Accountability in Poverty Reduction Strategies:
The Role of Empowerment and Participation

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Summary Findings

This paper is part of a research project analyzing the participation of stakeholders beyond the drafting process of *Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS)* — i.e. in implementation, monitoring and revision. Starting with a brief explanation of `institutionalized participation' as the analytical framework for the research, the findings of the various background papers prepared on the project are synthesized. Participation is potentially "meaningful" if it is rights-based, integrated in structures within the political environment of a given country, and if it has empowered and legitimate stakeholders. In most PRS countries, these standards are at best only partially fulfilled. The institutionalization of participation is still in its infancy. A number of constraints impede meaningful participation in the majority of the countries. However, exceptions to the rule showing a number of `good practices' demonstrate that meaningful participation in PRS processes is possible and has been strengthened over the last years. Based on these findings, four core challenges for embedding stakeholder participation in the living political environment of PRS countries are discussed.

1.   The principle of *country ownership* including *domestic accountability* has so far been realized in handful countries only. Governments in many PRS countries are still concerned primarily with meeting the conditions imposed by donors and/or are dominated by the interests of the non-poor elite. These are major impediments to meaningful participation.

2.   A development orientation of `the state' — including openness for poverty reduction politics and societal participation — cannot be assumed automatically. There is plenty of evidence that politics in a number of the poorest countries is still permeated by `neopatrimonial' practices.

3.   The relationship between a society and its political system as well as the role of civil society in this interplay is poorly understood in many PRS processes. Using Habermas' discourse theory, the paper advocates a review of the conceptual framework for participation: Civil societies have a crucial role to play, translating the interests of the people into `communicative power'. But the transformation into `administrative power' (executed by governments) has to take place in the democratically legitimized bodies, especially in parliaments. Furthermore, the participation agenda has been overloaded in many of the poorest countries, while the necessary conditions to enable stakeholders' participation have not been realized. The framework of institutionalized participation might help to match realistic roles to current conditions.

4.   `Powerlessness' is a form of poverty and a major cause of poverty. The distribution of power is therefore a highly relevant topic for poverty reduction debates. The findings underline the urgent need to start `empowerment initiatives' and to discuss the underlying issues.

The paper concludes with strategic recommendations to strengthen domestic accountability, institutionalized participation and empowerment. A breakthrough in the fight against poverty needs a coalition of stakeholders in the civil societies and political forces in the legislative bodies of PRS countries, unfolding `communicative power' to point `administrative power' in the pro-poor direction.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT PAPERS

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Foreword

The elaboration of Poverty Reduction Strategies has seen a promising amount of stakeholder participation in many PRS countries, even if considerable quality problems are recognizable, such as exclusion of marginalized groups, speed and depth and the ad hoc nature of participation events as well as macro-economic and structural policies being off-limits. Most countries have started implementing their PRSP, with participation dwindling instead of being institutionalized. Some observers speak of a 'participation gap'. The situation seems to be slightly more promising for the issue of participation in monitoring & evaluation of PRS, as in many countries independent civil society monitoring or participatory monitoring arrangements are planned, although mostly not yet operational. Stakeholder participation in the revision process has been occurring in a number of countries, but not much is known about the way this is done. For most of these issues a systematic review of experience is not available at this stage.

Building on earlier work on participation in elaborating PRSPs, the Participation and Civic Engagement Team (now 'CDD and Local Governance Team') in the World Bank Social Development Department included in its FY06 work program a review of experience with participation in implementation, monitoring and revisions of PRSP. The German Institute for Development and Peace (1NEF University of Duisburg-Essen) has been selected to support this review work. The overall objective is to increase the current understanding of the status, practice and challenges of participation in PRS implementation (including monitoring, evaluation, revisions, policy reforms, and institutionalization) and to make conceptual as well as 'good practice' contributions to the current discussion.

Different types of reviews have been carried out to gain an overall idea of the status, experience and challenges related to the issue. Besides a review of the international debate (Siebold 2007) and a desk review of 15 PRS countries (INEF 2005), a set of four background papers were produced to analyze the following specific topics:

- What does stakeholder participation in PRS implementation mean? Theoretical background and empirical evidence (Bliss 2006)
- Stakeholder participation in policy reforms linked to PRS implementation (Fuehrmann 2006)
- Stakeholder involvement in PRS monitoring (Eberlei / Siebold 2006)
- Early experience with participation in PRS revision processes (Eberlei 2007)

These four papers have informed two final products:
- The Synthesis Paper - synthesizing the findings and conclusions and discussing core conceptual aspects of the theme which is now published as a World Bank Social Development Paper.
- Recommendations for practitioners - based on lessons learned and conceptual developments. This task serves the purpose of guiding the actions of in-country stakeholders, the international community and the WB in particular (Rodenberg 2007).

The literature review, the background paper on the revision processes as well as the recommendations have been published as *INEF Report* by the I*nstitute for Development and Peace* (Walter Eberlei (Ed.), Stakeholder Participation in Poverty Reduction, Duisburg, INEF Report 86/2007). The INEF report as well as the other background papers are also available at the INEF website (www.inef.de).

List of Abbreviations

ALAT	The Association of Local Authorities of Tanzania
APR	Annual Progress Review
BMZ	Bundesministerium fuer wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit and Entwicklung (German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development)
CBO	Community Based Organization
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DFID	Department for International Development (UK) EURODAD European Network on Debt and Development
GTZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer Technische Zusammenarbeit (German Technical Cooperation)
IDA	International Development Association
IFI	International Finance Institutions
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INEF	Institut fir Entwicklung and Frieden (Institute for Development and Peace)
JSA/JSAN	Joint Staff Assessment / Joint Staff Advisory Note
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAF	Poverty Action Fund (Uganda)
PER	Public Expenditure Review
PRS	Poverty Reduction Strategy
PEAP	Poverty Eradication Action Plan (Uganda)
PPA	Participatory Poverty Assessment
PRSC	Poverty Reduction Strategy Credit
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UPPAP	Uganda Participatory Poverty Assessment Project

1. Introduction

1.   The systematic introduction of societal participation in national poverty reduction strategies is one of the cornerstones of the PRS approach that was launched six years ago. A lot of research work has been done since then to cover especially the inclusion of civil society actors in the drafting process of PRS in about 60 countries. This paper is part of the World Bank / INEF project on "Stakeholder participation in PRS processes" (see box on page 3 for details). The idea of this project is to analyze especially the participation of stakeholders beyond the drafting process and to answer the question of whether participation has meanwhile been institutionalized in the PRS policy cycle. The object of this paper is to synthesize the findings and conclusions in one document and to discuss especially aspects of the conceptual framework for stakeholder participation in PRS implementation.

2.   The paper is organized as follows: In Chapter 2, the analytical framework of `institutionalized participation', proposed by the author in earlier works (Eberlei 2001, 2002), is briefly explained and then used to synthesize the findings of the six previous papers prepared on the project since mid-2005.[1] Based on this, Chapter 3 discusses four core challenges for embedding stakeholder participation in the living political environment of PRS countries. Six specific terms which play an important role in the PRS debate – *country ownership, development orientation of the state, civil society, stakeholder participation, empowerment, accountability* – are used to organize the chapter. Chapter 4 summarizes and concludes the debate.

3.   It has to be explained that in parallel to this paper Birte Rodenberg has produced *Recommendations for Practitioners* (Rodenberg 2007). She has included numerous proposals and recommendations that came up during the INEF research work. This paper therefore concentrates on the conceptual debates and strategic recommendations.

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[1] Background papers that have been produced during the INEF project: Siebold 2007, INEF 2005, Bliss 2006, Eberlei 2007, Fuehrmann 2006, Eberlei / Siebold 2006.

2. Lessons Learned?
Institutionalizing Participation in the PRS Process

4.   The 2005 PRS Review emphasized the need for "institutionalized participation" that should contribute to "sustaining meaningful participation" (IMF / World Bank 2005: 10, 26). This is not a new demand but one that was discussed shortly after the PRS approach came into being (Brinkerhoff / Goldsmith 2001, Eberlei 2001, 2002). Talking about *institutionalizing* participation means to integrate and anchor participation in the political framework and the political processes of a country.[2] Four elements have been proposed to define this concept. Institutionalized participation

- Needs to be rights-based,
- Has to be integrated in the political structures of the country,
- Is inconceivable without capable stakeholders, and
- Needs legitimacy.

5.   Without these core elements, participatory processes run the risk of being no more than ad hoc, one-off participatory events, remaining tentative and fragile. The four elements are, in our view, essential for `meaningful participation'; they will be explained briefly in the following paragraphs. The conceptual explanations will be used further to synthesize the findings of the INEF research project.

