

## **ACTORS, PARTICIPATION AND OWNERSHIP**

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### **1.0 A framework for Evaluating Participation**

The Interim Guidelines for the Poverty Reduction Support Credits (PRSC)<sup>1</sup> issued by the World Bank reiterates a joint Bank/Fund recognition<sup>2</sup> of the importance of “good country-owned policies – both structural and social as well as macroeconomic – and good institutions to deliver them as the main drivers of sustainable growth and poverty reduction and as the basis for effective development assistance....” Consequently, “the Bank’s Poverty Reduction Support Credit (PRSC) and the Fund’s Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF) will support country-led poverty reduction strategies for which there is broad internal consensus...It recognizes that a transparent and participatory approach to policy making is important to sustain good policies and build institutional capacity”. Broad-based participation of civil society in the adoption and monitoring of the poverty reduction strategy tailored to country circumstances will enhance its sustained implementation<sup>3</sup>, because participation promotes a holistic approach, increases transparency and accountability and therefore reduces corruption; participation promotes ownership<sup>4</sup>.

The participation concept is constructed on a partnership framework, described as “a collaborative relationship between entities to work towards shared objectives through a mutually agreed division of labour”<sup>5</sup>. The key actors in this relationship are been defined to be governments, civil society organisations, the corporate sector and donors/creditors.

The evaluative task is confronted by a number of conceptual and empirical problems: What represents effective participation? Against what benchmarks - process, inputs and outcomes - and timeframe should participation be evaluated and by who? Whose participation matters, in what and at what stage? What does civil society represent in the Ghanaian context?

In terms of standards, an attempt by the Social Development Division of the World Bank to develop a framework with a set of criteria – both substantive and normative- was not adopted by the joint Boards of the IFIs<sup>6</sup>. Indeed the emphasis on “national ownership” partly obviates the need for detailed criteria. The rationale for this is that it is difficult, if not impossible, to specify universal standards, given the widely varying levels of democratisation/ participation, and the unique cultural and social conditions of each country. The formal position adopted by the Boards of the IMF/Bank, therefore, is that PRSPs will include a description of civil society participation, but neither Secretariat will *evaluate* the quality of participation though the Bank staff are mandated to offer advice and to apply the participatory approaches used in developing the country’s PRSPs and IPRSPs in monitoring and evaluating them.

In its Participation Source Book, the World Bank distinguishes a hierarchy of collaborative relationships, progressing upwards from: Information-sharing; Consultation, Joint decision-making and Initiation and control by stakeholders.

Given as it is the absence of normative standards, our evaluation of the quality of participation in the Ghana PRSP process will be guided by this hierarchy of relationships – the opportunities for established and emerging institutions and actors to promote transparency and broad ownership through awareness, consultation, joint decision-making and control - in the context of the broader historical and political economy framework.

### **2.0 Is there a Participatory tradition In Ghana**

The PRSP process is being mounted against a background of two decades of a top-down economic policy making process driven by a neo-liberal agenda which put economic growth above all else (Gyima Boadi, Offei-aboagye 2001). As the natural losers of such a policy agenda were the popular classes, engagement with them was driven largely by a containment objective which expressed itself in mitigation measures such as PAMSCAD, in repressive measures such as brutal police confrontation of

public dissent or, neo-cooperatist measures. In all of these, government maintained the dominant or domineering role over its social partners, including the business sector, the Trade Union Congress and others in civil society, and the engagement initiatives tended to be top-down with the mitigation measures being largely donor-driven (Brydon and Legge, 1996, Gyimah-Boadi, 1990)). Largely externally originated concepts such as popular participation and participatory development were essential subsumed within this top-down culture.

In this context, Ghana's policy-making environment over the years can be defined as a schism between participatory intensions, rhetoric and unexplored opportunities on the one hand and top-down, non-inclusive practices on the other.

