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Civil Society Participation Under the New Aid Approach

Pluralist prescriptions for pro-poor interests?

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CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION UNDER THE NEW AID

APPROACH:

Pluralist prescriptions for pro-poor interests?

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Discussion Paper for UNRISD

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Abstract

One of the most remarkable issues in the new aid approach is the place and role of civil society participation. It is mandatory and governments will have to prove that they undertook a genuine effort to involve civil society stakeholders in the drafting of the document. It is expected that civil society will monitor implementation of the PRSP and that they can provide valuable inputs back into the policy cycle. By now, a lot has been written on the wrongs and rights of introducing participation as a mandatory element in the PRSPs. In terms of assessing these participatory exercises, the aid paradox seems to strike again: it works where it isn't really needed, and where it is needed most, it doesn't work. In the words of Driscoll & Evans (2005), PRS processes have most clearly succeeded where they tended to coincide with a national project for poverty reduction (articulated by political leaders and widely shared by citizens). Notwithstanding the disillusionment with the results and impact of the processes, there are also positive sounds. In many countries, the PRS processes created political space for civil society, especially for NGOs, and it contributed to broadening the debate over economic and social policies (Curran 2004:5; IMF/World Bank 2006:26). The participation exercise also gave an impetus to civil society organisations engaging in networks, forming umbrella organisations and strategic alliances (Actionaid & Care 2006; Eberlei 2007a:5). The results are thus, at best, mixed and the huge number of assessments have led to an equally long and impressive list of recommendations: discussions on macro-economic issues should be opened up to civil society stakeholders, capacity building initiatives should prepare the poor for participation, participation of mass organisations and social movements should be stimulated so

¹ This paper draws to some extent on insights gathered during a joint research project with Robrecht Renard.

as to increase the legitimacy of the processes, participation should be institutionalised so as to ensure more control over the whole policy cycle process, from agenda-setting to policy formulation, decision making and implementation. The paper argues that most of the wrongs and rights of these participation processes can be linked back to a theoretical discussion on how the state should relate to society, and which model is more effective to ensure policy influencing. We will, in this paper, look into both the corporatist and the pluralist schools and see that the PRSP in design is closely related to the pluralist interpretation of participation. Most of the criticisms voiced around the actual shortcomings of these processes, on the other hand, are closely linked to the corporatist school. We will see that there are huge problems with the pluralist assumptions, and we will discover that literature seems to suggest that (neo-)corporatist models lend themselves better for deeper forms of participation, including on macro-economic issues (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith 2003:687). If we then take a closer look at some cases, it seems that reality is quite complex: corporatism has its own set of shortcomings, and more conditions are needed for the corporatist model to work effectively under a PRSP setting. We will take a closer look at four countries: Viet Nam, Uganda, Bolivia and Senegal². The aspects we highlight in these cases show that both corporatist and pluralist interaction patterns are imperfect and neither of them offer sufficient guarantees to ensure pro-poor participation³, yet at the same time both hold promising potentials.

² Important to mention is that this paper does not aim at giving a full account of what the participation processes in these countries entailed and what their impact has been. We zoom in on some events or remarkable moments which illustrate the tension between form and nature.

³ It is important to clarify that pro-poor participation and participation of the poor are two different things. According to some, achieving poverty reduction may be better served by supporting alliances and coalitions around a pro-poor agenda than by poor people participating. They underline a well-known fact that poor people often participate in politics on bases that objectively have little to do with their interest in poverty reduction, or that may be counterproductive to any goal of poverty reduction.

1. PRSP's and participation: where do we stand today?

The new aid approach was given birth by the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP), which in turn were launched by the World Bank in 1999. Governments in low-income countries wishing to receive debt relief and/or concessional assistance from the International Financial Institutions, and more aid from the larger donor community were expected to produce a national strategy on how they would use aid to combat poverty⁴. Although nowadays the PRSP as a concept has lost momentum⁵, its principles and procedures linger on and have dictated to a large extent quite fundamental changes in the aid architecture. The principles upon which the PRSP-format hinges indicated a desire to move away from donor driven development, in order to give more room to home-grown, government led and nationally owned strategies.

