance and construction, the availability of health services, road improvement and water-point construction. Agriculture services are poorly resourced compared to the social sectors, and the impact on agricultural production, productivity, diversification and incomes has been minimal to date, largely as a result of the preference of donors for directing resources into social sector expenditure. (Craig & Porter, 2003a: 62-63)

During 1998–2001, the 'ring-fencing' of public resources and the special purpose budgeting and expenditure controls that featured under PAF expanded. At the same time wide-ranging responsibilities for planning, management and accountability of service delivery were being assigned to elected local governments. Uganda's democratic decentralization, introduced in 1992, but with full force after the 1997 Local Government Act, in some respects mirrors globally popular experiments with decentralized governance. While globally the evidence is equivocal,<sup>62</sup> in Uganda some find reasons to argue that decentralization has enhanced the responsiveness to local needs of public resource planning and allocation; that it has improved efficiency, and built long-term capacity in democratic local governments (Craig & Porter, 2003a: 63).

Local governments are free to allocate resources according to local demands, and evaluations early in the process (1998-99) of implementation showed that local councils were responding to local demands in investment decisions, at the same

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<sup>62</sup> Francis & James, 2003; Blair, 2000.

time as articulating national priorities.<sup>63</sup> That the PAF has enabled a substantial growth in funding for primary service provision seems not in question.

After a couple of years, though, another side of the coin appeared. Local officials, councillors, administrators and informed citizens reportedly were quite consistent in their assessment that the PAF system, through which unprecedented resources were being channelled, was beginning to overwhelm the systems of the earlier 'District Development Programme' (incl. a largely unconditional or discretionary grant modality) producing perverse effects in terms of local governance.

Revisited research points out how the PAF reinforced the dominance of central line ministry-led sectoral approaches, in part because of the re-orientation of local government towards the administrative compliance and disciplinary reporting requirements of central ministries.

According to UNDP, although the Local Government Act authorizes district official to initiate development projects, their actions are hindered by an inability to raise local revenue as well as by slow and insufficient transfers from the central government.

Other assessments mention how the 'success' of PAF has turned attention of decentralized governments away from their constituencies, towards the center, from where resources flow. Just as central transfers have increased, local revenue collection has remained stagnant or in many cases fallen dramatically, referred as reflecting reduced incentives on the part of councils to collect tax, and on the part of constituents to feel any obligation to the local councils <sup>64</sup>.

A recent examination among smallholder farmers in the Uganda Kamuli district found that PAF services (schools, health clinics and assistance with crop production ao.) are best suited for groups more privileged than smallholder farmers, hence, de facto the PAFs were draining resources from the latter (Lenz, 2002). Depending on subsistence farming these peasants were reported to have 'strong ideas' about methods of coping with poverty, accumulating assets, and creating wealth. A key conclusion reads that while these methods provide effective and sustainable means to reduce poverty, they have been overlooked in assumptions and design of the PAF (Lenz, 2002: 11).

Recalling the call from local CSOs in Honduras, Nicaragua and Zambia to build on local productive and social resources, it appears that not only does the Ugandan experience display the critical complexities inherent in decentralisation of poverty reduction policies, it does indeed call for caution and critical attention from civil society. The following conclusions of key assessments reflect the challenges involved:

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<sup>63</sup> Craig & Porter, 2003a: 64; Lister & Nyamugasira, 2003: 103

<sup>64</sup> UNDP, 2000; Ellis & Bahigwa, 2003: 1010; Craig & Porter, 2003a: 65

Ellis & Bahigwa find that the 'institutional environment facing rural citizens in Uganda contains mixed omens for rapid poverty reduction. While substantial improvements are occurring in large-scale, centrally funded, services such as education and road provision, the delivery of local support services such as agricultural extension remains wholly wanting, and the capability of local authorities to provide such services effectively and even-handedly is unproven. In general, in villages, public agencies and officers are held in rather low esteem and are not seen as having positive influences on gaining a living. (...)

