

## **Session A Summary: Thursday 21 April**

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### **Participatory processes- broadening, deepening and sustaining- strengthening the role of CSOs in formulating and implementing PRS. How to secure greater participation from vulnerable groups, women, the elderly, youth and children.**

#### General points:

1. Capacity of CSOs to participate and to be relevant in their engagement in formulation processes and to offer alternatives
2. How to make this participation meaningful: many experiences showed that first round PRS had limited consultation, with questions around the selection of CSOs, the nature of consultations and exclusions. Governments often treat civil society as the opposition rather than as the people; but this affects the seriousness and credibility of PRS: without meaningful participation there is no widespread ownership. Meaningful participation is also linked to the right to participate.
3. Participation can be effective if local development actors receive capacity building and if processes are country-based.
4. Information and access to the details of the PRS process in all its stages is a major issue in all the PRS contexts.

#### Action in the PRS process

1. Resources for CSOs for capacity building and ensuring the quality of participation: the need to empower actors with more tools for analysis, research, evaluation and monitoring to generate evidence-based advocacy. The dissemination of information by governments and CSOs is a major challenge in this empowerment process and guaranteeing access.
2. There is a need to look for models of multi-stakeholder participatory processes that can embrace the diversity of civil society groups, their different models of organization and that allows for consultation at different levels from local through to national. In particular means must be found to involve vulnerable groups and give local level actors a voice at national level. There must be room to present alternatives that may not agree with the World Bank and government perspectives.
3. An institutional framework is needed to provide the necessary capacity building and resources for quality civil society participation. This framework would also serve to guarantee meaningful participation when political will is not strong by establishing minimum standards and a set of indicators by which participation can be assessed.
4. Involvement of parliaments is very important; these are the interlocutors between government and society. Parliamentarians also need information and capacity building to perform their oversight functions effectively.

#### Other Key Issues

1. PRS consultation has been a learning process for all actors; in both Sri Lanka and Tanzania there has been much improvement second time around; participatory processes can improve over time.
2. All of the lessons learned need to be documented and disseminated, especially the success stories that can then be used as models of meaningful participation.
3. Other dimensions of meaningful participation
  - a. Involvement in the macroeconomic framework debates, if civil society are participating actively, government limitations will be better understood since the macroeconomic framework underlies the context for the PRS.
  - b. Participation will become truly meaningful around PRS when civil society proposals are reflected and incorporated and when all public policies are aligned around the PRS.
4. Link between right to participate and situation in PRS countries where there is no space to participate, no freedom to express alternative opinions and where rights are often not defended (examples of Vietnam and Nepal were given)—no access to information.

Country examples given from:

Malawi, Togo, Gambia, Tanzania, Sri Lanka, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Nicaragua, Mali, Vietnam, Senegal, Mauritania, Nepal.