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Experiences of Uganda's PPA in implementing and monitoring poverty reduction

by RICHARD SSEWAKIRYANGA

The first Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP)

Although the first PEAP set out in broad terms the major constraints to poverty eradication in Uganda, its major criticism was that the process of its development only consulted policy makers, researchers, academicians and urban-based civil society organisations. The 1998 revision process of the PEAP was therefore designed to include a wider spectrum of stakeholders. This process gave rise to an initiative for the inclusion of poor people's voices and perspectives in the PEAP consultations. In this paper, I focus on some of the lessons learnt in the implementation of the PEAP/PRSP by using examples drawn from the Uganda Participatory Poverty Assessment Process (UPPAP). Implementation, monitoring and evaluation of PRSPs are taken as iterative processes rather than linear processes. Participatory Poverty Assessments (PPAs) contribute to these processes by providing policy knowledge to all stages of PRSP process. I conclude this article with some areas that require critical reflection, especially for countries that are implementing PRSP processes.

¹ First generation PPAs were mostly quantitative exercises of poverty assessment. They were conducted mostly by the World Bank to inform the development of Country Assistance Strategies. The second generation PPAs on the other hand usually include participatory research and processes of feeding back the findings in policy processes. They also seek to maximise national ownership of the PPA.

The birth of UPPAP

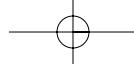
UPPAP was borne out of the need to include poor people's voices and perspectives in the PEAP but it was not clear how the poor would participate in the policy process. Hence the first large-scale 'second generation' PPA was designed.

Learning from Tanzania

Early enough in the design of the PPA it was realised that although the conviction to include the poor was there, there were no in-country examples of PPAs with a qualitative policy focus.² In the Eastern Africa region at the time, one example which identified where lessons could be learnt was the Tanzanian PPA conducted in Shinyanga. A select group of Ugandan policy makers, donors and researchers visited Tanzania to learn from this PPA. Two lessons emerged from this visit and the Ugandan PPA was designed so as to avoid the Shinyanga PPA shortcomings and build on its strong points.

What then were the lessons from the Shinyanga PPA that informed the Uganda PPA? The first lesson that emerged was that the PPA in Shinyanga, although methodologically robust, was located outside policy-making institutions. The use of its results in the implementation of Tanzania's poverty reduction

² For example the only study at the time (1997) that had any semblance of a participatory poverty assessment was one carried out by the Community Development Resource Network (CDRN). It had many interesting findings but it was limited in its scope.



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Box 1: How the PPA worked

The first PPA in Uganda was conducted in 36 communities in 9 districts in Uganda. It used participatory methodologies like community meetings, well-being ranking, social maps, seasonal calendars, and in-depth interviews with key informants among others. These were used to elicit findings on issues elaborated in the PPA research agenda, which included:

- understanding local concepts of poverty;
- vulnerability and well-being;
- perceptions on causes of poverty;
- changes in livelihoods;
- people's coping strategies; and
- people's views on the quality and relevance of government services.

The PPA also covered people's opinions on local governance and accountability. The PPA was carried out by a core team of researchers drawn from partner institutions and local government officials in each district. Researchers were given a three-week training course in participatory research methods, report writing, and policy awareness as well as the development of community action plans. The researchers spent about ten days in each of the communities, using various participatory methodologies to generate information on poverty. The research was conducted in three cycles over a seven-month period. Workshops were held after each cycle to promote learning among all researchers.

In the second PPA the same model was used with a few variations. The PPA covered 12 districts and 60 villages. Each research team worked in one district throughout the research process. Community Action Plans (CAPs) were not included in the PPA design and there was a focus on deepening the understanding of poverty and poverty trends and investigating people's experiences with government policies. In each of these processes, site, district and a national report were developed. For each PPA a video was produced, recording key moments in the PPA process as well as policy makers responding to issues arising from the PPA.

agenda at the time was very minimal. In Uganda this weakness was countered by locating the Uganda PPA within an institution that was responsible for co-ordinating the implementation of the poverty reduction strategy in Uganda – the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MoFPED).

The second lesson learnt was that it was important to implement the PPA using a 'partnership model'. The model adopted was one where selected local and international CSOs contributed staff with skills in participatory research to conduct fieldwork and also to write the PPA reports. The main coordinating institution – in this case OXFAM GB in Uganda – had an office at the MoFPED. The administrative management of the PPA had a twin reporting arrangement both in government – to the Director of Economic Affairs – and to CSOs, through the Country Representative of OXFAM

GB in Uganda.³ In the section that follows I reflect on the role of PPAs in the PEAP/PRSP process and highlight some of the challenges that emerged in the process.

