



The World
Bank Group

Deepening Voice and Accountability to Fight Poverty: Dialogue of Communication Implementers

OECD, meeting room Franqueville
30-31 March, 2006

PROGRAM

March 29

19:00 Welcome reception (optional, location tbd)

March 30

8:30 *Arrival and coffee outside meeting room*

9:00 Opening remarks by Louka T. Katseli, Director, OECD Development Center and Richard Manning, DAC Chair. Context and workshop set-up by Sina Odgubemi, Manager, Information and Communication for Development Information and Civil Society, DFID

9:30 **Panel I: Democracy and Poverty Reduction: Can we even have this discussion?**

10:45 *Break*

11:00 **Panel II: Accountability: What creates the demand for good governance?**

12:30 *LUNCH*

14:00 **Panel III: A Strong Civil Society: Looking for commitment**

15:15 *Break*

15:30 **Panel IV: The Media and Poverty Reduction: Moving beyond criticism**

16:45 Closing Remarks

17:30 *End of Day 1*

19:30 ***DINNER (location tbd)***

March 31

8:30	<i>Coffee outside room</i>
9:00	Wrap up from Day 1 Set goals for breakout groups, which will cover practical applications for topics discussed on Day I
10:00	<i>Break</i>
10:20	Breakout group discussions
12:30	<i>LUNCH</i>
14:00	Report back and discussion
16:00	<i>Break</i>
16:20	Wrap-up and commitments for next steps
18:00	<i>End of Conference</i>

Day I Panel Procedures

Each panel will have a facilitator, and will consist of three participants: a lead speaker and two respondents. After the facilitator introduces the topic, the lead speaker will briefly (10 minutes) identify key issues and priorities under that topic. One respondent will then reply to the points made by the lead speaker, expressing any agreement /disagreement with the key issues, and, if desired, add other issues or priorities. The second respondent will reply to the points made by the lead speaker and first respondent, and is free to add additional points. Each respondent is asked to take around 5 to 10 minutes to respond. The facilitator will summarize what has been said, and will then open up the discussion to the entire group.

Day II Breakout Group Procedures

A facilitator will work with the entire group to summarize proceedings from day one and set up the discussion for day two. Then the group will divide into smaller, breakout groups, which will meet for two hours to discuss the practical applications of the four topics discussed on day one. Each group will choose its own facilitator and *rapporteur*. One of the conference organizers will participate in each group to record proceedings in detail. Lunch will be served, after which, the groups will meet back in the main room where the four *rapporteurs* will report back to the entire group. A facilitator will then work with the entire group to summarize the conference and agree on recommendations for next steps.

Panel Details

Following is a more detailed outline of some key issues to guide the panel discussions, (participants may, of course, identify additional issues or priorities). Keeping in mind that this is a unique conference of people who are actively working worldwide in the areas of information, communication, and civil society participation, it is hoped that the following three questions will be explored as an underlying theme, in each discussion:

- 1) How do we reconcile the rhetoric of participatory poverty reduction with the reality of politics and political power plays on the ground?
- 2) How do we “scale up” and make sustainable the good work that is already being done?
- 3) What is the specific role of communication and information in all of the areas we are discussing?

Panel I: Democracy and Poverty Reduction: Can we even have this discussion?

Assertions: Donors commonly use “participation” and “transparency” as politically neutral terms which constitute good development practice. Yet these words actually represent democratic principles which challenge the political culture and power structure of many countries. What governments may accept at the table, in theory, to obtain financing, is typically distorted or even discarded in practice when politics take over and vested interests are threatened.

Questions:

1. What are the implications of avoiding the discussion of democratic principles and practice in relation to poverty reduction?
2. Are donors and governments in sync with other key development players—in particular the media and civil society—in terms of the terminology being used?
3. What does it mean today for outside development agencies to be politically “neutral”?
4. Is apolitical language acceptable for its diplomacy, or is it really a way for both governments and donors to shield their poverty reduction programs from having to adhere to true democratic principles?

Panel II: Accountability: What creates the demand for good governance?

Assertions: Donors and governments these days all formally agree on the need for good governance and accountability for poverty reduction programs and their results. Yet they do not fully recognize the essential role of information and communication processes, which are still added on as afterthoughts, rather than seen as integral to the transformation they are trying to achieve.