2.1 RIGHTS

6.   Meaningful, sustainable participation requires a number of fundamental rights and safe-guards. Looking at the broader picture, these requirements seem to have been met by PRS countries. Practically all of them offer their citizens the right to participate in political life. To-day, freedom of speech and freedom of the press, right of assembly, right of association, etc., are enshrined among other aspects in the constitutions in most of these countries. However, reality leaves much to be desired as the INEF background studies again confirm. In most of the cases, the enforceable legal framework for participation of societal stakeholders is only weakly developed, leaving a big gap between fundamental rights in the constitutions and the legal framework for the day-to-day political work.

7.   Participation in the PRS process, which after all is the central strategic process for most countries, is only governed by law in a handful of exceptional cases. But even then, the question remains whether this right really is put into practice (see the law on public participation in Bo-livia). Legal provisions are missing, and a lack of transparency as regards the rules of the game is characteristic of most processes; in many countries it remains indistinct which stakeholders should and can assume which task (Siebold 2007: 17-21; Eberlei/Siebold 2006: 17 f.). Thus, participation in PRS processes is at the mercy of the goodwill of governments or, in many cases, depends on the pressure the donors exert – if this is relaxed, the true prospects for participation decline. The guidelines for the revision of the PRSP in Uganda and Tanzania can be regarded as a positive example of what are at least politically enforceable rules of the PRS process. The Ugandan Budget Act 2001 is a very rare example of a legal framework enhancement for parliaments.

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[2] "Participation is the process by which stakeholders influence and share control over priority setting, policymaking, resource allocations, and/or program implementation." (World Bank 2002: 237)

Table 1: Tanzania: Consultation Guidelines

The PRS review consultation will seek to employ some principles of a human rights approach to poverty reduction strategies. The PRS review consultation aims at institutionalizing the participation process. The four standard principles namely *rights, structures, legitimacy and capacity* will be adhered to.

Rights: The current PRS review strives to ensure that the consultation process by all the stakeholders is characterized by freedom of opinion, information, media, association and campaigning. The stakeholders participate fully in the entire PRS cycle and the role of each stakeholder is clearly stipulated.

Structures: Leading stakeholders ensure views are collected from the grass root level to the national level. The Government will ensure openness prevails throughout the process in terms of information as regards to PRS cycle. The implementation of PRS will be decentralized and each individual stakeholder will have the role to contribute.

Legitimacy: Parliament will fully be involved in the PRS process and will have the role to approve the PRSP. The civil society organizations and other stakeholders have to organize and ensure that they are included in the process.

Capacity: The PRS review process will entail capacity building for stakeholders for them to effectively contribute in the PRS cycle.

Source: The United Republic of Tanzania (2004): Consultation Guideline for The PRS Review. Dar es Salaam; quoted in Eberlei 2007: 41

2.2 STRUCTURES

8.   Meaningful, sustainable participation requires clearly defined political structures for dialogue between all stakeholders at national and local levels. Necessary structures have to be shaped on a sustainable basis within a defined legal framework.

9.   The PRS approach has definitely had an impact on the dialogues between governments and societal stakeholders. "Relative to their starting points, in most countries the PRS approach has opened space for stakeholders to engage in a national dialogue on economic policy and poverty reduction." (IMF / World Bank 2005: 26) But, again in most countries, participation waned in the implementation process (incl. monitoring). In those countries in which government and civil society established dialogue structures, participation did not decline too much after the strategy had been developed (as a rule with exceptions). Sometimes these would be sectoral working groups that regularly also supported the implementation of the strategy (Albania, Uganda and—in a much weaker form—Zambia are examples of this). In part, forums organized on a regular basis (e.g. in Armenia, Mozambique and Tanzania) perform this role.

10.   An innovative approach to increasing participation in policy reform processes is the creation of the *Open Forum* in Armenia. The first *Open Forum* was held in *Tekeyan* in April 2005 to discuss the increase in drinking water tariff rates. "The objective of the *Open Forum* was to find out whether the new tariff rates were in agreement with the PRSP policy and to identify a possible social impact, particularly on socially vulnerable groups. The Forum had around 80 participants from the government water department, PRSP state entities, NGOs, independent experts, inter-national organizations and other stakeholders" (INEF 2005: 13).

11.   However, structures of this kind have not emerged in many countries. The participation of civil society continued to be correspondingly vague following the submission of the PRSP (in many cases, only occasionally organized workshops with fluctuating participants remain). In some of the countries, the donors also contributed to this development by creating their own dialogue structures with the government (e.g. in Ghana in the context of budget support) in which significant strategic decisions are taken and to which civil society has no access.

12.   A few good examples can be mentioned in the area of monitoring. The *Uganda Participatory Poverty Assessment Project (UPPAP)* constitutes an exemplary instrument of institutionalized participatory monitoring. UPPAP is designed in such a way as to enable the results to extend into the political decision-making processes concerned with the poverty reduction strategy of the PEAP. A whole system of monitoring groups with different tasks was established in 2001 in Tanzania. Non-governmental stakeholders – among them civil society, academia, private sector, major faith groups and donors – are represented in the *National Poverty Monitoring Steering Committee* as well as in several working groups. Institutionalized dialogue structures are also fully established in the area of budgetary control, e.g. *Public Expenditure Reviews,* and enhance participation. In addition, a large public forum is now held on an annual basis: the *Poverty Policy Week,* that can definitely be seen as an element of institutionalized dialogue structures.

Table 2: Participatory structures – the example of the PAF in Uganda

With its transparency, its co-operative decision-making processes and its sophisticated monitoring system, the Ugandan Poverty Action Fund (PAF) is probably the most advanced model of institutionalized participation in the context of poverty alleviation in sub-Saharan Africa. Around 35 percent of the national government budget is now accounted for by the PAF. While in principle, decisions on how this money is used as well as corresponding reporting are dealt with in the course of the regular budget compilation process and are subject to a final decision by parliament, extensive debates take place in public sessions called on a quarterly basis. These debates address priorities set in the PAF, important individual measures, controversial issues as well as government reporting on implementation. A number of NGOs and NGO networks regularly and actively participate in these meetings, which are also open to representatives of the donor side and journalists.

2.3 LEGITIMACY

13.   The legitimacy of PRS processes has to be discussed with regard to several aspects. Firstly, legitimacy exists only in those cases in which the democratically elected bodies of a country had the possibility to influence the content of the strategy and are involved in its implementation and oversight. Secondly, regarding civil society organizations, it has to be said that they do not possess the *formal* democratic legitimation to *determine* the political decisions of governments. CSOs are legitimized by organizing the interests of the poor and powerless people, by a critical oversight function, and by feeding innovative ideas into the public policy debate.[3] And CSOs can increase their legitimacy by making sure that they are organized in a representative and inclusive manner, that they are independent of government and other major players, and that they are internally organized in a democratic way. Thirdly, the poor themselves have to be given a chance not only to articulate their perspectives here and there (e.g. in Participatory Poverty Assessments), but to be involved in decision-making processes.

14.   The reality in PRS countries shows problems on all three counts. Starting with the last: So far, `the poor' and especially poor women are heavily underrepresented and even neglected in most PRS processes (Bliss 2006: 24; Eberlei / Siebold 2006: 17). There are only a few approaches to involving the "voices of the poor" frequently in PRS policymaking. The Ugandan experience is unique. Monitoring of the *Ugandan Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP)* implementation is carried out, inter alia, by a participatory designed structure, UPPAP. Furthermore, to improve institutionalization of local level monitoring, societal *Poverty Action Fund Monitoring Committees (PMCs)* were installed by NGOs at

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[3] In principle, the legitimacy of civil society participation has been recognized by all countries involved in the PRS process. Not only is the right of people and groups in society to participate in decision-making processes enshrined in international human rights, it is also an element of many constitutions of developing countries. Moreover, societal participation was part of a development consensus between governments, non-governmental, national and international actors even before the introduction of the PRS approach.

district level, consisting of nine to eleven representatives of NGOs, community-based organizations, women's organizations, and religious organizations. A few other countries have at least worked with a frequent participatory approach to impact monitoring (see Eberlei / Siebold 2006: 17 for examples). However, with the exception of UPPAP, hardly any mechanism can be found linking poor people frequently to policymaking.

15.   Another positive example is the PRS review process in Tanzania (Eberlei 2007: 38-44). Even critical NGO representatives affirm that the review was broad-based and inclusive. Due to a multipronged approach, many voices from local to national levels representing the various groups of the population have been heard. Most voices from sub-national level came in during the first phase through the consultations led by *The Association of Local Authorities of Tanzania (ALAT)* and those led by various civil society groups (see box).

Table 3: Tanzania: Inclusive PRS review process

During the PRS review process (2004-05), the *Association of Local Authorities of Tanzania (ALAT)* was chosen by the government to conduct consultations in 168 villages located in 42 districts all over the country. All the ALAT-initiated consultative meetings and workshops included representatives from local government and local assemblies as well as speakers from community-based organizations or local NGOs. More than 18,000 people attended. A number of civil society organizations or civil society networks active at national level took the lead to organize independent consultations (albeit within the framework of the jointly agreed review guidelines). Among this group are *Haki Kazi Catalyst, NGOs Policy Forum (NPF), Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP),* and *Tanzania Association of NGOs (TANGO)* as well as more than 30 other CSOs. Several thousand Tanzanians attended these independent PRS review meetings (usually no gender-specific differentiation; except TGNP-led consultations; it can be assumed that male participants formed the majority). Some of these "lead stakeholders" summarized results of different regional CSO consultations or merged contributions of their member organizations into one paper, e.g. NPF and TANGO.

