Participation in Poverty Reduction Strategies:

A synthesis of experience with participatory approaches to policy design, implementation and monitoring

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Table of contents

Section 1 Introduction
1.1 Aims and scope
1.2 Structure of the synthesis
1.3 Background and objectives

Section 2 Participation in the PRS process
2.1 The basic PRS cycle
2.2 What sort of participation is possible?
2.3 Who can take part, how, at which stage?

Section 3 Paradoxes of ownership
3.1 Country ownership of a Washington concept
  3.1.1 Country ownership means home-grown strategies
  3.1.2 Limits to the lessons from participatory CASs
3.2 What is the role for donors?
  3.2.1 An enabling role
  3.2.2 Institutionalising participation in donor agencies
3.3 Where there is little tradition of government-civil society engagement
  3.3.1 Fostering broad-based ownership
3.4 Summary and implications for PRS process

Section 4 Informing and being informed
4.1 Upward information flows: from people to policy-makers
  4.1.1 The contribution of Participatory Poverty Assessments
  4.1.2 The Structural Adjustment Participatory Review Initiative
  4.1.3 Monitoring poverty and policy
  4.1.4 Participatory poverty research conducted outside of PPAs
4.2 Downwards information flows: from policy-makers and service providers to poor people and service users
  4.2.1 Awareness of rights
  4.2.2 An essential ingredient for effective consultation or participation donors or governments
4.3 Sharing of information between civil society actors
  4.3.1 Demystifying institutions and official processes
  4.3.2 Strengthening public claims on information
4.4 Summary and implications for PRS process

Section 5 Influencing policy through participatory processes

5.1 Policy influencing through Participatory Poverty Assessment processes
   5.1.1 ‘Second-generation’ PPAs
   5.1.2 Factors for PPAs to influence policy processes
   5.1.3 PPAs and community-level impacts

5.2 Participatory processes outside of government
   5.2.1 Policy influencing through NGO advocacy, campaigning and lobbying

5.3 Summary and implications for the PRS process

Section 6 Accounting to the poor

6.1 Participatory budgeting
   6.1.1 Some examples of participatory budgets
   6.1.2 Factors for effective participatory budget initiatives

6.2 Citizen monitoring
   6.2.1 Empowerment through citizen monitoring
   6.2.2 Report cards
   6.2.3 Citizens’ access to information

6.3 How participatory is this accounting?

6.4 Summary and implications for PRS process

Section 7 Ensuring quality in participation

7.1 Participation: authentic, representative and inclusive?
   7.1.1 Authenticity of participation
   7.1.2 Who is included, who do they represent, and how can one know?
   7.1.3 Gender biases in ‘participatory’ processes

7.2 Standards for quality in participation
   7.2.1 Which benchmarks are needed?
   7.2.2 How should benchmarks be set?

7.3 Capacity-building needs for high-quality participation

7.4 Summary and implications for the PRS process

References
Executive Summary

Purpose

The purpose of this synthesis is to review the experience in applying participatory approaches to processes of policy formulation at the macro level, with a view to informing the evolution of guidance and approaches at the country level to facilitating broad based involvement in the PRS process. The synthesis aims to assist development actors engaging in the PRSP process:

- Southern governments responsible for leading PRSP processes, and civil society organizations (CSOs) wishing to engage with governments in formulating, implementing and monitoring these
- Bilateral and multilateral donor agencies, civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) both in the North and in country offices, aiming to play a supporting role as their Southern partners engage in national PRSP processes

Structure of the synthesis

Section 2 maps out the process of a national Poverty Reduction Strategy and identifies the entry-points for participation at its various stages.

Section 3 identifies some of the tensions and dilemmas which arise in attempts to foster country ownership of, and through, participatory processes.

Section 4 presents experience to date in relation to information-sharing and transparency for effective participation, and to the participatory generation of information for policy.

Section 5 focuses on influencing policy through the participatory process itself, as opposed to the outputs of the process.

Section 6 discusses a range of approaches to increasing the accountability of government and service providers to poor people.

Section 7 is about the quality and integrity of participatory practice.
Key messages

Paradoxes of ownership

Efforts are needed to ensure broad-based country ownership of PRSs. Ownership, like
empowerment, cannot be given. Donors can help to create and maintain conditions
conducive to national ownership, including the necessary revisions of their own policies
and practices, and a flexible interpretation of the PRSP model according to country
circumstances. Governments and civil society need to assume the new roles and
responsibilities country ownership implies.

• Country ownership implies country accountability for the PRS. This needs to be
  based on legitimate political structures in-country.

• The PRSP model is being applied to a range of countries with widely variant
  attitudes, histories, institutional arrangements and policy approaches in respect of
  both poverty reduction and public participation. This diversity implies that no
  ‘blueprint for a PRSP’ can be devised, but that each national PRS must start where
  the country is at, in terms of poverty reduction strategy, participatory experience, and
  capacity and legitimacy of civil society. No single model can be considered ‘best
  practice’ to be followed by all: such replication is neither possible nor desirable for all
  countries.

• Country diversity implies, at one end of the spectrum, fostering innovative and
  challenging initiatives in countries already at the cutting edge of participatory
  practice; and at the other, accepting that the opening up of spaces for public
  information and consultation on poverty policy issues, for countries with no tradition
  of this, constitutes significant progress in the right direction.

• Nurturing collaborative relationships between Government and civil society is a slow
  and in some cases a delicate process. This sort of advance in governance is an
  essential ingredient of development, an end in itself as well as a means to getting the
  PRSP in place. It therefore merits time and care, and recognition as a substantive
  form of progress. In some contexts it should be treated as an aim to be met as part
  of – rather than as a precondition to commencing work on – the PRS.

Informing and being informed

From past experience with participation of civil society in policy processes, it is clear that
information must be viewed as a prime resource in two senses. Policy-makers need to
ensure that they are better informed about realities other than their own if they are to
design and manage effective participatory processes, and also need to complement
traditional understandings of poverty with the sort of poverty information best disclosed
through participatory research. The public and CSOs, on the other hand, need to be
well-informed about the workings of policy institutions and processes to be able to
engage with them, whether in collaborative or adversarial mode. Experiments in
applying participatory research to policy issues offer decision-makers ways to be better
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informed; advocacy NGOs’ significant experience levering access to information and spreading it through their networks, whether for advocacy purposes or to fuel participatory engagement with decision-makers, is both a strength for civil society as it seeks to engage with future policy processes, and a resource from which for facilitators and participants in future processes can learn.

- Governments need to be well-informed about poverty and the poor, which means that they need the sort of information generated through participatory research as well as that from household surveys. Extensive experience with participatory research on poverty, and for policy purposes, now exists to demonstrate the power of such approaches to disclose hitherto unaddressed dimensions of poverty, and causal relations between people’s social, geographic and economic circumstances, their poverty, and government policies.

- A well-designed Participatory Poverty Assessment process can itself serve as a vehicle for sustained policy-influencing, with poverty-reducing and empowering impacts. Key ingredients for success in this regard appear to be Government ownership of, and commitment to, a PPA; and the construction of relationships between Government and civil society actors in the PPA process.

- Governments need to inform people about the PRS process. Not only does the initiation of a PRSP process need to be announced and discussed, but a channel established for ongoing communication, whereby people are kept up to date on activities, progress and opportunities to provide feedback on the PRS.

- Governments need to recognize and address information-poverty. It is one dimension of poverty; it is also a constraint on any participatory, consultative or dialogue process between Government and civil society. Addressing the need to inform people about rights, entitlements, government policies and processes will enable participatory processes to happen, as well as contributing to the greater and more distant goal of empowering and improving the lives of poor people.

- National and international NGOs have a wealth of experience in producing and sharing useable, accessible information about institutions and processes, to permit meaningful participation by non-experts and concerned citizens. This expertise could well be drawn on by governments needing to establish greater transparency and mutual understanding with civil society and the public at large, to enable participatory PRS processes to happen.

Influencing policy through participatory processes

There are a range of strategies for influencing policy using participatory processes. Who participates and how will vary according to strategy and to context. At one end of the spectrum, the contemporary PPA represents a collaborative relationship between government, civil society and probably other partners (donors, media, the local or national research community) in a research process wherein research findings and additional outcomes can transform decision-makers’ attitudes and practices, and policies themselves. At the far end, in NGO campaigning against national or international policy the voices of grassroots actors are gathered or amplified by their representatives, to
change policy positions by contradicting or challenging policy-makers, or enlightening them by exposing them to unfamiliar perspectives and bringing them face to face with the people their policies affect. In each case, as well as the concrete outputs - in terms of a revised law or a changed policy framework - in the course of the engagement attitudes are transformed, relationships undergo changes, new spaces are created for continued and constructive interaction between policy-makers and the public.

- A good PPA process is worth far more than the qualitative information it can generate, as clearly shown by past PPA experience. Extracting the full potential from a PPA process means designing it with due attention to the objective of policy and attitude transformation; implementing it without haste and with care to maximize learning opportunities and fruitful linkages between people and between processes; and monitoring its impacts on policy direction and effectiveness.

- Where PPAs have been undertaken already, follow-up investigation into their impact in researched communities would shed light on what stops communities from implementing their own solutions to poverty and related problems.

- Civil society in almost every country harbors some experience of participatory processes for policy change which will be a resource for Government and other actors to draw on in preparing and undertaking a participatory PRS process. Where these experiences are little known or have taken place at local rather than macro level, international and national NGOs may be able to assist Government in identifying the relevant people and processes – a step which in some contexts will constitute an important advance in Government-civil society collaboration. The search must go wider than documentation, since most of such experience is not documented.

- While weak rapport or hostile relations between Government and civil society in some countries need to be addressed in the course of developing a participatory PRS, they also enjoin realism in planning the process. In some contexts a PPA-style exercise would achieve little beyond its merely informational function because the preconditions for significant policy impact do not obtain.

- In such cases, civil society lobbying government for a more inclusive attitude to the PRS process may be the maximum form of policy influencing which can be hoped for in the short term, and should be duly supported by external actors promoting a participatory approach.

**Accounting to the poor**

A number of approaches have been tried and tested for making governments and service providers accountable to the poor. The various strengths of these approaches make them suitable for use at different stages and in different arenas of participatory policy work. Examples of participatory budgeting illustrate how research and advocacy – on various dimensions of poverty, or the conditions of one particular population group - conducted by civil society at local, regional and national levels can be fed upwards to the
national level and incorporated there. They also offer insights on how to draw in citizens at the local level, even into a government-led process. The on-going nature of the strategies highlighted here permits continued assessment and feedback as to how far government strategy is being fulfilled and is meeting both its own objectives and people’s needs. Experiences at the more local level suggest methods of instituting accountability mechanisms at the grassroots, which can eventually operate independently of their NGO mobilizers and trainers.

- Experiences to date in participatory mechanisms for accountability demonstrate the mutual advantage to government and civil society of working collaboratively to enhance the relevance and performance of policies and services. Parties involved in PRS processes might aspire to the same mutually advantageous cooperative approaches.

- Spanning from local to national level, the experience to date offer models for poverty-sensitive budget formulation and civil society acting as watchdog in budgetary processes. Both the analytical role and the watchdog role (both retrospective and ongoing) adopted by citizens’ groups could constitute important contributions of civil society to the PRS process, in sharpening the focus on poor and otherwise marginalized people, and in ensuring that debt relief is used efficiently, transparently and for the purpose for which it is intended.

- For monitoring service provision, while the report card approach has some limitations it is a minimal and efficient way to hold service providers to agreed minimum performance standards.

- Citizens will need their capacity built in analysis of budgets and service provision to help inform the PRS at formulation stage. The capacity-building carried out as an integral and essential part of several of the initiatives reviewed offers models for the PRS formulation process: manuals, training workshops bringing together a mixture of actors from different areas of civil society and government, semi-permanent ‘learning teams’ initially under the tutelage of NGOs with advocacy expertise.

- For PRS implementation, the most salient lesson from the experiences reviewed is the need for citizen access to information, which has been achieved mainly through the involvement of information-brokers (parliamentarians, government officials) who are well-disposed and committed to a participatory process.

- For participatory budget or service monitoring to work, governments and service providers have to be receptive to the findings and feedback generated. PRSs thus need to include the establishment of agreements between citizens and government which bind the latter (both in its own right and as the regulator of service provision) to take action in response to them.

- Besides information provision to the parties directly involved, a wider information dissemination strategy is also critical to success. It raises general awareness, heightens the visibility of the issues at stake and creates a constituency for accountability-strengthening measures. Examples the PRS could draw on include large public meetings, the use of the press, and the publication of materials on the process in simplified language.
Government is accountable to both citizens and donors for delivering on the PRS. To avoid undermining efforts by southern governments and civil society to establish and operate their own systems and cultures of accountability, donors need to ‘hand over’ both responsibility for and ownership of accountability, and redirect their efforts to supporting capacity-building and information dissemination of the types mentioned above.

**Ensuring quality in participation**

For the purposes of ensuring high-quality, participatory PRS processes, what is needed is a common understanding, shared by donors, governments and civil society, of what constitutes an acceptably participatory process. The examples reviewed suggest that it is possible to develop basic principles to apply to PRS processes in general, which can be further elaborated and expanded as fitting in each country context.

- The task of developing basic general principles should be undertaken by a mixed and global group of representatives from governments, the non-governmental sector and donor agencies, with expertise in participatory approaches and in upholding quality standards;¹

- The specific elaboration of the principles to individual country contexts, if required, should be done at country level by government and civil society, and will no doubt shed light on areas of practice, principles or procedure where enhanced capacity is required.

- Given the restrictions on the role of donors in PRSs which is implied by the framework’s strong focus on country ownership, it would be appropriate if donors concentrated their efforts to support the PRS process on responding to capacity-building needs identified in-country.

¹ It is hoped that this task can be attempted at the forthcoming workshop at IDS on ‘Designing participatory processes for formulation and monitoring of poverty reduction strategies’, 22-23 February 2000.
Section 1    Introduction

1.1    Aims and scope

This synthesis aims to assist development actors engaging in the PRSP process. By providing synthesized lessons and guidance, it aims to assist Southern governments responsible for leading PRSP processes, and civil society organizations (CSOs) wishing to engage with governments in formulating, implementing and monitoring these. By presenting relevant lessons and ideas to bilateral and multilateral donor agencies, civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) both in the North and in country offices, it aims to help these play a supporting role as their Southern partners engage in national PRSP processes.

The materials we have drawn on are both primary and secondary, from a range of sources. Documentation from NGOs was drawn on for information on NGO-led activities and analysis of policies and performance of other actors (official agencies or governments) in respect of participatory approaches. Academic literature was consulted, particularly research reports documenting the policies and performance of governments and official agencies, or initiatives by civil society actors. World Bank literature providing background on Bank interaction with civil society was reviewed in the course of analyzing civil society actors’ perspectives on this.

The World Bank has embarked on its own internal exercise of reviewing and drawing lessons from World Bank experience of civil society participation in the policy arena (Tikare & Shah, Participation Thematic Team, forthcoming). We seek to supplement this exercise by focusing principally on experiences beyond the Bank, involving civil society working with governments, with or without donor presence. We also seek to complement it by offering an alternative view on some of the same experience: the perspectives of non-Bank actors on Bank-related participatory processes. While the Bank’s efforts are generating largely technical products, we aim to bring out in this review the principles which must underpin participatory approaches in the policy context, and apply them to the case of the PRSP.

1.2    Structure of the synthesis

The synthesis is organized around six main sections. Their themes took shape in the course of the review of all available relevant documentation. Apart from section 2, each represents an area of experience. They are not mutually exclusive but are all interlinked to some extent, and are all necessary elements in the formulation, implementation or monitoring of a participatory poverty reduction strategy.

Section 2 maps out the process of a national Poverty Reduction Strategy and identifies the entry-points for participation at its various stages.

Section 3 identifies some of the tensions and dilemmas which arise in attempts to foster country ownership of, and through, participatory processes.

Section 4 presents experience to date in relation to information-sharing and transparency for effective participation, and to the participatory generation of information for policy.
Section 5 focuses on influencing policy through the participatory process itself, as opposed to the outputs of the process.

Section 6 discusses a range of approaches to increasing the accountability of government and service providers to poor people.

Section 7 is about the quality and integrity of participatory practice.

From each area of experience, a series of implications for the PRSP process are distilled and presented at the end of the respective section. An Executive Summary at the front brings together the main messages and implications for the different actors in the PRSP process; and a list of References at the back provides full details of all material reviewed.

1.3 Background and objectives

The World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) recently endorsed the preparation and implementation of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) by borrower countries seeking to benefit from the enhanced HIPC (Highly Indebted Poor Countries) Initiative.

“This enhanced framework for poverty reduction […] seeks to ensure a ‘robust link between debt relief and poverty reduction by making HIPC debt relief an integral part of broader efforts to implement outcome-oriented poverty reduction strategies using all available resources’ (World Bank website, 22 September 1999).

The framework is to be developed in the form of a poverty reduction strategy drawn up by government in cooperation with other actors. The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, once approved by World Bank and IMF, provides the basis for the tripartite agreement between these and the government. The PRSP model, although originally conceived of in the context of the HIPC debt relief initiative, is now envisaged as the center-piece for policy dialogue in all countries receiving concessional lending flows from the World Bank and IMF. The IMF’s facility for poor countries (formerly known as the Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility) has been re-named the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility. The PRSP is to replace the ‘Policy Framework Paper’ as the over-arching document which outlines the policy directions and resource allocation frameworks for IMF and Bank lending in countries eligible for concessional assistance. The PRS is envisaged as covering a three year time frame.

For poverty reduction strategies to be implemented in a sustained and effective manner they need to be nationally owned, as opposed to being donor-driven. ‘Country ownership of a poverty reduction strategy is paramount’ (IMF website, 10 December 1999). ‘Country’ ownership refers not only to Government but spans a wide cross-section of non-government actors. The process of preparing and implementing PRSPs, and monitoring their implementation, thus needs to be participatory – a point on which international financial institutions and participation advocates in government and non-governmental sectors agree.
The purpose of this paper is to review the experience in applying participatory approaches to processes of policy formulation at the macro level, with a view to informing the evolution of guidance and approaches at the country level to facilitating broad based involvement in the PRS process. The consultants were asked to focus on experiences led by development actors other than the World Bank, in order to complement the reviews of experience taking place within the Bank. The paper is intended for a broad audience of actors engaged with PRSs at the country level – including the full range of potential actors in civil society and government, and donor agency staff.

In some countries there is ample experience in consulting with civil society representatives, incorporating their views into policy formulation, seeking feedback from them for monitoring purposes, or giving them more substantial roles in policy processes. In others there is very little. Ensuring that Poverty Reduction Strategies are produced through high-quality participatory processes, involving representatives of civil society in their implementation and monitoring, poses a challenge for the development community at large, North and South, official and non-governmental.

This synthesis of experience with participatory approaches for formulating, implementing and monitoring policy processes is a contribution to meeting that challenge. The World Bank and IMF, as the main architects of the PRSP concept, are currently rising to the challenge in their own ways, elaborating guidelines and building capacity among their staff. The non-governmental sector is also actively seeking ways to engage with the PRS process, both at the level of global policy advocacy and on the ground in Southern countries.