Far from bringing the "voices of the poor" to decision-making at local levels, the signs are that decentralized local government merely recreates at district and lower levels the rent-seeking environment that understandably characterizes inadequately remunerated and underfunded public service jobs wherever they are located (...) In these circumstances decentralized authority becomes part of the problem of rural poverty, not part of the solution.' (Ellis & Bahigwa, 2003:1010)

On a slightly more optimistic note, Craig & Porter state that: 'Higher level transfers can be crucial for maintaining basic human need services, but they are most effective if also used to support a facilitative, engaging relation of local authorities with productive enterprises, whether these be the farmers in the field, or local efforts to add value and trade. The irony is that in the local Ugandan context, where there are many simple things the local state can do to support agricultural production, the focus in poverty reduction is almost entirely elsewhere.' (Craig & Porter, 2003a: 66)

## VI Conclusions and Policy Options

In the first part of this report assessments and hypotheses of PRSPs and civil society involvement in policy formulation processes were reviewed – the idea being to help guide the study of CS initiatives in Honduras, Nicaragua and Zambia. Main conclusions of this review are presented in the first section below, *PRSP and the Voice of Civil Society*.

In the three countries, Honduras, Nicaragua and Zambia, CS coalitions have been involved in efforts to identify national as well as local priorities of strategies for poverty eradication. National CSOs have worked to gain influence of national PRSPs, while local CSOs gathered to set up proposals for poverty eradication as seen from municipalities, districts and provinces. A wide range of policies are proposed, at national as well as at local levels. This engagement is studied in the core part of the report and main general conclusions are presented in sections *National Civil Society Coalitions and the PRSP*, and *Local Civil Society Response to PRSPs*.

Serving as input to advocacy initiatives and cross learning within civil society a short final section, *Ways Forward* discusses challenges and opportunities of bringing local poverty eradication efforts forward.

### PRSP and the Voice of Civil Society

#### PRSPs – Pro-Poor Growth or Pro-Growth Poverty?

A majority of assessments of the PRSP regard core parts of the approach sound. It is also found, though, that practice does not reflect the promise. One critical point is the reluctance to let the new process and players influence the underlying policies. Rigid adherence to a prescribed set of private sector focused policies is another. Moreover, neglect of key prerequisites such as intervention to address inequity and gender disparities, and conditions of rural populations in particular are seen to undermine both economic development and poverty reduction initiatives.

One of the intended benefits of PRSP is to introduce a consistent and coordinated approach to growth and poverty reduction. However, there is a significant disjuncture between the poverty reduction and social development strategies in the PRSP and their underlying macro-economic frameworks. The narrative of PRSP focuses on the importance of social safety nets and increased resource allocation to health and education, while the prescribed macroeconomic reforms remain undiscussed – in terms of previous failings or lessons learnt, in terms of consequences for the poor and marginalized groups, and with regard to sequencing of policies and the consideration of alternative options. As a result of this silence little change from previous economic reform initiatives is found.

While PRSPs are intended to promote ‘pro-poor growth’, CS actors are beginning to question what is in fact the meaning and implications of ‘pro-poor growth’. Do



PRSPs contribute to reduction of poverty for the marginalized majorities? For example peasants, small-scale farmers, incl. women, groups dependent on the informal sector, the disabled, children headed households? Or do especially the macroeconomic parts of PRSPs imply increase – or even creation of additional poverty?

#### The Role of Civil Society in PRSPs

While the IFIs have seen CS participation as a means to improve efficiency of government led policies, by and large CS has entered the PRSP process with the expectation of gaining a (new) voice in the policy-making of their country. In practice confusion, lack of clarity and power struggles have dominated decisions on the extent and at which stage of the process CS should take part, as well as on policy implications of CS participation.

CS engagement with government in policy processes has been increasing, and it is widely recognized that the PRSP process has brought with it an opportunity for this to occur. Nonetheless, the basis on which CS involvement is taking place is often unclear and contradictory. Guidelines on CS participation are few and vaguely formulated, and there is little discussion of which groups constitute legitimate participants in the process – and why. Inclusion in policy processes is unpredictable and largely based on non-formal relationships.

Hence, far from the consensual, apolitical process of participation envisaged in WB guidelines, the PRSP process to date has witnessed lengthy processes of initiated, at times disrupted, at times resumed government-CSO negotiations. The process has displayed power positioning within national PRSP commissions, exclusion of critical voices, antagonistic as well as consensual communication.