16.   Regards strengthening the legitimacy of civil society organizations, the following can be said: In a number of countries, non-state actors have teamed up in networks in order to achieve a better position to represent their positions in the PRS processes (e.g. in Zambia, Uganda, Ethiopia, Honduras, Cambodia; see INEF 2005). A strengthened self-consciousness of civil-society organizations as political actors and a strengthening of their representativity through networks is certainly one of the new developments that have been encouraged by the PRS processes.

17.   The exclusion of elected bodies, however, is still a significant problem. Although the 2005 PRS review report draws a somewhat optimistic picture ("upward trend in parliamentary involvement in the PRS process", IMF / World Bank 2005: 32), the INEF project team did not find a single example of parliamentary involvement that could serve as "good practice". The recently conducted PRS review processes in Burkina Faso, Uganda and Tanzania for example did not totally by-pass the parliaments (members were usually informed through PRS-related workshops); however, they did not involve the legislative institutions systematically. Capacity constraints, and in some cases also a limited understanding of parliament's role in political processes, hinder a full inclusion. This practice weakens the legitimacy of the PRS process.

2.4 CAPACITY

18.   Capacity building is often mentioned as a prerequisite for participatory processes. However, these discussions are often restricted to technical capacities (e.g. skills to analyze data or to con-duct participatory monitoring). Instead, it should be extended to include explicit political capacities. Participation can only be fully effective if the participants in political processes are able to represent their interests adequately. This requires knowledge of the rules, resources for defining and articulating political positions and experience with political negotiation processes, advocacy skills, access to information, specific knowledge in areas like macro-economics, and others.

19.   Our background papers show that few representatives of civil society have sufficient political capabilities and that they are often too weak to persuade the established, strong players to recognize their opinions. This is especially true in the field of macro-economic policymaking, where participation is not only limited by reluctant major players like the IMF or the technocrats in the ministries of finance, but is also due to a lack of capacity in both the governments and non-governmental stakeholders (Fuehrmann 2006: 17). These limitations meant that many non-state actors were not able to conduct rigorous analyses on policy or budget documents or propose realistic policy alternatives.[4] Only some larger NGOs, for instance, are able to put forward alternative policy choices; the majority of smaller civil society organizations do not yet have the capacity to turn queries or disagreement into credible and viable policy proposals. Their capacity in dialogue on complex policy issues, such as the macroeconomic framework, the sequencing of structural reforms, and policy trade-offs, was limited. It was often the case that non-state actors, especially CSOs, felt more comfortable discussing the `soft policy' areas such as health and education, of which they had direct knowledge through their service delivery experience, than the macroeconomic policy (ibid.).

2.5 PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

20.   The 2005 PRS Review report states that "participation can help enhance the quality of strategies"; and the report findings further "point to the supportive role that institutionalized participation can have on strengthening domestic accountability". Therefore, the report pleads for "sustaining meaningful participation" (IMF / World Bank 2005: Synthesis, 10). Our research premise has been to consider participation meaningful if it is rights-based, integrated in structures within the political environment of a given country and if it has empowered and legitimate stakeholders. Measured by this standard, our preliminary conclusion is that in most cases these standards are at best only partially fulfilled. The institutionalization of participation is – six years after the introduction of the PRS approach – still in its infancy. But: There are exceptions to the rule. Countries like Tanzania or Uganda demonstrate that meaningful participation in PRS processes is possible. A number of `good practices' in other countries (see the various `boxes' in the INEF background papers) contributed to the optimistic view that the PRS learning process is still underway.

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[4] And so far, CSOs or Parliaments are hardly involved in donor-government-exercises to strengthen the information basis for economic decisions, e.g. by using the *Poverty and Social Impact Analyses (PSIA).* In the light of the capacity constraints of societal stakeholders, it makes a lot of sense to "encourage and enable the participation of these stakeholders in the PSIA process" as a DFID / GTZ initiative proposed (Schnell et al 2005: 7).

3. Challenges: Embedding Stakeholder Participation in Poverty Reduction Politics

21.   Chapter 2 has summarized the progress made and the problems encountered on the way to institutionalized participation in PRS processes. Despite noteworthy progress, a number of constraints are impeding meaningful participation in the majority of PRS countries. This insight is not contested in principle, as for example the high-level meeting of African policymakers in March 2006 shows (see box). But it is simply not good enough to share principles and to believe that things will develop over time. Meaningful participation needs specific attention, more investment and the open debate on some political constraints. Chapter 3 will discuss four of the crucial challenges on the way to meaningful participation.

Table 4: African Policy Makers: Improve stakeholder participation

A group of over 70 ministers and policymakers from 37 African nations met in Cairo from 26 to 28 March 2006 for an `African Plenary on Poverty Reduction Strategies and the Implementation of the Millennium Development Goals.' The Plenary made a number of recommendations to guide the formulation of Second Generation PRSs, among them the following in the area of `ownership, leadership and accountability':
Improve stakeholder participation in the design, formulation, implementation and monitoring of national development strategies through:

- Building and enhancing technical capacity for policy design, decision-making, implementation and monitoring;
- The generation of more reliable, relevant and timely statistics including gender-sensitive statistics, for decision making and accountability;
- Improving the representativeness of stakeholders and the quality of their participation;
- improved accountability to parliaments and the citizenry in the spirit of strengthening domestic ac-countability

Improve ownership and accountability by avoiding the creation of parallel and duplicative institutions that could threaten the legitimacy of the fledgling institutions of representative democracy in Africa;
Recognize the role of communities in the development process and encourage their mobilization and empowerment toward poverty reduction strategies and sustainable development.

Source: http://www.uneca.org/prsp/cairo/OutcomeStatement.htm (access 28.04.2006)

3.1 OWNERSHIP, ACCOUNTABILITY AND THE DOMINATION OF DONORS AND ELITES

22.   Country ownership of poverty reduction strategies – including broad-based participation in the designing process and strong domestic accountability during implementation – is one of the core PRS principles. Compared to the 1980s and 1990s, the introduction of the PRS approach has supported remarkable progress to embed this principle in many countries.[5] However, domestic accountability remains a challenge: the political arena in which these processes unfold in PRS countries is still strongly dominated by the donor community on the one hand and the political elite on the other. Following a definition of country ownership formulated by the IMF in the early phase of the PRS approach, it might

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[5] For decades, the international donor community defined their own strategies for the recipient countries. The IMF and the World Bank especially, but also bilateral donors exported their blueprints *(Policy Framework Papers, Country Assistance Strategies)* for developing countries in a `take it or leave it' posture. According to PRS theory, this has changed. Country Ownership has become the superior principle of the new approach. The DAC guidelines on poverty reduction formulate: `Agency programmes should, first and foremost, build on partner country development frameworks. (...) The emerging national poverty reduction strategies should be the point of departure for external assistance' (OECD 2001: 23, 71 ff.).

be enough for "officials" to agree with a strategy (IMF 2001: 6). In our understanding, country ownership in democratically organized countries has to be more broadly defined: it materializes when a majority of the population and their representatives (democratically legitimated representatives as well as representatives of societal pressure groups) participate in the development of the strategy, identify with the goals and elements of the strategy, and will participate in its implementation, monitoring and ongoing development (Eberlei 2001: 11). Recognizing this broader understanding, the World Bank / OPCS has developed an operationalized approach of country ownership and is using it in its country ownership assessment studies (World Bank/OPCS 2005a: 2-7).

23.   Since the PRS approach was introduced in 1999 there has been an ongoing debate about whether the principle of country ownership has found its way into the real business or whether it is mere rhetoric. The World Bank / OPCS is working on a comprehensive analysis to assess the extent of country ownership and other important principles (World Bank 2005a-c/OPCS). The overall conclusion of these studies is that country ownership is progressing. Based on the above-mentioned operationalization, the analysis shows, however, that the rate of progress differs a lot between the PRS countries. Some examples: while the majority of PRS countries has taken at least some action to develop institutional mechanisms for stakeholder participation, only 12 percent of the countries have mechanisms in place for a systematic dialogue between governments and country stakeholders (World Bank / OPCS 2005c/rot: 17 f.). In just one third of the countries, parliaments are involved somehow in the processes, but only two countries – Ghana and Uganda – have involved their parliaments sufficiently (ibid.: 21). About 40 percent of the countries have taken action to improve their capacity to formulate a PRS (within the governments), but only a handful of countries show sufficient skills to design their strategy (ibid.: 17, 22 f.). One might see these figures as progress (rightly, if compared with the situation ten years ago), but they could also be used as an argument to demonstrate that country ownership is still in an early phase in the majority of PRS countries.

