

**“LEGISLATING POVERTY” IN AFRICA:
WHAT ROLE HAVE PARLIAMENTARIANS BEEN PLAYING IN PRSP IMPLEMENTATION
AND POLICY?**

DRAFT WORKING PAPER

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INTRODUCTION

Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) which appear to be the key development strategy with a promise to moving most developing countries out of their current 'development impasse' have gained in recent years considerable support in Africa. However, the immense potential of this strategy is at risk of being lost if proper policies are not put in place to ensure effective implementation. In order to ensure effective implementation of pro-poor policies and programs, greater recognition has been given to parliamentarians' crucial role in the oversight and monitoring of PRSPs especially through budget oversight. After 5 years of design, implementation and revision of PRSPs in Africa, it is appropriate to assess the roles parliamentarians have been playing in the PRSP, how effective these have been, what potential impacts they have had on PRS implementation and policy, with specific focus on the budget process.

The Parliamentary Centre has been in the past two years supporting African parliamentary committees through the Africa-Canada Parliamentary Strengthening Program in monitoring poverty reduction strategies and making the government accountable for pro-poor public expenditures. Moreover, the Parliamentary Centre has, with support of GTZ, conducted in 2004 a rapid appraisal review in four PRSP countries - Ghana, Niger, Tanzania and Malawi - in order to examine the strengths and weaknesses in the implementation of national PRSPs and the roles that parliaments are playing and could play to improve PRSP performance.

This work builds on the PC's previous four country study. With support from the World Bank Institute (WBI), the PC decided to undertake a seven country study to assess whether or not there have been improvements in the role of Parliaments since the 2004 study. The cases include the four original countries – Ghana, Niger, Tanzania, Malawi – and three other countries – Kenya, Senegal and Zambia.

Objectives

The study examined:

1. How effective has parliamentary involvement in the PRSP process been?
2. What impacts have the interventions had on PRS implementation and policy, with specific focus on the budget process?

Case Study Countries and Methodology

Seven countries are selected for this study: **Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Niger, Senegal, Tanzania and Zambia.**

A two-pronged methodology was adopted for the study. An in-country assessment technique was used for Kenya, Senegal and Zambia. For this purpose, the Parliamentary Centre research team met with groups of parliamentarians, parliamentary staff, researchers, public officials, donors as well as civil society groups in these countries.

For Ghana, Malawi and Tanzania and Niger, a combination of assessment techniques such as literature review, parliamentary audits and interaction with policy institutes was used.

To set the stage, the study begins with the current emerging trend of shifting from a narrow focus on poverty to a focus on growth, which it is believed, will lead to poverty reduction in the long run. The subsequent sections then focus on the key issues that were identified in the questionnaire used for the study (see appendix). A concluding section looks at lessons and issues that need to be addressed.

1. Narrowing the Focus: From Poverty Reduction to Growth

There is now enough evidence to suggest that sustained and rapid economic growth has invariably been accompanied by reduction of poverty and, conversely, persistent growth failures have invariably been accompanied by persistent failure to reduce poverty as is the case in some African and Latin American countries. Increasingly, economic growth is being recognised as necessary for poverty reduction.

The empirical evidence also points, however, to an important feature of the relationship between growth and poverty that is often neglected – namely, that there is no invariant relationship between the rate of growth and the rate of poverty reduction. Faster growth is not always accompanied by faster rate of poverty reduction, just as slower growth does not always entail slower rates of poverty reduction. Therefore, what matters for poverty reduction is not just the rate of growth but also what might be called the growth elasticity of poverty i.e. the rate of poverty reduction for any given rate of growth.

Policies for poverty reduction should therefore try to promote both faster rate of growth and a high growth elasticity of poverty. In the course of the recent explosion of growth literature, much has been written on what can be done to accelerate the rate of growth. But very little work has been done to understand what can be done to promote a high responsiveness of poverty to growth.

In all the countries studied, we witnessed a shift in approach to poverty reduction – a shift in favor of growth. This is informed mainly by a number of reasons. The first has to do with the reasons outlined above – the need for growth in order to reduce poverty. The second reason relates to the fact that most African countries are beginning to come to terms with the fact that in designing their PRSPs, the focus was narrow and targets mediocre. Third and importantly, most African countries are beginning to take ‘real ownership’ of their poverty agenda. Politics has also been another factor accounting for this shift. This is particularly the case in Kenya where Narc government preferred an Economic Recovery Strategy focusing on growth and investment, to the country’s PRSP that was designed by the government of Arap Moi.

In Ghana, the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy has now turned into the Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRSII). In Zambia, instead of the Zambian Poverty Reduction Strategy, the framework for development is the 5th National Development Plan. Tanzania now has a National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty (NSGRP), the second generation document of PRSP in that country. In countries like Niger, Tanzania, Malawi and Senegal, even though the name of the document has not changed, the focus has changed to growth.

Whether these countries can generate the growth that is necessary to bring about a meaningful reduction in poverty is one challenge that African countries will have to face head-on. It is commendable to ‘change course’ and focus on growth but the necessary policies and infrastructure have to be put in place in order to engender the needed growth.

2. Knowledge and access to information on PRSPs

As the PRSP is the national framework that shapes development in countries under study, and while Parliament is the institution representing the interests of the people and overseeing governmental programs, policy development as well as public spending, it is crucial if MPs are to play effectively their roles for them to have a fine understanding of the national strategy to reduce poverty.

What our study found out is that across a number of Parliaments, there is a general lack of knowledge and information relating to PRSPs. This is the case particularly in Zambia and Niger. In Zambia in particular, this is probably the case because for a long time, despite the existence of the PRSP, the framework for the development in that country was the National Development Plan (see discussion under growth and poverty).

This is a trend noticeable in a good number of PRSP countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Most MPs seem to be aware of the PRSP process, its existence as a national development strategy as well as some areas of focus but only a minority of MPs appears to be truly knowledgeable about the targets, priorities and commitments set for the country to reduce poverty in the national strategy.

It is fair to say however, that, in countries like Zambia and Tanzania, MPs awareness and understanding of PRSPs is on the rise when compared to 3 or 4 years ago when these strategies were starting to be implemented. This may be explained by a range of factors including increased interest by MPs to better grasp issues of national, regional and international development as these shape national policy and development. In reaction to the marginalization of Parliament in the PRSP process, parliamentarians are getting more engaged in PRS debates and conversant with the subject through their involvement in regional and international network's of parliamentarians, by taking part in international conferences, by creating linkages with CSOs, and by demanding to be systemically included in national development planning consultations with the World Bank and the IMF. African parliamentarians are adding their names to the International parliamentarians' petition for democratic oversight of the World Bank and IMF which is co-sponsored by the Parliamentary Network on the World Bank (PNoWB). As the Chair of the PNoWB, Mr. Beth Koenders (MP, Netherlands), points out in an endorsement letter of the petition "there can be no country ownership without parliamentary ownership". Greater will of government's to meaningfully engage MPs in all phases of the PRSP process could contribute to greater ownership of the strategy and stronger support.

