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# Zambia's PRSP process: from exclusion to inclusion, confrontation to cooperation?

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## A new beginning

Since Zambia's independence in 1964, and until recently, the majority of Zambians had virtually no say in deciding the course of their development destiny. Be it in the centralised planning and control paradigms based on founder President Kenneth Kaunda's philosophy of humanism, or the subsequent IMF-World Bank directed Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), Zambians remained passive spectators of the development programmes that were unfolding before them.<sup>1</sup> There was often little freedom even to comment critically on the programmes for fear of reprisals by the state.

Great expectations were generated when the Zambian government, under the directive of the multilateral financial institutions, invited civil society to participate in the formulation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). Civil society hitherto had been operating as a group of disparate NGOs with a feeble voice in national decision-making. Except for sporadic nominal consultations, it was largely excluded from the decision-making process. Civil society, therefore,

<sup>1</sup> Humanism states that man is at the centre of all development. The basic test of all development activities is man's ability to improve his condition. Therefore, humanism seeks to address the challenges posed by: **poverty** and its offshoots such as hunger, disease, ignorance and the exploitation of man by man; and **capitalism** and its offshoots such as neo-colonialism, racism, Zionism and apartheid.

saw an unprecedented opportunity to make its voice heard and influence government thinking.

In October 2000, civil society in Zambia galvanised itself by forming the NGO network, Civil Society for Poverty Reduction (CSPR), in order to enable it to interact more meaningfully with the government and provide systematic and compelling inputs into the PRSP formulation process.

The CSPR succeeded in having a significant say in shaping the final PRSP document of the government that was brought out in mid-2002. Government also provided subsequent opportunities to civil society to participate in the donor Consultative Group (CG) meeting in 2002 and in the Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) process in 2003. This heightened expectations that, from then on, through the CSPR, civil society would be able to make national decision-making truly democratic. Civil society hoped to achieve enhanced democratisation through continued participation in the processes of implementing, monitoring and evaluating not only the PRSP, but also other related development processes. These would include, for example:

- ensuring the release of approved PRSP allocations and their use for their intended purposes;
- monitoring Heavily Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) programmes and their use of funds; and

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- deciding on the contracting of new loans by the government.

With these developments, the PRSP in Zambia has undoubtedly succeeded in creating a new healthy process of interaction between civil society and the government. This process has improved the prospects for building consensus between civil society and the government on national poverty reduction goals and strategies. What was originally feared to be a game of one-upmanship between the government and civil society turned out to be a process of learning and mature appreciation of each others' views.

The above, however, is not to suggest that the relationship between government and civil society is now totally satisfactory. Mutual suspicions continue to abound. There are differences in the perceptions of the government and civil society on some basic issues relating to the PRSP. Furthermore, some major problems still remain in the post-PRSP formulation period, not only in terms of government-civil society interaction, but also in several other respects. These include: inadequate information flows; inadequate involvement of stakeholders; inadequate commitment of funds to the PRSP programme; and consequently, inadequate credibility of the programme itself.

### Seeking fulfilment of expectations

Civil society has continued to seek innovative ways to ensure that the momentum generated by the advent of the PRSP continues. It aims to compel the government to give the highest priority to poverty reduction.

The C SPR in particular has grown in strength and magnitude since its birth. What began as a loose network of a dozen NGOs is now a well-integrated and highly visible network of more than three-dozen organisations (see Box 1). Through its Steering Committee and its three Task Forces on Capacity Building, Monitoring and Evaluation, and Information Dissemination and Advocacy, the C SPR has been undertaking a number of measures to complement – and even compensate for – the government's efforts and to make the PRSP process more interactive, participatory and effective.

Through the C SPR, civil society in Zambia would like to ensure that:

- there is no misallocation or misuse by government of resources meant for poverty reduction;
- the PRSP actually achieves what it sets out to do;
- the right beneficiaries benefit from the implementation of the PRSP so that the prevailing inequities between the poor and the not-poor are reduced and eventually eliminated;
- there are sustained levels of government commitment to poverty reduction.