24.   Two arguments seem have supported the critical perspective from the very beginning. First, the fact that national strategies have to be endorsed by the boards of the IMF and the World Bank is very often criticized. The result of this requirement becomes obvious in the PRSP documents. From the very beginning, the countries formulate their strategy by anticipating the potential expectations of the IMF and World Bank. Therefore, many similarities are found between the finished PRSPs to date (and there is no real indication that this will change in the "second generation" of PRS papers). The vocabulary, e.g. `pro-poor growth', is drawn from the current international debate. There are few surprising strategic elements, and hardly any major changes to previous government policies. The second argument points to the aid dependency of many poor countries, which is extremely high.[6]

25.   These two arguments describe circumstances under which *country ownership* seems to be a highly questionable concept. They are, however, not necessarily applicable. Of crucial importance is a third aspect that seems to be intended in the approach: a power shift from those in power within `the state' (the government) to societal stakeholders and therefore a shift from a conditionality-based orientation of governments towards donors to policy-based accountability from governments to their citizens. Cooperation under the traditional aid approach was primarily focused on governments and political elites. The populations of developing countries or, more specifically `the poor', were simply treated as target groups for interventions. The new principle of *country ownership* does not grant governments alone the responsibility for the strategy but emphasizes the close connection with the participation of various societal stakeholders, especially within civil society.[7]

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[6] In many African countries for example, donors finance between 40 and 60 per cent of the annual government budget

[7] In their comprehensive study on the introduction phase of PRS, the Overseas Development Institute (ODI,

26.   This new approach embeds a concept of *good governance* in a broader democratic sense.[8] The OECD DAC *Guidelines Poverty Reduction* and many other donor documents illustrate the clear departure from the technocratic view prevailing in the past: "The main issues for governance in reducing poverty are ensuring that both poor men and women have greater influence in policy-making (...)." (OECD 2001: 61). The new governance perspective has found its way not only into fundamental donor principles but also into the PRS papers. A desk study regarding PRS documents of 54 countries showed clearly that the link between poverty reduction and governance issues in general is integrated into almost all existing *Poverty Reduction Strategies* worldwide.[9] Hence, the theory has changed. The question remains as to whether the reality reflects the broad-based democratic understanding, including empowerment of the poor, or is still in line with the old and more technocratic view.

27.   Based on case studies in Tanzania, Vietnam and Honduras, Jeremy Gould holds the view that these power relations have not changed.[10] The `new conditionality', introduced within the PRS approach, has in his perspective mainly served the IMF and the World Bank as they were able to strengthen their position vis-a-vis the recipient countries as well within the donor community. "To spell out the basic thesis that emerges from this study as bluntly as possible, the new conditionalities perpetuate debt servitude because aid agencies need to move money in order to survive." (Gould 2005: 150) This was implemented at the expense of democratic processes in the PRS countries. In these countries, an alliance of donors (under the direction of the IFIs), technocrats in ministries (especially Finance) and some selected, technocratically oriented international NGOs determine as an `iron triangle' the political processes, whereas domestic social movements and the poor themselves have been marginalized (ibid.: 150, 5-6). A second study that has recently been published on `donor politics' in the PRS context (Eberlei 2005) arrives at a more cautious assessment. In the light of an extensive case study on Zambia, the author sees a twofold implementation problem. While the Zambian Government reveals serious weaknesses in the implementation of the poverty reduction strategy, he argues that the donor community is also not implementing the new principles adequately. Firstly, the operational basis of many donors is still driven by their own interests and policy agendas, and not or only half-heartedly by the Zambian PRS. Secondly, almost six years after the introduction of the PRS approach, the harmonization of aid modalities is still in its early phase. Thirdly, donors miss opportunities to strengthen reform forces within the country. The author concludes that this twofold implementation problem contributes to continually high poverty levels and persistent neopatrimonial behavior in Zambia.

London) identifies four fundamental dimensions of country ownership: first, ministry technocrats need to be convinced by a strategy; secondly, senior figures in the government must be similarly convinced; thirdly, a wide array of civil society actors needs to be involved; and fourthly, the new approach needs to be institutionalised in the system of government (Booth 2003: 155). This shows a perception of civil society participation as a necessary condition for country ownership.

[8] See Mkandawire's (2004) brief description of different governance concepts and ODI 2006.

[9] Only six out of the total of 54 countries make no mention of it in their PRS (see Eberlei / Fuehrmann 2004: 5). The study gives special attention to corruption: 90 per cent of 34 countries with Full-PRSP address the issue of corruption in their strategies.

[10] The `old' power patters have been discussed frequently. Van de Walle writes for example, that, since independence, governments in developing countries have "loudly and successfully demanded a complete monopoly over aid resources", which led to the effect that `donors aided governments, not their populations' (2001: 196). This elite-orientation of development aid perceived the poor as recipients or target groups of joint government-donor interventions only. Authoritarian governments led by neopatrimonial political elites received support from donors to an extent that `made them less vulnerable to the absence of domestic legitimacy' (ibid.: 227). This narrow focus was even maintained after the so-called 'democratization wave' after the end of the cold war. Moreover, this focus combined with a limited technocratic governance concept, which is directed at public sector management, sees participation as a technical exercise and does not touch any real power issues or the democratization of decision-making (Mkandawire 1999: 126 - 129).

28.   These studies based on Tanzania, Honduras, Vietnam and Zambia should not be generalized too hastily. However, their common ground – a strong donor domination of PRS processes, combined with persisting power patterns within the domestic political arena – is confirmed by a number of observations by civil society actors as well as by the other working papers developed in the context of the INEF project on stakeholder participation (see for example Siebold 2007: 20-21). As mentioned earlier, `domestic accountability remains a challenge. The 2005 PRS Review report discusses this problem. Although the report states that "there is no inherent tension between domestic and external demands", it nevertheless cautions against factors that might "tilt the accountability towards donors at the expense of domestic stakeholders" (IMF / World Bank 2005: 42 f.). Factors mentioned are time pressure by donors, analytical input outpacing ownership, or the use of conditionalities.

29.   Taking a constitutional view in a democratic country, governments are accountable to their citizens. As the majority of the population in the PRS countries are poor, the answer is even more specific: governments are especially accountable to the poor within their societies. Following Ackerman's definition of accountability "as a proactive process by which public officials inform about and justify their plans of action, their behavior and results and are sanctioned accordingly" (Ackerman 2005: 6), the question arises how accountability can be realized under the circumstances prevailing in the poorest countries. Within the domestic arena, it makes sense to distinguish between vertical and horizontal accountability (Malena, Forster, Singh 2004: 3). The latter should have two elements at least: `political accountability' of governments vis-a-vis the parliaments [11](often neglected) and courts as well as `administrative accountability' to internal mechanisms like auditors general, etc. The vertical dimension includes `electoral accountability' and `social accountability'. Searching for an approach to realizing citizen's participation beyond formal electoral rights in practice, the *Participation & Civic Engagement Group* of the World Bank articulated the concept `social accountability'- "as an approach towards building accountability that relies on civic engagement, i.e., in which it is ordinary citizens and/or civil society organizations who participate directly or indirectly in exacting accountability" (Malena / Forster / Singh 2004: 3), including "actions and mechanisms beyond voting" (ibid.). This seems to be a fruitful approach for the PRS context.

30.   All dimensions of accountability — vertical (electoral, social) and horizontal (political, administrative) — are elements of *democratic accountability* within domestic arenas and an essential element of country ownership in its broad democratic perspective. Chapter 4.1 will include recommendations on how to strengthen this important dimension.

3.2 DEVELOPMENT ORIENTATION OF `THE STATE' AND NEOPATRIMONIAL RULE

31.   An important challenge is to realize broad-based participation and democratic accountability in an environment that has been described as "neopatrimonial rule". As this type of political rule prevails in a number of PRS countries (especially, but not exclusively in Africa), it is given specific attention in the following paragraphs.

32.   The new initiative to promote development through the PRS approach is taking place against the background of long-standing developmental stagnation or even decline in a great number of the poorest countries. Looking back to the 1980s and 1990s, this situation has been characterized in Africa as a "permanent crisis" (van de Walle 2001). At the beginning of the 1990s, in the majority of countries today belonging to the PRS group, there were great hopes that autocratic rule would be a thing of the past and that democratic multi-party systems could open up the perspective of new development progress. Already

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[11] See Eberlei / Henn 2003 with proposals how to strengthen parliaments' role in poverty reduction

in the mid-1990s, however, disenchantment set in again when it became apparent that the new regimes, which had now adopted development strategies of structural adjustment, showed marked similarities to the one-party systems of the past.