In the PRSP model the government is the principal agent, expected to activate the process, take the lead in designing and implementing the strategy, and be accountable to the population and to donors for delivering on commitments made therein. Government is also expected to engage with representatives of civil society at each stage of the process, so that the formulation stage is informed by each sector’s priorities, implementation is made sustainable by the population’s stake in it, and accountability is enhanced through progress monitoring by civil society actors. As a mainstream instrument of government policy the PRS will need to be led by the country’s formal political leadership – without their commitment to its effectiveness and formal approval of its content it is unlikely to achieve its potential impact.

While the PRSP refers to the formal document presented to the boards of the IFIs for endorsement, at times in this document we will refer to the country’s own process as the PRS (poverty reduction strategy). This is in recognition that the formulation of a coherent country approach to poverty reduction did not necessarily start with the recent changes in Washington. A PRS has the capacity to focus a country’s efforts on the reduction of poverty through numerous means, including the following:

- Establishing effective linkages between the targets and priorities set by the participatory process and the public resources allocated to support them

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2 “Civil society organizations [...] are business and non-governmental organizations [...]. They include academic and technical bodies, research initiatives, professional association, business associations, religious bodies, labour unions, farmers’ organizations, cooperatives, women’s organizations, environmental protection organizations, minority rights organizations, and rural development organizations. Citizens, not government officials, manage CSOs” (development Bank Watchers’ project 1998: 3). For a discussion of the general role of civil society in development, see Clark 1991; Hulme & Edwards 1997.
• Establishing a comprehensive approach across government, leading to the mainstreaming of poverty reduction priorities throughout public service
• Fostering common action between civil society actors committed to working to reduce poverty and public agencies
• Enhancing the understanding of the causes and distribution of poverty and thereby strengthening collective approaches to tackling the key issues
• Strengthening government accountability through elaboration of standards of service and entitlement which poor people can legitimately claim from public agencies.

Development NGOs\(^3\) have long voiced commitment to participatory approaches and have sought ways to apply them, with varying degrees of success (see, for example, ACORD 1991; Clark 1991; Nelson & Wright 1996; White 1996; Hulme & Edwards 1997). When participatory approaches were adopted initially, the project framework was the dominant mode of development activity, so the focus was on promoting stakeholder participation in projects. Lately, policy advocacy has assumed increasing importance for NGOs in North and South, and the principles and techniques of participation are being tested in this new area of activity. Donor agencies too have recognized the importance of participation in development. In some the participatory agenda is still in its infancy (the IMF and multilateral development banks – see Scholte 1999; Tussie 1999). In others significant strides have been taken to mainstream participation policies and practices throughout their operations, and in some cases in their analytical and policy work (Aycrigg 1998; INTRAC 1998; Forster 1998; LaVoy 1998). It is no doubt partly an indication of the success of participation mainstreaming efforts in the World Bank that country ownership and participation feature so centrally in the PRSP model.

A further indication of success is the abundance of experiences and lessons which can now be drawn on to help make PRSP processes participatory, as this synthesis shows. Relevant experiences of fostering participation in policy processes are found mainly in national and international NGOs and official donor agencies. There are also experiences to be found in developing country government institutions, albeit to a much lesser extent. This is on the one hand encouraging, given the lead role governments will take in PRSP processes. On the other hand, the paucity of government experience in promoting and facilitating participation in policy processes calls for rapid action to enhance their knowledge and capacity, if the potential for broad-based, national ownership of PRSPs, and for participation by civil society in their development and implementation, is to be realized.

\(^3\) Development NGOs are a sub-set of civil society organizations.
[INSERT DIAGRAM SHOWING TYPES OF P-IN-POLICY EXPERIENCES REVIEWED, AND MAIN ‘OWNERS’ OF THESE PROCESSES]
Section 2 Participation in the PRS process

The following section examines the PRS process and the various contributions that different forms of participation can make at different stages. The purpose of this section is to identify possibilities for action by different actors at different points. In doing so a basic description of process stages is offered to help map out these possibilities. This should not be seen as a country process ‘blueprint’ for a PRSP to be inflexibly applied. In countries where a government led poverty strategy has been developed with considerable levels of dialogue and consultation, it would not make sense for donor agencies to promote the development of a new strategy.

2.1 The basic PRS cycle

Initially a basic ‘cycle’ can be identified involving the generic stages of formulation, implementation and evaluation.

Based on the outline below, the PRS cycle can be further elaborated. The formulation stage is likely to have three components: preparatory analytical work, the formulation of the formal PRS text and content, and the process of approval and legitimization of the strategy. The fuller outline of the cycle is therefore as shown in Box X:
Box X:

The basic PRS cycle

During PRS formulation participatory practice can contribute to the process through:

- **Informing policy makers of local realities**: how poor people perceive the causes of poverty; what are their priorities for public action; which institutions do they see as effective. The standard means for this are research exercises using participatory methods. *These have a number of characteristics.* 1) _Intermediary actors participate in the exercise (research institutes, NGOs, service ministry and local government staff)_ – arguably the creation of relationships around the policy process is the most significant innovation. 2) _The exercise is by its nature one of consultation_ – _and the research team are of necessity obliged to select participants to provide a representative picture of livelihood conditions of the poor._

- **Joint formulation of the poverty reduction strategy itself** or the analyses of poverty, institutions or budgets which precede it. Joint formulation implies some right to negotiate about the content of the strategy. Stronger actors can determine the content. The ultimate sanction available to weaker actors would be simply the withdrawal of their own stamp of legitimacy from the process. _Joint formulation of the PRS is likely to involve government technocrats, intermediary actors in civil society representing groups from among the poor, independent analysts._

- **Formal approval and review** of the PRS by legitimate democratic political processes. *The approval function should be vested in political representatives._

On an ongoing basis during the PRSP implementation phase, participatory approaches have potential application throughout the full range of related public action, applied to areas such as the following:

- **Negotiating roles, responsibilities and entitlements at the local level**: these must iterate with consideration of the overall structures of development and government. However, if communication does not in the end lead to a position where people in poor communities are clear about what they can and cannot expect from public agencies, then it does not provide a framework for empowerment – the situation where claims can be made against expectations.

- **Monitoring the effectiveness of policy measures to contribute to policy change**: *Use of participatory approaches implies testing the implementation of policy goals against the level of change experiences by local level actors._

- **Direct involvement of citizens in formulating policy and budgets** at the local level, and monitoring the effectiveness of services.

In addition to ongoing monitoring, feedback and application of lessons to public policy during the implementation of the PRS, there may also be a retrospective attempt to synthesise lessons with a view to developing future policy. During evaluation of the PRS experience participatory approaches can contribute through:

- **Gathering perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the PRS experience from actors at multiple levels** (*community, street-level bureaucrats, local government actors, civil society, politicians, central government technocrats*) Contributing to the assessment of the impact of policy change by feeding in the perceptions of local level actors.
Stages of the PRS cycle

1. **Analytical/diagnostic work to prepare for PRS formulation:** firstly, on the nature of poverty (incidence, causes etc.); secondly, institutional and budget analyses to contribute to identifying strategies and setting priorities (with options for participatory processes in areas such as: consultative exercises in participatory research at community level; actors in civil society participating in analytical and research processes).

2. **PRS formulation (options for joint formulation with civil society specialists and advocates):** donor participation likely - not necessarily desirable - at this point there may be little option for direct participation from community level actors.

3. **PRS approval:** through formal political system. Donor agencies will need their boards to approve related programmes, but this does not need to proceed ‘in step’ with the country process.

4. **PRS implementation:** different actors participate according to agreed roles, responsibilities, extensive civil society participation in implementation and monitoring of the outcomes of the PRS.

5. **Impact assessment/evaluation:** extensive consultation in determining effectiveness and outcomes of PRS measures.

These stages imply a functional progression, rather than a simple set of stages carried out in series. The availability of findings from participatory research to feed into updating a PRS, for example, will be dependent on ongoing exercises being planned for and fed into the planning process (such as is happening in the UPPAP in Uganda).

### 2.2 What sort of participation is possible?

The nature of participation of different groups in the PRS process is likely to vary considerably. Box X below shows a typology of forms of participation, each implying different levels of authority, control and influence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Typology of forms of participation in PRS process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Formal approval:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This implies a low level of creative input in the development of the PRS but a high level of authority.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Joint formulation:**                              |
| This applies to the development of analysis, assessment (including evaluation) and strategy. Within this category different actors have different levels of centrality and control. The operation of this is not always transparent and vested in formal positions in the process. In a process where country actors have all the formal authority, staff from donor agencies may be effectively in a position to determine the dominant style of analysis and language, if the country’s objectives are heavily geared to obtaining donor resources. |

| **Shared responsibility:**                           |
| This applies to the implementation phase of the PRS, where roles, rights and responsibilities are complex, multi-faceted and may be subject to continual negotiation. |

| **Consultation:**                                    |
| This applies to development of analysis and strategy. The boundaries between joint formulation and consultation in these processes are ‘fuzzy’ rather than absolute. Consultation implies no commitment to incorporate conflicting views and perspectives into the final ‘product’. |

| **Information sharing:**                             |
| Applies at all points of the PRS process – and implies a broader process than disseminating the headlines of policy formulation. Enhancing public understanding of policy and budget formulation processes is critical to this. |
2.3 Who can take part, how, at which stage?

Table X then outlines the different actors in a national PRS process and the form of participation which they might achieve at different stages (1-5, as in Box X above) in the process.

Table X: Matrix of actors in the PRS process and their potential roles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actors in PRSP process:</th>
<th>Central govt</th>
<th>Local level govt. personnel</th>
<th>Civil society advocates/representatives for poor people</th>
<th>Civil society analysts – Academics etc</th>
<th>Politicians</th>
<th>People in poor communities or excluded social groups</th>
<th>Media</th>
<th>Donors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formal Approval/Veto</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Stage 3</td>
<td>A PRS linked into govt. planning and budget cycles requires political legitimacy</td>
<td>Stage 3</td>
<td>(donor programmes related to PRS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint formulation</td>
<td>Stage 1, 2, 5</td>
<td>Option for 1,2,5</td>
<td>Option for 1,2,5</td>
<td>Option for 1,2,5</td>
<td>Lead role</td>
<td>Option for 1,2,5</td>
<td>Likely role at 1,2,5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared responsibility</td>
<td>Stage 4, Lead role</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selective consultation</td>
<td>Stage 1, 2, 5</td>
<td>Stage 1, 2, 5</td>
<td>Stage 1, 2, 5</td>
<td></td>
<td>Stage 1, 2, 5</td>
<td>Stage 1, 2, 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information sharing</td>
<td>Over-arching responsibility at all points in process</td>
<td>Stage 1-5</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>1-5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above matrix implies that management and leadership are needed in the PRS process. These functions would normally be in the hands of officials from central government agencies. Within the categories of actors outlined above, processes of selection are likely to take place at all points. These will be necessary for a variety of reasons. Many civil society organizations have no particular brief to promote the interests of poor or excluded groups in the formulation of national policy. NGOs, membership associations and advocacy groups will need to be selected according to criteria. At best, it can be hoped that the governance of the PRS process will make transparent the nature of the judgements made, the criteria that were behind them, and allow for open challenge and debate on these issues. The rationale for involvement of different groups will vary but may include the following:
• Building broad legitimacy for the PRS
• Engaging partners whose active support will be necessary for PRS implementation
• Ensuring a full range of appropriate skills and understandings are brought together in preparing the PRS
• Improving the quality of understanding of deprivation, its causes, and the effectiveness of policy options in addressing key issues.

The discussions of the PRS process and planning cycle above have clear echoes of the ‘project cycle’. Underlying this approach are a series of assumptions about the process which could be seen as disturbingly technocratic in character. Some key questions could be asked:
• Will central government staff regulate the process fairly – including the interests of all key groups among the poor?
• How will conflicts and differences of views, priorities and perspectives be mediated and resolved in developing the PRS?
• Will the underlying objective of obtaining resources from donors influence the analysis and process – leading to a tendency to adopt priorities which are in line with orthodoxy in the donor community?

It is difficult to see any answer to these questions, apart from affirming that the formal political system of the country concerned has to provide legitimacy and leadership in these areas. Capacity in the field of governance is therefore critical to an effective PRS process. Donor agencies need to strengthen their own understanding of this area in order to ensure that the effects of their interventions in the process strengthen, rather than undermine, government accountability to domestic constituencies. Within this broad field, however, it may be productive for donors to engage to enhance the capacity of poor and excluded groups to influence public policy and make claims on services. Donor agencies have a legitimate interest in promoting the goal of poverty reduction where this is fundamental to accountability to their own constituencies. They also need to be sensitive to the fact that public policy in partner countries has obligations to the non-poor as well as the poor.
Section 3 Paradoxes of ownership

How far can past participatory experience in various kinds of policy process be transferred to inform future practice in the new and different context of the PRS? The experience reviewed here is rich and diverse. It is also all we have to go on in terms of experience with participatory approaches to policy at this point. Much of it comes from initiatives to formulate donor assistance strategies with the involvement of country governments and civil society; donor-funded participatory poverty assessment exercises; or NGO engagement with multilateral donors over governance issues and development priorities.

The PRS process differs from these in a way which is fundamentally important to efforts to promote participation. More than any other development partnership framework so far – more than the Comprehensive Development Framework, much more than the Country Assistance Strategy -, it is to be owned by the country. This presents a series of paradoxes for external actors like donors and technical advisors, who aim to support the PRS process.

3.1 Country ownership of a Washington concept

The PRSP model was conceived by the multilaterals - albeit with significant inputs from civil society organizations (Christian Aid 1998a; Foster & Norton 1999; International Monetary Fund & International Development Association 1999; International Monetary Fund 1999a, 1999b; Lockwood 1999; Tumutegeyerize 1999; UNDP/Bureau for Development Policy 1998), yet intended to be owned by borrower countries. Something similar happened with the Comprehensive Development Framework (CDF) in which countries are meant to be ‘in the driver’s seat and set the course’ (James Wolfensohn, cited in Wood 1999c). The fact that while the CDF was still being piloted the multilaterals conceived of yet another new overarching framework for development has generated skepticism in some quarters about how sincere the multilaterals’ commitment to ownership is. An NGO critique (Wood 1999b: 6) suggests that while national ownership is desirable, national leadership is a more realistic expectation. In support of this charge, it points out that Southern governments were only brought into the preparations for the PRSP late in the process.

3.1.1 Country ownership means home-grown strategies

Country ownership of poverty reduction strategies means that there can be no ideal-type poverty reduction strategy. Uganda’s Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) (MFPED 1997) is frequently cited as a good example of a national poverty reduction strategy, and thus may be held up as a model. The process followed in developing the PEAP, undertaking the Uganda Participatory Poverty Assessment Programme (UPPAP) (see UPPAP 2000), and using these to fundamentally re-orient the course of planning and budgeting in Uganda towards poverty reduction objectives, reflects strong national ownership and ongoing learning by government and donors about how best to incorporate participation and consultation, as described below:
The MFPED [Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development] circulated a draft of the PEAP in November 1996 in the hope of eliciting opinion through extensive national debate and consultation with district authorities, line ministries, NGOs, academics, and donors. This process, leading to the production of the final draft a year later, not only engendered consensus in the development community over national poverty eradication goals, but helped to build a sense of ownership and commitment to poverty eradication policy across government ministries. Late in the process, however, the MFPED personnel responsible for the PEAP realized that the consultative process had been exclusively Kampala- and elite-based. In mid-1997, MFPED staff participating in a World Bank Country Assistance Strategy mission to Soroti and Kabale found that the PEAP priorities were not necessarily shared by the communities they consulted. Recognition of the importance of understanding local variations in poverty has prompted an exercise in participatory poverty assessment. The PEAP will be continuously revised in the light of findings from the UPPAP” (Goetz & Jenkins 1999: 13).

Thus, ownership was initially created among key figures influential in politics and institutional processes, and later extended to the public at large, both as electorate and as the main beneficiaries of poverty reduction policies and programmes. Subsequently, as noted in Section 5, findings from the Uganda PPA, and the capacity building and attitude changes which resulted from bringing key actors into the process, have generated still wider ownership of the poverty reduction objective throughout the Ugandan public sector.

Without detracting from the PEAP’s many merits, it should be noted, firstly, that this Government-led plan takes precisely the over-arching, poverty-mainstreaming form envisaged for the PRS, and secondly, that the PEAP strategy itself reflects current poverty orthodoxy. There are countries which have made significant progress in reducing poverty without ever having developed this sort of overarching, mainstreamed, national poverty reduction strategy. Vietnam is a case in point:

“Although there has been quite a lot of poverty analysis in Vietnam over the past five years, work on a common national poverty reduction strategy is very recent. During the last year an intensive process of poverty analysis was begun in Vietnam. During the next year(s) this will be taken forward to develop concrete anti-poverty programmes and pro-poor policy recommendations for specific sectors. […] we are only at the beginning of this process […] International development aid in Vietnam is a fairly recent phenomenon, with INGOs\(^4\) having arrived about ten years ago and the World Bank opening an office only in 1994” (Joachim Theis, Save the Children Fund Vietnam, pers. comm).

Nonetheless, even in the absence of such an overarching national strategy and strong donor presence, substantial poverty reduction has been achieved already. Far-reaching land reform implemented by Government through the 1970s and 80s resulted in a very evenly-distributed asset base by the 1990s, when selective market reforms (the ‘Doi moi’)

\(^4\) International non-governmental organizations
were conceived and introduced by Government, with strong impact on poverty (Government of Vietnam et al 1999)

The case of Vietnam shows that an over-arching strategy aiming explicitly at poverty reduction, developed by government with support from donors, along PRS lines, is not the only viable policy approach to poverty reduction. The contrast between Uganda and Vietnam suggests that a pluralist concept of the PRS is vital if the stress on ownership is not to prove merely rhetorical. An interesting test will be which criterion prevails – degree of country ownership or degree of policy orthodoxy - when countries produce nationally-owned strategies which, unlike the PEAP, do not incorporate all the elements of the poverty reduction approach favored by the international financial institutions.

There are signs that the NGO community is already deeply wary about the depth of commitment to country ownership of the PRSP. Signaling the danger that the ‘enhanced donor coordination’ envisaged under the PRSP model actually means a convergence of the agendas of Bank, IMF and World Trade Organization, the NGO Working Group on the World Bank noted at a recent meeting:

“[...] it is not clear how borrowing countries will be able to stick to their national development plans if these differ from the priorities of the three heavy-weight institutions. The data on poverty and poverty reduction affirm that inclusive and context-specific strategies are necessary in order to combat poverty effectively. Thus, as the multi-dimensional aspects of poverty are being better understood, poverty reduction strategies are under threat to fall prey to unidimensional macroeconomic prescriptions” (NGO Working Group 1999).

3.1.2 Limits to the lessons from participatory CASs

Much of the World Bank's experience in promoting participation in policy work (as distinct from projects) has been with Country Assistance Strategies (CASs)\(^5\). Partly in response to in-country and international pressure groups, ‘since 1996, a great deal of effort has gone into giving ownership of the CAS to both the government and the people of the client country’, a recent Bank review claims (Tikare & Shah 1999: 1). The main objective of participation in the CAS, according to the same review, is ‘to obtain information from diverse sources and to consider a wide range of perspectives from various sectors of civil society, or stakeholders, in the formulation of the CAS’ (p.1). In the light of this, ‘giving ownership’ seems an exaggerated claim: it is perhaps more accurate to describe participatory CASs as an attempt by the Bank - the owner - to enhance the relevance and effectiveness of the CAS while also generating a sense of shared ownership among interested parties in country governments and civil society. It is incumbent on all parties involved to ensure that the same does not transpire for the PRSP.

