

A SWOT ANALYSIS OF THE PRSP: A CIVIL SOCIETY PERSPECTIVE BY MRS. MAGDALEN ABROKWA.(Vice Chair-GAPVOD)

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In 1999, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) endorsed the preparation and implementation of Poverty Reduction Strategy papers (PRSPs) by client countries seeking to benefit from debt relief under the Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) initiative. The new policy instrument is the two institutions' response to growing concerns over the slow rate of growth and widespread poverty in low-income countries. This instrument is a clear departure from previous programmes in several respects, three of which are of particular interest to civil society:

- the link with HIPC guarantees resource flows for implementation.
- the free-hand given to borrower nations to identify country-specific development priorities and lay their own road map for tackling poverty is **a positive change** and means that the programme is government- driven. By this prescription, the international financial institutions appear to be saying that they can no longer operate on their own in determining development priorities for borrower countries and still hope for true ownership.
- the emphasis on “broad and extensive civil society consultation” gives hope that the needs and voices of the poor will come up in the public debate and then be articulated directly or through credible interlocutors – civil society organisations for redress.

With these promises of cultural change in governments and among development partners, civil society was motivated to embark on the PRSP process with confidence for a healthy and fruitful partnership for a total war on poverty.

As I am not privy to an in-depth assessment of levels and quality of civil society participation in the various countries my best bet is to concentrate on the experience from Ghana where my knowledge is better, given the fact that I belong to a representative body of organized civil society—the Ghana Association of Private Voluntary Organisation in Development (GAPVOD) which has been involved in the process from inception.

2.0 THE GHANA POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY (GPRS)

A quick walk through Ghana's PRSP process reveals that the government of Ghana completed a draft Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS) to pave the way for Ghana to opt for the HIPC initiative in March 2001. By February 2002, the document had been passed and the GPRS was already a working document.

The main goal of the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS) is to “ensure sustainable equitable growth, accelerated poverty reduction and the protection of the vulnerable and excluded within a decentralized environment” (GoG 2002). The document sets out a number of poverty and growth targets that are to be achieved over a three-year period, 2002-2004. Five cross-sectoral themes are singled out for intervention. These are the macro-economy, production and gainful employment, human resource development, vulnerability and exclusion and governance.

The GPRS has a very broad scope in view of the multi-dimensional nature of poverty. It is therefore intended that the GPRS will address it by adopting a broad frontal attack. Accordingly, over 200 targets have been set out among the five defined thematic areas.

Generally, the GPRS is based on the government's Medium Term Priorities (the so-called “ President's Priorities”): infrastructure, modernized agriculture based on rural development, enhanced social services, good governance and private sector development.

