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Bottom-up planning? Participatory implementation, monitoring and evaluation of PRS processes in Bolivia

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by JORDI BENERIA SURKIN

Introduction

In February and October 2003, Bolivia experienced extensive social unrest by workers, peasants and other sectors of civil society (CS). In a country widely touted for its processes of decentralisation and participatory governance, the existence of such radical and extensive social upheaval might appear quite surprising.

There are multiple reasons that explain Bolivia's current predicament. The Bolivian PRSP or *Estrategia Boliviana de Reduccion de la Pobreza* (EBRP) enacted in 2000 was intended as a means to overcome existing conditions of poverty nationwide. However, it has done little to actually reduce poverty, accounting in part for rising levels of social discontent since 2000. Currently the EBRP is in a type of limbo and there is supposed to be a new national dialogue to reformulate it.¹ As a result of legal requirements, all levels of government civil society organisations (CSOs) have sought to have an active role in EBRP implementation and monitoring and evaluation (M&E).² However, overall, their participa-

tion in these processes has been limited and ineffective for a number of reasons including:

- 1) a legal framework that has created too many overlapping spaces of participation;
- 2) a lack of organisational capacity and funding;
- 3) inadequate access to information;
- 4) lack of quantitative and qualitative indicators for M&E; and
- 5) networks and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) do not have a unified advocacy platform and lack sufficient levels of coordination (Surkin *et al.*, 2003).

Before proceeding, it is important to briefly touch on Bolivia's complex and overlapping M&E structure of the EBRP. Within the national government, UDAPE (the Unit for Analysis of Social and Economic Policies) is in charge of M&E. The *Ley del Dialogo Nacional* (LDN-National Dialogue Law, enacted in July 2001) created new space for CS participation in EBRP M&E. In particular, it set up national (MNCS) and departmental (MDCS) mechanisms of social control. Both the MNCS and MDCS are largely made up of representatives from CSOs, and they are responsible for the M&E of EBRP implementation. The LDN also underscored that *Comites de Vigilancia*³ (CVs-Oversight Committees) have the right to watch over and control all the fiscal resources administered

¹ For an explanation and analysis see McGee *et al.*, 2002 and Surkin *et al.*, 2003.

² In the South there is much debate about whom or what constitutes civil society, and there are no definitive conclusions so far. For the purposes of this paper, it is important to bear in mind that in Bolivia NGOs are generally not thought of as CSOs, because many have no direct ties to grassroots organisations and social movements.

³ *Comites de vigilancia* are made up of CS representatives and were set the Law of Popular Participation (LPP), which decentralised Bolivia's government. The LPP also gave CVs legal power to veto municipal budgets and promote accountability (see Behrendt *et al.*, 2002; Beneria Surkin, 2003; Kohl, 2000).

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by the municipal government including Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) II funds. These multiple and overlapping mechanisms have often produced tensions within CS and made effective participatory M&E more difficult.

In this context, this paper analyses the role civil society has played in EBRP monitoring and implementation, focusing on how the *Grupo Nacional de Trabajo para la Participación* (GNTP) has worked with government, NGOs and other civil society organizations in an effort to generate conditions for greater people's participation in these processes.⁴ It draws specifically on one case of successful people's participation in EBRP monitoring and evaluation in Vallegrande. It concludes by analysing lessons learnt from the Bolivian experience.

Positive steps forward: GNTP's efforts to promote people's participation in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of EBRP processes

GNTP has taken a number of actions which have, among other things, sought to overcome existing bottlenecks and create better conditions for people's participation in EBRP processes.⁵ In particular, this section examines GNTP's role in promoting the inclusion of participatory processes in the adjustment of the Department of Santa Cruz' Economic and Social Development Plan (DSEDP), as well as how it has utilised formal and non-formal training to build a stronger network and learning community.

Participation in the adjustment of the Department of Santa Cruz' Social and Economic Development Plan

In January 2004, GNTP was invited by the planning department of the Prefecture of Santa Cruz to develop a proposal

⁴ GNTP (National Working Group for Participation) is a Bolivian network and learning community of NGOs and professionals specialised in participatory methods, equity and justice. Currently, GNTP has members in five of Bolivia's nine Departments and is one of a number of national networks and platforms promoting participation in EBRP processes.