Popular participation intentions and initiatives in the recent past which give hope, and provide the framework, for broadening participation in policy-making including PRSPs include:

## **2.1 Supportive Legal and Institutional Framework**

- An explicitly stated Constitutional objective to promote participation and participatory development. The Directive Principles of State Policy, Article 37 sections (1) and (2), of the Constitution of the Fourth Republic of Ghana (1992), guarantees to all citizens, the right to participate in the formulation and implementation of the development policies and programmes. Chapters 5 (21) and 6 (37) (1)(2)(3)) of the Constitution also define the political framework conducive for democratic participation in the formulation and implementation of policies, and spells out the complementary roles of government and non-governmental actors in this process.
- A constitutional rule framework governed by the rule of law and separation of powers which unleashed the media as a vibrant tool for good governance and for public participation in policy. The 2001-2004 Parliament offers a unique opportunity for enhancing the independent oversight role of parliament for the simple reason that it is more finely balanced between ruling and opposition parties than ever before. However there are still fears that Executive/Presidential dominance will remain a major factor undermining the effectiveness of the liberal institutions and processes in the new Republic. Typically, Executive Branch and presidential manipulation keeps constitutional bodies and other institutions of democratic governance deficient in independence, credibility, trust, and even legal and technical competence (Gyimah-Boadi).
- A public institutional reform agenda which promotes decentralization and some devolution of decision making and resources through District Assemblies and the lower level local government structures, offering the best opportunity yet for grassroots participation and bottom-up democratic accountability. Complementary reforms supportive of enhanced participation, including decentralization and decongestion within key sectors, civil service performance benchmarks (CSPIP) defined partly by beneficiary assessments and performance based budgeting (MTEF).

## **2.2 Supportive Policy framework**

- Though not currently active as the framework for medium term policies, the contribution of the Ghana Vision 2020 to a participatory culture lies in its attempt to re-define the development roles of the state, ceding to the 'private, for-profit sector the principal role of growing the economy and to civil society the principal role of bringing about a democratic, socially inclusive society<sup>7</sup>. The Vision 2020 document itself is credited as a product of a wide consensus building process. Though the former president promised broad consultation of all stakeholders<sup>8</sup> when he launched the process of producing the 2<sup>nd</sup> Medium Term policy framework, the *National Development Policy Framework (NDPF), Second Step*, this promised largely materialized in the form of the formation of eight *Cross-Sectoral Planning Groups* made up of expert drawn from Government structures, business sector and civil society bodies mainly in Accra. The promised broad consultation did not occur beyond this level.
- Though developed in an entirely non-participatory manner, the Interim Poverty Reduction strat-

egy, the “Development Strategy for Poverty Reduction” (DSPR, March 2000) did re-state the GOG’s commitment to broad consultation in the: “*determination of national goals and policies, preparation of plans and programmes, identification of national priorities, setting achievable targets and review of performance.*”<sup>9</sup> The role of civil society was once more underscored as key to establishing an enduring democracy because a “*well-developed civil society widens democratic space and facilitates opportunities for citizens participation in political and social life at large*”.

- Sectoral strategies, especially health and agriculture acknowledge participation in project and policy development and implementation as essential to achieving the objectives of their programmes. The health sector strategy is predicated on a decentralized, output oriented and participatory planning and budgeting system - the Budget Management Centres (BMCs). In theory, the health sector strategy requires that plans for a fiscal year should be produced from a consultative, participatory and transparent process involving stakeholders at the different levels of the planning process.

### **2.3 Useful Attempts at consultative policy-making initiatives**

- The National Economic Forum convened in September 1997 was a landmark event in several respects. It provided the first formal opportunity for the public, including opposition parties, independent research institutions and civil society to input into economic policy. The fact that it was possible agree on decisions demonstrated the feasibility of consensual decision-making and an effective crisis management tool in spite (or as a result of) of political differences and polarisation. Since then, the idea of multi-stakeholder decision-making forums seems to have taken root at the sector level (e.g. the National Education Forum and to a lesser extent, the Health Partners’ forum).
- This practice was recently repeated (May 2001) in the form of the National Economic Dialogue convened by the NPP government which drew a much broader public participation. The effectiveness of these as mechanisms to foster participation are however doubtful for several reasons. First the size of such fora (200 person or more), often defy effective debate and decisions drawn from them are much likely to closer to views of those who manage the process (a visible and influential few) than represent a consensus position. Secondly, these forums tend to occur in the context of information disparity.
- The decision by the GOG in 1998 to participate in a tripartite exercise together with Civil Society and the World Bank to evaluate the impacts of Structural Adjustment Policies through the *Structural Adjustment Participatory Review Initiative (SAPRI)* also represented an important step in opening up the policy making process. Whilst the quality of government participation in this exercise left much to be desired, it is noteworthy that for the first time in Ghana’s history, the GOG permitted representatives of the Civil Society Council (CIVISOC) to make a statement at the Consultative Group meeting held in Ghana in 1999 and to sit through the entire proceedings. The SAPRI exercise, recently concluded, also presented to civil society for the first time, a mechanism for organizing a truly nation-wide and cross-cutting civil society coalition – cutting across institutions in academia, NGOs, workers organizations, religious organizations, trade association, community groups, small and medium scale business - institutionally represented by a Civil Society Council (CIVISOC). This by all accounts is a potent framework for organizing deeper and more extensive participation in the future should this body endure.