For MPs to participate effectively in the PRSP process as well as all national economic policies, a firm grasp and a good understanding of policy documents and processes is important.

3. Participation in PRSP process

In a number of countries, right from the start of PRSP processes, participation has been problematic. Ironically, participation, which was supposed to be the hallmark of the process to ensure local country ownership, was one aspect of the PRSP that suffered significantly. In most instances, PRSPs, like many other economic policies, were seen as exclusive tasks of the Executive – mainly finance and planning ministries, with support from donor groups. What was worrying was the fact that Parliament, a key player in shaping economic policy issues, was completely left out in the process leading up to shaping PRSP documents.

This was true for Tanzania as it was for Ghana and a number of other African countries. But two notable exceptions are Senegal and Malawi.

The Senegalese government, early on in the PRSP process, debated the role of the National Assembly and seeing that it is one of the highest institutions of the state, felt that the National Assembly should not be consulted and treated in the same way as civil society and other partners in the process and should be involved for the milestones of the process such as the validation process, aligning priorities with the budget and so forth. There was also a decision in light of the status of the National Assembly that communication and exchanges on the PRSP should be conducted directly by the Minister of Finance and the President of the National Assembly. This decision, while facilitating participation for some MPs, created difficulties to involve many ordinary parliamentarians in the process and added a layer of formality to the involvement of the Assembly in the process.

Because of the formal relationship between the Ministry of Finance and the Budget and Finance Commission of the National Assembly, Government was also able to justify the direct involvement of the Commission in the PRSP process and this lead to the President of the Finance Commission becoming the focal point for Parliament in the PRSP and a representative from that commission has been invited to most key PRSP events and meetings.

For the initial “comité de pilotage” or Technical Committee that worked on the initial draft of the PRSP, Government officials also felt it important to involve the political parties by inviting each parliamentary group (caucus) to designate an MP to participate on the committee.

In Ghana, continuous collaborative work with civil society groups led to a relatively improved parliamentary engagement with the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) – the NDPC is the government agency responsible for Ghana’s poverty reduction. While there are no clear modalities for Parliament to make inputs into the process prior to the final document presented to Parliament, committees have persisted in demanding this right to engage with the NDPC. Consequently, a 3-member sub-committee has been recommended to continuously liaise with NDPC. In the 2nd phase of the PRSPs therefore the Parliamentary Committee on Poverty Reduction had the opportunity to formally interact with NDPC during the review process. In addition, through continuous consultations with CSO, courtesy of a CIDA funded *Ghana Parliamentary Committee Support Project* and the coordinating role of the *Institute of Democratic Governance*, the Poverty Reduction Committee of Parliament solicited civil society comments on the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy and lessons thereof that informed the current poverty reduction document The Poverty Reduction Committee, the Growth and Poverty Forum¹ and NDPC have thus dialogued on key poverty reduction issues were incorporated in the Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy II.

In Malawi, while Parliament as an institution has not had an active involvement in the PRSP process, efforts were made by Government to invite a number of parliamentary committee chairpersons to join the twenty-one preparatory thematic working groups for the PRSP formulation. The Chairperson of the Budget and Finance Committee for example, chaired the Public Expenditure Thematic Group. A limited number of parliamentarians also participated in the district consultation at the invitation of the PRSP Technical Committee but it is estimated that only a third of the Parliament participated in those district consultation which the government considered the main vehicle for parliamentary involvement in the PRSP process.

The Malawi Parliament’s involvement in the PRSP has been mainly through the Budget and Finance Committee and its budget review. In late 2001, the Budget and Finance committee established a task force on poverty reduction and decided that it would devote much of its energy to PRSP monitoring.

¹ A network of 30 CSO committed to promoting non-state participation and contribution in public policy discourse

Officially, the Malawi Government has not included Parliament or any of its committees in the official institutional structures responsible for the implementation and monitoring of the PRSP. Parliament is only associated indirectly in the monitoring process through the established Technical Working Committees (TWC) of which some parliamentarians are members. Otherwise, the responsibility of Parliament to monitor the MPRSP is based on a “as they see fit” scenario.

Findings from this study revealed that there has been some significant improvements both in terms of quality and quantity of participation. A number of Parliaments took the “gate-crashing” approach in order to get themselves counted in the process.

In fact, while the marginalization of legislatures in the PRSP process is a common situation across Africa, in many legislatures, parliamentarians have looked for ways to be more involved and with time have carved out a role for themselves particularly in the oversight and monitoring of the process. By being vocal and questioning Government on key PRSP issues, parliamentarians have often forced the Executive to take notice of their request for involvement and this has led to a more active role for parliamentarians over time both in an official and unofficial manner.

In Niger, for instance, PRSP II is intended to be more participatory than the first PRSP. Regional workshops and the creation of 15 thematic groups are planned with the intention of including inputs from these consultations in the first draft of the document. The approach is similar to the one in Tanzania in which input was sought from stakeholders before a draft report was even prepared. A national validation workshop is also planned for October 2006 at which the final document will be presented and discussed.

MPs may demand greater involvement in this second generation of PRSPs through their inclusion in all thematic groups set-up for consultations in the formulation process. One MP from the Finance Committee was present at the inauguration of these thematic groups. He was later able to brief 19 members of the Parliamentary Poverty Reduction Network on the discussions and outcomes of the meeting at a training session organized for the Network on PRSPs and Parliament’s role. The Finance Committee has been playing a key role in ensuring greater involvement by Parliament in the process this time around. As a result, each parliamentary committee should be represented in at least one thematic group.

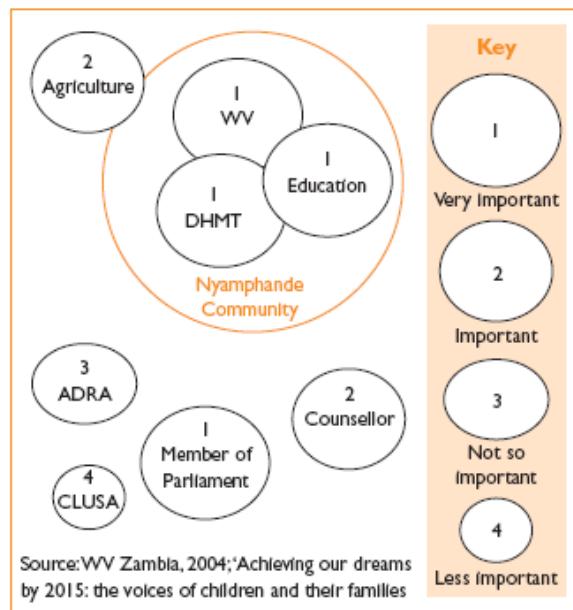
For one thing, strong Committee leadership in Niger played a key role in getting the Parliamentary “voice” heard in all PRSP dialogues. Added to this is the networking approach the PC adopted in tackling poverty issues around the continent. This approach gave a number of MPs across the continent, enormous opportunities to learn, meet other MPs and share experiences and lessons. This was the case particularly in Malawi and Tanzania.