33.   Comparative research about transition in Africa has led to general statements which identify a common denominator for various specific characteristics of transitions. Bratton and van de Walle submitted the argument that the experience with transition in Africa has been influenced by neopatrimonialism, which they define as "the incorporation of patrimonial logic into bureaucratic institutions" (1997: 62). Patrimonial logic, a concept developed by Max Weber in his studies on traditional societies, signifies the preeminence of individual authority based on personal power and prestige. Neopatrimonialism, however, is a modern phenomenon and refers to political systems "in which the customs and patterns of patrimonialism co-exist with, and suffuse, rational-legal institutions" (ibid.). Systemic characteristics of neopatrimonial rule, which Bratton and van de Walle point out, are presidentialism, clientelism, and the use of public resources for the purposes of political legitimation (ibid.: 63-68).

34.   It should be reiterated, however, that Bratton and van de Walle in their above-mentioned joint study also argue that the balance between patrimonial and rational-legal characteristics of a polity can shift in favor of the latter and that the political reforms of the 1990s were a step in that direction. Their analysis forcefully emphasizes the position that "politics matter". What this means is that "(u)nless the economic reform is accompanied by political changes that increase the checks on executive abuses of influence" (van de Walle 2001: 286), it is highly probable that the current reforms manifested in the introduction of poverty reduction strategies will be ousted by neopatrimonial interests.

35. How does the PRS approach affect these political processes and, conversely, how is the PRS approach influenced by neopatrimonial rule? A recently published case study on Zambia discusses these questions and comes up with a pessimistic view, at least in the short run (Eberlei, Meyns, Mutesa 2005; see box next page). The PRS process in Zambia has somehow changed the political environment. It has created opportunities, notably for civil society actors, to become more closely involved in developmental issues than was previously the case. However, as the authors conclude, there is plenty of evidence that politics in Zambia is still permeated by neopatrimonial practices, beginning with the highly personalized style of leadership at presidential level right down to the mode of operation of officials at local level. The civil society is not (yet?) strong enough to change this significantly. The authors conclusion is that it is necessary to create a development-oriented coalition of political forces within the country that can introduce significant changes. There is little reason to believe that Zambia is an exception.

Table 5: PRS in the Context of Neopatrimonial Rule – The Case of Zambia

Given the neopatrimonial reality of government politics in Zambia much hope has been pinned on the intervention of civil society actors. The PRSP process led to an increased number of advocacy-oriented civil society organizations, and the formation of networks has definitely strengthened the influence of civil society in the political arena. Civil society actors have added their voices to demands for more transparency of decision-making and greater accountability. They have become a positive factor in the constellation of political forces in Zambia. However, they cannot be expected to provide the clout for decisive changes in the balance of forces in favor of good governance and poverty reduction by them-selves.

Five years after the introduction of the PRSP in Zambia poverty persists at high levels. The time span is certainly too short to expect significant changes, but initial signs of improvements in the livelihood conditions of poor people around the country should be visible. However, it is precisely with regard to their impact at grassroots level that poverty reduction efforts in Zambia seem to be severely deficient. Whether one looks at the *Fertilizer Support Programme* or the *Tourism Development Credit Facility -* two examples referred to in the volume -, it is often not the intended beneficiaries who gain access to the support programmes. Those people who are close to the implementing agencies and who know how to use the system to their advantage are frequently the ones who benefit from them, while the rural poor and women are disadvantaged. These are the hallmarks of neopatrimonialism which stand in the way of effective poverty reduction, and their occurrence at grassroots level shows how deeply entrenched the system is.

The bottom line of poverty reduction efforts is whether they actually reach the poor people who are in need of support most urgently. So far participatory mechanisms do not adequately involve poor people themselves. This is most obviously an area for future improvement. But the other end of the pipeline is equally important, state, donors and civil society as the actors who in different ways are involved in raising or channeling the funds needed for poverty reduction policies. The state retains the key responsibility. It may be neopatrimonial but it is not homogeneous, and those forces which are reform and development-oriented within the state need to be strengthened. Both donors and civil society are called upon to bring their influence to bear on the state in this sense. The aim is to facilitate a development-oriented coalition of political forces within the country which will create conditions for sustainable poverty reduction, and in so doing will also be receptive to the needs and desires of the poor majority of the population. For such conditions of good governance to prevail over longstanding neopatrimonial practices, Zambia still has a long road ahead.

Source: Eberlei / Meyns / Mutesa 2005: 22-24 (extracts)

3.3 CIVIL SOCIETY AND ITS ROLE IN A DEMOCRATIC ENVIRONMENT

36.   Most analysts and observers agree that the dialogues between governments and civil societies in PRS countries have improved dramatically since the introduction of the PRS approach. It is now the challenge to define and develop a realistic and democratically legitimized role for civil societies in these countries. Based on the political theory of Juergen Habermas, this paper differentiates between various aspects: on the one hand, any attempts to cut back the influence of critical civil societies should be rebuffed; on the other, it is misleading to simply scale-up the `participation ladder' from the project level to the national level and to demand `joint decision-making'. The final political responsibility in a democratic society rests with the elected bodies – the legislative and/or the executive. However, the links, interfaces and channels between civil societies and legislative bodies have either been hardly used or not even been formed in PRS processes so far. To overcome this deficit remains part of the challenge.

37.   When the 1999 G-7 Summit in Cologne decided to link debt relief to poverty reduction strategies, the international leaders demanded that civil society organizations be included in the design of these strategies. This decision was the result of long lasting debates about the various rationalities for participation in development projects and processes (cf. Booth 2005: 240). The `scaling-up' of participation entered the national level in 1999. Pushed by the donors, governments had to convene civil society players in dialogue forums and in many countries governments and CSOs discussed major

development issues for the first time ever. The civil society was lauded for their competence and engagement. Meanwhile, the honeymoon is over. For many power holders in PRS countries, the civil society organizations with their inconvenient demands for participation, transparency and accountability have been something like a thorn in their flesh from the very beginning. These skeptics got support from external players. At the International Monetary Fund (IMF), for example, there has always been a tendency to see ownership as something exclusive to governments (if at all). In this view, participation is just a functional process, ultimately designed only to weaken civil society resistance to reform programmes. Interestingly, this position got support from some UN organizations, e.g. UNCTAD, which also basically associates ownership with governments whose sovereignty it seeks to strengthen (UNCTAD 2002: 191-200).

38.   Academic contributions to the debate show a wide range of positions. Some examples: Bliss (2006) criticizes sharply those NGOs that use the PRS process as a platform for their own business. Gould (2005) sees the international NGOs especially as being part of an `iron triangle" (donors, technocrats in governments, selected NGOs) determining the PRS process. He criticizes "the creation of `civil society' as an organized form of social agency linked to donor operations" while social forces fighting for more equity and accountability are bypassed (ibid.: 142). David Booth from the London-based *Overseas Development Institute,* who was one of the strong voices welcoming the shift to the PRS approach (see Booth 2003), recently articulated his disappointment with the progress made so far. Besides questioning the donors' role in the process, he raises doubts about the hope that civil society participation could push governments to reforms: "The theory that participation alone can generate accountability and an orientation to results is inconsistent with many findings from political science research. It also seems not to be confirmed by the PRSP `experiment' (2005: 243).[12]

39.   Furthermore, voices from the civil societies in PRS countries also articulate a growing frustration about their real involvement in the processes. For a number of critics it is not evident why CSOs should engage in the PRS processes. Participation that is at best `invited consultation' could lend "a false legitimacy to autocratically made decisions" (Alexander 2004: 12).[13] This criticism is always in the center of many debates: that participation in the PRS context means just `consultation' and `cooptation', not `joint responsibility' or `joint decision-making'. This view builds on the so-called `participation ladder' that exists in some variations (see Brinkerhoff / Goldsmith 2001: 5; McGee / Norton 2000: 14-16) and has been developed in the context of development projects and programmes. It starts with information-sharing, followed by consultations, than joint-decision making, and finally empowerment or initiation and control by stakeholders.

40.   Both approaches – the voices criticizing the civil society on the one hand and those criticizing the limited responsibility of civil society according to the normative `participation ladder' on the other – are shortsighted. They neglect to discuss and to define precisely the relationship between the political system of government and the society. Traditional political theory – from various schools - has offered plenty of ideas to explain this problem. The German sociologist and philosopher Juergen Habermas has developed in his `discourse theory' of society a proposal for this complex relationship that might be fruitful for the PRS debate. It is briefly referred to in the following paragraphs.

41.   Habermas' theory formulates the assumption of an "interplay of institutionalized deliberate

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[12] One of these fundamental studies on which skeptics can rely has been published by Leftwich (2000) whose model of a "developmental state" focuses on the autonomy of `the state' — including autonomy from a civil society that follows particular interests only.