In the same review (Tikare & Shah 1999), country ownership – taken to mean a broad ownership shared by all sectors of society – is considered a vital ingredient for participatory CASs. Tools for promoting it are proposed (p. 9), but the sensitivities of attaining it are not underestimated:

\(^5\) CASs are World Bank documents which set out the Bank’s strategy for its operations in a given country.
“If the participatory process is to succeed, [...] the government’s full support [is needed]. This is not easily achieved in cases where the government perceives that it is being coerced into ‘participating’ [...] Because ‘triggers’ for disbursement are designed to limit lending if their conditions are not met, it is in the government’s best interests to do everything necessary to gain influence over setting the triggers” (ibid: 10).

While the review recommends basing the CAS draft on ‘the government’s domestic poverty alleviation plan’ (p.10), it cannot be assumed that the government will have one. Indeed, one of the hardest challenges facing governments in that many do not, and that in some countries the PRS process has to start from a low level of national priority or awareness about poverty reduction. Where this is the case, broad national commitment is enhanced by adopting measures and approaches which bring government and non-governmental actors face to face, better to understand each other’s contexts and priorities; and also by ensuring that the participatory process in question is well-integrated with existing decision-making cycles and structures, including parliamentary and budgetary processes (p.11).

3.2 What role for donors?

Conceding ownership to borrower countries implies conceding control over the PRS, yet the donors have legitimate concerns relating to use of debt relief funds, state responsiveness to poverty issues and accountability to citizens, which lead them to attempt to influence the process. That the PRS is a government framework, not a donors’ framework, makes donors’ supportive role more complex than merely sharing ownership of country assistance strategies which essentially belong to their funders. Ultimately it is governments who will be accountable to both their populations and donors for delivering on PRSP commitments.

3.2.1 An enabling role

In the PRSP preparation process governments will ostensibly take the lead on choosing whom they consult, deciding on which areas to seek advice from non-government sources, and defining poverty reduction targets and monitoring indicators. However, the issuing of guidance by donors on how to facilitate a participatory PRS process may raise doubts as to how much latitude governments actually have. While there are inputs the World Bank and bilaterals can usefully provide as enablers, in order to avoid violating the principles of ownership, they need to refrain from assuming the role of intermediaries standing between Southern governments and their national civil society organizations (CSOs) or poor populations. In a nationally-owned, participatory PRS process, the main facilitator is the government, the main participants are national civil society actors, and the World Bank, IMF and bilateral donors are another category of participants, albeit enabling participants who can put financial and human resources at the disposal of the facilitators.

3.2.2 Institutionalizing participation in donor agencies
An overview of experience produced by IDS to assist the World Bank in mainstreaming participation in the CDF argues that for building partnership and ownership, changes in donors’ policies approaches and behavior is just as vital as changes within target countries (IDS 1999). The overview summarizes steps already followed and outstanding needs identified by four donors in reviewing their own efforts to mainstream participation (Aycrigg 1998; Forster 1998; INTRAC 1998; LaVoy 1998). The CDF’s central principles being ownership and partnership, the overview is concerned especially with how donors’ participation mainstreaming efforts can enhance country ownership of national development programming and partnership between donors, country governments and civil society. These lessons are thus relevant both to donors in attempting to play a supporting role in PRS processes, and to country governments learning how to lead them. They are reproduced in summary form in Table X.

Table X: Steps taken and needs identified by four donors for mainstreaming primary stakeholder participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘OWNERSHIP’ Participation in project cycle</th>
<th>DFID</th>
<th>GTZ</th>
<th>USAID</th>
<th>World Bank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘OWNERSHIP’ Participation in project cycle</td>
<td>More flexible use of logframe and PRA</td>
<td>More flexible use of logframe and PRA</td>
<td>‘Customer focus’</td>
<td>Need for more comprehensive and flexible project design approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human resource development</td>
<td>Secondments, job swaps, shadowing, distance learning</td>
<td>Need for wider debate on meaning of participation</td>
<td>Team learning</td>
<td>50+ Participation Forum Sessions to raise awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel continuity</td>
<td>Personnel continuity</td>
<td>Personnel continuity</td>
<td>Immersion training</td>
<td>Optimum use of communications technology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| ‘PARTNERSHIP’ Management frameworks | PCM too ‘front-loaded’ and consultant-dependent | PCM too ‘front-loaded’ and consultant-dependent | Piloting of ‘strategic objective’ approach | Country Assistance Strategies - better feedback and more systematic consultations; more integration with PPAs |
| Longer consultations with primary and secondary stakeholders | Longer consultations with primary and secondary stakeholders | Longer consultations with primary and secondary stakeholders | | |
| Types of programmes | Longer time frames | Longer time frames | Longer time frames | Longer time frames |
| Increased inter-institutional collaboration, especially between donors | Increased inter-institutional collaboration, especially between donors | Increased inter-institutional collaboration, especially between donors | Increased inter-institutional collaboration, especially between donors |
| Focus on sectoral investment programmes (SIPs) | Support for ‘enabling’ frameworks such as democratic decentralization | New Partnerships Initiative | CDF | |
The challenge for Bank staff in the context of participatory CASs is to retain a functional level of ownership of the process (Tikare & Shah 1999: 11-12). In the PRS context, the challenge for the Bank is to learn to provide optimal facilitation and support to the process without having any significant ownership of it.

### 3.3 Where there is little tradition of government-civil society engagement

Given that country ownership implies country control, the promotion of participatory approaches to the PRSP process by external actors in countries where government is not strongly committed to the participation of civil society, or to poverty reduction, requires sensitive handling.

#### 3.3.1 Fostering broad-based ownership

The major lesson about country-level ownership to be drawn from recent work on participation in aid coordination is summed up thus: ‘A central facet of the ownership debate is the need for Southern country rather than simply Southern government ownership’ (Richmond & McGee 1999: 7). Christian Aid’s report on civil society participation in aid coordination argues for the coordination of aid to be undertaken in-country, driven by country-led programming and budgeting processes rather than donor ones, and shared between government and non-government actors (ibid). It acknowledges, however, that there are complexities involved in attaining such broad-based country ownership of aid coordination.

The case of PRSs is at least as complex. With donors increasingly rewarding aid-recipients which commit themselves to poverty reduction, competition exists in some countries between governments whose pro-poor credentials and connections with poor communities are weak, and NGOs whose credentials as representatives of the poor’s interests may be more convincing. Furthermore, the concept of PRS as a vehicle for channeling debt relief into poverty reduction arises partly out of suspicions - or evidence - of impropriety and corruption among governments, often fuelled or substantiated by in-country NGOs. A watchdog function is being assumed by NGOs - in some cases foisted upon them by donors -, which may prove crucial to reducing corruption, but is likely to be detrimental in some countries to government-NGO relations and counter-productive to efforts to cultivate their shared ownership of national PRSs.

Cases can be cited where NGOs, Bank and government have collaborated in national aid programming exercises but differ in their opinions as to the success of the ‘participatory exercise’ or degree of ‘ownership’ achieved. One example is the National Dialogue and CDF pilot in Bolivia; another is the 1998 Mozambican Consultative Group meeting (Christian Aid 1999; Wood 1999c). Critical commentary on the CDF suggests that poor handling of relationships among key actors in some countries is leading to missed opportunities for improving government-civil society relations. The NGO Working Group comments:

> “While the PRSP suggests an equal space for civil society actors to participate in national poverty reduction and development processes, experience from pilot

countries implementing the Comprehensive Development Framework [...] suggests that the Bank is not serious about civil society participation. According to various NGOs, the CDF appears to be serving more as a tool for coordination among donors” (NGO Working Group 1999),

with relationships between governments and their private sectors and civil societies assuming secondary importance (Wood 1999c).

While external actors cannot forge good relations between government and civil society where they do not exist - especially not while proclaiming commitment to country ownership of the process - they can at least avoid hindering the development of relationships. Each country context needs to be read carefully, and behavior and approaches developed accordingly. In some cases this might entail refraining from mediating between government and civil society and allowing them to come together without donor tutelage. In others it might mean engaging directly with civil society; in others it might mean opening up spaces for interaction between civil society and government.

3.4 Summary and implications for PRS process

In summary, efforts are needed to ensure broad-based country ownership of PRSs. Ownership, like empowerment, cannot be given. Donors can help to create and maintain conditions conducive to national ownership, including the necessary revisions of their own policies and practices, and a flexible interpretation of the PRSP model according to country circumstances. Governments and civil society need to assume the new roles and responsibilities country ownership implies.

- Country ownership implies country accountability for the PRS. This needs to be based on legitimate political structures in-country.

- The PRSP model is being applied to a range of countries with widely variant attitudes, histories, institutional arrangements and policy approaches in respect of both poverty reduction and public participation. This diversity implies that no ‘blueprint for a PRSP’ can be devised, but that each national PRS must start where the country is at, in terms of poverty reduction strategy, participatory experience, and capacity and legitimacy of civil society. No single model can be considered ‘best practice’ to be followed by all: such replication is neither possible nor desirable for all countries.

- Country diversity implies, at one end of the spectrum, fostering innovative and challenging initiatives in countries already at the cutting edge of participatory practice; and at the other, accepting that the opening up of spaces for public information and consultation on poverty policy issues, for countries with no tradition of this, constitutes significant progress in the right direction.

- Nurturing collaborative relationships between Government and civil society is a slow and in some cases a delicate process. This sort of advance in governance is an essential ingredient of development, an end in itself as well as a means to getting the PRSP in place. It therefore merits time and care, and recognition as a substantive
form of progress. In some contexts it should be treated as an aim to be met as part of – rather than as a precondition to commencing work on – the PRS.
Section 4  Informing and being informed

This section presents experience to date in relation to information-sharing and transparency for effective participation, and to the participatory generation of information for policy. It reveals the role of ‘upwards’ information flows, from the poor to state institutions, in providing accurate pictures of poverty and informing policy choices as to appropriate responses; and of ‘downwards’ information flows in creating awareness about processes and entitlements and thus permitting informed participation by the public.

“Poor people have a long-overlooked capacity to contribute to the analysis of poverty – and without their insights we know only part of the reality of poverty, its causes, and the survival strategies of the poor” (Robb 1999: xii, on Participatory Poverty Assessments)

“Armed with […] understanding people can become more knowledgeable about their rights, confident in asserting them when they are not being realized, and able to find the appropriate channels […] through which to claim what they are entitled to receive” (Pigou et al 1998:4, reporting people’s perceptions of the South African Bill of Rights).

“[…] the sharing of information is key to any consultative exercise” (Clark & Dorschel 1998: 1, on World Bank CASs)

The three citations above are all about information. The first is about the generation of information at the level of poor communities, to feed into national-level poverty reduction policy and make it better informed. The second and third are about the provision of information to prospective ‘participants’ in democratic and consultative processes to enable them to participate in a meaningful way. Experience shows that several kinds of information flow – ‘upwards’ and ‘downwards’, as well as ‘horizontal’, among networks and alliances - are essential in participatory policy processes for poverty reduction. This section synthesizes learning to date.

4.1  Upward information flows: from people to policy-makers

In the context of the PRS, policy-makers’ need for a supply of good poverty information is self-evident. Information about the extent and depth of poverty among a population; the regions, demographic or occupational groups most affected by it; and the nature of their privations, is a vital input in the design of appropriate policy responses. Furthermore, periodic updating of this information – poverty monitoring - is required if poverty reduction strategies are to be relevant and effective over the medium and long term6.

6 Monitoring is also needed if government is to be accountable for delivering on its poverty reduction commitments. See Section 6 on accountability.
4.1.1 The contribution of Participatory Poverty Assessments

Much has been written since the early 1990s on the scope offered by participatory research for informing anti-poverty policy (Norton & Francis 1992; Norton & Stephens 1995; Booth et al 1995; Carvalho & White 1997; Holland with Blackburn 1997; Booth et al 1998; Robb 1999). This literature emerged in the wake of the first experiments in Participatory Poverty Assessments (PPAs). As participatory approaches to poverty assessment and policy research have spread both in latitude – to many countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America – and in size and scope, their legitimacy has grown. From the start, two distinct but compatible cases have been made for them: one stressing the benefits of participatory poverty research in terms of more and better information, the other stressing the right of the poor to participate in defining and analysing the phenomenon and processes of poverty as these affect them. More recently, as PPAs come of age, a third case – also compatible - has developed, which stresses the opportunities inherent in the PPA process itself to open up spaces in which poor people’s perspectives can influence policy-makers’ perspectives and practices (see Section 5). Here we focus on the first case: that participatory approaches to poverty assessment can increase the breadth, quality and relevance of information at policy-makers’ disposal, thus contributing to the formulation of more effective poverty reduction strategies.

The ‘better information’ case for a participatory approach to poverty assessment was well stated in one of the first and seminal documents on the topic:

“National debates on poverty tend to be conducted in terms of material deprivation as measured by income, consumption of expenditure. Such measures have the advantage of enabling comparison between individuals or households, and are the basis of much description, analysis and policy prescription about poverty and its relation to national development. However, they are also subject to well-known limitations. It is difficult, for example, with such methods to capture the complex distributional aspects of poverty, or to be certain of having defined the appropriate social unit or units of consumption […].

“Anthropological studies of poverty have shown that people’s own conceptions of disadvantage often differ markedly from those of outsiders. For example, considerable value is often attached to non-economic criteria such as independence, mobility, security and self-respect. Participatory approaches to poverty assessment should be capable of identifying and exploring such local ways of perceiving well-being and livelihood security. Experience has shown that such perceptions emphasize qualitative dimensions of poverty, disadvantage and vulnerability which are poorly represented in conventional approaches to ‘measuring’ poverty” (Norton & Francis 1992: 13).

The multiple facets, complex distributional aspects and dynamic nature of poverty revealed through qualitative and participatory techniques have policy implications, in the sense that different problems require different policy responses. When poverty is seen
through the lens of participatory research, the spectrum of policies impinging on it looks far wider. Hence, while policy-makers dispose of a wider range of relevant policy measures for combatting it, they are also faced with a far more complex challenge.

PPA findings most relevant to policy-makers have been identified as the phenomenon of vulnerability, the seasonality of poverty, the isolation of rural communities, barriers blocking access to healthcare; differences in perceptions, realities and priorities between women and men; the value of safety nets in bad seasons and bad years to supplement coping strategies; and the importance to the poor of having multiple sources of food and income (IDS 1996: 3).

More recently, Robb (1999) illustrates that PPAs can disclose how particular social factors – gender, vulnerability, social exclusion on the basis of ethnicity, the prevalence of crime – shape people’s experiences of poverty and determine their priorities; and how such information can enlighten policy makers as to the most appropriate responses (p.22-23). The poor’s own explanations of the causes of poverty, and the dynamics of deprivation at levels other than the standard household unit - individual, intrahousehold, community - offer further clues as to the most effective policy correctives (ibid: 24) and permit the deployment of sharper policy instruments. Robb concludes:

“PPAs are deepening the understanding and providing a dynamic picture of poverty. For example, all of the following insights have emerged from Zambia’s PPA: child-headed households, child labor, crime, violence, and prostitution as coping strategies; increased feelings of insecurity and lack of safety as an outcome of these strategies; seasonal fluctuations in sickness, rates of work, and access to food as triggers of greater vulnerability; and the impact of these new dimensions on people’s behavior as individuals, as household members, and as part of a community” (ibid: 25).

Several retrospective assessments of PPAs have drawn out the major practical lessons for PPA practitioners about how to do good PPA research (see especially Holland & Blackburn 1997). The main factors have been summarized by Robb (1999) and are reproduced below:
Box X: Factors to consider at the community level to increase impact of the PPA

**Research teams**
- Develop trust between the research teams and communities
- Be aware of bad practice in participatory rural appraisals (PRAs). Facilitators need experience, skills in applying the tools, and the ability to hand over control.
- Training of teams takes at least two weeks to discuss the complexities of undertaking national-level policy analysis; match participatory tools with the research agenda; decide on methods of recording and reporting; create an initial framework for analysis of results; build up a team spirit; and discuss attitudes and behaviour. Experience has shown that compromising on training time leads to poor-quality research
- Teams should be aware of major policies linked to research agenda before going to the communities

**Management of research teams**
- Be aware of the difficulties in managing diverse research teams that often represent different ages, genders, and ethnic groups
- Research teams working with poor communities may experience some degree of trauma for which they are not prepared. Managers should understand that this outcome is possible. This is an emerging issue and more training is required for both field researchers and managers to find ways in which such outcomes can be better managed.

**Research process**
- Share information with communities on an ongoing basis
- Do not undermine community self-reliance
- Be aware of respondent fatigue and raising expectations. Many communities – especially those accessible from major cities – are the subject of excessive research
- Before initiating any study, review existing data and material pertaining to the area
- Identify credible, not just experienced, institutions to undertake research. Use existing NGO networks where appropriate to promote follow-up
- Allow for more flexibility in urban than in rural areas
- Link results of PPA with other institutions for follow-up
- Write clear site reports to disseminate to communities
- Recognize the limitations of the PPA. Participatory poverty research is not a methodology for empowerment

**Methodologies**
- Adapt the methodologies to the research agenda
- For greater community-level analysis and ownership, use PRA. Be aware of the dangers of rapidly scaling up PRA methods, which can undermine the quality of the research
- Avoid biases – triangulate data
- Quantify and record the number of people involved in the participatory research

**Analysis and synthesis**
- Understand the difficulties of drawing macro conclusions from micro analysis
- Present clear policy messages – do not present everything

Source: adapted from Robb 1999: 64-5

As well as improving the reliability of poverty assessment, the information generated by participatory methods can be invaluable for designing participatory poverty assessment processes which will work. One dimension of poverty which was only identified through qualitative research (initially on gender dimensions of poverty and the impacts of structural adjustment on women in particular – see Elson 1995) is time poverty, or scarcity of work and leisure time which constrains poor people in their choices as to
livelihood and other activities (Narayan et al, forthcoming; Brock 1999). This is obviously a dimension that anyone designing policies and programmes intended to benefit the poor should take into account; but as well as enriching our understanding of what poverty is, time poverty has emerged as one of the major constraints on people’s participation in projects and in policy processes. Mayoux (1995) points out that even where women’s participation is not limited by their lack of the required skills and resources, ‘participation can be time-consuming… the additional time required for meetings and decision-making takes time away from production and thus has potential costs’ (op cit: 247). Mosse (1995) notes the limitation on women’s participation imposed by the fact that ‘Organized PRAs […] require the allocation of blocks of time away from field and house […]’ (op cit: 574). Researchers on the Uganda PPA found in an urban site that neither women nor men would not attend PPA sessions unless they were paid, in compensation for the earnings they were losing meanwhile (UPPAP team, pers. comm). Payment for participants’ time is increasingly recognized as a factor in raising the quality of participation (see Section 6). Since poor people allocate time on the basis of their own cost-benefit analysis, time poverty is likely to hamper participation in policy processes more than in projects, where potential benefits to participants will often appear more tangible, visible and direct.

