Civil Society and Poverty Reduction
The Poverty Reduction Strategy Process in Zambia

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Lusaka
2000
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There is no question about the existence of Poverty in Zambia today. The word is being increasingly used by the international community, the government, civil society and the poor themselves to describe the situation in which the majority of our people live today.

The challenge we face is not how to achieve poverty reduction but most definitely how to eradicate it. It is important to realise that poverty is certainly not a natural situation that can not be eradicated. But the impoverishment of people is by and large an imposed condition resulting from inappropriate or mismanaged policies, programmes, priorities, and politics.

A few people are poor because they are lazy, lack responsibility, and are culturally ready to accept their deprivation -- but these are a few exceptional cases. Therefore, being artificial, poverty is a challenge that can be fought. Our vision should be that of Poverty eradication and not merely poverty reduction, for the fight clearly goes for beyond treating the symptoms of poverty to fighting its root causes.

It is this realisation that brings us hope that gatherings like the one in which we are today, will yield the long sought after vision of a Poverty free Zambia.

Civil Society and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) process in Zambia

Guiding principles

Civil society’s involvement in the PRSP have been guided by the following principles:

Firstly, that the PRSP is addressing the most profound moral challenge facing Zambia today – Poverty (More than 80% of the population live in abject poverty). The PRSP is not a process only to solicit for funds to immediately meet the poverty challenge, but a process for long-term development planning to effectively eradicate that challenge.
The PRSP is not a short-term process with a one-off outcome, but will continue for several years with constant evaluation and revision based upon realistic assessment of results.

The PRSP is not a ‘home grown & country owned’ process unless civil society has effectively participated in the design and decision-making of PRSP at initial and final levels.

Following governments invitation to be part of the process, Civil Society has participated in the formulation of Zambia’s PRSP at two levels --- (i) the government working groups and (ii) the Civil Society consultative process through the Civil Society for Poverty Reduction (CSPR). The CSPR is a network of Civil Society Organisations (CSO’s) participating in Zambia’s PRSP.

The network evolved out of the need to ensure effective and meaningful participation of CSO’s in diverse locations and with different backgrounds in the PRSP process. It is a loose alliance with no formal structure regulating the participation of CSO’s.

**Government consultative process**

**Working Groups**

Some Civil Society Organisations (CSO’s) represented Civil Society on the various working groups of the government. They participated in the various activities of the working groups.

**Provincial Consultations**

The government undertook provincial consultations in May 2001 as part of the PRSP consultative process. Civil Society was part of the teams that went to the various provinces.

**Civil Society consultative process**

To complement government efforts, and in realising that a number of CSO’s (e.g. CBO’s) work very closely with the grassroots and those heavily affected by poverty, Civil Society carried out the following activities in line with the PRSP formulation;

**Consultative group meetings**

Civil Society held consultative group1[1] meetings in the ten thematic areas that were agreed upon through the CSPR network. These are; Growth, Agriculture and food security; Education, Youth and Child; Macroeconomics; Gender; Environment; Governance; Health & HIV/AIDS; Mining; Employment and Sustainable livelihoods; and Tourism.
**Provincial consultations**

In addition to the consultative group meetings, Civil Society complemented government efforts through its own provincial poverty hearings in four of the nations poorest provinces. The meetings were held in the provincial centres but included representatives from the various districts with the poorest districts being given higher priority.

**The CSPR report**

The input gathered by Civil Society was put together in a comprehensive report entitled ‘A PRSP for Zambia – A Civil Society Perspective’. This report was launched in July 2001 at an occasion that allowed for the official handover of the Civil Society input to the Government represented by the Minister of Finance and Economic Development and the PRSP Coordinator.

**Zambia’s draft PRSP**

Towards the end of September 2001, Civil Society was availed a copy of the first draft PRSP and on the 5th and 6th October 2001, Civil Society held a national forum for its response to the draft PRSP. The forum provided a platform for Civil Society from different parts of the country to review the first draft of the Zambian PRSP and drew together over 90 participants.

Some of the findings from the forum noted that the first draft PRSP contained a good number of proposed interventions by Civil Society. However, the forum noted weaknesses on the non-specificity of priorities in the majority of cases, lack of continuity (or flow) probably due to varying presentation formats of the working groups. Similarly, the logical frameworks in some instances contained new information and interventions, which were not reflected in the narratives. In addition to these more general comments, Civil Society proposed some specific interventions and priorities on the various chapters, meant to reinforce the generally accepted priority interventions in the draft PRSP as well as point to other important measures that my have been left out.

By mid October 2001, government held a National Summit on Poverty Reduction that drew participants from the various stakeholder groups (Government, Civil Society, Donor Community and the private sector) from different parts of the country. The summit, which aimed at stakeholder review of the first draft PRSP, provided an opportunity for Civil Society to present its position on the first draft as arising from the National Forum for Civil Society’s response to the PRSP.