⁵ For an analysis and in depth discussion of the processes of people's participation in the Bolivian EBRP, see McGee *et al.*, 2002, and World Bank, 2002.

for the adjustment and review of the existing DSEDP. In consultation with the Prefecture's planning department and its members, GNTP developed a proposal that will include wide scale participation by CS. It is expected that this process would be the first time that a DSEDP involves participation by CS in Bolivia. Given that the DSEDP is a mechanism that enables the departmental government to implement national policies such as the EBRP and articulate these policies with those of lower levels (for example municipalities) of government, this process clearly has implications in terms of improving people's participation in EBRP processes.

Another fundamental aspect of this process will be a heavy emphasis on dissemination of information on public policies such as the EBRP. Such an effort to provide CS with clear and didactic information on these policies would be, in many respects, a first in Bolivia, at least on such a wide scale. One of the central reasons for including these measures in the process of adjusting the DSEDP is that an increased access to such information will improve the capacity of CSOs to effectively participate in the monitoring and evaluation of public policies such as the EBRP. Without such information it is very difficult for CS to monitor whether EBRP policies are effectively, transparently and efficiently implemented inside the Department of Santa Cruz.

This innovative approach to developing the DSEDP was made possible by a combination of factors. On the one hand GNTP and its members worked hard to advocate for the inclusion of participation by CS in these processes. These efforts were also met by a high level of receptiveness on the part of the departmental government and its planning personnel. As a result, GNTP expects that the process of developing a new DSEDP will open up new spaces for people's participation in EBRP implementation and monitoring.

Why Santa Cruz's departmental government has been open to participatory processes is not totally clear, but preliminary evidence points to some possible explanations. Since November 2003, Santa Cruz's Prefect has been Carlos Hugo Molina, an intellectual not tied to political parties and who was one of the authors of Bolivia's Law of Popular Participation (LPP). In contrast to previous ones, this Prefect has more of a vested interest in promoting participation and has shown a willingness to make the departmental government more efficient and inclusive. Another possible explanation is that GNTP had already worked on a participatory DSEDP in the Department of Tarija. The head of the planning department in Tarija communicated with the head in Santa Cruz and helped to convince her that the participatory DSEDP in Tarija

led by GNTP had been a very valuable and useful process. In addition to these, there may be other perhaps less enlightened reasons for the receptiveness to participatory processes but so far they are not apparent or clear.

Strengthening networks and learning communities: capacity building through formal and non-formal training

One of the keys to improving conditions for poor people's participation in EBRP processes is to strengthen networks and learning communities that work on such issues. In fact, GNTP is so convinced of this that it has implemented formal and non-formal training programmes in an effort to move in this direction. These programmes have in many cases focused specifically on issues tied to CS participation in EBRP implementation and M&E. Even in cases when these trainings have not been so clearly linked to EBRP processes, evidence shows that they have served to strengthen GNTP members and other organisations, many of which are involved in working with CS to monitor EBRP implementation.

Between August 2003 and April 2004, GNTP implemented a post-graduate diploma programme in participation and social change.⁶ Participants in this program included GNTP members, CSOs, NGOs representatives, and representatives of municipal and departmental governments. A preliminary evaluation of this formal training process shows that in a number of important ways, it has succeeded to improving conditions for greater and more effective people's participation in EBRP processes. On the one hand, a number of students pointed to the topic of defining policies with the poor, which focused on EBRP experiences, as one of the most useful and important in the programme. This suggests that learning about poor people's participation in these processes made a significant impact on participants in the programme and, as a result this programme has helped to increase the capacity of participants and their organisations to promote these types of participatory processes.

