

BUILDING COMMUNICATION OPPORTUNITIES

Bi-Annual Meeting
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InterContinental Hotel
Lusaka, Zambia

Learning Day on PRSPs

Presentation by Kitty Warnock, Panos London

Overview of PRSPs

PRSPs are “a requirement for countries to receive concessional assistance from the World Bank (through the [International Development Association – IDA](#)) and the IMF (through the **Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility – PRGF**). In addition, they are the basis for the provision of debt relief under the enhanced [HIPC Initiative](#).” (World Bank website).

A PRSP is “a document that sets out an analysis of poverty in a country and defines a strategy for reducing it.” (Panos Media Brief)

PRSPs are based on five core principles:

1. **country-driven**, involving broad-based participation by civil society and the private sector
2. **results-oriented**, focusing on outcomes that would benefit the poor
3. **comprehensive** in recognizing the multidimensional nature of poverty and the scope of actions needed to reduce it
4. **partnership-oriented**, involving coordinated participation of development partners (bilateral, multilateral, and non-governmental)
5. based on a **long-term perspective** for poverty reduction

History

PRSPs were introduced as part of the HIPC 2 initiative by the IMF and World Bank in 1999, following widespread criticism of the previous SAPs and liberalisation approach. They quickly became the official approach for BWIs lending to low-income countries. 70 low(ish)-income countries now have a PRSP in place. Four are in second round, and one (Uganda) in third. PRSPs were acclaimed by many donors, on their introduction; and are a focus for donor coordination. On the other hand, many NGOs criticised them, and still do, seeing them as little different from SAPs.

Some examples of the core “pillars” of PRSPs

Bolivia

- Increase opportunities (Productive investment and technologies)
- Enhance capabilities (education, health, services)
- Reduce vulnerability (Security and social protection)
- Promote social integration

Madagascar

- Improving governance
- Broad-based growth (initially, transportation)

- Social and material security (education, health, security)

Indonesia (one of several local-level PRS)

- Agriculture – seed production, credit
- Infrastructure – irrigation, water infrastructure and users' associations
- Health – health provider training, subsidies for the poor, family planning extension service, developing community-level institutions

Uganda

- Primary healthcare
- Rural roads
- Agricultural extension
- Primary education
- Water and sanitation

Stages in a PRSP

- Interim PRSP (I-PRSP)
- Approval by the BWIs
- Full PRSP
- After one year, completion point for debt relief etc
- Country's Annual Progress Reviews
- Joint Staff Assessments (annual)
- After three years, review and development of new PRSP
- *Frequent studies, reviews, analyses and critiques by NGOs and donors*

Outcomes of PRSPs so far

On the positive side, PRSPs have led to greatly improved analysis of poverty in most countries introducing them. There is greater poverty-reduction focus by governments, and an increase in budget and spending on poverty-reducing measures. PRSPs lead to debt relief and concessional funding. They are serving as a focus for some bilateral donor coordination, though there is still lots of room for improvement.

Within countries, their effects are important: Dialogue and collaboration within governments, between sector ministries and finance/planning ministries, dialogue between government and CSOs, and strengthened Public Expenditure Management and MTEFs

But they are a work in progress: in "Second generation" PRSPs more attention is being paid to participation, ownership including by parliaments, monitoring and public awareness.

There are a number of questions and issues raised by critics of PRSPs, and to some extent by the BWIs themselves in their annual review of the process.

Around the first basic principle, that PRSPs should be "Country-driven and participatory":

- "Country-driven" is ambiguous. Does it mean government, or civil society?
- Do IFIs still retain power over PRSPs?
- Participatory: who? In what? With what power? what legitimacy?
- Participation is difficult: time, costs, capacity
- Transparency and access to information often inadequate
- Relationship of PRSP to politics crucial, but often ignored

- Civil society participation might undermine normal political processes and institutions
- Or the PRSP can open up new dialogue spaces.
- Parliaments have been very little involved – only in 2 countries.
- Limited scope of participation: not on macro-economic strategy.
- Danger of CSOs' disillusion and "participation fatigue".