Civil Society is now anxious to see the second draft and final PRSP documents before they are presented to the higher authorities at which levels we may have little if any influence.
Emerging strengths and constraints

Strengths

• The emerging partnership among various stakeholders on critical national issues;
• Through the PRSP process, we could see that Civil Society is better organised on national issues and is now being taken more seriously by government;
• The start of improved information exchange between the government and stakeholders;
• The CSPR consultative process helped to broaden participation and ownership in the PRSP;
• Strong Civil Society commitment to ensuring that the PRSP becomes a reality for Zambia;
• The PRSP has assisted in re-building the confidence and trust that government can at least listen (through incorporation of a good number of Civil Society concerns in the first draft P

Constraints

Limited access to vital information and documents.

• Non-Civil Society representation at higher levels of the process;
• Despite sensitisation workshops by both government and Civil Society, levels of PRSP awareness are still limited among the population;
• Link between HIPC debt relief and PRSP subjects the PRSP process to a rush atmosphere

PRSP Implementation, Monitoring & Evaluation

Implementing the resultant poverty reduction strategies is as important as the formulation of these strategies and setting of priorities. For a successful PRSP, both steps must be viewed with extreme importance.

For effective implementation, there must be transparency and accountability on the part of the government. This will enhance the spirit of ownership of the strategies and a resultant participation to ensure effectiveness.

There should be political will and commitment on the part of our leaders to ensure that the PRSP does not end up as another document on the shelf but a long term planning document for the nation.

To ensure that implementation is in line with the expectations of the various stakeholders, there must be a solid Monitoring and Evaluation plan for the PRSP. Due to its commitment to the people consulted, especially at the grass root level, Civil Society views PRSP monitoring as an important activity that should be taken very seriously. As such, it has embarked upon some initial poverty monitoring training for Civil Society with an emphasis on participatory approaches ~ to involve the targeted

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groups as much as possible. The first in the series of training was held in January 2002 and conducted by the Participatory Assessment Group (PAG). The first draft PRSP was used as a basis for this training.

Conclusion

For a successful PRSP, we require

• Political Will – From the highest authority to implement PRS based upon priority.
• Integral Framework – the PRSP must adequately address the many dimensions of poverty, not just income poverty.
• Capacity – Must build capacity among the various stakeholders including government on various aspects of the PRSP implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation.
• Ownership of policies to avoid alienation.
• Cooperation amongst the various stakeholders.
• Effective implementation, monitoring and evaluation – the PRSP process must have built into it, a commitment to implementation by donors, government and civil society. The PRSP, once in the process of implementation, must be subjected to on going monitoring and evaluations.

Civil society gains voice on reducing poverty in Zambia

UNDP has helped transform strained relations between the Zambian Government and civil society into productive dialogue on the national poverty reduction strategy and other development issues.

As a result of civil society input, the strategy calls for abolishing 75 District Administrators offices, which have become patronage jobs, and a Presidential discretionary fund that lacks accountability, as well as urging constitutional reform -- all key governance issues.

On education, the strategy recommends higher pay for teachers, incentives for rural teachers, improved teaching materials, curriculum renewal and life skills and HIV/AIDS counseling in schools. It also calls for a focus on food security and more investment in agriculture.

Progress began when UNDP helped groups form Civil Society for Poverty Reduction, a broad-based network to participate in poverty reduction strategy discussions with the Government, the World Bank, UN agencies and donor countries.

The network's steering committee includes 26 organizations, including the Chambers of Commerce and Industry, the University of Zambia, the Congress of Trade Unions, the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection and the Non-Governmental Organizations Coordinating Committee.
To smooth the way for dialogue, UNDP arranged for training in negotiating skills and conflict resolution for the steering committee through its Peak Performance Programme.

The training was effective, and more than 80 per cent of civil society inputs were incorporated into the poverty reduction strategy. The Government and the network have both requested additional conflict resolution training, which UNDP is arranging.

"The Government and civil society are moving away from the mutual suspicion of the past," said Besinati Phiri Mpepo, Coordinator of the coalition. For the process to work, civil society must be effectively organized and equipped with essential skills in negotiation and conflict resolution, she noted.

"We look forward to greater cooperation with the Government in ensuring that poverty reduction and overall national development is achieved," added Ms. Mpepo.

Participants learned how to communicate their needs effectively, manage conflicts productively, think in ways beneficial to themselves and the Government and develop healthy relationships with their development partners, said UNDP Resident Representative Olubanke King-Akerele.

UNDP, Oxfam and the German technical cooperation agency (GTZ) provided initial support for the network. With the success of the poverty process, a number of other donors have added their support.

UNDP is helping civil society get involved in other development issues such as monitoring progress on the Millennium Development Goals and formulation of the National Long-term Development Vision.