[13] Alexander, Nancy. 2004. *Poverty Reductions Strategy Papers (PRSPs) and the Vision Problems of the International Financial Institutions (IFIs).* Citizens' Network On Essential Services, Silver Spring: MD. http://www.servicesforall.org/html/otherpubs/PRSP vision.pdf (accessed July 9, 2005).

processes with informally developed public opinions" (1996: 298); or, in other words: "the interplay of a public sphere based in civil society with the opinion- and will-formation institutionalized in parliamentary bodies and courts" (ibid.: 371) He defines `civil society' as "associations, organizations, and movements that, attuned to how societal problems resonate in the private life spheres, distill and transmit such reactions in amplified form to the public sphere [and (...)] institutionalizes problem-solving discourses on questions of general interest inside the framework of organized public spheres." (ibid.: 366 f.) In his analysis of this `interplay', he distinguishes two types of power: the `communicative power' that is generated by civil society within the public sphere is "transformed through legislation into administrative power" (ibid.: 299). In his view, "the procedures (...) of democratic opinion- and will-formation function as the most important sluices for the discursive rationalization of the decisions of an administration bound by law and statute. (...) The power available to the administration alters its aggregate condition as long as it remains tied in with a democratic opinion- and will-formation that does not just monitor the exercise of political power ex post facto but more or less programs it as well." (ibid.: 300) This theoretical view embeds `civil society' in a democratic system and gives it a crucial role as communicative intermediator between `the state' and `the people". But he continues as follows: "Nevertheless, only the political system can `act'. It is a subsystem specialized for collectively binding decisions, whereas the communicative structures of the public sphere constitute a far-flung network of sensors that react to the pressure of society-wide problems and stimulate influential opinions. The public opinion that is worked up via democratic procedures into communicative power cannot `rule' of itself but can only point the use of administrative power in specific directions." (ibid.)

42. Following this perspective, any attempts to cut back the influence of civil society should be rebuffed. The critical public debate of political decisions – e.g. on the content of a PRS – is of crucial importance. An extensive, far-reaching involvement of all societal stakeholders is indispensable for this.

43. On the other side, the simple scaling-up of the `participation ladder' from the project level to the national is also misleading. The final political responsibility in a democratic society rests with the elected bodies – the legislative and/or the executive. A `joint decision-making' between a government and civil society actors is – constitutionally speaking – not possible. Nevertheless, a government (or a parliament) has to justify its decisions in public (and bear the risk of not being re-elected).

44. This perspective might help to clarify roles and responsibilities of actors in PRS processes. This includes implicitly a specific attention for the elected legislatives at local and national levels. It is they who have to take up public debates and to transform `communicative power' into `administrative power'.[14] This is an approach which underlines the severe deficiencies in many PRS processes, in which the legislative bodies at national and regional levels do not play the role they should play (see Eberlei / Henn 2003). Especially the `sluices' (Habermas), the links, interfaces and channels between civil societies and legislative bodies have been hardly used or shaped in PRS processes so far.

45. Beside the discussion about a democratically legitimized role for civil societies, it is also a challenge to define *a realistic* understanding of what participation could mean in PRS countries. Numerous expectations are overloading newly emerging civil societies.[15] Structures for public debates

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[14] This is one of the important differences between the terms "communication power" and "strategic communication" used by Mozammel / Odugbemi (2005) to describe a "two-way flow of information and ideas between the government and the citizenry as well as making deliberate efforts to build consensus amongst stakeholders about the development strategy the nation wishes to pursue" (ibid.: 9). Their paper gives a lot of very useful insight in the area of public communication in the sense of public relations. The term "communication power" is broader, however. It points to a crucial challenge: how to transform public opinion into executive power in a democratic way.

[15] Among those often mentioned expectations are the following:

are weak in the vast majority of the PRS countries (e.g. there are hardly any independent media), fundamental preconditions for political participation are lacking (e.g. access to in-formation); civil society organizations, many of them founded only a couple of years ago, have little financial or human resources and even less experience in political arenas. This overload is especially depressing when it is formulated as a short-term expectation. And – difficult to understand for donors – five years since the introduction of PRS are a very short period in societies (like in Africa), being independent for just five decades and organized – at least formally – in a pluralistic democracy for 15 years only. Therefore, again, getting a realistic and theoretically rooted understanding of who the stakeholders within a society are and what participation could mean actually, is a crucial challenge. This does not mean throwing the baby out with the bathwater. It means that "poor people's realities are the starting point" (Narayan 2002: 77) for every political process including societies in the poorest countries.

3.4 EMPOWERMENT OR `BRINGING THE PEOPLE (BACK) IN'

46.   Last but not least: The empowerment of the people in the poorest countries remains a crucial challenge for the next PRS process phases. There is indeed an encouraging opening-up of public and political spaces in many PRS countries for the organized civil society – as a rule those associations with a strong basis in the capitals. But one can hardly assess their work as communicative intermediators between the poor and the state. `Bringing the people (back) in' is an unresolved challenge. Mastering this challenge is seen as crucial because there is a definite link between the inclusion of poor people (or their legitimized representatives) and sufficient strategic approaches serving the poor.

47.   The PRS approach followed the newly growing insight that the state should again play a bigger role in development processes. "Bringing the state back in" (Evans et al 1985) was the demand that led finally to a turning away from the `Washington Consensus' of the 1980s and 1990s. However, the connection between the `lifeworld' *(Lebenswelt)* of the poor and the political system – to continue with Habermas' terminology – has not yet been built. The PRS Review 2005 confirmed anew that "the views of poor people and other marginalized groups have not been adequately reflected in poverty reduction strategies" (IMF / World Bank 2005: 33). Six years after the introduction of the PRS approach, this failing can hardly be explained by teething problems. The "powerlessness" of the poor (ibid.) has structural causes.

48.   Numerous case studies are confirming this view.[16] In Zambia, to give just one example, the highly effective umbrella organization *Civil Society for Poverty Reduction* (CSPR), supported by a wide

Country ownership: Societal participation shall ensure that a national poverty reduction strategy is not only owned by governments, but is given (full) societal support.

Legitimacy: A broad-based societal support shall furthermore help to anchor poverty reduction as an enforceable norm, i.e. to realize it, if necessary, even against the interests of a (non-poor) minority.

Efficiency and creativity: By bringing in their specific knowledge about poverty and/or poverty reduction efforts, societal stakeholders — be they private-sector members such as entrepreneurs, representatives of small-scale farmers, the spokeswoman of a women's organization, or others — shall contribute to developing the best ideas for poverty reduction.

Accountability: Stakeholder participation shall contribute to committing governments to work on pro-poor policies and to actually implement them.

Empowerment: Stakeholder participation shall help to enable poor people especially to shape the conditions of their lives and to make real choices.

[16] See for example the in-depth-analysis of 15 countries in the context of the World Bank / INEF-project (INEF 2005).

range of NGOs, made significant inputs to the formulation of Zambia's Full PRSP, and has performed a `watchdog' role subsequently in the form of regular critical comments on the implementation process (as mentioned in the `prologue' of the 2005 PRS Review report). At local level, however, civil society is barely involved in the PRS process at all (Imboela 2005, Waldenhof 2005).

49.   The donors perceive the well organized NGOs in the capitals also as `the civil society'. The PRS Review report justifies this "because direct engagement of poor people takes more time than existing planning cycles allow, and empowerment of the most vulnerable members of society is fundamentally difficult to do" (IMF / World Bank 2005: 33). Critics of the donor community argue that donors prefer to cooperate with well-meaning and technocratically oriented international NGOs instead of dealing with inconvenient social movements who even question the role of IFIs generally (see e.g. Gould 2005).

50.   The marginal inclusion of the poor has meanwhile become an issue (see above, PRS Re-view report). The question whether this has an impact on the quality of strategies is, however, not discussed. Basically, it is assumed that the strategies formulated so far are more or less on track (see IMF / World Bank Joint Staff Advisory Notes, JSANs) – obviously quite independent of the fact of whether the poor themselves have been involved in designing the strategies or not. A brief look at one of the deficiencies in many PRSPs to date – the lack of significant gender mainstreaming - exemplifies the problem with this calculated optimism.

51.   In many countries women's organizations participated only to a limited extent in the process (Siebold 2007: 19). Indeed, most PRSPs mentioned gender issues and recognized them as a crosscutting theme, but the hoped-for `engendering' of the poverty debate appears not to have happened on a regular basis. It is the impression of many observers that mostly lip service has been paid to gender concerns (World Bank 2002: 10; McGee and others 2002: 17; Sanchez and Cash 2003: 16; Zuckerman and Garrett 2003; Rodenberg 2004). In her study on gender in PRSPs, Whitehead (2003: 4) concludes: "Women's voices have hardly been sought and have definitely not been heard. Women citizens are hardly consulted at all and gender advocates within national CSOs are not heeded."