Today, more than 60 countries have produced PRSPs. Most of these countries are implementing their second PRSP and some countries (like Uganda) are already shaping their third generation of PRSPs. Important to mention is the dynamic character of the PRSPs. In terms of content, the first generation of PRSPs was very closely linked to debt relief. They were, in general, very strongly marked by focusing on service delivery and social sectors. Some critical CSOs even referred to the PRSP as 'poverty reduction by access to services' (Curran 2004:6). Donors have been in part responsible for this bias given the commitment to and the urge to realize the Millennium Development Goals which are marked by a relative dominance of social sector targets (Driscoll & Evans 2005:12). The second generation PRSPs – learning from the shortcomings of the first generation – already gives more emphasis to the sustainability of poverty reduction by focusing somewhat more on growth issues. And although second generation PRSPs often introduced the concept of 'growth' in their name, at the same time it was noticed that MDG targets are increasingly used as poverty reduction targets in the documents, which still emphasizes the access to services as a strategy to reduce poverty.

⁴ PRSPs were introduced as the basis for the provision of debt relief under the enhanced HIPC (Highly Indebted Poor Countries) Initiative in 1999, but is now a requirement for all low-income countries wishing to receive concessional assistance from the World Bank and the IMF. For more information on the formal requirements with regards to HIPC and PRSP: www.worldbank.org.

⁵ The PRSP as a denominator has had its best time. Nowadays most countries refer to their PRSP with localized names, and more often than not the PRSP concept is replaced by 'national development strategies'. The underlying principles however remain the same.

One of the most remarkable issues in the new aid approach is the place and role of civil society participation⁶. In the formulation of the PRSP, civil society participation is mandatory, and ideally participation will give rise to the institutionalisation of civil society involvement, amongst others in the monitoring and evaluation of the PRSP. Governments should hold consultations on the first draft of the PRSP and a description of this participation process is included in the final PRSP document. The PRSP is then sent to Washington where it is assessed by the World Bank and the IMF. The participation process in itself however is not strictly evaluated or screened as such because the World Bank and IMF staffs are not allowed to make political assessments. Yet governments have to prove that they undertook a genuine effort to involve civil society in the drafting process⁷. In spite of this lack of evaluation criteria, it is seen as a crucial component of the new approach, and references to it abound in donor institutions and documents (World Bank 2004, IMF 2004, Global Monitoring Report 2006)⁸. Also in the Paris Declaration, several commitments are made in which civil society is recognised as an important stakeholder in the process. In Commitment 48, for example, it is stated that partners will "Reinforce participatory approaches by systematically involving a broad range of development partners when formulating and assessing progress in implementing national development strategies" (OECD/DAC 2005).

When the participation conditionality was launched in 1999, it went hand in hand with high expectations. Through participation pro-poor concerns would be addressed more adequately, ownership would be broadened, accountability and transparency would improve (World Bank 2002:240). Participation would thus not only be linked to better poverty reduction and development, it would also have democracy enhancing effects.

By now, a lot has been written on the wrongs and rights of introducing participation as a mandatory element in the PRSPs. With regards to the impact of participation on the pro-poor and developmental aspects of the PRSP, the picture is bleak. Although from a technocratic point of view most authors on the topic agree that participation of civil society has played a huge role in the setting up of poverty diagnostics, in providing supplementary information and using participatory approaches, which deepened the understanding of the multidimensional character of poverty (Worldbank 2002:3, Thornton & Cox 2005:10; Driscoll & Evans 2004:3;

⁶ The World Bank proposes a very open definition of civil society and it makes no distinction between profit and non-profit organisations. As such it includes the private sector as part of civil society. In this paper we will use the concepts of civil society and private sector separately.