Reflection on the role of PPAs in the context of PEAP/PRSP monitoring and implementation

Systematic feedback from the poor to government

Arguably, Uganda's PPA did open up spaces for poor people's engagement in the implementation and monitoring of poverty eradication initiatives. For this first time in the history of Uganda, there was systematic feedback to government on how it was delivering social services and what people felt about government institutions. This was a humbling experience, especially for the government technocrats who were used to getting feedback through their own government machinery. For example, a famous quotation used in many places on corruption was from an old woman that referred to the technocrats as 'maggots that fed all the time and had bulging stomachs'. Although issues like poor health or lack of water were known as major causes of poverty, the severity of these problems (especially from the perspectives of the poor) was not appreciated.

Influencing government policies

Many technocrats in different line ministries used the PPA findings to argue out their sector positions. For example, the Director General of Health usually quoted the PPA finding that health was cited as the number one cause of poverty in many communities as a way of asking for more funding for the health sector. In the writing of the Plan for Modernisation of Agriculture (PMA) a lot of the information from the PPA was used to inform the focus of the plan. As such because of the PPA finding on poverty as multidimensional, the PMA focused on removing all constraints to agricultural productivity and livelihoods, which gave rise to the development of a non-sectoral conditional grant for local governments.

CSOs closer to the policy table

For CSOs, the PPA brought them closer to the policy table. It provided a forum where information generated through close collaboration between CSOs and government was used to influence the poverty agenda of the country directly.

³ Although this arrangement was desirable and theoretically innovative it led to a number of management complexities. For example UPPAP had to follow management procedures (especially financial accounting and staff management) of both government and OXFAM GB. This was always a strain on the Project Manager's time and since there was no experience to learn from, many decisions had to depend on the ingenuity of UPPAP staff.

A number of CSOs had carried out poverty studies and to some extent had documented many issues similar to those raised in the PPA consultations. However, what the new initiative added was closer collaboration with government institutions and direct linkages with the policy process.

Although these elements are very significant positive steps in the PPA process, there are many more areas where further critical thinking is needed. In the sections that follow I critically reflect on some challenges that emerged from the UPPAP partnership, especially in relation to the implementation and monitoring of the PEAP/PRSP in Uganda.

Challenges that emerged in the UPPAP process

Community Action Plans (CAPs) versus pro-poor budgets

One of the key implementation dilemmas faced during the PPA process was the question: at what stage should stakeholders respond to concerns raised by the poor? Should the implementation of interventions to address poverty issues wait for the government mechanisms to respond? Or should there be some modest implementation immediately after the collection of information so that the PPA is not an extractive but empowering process? Different stakeholders in the PPA process had different perspectives on this issue. Some of the CSOs were interested in implementing small interventions in communities where the PPA had been conducted as a way of giving back to the community. For some CSOs, the community interventions were tokens of appreciation. For other stakeholders they were interested in community interventions as a way of illustrating that when problems were identified, solutions were also not always very far and different stakeholders could contribute to these processes, especially the communities themselves.

These debates led to the development of CAPs in the first PPA because of the conviction by some partners in the PPA process that the PPA should not be an extractive type of research. The CAPs were developed at the end of the participatory research exercises in each community. Community members developed an action plan for a key problem and identified key actors in the community who would be instrumental in tackling the problem(s) identified by the community. Small amounts of about \$2,000 were allocated for each community as a token contribution by the PPA research partnership. Communities were supposed to use this money to finance parts of the CAP and also fundraise from other stakeholders in the community who had resources.

In some communities, CAPs were submitted to local governments. For example, one community got drainage

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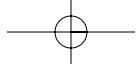
pipes for its community roads from the local government to deal with the problem of a poor road. In other communities local leaders, such as politicians, contributed some money. For example, in one community a local leader contributed to the revolving fund that was started to deal with the problem of lack of access to credit for women. In one island community with no school, an international NGO funded the building of classroom blocks in the community and the local government allocated teachers.