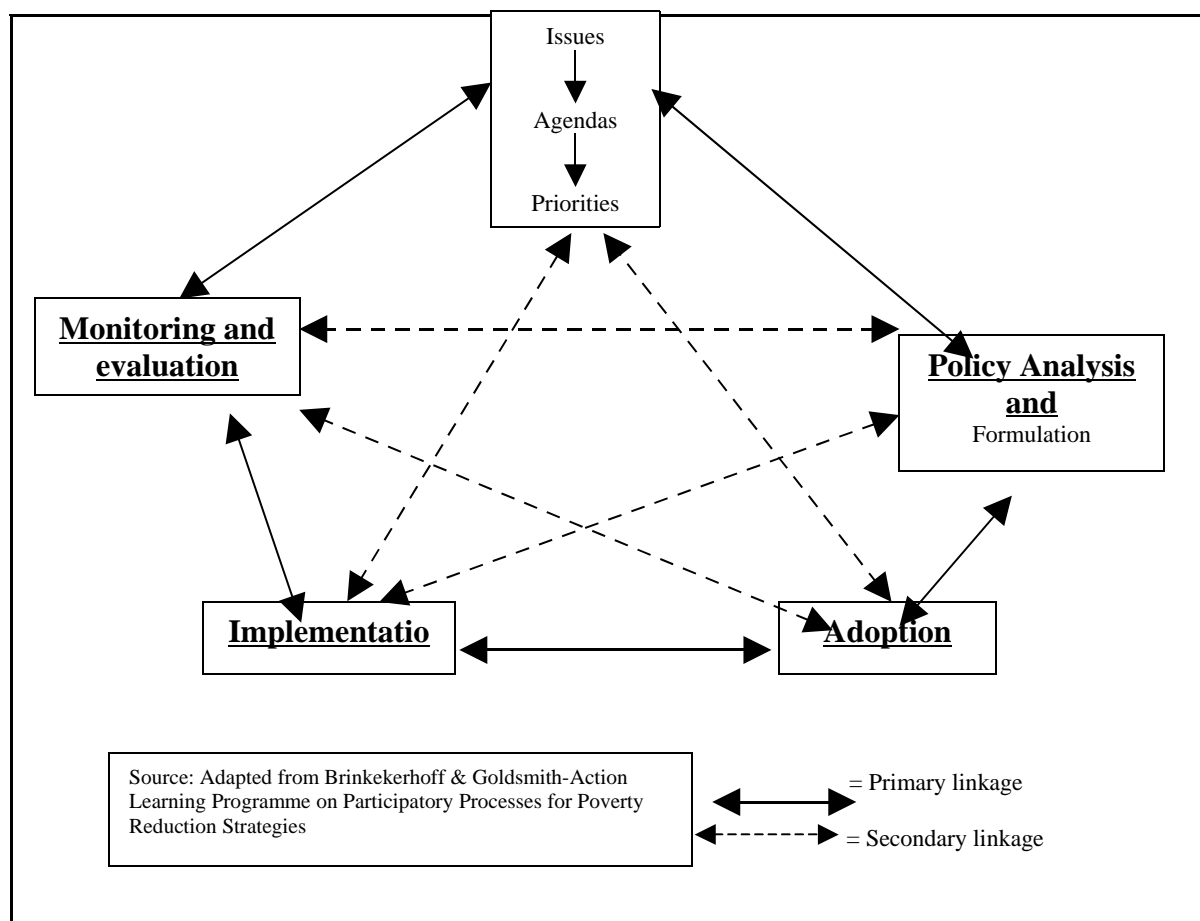
These priorities are to be achieved through:

- Ensuring sound economic management for accelerated growth;
- Increasing production and promoting sustainable livelihoods;
- Direct support for human development and the provision of basic services;
- Providing special programmes in support of the vulnerable and excluded;
- Ensuring good governance and increased capacity of the public sector; and
- The active involvement of the private sector as the main engine of growth and partner in national building

Conceptually, the PRSP/GPRS process is intended to be a cyclical one, consisting of the following stages:

- Strategy design (policy analysis/strategy definition and choice of options);
- Adoption/approval (by government/parliament/civil society);
- implementation; and
- Monitoring and Annual Progress Report and Evaluation. A stream of poverty reduction issues, agents, agenda and priority-setting exercises launches the cycle. In deed, the process is iterative and multi-directional as indicated in the diagram below:

The PRSP/GPRS Process Cycle



“World Development Report, 2000/2001, Attacking Poverty”, World Bank, September 2000, p.106, quoted in MoF/COWI Report

The various stages of the PRSP/GPRS process outlined above offer entry points for the participation of civil society organizations in the country and the levels of participation have been conceptualised as information sharing, consultation, collaboration, shared decision-making and empowerment (see Appendix 1. for details on each level). The evidence available, however, indicates that civil society organizations in Ghana were not offered sufficient space by the Ghana Government to actively participate in the process. Indeed, the process was government-led. Unlike civil society organizations in Uganda and Zambia , civil society organizations in Ghana were not proactive but waited for government to invite them to participate in the preparatory process. Consequently, the level and quality of participation, as gathered from the field and the GAPVOD commissioned Report, was very shallow.

Our observation is that although the consultative process applied in preparing and adopting the GPRS included civil society, the civil society organizations were

selected in an arbitrary manner thus leaving out certain vital organizations. For instance, labour which represents one organized civil society was less formally engaged while the unorganized civil society eg farmers, rural dwellers who are over-represented among the poorest of the poor had no platform to articulate their concerns. Consequently, the voices of the poor are not reflected in the document. In effect participation of civil society organizations has been limited.

Indeed, the feeling of the lucky members of civil society who were included in the process is that they had not been successful in getting their perspectives articulated. They claim they were lost in the process of “harmonization”. Essentially, the final write up reflected more on the government’s priorities than those of civil society. The consultative process and participation was thus largely viewed to be “mechanisms” of validation and “containment” rather than those of inclusiveness and partnership. (Desrosier and Gariba, 2001).