⁷ In every PRSP one can find a very brief description on the organisation of the process. There are however no guidelines on reporting on the process, the number and the quality of participants, nor their contributions or if and how the contributions have influenced the final content of the PRSP.

⁸ Although the Paris Declaration did not involve civil society as a signing stakeholder, the declaration does mention the importance of civil society as a partner in development

Cidse 2004), there is a general consensus that contributions did not impact the final document. Added to that the pro-poor nature of stakeholders was often questioned, and capacities were often weak or insufficient. As Lazarus boldly argues (2008:1207) *"No change in macroeconomic policies – the stark similarity in the macroeconomic policy components of PRSPs worldwide has led to conclusions that the standard neoliberal macroeconomic policies at the core of every PRSP remain non-negotiable. [...] Participation is, at best, consultation [...]. Overall most supposedly participatory PRSPs have arguable done little more than produce a 'standard IMF package with a larger social protection budget."* A couple of other things are also remarkable in this PRSP-era: first of all very few PRSPs are engendered (McGee et al 2002; Zuckerman & Garrett 2003), and secondly, ethnic minorities and indigenous groups are remarkably absent, both as stakeholders in the participation process and as target groups in the PRSP document itself (Tomei 2005). On the other hand Driscoll & Evans (2005) state that PRS processes have most clearly succeeded where they tended to coincide with a national project for poverty reduction (articulated by political leaders and widely shared by citizens).

Interestingly enough however some scholars agree that with regards to state-society interaction, PRSP participation has produced important gains⁹ (McGee & Norton 2000:18). *"Relative to their starting points, in most countries the PRS approach has opened space for stakeholders to engage in a national dialogue on poverty reduction"* (op cit. IMF/World Bank 2006:26). In many countries, the PRS processes created political space for civil society, especially for NGOs, and it contributed to broadening the debate over economic and social policies (Curran 2004:5; IMF/World Bank 2006:26). The participation exercise also gave an impetus to civil society organisations engaging in networks, forming umbrella organisations and strategic alliances (Actionaid & Care 2006; Eberlei 2007a:5). On the downside it seems that most PRS processes have been dominated by NGOs, including many with strong links to INGOs and donor agencies (Driscoll & Evans 2005). This is considered problematic because there are serious concerns about the nature of NGOs: they often do not reach the poorest, they are often unaccountable to their target groups and other stakeholders, they are not always efficient, effective, flexible and innovative, they have trouble proving that policy changes can be attributed to their efforts. Added to that it is not clear to what extent (and if) these

⁹ Involving parliament or political parties did not form part of the mandatory participation conditionality, hence in quite some countries these institutions were not involved in the drafting or approval of the final PRSP document. Some observers therefore argue that in fact the participation conditionality undermined the democratic institutions rather than strengthening them. On the other hand however most LICs are characterised by the fact that these political institutions are extremely weak and mostly dysfunctional, yet their exclusion had led to somewhat more dynamic around these institutions: today more and more parliamentary involvement in PRSP can be noted and donors are re-discovering the importance of supporting this institution in its role. As such the PRSP process can be said to have worked in both ways: in its initial stage undermining these institutions, yet furtheron these institutions gain importance and attention due to their initial exclusion.

NGOs have links to grass-roots organisations. They may be even disconnected from the poor sectors they claim to represent (e.g. Hickey & Bracking 2005; Boussard 2002; Fowler 2000, Edwards & Hulme 1997). The relative absence of more traditional, member based organisations (like trade unions, peasant organisations, producer organisations), in most PRS processes is considered problematic, especially because some of these organisations seem to have very clear links to the poor, and given their membership based constitution, they also seem to enjoy more legitimacy (Driscoll & Evans 2005:13). Finally, most of these participation processes were not institutionalised but remained rather ad hoc. The same goes for monitoring and evaluation, it remains weak and participation is often not institutionalised (Eberlei 2003).