Analyses and guidelines supporting the framework, as well as the language of IFI representatives and major multilateral and bilateral donor agencies suggest that the new PR policies go hand in hand with values of social inclusion: PRSPs aim at reflecting the voices of the poor, at participation of civil society actors, and at integration of social service policies and safety net provisions to those most vulnerable and marginal.

All these are no longer principles reserved for CS, or donor agencies advocating human and social development. They are adopted by the IFIs, in particular the WB; they are well reflected, and instrumentalised for the overall purpose of economic growth and poverty reduction. While communicated in universalised, apparently apolitical terms such as ‘voices of the poor’, ‘gender equality’, ‘partnership’ and ‘participation’ – the framework is deemed to find its shape within a specific local and national political economy. The asymmetries that characterize the terms have begun to show their face:

The majorities of the poor populations did not have their ‘voices’ heard during PRSP processes; in many cases ‘participation’ has been confined to carefully selected CSOs; the process has often been more exclusive than inclusive. Key civil

actors, in particular women's organisations have encountered difficulties in gaining access to the PRSP process. More often than not inequality and asymmetry is inherent in the 'partnership' – be it between IFIs or other donor agencies and recipient governments, between governments and CSOs, or between INGOs and national CSOs. Conflicts about economic resources, political influence, differing and at times contradictory understandings of key concepts and policy orientations, political power positioning, exclusion of parliamentarians and tribalism are common features.

While the PRSP framework emphasizes the plural and consensual rather than conflicting rationales of social inclusion, the experience of the PRSP formulation process has made the approach increasingly prone to accusations of being little trustworthy. It embodies a basic duplicity in dealing, with, on the one hand, 'the poor', who are to be 'included', and, on the other hand, with the political economy of poverty and inequality, which according to many observers is not addressed, except through commitments to growth and plans for 'inclusion'.

The degree and extent to which CS has engaged with the PRSP mirror this duplicity. While CSOs have found considerable limitations to their opportunities of influencing national PRSPs, at the same time, the very engagement with PRSP has paved new ways for CS and local and national government actors to enter and engage in public poverty agendas. Some of these are anticipated in the PRSP framework, others are evolving as results of political pressure and negotiations between CSOs and government during the PRSP process.

#### Limitations of Civil Society Participation and Influence

Contrary to expectations of CS representatives, in the first round of PRSPs CSOs have seen their involvement reduced to being consulted and informed by government, rather than being invited to a democratic process of contributing to the design of the PRSPs.

CS' reviews of the PRSP process are unanimous in concluding that opportunities in involving CS in national PR strategies are far from realised. Not only due to the lack of political will of national governments, but also to systemic failures in the PRSP framework that have affected process as well as policies of national PRSPs.

CSOs have not been given the opportunity to participate in macroeconomic policy, neither in design nor in analysis. CS has been invited to comment on social sector policies, while the macro-economic and structural elements were seen as being out of their domain.

The ministerial appointing of CS for participation in the PRSP process led to a restriction of the number of CSOs to be engaged in the process. Little information about the PRSP has been provided to the general public. In some countries CSOs and INGOs have facilitated dissemination of popular versions of PRSPs.

By and large representatives of poor communities, especially in rural areas have not been included in the PRSP process. In some cases local CSOs, community

leaders and/or local government officials have participated in workshops, PPAs or other activities, planned and initiated by CS coalitions or government.

The participatory role assigned to representatives of 'the poor' in the PRSP framework is based on conceptions of poor populations as basically victimized, as people in need of aid and development assistance, yet hailed by the WB as 'the true experts of poverty reduction'. These representational devices are particularly adept in silencing any sense of connection between their plight as losers in the wider political economy of access to capital, property and power and their expressed lacks, wants and vulnerabilities.

Time constraints are identified by both governments and CS as one of the most unsatisfactory elements of the PRSP process. To qualify for debt relief under the HIPC initiative a PRSP process must be successfully implemented for one year. This linkage with HIPC has pushed the pace of PRSPs, compromising their quality, hampering broad CS participation, and has delayed debt relief for a number of countries. There has been insufficient time for CSOs to consult with their constituencies, and key documents have been provided to local CSOs only in English, with no translation of information into indigenous languages.

Lack of political will on the part of governments to take cognisance of CS' inputs to PRSP has been a common experience; in particular in cases where CS provided policy input that would question or challenge government priorities and/or IFI requirements. In many cases CSO recommendations were not taken into account in the final versions of the PRSP. This has led to disappointment and triggered a certain 'participation fatigue' among CS actors.