### **2.4 Useful Accountability and Information dissemination mechanisms**

- Annual Governance Forums convened by the Parliament of Ghana and the National Institutional Renewal Program (NIRP) brings together representatives of the executive, judiciary, legislature, private sector, civil society, media, academics, opinion leaders and the donor community. Beginning from 1998, they have been organized around governance themes such as accountability (1998), conflict management and prevention (1999) and leadership (2000).
- The Speaker’s Breakfast Forum (9 have been held since 1997) at which key public officials discuss

key policy issues with national elites.

- The Meet-the-Press series began by the previous government where Ministers of state organize formal press briefings and respond to questions from the public was recently taken a step further when for the first time in several decades, the President met with the press, including the private press in free-flowing discussions considered by the public as having not been stage-managed. These public engagement events are largely limited to Accra. Whereas District chief executives and local politicians do tour their constituencies these are not organized in forms that permit public debate and dissent. Very few district assemblies have been reported to have organized free-flowing public forums with their constituent publics especially in issues central to local development – the generation and use of District Assembly resources.

## 2.5 An emerging civil society

- There is no doubt that there has been a rapid growth of civil society<sup>10</sup> over the last decade, represented by grassroots associations, intermediate level associations (both membership e.g trade unions and non-membership bodies e.g NGOs and specialised bodies such as research organizations and "think-tanks" ), networks, coalitions and platforms e.g. the Education Campaign Coalition, CIVISOC, Coalition for the Rights of the Child etc. The most visible of these are the intermediate level groups operating out of Accra and to some extent Kumasi. These groups have been gaining some ground in accessing key policy-making and decision points such as Parliament and especially its committees and in putting forward. The media, especially the private press and FM radio have also become a major forum for policy discussion all across the country. The role of the electronic media as a force for public education was recently exemplified by the manner in which the FM radio stations all over country managed to popularize the debate as to whether Ghana should apply for HIPC debt relief into a truly national one.
- Civil society organizations are also fast maturing in their ability to access democratic institutions and to put forward pro-active policy agenda. An example is the participation in national legislation and policy making by civil society groups and opinion leaders submitting memoranda to Parliament and its committees; and stakeholder reviews of Bills pending before Parliament.
- The emergence of networks, federations and coalitions across civil society is a recent phenomenon gaining momentum. There coalitions campaigning for the rights of children; the right to education and the right to water. There are coalitions fighting against violence against women, and there are federations of organizations of people with disability etc. Whilst these tend to be issues-led, their strength lie in the cross-cutting nature of their membership and their potential breadth of coverage. However these coalitions tend to be constrained by resources and therefore their continuity, momentum and democratic accountability tend to be serious question.
- The visibility of civic participation in the country's governance has in part being largely fostered by donor/creditor community which has tended to condition development assistance on good governance including participation by civil society and the private sector. As a result of donor interventions, civil society and the private sector enjoy formal memberships in national committees and forums. Whilst this has undoubtedly opened up the space for inclusive decision-making it has also partly contributed to the perception of the participation agenda as a donor-driven one.

In summary, the above review of the participation opportunities, initiatives and intensions broadly show that in terms of a legal an institutional framework for participation, these are firmly in place and can be built upon. However, this framework sits uncomfortably alongside a seemingly entrenched top-down culture which will at best accommodate some level of consultation in so far as this consultation process can be managed, and better still manipulated and dominated. As a result what may seem to be indications of openness and inclusiveness in policy making may well simply be mechanisms of validation and containment as seems evident in the Ghana PRSP process to date, as we shall see below. But we will also argue that the change to a more democratic dispensation alongside a maturing civil society

and much less-sure government combined with an international policy consensus favouring participatory governance offer unique opportunities for promoting effective participation if not in this current PRSP process, but in the next.