Questions:

1. Is this true?
2. Are donors and governments defining “accountability” clearly enough for it to be measured?
3. How are the media, academics and civil society doing in terms of holding government and donors to account?

4. What is the responsibility of donors and governments in supporting countries' information and communication processes to mobilize public opinion, and strengthen ownership and transparency of poverty reduction strategies?
5. What is the situation regarding solid research on the role of information and communication in improving development effectiveness, and do we need more?

Panel III: A Strong Civil Society: Looking for commitment

Assertion: An active civil society is important in the fight against poverty. However, local political dynamics and policies often prevent or undermine an active civil society despite efforts by donors and NGOs to support it.

Questions:

1. What are the most important developments needed, in terms of policy and the local environment, to support a more active and effective civil society?
2. What should be the roles of governments, donors, and academic researchers and civil society itself to help create such an environment?
3. Are we seeing enough commitment and action from these groups?

Panel IV: The Media and Poverty Reduction: Moving Beyond Criticism

Assertion: Free, plural and independent media systems are fundamental for pro-poor development. It is not for nothing that in the West, the media are called the Fourth Estate of the Realm. Yet still, too often we see that poverty issues in developing countries are not covered in a way that will mobilize public opinion and change policy, and lead to greater accountability and better results. We need to move beyond simple criticism of the media, however, and into constructive action for change which involves all relevant stakeholders.

Questions:

2. Is this true?
3. What are we seeing—and not seeing—in terms of strengthening the media and improving the environment in which they work?
4. Who is—and who should be—taking responsibility for various aspects of this?
5. What is the role that donors, governments and academia should be taking, and what do we need to see from the media themselves?

Deepening Voice and Accountability to Fight Poverty: Dialogue of Communication Implementers

I. Background

Two recent studies have provided practical insight into the implementation of strategic communication for poverty reduction strategies. The joint DFID/World Bank publication *With the Support of Multitudes*, and the subsequent opinion research study, *Deepening and Sustaining Participation in the Poverty Reduction Strategy*, have set the stage for a deeper investigation into the work being done in this area by communication implementers throughout the world.

These two studies identified common obstacles to achieving widespread participation in the design and implementation of national poverty reduction strategies, including: low media capacity and incentives to cover poverty issues, non-communicative political culture, a lack of respect in governments for communication practitioners, lack of access to information, and low capacity of nongovernmental and civil society organizations to analyze and communicate poverty issues. They also revealed underlying difficulties caused by antagonistic or weak relationships among key stakeholder groups which undermine efforts to improve communication and build consensus.

The studies also found good news in the form of creative programs around the world, which have had varying degrees of success in overcoming obstacles and deepening public voice and demand for accountability. These case studies lead us to the question: What can be done to improve the results of such work, “scale-up” projects to reach more people and make them sustainable, and share lessons learned across international borders?

II. Objectives

The Dialogue of Communication Implementers will seek lessons of experience, and concrete recommendations regarding how those with a stake in strengthening communication to fight poverty can work more closely with each other, and how their work can be supported more effectively by development agencies. By the end of the conference, it is hoped that the group will have identified:

- 1) Areas of consensus regarding the policies required for broadening participation and deepening voice and accountability for poverty reduction
- 2) Examples of what works and what doesn't work on the ground in using communication and information processes as a part of poverty reduction efforts
- 3) Concrete recommendations on the above areas, in particular, for how the various stakeholders involved in communication can work more cohesively, and how development agencies can play a more effective partnership role in this area.
- 4) Follow-on actions to build upon the results of this conference.

Study on Deepening and Sustaining Participation in the Poverty Reduction Strategy: The Opinions and Experiences of Implementers of Communication Interventions

Executive Summary

This DFID-World Bank study was conducted as part of the joint World Bank-IMF 2005 Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) five-year review process. The research was qualitative, based on desk research and telephone interviews with the implementers and supervisors of communication interventions in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). By collecting and analyzing the opinion, experience, and recommendations of the practitioners on the ground, the study aims to present practical constraints to two of the core PRSP principles of ownership and participation, offer solutions proposed by the practitioners for removing these constraints, and, finally, provide recommendations for specific action steps to utilize strategic communication approaches to strengthen stakeholder participation in the PRSP process.