However, differences in perception on the role of CAPs occurred when actors started questioning: how sustainable are the CAPs? Is the implementation of CAPs showing favouritism for those communities that participated in the PPA? Does this reduce the role of the PPA to an NGO-type instrument that focuses on micro issues of poverty reduction rather than on policy influence? In the second PPA, the CAPs were not included.

The challenge that is still outstanding is, that if up-scaling community participation in the implementation of poverty reduction initiatives is going to mean trade-offs like this, can PPAs deliver the twin mandate of policy influence and community empowerment? In the second PPA, the argument made was that instead of CAPs, the PPA should focus on influencing district- and national-level budgets so that they can address priority poverty issues identified by the communities. But one still wonders if pro-poor budgets can lead to community empowerment or if micro level actions like the CAPs are more advantageous. It therefore remains a challenge in our poverty eradication work to put in place a framework that can enhance empowerment as we implement, monitor and evaluate poverty eradication initiatives.

Government-CSOs partnerships versus subcontracting

It is always argued that participation enhances ownership of poverty eradication processes. In the Ugandan case the



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participation of CSOs in the implementation of the PPA was supposed to be one of the ways of increasing ownership of the PEAP implementation and monitoring processes. Since CSOs were the ones leading the PPA research process, this would increase their ownership of the results from the PPA process and ultimately the poverty eradication processes. However, throughout the process some CSOs felt that although they were participating in the PPA, they were not equal partners. They were implementing a process in which government was 'subcontracting them'. The example quoted was that when the CSOs seconded staff to participate in the PPA, they got completely submerged in the PPA activities with very little space left for the CSOs to reflect on the process or even influence the direction of events. Most actors recognised that the PPA was feeding into government processes and therefore was driven by government budgeting and planning cycles rather than partnership aspirations.

Here the outstanding issue is that although CSO participation in poverty eradication policy processes is a development mantra echoed in many of the post-Structural Adjustment documents, the ways in which CSO participation unfolds might sometimes tilt the power dynamics to favour more powerful actors like government. Sometimes CSOs may desire to have their own independent ways of engaging with the PRSP implementation and monitoring. But the PEAP/PRSP process is built around inclusion of various stakeholders. The challenge that remains therefore is how different actors can come together to influence a poverty eradication policy process in an egalitarian way, which stays true to CSO aspirations and government mandates in a situation where each actor has a different perception of what participation actually means.

Legitimising government processes and the poverty agenda
The PPA in Uganda helped to legitimise government poverty eradication policy processes to donors, CSOs and local communities. This was through the contribution of the first PPA to the adoption of Uganda's PEAP as the country's PRSP because the revision process of the PEAP was very much in line with the World Bank guidelines set for the development of PRSPs. In fact, as the former Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Finance once told the BBC World Service in October 2000, the World Bank should have paid Uganda royalties for copying the PEAP process and using it as the PRSP process. The question that remains outstanding is: to what extent is the adoption of the PEAP as the PRSP a legitimisation of the power of government over other actors within Uganda's poverty eradication processes? Participation of over 96 communities in close to half of the districts of Uganda (21 out of 56 districts) in the PPA is a very big achievement for the government. The CSOs who believe in participation (with the complaint of subcontracting notwithstanding) have got very little manoeuvring space in the face of this powerful discourse. But what are the inherent threats of this power to the continuation of independent monitoring and implementation of poverty initiatives by CSOs?

It is not yet clear how this challenge will be combated especially because the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) are happy with the current PEAP/PRSP process outcomes. In the end the CSO positions are becoming more compromised since they are only expressed within a much more powerful discourse of participation in the PRSP processes. Although some CSOs have voiced their concerns, the spaces for exiting such powerful processes are very limited if not non-existent especially when accompanied with the reality that CSO funding to monitor the PEAP/PRSP is dependent on their participation in the PEAP process.

Financing poverty issues

One of the critical areas for the successful implementation of the PEAP/PRSP is financing priority problems raised by the poor in the PPA process. The government of Uganda boasts of having contained public spending within an overall framework to restore budget discipline and macroeconomic stability through cash budgeting and by categorising government spending into priority programme areas and non-priority areas. The priority areas included the areas that are covered under the Poverty Action Fund. Statistics show that between 1997–98 and 2000–01, the share of government spending on poverty reduction increased from 17% of the budget to 32%. Key to this success was that government earmarked

HIPC savings and donor commitments against additional spending on Poverty Action Fund budget lines. The Poverty Action Fund now includes all major poverty sensitive expenditures identified within the PEAP, with its expenditures fully integrated in the budget. However the danger that emanates from the additional donor commitments that accompany PAF funds is that Uganda's debt volume is also growing with more donor funds expanding the debt volume of the country. The challenge therefore is to find innovative ways of spending more in poverty reduction areas without expanding the debt volume of the country, which seems to be the trend in many countries implementing the HIPC initiative.