In addition, in Tanzania for instance, improvements in Executive-Legislative relations played a key role in this effort. Through various PC interventions, the Committee on Poverty Reduction in Tanzania developed a good working relationship with the office of the Vice President in Tanzania – the office is responsible for coordinating all PRSP and poverty related policies in Tanzania. This relationship has been useful in ensuring Parliament’s participation in Tanzania’s second PRSP – they were ignored in the first one.

In assessing levels and quality of participation, a number of issues emerged as those hindering Parliament’s participation. One of the major challenges and obstacles for Parliament to play an effective role in PRSP oversight is the lack of qualified and trained staff to assist MPs with their research and investigative work. The other obstacle is the lack of training for MPs themselves in matters of budget oversight and poverty analysis. The third is deliberate Executive interest to side-line Parliament as an institution.

While the case should be made for MP involvement and participation in the PRSP process as well as other important national developmental policy issues, there are some who question whether MPs are really representative of the 'people' they are supposed to represent. In a survey conducted by World Vision Zambia, children and families surveyed ranked Members of Parliament along with NGO's, the Ministry of Health and Education to be the most important institutions working for their community. However, the distance of the MPs circle from the orange community circle indicates that children and families feel that their MPs are not always close to the community (figure below). In order for MPs to efficiently play their representative role they need to reach further to their communities and build stronger relationships with their constituents. Out of these interactions MPs can gain greater knowledge and understanding of challenges faced by the community as well as gain greater respect and trust from constituents that their elected representative is listening to their needs and priorities and working for them. In the process, accountability of MPs to their constituents should be strengthened. This is of particular importance as Africans in general have more trust in the executive branch (52%) than in their parliament (44%), while opposition parties only get a meager confidence rate of 23% (Afrobarometer, 2004). The establishment of constituency offices in Zambia (as a USAID-funded project is starting to do) may be a first positive step towards building a stronger relationship and trust between parliamentarians and their constituencies and improving information flows between the constituency and Lusaka. These findings also demonstrate the importance of involving MPs in development processes such as the PRSPs as they are seen as important actors in shaping and building the community.

Fig.3: Venn diagram drawn by children and their families in Zambia on institutions working in their community



4. Parliament and the budget process

At the core of the Parliamentary role in a functioning democracy is the authority of the people's representatives over the annual spending and revenue plans that make up the national budget. In the same way, any serious PRSP process will have to have its policy diagnosis and choices embodied in the budget cycle of economic planning, expenditure allocation and revenue determination, validation by parliament, program implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. The budget should represent where parliamentary authority and poverty reduction policies come together in the form of a well-constructed and widely-understood strategy to achieve socio-economic results that can be monitored over time.

So, the question is: to what extent do national budgets reflect PRSP priorities? And to what extent is Parliament involved in the budget process?

In a number of countries studied, there is an appreciable increase in the level of knowledge and engagement of Parliaments in the budget process to ensure that it reflects the priorities set out in the national poverty document. In Ghana for instance, Parliament is slowly becoming the centre of 'budget activism'. In the last two years, there has been increasing demands from Parliament for training either before or after the budget is tabled in House so as to adequately prepare MPs to properly scrutinize the budget. Under the PC's work in Ghana, with a thrust on poverty reduction, it has almost become a tradition that each year either a pre- or post-budget training seminar is

organized for key Parliamentary committees to prepare them for the budget session. These training programs have been extremely useful in helping Parliament ask the right questions and demand accountability on the part of the Executive.

There is also a new development in the budget process in Ghana which bodes well for accountability: for the first time, the annual budget was prepared and passed in November 2005 – one clear month before the beginning of the fiscal year to which it relates. In the past, the budget was prepared a couple of months into the fiscal year. This has led to some complications in terms auditing and reporting to Parliament. The consequence has been persistent back-logs of reports from the Auditor General's department. This has impacted negatively on Parliament's ability to ensure accountability – reports are usually discussed several years after the fact.

Amongst all the cases studied, Tanzania seems to have made some significant progress with regards ensuring that the budget is in line with pro-poor priorities. A holistic approach poverty is adopted in Tanzania; one that ensures alignment (between development policies, budgets and the PRSP) as the sector strategic plans are being re-developed to reflect cluster strategies of the NSGRP relevant to each sector/ministry. The national budget is currently prepared using the Strategic Budget Allocation System (SBAS), a software developed to ensure that budgets reflects NSGRP priorities as guided through the public expenditure review process.

Each year, public expenditure reviews are undertaken for each PRS priority sector (now it will be for all sectors as NSGRP is cross sector and based on priority outcomes). The review findings inform the preparation of the budget guidelines, which sectors are required to follow during budget preparations.

All sectors are required to submit reports to the respective Parliamentary Committees. In addition, a new performance assessment framework agreed between the Government and development partners is meant to achieve this. Obviously, no budget is approved without the Parliament. Even though the Parliament as a whole does not scrutinize budgets in detail, the Parliamentary Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs works closely with the Ministry and the budget guidelines committee on budget issues. The committee is increasing its influence on the budget in the early stages of the budget cycle.

Some public consultations are usually planned for different stakeholders on specific proposals of the budget, for example business and farmers associations, trade unions, etc. Some recommendations are sometimes integrated in the reports, and hence may influence on the budget. However, it is not clear if public consultations are held with the public.

In Senegal, the Finance Commission has sent representatives to various stages of the PRSP process which has enabled it to keep informed and engaged in the process. The most important role of the Finance Commission remains in the annual budget review where it is called on to approve budget priorities and to stipulate which sectors must receive secured state funding in the budget and which sectors can be identified for possible donor support. In that regard, the Finance Commission has been able to decide and support which PRSP sectors will be allocated guaranteed funding from the state in any given year and monitoring expenditures accordingly. In the same way, the Commission also studies how HIPC funds have been spent and the amounts allocated to HIPC programs in the new budget.

According to government officials from the Ministry of Finance, the Finance Commission is well-informed of PRSP priorities and the exchanges and debates with officials during the budget review is of high caliber. However when asked about their role in the PRSP process, the Finance Commission did not elaborate on the budget process and did not indicate that it undertakes a detailed review or analysis of the PRSP expenditures or provide recommendations to the Executive on the matter.

It should be noted however that the PRSP process in Senegal has led to several budgetary reforms which indirectly and directly have affected the work of the Finance Commission. For instance, Senegal is now working on "budget par objectif" or budget by objectives and results, it has also undertaken MTEF and participatory budgets.

Reforms introduced in Zambia in the last three years have had interesting impact on measures of scrutiny of the budget by committees and involvement of CSOs in the budget process.

Public consultations are now being held during the budgetary session in which the public, CSOs and individual MPs are welcomed to submit their comments on the budget to the Joint Committee on Estimates. This joint committee is made up of the Committee on Estimates as well as the Chairs of the other committees. These hearings are held in Parliament and allow members to listen to the concerns or comments of various stakeholders and question them on issues of importance. Elements raised through the public consultations seem to be integrated in the committee's report.