Other ‘intangible’ dimensions of poverty revealed by participatory research to constrain participation include gendered constraints on women’s mobility or public behaviour (Mosse 1991; Mayoux 1995; Welbourn 1991; UPPAP team, pers. comm), fear of crime deterring people from attending sessions in the evenings or far from home; cynicism bred by unsatisfactory dealings with authorities or researchers in the past (McGee 1998). Such constraints need to be understood in a given context and taken into account in the design and management of participatory policy processes, for participation to be substantial and of a high quality.

4.1.2 The Structural Adjustment Participatory Review Initiative

Important as they are as a source of richer, more informative data for poverty reduction policy, PPAs are not the only kind of research which provides this. The Structural Adjustment Participatory Review Initiative (SAPRI) is a multi-stakeholder exercise, bringing together NGO, academic and World Bank personnel, in a programme of participatory research which seeks to gather evidence directly from specific demographic groups thought to have lost out disproportionately under structural adjustment programmes, and to issue recommendations for policy change. The critiquing of World Bank policy through SAPRI is only possible and plausible because it is based on research which is participatory, amplifying the voices of those negatively affected; and because it upholds certain agreed quality standards to which the Bank as a participant in the SAPRI team must have been party.

Although documentation on the SAPRI process, institutional arrangements and problems is available, little appears to have been published so far on SAPRI findings (an exception is Bretton Woods Update, December 1999). This might be due to any or all of the problems the World Bank has identified with SAPRI: the extensive costs – in time as well as money - of such a participatory and multi-stakeholder process; tensions around leadership and ownership; and methodological disagreements over what constitutes ‘evidence’ (Aycrigg 1998).
4.1.3 Monitoring poverty and policy

PPAs offer the scope for developing ongoing monitoring systems on the basis of periodic updating of the original PPA, possibly on a smaller scale or with a focus on a particular area (e.g., the capital city), sector (e.g., agriculture), population group (e.g., the elderly, orphans in AIDS-stricken countries, pastoralists) or dimension of poverty (e.g., insecurity, governance). Since the PPA is relatively young as yet, there are few examples of countries which have instituted them on a periodic basis for monitoring purposes. One exception is Zambia, where the national NGO and academic personnel who had carried out the PPA research (as well as numerous other participatory research projects) updated the PPA findings a year after the original PPA in order to monitor the effects on the poor of a new and drastic adjustment package (Participatory Assessment Group 1995). Subsequently, participatory poverty monitoring has become institutionalized, routinely conducted in conjunction with household survey methods for a more rounded picture of poverty (Booth et al 1998: 10).

In Uganda a key objective of the PPA is to monitor not only poverty trends but policy effectiveness and relevance on a sustained basis over the coming years. This strategy is already contributing to a review and refinement of the Poverty Eradication Action Plan, in an effort to maximize its effectiveness. If the national poverty reduction strategy is well-designed, participatory mapping of trends and priorities should reveal positive impact. If the strategy misses the point or has been outdated by changes in context, the mismatch between past policy focuses and the poor’s immediate concerns should be revealed through participatory identification of priority policy areas. Although one of the UPPAP’s great strengths is the extent of government ownership and participation in it, given the number of complaints from poor people about poor governance at the local level, it is recognized that policy monitoring may be best conducted by third parties with no connection to government – local and national NGOs - if respondents’ and researchers’ biases are to be avoided.

There is increasing interest in establishing poverty monitoring systems which combine participatory exercises with traditional household surveys, allowing one set of findings to complement or supplement the other or inform the process of conducting it. Carvalho & White (1997) examine ‘the practice and the potential’ for combining the quantitative and qualitative approaches to poverty measurement and analysis, and outline three ways of doing so: ‘integrating quantitative and qualitative methodologies; examining, explaining, confirming, refuting and/or enriching information from one approach with that of the other; and merging the findings from the two approaches into one set of policy recommendations’ (op cit: 16). Booth et al (1998) evaluate the relative merits of ‘contextual’ and ‘non-contextual’ methods and explore the potential offered by methodological complementarity for enriching the poverty profile – descriptions and understandings of the nature of poverty – and advancing more substantial causal

3 “[…] we try […] to distinguish methods of data collection on a continuum from ‘contextual’ to non-contextual […]” Methods which are contextual […] are those that attempt to capture a social phenomenon within its social, economic and cultural context. This includes obviously ethnographies and PRASs, but also survey-based longitudinal studies of single villages. On the other hand, any large-scale survey […] will lie at the non-contextual end of this spectrum […]” (Booth et al 1997: 11).
explanations which can in turn generate better poverty reduction strategies. Robb (1999) proposes an iterative cycle of poverty research, in which a first PPA raises research ‘hypotheses’ or questions for exploration via a standard household survey; the survey’s results test the robustness of the PPA results and influence the research questions and site selection for a subsequent PPA; this in turn sheds light on the survey’s results and raises new questions for testing in a later survey, et cetera (op cit: 10). The conclusion reached by Carvalho and White is shared by the other analysts:

“[…] in most cases both approaches will generally be required to address different aspects of a problem and to answer questions which the other approach cannot answer as well or cannot answer at all. The need to build links between the two approaches cannot be overemphasized” (Carvalho & White 1997: 26, emphasis in original).

All these suggested combinations, as well as representing the best knowledge to date on methodological complementarity for poverty assessment, have the added advantage of observing the well-accepted principle of methodological triangulation, so central to participatory research (see Pretty 1995). This principle attaches ‘superior validity and reliability’ (Booth et al 1998: 5) to understandings of poverty which draw on data of different kinds, derived from a range of methods. Participatory research by itself derives much of its internal validity from triangulation between the various methods available; a combination of participatory with other methods is thus doubly rigorous in the sense that an approach already fortified by triangulation is then triangulated against another approach with different epistemological roots.

4.1.4 Participatory poverty research conducted outside of PPAs

Besides the participatory research conducted with the explicit purpose of informing policy, there is a further body of experience with micro-level, non-policy-oriented poverty research based on participatory methods, which complements the policy-oriented participatory poverty research in unique ways. A recent synthesis is offered in Brock (1999), which reviewed participatory work on illbeing and poverty undertaken outside of national PPAs, and was conducted as one component of the ‘Consultations with the Poor’ project10. Although the sources reviewed consist of micro-level rather than national-level analysis and were not produced for policy purposes, many of the recurrent findings are highly relevant to policy processes. Brock acknowledges from the outset the challenges of integrating such research outputs with data generated through quantitative or macro-level approaches, but notes:

“This collection of work repeatedly shows that, from the perspectives of the poor men, women and children, context-specific issues and their dynamics at the level of the household and the wider social networks in which it is embedded, are central both to the experience of poverty and to identifying and taking advantage of opportunities to leave it behind. This in itself provides a powerful argument for

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10 ‘Consultations with the Poor’ is a comparative study of poverty in 23 countries which has used participatory methods to examine poor people’s perceptions of poverty and illbeing, their priority problems, their perceptions of institutions, and their understanding of changing gender relations. The study was commissioned and managed by the World Bank, to inform the team that is writing the World Development Report 2000/1.
Thus, such micro-level research offers policy makers insights which are, firstly, relevant to the formulation and implementation of poverty reduction policy; and secondly, impossible to capture through research tools which pay less attention to micro-level social dynamics, context, and holistic analysis of problems. This second point may be illustrated with reference to the review’s focus on the ‘intangibles’ involved in ‘managing livelihoods at the household level’ (pp.33-45). This section suggests that the intangible aspects of poverty and illbeing are better disclosed in this sort of research than in either orthodox household surveys or bigger-scale PPAs; are some of them more amenable to policy solutions than others (for example, crime and violence problems respond more readily to policy measures than gender-discriminatory behaviour within the household); and, if heard, possibly represent greater challenges for policy makers than do tangible aspects of poverty. Arguably, designing policies which impinge on power relations at the community, household or intra-household level is harder than designing a project or programme which increases people’s control over tangibles alone; but may prove a more direct way to tackle poverty as described by people in these studies.

A common thread running through the findings reviewed here is the importance of institutions and their performance, the provision of information about entitlements to services and rights, and lack of equitable and affordable access to services (see also Section V below). It is a reasonable assumption that the poor’s views of institutions and service delivery as reported in micro-level, anthropological research of the kind Brock reviews, will be more frank and comprehensive than those which emerge in national PPAs (always conducted by some sort of institution, even if only an NGO) or household surveys (generally conducted by State or supra-statal institutions, eg UN agencies). In the latter cases, findings on institutions and policy are likely to be biased by poor respondents’ awareness of researchers’ institutional connections: a form of ‘courtesy bias’ (Bulmer & Warwick 1993). Findings on these issues from micro-level, non-policy oriented research are thus worthy of policy-makers’ attention11.

Brock’s conclusions point to the need to reverse the tendency for micro-level, non-policy oriented research findings to be marginalized in policy processes and the planning of poverty alleviation strategies. An additional conclusion we might draw, of particular relevance in PRS formulation, is that there are more ways of giving the poor voice in poverty diagnostics and monitoring than through district- or national-level PPAs and other large-scale participatory research studies. The identity and agency of researchers and facilitators matters in the process of seeking the poor’s voices. Even though within the participatory research tradition agency and inter-personal dynamics are the subject of analysis and their possible consequences for findings are often explored explicitly,

11 A similar case of ‘courtesy bias’ arises with research conducted by independent researchers, into a participatory process facilitated by an NGO relating to a government neighbourhood improvement scheme (Rydin & Sommers 1999). This found that people’s participation was low as a result of their own, rational cost-benefit analyses of the value of participating. Such views were not revealed readily to the NGO project itself because of its central role in promoting participation.
drawing on participatory researchers and facilitators from non-institutional, even non-NGO backgrounds, and on participatory exercises conducted at micro- as well as macro-level, may well offer access to a more full understanding of problems, and more creative and effective responses to them.

On the micro-level participatory research, Brock concludes:

“There is little here that is new information. [...] It sometimes seems that our enthusiasm to search for the new, to reach a different conclusion or find a fresh theory, is a way of distancing ourselves from the everyday realities of poverty and illbeing. A great deal of what the material reviewed in this report tells us is that what we have to learn is how to ask, to listen and then to act according to what we have heard” (op cit: 63-4).

The history of PPAs seems to follow the course Brock charts: the early PPAs were remarkable for the new substantive insights they offered on the nature of poverty, whereas the ‘second generation’ PPAs (South Africa, Uganda, and others forthcoming) are less noteworthy for new findings than for fostering and enabling new institutional characteristics, protagonists, owners and processes. The lesson for PRSPs is that, while poverty information generated by participatory methods offers essential insights for forming a robust understanding of the nature, processes and variations of poverty, fresh participatory research might unearth less new information than new and more effective ways of applying the lessons of participatory assessment to policy formulation, implementation and monitoring, especially through the exploitation of the new spaces and relationships offered by the participatory research process.

4.2 Downwards information flows: from policy-makers and service providers to poor people and service users

The supply of information by decision-makers to prospective participants and interlocutors is a vital ingredient for enabling participation at all levels of policy process – to make constitutional democracy a reality, to allow advocacy organizations to perform their function of monitoring and influencing, and to make policy consultation exercises meaningful. Several studies and reports document failures at each of these levels to make the necessary information available, and highlight the futility of affording ‘access’ to people and organizations to participate in policy processes, when they do not command the necessary skills or capacity to exploit the opportunities such access represents. Many argue that these cases do not constitute the promotion of participation, and that facilitation and enabling actions are essential complements to any declaration of ‘access’ to make it effective: ‘Abstract rights without concrete mechanisms of access are meaningless’ (Pigou et al 1998: 83).

4.2.1 Awareness of rights

The importance of potential participants having a working understanding of the issues and entitlements at stake is exemplified by a research study on public perceptions of the state of realization of human rights in South Africa, given the Constitutional focus on socio-economic rights (Pigou et al 1998). The study’s most important finding is that:
“[...] knowledge of the socio-economic clauses in the Bill of Rights as constitutionally-guaranteed rights, rather than as demands to be advanced and met in a political process, is poorly spread among the population [...]. Knowledge of abstract and constitutionally-guaranteed socio-economic rights is poor, but knowledge of specific policies that have a bearing on these rights is more widespread, though still limited. When a right is translated into a concrete policy that is widely advertised, implemented and monitored by a government department, people come to realise that right is their to claim” (ibid: v).

Otherwise, they do not, so never claim it. To allow meaningful public participation in debates about rights, the report continues, clear definitions of the state’s understanding of rights need to be established, challenged if necessary, and widely disseminated to clarify understanding of what can be expected of government and what cannot. This is state accountability at its broadest and most basic level 12.

Many Northern advocacy NGOs have assumed a pivotal role in accessing information from decision-making institutions, sometimes through ingenious means, and disseminating it to associates located further from the global centres of power or enjoying less advanced communications technology than they. Others, going a step further, work to equip Southern partners with the technology they need to access this information themselves, without brokerage. The ‘Democratizing Bretton Woods Institutions Reform Project’ of the Washington-based Center for Concern, for example, aims to strengthen and broaden the citizen networks that have access to high-quality information on the World Bank, IMF and World Trade Organization, by creating a cascade-like dissemination mechanism via ‘lead regional partners’ and networks of local organizations in the South (Nelson 1999).

4.2.2 An essential ingredient for effective consultation or participation

In policy consultation processes where institutions and decision-makers invite scrutiny, consultation and/or participation by civil society, it is their duty to provide those invited with both the information they need to comprehend and analyse the process and be able to contribute to it; and to give feedback to participants after the event, sharing the resulting documents, explaining the grounds on which contributions were incorporated or left out, and outlining follow-up plans. Noting that many attempts by civil society to participate in aid coordination fora are thwarted by lack of timely, accessible information, Richmond & McGee (1999) point out, citing Clark & Dorschel (1998: 1) that:

“‘the sharing of information is key to any consultative exercise’ – in relevant languages and in sufficient time to prepare satisfactory input prior to the [event]. Without appropriate information, CSOs cannot make informed and analytical critiques of government and donor activities” (p.19).

Of the cases of civil society ‘participation’ in Consultative Group meetings which Richmond & McGee discuss,

12 More specific issues and examples of the right to information on government programmes and service providers, are found in the section 5, on accountability.
“Mozambican CSOs were not provided with any information to prepare [for a Consultative Group meeting], putting them at an immediate disadvantage and making them feel they were not true participants. In Bolivia the World Bank and some other donors have consistently circulated consultation documents in English and, even where they are printed in the appropriate language, inaccessible and jargon-laden language can also prevent NGOs from offering informed critique” (p.19).

Reviewing participation of primary stakeholders in World Bank CASs, Tandon & Cordeiro (1998) report similar findings in most of the nine countries they covered, with provision of feedback especially poor (p.16). Indeed, the question of proper information and communication has attracted attention in several reviews of participation in CASs, conducted both by the Bank and by critical outsiders (Clark & Dorschel 1998; IBRD et al 1998; Boyd 1999; Tikare & Shah 1999), and is featured in the Bank’s ‘Consultations with Civil Society Organizations: General Guidelines for World Bank staff’ (Edwards 1999).

Nonetheless, however efficiently the institution performs this duty of supplying the needed information, for advocacy and campaigning actors it is always desirable to have access to information sources of their own, which will harbour less vested interests than the target institution in question and will offer the possibility of counter-views, triangulation and balanced assessment. Pigou et al (1998), for the case of the South African Bill of Rights, stress that it is not only information dissemination by state institutions which is needed, but also the existence of, and access by lay-people to, systems for data-collection and processing, for activists wishing to influence policy processes or monitor and evaluate their effectiveness (p.83).

Ensuring that the information supplied by decision-makers and institutions can actually be used by prospective participants involves spelling out terms and acronyms which will be unfamiliar to the uninitiated, giving institutional and process maps which explain details of the structure and functioning of target institutions and processes, and providing guidance as to where further information may be obtained or who the responsible units or contact persons are for a given issue. Demystification will be needed. This is an area in which NGOs have considerably greater experience than formal institutions (see section 4.3 below).

4.2.3 At the interface between civil society and donors or governments

To permit constructive engagement with the public and the electorates they are supposed to represent, bilateral donors and governments need proactive strategies for demystifying themselves too. Christian Aid in a recent study on the quality of UK aid to India (van Diesen 1998) found Indian respondents dissatisfied with DFID’s transparency, accessibility and provision of information on its activities and programmes. It made the following recommendations, both broad and specific, to address this:
**Recommendations on DFID’s interface with Indian civil society**

- One step towards improving DFID’s interface with civil society is to hold broad-based consultations on the Country Strategy Paper currently under development. The consultations with international NGOs is welcome, but we feel that direct consultation with Indian NGOs, academics and other relevant elements of civil society is crucial both in terms of process and content.
- Another way to begin formalising relations between DFID and Indian civil society is to initiate broad-based consultations on the direction of British aid to India. These could be an outcome of the consultations on the new Country Strategy Paper and could be modelled on the example of the annual Development Policy Forum planned by DFID in Britain.
- A third and final suggestion is for the DFID office in India to create a single ‘window’ for its interaction with civil society beyond direct project partners. This ‘window’ could be the first contact point for people seeking to obtain information, people keen to provide input and ideas and organisations that want to submit proposals for funding.

Source: van Diesen 1998: 15

In the same year DFID’s consultation process on ‘Strengthening DFID’s support for civil society’ concluded that:

> “Providing information should be an integral part of all DFID’s work. This ensures that people […] in poorer countries are informed of DFID policies and procedures and that DFID is more transparent about its structure, systems and staff. It is a pre-requisite for all other types of engagement [with civil society]” (DFID 1999: 4).

### 4.3 Sharing of information between civil society actors

Key strengths of the international community of development NGOs is their recognition of the power inherent in information and the importance of information flows; and their innovative approaches to sharing information horizontally, between northern and southern NGOs and among NGOs in the same country or region.

#### 4.3.1 Demystifying institutions and official processes

Good publications which demystify the Bank, IMF and multilateral development banks have been produced by lobbying and campaigning organizations, for example Development Bank Watchers Project 1998, ‘A Guide to influencing the World Bank’s Country Assistance Strategies’; Ruthrauff 1997, ‘An Introduction to the World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank and International Monetary Fund’ and Ruthrauff 1998, ‘Guidelines for Influencing the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank’; Bread for the World’s ‘News and Notices for World Bank Watchers’ and Bretton Woods Project’s ‘Bretton Woods Update’ which offer frequent and free digests of relevant information to civil society actors globally. Other examples from the Bretton Woods Project and associates include the published proceedings of a meeting at which the growth model beloved to the Bank and IMF was unpacked and critically analysed by a range of civil society and academic actors (Both Ends & Bretton Woods 1999), and an analysis of the Bank’s Genuine Savings Indicator for non-experts (Everett & Wilks 1999).
There are as yet few published documents which demystify for a readership of non-experts and concerned public the impenetrable workings of their own governments. There are two noteworthy exceptions: the publications of the Women’s Budget Initiative (WBI) in South Africa (see Budlender 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999; Hurt & Budlender 1998), and that of the Uganda Debt Network and Uganda Women’s Network (1998). The WBI explains the competing needs for demystification presented by the post-apartheid situation in South Africa, which parallels the needs arising at local government level in many countries where decentralization has outpaced capacity-building of local government actors:

“[…] one of the strong motivations for our work is to allow greater participation in policy and budget debates. Here we think firstly of parliamentarians. We know that among the post-1994 public representatives, even in the national parliament there are many who do not even have a school-leaving certificate. When we think further to NGOs and community activists, there are many more who will not have the time, energy or skills to read the primary research reports. In order to address part of this audience, in 1998 we produced Money Matters: Women and the government budget. This book contains simplified ‘translations’ of selected chapters from [the WBI’s previous publications] at a level which we hoped a second-language English speaker with ten years of education would understand” (Budlender 1999).