Around the second basic principle, that PRSPs should be: "Results-oriented" :

- Most PRSPs are a wish-list, not prioritized or costed to match available budgets. Monitoring and evaluation not possible.
- Donors aid not predictable - budget planning difficult
- More focus on social sectors, less on productive sectors.
- Social sector spending does not always reach the poor; more analysis and better processes needed
- Policy debate and analysis generally weak on gender
- Aim at "pro-poor growth", but: what policy measures needed to achieve growth? What measures to make growth "pro-poor"? How to measure the poverty impact of growth?

Around the basic principle of being "Partnership-oriented"

- Some progress but donors need to do more

Around the principle of "Long-term perspective"

- Political processes favour short-term
- Continuity from one government to another? Contradicts "government ownership" principle.
- Relationship with MDGs

Relationship with MDGs

- The 2005 WB/IMF PRS review will "assess their effectiveness in achieving the MDGs"
- First generation didn't mention MDGs but covered same topics.
- Second generation, more explicit link with MDGs
- PRSPs a vehicle for building country ownership of MDGs.
- Mostly more ambitious goals and increased donor financing are needed to achieve the MDGs – but are PRSPs sufficiently robust to manage these?
- Potential contradiction between the increased donor financing needed, and macro-economic discipline and government-empowerment that is part of PRSPs.

ICD and PRSPs

PRSPs are based on "Participation", so communication and information are fundamental. *There's no participation without communication.*

PRSPs are about poverty reduction. Panos argues that *There's no poverty reduction without communication.*

But ICD was neglected in early thinking about "How to do a PRSP".

Three categories of ICD for PRSPs

1. Communication as **part of designing and carrying out a PRSP**
2. ICD identified as **one of the poverty-reducing strategies within a PRSP**
3. Communication **around the PRSP**

Category 1

Communication as **part of designing and carrying out a PRSP**: consultation within government and with civil society; to inform and mobilise civil society in implementation, monitoring and accountability.

This is more or less what the term “Strategic communication” refers to – communication to make the PRSP work. It is communication planned by government, to build desired consultation and inclusion, consensus and “ownership”. It may use the basic principles of social marketing.

Communication is part of creating transparency, good governance and accountability mechanisms. Civil society capacity for participating often has to be strengthened, including strengthening and creating opportunities for the poor to participate in the PRSP. The main focus of Strategic Communication is often on Civil Society participation.

But a PRSP also requires communication within government:

At the design stage: cross-sectoral dialogue, aligning PRSP with other development plans and cycles. Ownership by ministries other than Finance or Planning; parliamentary participation and ownership; local government involvement
 In carrying out: Budget planning and management linked to PRSP targets. MTEF.
 (This is a big new step for most governments).

And in Monitoring and evaluation: this needs transparency (eg for parliamentary scrutiny) of government spending; feedback and analysis mechanisms.

Within this category of communication, there have been some good experiences:

- first-ever dialogue between CSOs and govt, new spaces being opened up.
- inter-ministerial communication within governments, and inclusion of parliaments
- Annual Progress Reports: can be key tool for public awareness and discussion.

However, critics also identify some issues, in which most countries and the BWIs themselves need to invest more thought and effort:

- Dialogue is often “Closed” – limited participants, limited possible outcomes.
- Lack of capacity for dialogue, within governments and civil society.
- Need for accessible information
- Conflicting timescales – between the long time needed for participation, and the short deadlines often set by the PRSP process.
- Monitoring of impact is difficult, because the long-term general goals stated in PRSPs are not turned into clear policy measures and deliverables. Problems include weak analysis of policy options for achieving the goals – what policy measures would deliver? And weak budgeting and public expenditure management.
- Low expectations of parliament, who are rarely given opportunities to debate and participate
- Countries vary in how high up their political agendas PRSPs come.
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Media have a potentially important role to play in this category of communication:

- Raising public concern and debate about poverty issues, different policy solutions, policy and budget processes, etc;
- forum for debate;
- platform for voices of the poor.
- Media watchdog role for PRSP implementation – demanding clear indicators, transparency and accountability.

