

## **STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION IN PRSP: REPORT OF SEMINAR AND ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION**

An international seminar on **Strategic Communication in PRSP** took place in London on November 27 2002 at the 1 Palace Street headquarters of DFID. The main purpose was to discuss the latest chapter in the World Bank's *PRSP Sourcebook*, which has the same title. The presenter was Paul Mitchell, Chief, Development Communications, External Affairs Vice Presidency at the Bank. The seminar was attended by 21 people, including representatives from SIDA, Danida, Panos, BBC World Service Trust, Help Age International, ODI and, of course, staff working in development communications within DFID and the Bank.

(For copies of the Chapter please visit

<http://worldbank.org/poverty/strategies/chapters/communication/stratcom.htm>  
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### **The roundtable discussion**

The following points came out clearly in the lively discussion that followed the presentation:

1. Core PRSP concepts like ownership, participation accountability and empowerment are premised upon good information flows, bottom up and top down. Yet it appears that in many places PRSPs are donor and governments driven. They are generally not owned more broadly. The discussion emphasised the need to involve the media, parliamentarians, civil society groups and others.
2. Communication is not an optional add-on to the PRSP process. It must be employed from the beginning and shape both the design and implementation of the PRSP. Where this happens, as in Niger and Vietnam, the evidence is that the PRSP is more broadly owned.

Communication audits and an analysis of who the influencers are in each country is the beginning of the entire process.

3. Accountability is fundamental to the PRSP process. Media and civil society involvement is indispensable when it comes to the monitoring and evaluation of the PRSP process. The priority is to operationalise bottom-up flow, really pressure from below, in order to produce constructive results.
4. In working with the media in developing countries, particularly in building media capacity, it is important for donors to insist on the reform of the wider media environment.
5. There are two competing approaches to deepening media and civil society participation in the PRSP process (and, more generally, the reform process). The rights based approach seeks to promote the right to information. The competing approach is to show the value of doing it and let developing countries buy in rather than say that it is a right.
6. Above all, it must be realised that the role of development communications in the reform process is political. For it unleashes a political dynamic capable of transforming the environment. As a result, free flow of information is often hindered. Nevertheless, the goal must be to create a situation where the preponderant focus of public policy and public expenditure will be the needs of the poor.

### **Next Steps**

With the Bank taking a leading, the meeting agreed on the desirability of the following:

- a) A global network of specialists in development communications generally, including those interested in pursuing the role of strategic communications in the PRSP process.
- b) The network will become a knowledge sharing network, perhaps with a dedicated website, annual meetings/conferences and so on.
- c) Pilot projects in 5-6 countries focusing on the role of strategic communications in the PRSP process to be jointly funded and run by several donors.

d) Steps are to be taken to involve NGOs and editors in donor countries in the efforts to promote the importance of development communications.