A witness from the Zambia Revenue Authority may also sit through hearings and debates about the budget. It is hoped that discussions will be taken up to key levels at the Revenue Authority by this witness with some potential actions taken on the matters. The Minister of Finance toured the districts but did not meet MPs.

The Constitution does not give power to Parliament to increase the figures in the budget, but they can make changes to how the budget is distributed per sector. In the last two budgetary sessions, Parliament has had some success in persuading the executive to make some amendments to the budget. This it seems is mostly due to the openness of the actual Finance Minister. In addition, it seems as though opposition has greater leverage in the budget in part due to the fact the executive does not have the 2/3 of seats it would need to have the budget rubberstamped. Some compromise thus needs to be done with the opposition. Nonetheless, Parliament in Zambia is still perceived as a rubberstamp institution (CSPR, 2005a).

However, there is no formal system for Parliaments' input before the budget is done. Government may take cues from the questions put forward on the floor of the House and take these into consideration when elaborating the budget. One positive step towards greater engagement of MPs in the budget process has been meetings held between the Estimates Committee and the Ministry of Finance. However, these come at a late stage in the budget process. MPs are demanding to be involved in consultations in a much more formal way and before the budget is drafted.

Some assurance was given to the public and Parliament that PRSP priorities would be reflected in budget lines. PRSP allocations were clearly indicated in the budget lines of the past budgets. However, the 2006 budget does not reflect those anymore. This may be explained by a shift from the PRSP to the new National Development Plan. As Zambia has achieved the HIPC Completion Point, MPs are calling for allocations from relieved funds to be reflected in the budget to ensure that these will be channeled properly to poverty reduction initiatives. This would be in line with principles of accountability and transparency and would facilitate oversight of these funds by Parliament.

With the 2006 Budget, one can notice that 2/3 of the budget are for recurrent expenditures while 21.5% of the budget is for capital expenditures. Of the capital expenditures, almost 2/3 are funded by donors. However, for the recurrent expenditures, it is not known how much of the amount is funded by donors as the money from these is put into a pool. Thus, only a small portion of the budget is secured for development projects and these are dependent of donor funding. It costs more to the Government of Zambia to run the system than to implement development projects. The budget promised for capital expenditures is not even fully spent every year and thus

implementation rate is low. This is due to the low level of capacity of ministerial departments and agencies to implement projects.

A Budget Bill put forward in May 2004 included a statement about giving greater powers to parliament to be involved in the PRSP and other strategic plans, but action on the act is still pending. Since Zambians don't own the budget or planning process, any input is filtered slowly. Influence is thus quite low. Moreover, Zambian CSOs perceive Parliament as still being a rubberstamp institution which still has great efforts to make to improve access by the public to proceedings (CSPR, 2005).

Niger is yet another interesting example. Relations between the Finance Committee and the Finance Ministry seem to have increased in recent years. After the budget is presented in parliament, the Finance Committee invites the Finance Minister and his associates to a working session to discuss the speech and obtain greater clarification on certain budget lines. This session takes the form of a question-answer debate. If need be, the Minister can be invited at a later stage in the review process to answer more questions. Hearings are held upon request of organizations such as unions and professional associations but it seems as though public consultations are not organized by the committee. Other parliamentary committees make their reports available to the Finance Committee for consideration. However, these committees often request an increase in budget in their field of competence which rarely find echo. The Finance Committee will most likely recommend some shifts in budget allocations from one sector to another but cannot increase the overall budget nor will it make significant changes to the budget proposed by the government due to restrictions imposed by the Constitution (article 93) and the Organic Law (article 40). During this procedure, the Finance Committee often faces certain constraints. In theory, committees have 60 days to review the budget but are asked by the Executive to review and adopt the budget in a relatively shorter period of time as negotiations with donors usually take place during this period. This gives little time for both committees and political parties to review the budget considering the volume and complexity of documents to review (the budget plus all the annexes). The Finance Committee's influence of the budget is limited. Even so, it was able to reduce the level of income tax for people with low revenues.

The Finance Committee does not have the capacity at this point in time too effectively analyze budgets in terms of allocations being aligned with PRS. However, certain budget indicators seem to demonstrate that domestic policies have been taken into account in relation to PRS priorities. Reports on PRS implementation are not systematically made available to the National Assembly; however, MPs can request to receive them.

The disbursement rate of allocations put forward in the budget have jumped from 65,17% in 2003 to 75,70% in 2004. This is the case particularly in priority sectors such as education, health and the rural sector. However, 85% of expenditures in priority sectors are from foreign resources which make these investments vulnerable and dependent on foreign aid.

As for HIPC funds, these continue to be managed from a unit located in the Ministry of Finance under the supervision of the country's President. HIPC fund appear in the budget by sector. The HIPC unit prepares reports that indicate how funds are disbursed. The program under which these funds are used is known as the Special program of the President of the Republic. This program seems better known among MPs and citizens than the PRS. This may be because of the promotion that is made of the projects among the population as these are funded through this special program supervised by the President's office.

Against these interesting developments, Kenya is a sharp contrast. Parliamentarians are not involved in the budget process but only review the budget before adoption. Committees cannot make changes to the budget figures. Debates in committees seem to be weak, though questions made on the floor of the House seem to have more impact. Overall, parliament's influence on the budget is limited.

Views are mixed on budget alignment with ERS priorities. Most representatives met felt that there was no linkage between ERS priorities and the budget, for instance, allocations for defence are higher than what the ERS would propose. Although it seems that some slow progress is being made. A Budget Strategy Paper has been developed to link the Investment Programme of the ERS to the budget. Other representatives thought that priorities had been reflected to some extent in the budget with increased allocations to central sectors like education and health (but 50% of allocations are for recurrent expenses). Nonetheless, it seems that limited funds are allocated to development projects while the funds that are, are not fully spent. Absorption is low with important monies returned to the Treasury at the end of the year. Project completion rate is around 2.4% in Kenya while 80% of the budget is for recurrent expenses, mostly salaries. Very slow procurement procedures are contributing to the low rate of project implementation with Ministries incapacitated in this regards to deliver programs. A new procurement act should speed-up delivery of development projects. Other efforts made to facilitate procedures include the creation of an independent board to deal with demands that are then streamlined in ministries within procurement departments.

A budget office is being set up in Parliament to assist MPs in budget scrutiny. This effort is expected to contribute to increased performance of the Finance Committee in budget oversight and scrutiny. In the meantime, the Research Office has been providing assistance mainly to opposition MPs during the budget session. Most motions put forward by MPs focus on resources in their constituency and not necessarily on national policies.

The Ministry of Finance has not appeared in front of the Finance Committee. Some efforts are being made to make the budgetary process more participative for the public such as the organization of sector hearings. The trouble with these hearings is that they are being held only in Nairobi and information on these is published at the last minute.

5. Monitoring and evaluation of PRSP

Monitoring and evaluation is one critical element of the PRSP process, particularly in situations where there isn't effective participation. But where Parliament approves the national budget.