In Tarija, this diploma programme has also contributed, in other ways, to fostering better conditions for participation in defining public policies. It turns out that one of the participants in Tarija is now the general manager of the Prefecture. The diploma helped him to value and understand the significance of participatory processes. As a result, from his position within the regional government, he has been working with GNTP, other NGOs, and CS to bring about a greater role for CS in departmental public policies, including those tied

⁶ This programme was co-financed by the DED (German Technical Service) and Nur University in Santa Cruz provided the formal academic accreditation.

Grassroots participants at the PDM workshop in Vallegrande, May 2003



Photo: Jordi Beneria Surkin

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to EBRP implementation.

In addition to formal training, GNTP has implemented non-formal trainings. Here I focus on two examples of such trainings which have perhaps the most direct ties to EBRP issues: a) advocacy training, and b) a workshop on the EBRP and HIPC II resources for CVs in the Department of Santa Cruz.

In May 2004, along with SNV (a Dutch development agency), GNTP provided its members with an advocacy training workshop. This workshop had two main objectives:

- to increase the capacity of members to advocate greater people's participation in defining public policies; and
- to generate a unified advocacy and lobbying platform.

It is expected that such steps will, among others things, contribute to increasing capacity to promote effective participation in EBRP processes.

In October 2003, GNTP and several international cooperation agencies supported a workshop intended to increase the capacity of CVs to participate in M&E of EBRP implementation by municipal governments. This workshop sought to provide participants with information on the EBRP and analyse how municipalities in the Department of Santa Cruz had been spending HIPC II resources, which are supposed to be utilised to implement the EBRP. As noted above, this is the type of information that CS organisations such as CVs have often lacked. As a result, GNTP thinks that this workshop helped to increase the capacity of CVs to engage in M&E of EBRPs at the municipal level.

An analysis of successful people's participation in EBRP monitoring and evaluation

This section turns to GNTP's work with participatory planning

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Grassroots participants at the PDM workshop in Vallegrande, May 2003

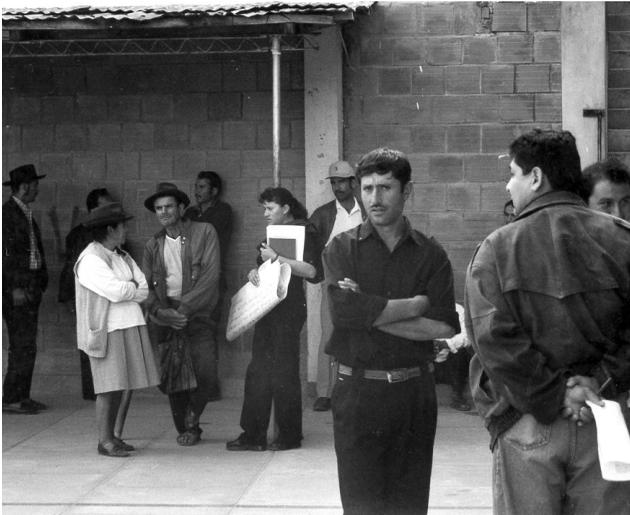


Photo: Jordi Beneria Surkin

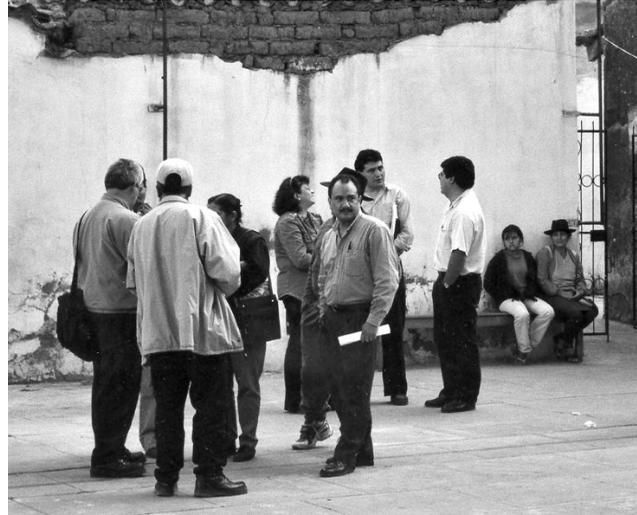


Photo: Jordi Beneria Surkin

in the municipality of Vallegrande in the Department of Santa Cruz and focuses on how this has helped to open the door for CS to participate in EBRP M&E in this municipality. The second part of this section focuses on key factors that enable CS to participate in the public domain.