In spite of these flaws, the principles underlying the GPRS offer the greatest prospect for civil society to join in analysing and diagnosing poverty reduction policies and in implementing, monitoring, evaluating and assessing the impact of these policies. Experiences from a number of developing and developed countries have shown that for civil society participation in the PRSP process to have any impact on poverty reduction, they must be sufficiently structured to have centralized organizational representation. This requires the presence of one or more peak/apex associations that would represent broad sectors of the society. All the CSOs and organizations contacted expressed the desire to see GAPVOD playing a more proactive role of intermediation, representation, advocacy and collaboration in the country. In fact, the consensus was that, to sustain any CS platform into the future, in the long run, GAPVOD must be restructured from a membership-based organisation to an apex/peak organisation of NGO networks so as to assert itself in the management of NGO/CSO participation in the GPRS.

From the literature review a number of options were identified for CSO participation in the GPRS process. In the preparation of the GPRS, civil society was only made to provide information during the poverty assessment study on their needs, preferences, etc.

In the adoption of the GPRS, consultation, collaboration, and joint decision-making offered high opportunity for CSO participation in the process but were never employed. Consequently, ownership of the GPRS and building supportive constituencies is lacking. The implementation stage of the GPRS offers high prospects for participation of CSOs. This is currently going on in some respect with related programmes such as the Emergency Social Relief Programme and the Women’s Development Fund but not with the HIPC Fund being disbursed to the districts. With regards to monitoring and evaluation of the GPRS all the options assure a higher level of participation for CSOs. They can be consulted for their opinions, interpretations, and analysis, collaborate in joint monitoring and

evaluation with government, or they can conduct their own independent monitoring, evaluations or assessments.

By comparison and from available data, experience from a number of developing countries have shown that civil society participation in the PRSP process is effective **when a vibrant and functional civil society platform is in existence** to play the role of intermediation, representation, advocacy, and collaboration. This seems to be lacking in Ghana.

Since civil society has been acknowledged as major partner of government in the implementation monitoring and evaluation of the GPRS, a move has been made to explore the setting up of a Civil Society Organisation (CSO) platform for engaging with government on the GPRS> the development of a concept paper to guide the setting up of such a platform has already been awarded on sub-contract and a draft concept paper is currently being discussed.

3.0 CONCLUSION

From the above analysis, it is clear that the PRSP is a promising environment for government, development partners and civil society to work in concert to prove their commitment to reducing poverty among the weaker segments of the population.

It is also clear from Ghana's example that the major weakness relates to the diverse nature and fragmentation of civil society. A fair share of the blame can also be attributed to the weakness of the key civil society organisations and the attitude of the bureaucrats in believing that they either know it all or can have short cuts to development and poverty reduction.

In terms of opportunities, civil society organisations must know for a fact that they will not come to them on silver or copper platter. They must earn them.

Finally, the mutual mistrust between civil society and government must definitely give way so that there will be no threats to civil society acting better in partnership with government and other stakeholders to fight poverty.

Appendix 1: Defined Roles for Civil Society in the GPRS

The GPRS clearly states: civil society has a wider role as a participator in policy formulation, implementation and monitoring the outputs and evaluating the outcomes of the development process. Participation is manifested at four levels, viz, information sharing, consultation, collaboration and empowerment. (Government of Ghana, 2002:122). Subject matters for these levels of participation are to be jointly defined.

Portions of the GPRS spelt out proposed actions on which civil society organisations should concentrate. These include the following:

- production/environment
- HIV/AIDS
- population management
- education
- special programmes for the vulnerable and excluded.

In the area of implementation, the proposed actions include:

- Macro economy
- Production and gainful employment
- Health/HIV-AIDS
- Education
- Water & sanitation in rural and peri-urban areas
- Special programmes for the vulnerable and excluded
- Governance

The focus of CSOs in monitoring and evaluation is intended to be at two levels:

- Monitoring and evaluation of CSO initiated activities under the GPRS
- Monitoring the process and outcomes of the GPRS

In performing this role, umbrella CSOs are to establish framework to monitor implementations of the activities undertaken by CSOs. Outcomes of these exercises are to be fed by the umbrella organizations on the overall GPRS M&E system. In addition, CSOs are to serve as watchdogs, organise discussions to monitor achievements.