In Senegal, parliamentarians are not included in any of the monitoring bodies put in place by the Executive. While civil society and locally elected officials form part of those bodies, parliamentarians have not been given a mandate to participate formally in the monitoring and evaluation of the PRSP.

Within Parliament, if committees are involved in monitoring poverty reduction, they are doing so indirectly by monitoring progress and implementation of programs in specific sectors but there is no record of a parliamentary committee report on the PRSP specifically and its implementation. Some parliamentary committees such as the Committee for Rural Affairs has often undertaken field assessments to hear the views and concerns of the rural population and farmers and to investigate government programs in rural sectors- those reports can provide insight into the level of poverty reduction taking place in rural sectors and may provide some information to the DSRP Monitoring Unit but again this is done in an informal way.

The poverty reduction committee in the Ghana Parliament has been eager to play a role on monitoring the implementation of the GPRS but to date, this has not been possible. There are no 'official' structures in place to monitor poverty policy implementation in Ghana. As a result, the committee has been eager to fill the vacuum that exists but its efforts have been hampered by lack of resources and Parliament's unwillingness to see this as a priority and thus allocate resources to it. Thus far, monitoring has been spearheaded by civil society groups in

Ghana; notable among them is the SEND Foundation which carries out ‘HIPC Watch’ – a project to monitor how HIPC resources are utilized at the district level.

The district level is where the implementation of the GPRS takes place but the Local Government System in Ghana, which presents the most viable framework for the implementation of the GPRS does not seem to have been given the level of attention commensurate with its importance.

At Parliament’s request, under the phase two of the Ghana Parliamentary Committee Support Project (GPCSII), the PC has provided some opportunities to parliamentary committees for public consultation/monitoring on key poverty reduction policy issues in Ghana. Two notable examples of this legislative-public consultation process facilitated by the project were the Government Assurances Committee (GAC) outreach to the three Northern Regions of Ghana on pro-poor policy issues and the Local Government and Rural Development (LGRD) Committee oversight visit on the Decentralization process in number of districts in the Volta and Eastern Regions of Ghana.

In Ghana, continuous collaborative work with civil society groups led to a relatively improved parliamentary engagement with the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC). While there are no clear modalities for Parliament to make inputs into the process prior to the final document presented to Parliament, the legislature’s mandated committee have persisted in demanding this right to engage with the NDPC. Consequently, 3- member sub-Committee has been recommended to continuously liaise with NDPC. In the 2nd phase of the PRSPs therefore the Parliamentary Committee on PR had the opportunity to formally interact with NDPC during the review process. In addition, through continuous consultations with CSO, courtesy of a CIDA funded *Ghana Parliamentary Committee Support Project* and the coordinating role of the *Institute of Democratic Governance*, the Poverty Reduction Committee of Parliament solicited civil society comments on the GPRS I and lessons thereof that should inform the 2nd Phase. The Poverty Reduction Committee, the Growth and Poverty Forum² and NDPC have thus dialogued on key poverty reduction issues that should be incorporated in the GPRS II.

In Zambia, monitoring activities are being undertaken in certain departments in ministries. However at the parliamentary level, research and analytical support is lacking for MPs in this area while their involvement in monitoring is negligible if non-existent. Accountability systems need to be reinforced and institutionalized. There is also need to cultivate demand for accountability.

It is widely recognized that one important and realistic entry point for Parliament in PRS implementation is through monitoring and evaluation of the process. In Tanzania, the NSGRP calls for the involvement of everybody in the country in PRSP implementation including Parliament. The main role and responsibility identified for Parliament is oversight over the implementation process. The strategy document also indicates that MPs may be included in special working groups when appropriate.

In terms of monitoring of public allocations, there is no mechanism in Zambia to ensure that the allocations stated in the budget are implemented. Regular reporting is not available to inform Parliament and the public on how the monies are being disbursed. There is actually a tendency in Zambia for the government to overspend, over expenditures that Parliament does not get to approve. “The legal framework in Zambia allows for virtually limitless expenditure with approval after the fact and requires very little information to be published” (IDASA, 2002). This has for effect to increase the debt, especially the country’s internal debt, while the country is on its way to reducing its international debt through the HIPC initiative.

² A network of 30 CSO committed to promoting non-state participation and contribution in public policy discourse

Civil society plays a key role in monitoring the PRSP. They try to feed their findings to the Ministry of Finance but don't get the access that they desire. In general, government monitoring systems have been weak. A new monitoring department has been set up at the Ministry of Finance which is hoped to have an impact in re-targeting programs and projects that are not having the desired impact and in overseeing the utilization of resources in an efficient manner.

Through the strengthening of the public expenditure management and financial accounting system (PEMFA), parliament's capacity to perform its oversight role should increase and lead to checks and balances on all government spending.

MPs get support from the parliamentary research department on the budget. MPs put their requests forward to a researcher who then provides an analysis or brief on the subject of inquiry. Past subjects have focused on the MDGs and on roads an item that is among the priorities laid out in the PRSP. However, there has been no question asked directly on the PRSP document itself.

In Niger, the National Assembly, including the Parliamentary Poverty Reduction Network, does not monitor PRS. The Network is trying to define modalities to do so. It will start a pilot project funded by the Parliamentary Centre very soon to evaluate a governmental program on micro-finance. The Network is also preparing a work plan for the coming years in which they may include monitoring as a strategic activity of the Network. Other plans of the National Assembly on monitoring are not known at this time.

MPs that took part in the roundtable still felt that in most cases government does take into account recommendations of the National Assembly and committees.

6. Gender, the poor, civil society and PRSPs

Civil Society groups, women and the poor in general continue to be 'voice-less' in the poverty dialogue across a number of countries. The one group that has fared better in this regard is civil society, perhaps because of the recognition that a number of governments are beginning to accord some civil society groups and also perhaps because of their organizational capabilities.

Senegalese government made efforts early on to involve civil society in the PRSP process. However, in the initial stages Government did not undertake widespread consultations with civil society but rather invited key umbrella organizations to take part in meetings and technical committees. As various civil society organizations found out about the PRSP and the impact it could have for policy change in the country, groups began to organize and began to pressure Government for a more coordinated approach to working with civil society.

The participatory process in the Senegalese PRSP prompted a radical change in Senegalese civil society and for the first time organizations from various sectors were able to come together to work on a common issue and agreed to a united approach to liaise with the Senegalese Executive. Historically, civil society in Senegal had been competitive and divisive and the opportunity to be invited to take part in such a direct way in policy-making for the PRSP seems to forced civil society representatives to work in synergy in order to have a greater policy impact.

On the role of women, Senegalese experts as well as the IMF and World Bank agree that the first PRSP failed to mainstream gender and only gave general indications on how gender equality could be taken into account in the strategy. Furthermore, the Joint Staff Assessment from the IMF has on numerous occasions noted that the third PRSP pillar focused on vulnerable groups has consistently been the weakest in terms of priority and

implementation by the Senegalese government. Since most of the programs targeting women and children in the first PRSP were under Pillar Three, there is some concern that those programs have not been successful and lag behind other PRSP initiatives in Senegal.