A commonly held assessment concerns the limited or even lacking capacity of CS. Some IFIs representatives claim that CS would not have the skills required to engage in macroeconomic planning. While this may be true in a strictly economic-technical sense there seem to be other interests involved as well; even in cases where CS coalitions un-mistakenly have been able to provide such capacity their input was not acknowledged. Stressing the need for building capacity among CSOs is justified considering the complexity of the PRSP framework; there is, however, reason to further discuss what may be meant by 'capacity building', by whom and for which groups.

There is a risk inherent that PRSP as the new aid modality will take predominance at the cost of other crucial agendas. In the interest of advocacy/ lobby of governments and IFIs, the engagement of CSOs on PRSP related agendas can lead to widening the gap between urban-based CSOs which are well trained and qualified to participate and those which are not, i.e. the poor majorities in rural and urban marginalized areas.

#### Enlargement of Political Space

The PRSP process has served as vehicle for opening up political space for CS, in particular in policy formulation. Some countries have witnessed improved

cooperation between government and CS. Assessments recommend that governments, having finalised the first PRSPs, take steps to ensure that CS/government cooperation is maintained and institutionalised.

The multi-dimensional nature of poverty is now acknowledged throughout societies. This said, stated policy and common wording often obscures contested political divergences between government, IFIs and CSOs on analyses of poverty and the policies suggested for poverty reduction.

CS involvement with PRSP has increased the numbers of CS actors who relate to public debate on poverty and PRSP policies. Social sector policies in PRSPs recognize the importance of access to basic services and the need to increase and protect spending on health, education, water and sanitation. The compatibility of this aim with the macro-economic framework is being questioned, though, by introduction of user-fees as part of cost-recovery or privatisation.

Whether government-, donor-, or CS-driven, in the first PRSP phase a broad range of experiences has been gained at local levels, and between national/local government and CSOs. Whether or how these carry potentials to materialise in viable local organising for PR is yet to be seen.

Well developed capabilities of CSOs and NGOs, local as well as national, have received less attention, yet, they are important, as CSOs represent a broad range of knowledge – from experiences of lobby/advocacy on economic, political and social issues to sector specific and thematic areas. This is true for CSOs that are already engaged in PRSP-related work, as well as for those not involved, but which for years have been actively involved in efforts to combat poverty and inequality in the communities.

While such capabilities often relate to providing basic needs and service delivery, rather than to advocacy and lobby, attention to their potentials is well justified. Workshops and hearings at municipal and district levels give evidence that, once given the opportunity to articulate their priorities, CBOs and local CSOs are prepared to engage in local strategizing for poverty reduction.

### **National Civil Society Coalitions and the PRSP**

1. Economic, political history as well as socio-political culture differ at crucial points in Nicaragua and Honduras from that of Zambia. These differences in terms of context are reflected in the PRSP processes.

While critical to the overall conditions, such as for instance the linking of PRSP and HIPC, in Zambia the national CS coalition, CSPR joined the PRSP process, intending to participate in a cooperative spirit, with the aim of complementing government efforts. In Nicaragua and Honduras Hurricane Mitch 1998 marked a new era with national coalitions emerging, such as Interforos in Honduras and CCER, later Coordinadora Civil, CC in Nicaragua. Both sought to promote CS

involvement in formulating national plans for reconstruction. While emerging as strong CS voices in the post-Mitch era, they threatened what some see as weak governments, with some hostility characterizing relations. Negotiations in the PRSP process in the two countries were met with caution by both sides.

While CSPR in Zambia finds close to 80% of their input reflected in the Zambian PRSP, proposals of Interforos (including ASONOG and FOSDEH) and CC were not taken on board by government; all CSOs have continued to call upon governments and the IFIs to enter into dialogue on critical policy areas.

In Honduras and Nicaragua criticism of privatization of public companies, decentralisation of governance and debt relief are key issues, in Zambia gender inequality, dependence of donors and the struggle against HIV/AIDS.

2. Across countries, national CS coalitions share a series of recommendations for PR strategies. They have all taken on the role, ascribed in the PRSP framework, as CS actors with some representation among poor populations, and with special experience and attention to social policies (health, education, water & sanitation). At the same time they have criticised other aspects of that role, by consistently advocating for CS influence on the entire PRSP, including macroeconomic policies.