### Box 1: The Civil Society for Poverty Reduction (C SPR) network

When the C SPR began, it was a loose network of about a dozen NGOs based only in Lusaka. Today, the number has grown enormously, with branches and focal points also in four of the poorest provinces. The C SPR has plans to extend its presence to two more provinces by the end of 2005 and eventually be operating throughout the country. The Steering Committee of the C SPR has 26 organisations. If non-Steering Committee organisations are also included, the membership could be placed at approximately 90 organisations. The C SPR is currently hosted by the lead civil society organisation (CSO), the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR). But plans are on for the transfer of the network to be hosted by an independent institution constituted by representatives of the network members. Visit [www.cspr.org.zm](http://www.cspr.org.zm) for more details.

### Conflict of perceptions between the government and civil society on PRSP issues

The interaction between government and civil society ushered in by the PRSP is a wholesome process. But it is important to point out that there are some fundamental differences in government and civil society perceptions that exist with regard to PRSP implementation. We present two such differences below.

#### Ability versus willingness

The government has attributed the low levels of resource disbursements for PRSP during the first two years of implementation to the shortage of resources. In particular, pledged funds from the donors have not been forthcoming. This has led to significant shortfalls. The government's ability to disburse the approved PRSP allocations was thus constrained.

Civil society recognises the problem created by the non-release of donor funds. But it is of the view that government could still be doing a lot more if it were more seriously committed and willing to spend on PRSPs. A draft report on Budget Tracking commissioned by the C SPR presented some revealing expenditure patterns for 2002 and 2003. On the one hand, the actual release of funds to departments/ministries that would have little to do with poverty reduction (e.g. Cabinet Office, State House, Office of the President, Office of the Vice President) significantly exceeded approved allocations. On the other hand, departments/ministries that have a more direct bearing on poverty reduction (e.g. Energy and Water Development, Health, Agriculture) received less than their approved allocations. Indeed, such variations between programmed and actual expenditures have occurred not only in the past two years, but over many more years. This is the reason why one of the mottos

of Zambia's civil society has been for a long time, that Zambia's main problem is not primarily one of **resource shortage** but of **right priorities**. CSPR aims to use this information to pressure the government to be more committed to the poverty battle.

#### Resource mobilisation versus poverty reduction

It now seems that for the government, PRSP implementation is a conditionality to be fulfilled for the country to reach the HIPC Completion Point and obtain debt relief and additional resources. That is to say, the PRSP is principally a tool of resource mobilisation. The government, therefore, has been highly concerned that the country did not reach the HIPC Completion Point by the scheduled date, the end December 2003 (due to non-fulfilment of some critical triggers). It is now eager that this should be achieved before the end of 2004.

Civil society does not approve of such a stance. It would rather look upon the PRSP as an opportunity to begin redressing the plight of four fifths of its people that live in poverty. Civil society also does not think of HIPC funds as a solution to the country's debt crisis. It does not think that Zambia can achieve debt sustainability even after reaching the Completion Point. Hence civil society organisations have been continuing their Jubilee Campaign for the total cancellation of Zambia's debt. They have also repeatedly called for a delinkage between the PRSP and HIPC. This has meant civil society has had to invest in research and lobbying the government, Members of Parliament, the international community etc. as has been done by Jubilee Zambia on HIPC and by CSPR on PRSP.

#### Civil society's commitment to progressive poverty reduction and eventual eradication

The CSPR (as a collective network) and several of its main affiliated organisations (as individual organisations) have taken the lead to engage in a number of mutually reinforcing activities.<sup>2</sup> Some of these are:

#### Poverty Monitoring

Although the government has its monitoring system, civil society has also developed its own monitoring framework to monitor the implementation of the PRSP. The idea is to be

<sup>2</sup> A small illustrative sample of such organisations would be the Catholic Commission for Justice Development and Peace; National Association for Peasants and Small Scale Farmers of Zambia; Zambia Civic Education Association; Zambia Alliance of Women; Programme Against Malnutrition; Economics Association of Zambia; Zambia Land Alliance; Zambia Council for Social Development; and the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection.

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part of the government monitoring system while at the same time keeping an independent voice through some independent data collection and analysis.