More often than not inventories of problems, like the one above, have led to a string of recommendations: discussions on macro-economic issues should be opened up to civil society stakeholders, capacity building initiatives should prepare the poor for participation, participation of mass organisations and social movements should be stimulated so as to increase the legitimacy of the processes, the private sector, business should be more involved, participation should be institutionalised so as to ensure more control over the whole policy cycle process, from agenda-setting to policy formulation, decision making and implementation.

The paper argues that most of the wrongs and rights of these participation processes can be linked back to a theoretical discussion on how the state should relate to society, and which model is more effective to ensure policy influencing. We will, in this paper, look into both the corporatist and the pluralist schools and see that the PRSP in design is closely related to the pluralist interpretation of participation. Most of the criticisms voiced around the actual shortcomings of these processes, on the other hand, are closely linked to the corporatist school. We will see that there are huge problems with the pluralist assumptions, and we will discover that literature seems to suggest that (neo-)corporatist models lend themselves better for deeper forms of participation, including on macro-economic issues (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith 2003:687). If we then take a closer look at some cases, it seems that reality is quite complex: corporatism has its own set of shortcomings, and more conditions are needed for the corporatist model to work effectively under a PRSP setting. We will take a closer look at four countries: Viet Nam, Uganda, Bolivia and Senegal¹⁰. The aspects we highlight in these cases show that both corporatist and pluralist interaction patterns are imperfect and neither of

¹⁰ Important to mention is that this paper does not aim at giving a full account of what the participation processes in these countries entailed and what their impact has been. We zoom in on some events or remarkable moments which illustrate the tension between form and nature.

them offer sufficient guarantees to ensure pro-poor participation¹¹, yet at the same time both hold promising potentials. The most important argument of this paper is that not form but substance matters. Substance here refers to the ability or lack thereof to combine political legitimacy with developmental effectiveness. If, for example corporatism succeeds in combining both dimensions, then adding more fluid like patterns of participation can bring out interesting new dynamics, while at the same time they can destabilize existing and more institutionalised patterns of state-society interaction. If however political legitimacy and development effectiveness are not successfully combined, participation under the PRSP can stimulate debate and challenge systemic shortcomings. The core argument of this paper tries to illustrate that an eclectic approach, using different features of both models if the context asks for it, provides new and interesting action scenarios.

2. Models of state-society interaction

Broadly speaking, two approaches exist to configure the relation between government and specific constituency groups.

The pluralist (or society centred) model is based on competition. Participation and policy influencing is about interest groups, individuals and political parties which compete for influence over policy domains. Gaining the approval of state decision makers is what is at stake (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith 2003:686). The pluralist assumes that the government is a 'neutral' player, everyone is free to organise for political purposes, and, the policy making process is not monopolised by powerful political forces. Power is widely distributed and different centres of power keep one another in check (Dahl 1961). Policies thus emerge through negotiation, bargaining and conciliation among interest groups. The challenge for policy makers is to orchestrate political compromises which keep competing interests relatively satisfied with policy outcomes (Palumbo et al. 2004:654). These compromises tend to generate policies which are moderate and acceptable to a wide array of policy stakeholders. Incrementalism minimizes the intellectual investment required to fundamentally rethink basic issues, problems and solutions, because it tends to build upon what already exists and has been done. At the systemic level this implies that, if at all, the status quo changes only very slowly and gradually. According to Lindblom (1977 cited by Palumbo et al. 2004:654) this doesn't mean that major changes cannot occur. Although incrementalism refers to a series of

¹¹ It is important to clarify that pro-poor participation and participation of the poor are two different things. According to some, achieving poverty reduction may be better served by supporting alliances and coalitions around a pro-poor agenda than by poor people participating. They underline a well-known fact that poor people often participate in politics on bases that objectively have little to do with their interest in poverty reduction, or that may be counterproductive to any goal of poverty reduction.

small adjustments, these can provoke major changes depending on what is changed as well as the quantity of change. In the real world, all Western democracies exhibit some degree of pluralism, but the United States come maybe the closest to the realization of this model.

