



United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

**Comments on the Concept Note
Joint World Bank and IMF Report on
Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers – Progress in Implementation
2005 PRS Review**

1. The Concept Note identifies relevant thematic issues related to the process and content of the PRS approach, as well as the methodological steps necessary to evolve a comprehensive framework for undertaking the 2005 PRS review.

2. In our view, the issue of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms related to poverty reduction should be addressed more squarely in the review, as this issue cuts –across all process-related and substantive concerns connected with the PRSP implementation. Though there is a reference to PSIA (para 9) and the methodology outlined in para 14 raises the question of identifying the appropriate results chain for monitoring progress in PRS implementation, there is a need to address directly the issue of mechanisms and capacities needed for evidence based policy formulation to support contextualisation of the approach at national and sub-national levels and improve accountability and results-orientation. Moreover, if the PRS approach has to be utilized as a mutual accountability framework between countries and donors and between the State and its citizens (see para. 5 below), particularly those who need to be targeted under the approach, there is a need to focus on this issue, more explicitly at a cross-cutting thematic level.

Specific Comments

Strengthening the medium-term orientation of the PRS

3. The emphasis on medium-term orientation of PRS and linking it to the MDGs is very desirable. However, one has to be careful in not limiting the scope of the PRS approach to the implementation of MDGs, particularly if MDGs are understood in a narrow technocratic sense meaning the 8 MDGs and its indicators framework. There would be instances where effectively reducing poverty may require a more comprehensive framework. Much has already been said on the insufficient reference to institutions and systems of governance within the PRSP process. For example, a human rights assessment of the country situation may reveal more fundamental institutional and strategic policy measures needed to address exclusion of certain groups or ethnic discrimination as necessary steps to address the poverty incidence in a sustainable manner. Therefore, in setting targets and objectives for PRS there has to be sufficient flexibility in customising and even going beyond the MDG targets with a view to address the fundamental structural issues that are contributing to the state of poverty in that country.

4. The other relevant issue here relates to the importance of having inter-sectoral policy coherence at the national level to ensure a coordinated and more sustainable implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy. One of those issues is human rights. The World Bank has recognized the great deal of overlap between human rights principles and the Bank's mission

to eradicate poverty¹. In linking a Poverty Reduction Strategy to a universal normative framework and State obligations emanating from the human rights instruments, the goals of the Poverty Reduction Strategy could be sustained with enhanced accountability of the relevant stake-holders. The universal nature of human rights, their mobilization potential and their emphasis on legal obligations to respect, protect and promote human rights, while encouraging national ownership and people's empowerment makes the human rights framework a useful tool to strengthen the accountability and equity dimensions of the Poverty Reduction Strategies. OHCHR has elaborated on this synergy between the two frameworks in the enclosed document titled "Human Rights Guidelines on the Poverty Reduction Strategies".

Utilizing the PRS as accountability framework

5. The Concept note proposes as one of the themes of the review the utilization of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers as a mutual accountability framework between governments and donors. More importantly, they should be viewed as an accountability framework between governments and their citizens. MDGs are mentioned under strengthening medium term orientation, but it would be particularly useful if the links between human rights commitments and MDGs could be spelled out, along with accountability systems (in addition to monitoring systems). There is an isolated reference to 'social accountability' mechanisms towards the bottom of page 6, which could be spelled out and supplemented with legal and political mechanisms.

Broadening and deepening meaningful participation

6. The priority given to alternative macro-economic policy options /scenarios and a broad based dialogue is very welcome. We would like to see the participation of national human rights institutions and national human rights organizations in this process. There are studies (such as the one undertaken by the Danish Institute for Human Rights) recommending, among other things, more active roles for national human rights institutions in policy debates. But such institutions, as with other domestic constituencies, need to be capacitated and empowered if participation is to be something other than fleeting and tokenistic, not coming at the cost of the effective fulfilment of core human rights monitoring, reporting, and complaint -handling functions. There is, perhaps, a strong case for participation to be separately costed, planned for, and funded for in the long term in order to be meaningful and sustainable, with 'ad hoc' consultation processes to operate in harmony with established democratic institutions.

Tailoring the PRS approach to conflict-affected and fragile states

7. The need to tailor the PRS approach to country situations is extremely critical and more so in case of the conflict-affected and fragile States. In such cases especially, there may be a strong case for integrating human rights into analytical process (poverty diagnostics/ PSIA) with a view to reveal - rather than mask and perpetuate - latent conflicts, patterns of discrimination and in extreme cases 'structural violence' that risk spilling over into violent conflict if not addressed. In this sense a human rights based approach might be seen as supporting the implementation of the PRS approach in fragile and 'pre' or 'post' conflict states, together with requirements of human rights-sensitive monitoring and accountability/grievance resolution.

¹ "Talking points to the High Level Task Force on the Right to Development", Joseph K. Ingram, Special Representative to the UN and the WTO in Geneva, December 2004

References

- (i) “Human Rights Guidelines on the Poverty Reduction Strategies”, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Geneva, 2003
<http://www.ohchr.org/english/issues/poverty/guidelines.htm> ;
- (ii) Human Rights and Poverty Reduction: A Conceptual Framework, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 2004,
<http://www.ohchr.org/english/issues/poverty/guidelines.htm>
- (iii) “ A human rights perspective on the Millennium Development Goals”, Paper prepared by Prof. Philip Alston, Special Adviser to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the Millennium Development Goals, as a contribution to the work of the Millennium Project Task Force on Poverty and Economic Development.
- (iv) “Human Rights and extreme poverty”, report of the independent expert Prof. Arjun Sengupta, on the question of human rights and extreme poverty; E/CN.4/2005/49,
<http://www.ohchr.org/english/issues/poverty/expert/index.htm>
- (v) “Study on policies for development in a globalising world: What can the human rights approach contribute”, Paper prepared by Prof. S.R. Osmani; E/CN.4/Sub.2/2004/18,
<http://www.ohchr.org/english/bodies/subcom/56th/documents.htm>