52.   These shortcomings in the inclusion of women in general and women's organizations focusing on gender issues in particular, is mirrored significantly in weak documents (see Roden-berg 2004: 36 ff.). The majority of the PRS are characterized by a) a widespread confusion as to the precise distinction between the Women-in-Development approach (WID) and the Gender and Development approach (GAD); b) a fragmented gender analysis (although a fund of disaggregated data is available, it is not used in syntheses and long-term strategies); and c) a gender-blind macroeconomic framework (that does not make any reference to gender-specific impacts of national and international economic and financial policies, trade liberalization and external shocks). With regard to the main concerns of a critical gender analysis, firstly, anchoring a comprehensive gender-sensitive approach in the national poverty strategy and, secondly, the fully and meaningful participation of women and women's organizations, the continued use of a WID policy by the vast majority of the involved national institutions leads to crucial short-comings in writing, implementing and monitoring processes and the participatory political process in general. Gender issues have generally been delegated to women, although the core of the gender approach is precisely this: no longer to focus only on women as an isolated and homogenous vulnerable group. Furthermore, the advocacy of women's NGOs, but also the need to meet donors' demands for bringing gender issues in, had often led to quite superficial corrective procedures, in a way that national gender experts or even external expertise have revised and "engendered" written drafts. This example demonstrates, that there is a definite link between the fact that specific groups of poor people or their legitimized representatives are neglected in the participatory processes on the one hand, and insufficient strategic approaches serving the poor on the other.

53.   The *World Development Report 2000/01* clearly stated that "facilitating the empowerment of poor people (...) (is the) key to reducing poverty" (World Bank 2001: 3; see also the box). Shortly after this ground-breaking report, the wealth of knowledge about empowerment and its (potential) impact on poverty reduction was compiled in a comprehensive sourcebook (Narayan 2002; see main messages in the box). Having this in mind, the gulf between theory and practice hurts even more. Mosedale states rightly that empowerment cannot be "done", it can only be supported.17 Chapter 4.3 nevertheless includes some recommendations on what could be done to strengthen empowerment in PRS processes.

Table 6: World Development Report 2000/01 on empowerment

"The choice and implementation of public actions that are responsive to the needs of poor people de-pend on the interaction of political, social, and other institutional processes. Access to market opportu-nities and to public sector services is often strongly influenced by state and social institutions, which must be responsive and accountable to poor people. Achieving access, responsibility, and accountability is intrinsically political and requires active collaboration among poor people, the middle class, and other groups in society. Active collaboration can be greatly facilitated by changes in governance that make public administration, legal institutions, and public service delivery and more efficient and ac-countable to all citizens - and by strengthening the participation of poor people in political processes and local decision making. Also important is removing the social and institutional barriers that result from distinctions of gender, ethnicity, and social status. Sound and responsive institutions are not only important to benefit the poor but are also fundamental to the overall growth process."

(World Bank 2001: 7)

Table 7: Empowerment and Poverty Reduction: Lessons learned

- Respect, trust, and social relations matter.
- Participatory processes and conflict management go together.
- Change is brought about by champions and alliances in country.
- Bringing key actors together is vital.
- Four empowerment elements act in synergy: Access to timely and understandable information,inclusion and participation, accountability, and investment in local organizational capacity. Direct, intensive forms of participation are not always appropriate.
- Poor people's realities are the starting point.
- Local capacity is systematically underestimated.
- Poor people's membership-based organizations are overlooked.
- Changes in rules and institutional processes enable large-scale change.

Source: Narayan 2002: 76 f.

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[17] "Empowerment cannot be bestowed by a third party. Rather those who would become empowered must claim it. Development agencies cannot therefore empower women — the most they can achieve is to facilitate women empowering themselves. They may be able to create conditions favourable to empowerment but they cannot make it happen." (Mosedale 2003: 1)

4. Conclusions: Unfolding Communicative Power

54.   The 2005 PRS review report states that "meaningful participation" can contribute to high-quality strategies as well to domestic accountability (IMF, World Bank 2005, Synthesis, 10). The author fully agrees with this conclusion and would even stress a clear correlation: A high-quality poverty reduction strategy needs meaningful participation. But what is `meaningful'? In our view, using Habermas' terminology, meaningful participation is the successful transformation of societal *communicative power* into governmental *administrative power*. With other words: Meaningful participation ensures that Governments' rule translates the interests of the people into *country* owned policies.[18] To distinguish between *communicative* power as all democratic means to influence decision-making processes and *administrative* power as all means to implement decisions made by democratically legitimized bodies seems helpful for getting a clear picture of roles and responsibilities. Our conclusion is therefore: Strengthening meaningful stakeholder participation in PRS processes requires the *unfolding of communicative power*. Operationalizing this leads us to three core objectives: strengthening democratic accountability, institutionalized participation and empowerment.

4.1 STRENGTHENING DEMOCRATIC ACCOUNTABILITY

55.   Strengthening *domestic accountability* is one of the key messages of the 2005 PRS Review report. Our findings support the view that domestic accountability is a necessary pillar for poverty reduction politics. The relationship between governments and their citizens is a matter of *democratic accountability*. External partners can support democratic accountability in various ways. Three strategic recommendations would seem to have specific importance.

56.   ***Strengthening country ownership:*** Democratic domestic accountability should be distinguished from external obligations and contractually agreed conditionalities. The PRS arena is influenced by three groups of actors: "government, stakeholders, and external partners" (World Bank / OPCS 2005c/rot: ix). Hence, donors are important and influential actors, but they are not `stakeholders' in the domestic democratic arena. Therefore: all efforts to strengthen country ownership (as intended by the PRS approach, see World Bank /OPCS 2005a-b for operationalization) do support democratic accountability within the PRS countries. One example: donors should strengthen the existing national planning processes rather than create new ones (World Bank /OPCS 2005c: x). Some progress has been made in this respect. In the early years of the PRS approach, only a few `strong' countries (like Uganda and Vietnam) integrated the PRS approach into their own planning mechanisms, while donors pushed the majority of countries to come up with a completely new set of mechanisms and instruments in the PRS context. More countries are now going back to their old instruments, integrating important PRS principles into these national planning mechanisms or documents (e.g. Zambia). A few countries are even developing new approaches, sometimes not without coming into conflict with the donor community (e.g. Ghana). A second example are the PRS monitoring systems: nearly all constitutions of PRS countries provide for some controls over government actions, e.g. by parliaments or institutions like the Auditor General, etc. In most cases, these are weak institutions which the donors did not think were capable of carrying out effective monitoring. So, as a result: "Performance monitoring systems were set up in parallel to existing (albeit often weak) domestic ones. These practices have at times fragmented scarce human capacity and drawn attention away from strengthening existing processes. Disconnecting the PRS

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[18] This builds the bridge to our earlier mentioned understanding of country ownership: A (clear) majority of the population and their representatives (democratically legitimated representatives as well as representatives of pressure groups) have participated in the development of the strategy, identify with the goals and elements of the strategy, and will participate in implementation and ongoing development of it.

cycle from domestic political cycles can also detract from domestic accountability." (IMF / World Bank 2005: 44) The debate about accountability should include a debate about donors' roles. It is true: "For better or worse, donors are actors in the political processes of countries; they are capable of either strengthening or undermining the bonds of accountability between governments and their citizens" (Driscoll et al. 2005: 16). Therefore, again: Donors are actors, influential actors, important actors – but they are not `stakeholders' within a democratically organized society.

57.   ***Strengthening accountability mechanisms:*** There are various ways and means to strengthen the vertical (electoral, social) and horizontal (political, administrative) elements of domestic accountability. All four dimensions are equally important. As yet, donors are concentrating on the administrative dimension (e.g. improving financial transparency mechanisms). Especially the political and social dimension have to be supported more in the context of PRS. Including the parliaments systematically is one crucial element: "External partners (...) need to favor debate and the emergence of stronger checks and balances between the executive and the legislature." (World Bank / OPCS 2005c/rot: xii). Detailed proposals on how to strengthen legislatures in the PRS context have been made in the past (e.g. Eberlei / Henn 2003). The question of more direct involvement of citizens in policymaking and monitoring has been brought forward in the `social accountability' approach, fostered by the World Bank's *Participation and Civic Engagment Group* (see Malena, Forster, Singh 2004; Ackerman 2005a and b).

58.   ***Improving political analysis:*** PRS processes are taking place in a domestic political arena. This `political dimension' has been mentioned quite often. Some recent publications – like DFID's "Drivers for Change" study series – try to provide a clearer picture of the underlying factors in these processes. Very few independent academic studies (e.g. Gould 2005, Eberlei et al 2005) give additional insight. These approaches have to be strengthened systematically, especially within the countries. This needs capacity building for domestic academic institutions (preferable university academics rather than consultants) as well as political journalists within PRS countries (capacity in terms of skills, access to information, but also sustainable financial resources for their work). Some donors have already launched initiatives to support deeper debates on PRS within countries (see for example DFID / World Bank cooperation on strategic communication, Mozammel / Odugbemi 2005); these initiatives should be enhanced systematically. But improving political analysis and getting a better understanding of the political economy of poverty reduction is also a task for the donors themselves. Booth is right when he calls upon the donors to put more effort into understanding the "political economy of previous reform efforts" (2005: 242). This demands more analytical work, but also the systematic inclusion of the political dimension in strategically important documents (e.g. the JSANs, PSIAs, donor country assistance strategies, etc.)

