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Setting the scene: the Ugandan Poverty Eradication Action Plan

THEME SECTION

by MOSES ISOOBA and RICHARD SSEWAKIRYANGA

Introduction

The need for developing a poverty eradication plan in Uganda grew out of the political discontent voiced by rural Ugandans during the 1996 presidential election. Communities that interacted with the politicians reminded those who were canvassing for re-election votes that, although there was relative peace and security in the country following the turbulent civil war of 1980 to 1986, people could 'not eat peace'. They needed tangible improvements in their livelihoods. The economic growth that was being celebrated nationally was not visible in all communities around the country. There was a need for an alternative approach that could bring about improvements in poor people's livelihoods.

When the 1996 electioneering ended, the incumbent president, President Museveni, who had been re-elected, gathered his policy makers and donors and took them to the rural communities in the Luwero Triangle (a region where the 1986 guerrilla war had started and thousands had been killed) for a 'poverty tour'. Following this poverty tour, subsequent technical meetings with donors and policy makers were held to debate the intricacies of dealing with what had been seen in the region. The resultant document from these discussions and consultations was Uganda's first Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP).

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The PEAP is a broad Government of Uganda national development strategy that has recently undergone its second revision. It has a target to reduce absolute poverty to less than 10% by the year 2017. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) – the architects of the PRS processes – have also endorsed the PEAP as Uganda's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, which enabled the country to be the first beneficiary of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries' (HIPC's) debt relief initiative. Thus, in Uganda, poverty reduction strategies are designed within

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PLA 51 writeshop participants break into small discussion groups. From left to right: Harriet Yeboah, Jordi Beneria Surkin, Moses Isooba and Richard Ssewakiryanga



the framework of the PEAP.

The PEAP was designed in 1997 and is revised every three years. The revision process involves the **participation** of government, donors, civil society, the private sector and the poor themselves to **incorporate** their perspectives. Furthermore, these stakeholders are also **invited** by government to participate in the monitoring and evaluation of PEAP implementation.

The mechanisms

The Uganda Participatory Poverty Assessment Process (UPPAP) is an initiative of the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MoFPED), civil society organisations (CSOs) and district local governments. Its overall aim is to bring the voices and perspectives of poor people into policy formulation, planning and implementation by central and local governments. OXFAM GB in Uganda was the implementing agency until the end of 2002. A first

participatory poverty assessment (PPA1) was carried out in 1998-99 in 36 research sites in nine districts. Its findings were used to inform policy-making. A second PPA (PPA2) was implemented in 2002 in 60 villages in 12 districts with the aim of deepening the understanding of poverty and poverty trends gained in the first PPA and investigate people's experiences with selected government policies.

The PEAP Revision Civil Society Task Force

In the first revision of the PEAP, local CSOs worked together with international CSOs and formed a CSO taskforce that was housed in the Uganda Debt Network (UDN).¹ The CSO PEAP Revision Task Force was borne out of a meeting between CSOs and representatives of the IMF and the World Bank who had come to Uganda as part of the PRSP mission. In this meeting CSOs sought to understand what

¹ For more information visit www.udn.or.ug

the PRSP was, how they could engage, and who could engage. At the end of the deliberations it was agreed that CSOs should have their own parallel consultations for the PEAP process. A Civil Society PEAP Revision Task Force of about ten non-governmental organisations (NGOs) was launched and they coordinated the inputs of CSOs in the PEAP. The product of these consultations constituted of a number of workshop reports detailing the CSO input into the PEAP revision.

In the second revision process of 2003, there was no independent CSO task force. The CSOs organised under the aegis of the NGO Forum and they worked with several sector-working groups and also conducted a number of consultations countrywide. They produced a 130-page document that brought together all issues that the CSOs wanted to raise on the PEAP revision process.² The document was submitted to the PEAP Secretariat in the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MoFPED).

The above two processes link to each other because the UPPAP partnership was formulated as a unique process involving government, CSOs, local governments and the poor themselves in the generation of poverty information from the perspectives of the poor. The CSO PEAP Revision Task Force, on the other hand, is a mechanism of engaging with the PEAP/PRSP policy process through the use of data from processes like UPPAP and other independent CSO consultative processes. The link between these two processes therefore is that UPPAP provided the **evidence**, while the CSO PEAP Revision Task Force provided the **space** for CSO engagement in the PEAP/PRSP process. Reflecting on the role of these two processes in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of PRSPs is an insightful process especially for countries that are implementing the PRSP process.

Poverty trends in Uganda

Poverty levels appear to be dropping in Uganda. Current statistics put absolute poverty at 38%.³ This current poverty level suggests an oscillation in the poverty trends: 1992: 56%; 1994: 52.2%; 1997:44%; 2000:34%; and 2002:38%.⁴ However, evidence from studies under the Uganda Participatory Poverty Assessment Process which consulted directly with the poor in

² CSO PEAP Revision Steering Committee (2003) 'In search of consensus on a new development path: a synthesis of civil society views into the 2003 PEAP Revision Process.' CSO PEAP Revision Steering Committee/Liaison Office, Uganda National NGO Forum, Kampala.

³ Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (2003) 'Uganda's progress in attaining PEAP target in the context of the Millennium Development Goals.' Paper presented at the Donor Consultative Group (CG) Meeting, May, Kampala.

⁴ *ibid.*

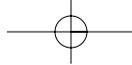
“...a critical look at certain dynamics inherent to the PEAP process, and assumptions behind what are appropriate ways of implementing and monitoring the PEAP, suggest that much work needs to be done to ensure effective participation and influence of the poor and civil society”

96 communities in 21 districts in the years 1998 and 2003, indicates that no obvious patterns are discernible in perceptions of poverty trends among the poor, as local communities identified both improving and worsening dimensions of livelihood, possibly indicating changes in the nature of poverty over the years. Some communities reported declining poverty trends overall, others a mixed picture, while some reported increasing poverty. However, key messages that come across from these consultations are the following:

- Access to social services, particularly education, water and health, has dramatically improved during the past decade although quality of service remains an issue.
- The productive sectors (crop, livestock and fish farming) are believed to be faring badly, particularly crop farming, and this has affected households' levels of income. This is due to poor production and yields, poor prices, lack of incentives to expand production due to lack of markets, and environmental concerns.
- People who have been subject to shocks such as displacement and insurgency generally feel poorer, as they have lost household members, property and social support.

Nonetheless, a critical look at certain dynamics inherent to the PEAP process, and assumptions behind what are appropriate ways of implementing and monitoring the PEAP, suggest that much work needs to be done to ensure effective participation and influence of the poor and civil society.

The following two theme articles examine these two selected mechanisms in the monitoring, evaluation and implementation of the PEAP process. The first comes from a civil society perspective and looks at a PEAP revision task force; the second looks at the work of the Uganda Participatory Poverty Assessment Process (UPPAP) from a government perspective.



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