The Uganda publication, aimed at civil society organizations, details the processes of budget formulation and allocation of public expenditure, and presents recommendations to government and CSOs on how a better-informed civil society can engage with these.

4.3.2 Strengthening public claims on information

Budget Advocacy Workshop in Uganda

The Uganda Debt Network (UDN) conducted a workshop on budget advocacy for Network members organizations in October 1999. The Global Women in Politics (GWIP) Initiative of the Asia Foundation, and the Institute of Democracy in South Africa (IDASA) provided technical assistance. The activity brought together a complementary group of international experts including UDN’s expertise in debt advocacy, GWIP’s expertise in advocacy planning, training and constituency building, and IDASA’s expertise in infusing national budgets with a gender perspective.

Participants were from 15 civil society organizations, including a women’s network and resource centre, the Uganda Manufacturers’ Association, the national NGO Forum, and National Farmers’ association, and the National Orgnaziation of Trade Unions. The workshop:

• Equipped participants with skills in advocacy and lobbying;
• Increased their knowledge of the policy environment;
• Identified key state actors in policy planning and formulation;
• Discussed and identified strategies to influence them;
• Identified potential issues around which to design advocacy campaigns;
• Developed advocacy strategies that combine constituency-building, message development, and persuasive lobbying.

Source: Adapted from GWIP 1999 and Lisa Vene-Klasen, pers. comm.
Capacity-building for NGO monitoring of the quality of aid to Mali

Christian Aid’s policy staff have been working on the quality of bilateral and multilateral aid since 1998, and have produced a series of case studies on aid quality over the past two years (on India, Ethiopia and Mozambique). It was felt that the direction of this work should change towards capacity building among partners to facilitate local processes of aid quality monitoring and advocacy. An opportunity to pursue this intention arose in Mali in 1999. A senior policy officer from Christian Aid worked with an African consultant and the local Christian Aid Field Officer in an assignment designed to build the capacity of Christian Aid’s Malian partners in this regard.

The objectives of the assignment, which consisted of limited research and an advocacy capacity-strengthening workshop involving representatives from the partner organizations, were:

- To draw up a profile of the quality of aid to Mali;
- To raise awareness of partners about the quality of aid;
- To provide tools and skills to participating partners in the areas of collecting and analysing data on aid interventions and provide clues on how they could go about raising issues with concerned authorities about the quality of aid;
- To enlist partners’ interest and commitment to participate in a national ‘observatory’ for monitoring the quality of aid and to work out the modality for its operation;
- To work out with partners the form and substance of future Christian Aid support and follow-up for the operation of the ‘observatory’ and to make concrete recommendations to Christian Aid on this.

Source: Alemayehu & van Diesen 1999

Whatever the paucity of published documentation, there are numerous processes under way which will expand the public’s ability to claim the information necessary to participate in policy processes. Two examples are shown above of NGO-led capacity-building initiatives which stress the public’s and CSOs’ access to information for participation, in the Uganda example in the national budget, and in the Malian example in monitoring the quality and uses of international aid.

4.4 Summary and implications for PRS process

In summary, from past experience with participation of civil society in policy processes it is clear that information must be viewed as a prime resource in two senses. Policy-makers need to ensure that they are better informed about realities other than their own if they are to design and manage effective participatory processes, and also need to complement traditional understandings of poverty with the sort of poverty information best disclosed through participatory research. The public and CSOs, on the other hand, need to be well-informed about the workings of policy institutions and processes to be able to engage with them, whether in collaborative or adversarial mode. Experiments in applying participatory research to policy issues offer decision-makers ways to be better informed; advocacy NGOs’ significant experience levering access to information and spreading it through their networks, whether for advocacy purposes or to fuel participatory engagement with decision-makers, is both a strength for civil society as it seeks to engage with future policy processes, and a resource from which for facilitators and participants in future processes can learn.

- Governments need to be well-informed about poverty and the poor, which means that they need the sort of information generated through participatory research as well as that from household surveys. Extensive experience with participatory
research on poverty, and for policy purposes, now exists to demonstrate the power of such approaches to disclose hitherto unaddressed dimensions of poverty, and causal relations between people’s social, geographic and economic circumstances, their poverty, and government policies.

- A well-designed Participatory Poverty Assessment process can itself serve as a vehicle for sustained policy-influencing, with poverty-reducing and empowering impacts. Key ingredients for success in this regard appear to be Government ownership of, and commitment to, a PPA; and the construction of relationships between Government and civil society actors in the PPA process.

- Governments need to inform people about the PRS process. Not only does the initiation of a PRSP process need to be announced and discussed, but a channel established for ongoing communication, whereby people are kept up to date on activities, progress and opportunities to provide feedback on the PRS.

- Governments need to recognize and address information-poverty. It is one dimension of poverty; it is also a constraint on any participatory, consultative or dialogue process between Government and civil society. Addressing the need to inform people about rights, entitlements, government policies and processes will enable participatory processes to happen, as well as contributing to the greater and more distant goal of empowering and improving the lives of poor people.

- National and international NGOs have a wealth of experience in producing and sharing useable, accessible information about institutions and processes, to permit meaningful participation by non-experts and concerned citizens. This expertise could well be drawn on by governments needing to establish greater transparency and mutual understanding with civil society and the public at large, to enable participatory PRS processes to happen.
Section 5 Influencing policy through participatory processes

The other vital function of PPAs, besides the generation of information, is the influencing of policy through the participatory process itself. This section shows that the PPA has evolved since its inception, when its function was informational, into a sophisticated and complex process for influencing the formulation and monitoring of policy. The PPA exemplifies a collaborative relationship between government and civil society, with these parties working towards a common goal. A different model of policy influencing through participatory process is the more adversarial approach of campaigning and lobbying of government by non-governmental actors. This is illustrated here using selected examples of policy influencing by international and southern NGOs.

5.1 Policy influencing through Participatory Poverty Assessment processes

PPAs are now giving rise to a fast-growing secondary literature which analyses their strengths and weaknesses in relation to other research approaches. Much of this analysis remains at the level of the information PPAs produce (see Section 3). It is now recognized, however, that:

“[…] PPAs have the potential both to give us a fuller understanding of poverty, and to make it more difficult for poverty to be ignored or sidelined by politicians and other decision makers” (Booth et al 1998: 5).

In stating the case for participation in poverty assessment Booth et al, as well as listing the informational benefits (discussed in Section 3), add a third. Stakeholder involvement in the process, ‘by helping to give the poor a voice, bringing new actors into the policy dialogue and encouraging those who decide priorities to engage actively with these discrepant perspectives, […] alters the terms on which policy is decided’ (ibid: 3)\(^3\).

5.1.1 ‘Second-generation’ PPAs

While many PPAs have now been carried out\(^4\), it is only the most recent – ‘second generation PPAs’ – which have made this sort of policy influence an explicit objective, or documented the means by which learnings flow into policy processes.

“Bringing together diverse teams of facilitators and researchers in innovative and longer-term processes, these ‘new generation’ PPAs open up spaces for

\(^3\) That it can now be asserted that this particular application of participatory tools leads to empowerment of poor people through the route outlined by Booth et al (1998), helps to resolve a tension many participatory practitioners experience. This tension is between participation for instrumentalist purposes and participation for transforming and empowering purposes. In contrast to PRA, adopting participatory approaches to conduct poverty assessment is an extractive exercise rather than one which empowers the poor people involved. It implies ‘a shift along this spectrum from process to product that forces the PRA community to re-examine the values underlying participatory approaches […]’. Participatory tools are put to use to enlighten policy rather than necessarily to empower local people” (Holland with Blackburn 1997: 3-4).

\(^4\) According to Robb (1999), quoting Bank figures, 43 had been carried out by 1999. Other PPA practitioners and analysts would not term some of those counted therein as PPAs.
engagement by local government officials and NGOs: the ‘street-level bureaucrats’ who play vital, often unacknowledged, roles in the shaping of policy on the ground […]” (Cornwall, forthcoming).

Two prominent recent examples of PPAs influencing policy are those of Uganda and Vietnam. Designed to have a wider influence that merely generating better information, both are hence linked to other consultative and institutional processes – public and political accountability mechanisms, the budget cycle, administrative decentralization, surveys, cross-sectoral poverty working groups. The boxes below summarize these two experiences:
Box X:

**Budgeting for Poverty Reduction: Uganda’s Public Sector Responds to Needs**

Public sector programmes for poverty reduction can benefit enormously from participatory processes. A public debate on the allocation of public expenditure can help in developing a national consensus on the need for effective public action to reduce poverty. The process of establishing priorities gains legitimacy, and leads to better programme design.

Uganda has a clear vision of the public sector’s role in poverty eradication, which is linked to a well developed process of consultation. The Poverty Eradication Action Plan involved wide consultation with individuals inside and outside government. Consultation has been extended directly to the poor via the Uganda Participatory Poverty Assessment Programme (UPPAP) which aims to institutionalise a participatory approach to poverty planning and monitoring that extends to the district level. DFID has played a leading role in supporting the UPPAP, and although the programme is in its formative stage, it is already helping to change government priorities and processes. Findings from the most recent poverty analysis have been incorporated into the 1999/00 Background to the Budget. A Poverty Working Group has also been set up comprising Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MFPED) officials, independent poverty analysts, donors, and civil society representatives. The working group intends appraising sectoral submissions for the 2000/01 budget for their focus on poverty. While work is still in progress, senior MFPED officials highlight important changes.

- Senior MFPED officials now have a better understanding of poverty and of the need to address it within an overall medium-term budgeting framework, and are eager to spread this knowledge more widely within government.

- Spending priorities are shifting, and are informed by having better consultation with the poor. Thus, expenditure on water and sanitation are set to increase in the 2000/01 budget, partly through additional funds to be secured from the enhanced HIPC initiative.

- In order that locally-specific priorities can be addressed, greater flexibility in providing conditional grant allocations to districts is being considered.

- The importance of the need for equalisation grants to assist poorer districts is being re-emphasised to reduce marginalisation and increase political stability.

- The importance of security (from insurgency, theft and/or violence) has been highlighted as a key poverty issue. The content of household surveys have been adjusted to capture additional information on this for policy development.

- The need for poverty monitoring systems which incorporate the findings of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies is more acutely recognised now.

- There is a clear recognition of the beneficial role that information (regarding rights, services, budgets, markets) can play in helping poor people to move out of poverty. Thereby, public accountability is enhanced.

For this year’s budget process, five themes are identified by the recently constituted Poverty Working Group, which stem from quantitative and participatory analysis that have been undertaken of various sectors—health, education, agriculture, water, and law and order.

- benefiting the poorest 20% from sectoral allocations;
- addressing specific concerns of women;
- improving information regarding government policies, programmes and budgetary allocations;
- addressing inequalities in access to services and opportunities across regions;
- tackling poverty problems that require multi-sectoral responses, e.g. nutrition.

Source: Synthesis of ongoing work in Uganda, contributed by DFID.
Box X:

The Government of Vietnam and the PPAs: A process which takes participatory research beyond the final report

The outputs and benefits of the Vietnam PPAs go beyond the research documentation – four PPA site reports and a national Synthesis report. This reflects the original objective of the PPAs, which were planned before the Consultations with the Poor exercise was initiated [see note below]. The PPAs were commissioned to inform the poverty debate within Vietnam and to complement statistical data in a new, national analysis of poverty.

The PPA research work was carried out by organizations working in partnership with Government in poverty alleviation at the grassroots level and, as such, the research was embedded in ongoing relationships and dialogue with local Government. Linking this work to the national level through the Poverty Working Group (PWG) has provided an important opportunity to involve central Government agencies in the analysis of poverty at a local level. The process has been powerful in demonstrating the value of opening up direct lines of communication with poor households in planning for poverty alleviation. Importantly, the process followed also means that research findings have an in-built link into Government programming for poverty reduction and into policy making.

At a national level, the task of coordinating the PPAs fell to the World Bank on behalf of the PWG - the coalition of seven government ministries and eight donor and non-governmental organizations which was established to guide the drafting of the Vietnam Development Report (“Attacking Poverty”) for the Consultative Group meeting. There were many advantages of this arrangement. First, the PWG was actively involved and interested in the PPAs – the study agencies were members of the PWG and kept the PWG fully informed of progress. Government members of the PWG attended local-level PPA feedback sessions where findings were discussed and debated. At these workshops, it was clear to national Government officials that local leaders who had lived in these areas their whole lives were endorsing the PPAs as fully reflecting the lives of the poor. Secondly, because the PWG was responsible for producing Attacking Poverty for the Consultative Group meeting, the PPA findings were fully incorporated into the discussions tabled at the CG. This attracted attention from policymakers at the very highest level and Government requested donors at the CG to assist them in mainstreaming such techniques.

At a local level, each of the PPAs was carried out in partnership with local authorities. In some cases, this meant that local officials were trained in participatory techniques and took part in the training. In other areas, it meant that commune, district and provincial officials were closely involved in the planning and analysis stages, but not actually in conducting the field work. In all areas, however, it has meant that local authorities have been keenly interested in the PPA findings and have requested support in exploring ways of dealing with problems raised. At a local level, Government buy-in to the PPA findings meant that these studies have a real chance of influencing decisions relevant to poor households. As an example, local officials in one of the Provinces are now lobbying for improved and more sustainable financial sector interventions that could provide services adapted to the needs of the poor on a sustainable basis.


15 ‘Consultations with the Poor’ is a comparative study of poverty in 23 countries which has used participatory methods to examine poor people’s perceptions of poverty and illbeing, their priority problems, their perceptions of institutions, and their understanding of changing gender relations. The study was commissioned and managed by the World Bank, to inform the team that is writing the World Development Report 2000/1.
5.1.2 Factors for PPAs to influence policy processes

Drawing on the World Bank’s experience of conducting or supporting PPAs, Robb (1999) analyses how PPAs can influence policy, and summarizes factors which need to be considered to increase their policy-influencing impact of PPAs. Although directed at Bank staff, some of her recommendations offer food for thought to governments needing to undertake a PPA, or civil society planning to engage with them in it:

Box X:

**Factors to consider at national level to increase the impact of PPAs**

**Understand the political environment:**

- Undertake the PPA only after potential political implications have been thought through
- Use the institutional, formal, personal and informal structures and networks and understand the impact they have on policy-makers […]

**Create a conducive policy environment if possible:**

- Question the value of conducting a PPA where there is limited government support
- Build dialogue to create a more open climate so that governments feel less threatened by the resulting data
- Maintain a policy dialogue through continuous follow-up with various stakeholders
- Use personal judgement and attune stakeholder involvement to the overall political, social, economic, and institutional environment in country. There is no blueprint approach to the timing of stakeholder inclusion in the policy dialogue.

**Promote ownership:**

- Include key policymakers from the beginning. Develop relationships with and understanding of key players.
- Consider publishing joint documents (World Bank and government) where appropriate
- Know how to organize workshops with appropriate follow-up. Workshops are not the end of a process of participation. Final consensus might not be achieved so the documents should reflect the differing views. If people’s views are not included, that should be explained. The quality and follow-up of workshops will affect that impact of the PPA and the relationship among participating stakeholders.

**Strengthen the policy delivery framework:**

- Identify a credible institution where participatory research could be analyzed, coordinated, and disseminated. Investigate provincial capacities.
- Work with institutions (universities, networks of social scientists, etc) already undertaking social research to ensure that research is not duplicated and the PPA becomes part of the body of social knowledge.

Source: adapted from Robb 1999: 54-5

Reflecting on processes and lessons learnt in the main PPAs to date, Norton (1997) acknowledges that a PPA is not intrinsically participatory, being focused on a product (a particular, rich kind of poverty information) rather than on a process. Retrospective analysis of the Zambia PPA has recognized that ‘the primary objective of [it] was to give
voice to the poor in a process of policy formulation rather than to enable the community to ‘own and use’ information to develop action plans at the community level’ (op.cit: 144).

“The emerging consensus amongst those involved is that the PPA creates a sounding-board for the poor in the policy debate, but that it is essentially an extractive process. This conceptualization of the role of the PPA is often reflected in the relative emphasis given to product over process during the PPA. Inbuilt constraints, often temporal and financial, mitigate against a more participatory approach, with implications for feedback into the community and continuing change at local level. In Zambia, the need to produce material and policy insights which could contribute to the overall poverty analysis resulted in severe time constraints. The entire PPA process, from research design, through training of the field teams, fieldwork, analysis and developing preliminary policy conclusions, had to be completed in four months. Following up on feedback and involvement of research in ongoing programmes was beyond the financial and time scope of the South Africa PPA, weakening the principle of research being part of ongoing work. In Ghana, no financial or other allowance was made for revisiting the communities involved in the PPA.” (op cit: 146).

These shortcomings, easily identified with hindsight, are taken to reflect a lack of confidence in this new approach in its early days. ‘As confidence in the process grows […] efforts should be made to ensure a minimum level of engagement both of primary and institutional stakeholders in the ongoing dialogue, whatever the constraints’ (op cit: 146). Box X demonstrates that these efforts have succeeded in the Uganda case. But the key lessons of this retrospective reflection are worth reproducing here, for the benefit of those designing future PPAs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The outcomes of PPAs can be considerably strengthened over the early examples by paying more attention to the following features:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• negotiation of clear objectives early in the process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• training of research teams, especially in policy analysis using participatory research material;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• better integration in national policy processes;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• more attention to verifying final results through cross-checking with community level participants.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Norton 1997: 143

Analysis of the UPPAP’s success in influencing policy (McLean 1999) defines factors which are felt to be critical to its success, enumerating, among others, a set of factors comprising a conducive environment to poverty reduction; and a set of characteristics of the PPA process which maximise the scope for influencing policy. These are reproduced below, as design issues for consideration before embarking on a participatory poverty assessment exercise: There are, obviously, few countries which present all those factors listed as making up the conducive environment in Uganda, but the list outlines what other governments might aim for and illustrates how the nesting of a PPA within such an environment offers maximum policy influencing potential:
Utilizing the PPA to influence policy:

Conducive environment for poverty reduction

- Macro-economic stability
- Established system of decentralized governance
- Good governance
- National vision for poverty reduction
- Commitment to poverty reduction formalized in comprehensive strategy
- Mechanisms for setting budgetary priorities in line with poverty reduction objectives
- Commitment of government resources to poverty reduction
- Poverty monitoring system in place

Characteristics of the UPPAP process which maximize the scope for policy-influencing

- Ownership of the PPA by Government
- Location of the PPA process within Government
- Strategic methods of dissemination of PPA findings
- Flexible, reflective mechanisms of policy review
- Institutionalization of consultations with the poor
- Strategies to ensure sustainability of the PPA process

Source: adapted from McLean 1999

The speed with which UPPAP findings, released in draft in mid-1999, were taken up in crucial policy fora, was surprising, as illustrated by comparing a review based on field work in late 1998 (Goetz & Jenkins 1999) with McLean 1999. This was due in part to a concentrated attempt to synchronize the processing of results with key stages in the national budget and planning process (for example, the production by government of a semi-annual Poverty Status Report), and to start disseminating results as soon as they were available, in strategically selected fora, while continuing to work in parallel on refining and synthesizing them for final publication.