4.2 STRENGTHENING INSTITUTIONALIZED PARTICIPATION

59.   Societal participation takes place in a highly contested political field where the vested interests of numerous parties are at stake (Siebold 2007: 17 f.; Eberlei / Siebold 2006: 7, 24 f.). To expect that all stakeholders agree on methods and results (e.g. of participatory planning or monitoring) is unrealistic. Sociological and political research on the state of political affairs in poor countries, especially in Africa, shows how deeply rooted neopatrimonial systems are and how strongly the `non-poor' and the power elites in many countries are interwoven. To assume that a development orientation of the elites dominating the states is automatically given and to think it is just a question of "setting clear development goals and specific targets" (IMF, World Bank, Synthesis: 6) seems to be too optimistic in many countries. Instead, it is necessary to foster open discussions as to which stakeholder has which (i) interests, (ii) capacities and (iii) legitimacy in which phase of the PRS process. It should be borne in mind that a participatory system presupposes that minimum standards of a democratic political culture are met. We

conclude that the strengthening and embedding of institutionalized participation in living political systems is without an alternative. Only a lively political society with strong civil society players and at least independent legislative institutions can form those political coalitions between `drivers of change' that are necessary to overcome the rule of partial interests.

60.   ***Getting the institutions right:*** Sustainable structures and legal frameworks for participation have to be created in order to foster meaningful participation. A number of good practices for structures exist: examples like sector working groups in a number of countries, the *Policy Forums* in Armenia and Tanzania, *UPPAP* in Uganda, and others have been highlighted in the background papers to this project (see also examples of "permanent platforms" in other studies like World Bank / OPCS 2005c: xii). Legal frameworks are less developed. But even here a few examples can be mentioned (like the Budget Act 2001 in Uganda, the rules and procedures for revision processes in Uganda and Tanzania; the framework for participation in Armenia). To enhance the institutionalization, two recommendations would seem to be important: Firstly, it is necessary to enhance the information basis for actors. South-south learning processes between governments and country stakeholders can help. Websites offering information on good practices are useful, as are publications like the World Bank's chapter on participation in the *PRS Sourcebook* (that could be updated with more models from the implementation phase). Based on sufficient knowledge, a second step could be to organize systematic dialogues between governments and country stakeholders with the aim of developing a self-assessment to define status and objectives of participation within a specific country context (see World Bank, P&CE proposals under preparation). Donors can support these processes by initiating learning processes, playing an intermediate role or simply by financing the emerging structures.

61.   ***Fostering the interplay between civil societies and legislatures:*** One of the conclusions drawn from the previous chapters is that the links or interfaces (Habermas: `sluices') between civil society organizations and democratically legitimized parliaments have been neglected so far and have to be strengthened in future. This recommendation is based on a specific perspective of the role of civil societies in PRS processes. No doubt: among the various stakeholder groups, the civil societies and their organizations play a crucial role in the PRS processes worldwide. The 2005 Review report underlines this with numerous examples which are also confirmed by our findings. Nevertheless, six years of experience with the PRS approach show the necessity to define a clearer role for civil societies in PRS countries. The expectation should be neither overloaded nor underestimated. This paper proposes a realistic view of the role of civil society, based on a entirely valid theoretical framework (see 3.3). This perspective strengthens civil society in its critical role in society as a whole, but it also limits expectations to a realistic level. Civil society gets its legitimacy through the "network of sensors that react to the pressure of society-wide problems and stimulate influential opinions" (Habermas 1996: 300). It might translate this into "communicative power" but it "cannot `rule' of itself and can only point the use of administrative power in specific directions" (ibid.). Stakeholders within civil society can therefore be advocates, not judges. They can be watchdogs, `ad monitors', or agents of specific interests. But they cannot assume the role of those who make the binding political decisions. Civil society actors have a crucial, supportive role for democracies, but in themselves cannot replace the democratic steering and controlling functions. The latter is the task of legislatures. Both - the civil societies and the legislatures - have to play their specific role. Therefore, parliaments are not "neglected stakeholders" (IMF, World Bank 2005: 32). Parliaments are (or should be/become) the constitutionally based and democratically legitimized forum for domestic debates, while civil societies can initiate communicative power to inspire, influence or even publicly criticize those who are in power. This approach can be supported by various ways and means, for example:

- Strengthening mechanisms for information exchange and discussion between legislative institutions and country stakeholders at national and local level (e.g. hearings, open forums, participation of civil society representatives in committee meetings, using instruments of strategic communication, etc.);

- Strengthening the accountability of parliamentarians vis-a-vis their constituencies (e.g. by supporting local offices of national MPs, feedback mechanisms, monitoring instruments by citizens, etc.);
- Involving political parties in PRS debates;
- Strengthening the media reporting on parliamentary affairs (improving legal frameworks for journalists; capacity building; sustainable resource basis).

62.   ***Capacity building:*** Having shown the `theoretical' limits of civil societies or societal stakeholders in general, the real capacity limits of stakeholders in many poor countries should also be discussed openly. The participation agenda has been overloaded especially in the poorest countries while the necessary conditions to enable stakeholders' participation in these countries have not been realized. The framework of institutionalized participation can help to match realistic roles to actual conditions. The *Guidelines,* which are part of the INEF papers, include a number of concrete proposals on how to strengthen the capacity of civil societies to act (see Rodenberg 2007).

63.   ***Developing indicators for institutionalized participation:*** Besides numerous possible single measures to support the institutionalization of participation, the institutionalization of frameworks for participation should be promoted by introducing indicators or measurable standards for participation that include rights and structures for an ongoing cooperative dialogue between legitimated and capacitated stakeholders. The author's proposal in an earlier paper to develop "minimal standards" (Eberlei 2002) has been taken up as a demand by civil society organizations in some countries and was agreed upon as reference for the Tanzanian PRS revision process. However, as "standards" might be too demanding, the development of "indicators" would give societal stakeholders as well as governments a tool to self-assess the state of institutionalized participation in their countries (necessarily taking specific socio-cultural and political circumstances into consideration) and to initiate an ongoing learning process to qualify the inclusion of all stakeholders. Donor and development countries have included this dimension in their work on the harmonization agenda (Paris Declaration). Based on the analysis of the World Bank / OPCS, the progress with regard to target 1 – ownership – shall be measured by several indicators, among them also indicators of institutionalized participation.

4.3 STRENGTHENING EMPOWERMENT

64.   The findings in several of our papers underline the urgent need to start `empowerment initiatives' and to discuss the underlying issues. The distribution of power is a highly relevant topic for poverty reduction debates. `Powerlessness' is a form of poverty and a major cause of poverty. Discussing poverty issues without recognizing power issues does not lead to proper poverty analyses. A better understanding of power issues should lead to different processes, taking into account the interests of especially poor and vulnerable groups. In some PRS countries – like Uganda and Tanzania – successful efforts have been undertaken to include poor peoples' views in PRS processes. There is a lot of knowledge about empowerment, including numerous proposals for supporting it (for World Bank initiated publications see Narayan 2002 or the social accountability initiative; see also Rodenberg 2007 as a summary of good practices and recommendations highlighted in the INEF research project). Even more important: plenty of empowerment initiatives by local peoples themselves exist in reality, but are neglected in the national PRS processes as the PRS review report states. It is recommended that donors pay more attention to the support of empowerment initiatives in the context of PRS (e.g. social accountability initiatives). It might also be recommendable to change their own practice in these processes, e.g. by explicitly paying attention to grassroots organizations in remote areas, to social movements or small regional networks of stakeholders, even if this needs much more time, patience and resources than dealing with the professionally staffed, capital-based international NGOs.

4.4 LONG-TERM PERSPECTIVE

Ten years ago, anyone forecasting that, in 2006, some 60 of the poorest countries would be preparing or even implementing comprehensive national poverty reduction strategies would have been a laughing stock. And anyone predicting that those strategies would be co-shaped by broad-based stakeholder participation and recognized by the entire donor community (in principle) as a cornerstone of their work would have been considered totally out of touch with reality. To appreciate the change that has occurred in the fight against poverty since the late 1990s (at a conceptual level at least), one needs to take a medium-range view of PRS processes and contents. Whether they have already made a real difference to the lives of the poor can then be discussed in a somewhat more balanced horizon, although still not without impatience. Fighting poverty is a task for decades, not just for a few years. But the sooner the strengthening of meaningful participation enhances the quality of poverty strategies and strengthens domestic accountability for their implementation, the better for the poor. Stakeholders in the civil societies and political forces in the legislative bodies of PRS countries have to unfold the `communicative power' to point the `administrative power' in a pro-poor direction. This, and in our opinion only this, can lead to a breakthrough in the fight against poverty.

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