### **3.0 How Participatory Has the Ghana PRS process Been?**

#### **3.1 Knowledge, Awareness and Perceptions of the GPRS Process**

Public awareness of the GPRS process – what it is about, who is involved or should be involved, principles and guidelines governing its preparation, how it differs from other policy frameworks etc. – is extremely limited even among those who ought to know. As a result, important constituencies such as the Private Enterprise Foundation (PEF), the GAPVOD (NGO Umbrella group) and even some “think-tanks” carry strong misperceptions. For example, the PRSP is equated with the UNDP-supported Poverty Reduction Programme being executed in 5 districts. Others (such as Chairman of PEF) believe it to be a second generation PAMSCAD which is seeking to suck resources away from investment in growth oriented activities into poverty relief. Yet others (e.g GAPVOD and the TUC) confuse the GPRS process with the once parallel process to produce the 2<sup>nd</sup> national Development Policy Framework (the Vision 2020 2<sup>nd</sup> Step and the few who know something about PRSPs from largely from global networks present it largely as an IMF/World Bank/ donor conditionality, a back-door to a second generation Structural adjustment Programmes (TWN, Accra).

A survey<sup>11</sup> of awareness of the GPRS by media practitioners and publishers over the period January to March, 2001 indicated hardly any knowledge among editors and sub-editors of what the GPRS is about. Reporting on the GPRS process has been relatively recent, beginning with a Press Conference in the second half of 2000 when the Minister of Finance launched the PRSP process. This was followed by a long spell of silence until the outreach regional consultations conducted by NDPC. These consultations were reported largely as forums for discussing the nature of poverty in communities rather than as an input into the development of a strategy. Media coverage on policies for poverty reduction was generally limited to reporting of projects. Generally, reference to poverty reduction was understood in the context of a project for “poverty alleviation”.

Two events since March helped to raise the profile of the GPRS process. The first was the emotive held over the airwaves sometime in March and April around Ghana’s decision to apply for HIPC debt relief where the GPRS was presented, by the representatives of the World Bank and the IMF, largely as a condition attached to debt relief. Following that a various preparatory workshops were held to prepare an input into the national Economic Dialogue held at the beginning of May. Two GPRS related workshops (one a consolidation workshop and the other a validation/consultation workshop) produced inputs into the National Economic Dialogue.

These notwithstanding, the profile of the GPRS remains low and misconceptions remain widespread. Knowledge about the key principles of the PRSP – pro-poor growth strategy, participation and national ownership – remain thin and the media continues to be largely uninformed. No newspaper has since published a features length article on what the GPRS is about or ought to be about and there have no sponsored radio or television discussions on the subject. The newspaper review did not come across evidence that proactive effort were made by the NDPC, e.g. through advertising the work programme of the Core Groups, to encourage wide participation in the deliberations of the core groups.

#### **3.2 Consultation, representation and participation**

The strategy for consultation has evolved around the ff processes:

(1) the constitution of Core Groups to produce policy papers in 5 areas namely: macroeconomics, production and Gainful Employment, Human Resource Development and Basic Services, Vulnerability and Exclusion; and Governance. These groups were in theory composed from representatives of the key stakeholders; MDAs of government, the private sector, civil society and donors. Persons were

selected not on the basis of their representativeness but on their perceived technical competence. They were charged to produce programme documents in their respective areas and not with the responsibility of consulting constituencies.

(2) participatory poverty analysis conducted by Community Consultation Groups in 36 sample communities drawn from 6 regions. The results of these community-based analysis were fed in regional workshops convened by NDPC.

(3) a consolidation workshop which sought to harmonise findings and recommendations from the 5 core groups into a poverty reduction Policy Framework (PRPF).

(4) a consultation workshop held in Accra which sought to validate the PRPF.

(5) a National economic Dialogue where the GPRS PRPF will be reviewed, confirmed and made ready to be used as guide for budgetary process.

(6) Joint Policy review MOF/NDPC and second Poverty reduction Workshop (june)

(7) Joint Policy review MOF/NDPC and second civil society workshop (july)

(8) submission and joint review of draft Strategic Plan and Budget inclusive of Poverty Reduction Measures. (August-Sep)

(9) Finalisation of substantive GPRS, strategic Plan and Budget 2002 (Sept/Oct).