The study was designed around four main themes: Governance, Access to Information, Media, and Civil Society. These particular themes were chosen because they represent the areas in which structural impediments to participation and country ownership are most visible in many of the PRSP-implementing countries.

Governance. Governance refers to the institutional arrangement within a country, and whether this arrangement fosters government-citizen dialogue, enabling participation by the public in the formulation of policy. Following were the main findings:

- In countries with a low participation governance culture, government-citizen dialogue, in general, has not been conducive to broad and effective public participation in the PRSP process.
- Government-citizen dialogue was strengthened by the PRSP process, which established an institutional setup for more systematic communication and legal framework for public participation.
- The PRSP might leave some permanent practical legacies if some of the practical constraints to participation are addressed.
- Respondents stated that constraints to participation include: lack of legal framework for participation, lack of awareness about the PRSP, lack of demand for information by the general public, lack of transport infrastructure and communication channels, lack of media capacity, and lack of trust between Government and civil society.
- Recommendations to improve participation include: transparency and open disclosure of information by Government; formalizing the partnership between Government and civil society; removing the public's dependency on the government and encouraging public participation in policy-making; and building capacity of government employees, citizens, and NGOs.

Access to Information. This category examines the existing system within a country for policy-related information to effectively reach its citizens. Main findings include:

- PRSP is a relatively complex policy document, whose related policies are difficult to translate into manageable information for the different stakeholders.

- Much information about the PRSP was circulated at the preparation stage, but this practice has not continued through implementation, thus creating a communication and policy gap between and among PRSP stakeholders.
- There seem to be irregularity and inconsistency in the data published by the Government on PRSP policies.
- While data may be relatively easy to access, the practicalities of doing so are limited only to insiders.
- Respondents' suggestions to overcome obstacles to effective policy communication include: creation of local-level PRSP monitoring centers, promotion of NGO participation at the local level as conduit for information dissemination and feedback, and establishment of formal partnership and cooperation between Government and civil society.

Media. The most common obstacles for communicating PRSP-related reforms rest in the media. Main findings about the media include:

- Lack of practical, legal, and institutional protections of the media for free speech
- Weakness of institutional capacity within the country to respond to media investigations
- Media's vulnerability to capture by a few interest groups or individuals
- Absence of independent sources of finance
- Lack of expertise of media professionals
- Weakness of business acumen among media managers and shareholders
- Weakness of the advertising markets
- Lack of awareness and interest among the media professionals about the PRSP
- Lack of understanding by the media professionals about their role in the PRSP
- Recommendations to overcome these obstacles include: building ownership in the media to continuously cover PRSP-related policies, fostering cooperation between Government and the media, encouraging the Government to provide information regularly and in a timely fashion, and providing training for media professionals.

Civil Society. The role of the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) as the link between Government and citizens is important in the PRSP implementation, monitoring, and evaluation process. Main findings are as follows:

- Lack of CSO involvement past the PRSP policy-formulation stage
- Lack of effective, albeit active, CSO involvement in the implementation process
- Constraints to CSO participation in the PRSP process include: the absence of capable CSO counterparts to work with the line ministries and government agencies on specific PRSP-related policy issues, lack of CSO capacity to effectively work as partners to or watchdog of the government agencies, lack of Government support to promote CSO inclusion in the process, lack of timely and regular information flow to CSOs, absence of transparency in the CSO selection process in the PRSP, and lack of a clearly defined role for CSOs in the PRSP process.
- Proposed solutions to remove these constraints include: building NGO capacity; educating NGOs about the PRSP and clearly defining their role in it; training NGOs in the independent analysis, identification, and report-writing within the PRSP;

explicit Government support for NGO participation in the PRSP; remunerating NGOs; building a genuine partnership paradigm between CSO and Government within the PRSP, establishing an institutional setup for NGOs to promote cooperation among NGOs to work as a team, encouraging closer cooperation between NGOs and the media, and promoting donor coordination to remove duplication of efforts by CSOs in certain sectors and regions.