APPLEDIX 2:Description of Levels of Participation in the PRSP/GPRS

Information Sharing

One-way information flows. From government to the public, examples are dissemination of written material through official documents, newspapers, or magazines; distribution of documents from local government offices; press conference; radio or television broadcast; or establishment of websites. From the public to government, examples include responding to questionnaires and surveys, accessing toll-free telephone "hot lines," or providing various kinds of data.

Consultation

Two-way information flows and exchange of views. Examples are beneficiary assessments, participatory poverty assessments, town hall meetings, focus groups, national conferences, round tables, and parliamentary hearings.

Collaboration

Joint activities where the initiator invites other groups to be involved but retains decision-making authority and control. Examples include public reviews of draft legislation, government-led working groups and government-convened planning sessions.

Shared Decision Making

Collaboration where there is shared control over decision made. Examples are: joint committees, advisory councils, public-private partnerships, and taskforces.

Empowerment

Transfer of control over decision-making, resources, and activities from the initiator to other stakeholders. Examples are, local natural resource management committees, community empowerment zones, water user associations, and civil society "seed" grants.

Source: Adapted from Crosby (2000) and Edgerton et al. (2000).

APPENDIX 3:Description of Roles of CSO Participation in the PRSP

Intermediate

Civil society groups may seek out and interpret macroeconomic information that is important to their clients, simplifying it and passing it on so that clients can understand it and change their behavior accordingly. It is a mistake to underestimate the knowledge of poor or formally uneducated people, but their conclusions about macroeconomics policies may be inaccurate. Further, civil society groups can collect and interpret information on citizens' views and satisfaction with policies and provide it to government; here civil society intermediation supports accountability and responsiveness of government.

Representation

They may aggregate their members' preferred macroeconomic policies and transmit that information to authoritative decision-makers. This information is critical to sustained and successful monetary and fiscal activities

Advocacy

They may endorse particular policies based on their analysis of the issues and what best serves their members' needs, and work to have those policies enacted.

Collaboration

Interest groups may develop alliance with other likeminded groups on macroeconomic issues, increasing their potential clout with decision-makers. Geographically isolated or less grassroots organizations are likely to have limited capacity either to understand macroeconomic policy or to influence it-unless they have linked up similar groups so they can operate beyond the local area.

APPENDIX 4: Envisaged Constraints/Challenges & Benefits/Outcome of CSO Participation in the GPRS

| GPRS Process | Constraints to Participation | Benefits & Outcomes | Examples |
|---|---|---|---|
| Analysis & Formulation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cost of consulting Poor ▪ Attitudes of Technocrats ▪ Capacity of poor to Participate effectively ▪ Budget cycles and Program preparation deadlines ▪ Negative prior Experience, lack of Mutual trust | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Views of civil society_and the poor ▪ Considered in policy formulation ▪ Increased equity ▪ Better understanding of Implication for the poor ▪ Higher quality policy_Design ▪ Demystification of_Policy content | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Participatory Poverty Assessments ▪ PEAP - Uganda ▪ Australia Tax <u>Submit</u> ▪ Canada Alternative_Federal Budget ▪ Reserved Bank of_India Electronic Media Project ▪ Bolivia National_Dialogue I and II |
| Adoption (Legitimacy & Constituency-building) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Limited access of Poor to decision makers ▪ Attitude of policy makers ▪ Weak winners, strong losers ▪ Capacity of government and civil society for participation ▪ Technical nature of macroeconomic policies, lack of understanding buy public | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Policy viewed as Necessary and Legitimate ▪ Supportive policy coalitions for sustained reform ▪ Increased Responsiveness and accountability to a wider range of citizens ▪ Demystification of policy content | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Porto Alegre Participatory Municipal Budgeting ▪ Ireland Social Partnership ▪ IDASA, South Africa Women's Budget Initiative |
| Implementation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Legal limitations Secrecy ▪ Limited role for external involvement given nature of most monetary and fiscal policies (except for budgeting) ▪ High degree of centralization | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lower social divisions and conflict ▪ Fewer public complaints ▪ Reform sustainability ▪ Political and macro-economic Stability ▪ Increased compliance with policy measures ▪ Improved living standards for poor people | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Porto Alegre participatory municipal Budgeting ▪ Ireland Social Partnership ▪ Sweden parliamentary commission on Inquiry |
| Monitoring & Evaluation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ High cost of participatory M&E ▪ Capacity of government and civil society ▪ Time requirements ▪ Recurrent costs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Enhanced accountability and responsiveness ▪ Increased empowerment of citizens ▪ Feedback on quality of policies & strategies ▪ Better implementation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Service Delivery Surveys (e.g., Public Affairs centre, Bangalore, India) ▪ DISHA, Gujarat, India ▪ SAPRI/ CivisoC, Ghana ▪ HIPC watch / SEND, Ghana |