In light of the shortcomings of the PRSP strategy with regard to gender, the gender and women's organizations in Senegal created in 2004 the "Groupe d'initiative des femmes (GIF)" as a separate civil society group made up of over 20 different women's organizations that would concentrate on gender and women's issues in the PRSP. Until that time, women's groups were represented within the umbrella civil society organizations invited by government to the PRSP process and their voice did not carry enough weight to bring gender issues to the forefront.

Following the creation of the GIF, reports and assessments of the PRSP's gender equality policies became more frequent and the GIF was able to expose the fact that the Senegalese PRSP did not adequately represent the concerns and needs of women and that gender equality was not reflected in the four pillars or in the objectives of the strategy.

Zambia has a vibrant and active civil society and NGO sector which seems to be well organized. Relationship between Civil Society Organizations and the parliamentary research department in Zambia is qualified as good especially on gender issues. Parliament is compiling a directory of more than 300 CSOs that could be of assistance to Parliament.

The Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection has received invitations from Parliament to make submissions to the Economic Affairs Committee on issues of debt and trade justice. Interactions have been on-going and JCTR has been asked by the committee to provide a document on loan processes under a formal bill that the committee could table in Parliament. JCTR feels that slowly parliamentary debates are improving and reflecting issues brought forward by organizations as there's. Provincial teams of JCTR are also trying to engage MPs through other means such as organizing forums at the local level to which MPs are invited to take part, some refuse but others accept and are keen to take part.

Civil Society for Poverty Reduction (CSPR) was meaningfully involved in the PRSP formulation phase and continues to be involved in poverty policy matters through hearings with the Estimates Committee.

Constituency offices are now being implemented in Zambia in order to bridge the gap between MPs and their constituents and facilitate information flow from the constituency to the MP in Lusaka. General feeling is that those that have been implemented until now seem to be working well.

In Ghana, there has been a significant improvement in civil society input into the GPRS. The poor are also beginning to interact with MPs and have a voice in the policy process, particularly as it relates to poverty reduction. During consultations leading to the drafting of the GPRSII, a number of civil society groups played an active role shaping the document. In the past year, the PC has facilitated MP-public consultations to facilitate a two-way dialogue between MPs and people in various rural areas. In early 2006 for instance, the Government Assurances Committee (GAC) carried out an outreach to the three Northern Regions of Ghana on pro-poor policy issues. The outreach contributed to assuring pro-poor policy implementation at the national level. It also exposed the MPs at first hand to how the policies are doing on the ground. Specifically, it led to:

1. Improved cross-partisan working culture
2. Enabled community input into the policy process
3. Enabled consultative feedback on policy implementation
4. Improved MPs' social interaction skills

5. Increased Committee knowledge on poverty issues

Subsequently the committee is exploring how to effectively follow-up with executive on the following Government policies:

7. Policy impact

Across the continent, particularly in the countries studied, the impact of PRSPs is mixed. While some countries show slow progress in terms of reduction in levels of poverty, the situation in others is worsening. What is not certain is whether the little progress being made is the result government policy or the result of economic growth that some countries are witnessing. In Senegal for instance, our study found that poverty reduction is likely the result of strong economic growth in recent years and less to do with PRSP programs which have been difficult to implement particularly in light of the delays in decentralization in the country. The Executive has been in a fortunate position in that it can show results without actually tackling the issue of poverty. Because of this sustained growth and consistent state revenues, there is little pressure that donors and the IMF can exert on Senegal to respect its poverty reduction commitments since the country no longer needs donor support for the running of the state and basic services. A case in point is the fact that Senegal has benefited from debt relief without any real PRSP performance. The PRSP resources and expenditures now make up a very limited amount of the national budget.

The policy impact of the PRSP has also been limited by the lack of political will and support for the initiative. As indicated earlier, in Ghana for instance, despite the continuing desire of the committee on PRSP and other Parliamentary committees to play a lead role, particularly in monitoring PRSP implementation, the much-needed political will to facilitate this has been lacking.

However, it is fair to note that through the intervention of the PC in Ghana, particularly under the committee outreach program, poverty policy is slowly beginning to make some impact in a few districts. For one thing, those at the forefront of poverty policy implementation – officials at the district level – are beginning to realize that there is the possibility that MPs could pay them a visit to assess how they are implementing poverty programs. Such a development has a very important deterrent effect. Conversely, by monitoring policy at the local level, MPs are also beginning to realize that some changes need to be made in order for pro-poor policies to have a meaningful effect.

In Senegal, President Abdoulaye Wade is seldom heard speaking of PRSP and has developed other national strategies for economic growth that are more in line with his vision of a developing Senegal. In particular, he has put emphasis on human capital investment and infrastructure as the two priorities that will help the country prosper. To this end government has developed the “Stratégie de Croissance Accélérée (SCA)” or strategy for accelerated growth which is seen as the priority document by the Executive and in turn by institutions such as the National Assembly. Such a strategy will benefit the country and in particular the tertiary sector but it is unclear how such a strategy can ensure that the poor and marginalized will feel the effects and benefit from poverty reduction. At the moment there is little synergy between the SCA and the PRSP II. For the PRSP to be successful it will have to incorporate elements of the SCA and receive support from the political leadership- without such support, it will likely take a backseat to the SCA.

The ERS in Kenya seems to be producing mixed results - poverty rates have increased by 4% in the past years; even though the economy is doing better. Incomes are not improving and services are less subsidized.

Implementation of development projects is very slow; in return some policy reforms have been introduced. For instance, commitment to free education and arid lands has worked fairly well. Overall, impact of ERS has been minimal. There is a high level of demand by Kenyans for the government to do more. Presidential and Ministerial constituencies seem to benefit more from development projects than other constituencies.

The poverty situation has not improved significantly in Zambia since the implementation of the PRSP. Implementation has been challenging due in part to lack of capacity at the national, provincial and local level to deliver the projects. An important part of monies is disbursed quite late in the budgetary year and information dissemination is weak.

In Niger, some measures have been introduced to strengthen food security, various agencies and centers have been created to assist and supervise the creation and development of private businesses, 1774 community health agents have been trained but real impact is still to be seen. Still, the poverty situation has not improved and the growth level of 0,6 % for 2004 has reached a low (3,8% in 2003 and 3% in 2002). In the context of the PRSP revision, a poverty analysis is being conducted in Niger to establish a clearer profile of poverty as well as measure any progress that has been made.

In Tanzania, the Government is taking the PRS/NSGRP very seriously. Some gains from PRS I were noted in various areas such GDP growth, increased enrollments and gender parity in primary schools, etc. The adoption of the SBAS as a compulsory budgeting tool and reconsideration of the sectors' strategic plans in line with NSGRP is a testimony towards this commitment. However, real impact on income poverty can only be assured using the Household Budget Survey, which is scheduled for 2007. The last survey took place in 2001.