Civil society uses two approaches for its monitoring work – expenditure tracking and participatory poverty monitoring. Expenditure tracking involves a **macro** analysis of the government's budgetary allocations, as well as actual disbursements. This determines the extent of its prioritisation of poverty reduction. Participatory poverty monitoring involves a **micro** approach. This aims to assess the benefits accruing to the poor. It looks at the trends in the livelihoods of poor households over time due to PRSP interventions. The participatory poverty monitoring approach is particularly important due to its ability to involve the poor in monitoring programmes that are supposed to improve their lives. Realistically, the poor are the right people to say whether the PRSP is bringing about any tangible benefits for them. Civil society has seen itself as a key stakeholder to bring the poor on board the monitoring process, as its members tend to work with the grassroots on a regular basis.<sup>3</sup>

#### Research and data gathering

The CSPR and its member organisations commission poverty related research to generate critical information to guide civil society PRSP monitoring. The research also aims to analyse policies that may have a direct bearing on the implementation of the PRSP.

Civil society has considered that while the Government's monitoring system is likely to concentrate at the level of

<sup>3</sup> Knowledge is of two types: **expert** knowledge acquired through third party data collection and analysis, and **experiential** knowledge acquired through personal experience. In the context of knowledge regarding poverty and poverty reduction strategies, the civil service and the government may have a lot of expert knowledge but not enough experiential knowledge. Civil society organisations and grassroots communities, on the other hand, have more experiential knowledge than expert knowledge. Better policy judgements can result through the pooling of both types of knowledge.

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**input** (e.g. public expenditure management) and **output** (physical quantities, e.g. schools, health centres) monitoring, civil society could help monitor **outcomes** (e.g. access to and usage of service facilities) and **impacts** (e.g. poverty reduction, improvement in living standard indicators). The latter type of monitoring would require not only quantitative but qualitative data. In a sense, civil society is better equipped than government to collect qualitative data and illuminating case studies and to evaluate specific projects. This can be attributed to the nature of civil society work that is in a number of cases close to the people affected by and living in high levels of poverty.

#### Information dissemination and training

As noted earlier, there is little information on the PRSP flowing down to the decentralised structures of government. As a result, lower-level government structures find it difficult to follow closely their role as it links to the implementation of the PRSP. This has also frustrated civil society at the local levels in its attempts to engage with local level government on PRSP issues. Hence, in 2003, the C SPR in collaboration with the North South PRSP programme hosted three pilot workshops to bring both civil society and government officials together. This was to see how they could partner on a new approach. The workshops were held in three districts (Petuake, Katete and Chipata) of the Eastern province in Zambia.

As an aside, it may be mentioned that it becomes a challenge to monitor the same locations for PRSP implementation in order to give feedback to intended beneficiaries on what the PRSP programme is supposed to be doing for them. Most poor communities have been over researched and have reached a level of consultation fatigue. Now the poor expect the monitors to ‘take to them’ rather than ‘take from them’. C SPR is committed to providing feedback to communities in terms of what has been put aside for their areas for poverty

reduction through the PRSP. It is perceived that providing this information can lead to local-level lobby and advocacy activities to ensure that what has been directed to particular communities actually benefits the people in the community.

#### Advocacy

Civil society uses the results of its monitoring work for advocacy through press statements, stakeholder round table meetings, television documentaries and radio programmes. It has also been holding sensitisation seminars on the budget, PRSP and other critical issues for Members of Parliament and top civil servants to enthuse them to engage more proactively in development discussions and programmes.

Civil society has also been engaging in direct consultations with key institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank to provide a direct feedback to these institutions on its views. In order to ensure that such consultations do not degenerate into meaningless routine exercises, civil society has begun pressing for its own agenda for such consultative meetings. A recent example of this was the meeting proposed between civil society and the visiting IMF team in late April 2004. This was to discuss Zambia’s socio-economic conditions. Civil society responded to the invitation by saying that the proposed subject for discussion was redundant since the IMF was already aware of civil society’s views on the same from an earlier meeting held in November 2003. Civil society, therefore, agreed to meet with the IMF team only if the team was prepared to share with it the ongoing discussions on the contents of the next Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF) and what consequences they would have for Zambia’s socio-economic situation.