5.1.3 PPAs and community-level impacts

This synthesis has concentrated on how poverty-reducing impacts can result from the incorporation of findings and other, more experiential, outcomes into national-level processes. This begs a question about the scope of PPAs for catalysing community-led initiatives which advance poverty reduction objectives on the community’s own terms at the local level. It has been suggested that the PPA process helps set the stage for communities to initiate their own local processes of transformation. Indeed, PPA researchers often leave research sites convinced that this kind of activism will ensue, as a consequence of the collective and individual analysis which has gone on; rapport built with PPA teams, which may include local government officers and NGO activists; the sharing of information by PPA researchers about rights, entitlements and government policies and programmes; and the action plans which have developed out of PPA exercises, intended or not. Yet hard evidence on sustained community initiatives arising out of PPAs remains scant and elusive. Few evaluations or assessments of PPAs exist to document evidence of this: one exception is Agyarko (1998) on Ghana, which documents a mixed picture. That few sustained success stories at community level are known, that some PPAs are still being designed with no attention to how
community process might be developed and supported, and that others attempting to build this in are finding it a difficult principle to implement (eg UPPAP)\textsuperscript{16}, suggests that investigation is needed of what happened in PPA communities after the PPA. If constraints on sustaining the momentum catalysed by the PPA can be identified, this information will provide extremely useful inputs for government or non-government actors seeking to formulate and implement broad-based, national PRSs.

### 5.2 Participatory processes outside of government

While PPAs are the object of much current interest and will no doubt receive fresh impetus under the PRSP framework, they are but one in a range of ways for the poor and their representatives to influence policy processes. There are numerous other, more direct or more adversarial ways for civil society to influence government policy. From the perspective of civil society actors, engagement in PPAs is a way of working \textit{with} the government (or, in some cases, donors). Some of the examples reviewed in the next section, on accountability, are better described as working \textit{outside} of government. Circumstances in a given country will dictate to what extent each of these strategies is advisable or feasible, and what the best combination might be for greatest impact on poverty. From the perspective of governments, a range of historic, political, sociological and other factors will determine whether spontaneous civil society activism is welcomed or repudiated in a particular country; but even in cases where there is little room for that, PPA research may be feasible, and if undertaken, will surely foster improvements in understanding between civil society and the state. Herein lies one of the greatest innovations of participatory policy processes: the face-to-face interaction of actors from very diverse backgrounds, occupations and socioeconomic classes, with little past exposure to each other’s worlds, to pool their knowledge, influence and energy in a common purpose.

#### 5.2.1 Policy influencing through NGO advocacy, campaigning and lobbying

The examples of participatory processes supported or spearheaded by NGOs which have sought to influence macro-level policy are myriad, although in general poorly documented. We include some here as a reminder that in some countries there is as yet only a weak basis for a collaborative relationship between civil society and government. In the worst cases, the collaboration represented by an ideal-type PPA is impossible and, where participatory processes have been used to influence policy, their ‘participatory’ quality has often lain not in bringing together civil society and government but in fostering participation of the poor in developing the NGO agenda and then forcing open high-level policy debates to admit poor people’s voices. These forms, illustrated here with a tiny sample of the various different tactics and levels of advocacy\textsuperscript{17}, are

\textsuperscript{16} A dissatisfaction that many of those involved have experienced with the ‘Consultations with the Poor’ is precisely this: that in designing the twenty-three PPAs no attention or resources were allocated to developing or supporting community-level activities catalysed by the PPA process. In the UPPAP, resources were allocated for supporting ongoing processes in the thirty-six research sites; but the money available is small compared to needs and expectations, and there are the inevitable problems of avoiding the creation of dependence, and containing communities’ expectations.

\textsuperscript{17} The sample, besides being tiny, is heavily influenced by the availability of written information about NGO advocacy initiatives. The fact that a call for inputs, sent out to NGO contacts,
nonetheless a valid part of the national experience in participatory processes, and offer a
resource in terms of human expertise, lessons learnt and networks and relationships
established, on which the PRS process can draw.

The three examples presented below represent different strategies for NGO-led policy
influencing. The first, the closest to the collaborative relationship between NGOs and
government working on a PPA together, is about changing policy through changing
attitudes of government personnel. An international NGO, with support from the World
Bank, worked to mainstream a participatory approach in a major government
programme in order to enhance programme effectiveness and accountability, for the
benefit of the poor population. The second example illustrates a campaigning strategy
for altering a government policy position. In this classic, broad-based, national advocacy
campaign, as in many successful advocacy campaigns, initially adversarial relations
eventually gave way to collaboration between government and campaigners in
implementing a revised policy. The third example illustrates the intermediary role which
international (or sometimes national) NGOs can play in policy influencing. An
international NGO provided a platform for representatives of the poor to enter a dialogue
with policy-makers from powerful nations to influence international policy, a strategy
which international NGOs are often well-placed to facilitate at the national level too.

Box X:

**Introducing participatory strategies into Mongolian’s National Poverty Alleviation Programme (NPAP)**

Concerned that the NPAP would be designed in a top-down way, Save the Children Fund supported the
NPAP to introduce participatory strategies throughout the entire programme, to allow projects to be
designed and choices made at a local level. In collaboration with a World Bank-funded position, a
combination of funds were prepared which allowed scope for local choice by county officials as well as
permitting local people to apply for funds for their own locally conceived projects. Facilitators were trained to
conduct PRA in order to identify appropriate projects. Shifts in power and changes in attitude had to take
place. This included the relatively small changes in central, regional and county officials behaving in a more
participatory manner, listening and learning, and much larger shifts in projects being conceived locally as a
result of participatory assessments. Women, in particular, were supported to conceive ideas or simply
apply for welfare support.

Important to the whole process was a belief by SCF and NPAP that the alternative to a participatory process
was a non-participatory one, involving top-down decision-making and project design, and that this was
unacceptable. Even though the agenda was ambitious and could not be expected to work everywhere,
participatory principles applied to the whole programme, Staff of NPAP were made aware of its importance
at different levels and in all activities. Key to the design and implementation were two agency personnel
(SCF and World Bank) who understood the range of possible empowerment at different levels of the
programme, the importance of social and political relations and whose own style of work was empowering.
[...]

The programme has had tremendous difficulties, not least as a result of slow release of funds, changes in
government, and fluctuations in donor support (in part as a result of visiting consultants with limited
understanding of, and commitment to, participation. Nevertheless, in July 1997 the NPAP was one of only
three out of sixty ministries and agencies rated as excellent by the government’s assessment of

received little response, is an indication of the scarcity of time, facilities and capacity at the
disposal of most advocacy NGOs for systematically documenting their activities. It also suggests
that Governments looking for national experience and expertise in participatory processes need
to consider other forms of accessing it than through the written medium, because this is not
representative of the experience which exists.

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*Participation in Poverty Reduction Strategies: DRAFT: 10 February 2000 (NOT FOR CITATION)*
administration and financial accountability. Impact assessments now reveal good targeting at the local level and the increasing involvement and empowerment of the marginalized [...].

Source: Save the Children Fund, REFERENCE?

Box X:

The ‘Campanha Terra’ in Mozambique

The transition to a market economy in Mozambique from the late 1980s led to a national land policy in 1996. This policy promised to strengthen tenure security for poor farmers but also established the government’s right to transfer land from the state to foreign citizens. The Bill sparked a lively national debate, and over the next two years the land issue became a major preoccupation for local civil society, the government and the international community. Several aspects of the draft legislation were problematic for small farmers. When a parliamentary debate on the law started, farmers led a march on parliament to protest that their proposed amendments should be considered, and to resolve land conflicts in rural areas. Other voices expressed concerns about the implications for the rural poor, arguing that the new legislation, by giving the state exclusive authority to allocate land for commercial exploitation, might endanger rather than strengthen access to and ownership of land by the smallholder subsector.

Initially, civil society assembled around principles that were defined in the negative: ‘We do not want anybody to be without land, we do not want access to land to be determined by income and we do not want the family sector confined to marginal areas’. Opposition to the Land Bill coalesced around the ‘campanha terra’ – a coalition of over 150 civil rights organizations, farmers’ associations and women’s movements, as well as church groups, trade unions, academics and lawyers. Interestingly, many local organizations involved in the ‘campanha terra’ received financial support from bilateral donors and foreign NGOs, which is indicative of international civil society’s deep concern with the land issue in Mozambique.

The ‘campanha terra’ had three phases. In the first phase the NGOs took the debate to rural communities, where they informed farmers about the draft land law, and collected reactions which they reported back to the Inter-ministerial Commission on land in Maputo. A wide variety of information dissemination media were used, including national and provincial seminars, and farmers’ workshops; posters, pamphlets and a ‘Manual to Better Understanding of the New Land Law’ in Portuguese and local languages, as well as comic books for the illiterate; theatre productions, local radio broadcasts, audio cassettes and video programmes.

Those involved found that smallholders did not want privatization of land, but did want registration of communal land. Women’s groups argued strongly for women’s rights to land to be recognized in the Land Law (the first draft did not consider gender aspects at all), in keeping with the 1990 Constitution which recognizes the equality of women and men. In the second phase, therefore, the ‘campanha terra’ sought to influence the revision of the legislation, and the campaign’s major achievements can be seen in the amendments that were included in the revision. The 1997 Land Law formalizes tenure security for smallholders and enshrines women’s rights to own and inherit land. It also involves communities in mediating conflicts over land, and protects smallholders against the granting of concessions to investors in areas already under cultivation. This is not intended to discourage foreign investors, but it does ensure that smallholders are not disadvantaged because they have no title deeds to their family’s land – their rights to this land can be established simply by oral testimony supported by the local community.

Following the successful campaign to revise the law, the third phase aimed to assist smallholders and the government in pilot registration of communal land and the issuing of title deeds. Additional information was also disseminated about the relationship between traditional, customary and legal rights to land, and about women’s rights. Civil society organizations are currently engaged in sensitizing men about giving land rights to women – a gender sensitive change in the law is unlikely to be implemented immediately with no resistance in traditional rural societies – and in assisting communities with conflict resolution around land disputes.

The land issue in Mozambique is an example of a populist campaign which achieved unprecedented success, in terms of a national government consulting the people and reacting constructively to civil society inputs. According to a prominent writer on Mozambique, ‘The Land Law might have been the most significant anti-poverty action taken by this government’.

Source: Adapted from Greeley & Devereux 1999

Participation in Poverty Reduction Strategies: DRAFT: 10 February 2000 (NOT FOR CITATION)
Box X:

Eight poor nations issue challenge to G8 on eve of Birmingham Summit

Christian Aid focused its campaigning against international debt on eight heavily-indebted poor countries – which it dubbed the P8 as a counterpart to the G8 - where debt was obstructing human development. In May 1999, the leaders of G8 nations held their annual summit in Birmingham, UK, at the height of the Jubilee 2000 campaign for debt cancellation. Christian Aid brought to the UK representatives from its partner organizations in the P8 countries and organized a P8 ‘mini-summit’ in Birmingham to coincide with the G8 one. The P8 representatives were given a platform to call on heads of state from the G8 to tackle the problem of unpayable debt and to answer their questions. Small meetings between individual P8 representatives, Christian Aid advocacy staff and members of the UK government were also organized, to give P8 representatives a chance to put their case for debt cancellation to the UK government directly.

5.3 Summary and implications for the PRS process

There are, then, a range of strategies for influencing policy using participatory processes. Who participates and how will vary according to strategy and to context. At one end of the spectrum, the contemporary PPA represents a collaborative relationship between government, civil society and probably other partners (donors, media, the local or national research community) in a research process wherein research findings and additional outcomes can transform decision-makers’ attitudes and practices, and policies themselves. At the far end, in NGO campaigning against national or international policy the voices of grassroots actors are gathered or amplified by their representatives, to change policy positions by contradicting or challenging policy-makers, or enlightening them by exposing them to unfamiliar perspectives and bringing them face to face with the people their policies affect. In each case, as well as the concrete outputs - in terms of a revised law or a changed policy framework - in the course of the engagement attitudes are transformed, relationships undergo changes, new spaces are created for continued and constructive interaction between policy-makers and the public.

- A good PPA process is worth far more than the qualitative information it can generate, as clearly shown by past PPA experience. Extracting the full potential from a PPA process means designing it with due attention to the objective of policy and attitude transformation; implementing it without haste and with care to maximize learning opportunities and fruitful linkages between people and between processes; and monitoring its impacts on policy direction and effectiveness.

- Where PPAs have been undertaken already, follow-up investigation into their impact in researched communities would shed light on what stops communities from implementing their own solutions to poverty and related problems.

- Civil society in almost every country harbours some experience of participatory processes for policy change which will be a resource for Government and other actors to draw on in preparing and undertaking a participatory PRS process. Where these experiences are little known or have taken place at local rather than macro level, international and national NGOs may be able to assist Government in
identifying the relevant people and processes – a step which in some contexts will constitute an important advance in Government-civil society collaboration. The search must go wider than documentation, since most of such experience is not documented.

- While weak rapport or hostile relations between Government and civil society in some countries need to be addressed in the course of developing a participatory PRS, they also enjoin realism in planning the process. In some contexts a PPA-style exercise would achieve little beyond its merely informational function because the preconditions for significant policy impact do not obtain.

- In such cases, civil society lobbying government for a more inclusive attitude to the PRS process may be the maximum form of policy influencing which can be hoped for in the short term, and should be duly supported by external actors promoting a participatory approach.
Section 6 Accounting to the poor

Participatory approaches have been used in the fields of governance and policy to enhance the accountability of state institutions and service providers to citizens and users. Mechanisms for securing accountability are particularly beneficial to the poor, given their relatively weak voice as voters or purchasers and users of services. PRSs will need to address accountability to the poor in three main respects: ensuring at the formulation stage that the PRS reflects the needs and priorities of the poor; ensuring during implementation that mechanisms are developed and enforced whereby the poor can contain corruption and hold government and service providers accountable for delivery of policies and goods; and building into the design the continuous monitoring by poor people of the fulfilment of PRS commitments more broadly.

A different argument for a strong focus on accountability in PRSs is that enabling the poor to demand and secure accountability is an objective in itself. While participation in budgets or service monitoring can deliver to the poor tangible benefits such as a more gender-equitable allocation of national resources, or effective access to a minimum health care package, it also delivers important intangible benefits, in terms of assertiveness and empowerment, which ensue from the action of calling a government or firm to account for its performance. If it is accepted that powerlessness and social inferiority in the face of officialdom are themselves dimensions of poverty (as Brock 1999 strongly implies it should be – see Section 4), then empowerment resulting from participation in accountability initiatives counts as poverty reduction, and the development of accountability mechanisms by pro-poor governments is an end in itself.

Here we review two relevant areas of experience in securing accountability: citizen participation in budgetary processes, and citizen monitoring of service providers and local government. Given the nature of the task, as discussed in Section 2 for participatory poverty monitoring, the main actors have to be non-State actors. The experiences we have synthesized are mostly initiated by non-governmental advocacy organizations or research centres, with varying degrees of interaction with officials and institutions. Some cases, however, receive significant support from State programmes and institutions or even originate in them, and many non-government initiatives rely on performance standards established by Government in efforts to improve their own accountability.

6.1 Participatory budgeting

Participatory budgeting describes the process in which citizens engage in debate and consultation to contribute to defining the balance of expenditures, investments and income, budgetary priorities and uses for state resources. So far, apart from a few well-known examples (the Women’s Budget Initiative (WBI) in South Africa, for example) it is a relatively little explored area of participatory policy influencing, due in part to the dominant attitude among policy-makers that ordinary people ‘shouldn’t meddle in these matters’ and to ordinary people’s perceptions that such topics are too technical for them (Budlender 1999: 1). A motivating force behind the WBI is that the budget is the most important policy instrument of any government because, without resources to implement it, policy is only words (Budlender 1999). Zie Gariyo, of the Uganda Debt Network which
has combatted corruption in Uganda through engaging in a budget monitoring process, argues that unless people understand how the budgetary process works, how money is allocated, where it goes and for what purpose, an anti-corruption initiative is only a ‘feeble moral plea to folks who don’t yet respond to ethics in government’ (Lisa Vene Klasen, pers.comm).

6.1.1 Some examples of participatory budgets

As a tool for poverty reduction, the direct participation of ‘beneficiaries’ has been found to provide more effective targeting of spending to areas and groups of greatest need. It can also be a useful tool for communication and advocacy, providing a focal point for sectors of the population to raise government’s awareness of their needs. As noted in the case of Porto Alegre (below), the process both ‘cut the chains and bureaucratic barriers separating society from the state’, and provided an ‘extremely positive tension’ between direct participatory democracy and representative democracy (Unesco 1999). Sixty per cent of citizens of the State were found to be aware of the participatory budget process and millions of people participated, across all levels. The initiatives was judged to break the ‘tradition of the political relationship based on the exchange of favours between the public power and the citizen’, which inculcates passivity; and to foster an active and mobilized citizenry (ibid).

Box X:

**Participatory Budgeting, Porto Alegre, Brazil**

Participatory Budgeting has been used in Porto Alegre since 1989, introduced by the city administration. It involves, firstly, checking that the previous year’s budget has performed according to policy; and secondly, bringing together people from different geographical areas and interest groups to define investment and expenditure priorities, based on objective criteria accepted by all the community.

- The city is divided into sections to account for geographic, social and community organizational aspects (to account for the difference in needs and organizational capacity of richer and poorer areas), and five groupings created around major policy issues (eg transport and traffic; health and social care) two huge assemblies are held per annum (one to check the previous year’s budget, one to identify priorities and elect representatives for decisions over the forthcoming budget (following smaller meetings by theme and region to discuss priorities).

- Regional and Thematic Delegate Forum and Municipal Council of Government Plan and Budget are formed - made up of two government representatives (observers with no voting right), councilors and their elected substitutes from regions and thematic groupings, plus representatives of the Municipal Employee Association and Union of Inhabitants’ Associations. The mandate of councilors is one year, revocable at any time. Council co-ordinates and organizes the process of conceiving the budget and investment plan and later checks execution, by holding weekly meetings where they debate plans and make links with the Executive.

- the final budget and investment plan (according each region priority, population region & relative poverty services) are drawn up, subject to approval by Municipal Council

- the Executive sends the proposal to Municipal Town Councillors. At this point intense negotiation takes place around allocations, with some amendments resulting although no alteration to the global structure of the budget. The overall structure is respected and protected because it is seen to have emerged from a true process of political and social representation.