APPENDIX 5: SWOT ANALYSIS OF CSO IN GHANA

The civil society sector is diverse. Below is a reproduced SWOT analysis of NGOs in health¹, which the Coalition of NGOs in Health came up with in November, 2001, when it was developing its 5-year strategic plan. This SWOT analysis would, by and large, apply to most CSOs operating in other sectors.

| Strengths | Weaknesses |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NGOs are close to the communities which they serve • NGOs have a strong sense of social responsibilities towards the communities that they serve • NGOs have good relationships with opinion leaders and therefore are more effective • Since NGOs cover small areas they are able to implement their programmes better • NGOs are flexible and adaptable – little or no bureaucracy • NGOs are responsive to the needs of their communities or of the times - opportunistic • There is a strong sense of solidarity among NGOs as a community • Personnel of NGOs are prepared to go beyond the call of duty – sense of ownership and commitment to the goals of the NGO • NGOs are creative and innovative • NGOs operate in underserved and marginalized communities • NGOs are prudent in the use of resources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most NGOs, especially local NGOs, have scarce resources leading to competition among them • Most NGOs have weak capacity in terms of skills, knowledge, organisational structures, administrative systems and procedures • Most NGOs have weak project management skills in terms of poor monitoring, supervision, co-ordination and evaluation, and project documentation and reporting • Most NGOs have weak financial management and reporting systems • There are weak linkages among NGOs and with other networks • There is duplication of efforts and lack of co-ordination among NGOs • There is suspicion and lack of trust among NGOs • The Coalition has weak organisational structures, administrative systems and procedures • There is no code of ethics and professionalism within the NGO sector • There is poor health and general management information system among NGOs and the Coalition • The Coalition currently holds meetings in Accra and though some members come from the other regions with time the National Executive run the risk of being hijacked by those in Accra |
| Opportunities | Threats |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is an improving and enabling environment for NGOs – with increasing goodwill from donors and government • There is an increasing recognition of the role of NGOs in national development with frameworks for partnership with government • The decentralisation programme offers opportunities for NGOs to partnership with District Assemblies and decentralised departments at the district and sub-district levels | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weak capacity within the government sector in dealing with NGOs has led to inadequate standards, procedures, policies for the formation and operation of NGOs leading to the mushrooming of NGOs and diminishing image • There is a growing tendency to use NGOs as a means of job creation • There is inadequate support from government agencies to NGOs • There is unfair competition from international NGOs leading to weakening |

¹ Coalition Of NGOs in Health, Draft Strategic Plan for 2002-2006, November 2001, pg. 12-13

| | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are increasing opportunities for participation in international development conferences through NGO forums • There is goodwill towards NGO participation in policy formulation of government and donors • The campaign against HIV/AIDS require the use of NGOs who are closer to the people for public education on prevention and care • Increasing recognition of the impact of other sectors like water and sanitation on health offers opportunities for NGOs in health to venture into other sectors • Liberalisation of the mass media, especially the airwaves offers opportunities to NGOs to educate the public, especially non-literate people, on health issues • Under the HIPC initiative and the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy, there is going to be more financial resources to the social sectors, notably health, education, agriculture and NGOs are to play a major role. There is therefore the potential for more resources to NGOs if they prove themselves credible partners to government and donors • Government's policy on private sector development and the establishment of the Private Sector Unit within MoH provides opportunities for greater support for NGOs and enabling environment for NGOs • The Five-Year Programme of Work (5YPOW) and the SWAp recognise the need to provide funding to support the work of NGOs in health | <p>of local NGOs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The poor economy of the country threatens the very survival of local NGOs • Religious and ethnic conflicts in communities where NGOs operate forces them to abandon whatever they have initiated and leads to the lose of scarce resources • Undue interference from opinion leaders and politicians undermines NGOs • Creation of NGOs affiliated to political parties politicises the NGO sector • NGOs also suffer from the brain-drain syndrome, leading to the lose of scarce personnel |
|--|---|