This pluralist way of thinking, and the incrementalist nature of policy making which is closely linked to it, has been criticized on several accounts. The predominant argument has been that in reality political access and power are unevenly distributed in most societies, even the consolidated democratic ones. This inequality results from varying levels in education, economic resources, and political constraints. Responses of scholars of pluralism to criticism led to the development of the elitist theory, which acknowledges that financially privileged individuals and groups have more impact on policy-making than other groups. Incrementalism thus favours the vested interests (Lowi 1979). Furthermore, the neutrality of the government is questioned. Rather, it is assumed that the state favours some groups over others, and that it is involved in the conflict resolution process, often with the need to defend interests of its own (Schreiner 1994:13).

This brings us to the second school of thought: (neo-)corporatism. Corporatism tries to engineer a cooperative relationship among major interests (Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith, 2003:687). As defined by Philippe Schmitter corporatism is a system where one organization is granted a monopoly to represent the interests of an affected party in a policy sector (Schmitter & Lehmbruch 1979). This view of interest group activity describes a cooperative relationship between government and certain interest groups. Cooperation serves the purpose of maintaining stability to the procedures of developing and implementing policies. Neo-corporatism focuses primarily on economic policies. Three sectors of society, business, labor, and government are involved in negotiations about questions of policy, and the institutionalized process of negotiations between representatives of these key sectors is referred to as *intermediation* or *conservation*. Also, government intervenes substantially in the economy in order to achieve particular goals. Corporatists thus assume that there are a few small groups of power holders who determine political outcomes in society (Schmitter & Lehmbruch 1979; Grant 1985). The corporatist model has proven to work for many West and Central European societies in overcoming chronic political stability in situations of deep social cleavages. According to Wood & Harcourt (2000:15) there is sufficient evidence that neo-corporatist strategies can make for superior economic performance, if there is a shared notion of severe crisis on the level of state, private sector, trade unions, and if these involved partners have sufficiently broad

“social footprint”. Should a large segment of society find itself locked outside the agreements made, then it is likely that any deal will prove unsustainable.

The pure models of pluralism as well as of corporatism hardly exist in the real world. What can be observed in actual politics, are systems in which characteristics of both models are present to varying extent (Bleiklie 2004:375). Pluralist patterns have tended to be characterized by relatively fluid relations and lobbying (Bleiklie 2004:375), and many NGOs see advantages in this nonexclusive style of participation associated with it (Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith 2003:687). Corporatist patterns have been made up by more stable, regular and sometimes semi-permanent committees and other forms of consultation with actors who are considered legitimately affected parties (Bleiklie 2004:375). This pattern has big advantages for macroeconomic decisions because such decisions are mainly taken at the center, hence it is helpful that the involved organizations have centralized representation (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith 2003:687).

When looking at the PRSP-model with its participation conditionality, in its assumptions, it seems to incline strongly toward the pluralist vision, interpretation or expectation of what policy influencing is. It is assumed that the political regime is open, that the associational landscape allows for sufficient pro-poor competition, that poor people and vulnerable groups have equal access to the political arena, that they will be able to voice their interests and influence the policy making cycle, that the government has a neutral stand towards the different groups in society, and that that goal of poverty reduction is politically neutral. Although participation is injected with extremely high ambitions, expecting from it that it will induce a grand progress in both democratic and developmental arenas, it is remarkable that all this is to be achieved through so little steering, no screening nor monitoring or evaluating the participation itself. As such the participation conditionality is loaded with voluntaristic assumptions, it is seen as an unmitigated good, and any form of participation is considered as an improvement over past practices (Hickey & Mohan 2005:238).

When looking at the string of recommendations that often flow from the identified weaknesses of the participation processes, they come close to some of the features of the neo-corporatist model: macro-economic issues should be open for discussion, the private sector should be involved more, civil society should have influence during the whole policy cycle (including agenda setting, formulation, implementation and M&E), participation should be institutionalized, the involvement of mass organizations should be stimulated, etc...