Source: http://www.unesco.org/most/southa13.html
A second, and much-cited, example of successful participatory budgeting is the Women’s Budget Initiative in South Africa. This differs from the Brazilian example in that it operates at the national rather than the District level, and focuses on correcting a specific dimension of political, social and economic disadvantage: gender inequality. Its basic premise is that by disaggregating the outputs of the budget process it is possible to ensure greater efficiency by targeting expenditures better, and also to monitor the equity of allocation, rendering the whole budget more democratic.

Box X:

**South Africa’s Women’s Budget Initiative (WBI)**

In 1995 the civil society WBI began to analyse South Africa’s budget for its impact on different groups by gender.

**Outside of government**, the initiative analyses whether the budget addresses women’s needs and makes adequate provision (financial and other) for implementing gender-sensitive policy. It seeks to identify indicators to measure whether resources are used effectively in reaching intended targets/goals (output/outcome indicators). It looks both at revenue and expenditure, taking on board the limited nature of financial resources available, and where it highlights a need for greater budgetary allocation in a particular area, this is balanced by identifying potential savings from expenditure which it sees as subverting gender equity. The initiative started small, with analysis in the first year of expenditure in six key sectors, identified for their close relationship to women’s issues and for being policy areas to which women could easily relate.

Within a year, a parallel initiative for a gender analysis of the budget **within government** was launched. The Select Committee on Finance has a special hearing on women, at which the WBI and other organizations made presentations. The research is launched 3 days before Budget Day and presented to key stakeholders, parliamentarians, media, NGO and others, through plenary presentations and group discussions of sectoral findings.

**Who’s involved**
The WBI began as an alliance of new parliamentarians (in the post-apartheid context post-1994) and 2 NGOs with background in policy analysis. The roles and relationships of those involved are critical to its success:

- NGOs provide the expertise and time necessary to collect information, undertake research, produce analysis;
- Parliamentarians provide access to information, focus in terms of salient political issues and a strong advocacy voice, without which the analysis might have gathered dust or circulated only among a closed circle of gender activists;
- Government - the strong policy link implies that such initiatives are most successful when they are collaborative ventures between staff policy, budget, information management systems and gender units (though even in the WBI’s case, such extensive intra-governmental collaboration seldom occurs). Government is expected to provide information, report honestly on what it is doing, what it hopes to do and what difficulties it is experiencing in achieving aims.

**Process**
- Analysis is undertaken by researchers from range NGOs, academic institutions and elsewhere. They are chosen for their knowledge of particular sector and of gender issues.
- Researchers are supported by a reference group. These are parliamentarians, government officials, NGO members and others chosen for their knowledge of a sector, but often too busy.
to do analysis themselves. They provide information and insights while themselves learning to combine sectoral, gender and budget analysis

- Researchers and reference groups change every year, in order to draw in the widest possible range of experience and reach out to a wider range of people. This has inspired initiatives concerning disaggregation by other interest groups (children, rural people, disabled, poor). There is a conscious effort to extend the network involved, using a snowballing technique for identifying reference group members
- A Gender Budget manual was produced for government officials
- Since 1998 the analysis has been disseminated through materials written in accessible, popular language, including simplified translations of key sections (for maximum accessibility, these were aimed at readers with just ten years of education and who speak English as a second language). Materials have been developed for workshops and training events.

Source: Adapted from Budlender (1996, 1998)

### 6.1.2 Factors for effective participatory budget initiatives

These two examples of participatory budgets are led by different sectors of society. The Porto Alegre case, led by District (State) government and working at the District level, is able to involve and coordinate a large proportion of the population who, in turn, provide the pressure for accountability from local government. The WBI, initially a non-governmental venture, relied on the cooperative interaction of NGOs with central government to bring about change, and holes to involve ever wider sectors of the population as it proceeds. This strategy of working with government from outside it has the advantage of engaging government in gender sensitive work, moving it beyond a rhetorical commitment to implementation. Conversely, a similar programme in Australia was less successful because it failed to involve actors outside government, thus limiting possibilities for ownership and sustainability, let alone popular empowerment through participation – an experience which counsels a widely participatory approach. There are, then, trade-offs to consider in terms of the scale of the initiative, breadth and depth of participation, and working closer to or further from government.

Which factors appear conducive to effective participatory budget initiatives, on the basis of these two examples? The Brazilian case reveals the opportunities offered by fiscal decentralization, since this permits a direct accountability relationship to develop between citizens and local government. The South African case demonstrates the importance of political openness, including a commitment on the government’s part to clean up corruption and pursue greater transparency and more open communication with civil society. It also proves the value of involving a key group of reformers, drawn from key ministries, where they can provide access to information and help channel citizen advocacy to strategic targets within government; and also from Parliament, where they can influence political debate and culture, and publicize findings. Both experiences indicate that citizen-government relations can be improved by a greater understanding by citizens of the limits to available resources and the multiple claims on them. Both also reinforce the message that since policy is only as good as its outcomes, and since

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18 And a further one in Uganda modelled on the WBI, led by Uganda Debt Network and Global Women in Politics Programme of the Asia Foundation (Lisa Vene Klasen, pers.comm).
outcomes are dependent on resources, budgetary processes at local and central
government level are a nerve centre for efforts by citizens to influence policy.

6.2 Citizen monitoring

Citizen monitoring refers to processes of accountability in the arena of local government
and service provision. In this area too, accountability questions arise both about whose
priorities are reflected in the supply of services or performance of local government; and
about the fulfillment of commitments made and performance standards underwritten by
the government or provider. In many cases of citizen monitoring of the quality of local
governance or provision of services the objective is to improve the quality of life of the poor,
either indirectly through stamping out corruption, or directly through improving their
access to essential goods and services and responsive, effective governance.

6.2.1 Empowerment through citizen monitoring

An interesting approach to participatory, grassroots citizen monitoring is the Community-
based Monitoring, Learning and Action in the United States. This method not only offers
the opportunity for tracking and monitoring government decision-making but also
involves constituencies in research, systematically building power and capacity to bring
about significant change and facilitating in-depth learning by large numbers of people on
the issues which concern them (Parachini & Mott 1997: 10). One example of this
approach in operation is outlined below:

Box X:

**Community-Based Monitoring, Learning and Action: The USA Empowerment Zone/Enterprise Community Learning Initiative**

The EZ/EC Learning Initiative (LI), launched in 1995, is intended to monitor and measure the
impact of the federal EZ/EC program, document its lessons for community development and
provide a national assessment for federal officials.

The monitoring is carried out by a cross-section of residents organised into a ‘learning team’. The
members decide which local goals of the EZ/EC program are most important to them, and
assess how well these goals are being achieved. The LI seeks to build the knowledge and
capacity of the learning teams to do monitoring and then helps them analyse and report on their
findings and conclusions to local EZ/EC administrators and the federal government.

An informal assessment of this still on-going process finds that the Initiative has significantly
affected the relational dynamics, decision making and/or outcomes in many of the targeted
communities, changing them for the better from what could have been anticipated if the
community ‘power structures’ had been left to their own devices. The keys to this are seen as the
work and very presence of the local learning teams and coordinators, backstopped by project
staff and regional researchers. On a substantive level, it is reported that the teams have
produced timely and in some cases ground-breaking information and analysis useful to EZ/EC
decision-makers.

Source: Parachini & Mott (1997)
The system of community monitoring described here goes further than PPAs in delivering community empowerment as well as policy-relevant information (see Sections 3 and 4). It recognizes explicitly the political nature of the impact assessment task, provides a grassroots perspective with the explicit objective of challenging large-scale government programmes and resource management procedures. It is not only an effective form of participatory accounting, but is empowering of participants. One limitation of this sort of approach is its prohibitive cost, given the high levels of technical assistance and coordination required, which effectively precludes its adoption in the South when substantial donor or government funding is not available. A further limitation to the strategy of using the public as 'messengers' to policy-makers is that conflicts arise when findings reflect negatively on local officials' work, leading to attempts by officials to blame (or 'throttle') the messenger (ibid: 23).

6.2.2 Report cards

A cheaper and quicker method for holding service providers to account is that of 'Report Cards', an approach which has spread rapidly in India. Initiatiated by the Public Affairs Centre in Bangalore (founded by an ex-World Bank staff member), this approach surveys the quality of public services and gathers citizens' proposals for improvements, using the market research technique of systematic sampling of all sectors of the population in a given area. The resulting 'report card' is presented to the service provider, with the aim of catalysing improvements in line with citizen demands. It is also widely publicized in the press, theroretically to disseminate the information and educate citizens about civic rights and responsibilities but no doubt with the additional effect of shaming poor performers.

Judged as a participatory process and in contrast to Community-Based Monitoring, Learning and Action, the main limitation of report cards is the low level of citizen participation in setting the agenda, debating the issues and presenting or acting on findings. This reduces to a minimum the degree of empowerment afforded, and makes the ownership and sustainability of the initiative fragile. On the other hand, it provides a means for accountability in contexts where people do not want or cannot commit themselves to full 'participation', with its time-costs and implications of long-term involvement, but are happy to provide this sort of market-research response and have it mediated and fed back to service providers or local government on their behalf.

6.2.3 Citizens’ access to information

The report card approach takes it as given that citizens have both access to the information they need to assess their satisfaction with services or government; and also that these will respond once users' dissatisfaction has been expressed (Goetz & Jenkins 1999). Goetz and Jenkins argue that the struggle for the right to information in India provides a much more effective means of holding officials to account, because it combines the quest for the necessary ingredient - information - with civic associations actually taking on themselves the task of exposing misdeeds and directly challenging the diversion of funds (op cit: 14):
Box X:

**The Right-to-Information Movement in India**

In Rajasthan, an activist group, Mazdoor Kishan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS), have introduced a process of ‘participatory auditing’ as a way of ordinary people seeking and using their right to information in collective fashion. This has involved initiating public hearings, in which detailed accounts derived from official expenditure records and other supporting documentation are read aloud to assembled villagers. The meetings are organized independently and presided over by a panel of respected people from within and outside the area. Officials are invited to attend and local people are invited to give testimonies, highlighting discrepancies between official records and their own experiences (as labourers on public work projects, applicants for means-tested anti-poverty schemes, consumers in ration shops, etc).

The activity of MKSS has led to the exposure of misdeeds of local politicians, private contractors, government engineers, leading, in a number of cases, to voluntary restitution. In broader terms, they have increased pressure at a regional and national level to grant the right to information, which could have implications for similar holding of local governments to account elsewhere in India. The strength of the movement is seen to be the result of the route through which people arrived at the decision to assert that information was theirs by right; the catalysing of an almost entirely bottom-up grass-roots pressure through conscientization and public performance.

Source: Goetz & Jenkins 1999b

This approach too has its limitations. Its highly confrontational style is simply not possible in contexts characterized by political repression or insecurity for civil activists. In many parts of the world where NGOs have assumed the function of service delivery on the state’s behalf, they will be unwilling to expose themselves by promoting or participating in such an initiative. The right-to-information movement does, however, illustrate the importance of government provision of information as an enabling factor for participatory accountability mechanisms to develop and operate; and also the potential for even grassroots activist groups to mobilize communities to demand and secure accountability from local government and service providers.

6.3 **How participatory is this accounting?**

The accountability mechanisms reviewed rest on varying degrees of participation and interaction of different actors. The WBI and Report Card methods are led by NGOs and other civil society groups which interact closely and in a non-confrontational, collaborative manner with government, only attempting to ‘educate’ and mobilise community members on salient issues at a later stage or as a by-product. At the other end of the spectrum, the activities of the Community-based Monitoring, Learning and Action and of the Right-to-Information movement cast NGOs in a pivotal role throughout, in catalysing grassroots activism which progressively assumes the task of holding government to account, largely in a confrontational or challenging manner. This range of
roles and interactions is summarised in the matrix below. The roles assigned to community members denote different levels of participation and degrees of potential empowerment.

Table X:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Demands Made or Roles Allotted to Citizens</th>
<th>Role of Intermediary Organization (NGO/CSO)</th>
<th>Degree of Learning for Government</th>
<th>Type of Citizen Participation</th>
<th>Level of Citizen Empowerment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participatory Budgeting (eg Brazil)</td>
<td>medium choosing &amp; feeding priorities to representatives</td>
<td>medium representatives from relevant CS equal partners to citizens</td>
<td>medium-high challenged to adopt measures or explain why not</td>
<td>Delegated power</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disaggregate d Citizen’s Budget (eg WBI in South Africa)</td>
<td>low information subsequently disseminated</td>
<td>high responsibility for research, advocacy, dissemination</td>
<td>high process of learning also taking place in government</td>
<td>Informing</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report Cards (eg India, Public Affairs Centre)</td>
<td>low response to survey</td>
<td>medium-high taking of survey, advocacy</td>
<td>low presentation of findings, little to force adopt</td>
<td>Consultation</td>
<td>low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community-based Monitoring Learning and Action (eg USA)</td>
<td>high issue identification, research &amp; advocacy by citizens</td>
<td>medium support &amp; training role, non-directive (decreasing over time)</td>
<td>medium-high high level pressure, forces rethink citizen capabilities and needs</td>
<td>Delegated power</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right-to-Information Movements (eg India, MKSS)</td>
<td>high action taken by citizens</td>
<td>medium mobilizing role (decreasing over time)</td>
<td>high high exposure and pressure account for acts</td>
<td>Citizen control</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 6.4 Summary and implications for PRS process

The various strengths of these approaches make them suitable for use at different stages and in different arenas of participatory policy work. For the PRS process, the examples of participatory budgeting illustrate how research and advocacy – on various dimensions of poverty, or the conditions of one particular population group - conducted by civil society at local, regional and national levels can be fed upwards to the national level and incorporated there (South Africa, Brazil). They also offer insights on how to draw in citizens at the local level, even into a government-led process (Brazil). The ongoing nature of both these strategies is an example of continued assessment and feedback as to how far government strategy is being fulfilled and is meeting both its own objectives and people’s needs. At the local level, the experience of the Learning
Initiative in the USA suggests methods of instituting accountability mechanisms at the grassroots, which operate increasingly independently of their NGO mobilizers and trainers.

- Experiences to date in participatory mechanisms for accountability demonstrate the mutual advantage to government and civil society of working collaboratively to enhance the relevance and performance of policies and services. Parties involved in PRS processes might aspire to the same mutually advantageous cooperative approaches.

- Spanning from local to national level, the experience to date offer models for poverty-sensitive budget formulation (WBI in South Africa) and civil society acting as watchdog in budgetary processes (Brazil, South Africa, Uganda). The analytical role adopted by the WBI and the watchdog role (both retrospective and ongoing) adopted by citizens’ groups in Brazil would both constitute important contributions of civil society to the PRS process, in sharpening the focus on poor and otherwise marginalized people and in ensuring that debt relief is used efficiently, transparently and for the purpose for which it is intended.

- For monitoring service provision, while the report card approach has some limitations it is a minimal and efficient way to hold service providers to agreed minimum performance standards.

- Citizens will need their capacity built in analysis of budgets and service provision to help inform the PRS at formulation stage. The capacity-building carried out as an integral and essential part of several of the initiatives reviewed offers models for the PRS formulation process: manuals, training workshops bringing together a mixture of actors from different areas of civil society and government, semi-permanent ‘learning teams’ initially under the tutelage of NGOs with advocacy expertise.

- For PRS implementation, the most salient lesson from the experiences reviewed is the need for citizen access to information, which has been achieved mainly through the involvement of information-brokers (parliamentarians, government officials) who are well-disposed and committed to a participatory process.

- For participatory budget or service monitoring to work, governments and service providers have to be receptive to the findings and feedback generated. PRSs thus need to include the establishment of agreements between citizens and government which bind the latter (both in its own right and as the regulator of service provision) to take action in response to them.

- Besides information provision to the parties directly involved, a wider information dissemination strategy is also critical to success. It raises general awareness, heightens the visibility of the issues at stake and creates a constituency for accountability-strengthening measures. Examples the PRS could draw on include large public meetings, the use of the press, and the publication of materials on the process in simplified language.

- Government is accountable to both citizens and donors for delivering on the PRS. To avoid undermining efforts by southern governments and civil society to establish
and operate their own systems and cultures of accountability, donors need to ‘hand over’ both responsibility for and ownership of accountability, and redirect their efforts to supporting capacity-building and information dissemination of the types mentioned above.
Section 7  Ensuring quality in participation

The extension of participatory approaches into the field of policy is a relatively recent happening, so attention has mainly focussed so far on entry points and ways of applying them in this new domain. However, participatory approaches have suddenly become a requisite component of PRSs for these to obtain international financial institutions' approval. Making participation mandatory at this level and linking the flow of debt relief to it, raises the question of what standard of participation is acceptable. The development of quality standards becomes urgent.

This section deals first with some overarching procedural issues which emerge repeatedly throughout the experiences reviewed for this synthesis as affecting the quality of engagement between civil society and government or donors. Progress to date in developing appropriate standards for gauging and monitoring quality in participatory policy processes is then reported, and the areas where capacity needs to be built are identified.

Many of the examples drawn on here are from the Bank’s efforts to make the Country Assistance Strategy process participatory. The CAS experience is well-documented and critically reviewed by participation specialists within the Bank and without (see, for example, World Bank External Gender Consultative Group 1997, Aycrigg 1998, Clark & Dorschel 1998, Development Bank Watchers’ Project 1998, IBRD et al 1998, Tandon & Cordeiro 1998, Arboleda 1999, Tikare & Shah 1999). There are, of course, caveats to bear in mind when transferring lessons from participatory donor country assistance strategies to the area of national poverty reduction strategies, as mentioned in Section 2, but this body of experience is nonetheless useful.

7.1 Participation: authentic, representative and inclusive?

Many critiques of participation in project work have used the ‘participation ladder’, in various forms, to argue that the terms ‘participation’ and ‘participatory’ are used too loosely, often referring to information-sharing or consultation, which offer less popular involvement and at a lower intensity than does genuine ‘participation’. Questions have been raised about whether all who should have been included were; and whether those participating as intermediaries were really representative of those for whom they claimed to speak.

7.1.1 Authenticity of participation

Reviews of World Bank CASs, and our knowledge of other donors’ assistance strategies, suggest that civil society ‘participation’ in them rarely extends beyond information-sharing and consultation to shared agenda-setting, decision-making or any kind of empowerment for participants. Also, ‘participation’ is rarely evident in any but the

19 Often the Bank’s schema of ‘Intensity of Participation’ is cited (see World Bank 1996). Others frequently used are Arnstein’s (1969) one developed for Northern countries; and the ‘Typology of participation: how people participate in development programmes and projects’ developed by Pretty (1995).
middle stages of the initiative – commenting on a first draft, or contributing ideas as to focal areas -, never in the agenda-setting or final drafting stages, and in monitoring and evaluating the policy’s implementation. In most examples covered by the Bank’s own retrospective reviews of CASs, (IBRD et al 1998; Tikare & Shah 1999) and critical reviews (Tandon & Cordeiro 1998), ‘participation’ ceases as soon as the published CAS is sent to those who commented on the first draft – if indeed the final product is ever shared with them at all. Both these facts constitute limits on the extent and quality of participation.

Reviewing how DFID country strategy papers (CSPs) can become a better tool for poverty reduction, Booth & White (1999) note that although the CSP guidance notes require that poor people’s perspective be incorporated in the analysis of poverty therein and the resulting strategy, most CSPs reviewed mention only consultations with government. While information on DFID priorities was shared with civil society (among other stakeholders in several of the cases reviewed, only exceptionally was civil society participation significant, or sustained throughout the CSP process. In no instance was a role given to civil society – or indeed to government – in monitoring or evaluating the impact of the CSP.