Participatory municipal planning in the municipality of Vallegrande

During 2003, GNTP worked on developing the *Plan de Desarrollo Municipal* (PDM-Municipal Development Plan) of the municipality of Vallegrande, located in the mesothermic valleys of the Department of Santa Cruz.⁷ As part of this process, it promoted widespread participation by CS through the use of participatory theatre, participatory rural appraisals and other techniques. These techniques and methods were so successful that throughout the process more than one hundred CSOs, grassroots organisations (GROs) and other organisations participated (GNTP, 2004).

Here I can only briefly focus on some important and positive impacts of this process. For one, widespread participation led to CS feeling that the PDM was really its plan, one that reflected its needs and demands. It also helped to strengthen and empower CS, which is now working with the mayor to make the municipal government more efficient and effective. As a result of participatory planning processes supported by GNTP, CS is now very active in monitoring the expenditures, policies, actions and impacts of the municipal government, including those directly linked

to EBRP implementation.

As part of the PDM process, GNTP also worked with the municipal government to generate more transparency and accountability. For example, in coordination with the municipal government, GNTP disseminated a brief document on PDM to CS. This document also discussed all the fiscal resources received by municipal government including HIPC II funds and how they would be invested. Another step taken was to display the municipal budget in front of its offices while technical personnel from the municipality explained the budget to passers-by. This later step was the result of learning GNTP had obtained during a South-South exchange visit by Ugandan and Kenyans to Bolivia. While these steps were not per se a part of the PDM process, GNTP advocated them because it believed, as has been the case, they would serve to provide CS with access to important information that would help to increase its ability to monitor policies and actions of the municipal government, including the implementation of EBRP policies.

Key enabling factors

The Vallegrande experience, PRS processes in other countries (for example Uganda and Kenya) and other cases of participatory governance have shown that there are a number of key factors which account for the ability of CS to participate (Hughes, 2002; McGee *et al.*, 2002; Surkin *et al.*, 2003; World Bank, 2002). Government needs to be open to participatory process, if not the task is much more difficult. NGOs that work with CSOs need to have a real commitment to participatory processes. In many cases, NGOs promote such processes, but the level of quality

⁷ The LPP requires that every municipality have a PDM, which is a five-year plan that guides municipal development policies (See Rengel, 2004).

Flipcharts from the PDM workshop in Vallegrande, May 2003

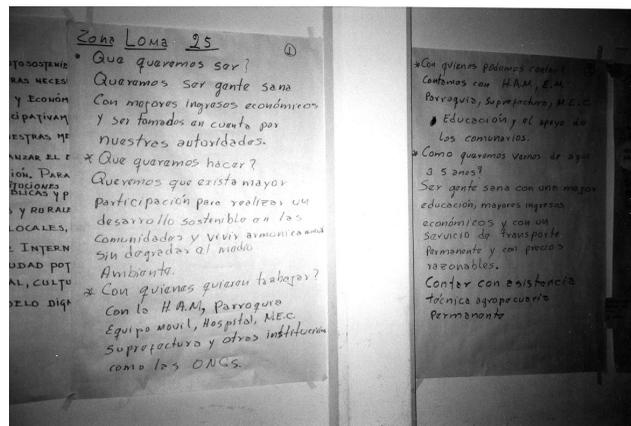
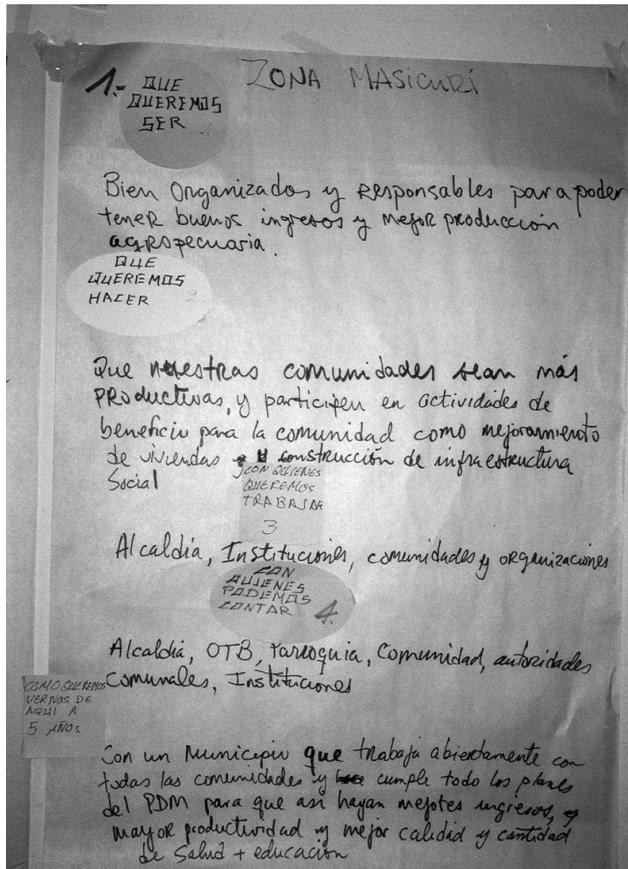