Zambian CSPR being slightly more positive to the official PRSP, all have warned against 'more of the same', in terms of continuation of planned interventions, lack of new analyses or prioritisation and disjuncture between policy proposals and budget allocations for PR. All have highlighted the failure of economic growth strategies of the PRSPs to address needs of poor rural and urban population.

Integral strategies for agrarian production and local industry is the high priority alternative, suggested in all countries: CSPR (Zambia) explicitly calls for an agricultural reform; Interforos/ FOSDEH (Honduras) focus on economic policies related to the microeconomic situation (SMEs contributing to the social sector), and like CC (Nicaragua) and CSPR (Zambia) they suggest increased support to small scale farmers, micro, small and medium producers and promotion of local investment.

3. By and large consensus on key concepts and perspectives of the PRSP is widespread in the international donor community. However, scepticism appears to be growing among CS actors, following the lack of will on the part of governments and IFIs to let CS suggestions influence policies.

CS in all three countries have emphasized the need to treat PRSPs as national development plans for the entire population, as opposed to government attempts to primarily adhere to HIPC-conditions. In the three countries national as well as local CSOs make considerable efforts to hold governments accountable to the PRSPs. Divergences of orientations are being un-covered currently with CS experiences of lack of political will of governments and IFIs to follow through

policies with practice – be it in the form of inappropriate budget allocations (all countries), by disregarding needs of obvious poverty stricken areas (Nicaragua, Zambia) or by facing the dead-locks of missing debt relief, due to non-compliance with IMF' conditions (Honduras).

4. While CSOs in Nicaragua and Honduras have seen their participation in the PRSP reduced to being consulted by government, CS in Zambia had some more attention from government. In all the countries CS organised provincial, district or community level hearings, in order to include voices of citizens in the document. While the proposals collected from provinces, notwithstanding huge advocacy CS efforts have had little impact on official PRSPs (Zambia partly representing an exception to the rule) the very opportunity of 'wide participatory dialogue throughout society', given with the WB' PRSP framework, has been conducive for opening up space for cross-country hearings to take place.

At local hearings a similar methodology has been applied in the three countries. Organised by national CSOs all workshops aimed to serve a duplex purpose: (i) to facilitate a process for local CS actors to define their own priorities, as input to the national PRSP, *and* (ii) to inform them on the basis of government or national CS PRSP-drafts. Thus workshops dealt with an ambiguous goal: while intending to collect proposals, identified by local CS actors, at the same time CSO representatives facilitated the process by presenting defined areas or themes for PR (such as agriculture, health and HIV/AIDS, environment etc.). National CSOs entered the local scene communicating a duplex message: let us collect priorities of local CS actors as they define them, however, at the same time we need to enable this process through information and empowerment.

From the documents available, it is not possible to fully assess to which extent CS facilitators have influenced local priorities as suggested at hearings, or whether priorities fully mirror concerns and proposals of citizens in the various districts and provinces. While hearings and workshops took place at provincial, district or municipal levels, they were arranged with the overall goal of influencing the national PRSPs.

This is reflected in the national CS PRSP shadow reports, which have all included summaries of priorities from the various districts and provinces. It appears that targeting the national PRSPs has been decisive in setting agendas and orientation of much PRSP engagement of CS.

5. In the PRSP formulation process as well as in efforts to monitor implementation, advocacy has been directed mainly *upwards* towards governments, IFIs and other donor agencies. There is a risk that focusing attention on national and international PRSP agendas CS unwillingly allow IFIs and other donor agencies to set the main agenda for eradication of poverty in the countries – be it through the policy agenda, or by diverting key CS attention to upwards advocacy.

Furthermore, it entails the risk that the well trained, educated and mainly urban-based CSOs overlook, or even distance themselves from needs and priorities of the poor majorities of the population. This risk prevails, given existing structural inequalities in countries between the smaller, comparably privileged social groups and the marginalized majorities, living in the rural areas and in poor urban townships.

However, once hearings and consultations have taken place at local level, they appear to be triggering new political processes. All three countries witness not only increased awareness on poverty eradication as an issue for popular engagement, but also a certain amount of popular mobilisation. Participation in CS workshops at local levels have led to new political demands on government and IFIs, and raised expectations that attention to the voices and concerns of local CSOs and citizens be maintained.