The poverty situation has not improved significantly in Malawi and in some cases worsened since the implementation of the PRSP. The MPRS has been characterized by policy slippages, especially in the area of fiscal management and the under-funding of pro-poor activities. There has been an increase in domestic debt and interest rates as well as inflation because of the fiscal indiscipline of the government. This led to funding freezes from various donors throughout PRSP implementation which further reduced resources available for pro-poor programs. Since May 2004, the new government has vowed to restore fiscal discipline and this has helped to improve overall macroeconomic performance which helped donors resume their budgetary support. Whether those changes will help Malawi show greater success in the final year of the MPRS through the 2004-2005 assessment remains to be seen.

Despite some of the shortcomings and slippage in the PRSP process, overall the Malawi Government was committed to the strategy and this helped to increase allocations to poverty reducing expenditures, protection of pro-poor expenditures and so on. According to the office of the Speaker of Parliament, pro-poor expenditure covered nearly 23% of all discretionary expenditure during the MPRS years.

The change in government in 2004 has had an impact on the future of the MPRS in Malawi and it seems that the second generation strategy will now be focused on the MDGS and that will likely force the PRSP to become a secondary instrument. However, if the new Government remains committed to poverty reduction and a more fiscally responsible government, Malawi may yet reach the objectives and goals set in the initial MPRS.

8. Overall effectiveness of MPs in PRSP process

In a larger number of Parliaments, knowledge of MPs on poverty reduction issues seems to have increased in the past years, giving them a better understanding of the strategy itself and on entry points for Parliament to be involved in the process.

- The overall assessment of the impact of the Senegal National Assembly in the PRSP process is that their involvement is almost non-existent and has had very little impact on the evolution of the PRSP in the country. Parliamentarians remain largely unaware of the PRSP and the institution is showing no signs of looking for ways to become engaged for the second PRSP.
- Some of the explanations for this situation include the following challenges:
 - Limited invitation from the Executive for legislative participation in the process
 - A feeling among parliamentarians that the PRSP is a policy document developed by the Executive and that the National Assembly is not responsible for policy-making and unless the PRSP becomes a law to be passed in the Assembly, they cannot be expected to be involved
 - Lack of political will and support for the PRSP means that the government party sees little need to be involved in the process
 - Lack of capacity and technical skills among many parliamentarians to be involved in analysis of the PRSP
 - Lack of trained parliamentary assistants and committee clerks to provide analysis and information to MPs on the matter
 - Absence of relationship between legislature and civil society or outside experts that could provide much needed expertise on the PRSP
- In Kenya, MPs are not perceived to play a strong role in the ERS by certain CSO representatives met. They also feel that parliamentarians do not see monitoring as one of their roles while their role in policy-making is negligible. In general, MPs don't seem to know what their role is. They receive insatiable demands from constituents and money is asked constantly. MPs tend to respond to monetary demands by distributing money to their constituents. Some MPs see themselves as agents of development for their communities, especially with the Community Development Funds (CDF), instead of seeing themselves as legislators with specific functions of people's representative, government watchdog and policy-maker. This perception is reinforced with most MPs assuming Chairmanship of CDFs and also appointing committee members. MPs focus seems to be more on constituency work than in parliamentary work. Critics of CDFs include mismanagement of funds, lack of strategic plans to guide project approval and spending, lack of reporting and monitoring systems, lack of process transparency. Some MPs also credit development projects to their personal work when in fact these are part of a national program developed by government.

Parliament is usually empty and laws are generally adopted by a little number of MPs. With excessively high salaries but marginal presence in Parliament even during important debates, MPs in Kenya are not perceived to be serious in their role and their performance is perceived as weak. This is especially true when it comes to the ERS.

- Efforts have been made in Zambia to make Parliament more opened to CSOs and the public than in the past. A stronger role is being plaid by committees, especially the Estimates Committee. Public hearings have contributed to the increased participation by MPs and the public in the budget and policy review. CSOs access to parliamentary committees has improved much more could be done. The National Youth Constitutional Assembly (NYCA) has seen a few changes in youth policies programs such as free education from grade 8 to

12. However, they are not certain that is due to their input and advocacy work as they lack the capacity to undertake impact assessment. Nonetheless, it does seem as though CSOs advocacy work has had some impact on policy.

- The Malawi Parliament itself argues that it is not satisfied with its role in the PRSP. Yet, while the overall effectiveness of the Malawi Parliament as an institution has been limited in the PRSP, parliamentary committees and in particular the Budget and Finance Committee have become champions within the institution working to restore Parliament's oversight role of the PRSP process.

Government has made an effort to include Parliament in the process by inviting the principal parliamentary committees to send representatives to the various Technical Working Groups and also in the official Monitoring Unit. This has enabled Parliament to have an official foothold in the process. However, the real impact of Parliament's involvement has been through the budget process and the recommendations that Parliament has made through its budget report on the PRSP.

The growing relationship between civil society and the Finance Committee has helped empower the committee with information and resources to help it in scrutinizing and tracking PRSP expenditures and questioning the Government on PRSP implementation through the national budgetary review. The CSO-Parliament relationship has also expanded to include collaboration in field visits and field investigations and also provided some training opportunities for MPs who attended CSO and donor-organized workshops on the PRSP.

The remaining challenge is to increase overall awareness of the PRSP among all parliamentarians particularly in light of the recent election and the arrival of new MPs on the scene. Furthermore, although one parliamentary committee is heavily involved in the PRSP monitoring, the role should be one that every committee takes on in their particular field of expertise to improve monitoring of the PRSP by sector and increase the level of recommendations provided by Parliament.

- The overall assessment of the impact of the Niger National Assembly in the PRSP process is that their involvement is almost non-existent and has had very little impact on the evolution of the PRSP in the country. Parliamentarians are starting to become aware of the PRSP through trainings organized by the Parliamentary Centre on the matter but more needs to be done. It seems however they will have a greater role to play in the second PRSP through their involvement in thematic groups and regional workshops. It is hoped that those who participate on behalf of their committees do report to their respective committees on the exchanges and outcomes of these meetings and develop a committee position on the issues being discussed in the thematic group. It is also important for MPs to poll their constituents on these issues.

9. Conclusions: Main challenges for Parliament involvement in PRSP and strategies to overcome them

The Parliamentary Centre's experience with a number of Parliaments across the continent the Senegalese National Assembly with regard to PRSP has shown that when offered the opportunity to participate and engage on PRSP issues, parliamentarians are both willing and available to take part. A recent pilot project on community monitoring of PRSP programs as well as a workshop for the Finance Commission on budget oversight shows that 7MPs are eager to be engaged in the PRSP.

However, it seems that institutional barriers have made the participation of MPs in the formal process difficult. This is in part due to the decision of the Executive to involve parliamentarians only in key decision-making activities including validation seminars and formal approval in plenary as well as the decision to limit involvement of MPs to the Finance Commission and any communication on PRSP to be between the Ministry of Finance and the President of the Assembly. Such measures make it difficult for ordinary parliamentarians to have access to information and decision-making roles in the PRSP process.