Category 2: ICD within the PRSP

ICD identified as **one of the poverty-reducing strategies within a PRSP**, or part of the strategies, enhancing development sectors (education, health etc)

ICD is not often present as a stand-alone sector.

- *Rwanda's Poverty Reduction Strategy: "The Government has ... established the Rwanda Information Technology Agency (RITA) and developed a twenty year strategy for ICT-led socio-economic development." (Chapter 4.7, para 252)*
- *Mozambique's Poverty Reduction Strategy: "Information Technology, main objectives: to expand access to computers and the internet for rural populations; expand knowledge of computers through educational systems." (PRS, Chapter IV, para 268.1)*

To what extent is ICD present, mainstreamed within other sectors?

There is a lot of scope for NGO activity, in advocacy for the role of ICD within PRS.

Category 3: ICD around the PRSP

Communication **around the PRSP**:

- an enabling communication environment is an underlying requirement for development, poverty reduction, political dialogue, ownership and critique.
- Debate about the PRSP by "outside" CSOs, critics, etc

ICD that is not part of deliberate government-led PRSP strategy:

- challenges to the strategy
 - comments on the process
 - CSOs or sectors "excluded" from the approved dialogue.
 - Free media and Freedom of Expression are requirements
- (This kind of critical communication may be considered part of a good consultation process).

A rich communication environment is an essential enabling factor for *any* poverty reduction. It enables:

- information exchange and knowledge creation
- effective service delivery and take-up of services
- accountability
- political processes
- empowerment
- social and cultural discourse, adapting and adopting

Opportunities for ICD development interventions in support of PRSPs

BCO strategic outcomes match well:

- Mainstreaming ICD (Category 2)
- Demonstrating impact of ICD (Category 2)
- Stronger voice of poor and debate (Category 1)

Category 1

- a) Advocacy for strategic communication to be built into PRSP implementation plans
- b) Capacity building and practical support for governments on ICD
- c) Capacity building and support for national CSOs and CBOs – to demand and contribute to communication, participation
- d) Support for media

Category 2

- a) Advocacy support for ICD to be included in the PRS as a poverty-reducing tool
- b) Advocacy support for ICD to be included in sector strategies of PRS
- c) Practical support for sector actors to carry out ICD activities within the PRS

Category 3

- a) Advocacy for enabling media/communication environment
- b) Advocacy for poverty impact of ICDs

Presentation by board member of Civil Society for Poverty Reduction (CSPR), Kasote Singogo

Mr Singongo's presentation outlined critical steps leading to the implementation of PRSP within a Zambian context. He noted that Zambia is riddled with poverty and as such, needs a well structured PRSP as opposed to "government knows best to stakeholder participation". He applauded PRSP for having opened up a 'window' of opportunity for CSO to dialogue with government and further outlined the successes recorded by his organization in its bid to fight poverty by focusing on three areas of competence.

Poverty Monitoring and Evaluation

Effective monitoring is crucial, to support government commitment to PRSP whilst taking stock of the impact of PRSP.

CSPR is also now reviewing the work it has done since 2002. Preliminary results show CSPR impacted on both government decisions and communities by:

- Putting in place a well structured board with program manager teams at provincial and national level with representatives who then reach out to communities.
- Commissioning research teams to critically analyse government budget allocation against actual expenditure by focusing on issues of highest impact on poverty.
- Influencing government policy though indirectly as evident in the adoption of some of the recommendations in a speech made by the Finance Minister as well as the Finance Budget. Outcome based budgeting an option to consider

Information dissemination and advocacy

CSPR believes advocacy is the key component for change and CSOs exist for advocacy purposes. The challenge to plan to be effective by:

- Materials that popularise the PRSP – simplified PRSP, brochures, fliers

- Use media as 'strategic partners' - media round table meetings capacity building
- Adopt multimedia approach i.e. Website, Radio programmes, TV documentaries
- Having a clear evidence based message with a defined target audience;
- Maintaining consistency of message
- Creating allies to form a strong network
- Being timeous with advocacy messages to be relevant

Capacity Building

- Build CSO skills in delivering areas of competences while teaming up with partners to complement each other.
- Cross cutting issues have been on Gender and Aids but ICD should be included as another cross cutting issue to be included hence the need to build capacity

Issues raised in discussion after Mr Singogo's presentation

Though CSPR has done well, the following challenges were noted:

- There is need for a high level discussion if CSOs are to engage government in dialogue on the need to harmonise MDGs, ICD and PRSP;
- Mode of disseminating information is not transparent because of lack of infrastructure feeding into government information system
- Inadequate financial resources from government, though it is committed to address poverty issues as indicated by Finance Ministry official.
- PRSP should try to address distribution of income/trade and linkages to markets at all levels, to create a link between PRSP and MDGs if PRSP – Uganda is a success story;
- Certain advocacy methods are thwarted ie. Voice of the poor unpopular/ignored
- Poverty is not homogeneous thus needs to be tackled carefully;
- Need to be more focused.
- PRSP is a relatively new subject for both government and society at large so there is need for more publicity and advocacy;
- Women are more impoverished than they were, giving doubts to the effectiveness of the process;
- Relative financial independence for women versus the need to change the face of poverty and its impact
- Gender issues continue to be top-down expecting women to fit into a framework designed for others;
- .Timeframe for PRSP to effectively impact – medium term of 3 -5 years – a bit short making it difficult to attain desired results
- Donors – some of the projects on ICTs have been too short term and unsustainable. Donors need to be long term though some has to do with infrastructure and some has to do with them specifying where money has to be used.
- ICD is yet another cross cutting issue apart from Gender an HIV and AIDS and as such, deserves serious consideration;
- National IT strategies should focus on ICD issues whilst at sector level, ICD issued should also be considered i.e Zambia policy keeps referring to PRSP in relation to gender but does not articulate it properly;

Presentation from Singy Hanyona, Public Policy Liason Officer – Panos

Singy shared his experiences on an Oral Testimony Project implemented in Choma in the Southern Province of Zambia an area often drought stricken. Panos program on PRSPs involves raising the voices of the poor, with a focus on building the

capacity of journalists to adequately capture the human face of poverty. Members of communities work with radio stations to record audio content, which is translated and aired through the various radio stations across the country.

Emerging lessons on media capacity to report on poverty issues

1. Most journalists in Zambia need re-orientation to move away from reporting speeches by politicians to real life challenges. They are assignment oriented and do not go beyond that by digging deeper into the problem in order to make a difference. This is disturbing given that the women in Choma are articulate on development issues and make time to talk about such issues from their own perspective.
2. Politics sells newspapers and thus take up most of the space, leaving no room for important poverty related issues. Editors have their own editorial policies: they often believe Zambia's poverty is well-known and of no interest. Panos is trying to re-orient the entire media fraternity.
3. Priscilla shared her experiences on a project implemented in Chipata where women are trained to record and share poverty reduction issues through Radio Breeze. Such messages are meant to trigger responses from responsible authorities. The network of women engaged in similar projects is likely to increase.

Recommendations for strengthening media coverage of poverty issues:

- Produce a tool kit on RSPS and MDGs to help journalists understand issues.
- Media should strive to link up influential people i.e minister with a person in poverty to highlight development challenges - something achieved by "The Post Newspaper".
- Liberalization of airwaves would enable community radio stations to sustain their activities i.e there is need for pro-poor policies where IT policy can be linked to poverty especially in Zambia where infrastructure is limited.
- Not many private companies are keen to invest in infrastructure, which leaves a great potential for partnership.