A wide range of monitoring initiatives evolving in the wake of PRSPs aim to ensure implementation at local levels. Initiatives studied appear to have the potential to begin a process of CS re-directing attention *downwards* towards local CSOs, communities and local government.

## **Local Civil Society Response to PRSPs**

### Local Priorities

Whether carried out with the purpose of providing input to the PRSP formulation process, or as initiatives aimed at monitoring implementation of PRSPs, CS actors in villages, municipalities, districts and provinces share the basic goal of attracting attention to their needs as citizens, living far from and outside the realm of political influence.

Notwithstanding country differences related to economic, social, cultural and political history, citizens in the three countries share a range of needs and wishes. Six key areas of concern stand out:

1. Women's role in poverty eradication – crucial for sustainable solutions
2. Agrarian reforms – focus on agriculture and rural development
3. Local production – local trade
4. Children and youth – gender inequalities be accounted for
5. Decentralisation – increased resources and local investments
6. Calls to national CSOs – incorporate local priorities in national development plans

1. Women's role in poverty eradication: While by and large national CSOs respond to gender inequality and poverty by highlighting the need to address women's subordination, local priorities focus also on women's capabilities. Women carry main responsibilities as producers, farmers and traders but also as mothers, caretakers and community planners, hence, their experiences are crucial in the design of local poverty eradication plans. Local proposals suggest that women's

experiences and contributions are regarded as an asset in terms of poverty eradication.

2. Agrarian reforms: At all local consultations participants call for assistance to peasants, micro, small and medium size producers, and informal market operators, for years neglected by government as well as by bilateral donors. It is proposed that long-term agrarian reforms are designed with the main goal of ensuring food security for the majority of populations in the countries.

3. Local production: A series of proposals aim to promote local production, to improve establishing of micro business and create opportunities for local marketing. Suggesting direct interventions to small farmers and producers, to local production, to promotion of production for food security and local trade rather than for export are policy options that basically challenge prevailing policies of national governments, as well as approaches taken by IFIs and bilateral donors.

4. Children and youth: Local priorities targeted at children and youth are distinguishing between needs of girls and boys, young women and men, to a greater extent than do national CS shadow reports. Local proposals appear to reflect citizens' experiences that poverty in families, nutrition, children health, risks of HIV/AIDS and opportunities for education are closely interrelated.

5. Decentralisation: Not the least demands for agrarian reforms in favour of women, other peasants and small producers lead local CSOs to suggest decentralisation of governance. In all countries CS calls for upgrading of institutional capacities of municipalities or districts, as well as for establishing regular dialogue meetings with the local civil society. Existing local resources are to be (better) utilised, and public and private investment in a given area be made according to its potential.

6. Calls to national CSOs: Scepticism towards national government is widespread whereby local CSOs have called into question whether resources for poverty reduction will 'get down to' the people and the areas that need them. This experience further strengthens the calls to national CSOs to ensure that local priorities are incorporated in national PRSP proposals. In Zambia local CSOs raised particular questions with national CSOs in order to enhance the participatory process and ensure that more citizens, including those living in the remotest districts are included in poverty reduction efforts. In Honduras local CSOs strongly advocated for inclusion of local/regional PRSPs in national government plans, while in Nicaragua the four municipalities of the León Norte region presented their own PRSP, the PRSPcito, independently of the national CSO, CC.

#### Local Initiatives – General Conclusions

In all countries local priorities indicate that citizens and local CSOs participating in workshops and hearings carry - yet unutilised – resources in terms of a



commitment to involve themselves further in solutions appropriate to local needs. Proposals also suggest that the many local priorities, listed in regional reports and/or in annexes to national CS shadow reports, carry potentials for more elaborated locally based PR strategies. Finally, several proposals are aimed at national decision-makers, with the purpose of calling for local priorities to be accounted for in the national PRS, i.e. in planning as well as in implementation.

In the three countries CSOs carry out their own projects aimed at poverty eradication at local levels, some initiated in relation to PRSPs, some initiated by CSOs regardless of and before initiation of the national PRSP process.