In 2004, C SPR launched an advocacy campaign to create and strengthen mechanisms aimed at protecting resources meant for poverty reduction in the budget. The idea was to have a mechanism in place that could prevent the government from shifting resources from poverty reduction budget lines to non-priority programmes, as has been the case during the current PRSP implementation cycle.

#### Roadblocks

In doing its PRSP-related work, C SPR has encountered the following problems and disappointments:

- A lack of prompt and adequate relay of information to civil society from the government, notably on PRSP expenditures.
- A distinct gap between the promise and the performance of the PRSP in terms of resource allocation and actual disbursements.

- The government has failed to bring on board the marginalised in society, especially the poor, who are the principal targets of the PRSP. The PRSP reflects only the indirect views of the poor through their representatives from civil society and community organisations that have been participating in the PRSP consultative process. Consequently not many poor people are likely to know about the PRSP.
- Lack of participation in the PRSP so far by one critical stakeholder, namely, Members of Parliament (MPs).
- The glaring risk that the focus of the PRSP may be lost in implementation. The PRSP is no longer the core development document. It is now embedded within a larger National Development Plan that is the main focus of attention. Moreover, the primary tool for effecting PRSP expenditures – the annual budget – does not adequately reflect the significance of the poverty reducing plans contained in the PRSP.
- Signs of the government's waning willingness to involve civil society in the PRSP process beyond document formulation. An example of this is the suspension of the HIPC Monitoring and Tracking team (in which the civil society was represented) especially after the release of the findings of the team in late 2003. The key findings of the team, in sum, were that the implementation of the HIPC projects left much to be desired since there were misapplications and abuses of HIPC funds.
- From a conceptual point of view, there is now a fear that Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) policies may permeate the national agenda under the guise of the PRSP ('old wine in old bottle with a new label!') since the latter too needs the 'seal of approval' by the IMF and the World Bank.

### Conclusion

Despite the existing roadblocks, the government-civil society interaction and the consultative process in Zambia represent one of the best-practice cases in sub-Saharan Africa. There

has been a considerable amount of learning on both sides over the past four years. As a result, while mutual suspicions may not have been eliminated, there is now a greater sense of appreciation between the two parties of each other's views and perspectives.

Civil society united during the process of the PRSP through the CSPR network and has proved effective in getting the voice of civil society heard in the final PRSP. CSPR's work has continued in monitoring the implementation of the PRSP, in conducting pro-poor lobby and advocacy, and in capacity-building. Civil society in Zambia today understands better the constraining political and economic trade-offs that the government has to deal with.<sup>4</sup> It is able to identify the different issues which may require it to unite efforts with the government or alternatively to challenge the government. The government too has become aware of the intellectual and professional capacity within civil society that it has hitherto failed to tap into adequately.

Civil society in Zambia stoutly maintains that the PRSP should not be taken just as a tool to solicit funds and debt relief from the international community, but as a true tool for fighting the poverty situation in which 80% of the Zambian population lives today. The role for civil society is crucial in attempting to influence the concept and contents of the PRSPs in a way that could actually bring about some tangible benefits for the poor.

So far, the results of the monitoring indicate that the first phase of Zambia's PRSP that ended in 2004 has not achieved satisfying results for the Zambian people. Promises made have remained unfulfilled. However, some scholars contend that this should be expected in first round processes and therefore urge stakeholders to be more expectant of results from the second phase of the PRSP scheduled to begin in 2005.

<sup>4</sup> For instance, in 2003, on the one hand, the government had to award a significant pay rise to civil servants in view of the rising cost of living; on the other hand, it had to fulfill the HIPC trigger of ensuring that wages did not exceed 8% of the GDP.

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#### REFERENCES/RESOURCES

CSPR Publications:  
*Path away from Poverty* ([www.cspr.org.zm/Programmes/PRSP.pdf](http://www.cspr.org.zm/Programmes/PRSP.pdf))  
*Civil Society and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Process in Zambia* ([www.cspr.org.zm/Reports&Updates/KepaReport.pdf](http://www.cspr.org.zm/Reports&Updates/KepaReport.pdf))