Whilst undoubtedly the NDPC has made more effort than has previously been the case to be more inclusive, the depth and breadth of the consultation has been limited by the following factors.

1. the Core Group concept, whilst perhaps a manageable mechanism for producing technical results within a defined time frame, it narrowed down effective participation largely to donors and government representatives and became a largely Accra-based affair. It is unclear in what way the results of the community consultations fed into the analysis and recommendations of the Core Groups.
2. information access disparities skewed the quality of the consultative process. For example Core Groups, including the macroeconomics Group were not provided with information on the policy matrix/commitments under the IPRSP nor did the IMF representative come clean with what they consider as non-negotiable benchmarks against which informed debate could be conducted.
3. unlike in countries such as Kenya or Uganda, there has been no independent civil society-led initiatives to engage with the PRSP process let alone produce civil society-led parallel analysis. This has limited the quality of the debate and deepened government's control over the entire process. This situation arises partly as a reflection of limited capacity to undertake economic policy analysis and institutional capacity to conduct broad-based but accountable consultation within civil society.
4. the lack of active involvement of the District Assemblies as representatives of grassroots democratic processes has limited the extent to which the PRSP process can be made meaningful as an opportunity for promoting accountable governance, participatory policy making and pro-poor expenditures at the district Assembly level.
5. so far the GPRS discussions did not sufficiently integrate sector ministries. It is in sector-based work that civil society organizations possess the most in-depth and practical knowledge. The cross-cutting approach may have disempowered and sidelined otherwise knowledgeable voices.

Clearly, the depth and quality of public participation is severely inhibited by a number of structural and cultural factors in the Ghanaian political economy. Moreover, the prevailing political culture sees non-state actors as subordinate to state actors. And donors appear to be more interested in the formality of participation and not the quality of participation and consultation. Also, the process of selecting non-state actors for participation and inclusion is highly arbitrary and far from representative. The non-state bodies involved in the preparation of the GPRS are not always representative of the pro-poor constituency and yet those closest to the poor – those work at local government level and with grassroots

groups have so far not been drawn into the GPRS process.

## Recommendations and Conclusions

Separate document.

<sup>1</sup> Poverty reduction Support Credits (Discussion Draft), Operations Policy and Country Services, The World Bank, April 10, 2001

<sup>2</sup> See Poverty reduction Strategy Papers –Operational Issues. Joint IMF-World Bank paper (R99-241), December 10, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> A New Approach to Country-Owned Poverty Reduction Strategies, The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, January 2000.

<sup>4</sup> World Bank (1998), “Assessing Aid: What Works, What Doesn’t, and Why”; A World Bank Policy Research Report, Oxford University Press, New York.

<sup>5</sup> See, “partnership for development: Proposed Actions for the World Bank’. A discussion paper, May, 1998.

<sup>6</sup> See Participatory Processes in the Poverty Reduction Strategy (draft) and Technical Notes, World Bank, April 2000. This approach is being used with some governments and CSOs to help design PRSP processes.

<sup>7</sup> See Akwetey, “Final Draft NGO Policy Paper” for a fuller discussion of these relationships.

<sup>8</sup> Face to Face: What of the Future, Mr. President?, Focus on Ghana, The Times, London, April 18 2000.

8. Paragraph 100, Development Strategy for Poverty Reduction, Ministry of Finance, March 2000. This document was prepared to fulfil the requirements by the IMF and World Bank for an Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP).

<sup>10</sup> Examples are Policy research think tanks (Center for Policy Analysis (CEPA), Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), and Center for Democracy and Development (CDD-Ghana)) and myriad of advocacy groups such as ISODEC and FIDA as well as the TUC, Private Enterprise Foundation (PEF), Association of Ghanaian Industrialists (AGI), Ghana Bar Association (GBA).

As everywhere the term civil society defies simple definition. For our current purposes, we define civil society as the social organisations and relationships, which are not within the state machinery, organised business interests or family units, who act for the collective social good other than political power or driven purely by individual profit motive

<sup>11</sup> Basic Statistics related to Review

- No of articles reviewed with poverty reduction as principal subject: 186; Period: July 2000 – March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2001; Number of newspapers reviewed: 10 newspaper titles, 120 issues overall. Poverty-related articles as a proportion of total articles contained in newspapers reviewed : less than 1%. Proportion of GPRS specific information relative to published information on poverty reduction: 8.8%.