ICD and PRSP for BCO – Group discussions

GROUP 1: ICD Category 1 -

Communication as part of development and implementation of PRSPs in Zambia

(print, electronic, internet in relation to policy, community and other players' interest).
Recommendations were made as follows:

1. Build capacity of all players to understand PRSP
2. Advocacy information around PRSP should be carefully tailored for different target audiences. Skills and resources for doing this need to be strengthened.
3. CSOs could usefully meet together for discussion and strategic thinking about communication.
4. Radio stations could be an important source of enhancing communication around PRSPs. NGOs should explore liaison with the Catholic radio stations, which are not doing much in this area.

5. Use a web dedicated to publishing information around PRSP. This can bring transparency that will in due course lead to regional harmonization i.e trade and tariffs has done that so the same can happen for PRSP.

**GROUP 2: ICD category 2 -
ICD within PRSP and within sectoral poverty-reduction strategies within PRSPs.**

What are we looking for?

BCO partners and other organisations are already working a lot on ICD at national level and sector/thematic areas, yet we need to:

- Ensure integration of ICD as an important and cross-cutting issue in the PRSP
- Seek mainstreaming of ICD in key priority themes or areas referred to in the PRSP (not necessarily sectors, can be broader areas such as economic development)

Who are key stakeholders to ensure the integration of ICD in PRSP?

Principal key stakeholder

- NGO networks
- ICT government bodies (regulator, ICT committee..)

Other important stakeholders, depending on country-specific situation and capacity of stakeholder group, include: Line ministries (health, education, agriculture,...); Bi-lateral donor and Multilateral donor agencies; Private sector; Parliament ; Communities; Practical ICT experiences; Consultants; Media; Central statistics departments; Researchers.

**GROUP 3: Category 3 -
Information And Communication Around Poverty Reduction Papers**

Focused on how to stimulate inclusive dialogue and media coverage:

Opportunities/Action Plan

1. Link politicians to poverty eg constituency based
 - Meet your MPs meetings
 - Exposing contradiction
 - Cover events etc on poverty
 - Influence editors on poverty
 - Constituency round up (local issues) and relate them to PRSP/NDP
2. Budget mobilisation in good time e.g. Civil Society could have a shadow budget, people's budget, Use ICTs
 - Critique the policies to show whether they harmonise with the PRSP. It must be a basis for public discussion, analysis, marching, demonstrations,
 - Alternative or additional mechanisms and actions to address poverty.
3. Link PRSP to a bigger picture/regional/global context
4. Awards to media that promote appropriate communication on poverty
5. Specialised media training to shade off monotonous routine baggage censorship

Challenges

- Lack of political will
- Self censorship
- Lack of interest /support from editors
- Lack of resources (money, materials human)

- Old-fashioned/(stereotyped) e.g. gender (patriarchal)
 - Neoliberal-minded
-

Mapping BCO partners' work relating to PRSPs

Media - Meeting with CSO on PRSP

PANOS

- Raising debates, stories of experience of poverty.
- Commissioned research into media coverage of poverty, in Zambia and Pakistan so far, other countries planned.
- The objective is for the media to be an effective actor in raising awareness building transparency and accountability
- Change should be driven from inside the country, not outside.
- Changing Journalist perspectives on reporting poverty.
- Transforming Journalists (unlearning what they learned)

APC

- Advocacy around poverty and empowerment as poverty will not change without greater empowerment and security
- Gender analysis, capacity building
- Dialogues and public discussion

Gender/APC- Influence decision makers to integrate gender

FEMNET

Critiquing the PRSP (from a gender perspective), as they can raise false hopes for women if the present format is followed

Closing Comments:

The general consensus was that:

- PRSP has the power to create an inclusive national debate, accountability, and transparency. But it needs to change level of engagement with government and CSOs – need to apply it in a multidimensional way – Anriette
- There is need to publicise ICD for people to appreciate the need for prioritizing it as it is a cross cutting issue that can trigger new dimension in PRSP. Mr Songono promised to try to influence ICD on other agendas
- Kitty - very positive about what is to be done with information obtained as BCO i.e. incorporate this at a higher level and see how to move forward – could do a write up.