Notwithstanding intentions of both local and national CSOs to make sure that advocacy efforts are 'downwards' accountable, it appears that in some cases CS at local levels are less actively involved on a continuous basis. Affected also by widespread lack of economic and human resources in districts and municipalities, as a result, until now much of the efforts and energy invested at local level during the PRSP process has been left unutilised.

Major efforts of CSOs (and INGOs) to date have been directed upwards towards lobbying at national and international levels. While well justified, this focus advances the risk of disappointing local expectations of citizens and CSOs to carry out initiatives in communities and districts. Consequently there is a need to support a process that encourages citizens and local CSOs to engage in a long-term commitment, including continuous mobilisation in municipalities and villages.

This points to a critical dilemma facing CS. While engaging at local levels in order to gain broad and local level participation, let alone provide grassroots' input to the national PRSPs, CSOs, along with INGOs working in solidarity and support, tend to direct efforts mainly towards the goal of lobbying at national level.

Given the predominance of the IFIs and other external donors in the PRSP process, there is a risk that CSOs at national as well as local levels are led to give priority to advocacy at the expense of the service delivery elements of their engagement, much as the former is mainly concentrated at national level while the latter takes place within local settings.

This trend is exacerbated by the role played by bilateral donors. Increasingly aid is channelled to supporting budgets of recipient governments, rather than to programmes and projects aimed at basic needs and 'service delivery'. A simplified conception of the role of CS appears to accompany this development. While separating 'service delivery' from 'advocacy' roles donors fail to appreciate the realities in which NGOs/CSOs benefit from the synergy arising from playing both roles simultaneously.

### **Ways Forward**

Having met at workshops during the PRSP formulation process, at initiatives aimed at monitoring implementation of PRSPs, or in efforts to draft alternative

policies for local PRSPs, civil society actors in villages, municipalities, districts and provinces appear to have engaged themselves with remarkable enthusiasm. A social and political mobilisation has taken place whereby citizens and local CSOs expressed strong commitment to being part of continued efforts to combat poverty in their home area.

As the majority of local initiatives were arranged with the purpose of providing input to national PRSPs, local policy proposals (except for the PRSPcito and monitoring initiatives in Honduras and Nicaragua) have not been drafted with the explicit goal of setting up specific strategies for municipalities, or as district level or regional poverty reduction policies. It does appear, though, that potentials to develop more elaborated local strategies exist.

Such potentials are embedded in the many local priorities set up at hearings and workshops. While there is outspoken dissatisfaction with efforts of central government there is a richness of ideas among citizens on how to overcome poverty. A considerable amount of unutilised resources exist. In Honduras and Nicaragua CSOs realised the opportunities of forming alliances across municipalities, materialising in suggestions to begin to create regional strategies for poverty eradication. Local CSOs in Zambia work with community based organisations in a series of districts in order to increase civil society influence on local government.

One major challenge ahead obviously relates to the question: How to sustain the local popular mobilisation? How to build on ideas and engagement of citizens while at the same time build capacity within local civil society to further elaborate strategies and advocacy initiatives towards governments?

Notwithstanding the critical issue of whether resources will be allocated for poverty reduction in local settings (or not), these questions call for continuous reflection and consideration among CSOs.

Whether working on alternative policies as the GISN in Nicaragua, or advocating for close monitoring of PRSP implementation at local levels as in Honduras and Zambia, CSOs are involved in a diversity of capacity building and advocacy skills training initiatives. A common understanding is that local CSOs must be sensitised and provided with relevant advocacy tools and information about the PRSP and related issues.

It appears, though, that such training might benefit, and even in some cases be best approached, by involving CSOs who are already actively involved in development programmes and advocacy within communities and districts. Church groups, women organisations and other NGOs working on long-term 'service delivery' projects are in many cases well rooted in towns and villages.

They have a thorough knowledge of needs and constraints as well as of social and productive resources within communities. Building upon the confidence they

share among citizens appears to be a constructive way of supporting a continued and active engagement in local poverty eradication efforts.

A way of paying due respect to the richness of ideas and solutions, continuously being developed and tried out in villages, communities and towns throughout the countries.

As expressed by representatives of civil society at the North/South PRSP Programme conference in Copenhagen 17-23 August 2003: 'We do not represent the poor. The poor have their own voice. What we need to do is listen to it.'

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### **Interviews – Personal Communications**

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