Some of the recommendations to improve the role of Senegalese MPs in the PRSP process include the following:

- Recognition by the Executive that Parliament should be represented on technical committees involved in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of the PRSP and pressure from the leadership of the National Assembly to ensure adequate representation of MPs on such committees
- Agreement between the Minister of Finance and the President of the National Assembly that a focal point from each institution can be designated to facilitate information flow and dialogue on PRSP issues
- The Finance Commission should ensure wider dissemination of the results of its participation and input in the PRSP process. For instance, when the Finance Commission receives a draft PRSP document for comments, it should organize a meeting including all other chairs of commissions (they are part of the Finance Commission in any case) to secure the recommendations and comments of other key committees. The result of the Finance Commission contribution should be made available to other MPs.
- Training programs for both parliamentarians and staff in PRSP monitoring are required and Parliament should identify this as a priority need when discussing with potential donors. For instance, a new ACBF program for the Finance Commission could include a component to train committee members of budgetary oversight of the PRSP.
- The Senegalese National Assembly does not often consult with civil society organizations, academics or other experts. Commission chairpersons should organize hearings and consultations with civil society and experts to acquire up to date information and reports that could assist with the evaluation and monitoring of PRSP programs.
- Given the fact that several parliamentarians are members of parliamentary networks outside the formal institution which have benefited from PRSP training, the networks should disseminate reports and lessons learned from their training to the institution of Parliament.
- Parliamentarians need to take advantage of those occasions made available to them to learn more about the PRSP such as the general invitation to MPs to take part in national and regional PRSP workshops and seminars as well as the formal presentation of the PRSP document in Parliament by the Minister of Finance. So far, MPs have not seized those opportunities to influence the process.
- Since many parliamentary commissions already conduct field investigations and inquiries into poverty reduction programs, the National Assembly should designate one commission responsible for mainstreaming PRSP issues and ensuring that commissions feed information on poverty reduction back to them for a central report on the PRSP. If possible, the National Assembly could create a separate sub-committee on poverty reduction or PRSP as it has been done in other neighbouring countries.
- Parliament and Civil society will have a difficult time monitoring HIPC funds if these are not clearly indicated in the budget. Parliament needs to push for a bill that will ensure that all funds freed under the HIPC initiative are channeled in a way that monitoring will be possible. Monitoring is definitely a key area in which Parliaments should take a more active and leading role.
- To ensure continuity and a good level of knowledge on PRSP's and other matters such as MDG's and NEPAD, specific trainings should be offered to all parliamentarians at the start of the first parliamentary session following the elections. This would contribute to increase the effectiveness of committee work, especially in committees responsible for poverty issues, debates in the House, monitoring of poverty projects

and analysis of bills. With greater training, MPs should be able to play a key role in overseeing public expenditures, policy development, and monitoring of poverty projects.

- Political will and commitment are necessary to implement policies that promote accountability, participation and transparency in the use of public funds. Mechanisms need to be put in place to ensure proper management of funds. Priorities need to be set correctly. Parliamentarians can play a key role in pushing for those mechanisms to be put in place.
- Connecting with the poor still seems to remain a challenge for parliamentarians. The assessment conducted by the Parliamentary Centre in 2004 revealed that engagement between parliamentarians and their constituents was quite limited while relationships between Parliament and civil society seemed in most cases positive and growing. Findings from this latest study indicate that relationships between Parliament and civil society organizations are getting stronger, constructive and there seems to be on-going exchanges. This is particularly so for Zambia and Tanzania. However, it seems as though relationships between MPs and their constituents, especially the poor, are still weak. In Niger, MPs rarely solicit the opinion of their constituents on poverty reduction strategies. In some instances, MPs have been candid in admitting that they seldom return to their constituencies for fear of being besieged by constituent demands for money or other support. Until, the functional role of MPs is fully understood and assimilated by constituents and MPs, this role of "money giver" may continue to burden MPs in creating a healthy constituent-MP relationship that could lead to accountability, policy and oversight impact. Increasing public awareness on the role of parliamentarians should be emphasized. In addition, MPs capacity to work and dialogue with constituents should be strengthened.
- Parliament should be involved in processes and negotiations that have an impact on the national economy or development. This can be debated as a question of ownership. Democratic institutions need to be included in such processes. Parliament is ultimately accountable to the people. Parliamentarians could push for the inclusion of MPs in official delegations attending international meetings. The South Africa government includes parliamentarians in official delegations attending international meetings with the World Bank and the IMF for example. Other countries could follow this example and MPs could push for this commitment from the Executive. MPs would then be better informed on negotiations and discussions taking place and in a better position to question the Executive on actions or promises it has made.

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APPENDIX

PRSP STUDY QUESTIONNAIRE

KNOWLEDGE AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION

- What is the level of parliament's general knowledge of PRSP?
- Have parliamentarians received any training on the PRSP?
- What is the level of the population's general knowledge of PRSP?
- Was the PRSP document distributed to every individual MP?
- Can MPs access PRSP documentation easily?
- Can the poor access PRSP information easily and quickly?

PRSP STATUS

- Is that the country's first PRSP?
- Has there been any review of the PRSP?
- What were the main outcomes of such review?

PARTICIPATION

- How participative is the PRSP process?
- Does Parliament play a role in the PRSP process/policy?
- Was there parliamentary input at the formulation/diagnostic stage of the PRSP?
- Is there parliamentary input in the review process of the PRSP?
- Does a serious, substantive debate about the PRSP take place in parliament?
- Did parliament approve the PRSP before final adoption by the government and presentation to international financial institutions?
- Does parliament approve the PRSP reviews before final adoption by the government and presentation to the international financial institutions?
- Do parliamentarians inform their constituents about the PRSP?

MONITORING/ACCOUNTABILITY

- Are domestic development policies, budgets and public expenditures aligned with PRSP?
- Does the Ministry of Finance prepare an explanatory note on the PRSP in the budget?
- Are measures taken to ensure that the annual budget in particular reflects PRSP priorities?
- Is the PRSP referred to in committee work? To what extent?
- Are measures taken to ensure that monies are spent according to PRSP priorities?
- Does parliament do any monitoring of PRSP implementation?
- Does parliament hold government accountable for PRSP results?

- Do parliamentary committees call on ministers and government officials to appear at hearings to answer questions on the PRSP?
- Does parliament set conditions for HIPC spending?
- Do reports of parliamentary evaluations and other feedback lead to changes in PRSP implementation?

LINKAGES WITH GENDER, THE POOR AND CIVIL SOCIETY

- Do parliamentarians solicit the views of their constituents, particularly the poor, in order to make inputs into the formulation of the PRSP?
- Does parliament solicit the views of experts before making input into the PRSP?
- Does parliament consult civil society organizations before it makes input into the PRSP?
- Does parliament employ gender analysis in making input into the PRSP?
- Did parliament consult women's groups during the PRSP formulation?
- Is it including women's groups in PRSP reviews?

POLICY IMPACT

- Is parliament satisfied with the implementation of the PRSP?
- Are there regular exchanges and communication between parliament and the PRSP unit within government?
- Is the PRSP making any difference in poverty levels? Provide examples.