The Poverty Monitoring Strategy

An informal Poverty Monitoring Network has been meeting since 2000. It is comprised of ministries, the Uganda Bureau of Statistics, Makerere University, NGOs and donors. Building on this, the government formulated a Poverty Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy (PMES). The PMES was the product of a national effort, and represents an overarching plan for monitoring and evaluation within the context of government's PEAP. The PMES identified a set of 33 priority indicators for implementation of the PEAP, for which a systematic effort was made to establish a baseline and target.⁴ The PMES also addressed institutional responsibilities for tracking and reviewing poverty status. Moreover, the PMES sought to draw the linkage between poverty indicators on the one hand and the planning and operations of ministries and their service delivery chain on the other. Further more, every two years, the government prepares the Poverty Status Report, outlining progress in reducing poverty and forming the basis for revision of the PEAP. In addition, annual PRSP Progress Reports are produced, on the basis of the government's *Background to the Budget* document.

After the 2003 PEAP revision, efforts are being made to update the PMES list of indicators that will be used to monitor the revised PEAP. The rest of the indicators for monitoring different elements of poverty will be at a sectoral level. Each sector will develop a list of indicators that it will monitor. However as this process unfolds there is the attendant World Bank-led process of monitoring the Poverty Reduction Strategy Credit, which includes a policy matrix that also has a number of indicators that inform the World Bank disbursement of the PRSC. Although there is supposed to be harmony in both the PRSC and PEAP indicators (with the PRSC indicators being subsets of the PEAP indicators) the

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process of harmonisation is still a very inconclusive one and yet the process of PRSC disbursement is on-going.

This lack of coherency in monitoring systems is a point of concern. How CSOs participate in the development of the PRSC indicators is a point of speculation because of the lack of systematic procedures to include CSOs, and yet the CSOs are supposed to be part of the monitoring and evaluation of the PEAP process. This is a challenge that will have to be followed through especially because having many monitoring instruments may also create many different versions of the same poverty situation.

Conclusion

More critical reflection needs to be undertaken on the role of PPAs in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of PEAP/PRSP processes.

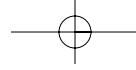
The PPA process was very instrumental in bringing about new ways of working between civil society, government and other actors. But the success of this partnership depends on each actor's understanding of the role of the partnership. Government feels they have opened up spaces for participation through the partnership process. The CSOs feel they are subcontractors rather than equal partners. Reconciling these differences would be important.

Through the PPA process, CSOs got a chance to come closer to the policy table. However, it is not clear how this close interaction in PEAP/PRSP policy spaces has influenced CSOs' effective engagement in policy processes.

Although the poor people participated in the generation of information in the PPA process, mechanisms for sustained engagement of the poor and CSO actors in the process are still very poor. Designing ways in which different actors stay engaged in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of the PEAP/PRSP process is important.

Empowerment of poor people in the implementation

⁴ For a detailed elaboration of these indicators see MoFPED, 2000a and 2000b.



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of PRSP processes is still a contested arena. In Uganda, the PPA has two empowerment strategies: through both the development of micro projects (CAPs); and through influencing national and local government budgets to make them pro-poor. However, it is not clear which of the two processes is a more effective one. It is therefore important for all practitioners to ask if empowerment of the poor is still a central objective of PRSP processes and how it can be attained.

In Uganda, financing the PEAP/PRSP has been through the creation of the Poverty Action Fund, which is part of the national budget. But the creation of this fund has

attracted more donor funds, which has led to a growth in the debt volume for the country. HIPC funds were meant to reduce the debt volumes through debt forgiveness. This raises the question of whether the HIPC is actually achieving its goals or not.

Finally, the monitoring and evaluation of PRSP exists in a situation where there are other monitoring mechanisms which are also used as triggers for funding PRSP priorities. To enhance coordination and to allow for more inclusion of actors, it is vital that the different monitoring frameworks for the PEAP/PRSP monitoring are well aligned and their roles understood by all actors.

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