Analysis of the extent and quality of participation by civil society in aid coordination fora similarly identifies a low degree of access for CSOs at the most significant stages of the process, where any access has been granted at all, and suggests it would be better termed consultation or information-sharing than participation (Richmond & McGee 1999). These issues are also identified in the Bank’s most recent review of participatory CASs as lessons learnt or areas needing further work (Tikare & Shah 1999). While the review itself seems at times to conflate ‘participatory’ with ‘consultative’ processes, it does focus on the quality of participation rather than on the quantity of CASs which can be deemed participatory, as previous Bank reviews have tended to.

The question of authenticity of ‘participation’ is intimately linked to access issues – whether participants have access to relevant information, in a suitably tailored form and appropriate languages; whether they are supplied with or at least enabled to seek out contacts and connections to key actors (eg through government or donor NGO units or civil society liaison officers). It is also closely linked to issues of organizational capacity of NGOs and CSOs, especially availability of time, of the right mix of staff with the necessary skills activities as diverse as policy analysis, document drafting, negotiation, community mobilization, financial accounting; and of networks of like-minded organizations to add influence and share tasks. Time is required to put these factors in place where they do not exist. Availability of sufficient time, and adoption of an unhurried approach by facilitators and participants, are also perhaps the most often cited weak points in experiences of participatory policy processes to date, and those which contribute most directly to making a travesty of ‘participation’ (Tandon & Cordeiro 1998; Richmond & McGee 1999).

7.1.2 Who is included, who do they represent, and how can one know?

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20 The authors suggest that this is due to the fact that no outcome targets are set at all, nor are ways for anyone - even DFID - to track them specified.
It is commonly felt that in a truly participatory process ‘everyone with a stake’ should be included. This issue is more complex than it appears. Those negatively affected by a policy or programme have stakes, as well as the prospective beneficiaries. In the case of participation in poverty reduction policy, the non-poor have a stake as well as the poor, and will probably want less rather than more resources to be channelled to the poor. Hence the critical importance of the governance of the governance of the PRS process, discussed in section 2.3. A further complication is that for practical reasons it usually has to be representatives of all stakeholders, able to put forward their views, who are invited to participate. Selection of intermediaries to participate has to be based on either special skills (academics etc.), or some sense of representation of the interests of poor and socially excluded groups.

This raises obvious questions about how to know whether a CSO or NGO is representative or not. The NGO Working Group on the World Bank, reviewing participatory CASs (Tandon & Cordeiro 1998: 15-16), points out the need for convenors of the participatory process to be fully transparent about the stakeholders consulted, since this is an important dimension of the quality of the participatory process. Broad-based ownership obviously requires that those participating are seen by the wider public as legitimate and as representing a genuine constituency.

Richmond & McGee (1999), investigating civil society participation in aid coordination fora, encountered a significant scepticism about CSO representativity among the donor staff interviewed. They strongly urge development NGOs to attend to the question of their own representativity and relationships, on the one hand by clarifying their links to poor communities, and on the other by coordinating and work-sharing with other civil society actors at the level of national NGO networks (op cit). National NGO networks have a vital role to play here, in developing representativity criteria for their membership; encouraging and facilitating members to keep open communication channels with grassroots groups, the public at large and other civil society actors; and playing a validating function. The time question arises here too: convenors must provide adequate time for representatives to hold negotiations with their constituents, to reach consensus or common positions from which to develop representative and legitimate messages and input them at opportune moments in the process.

Who needs to be included in the pool of voices which the intermediaries represent? The consensus seems to be that all those with a stake in the issue at hand have a right to be represented. In the case of macro policy, this would mean all sectors of the population. Some self-selection inevitably operates; and the right not to participate needs to be respected (Richmond & McGee 1999). Even when the boundaries for inclusion are so wide – or perhaps because they are so wide and little or nothing is done to compensate biases existing in society at large –, there are always parts of the population whose voices are heard less clearly or not at all.

“In urban Bolivia, migrants from rural areas who have work in the construction sector discussed the construction workers’ syndicate: ‘We distrust the syndicate leaders because they have their arrangements with the bosses… As we are from the fields, and sometimes we can’t talk Spanish, they easily take advantage of us […]. The language barrier is Bolivia is mirrored by a literacy barrier in Ghana: ‘In Tumu… bank staff acknowledge the vast number of illiterate older men farmers who are […] not aware of the agriculture input marketing credit
A more general absence of information in Tanzania has implications for the success of decentralized local government and its relations to central government. This information gap translates into resistance to paying taxes and non-participation in local government self-help projects... In Kahama some villagers were unaware of the existence of district council budgets and of their legal requirement to contribute to them” (Brock 1999: 56).

This excerpt shows clearly the groups likely to be inadvertently excluded, the voices likely to be under-represented in participatory processes unless special measures are taken to privilege them: the less literate, those not fluent in the lingua franca or major European Languages; elderly people; rural people.

7.1.3 Gender biases in ‘participatory’ processes

Gender biases limit the extent that women can effectively participate in policy reviews or processes. This point is illustrated by Helen Wangusa, participant at a meeting of the World Bank External Gender Consultative Group who, in discussion on participatory CASs, pointed out that:

“[…] many women’s groups are not aware of what the CAS is. A real participatory processes requires a long lead-time to prepare women’s organizations through workshops, particularly at the local level. Women’s organizations need a greater clarity on the CAS process, who can participate and the role of different groups. A key issue is whether women will be able to see the final CAS document. Referring to SAPRI, […] it is difficult for many women’s organizations to be actively involved as the research methods are very complex and technical and consequently there are only a limited number of women who can participate. The debates are too technical and difficult to transfer back to the country level. There is a need to focus more on unorthodox methods such as participant observation and oral history […]” (World Bank External Gender Consultative Group 1997: 18).

The incidental discrimination women experience in all power relationships (whether within their households or in civic engagement with powerful public institutions) requires special capacity-building and procedural measures if these voices – likely to express distinctive gendered experiences of marginalization or deprivation – are to be included. Claims that these voices are disclosed by PPA-type approaches have been challenged recently: Cornwall (forthcoming), reviewing PPAs from the perspective of their scope to deepen understandings of gender and poverty issue, reminds us that while PRA can be used to enhance the agency and voice of poor women,

“a focus on gender is not implicit in the methodology, nor is it often an explicit element of PRA practice. Where gender has been paid attention, it is often through a deliberate emphasis on difference […] or through the use of other tools alongside PRA, such as gender analysis […]” (op cit: no page).

Facilitation which pays no attention to the participatory process itself, or to how the process is affected by the researchers’ agency and by power differences between participants, will tend to silence women’s voices or lead to their being represented only at a superficial level, with no consequences for policy. Cornwall continues:
“Razavi and Miller argue that ‘the situation of women cannot be improved simply by “asking the women themselves” what their interests are’ (1995:38). The deliberative potential of PPAs is [...] under-realised, exacerbated by the tensions highlighted earlier between simply eliciting local versions and engaging in a process of critical reflection” (ibid: no page).

In relation to incorporating gender issues when developing PRSPs, advice has been issued by the World Bank’s Gender Team (Poverty Reduction and Social Development Group) on how to ‘engender’ PRSPs in Africa. It stresses that this question of integration - itself a participation issue - needs to be approached on at least three different levels in the PRSP process:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels at which gender needs to be addressed in the PRSP process:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Analysis: in analysing the gender dimensions of poverty and growth;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Prioritization: in determining criteria for prioritizing some poverty reduction actions and relegating others; and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Representation in participatory exercises - ‘asking the women themselves’ : in identifying civil society participants in PRSP formulation, implementation and setting and tracking performance indicators</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from AFTI1 1999

A vital yet often neglected aspect of being inclusive in participatory processes is choosing with care when and where meetings and events will be held, and at what level of protocol and formality. Richmond and McGee (1999) note that

“the plush surroundings of one of Mozambique’s top hotels were unfamiliar and intimidating for many CSOs invited to the [Consultative Group meeting], especially the most representative grassroots groups, such as farmers’ associations and community groups” (op cit: 17).

Pre-set, full workshop or meeting agendas were also identified in that study to effectively exclude even those who are physically present at the event.

7.2 Standards for quality in participation

Setting standards for quality in participation poses two challenges: what sort of benchmarks are needed to judge quality; and by what sort of process such benchmarks should be established.

Recommendations put to the World Bank by the NGO Working Group at the November 1998 international conference on ‘Upscaling and Mainstreaming Participation of Primary Stakeholders’ (Tandon 1998) argue strongly for the establishment and enforcement of minimum quality standards:
“The first and perhaps the most important new generation issue for participation is to begin to set and enforce minimum quality standards. […] Consultations have been attempted in different ways, but we have yet to have a minimum quality standards [sic] for information dissemination, for consultation, for duration of consultations, for types of capacity building that needs to be done to enable consultation” (p. 3).

The UK Participation Group, too, has held electronic discussions on the need for a set of standards for participation, associated with a hallmark to be awarded to qualifying institutions or organizations; and for forms of appraising participation exercises, for use by the intended participants (Richard Adam, Partners for London Vision, pers. comm).

7.2.1 Which benchmarks are needed?

Tandon (1999) initiates the task of setting standards. ‘Quality in participation’ (QIP) is defined as the extension of participation in policy formulation beyond the usual small coterie of national experts and political and bureaucratic elites to a wide range of other stakeholders, with an attendant increase in overall legitimacy and competency of those involved to formulate appropriate policy. Focusing on benchmarks for enhancing participation in WB policy work, Tandon suggests three basic parameters for defining a ‘minimum acceptable level of quality of participation in any World Bank policy work’ (p.2): minimum acceptable standard of participation; minimum set of procedures to be adopted to assure acceptable quality; minimum expected outcomes of quality participation in a given setting:

**Proposed minimum standard of participation**

The issue of minimum acceptable standards for quality in participation is not easy. One approach would be to ensure that the weakest and most powerless group is enabled to participate in the policy formulation. This will ensure that the voices not normally heard are included.

**Expected outcomes of quality in participation in policy work:**

- quality of the resulting policy: in terms of how equitable, far-sighted and sustainable its effects are;
- inclusiveness: the hearing and inclusion in negotiations of all the different perspectives and priorities on a particular issue;
- broad-based ownership: attainment of widespread ownership of and support for the policy in the country and throughout the population;
- capacity-building: enhanced capacities of various stakeholder groups and public agencies to enable participation in future policy work (based on Tandon 1999 p.3).

**Proposed procedures to be followed are:**

- stakeholder analysis to be conducted for that particular policy;
- identification of key partners in each stakeholder group;
- provision of full information to key partners on past policy in this field, its impact, need and rationale for new policy etc; and support to enhance capacity of key partners where necessary, to permit them to understand and utilize the information;
- facilitated consultation and negotiation across different stakeholder groups to bring out diverse perspectives and priorities and attain agreement on the resolution of differences;
- a defined and publicized procedure for providing feedback to all key partners and supporting them in the fulfillment of their roles in subsequent implementation of the policy;
- built-in monitoring procedure providing feedback to key partners periodically throughout the whole process (based on Tandon 1999 p.4).
Work has also been going on in the UK Participation Group on quality standards for participation, though not specifically in the policy context. The following set of ‘ten pointers to good practice’ can be used as an aide-memoire, and could be adapted to make it more explicitly applicable to particular contexts, or, for those seeking numerical indications, developed further and scores attached to each possible answer.

**Ten pointers for good practice, which have all been raised by community members in discussions on this issue**

- Everyone likely to be affected by the issue knew the process was happening
- The initiating body (e.g., the council) discussed and agreed the objectives with local people, as early in the process as possible
- Everyone had an opportunity to take part, in ways that were appropriate to their personal circumstances
- Information and all documentation relevant to the process was freely available to all participants
- The aims and objectives were fully discussed; conflicts were made clear and resolved where possible
- The process was adequately resourced and did not rely on voluntary efforts to run it
- Independent advisors helped ensure that the process was open, and this was acknowledged by the people who took part
- All the inputs were taken into account
- At the end of the process a final assessment of what had been agreed, and what had not, was presented for discussion and agreed
- People taking part agreed that it had been worth their time and effort. There was no evidence that any groups felt that they had been excluded from the process

Source: Church C. (forthcoming 2000)

What exactly these statements might mean in a given setting, and what level, ‘depth’ or ‘intensity’ of participation is an acceptable minimum for particular actors in a particular case, is obviously partly context-specific. Further development of the concept of minimum standards for quality participation might involve distinguishing between the various levels or intensities of participation named by some analysts (Arnstein 1969; World Bank 1996; ODA 1995; Narayan 1995; Centre for Rural Development and Training), specifying what sort of activity constitutes each and giving examples of which level or intensity of participation might be appropriate to various types of stakeholder in different contexts. Judgements are required on how transferable the existing ladders and typologies of participation are to the field of policy, as opposed to the field of projects, for which they were devised, and on how they could be appropriately adapted.

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21 The application of these principles to the particular case of participatory CASs is annexed in the document.
7.2.2 How should benchmarks be set?

How quality standards or benchmarks are established is at least important as their scope and content. Clearly, the sort of process which best befits the task of developing quality standards for participation is a participatory process. ‘A sense of ownership over a [participatory monitoring process] and the results is recognised to be essential’ (Gaventa & Blauert 1999), implying that people involved in the participatory exercise should themselves set the quality criteria by which it is judged. Ownership issues notwithstanding, care is needed in selecting who will be involved, set indicators and apply them, because quality monitoring ‘does not necessarily benefit the people directly and has opportunity costs in terms of [...] people’s time which should not be undervalued’ (McAllister & Vernooy 1999: 69).

Rydin and Sommer (1999) evaluate an experiment in the participatory setting of standards, in this case indicators of urban sustainability in a London location. The sustainability of their community is considered to be of interest to all local residents, yet it is found that people’s participation in the setting of indicators for this dimension of their quality of life has been low, because their perceptions of costs and benefits were such as to inhibit their greater participation. The main problems impeding the smooth functioning of the project’s bottom-up strategy have wider relevance than the individual project, applying to all indicator-setting programmes and, indeed, to public participation exercises as a whole:

- problems of understanding;
- lack of familiarity with the process;
- problems of credibility and trust;
- lack of certainty of benefits;
- distribution of costs and benefits;
- structure of benefits (adapted from Rydin & Sommer p. 3).

A series of recommendations for developing local indicators – whether of participation or other aspects of a change process - in participatory fashion are derived from this evaluation. Many of them are applicable for civil society and government to use in developing quality standards for participation in policy processes such as the PRS:

Box X:

**Recommendations for enhancing effective public participation in developing local indicators**

- Be clear and transparent throughout the process;
- Design and promote the process on the basis of an appraisal of the level of understanding and trust within the community;
- Focus on partners with appropriate skills and a high level of acceptance in the community;
- Make use of existing networks and knowledge;
- Foster the community’s control over the process and benefits by delegating authority over the process (including funding) to the community where appropriate;
- With indicator selection, focus on issues where benefits occur at the local level and are visible;
- In order to highlight the benefits of indicators, develop, formalize and advertise the link to action;
- Keep the costs of participation low (by payment of expenses, short meetings, effective communication) and consider payment for participation (ibid: 9).

Source: Adapted from Rydin & Sommer (1999)
7.3 Capacity-building needs for high-quality participation

To permit participation of a high quality in policy processes, capacity building of two kinds is needed. At the more basic level, participants and facilitators both need an understanding of participatory approaches, leading facilitators (e.g., governments) need expertise in using them for policy purposes and intermediary facilitators (e.g., NGOs) need experience and skills in policy advocacy.

To permit judgements to be made about whether participatory processes are of an acceptable standard or not, facilitators also need to be able to lead open discussions on setting indicators, and must be open to critical judgements on their performance as facilitators. Here much depends on the attitudes and behaviour of key people involved, and access to PRA practitioners with experience of training in behaviour and attitudes may be helpful. Participants need to know how to judge the quality of the process in which they are being offered a role, and to be supported by experienced participatory practitioners in attempts to identify ways quality could be improved if it is questionable.

Since the spread of experience with participatory policy processes is so uneven, and resides so predominantly in the advocacy NGO community in particular countries, there is a strong case for sharing experience between NGO networks within and across countries, and for using NGOs to build the capacity of government personnel. Civil society actors are generally well aware of the synergies to be gained by networking and forming alliances within their own ranks, but may need financial and logistical support from donors or government to do so. Their capacity— in terms of time, personnel and know-how— for advocacy work is often limited, especially in sub-Saharan Africa where civil society or CSO advocacy is newer and less developed than elsewhere. In situations where prevailing power relations would make it inappropriate or impossible for a national CSO to train or sensitize government officials, international CSOs or southern CSOs from other countries in the region might be better placed to fill this role. Capacity-building by international CSOs can provide the crucial knowledge which allows southern CSOs to benefit from openings available to them. A good example is the Center for Democratic Education’s support to Guatemalan NGOs in influencing the Consultative Group process (Ruthrauff 1996).

An Advocacy Working Group comprising Northern NGOs and their counterparts in the Philippines, analyzing capacity-building needs for advocacy purposes and how Northern NGOs could best supply them, come up with the following list, aimed at NGOs, which highlights some of the capacity needs likely to arise in both the non-governmental sector and the government in the course of planning and undertaking participatory PRS processes:

Box X:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specific recommendations for capacity-building for advocacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Enhance the framework for doing advocacy, especially analytical tools, sensitivity to constituents' behaviours and ideas, an actor- rather than structure-oriented approach, inclusiveness and conversance with the dynamics of power and policy processes;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Integrate research and information management into advocacy, including access to information, information-sharing among allies, and analysis of information and context;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Building capability to design and conduct policy-focused research;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Developing market research skills to test public opinion and evaluate the impact of advocacy initiatives;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Negotiation skills, including analysis of institutions and power relationships;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Broadening linkages and networks;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participation in Poverty Reduction Strategies: DRAFT: 10 February 2000 (NOT FOR CITATION)
7.4 **Summary and implications for the PRS process**

For the purposes of ensuring high-quality, participatory PRS processes, what is needed is a common understanding, shared by donors, governments and civil society, of what constitutes an acceptably participatory process. The examples shown above (Tandon 1998 and Church, forthcoming) suggest that it is possible to develop basic principles to apply to PRS processes in general, which can be further elaborated and expanded as fitting in each country context.

- The task of developing basic general principles should be undertaken by a mixed and global group of representatives from governments, the non-governmental sector and donor agencies, with expertise in participatory approaches and in upholding quality standards;

- The specific elaboration of the principles to individual country contexts, if required, should be done at country level by government and civil society, and will no doubt shed light on areas of practice, principles or procedure where enhanced capacity is required.

- Given the restrictions on the role of donors in PRSs which is implied by the framework’s strong focus on country ownership, it would be appropriate if donors concentrated their efforts to support the PRS process on responding to capacity-building needs identified in-country.

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22 It is hoped that this task can be attempted at the forthcoming workshop at IDS on ‘Designing participatory processes for formulation and monitoring of poverty reduction strategies’, 22-23 February 2000.
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