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to information on EBRP processes, budgets, etc. From the perspective of CS, organisational capacity and access to information are two key factors that affect their ability to be effective participants in the public domain.

Conclusions: Lessons learnt from the Bolivian experience

I have argued that the level of participation in EBRP processes in Bolivia has been limited because of, among other factors, too many overlapping spaces of participation, CS' lack of organisational capacity, a lack of funding for participatory M&E, inadequate access to information, and the fact that NGOs have failed to develop a unified advocacy platform.

GNTP's experiences point out that the bottlenecks for people's participation can, in part, be overcome by strengthening networks and learning communities through formal and non-formal training programmes⁸. These programmes have, among other things, increased the capacity of GNTP members, CSOs and others to bring about greater people's participation in EBRP processes. Efforts to advocate for the inclusion of information dissemination processes in the adjustment of Santa Cruz's DSEDP have helped to ensure that the citizens are informed on the EBRP, Millennium Development Goals and other national policies. They have also contributed to increasing the capacity of CS to participate in M&E of EBRP processes and other public policies.

GNTP's work with the PDM in Vallegrande shows that in some cases participatory municipal planning processes can empower CS to be more active in M&E of their local governments and the implementation of EBRP policies. The Valle-

participation is limited and CS does not have a role in decision-making. The establishment and strengthening of learning communities is another factor that can be key in enabling participation in PRS processes. For example, GNTP has disseminated information on its work with participatory planning in Vallegrande to members, government NGOs and at the international level. These efforts have strengthened GNTP's learning community, enabling it and its members to more effectively implement and advocate for participatory forms of governance.

There are also several factors more directly tied to CSOs themselves. It is quite clear that if they lack organisational capacity, it is very difficult for them to be effective participants in EBRPs processes. For example, for CVs, MNCS and MDCS to be able to monitor EBRP implementation, they need to have the capacity to analyse budgets and M&E indicators, as well as process and digest this information. These are capacities that CVs, MNCS, MDCS and many CSOs in Bolivia do not have. Even in cases when they do have these capacities, they are of little use if they do not have access

⁸ The idea for these learning plans came from documentation prepared by the Participation Group at IDS for its masters programme on Participation, Development and Social Change.

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grande case highlights key factors that enable people's participation in EBRPs processes. These include government openness to participatory processes, access to information (for example the efforts that were made to disseminate information on the municipal budget), organisational capacity within CS, NGOs' commitment to participatory

processes, and the existence of learning communities. In addition, GNTP's work in Vallegrande is clear evidence of how important it is to strengthen learning communities through South-South exchanges. Finally, it is important to note that to date it is not clear what impacts GNTP's actions will actually have on poverty.

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