3. Participation processes in reality: is pluralism a guarantee for pro-poor interest articulation?

As mentioned above, the pluralist model parts from a number of assumptions: the political system is open, the state is 'neutral', and all have equal opportunities to influence policy making. The reality of most low income and aid dependent countries however does not fit these assumptions in a number of ways.

First there is the 'openness of the system' or the political opportunity structure. If we take the PRSP countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (where the bulk of PRSP countries are situated) and screen them on their 2006 freedom house status with regards to press freedom, then only 15% of these countries is free, 40% is partially free, while 45% is not free at all¹². The large majority of these countries thus lack a fully open opportunity structure which would be, in order of importance, the most fundamental principle for pluralism to exist and thrive. Interestingly enough though there are some 'authoritarian regimes' which seem to do relatively well in terms of growth and poverty reduction. And, surprisingly, these countries seem to use more 'corporatist' mechanisms to organize participation and ensure social stability.

3.1. Viet Nam and Uganda

Viet Nam is one of those rare success stories where sustained high growth levels go hand in hand with an extraordinary rate of poverty reduction. From a political point of view, Viet Nam is a one-party state with low scores on voice and accountability, on civil rights and political liberties. It however would be a mistake to assume that state-society relations are characterised by pure domination or authoritarian patterns. True enough, autonomous forms of civil society have been to a large extent suppressed, but state-society relationships in Vietnam have traditionally required the state to demonstrate its legitimacy and to negotiate policy with society in order to be effective. Party-affiliated mass organisations serve as elements of a corporatist state, mobilising society in pursuit of Party policies; however, they also provide channels for different groups (farmers, women, etc.) to communicate their views to the political leadership. The mass movements are furthermore an important vehicle for improving access of services specifically across the poorest provinces, and over the past decade they have proved to be effective in reaching services down to the communes (Sabharwal & Than Thi Thien Huong 2005). One could say that in Viet Nam the corporatist set-up provides for the necessary checks and balances which help ensure that an authoritarian

¹² The data can be retrieved at the Freedom House website www.freedomhouse.org

developmental state does not evolve into a self-serving dictatorship. So the state and the political system more generally display both a greater commitment to poverty reduction and a greater capacity to realise this goal (Conway 2004). Participation, so it seems is introduced in this system to ensure downward legitimacy (towards the citizens) and to channel information back to the top which, combined with the political will to address development, ensures development effectiveness.

Interestingly enough the PRSP introduced a new kind of participation¹³. In the first place the process seemed to take place outside the usual procedures and structures through which development plans traditionally are formulated. This created quite some confusion as it was not clear what the status of the PRSP document was versus the status of the national development plan. The government had already produced its own medium and long-term strategies (particularly the Ten-Year Socio-Economic Development Strategy and the Five-Year Plan), which had gone through the regular institutional processes (the Party Congress) and thus much more deeply embedded in the political system. The Vietnamese PRSP was not debated in the National Assembly (which has admittedly limited power, but which is nonetheless a necessary factor in signing off important policy changes) and this is a major weakness. Knowledge of the CPRGS (Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy) is somewhat shallow, with limited engagement of officials within ministries, and very limited engagement of provincial or sub-provincial political actors (Conway 2004).

The PRSP process also introduced a change in the composition of the stakeholders. Where traditionally the mass movements are involved, the PRSP failed to engage all of them in the drafting process. As a consequence, the resulting policy framework became somewhat more shallow and thus less effective than it could have been. The PRSP participation thus partially undermined the regular governance structures by running parallel to them. On the suggestion of donors, government was asked to consider consulting national NGOs. Initially the government was not very keen to discuss its development plan with national NGOs (some of them having somewhat dissident views) and preferred to have contact with International NGOs which, historically, have had good relations with the Vietnamese government (Molenaers & Renard 2007). Through carefully constructed consultation however, there are some interesting new achievements. Although the degree of popular participation fell short of the ideal expressed in the PRSP principles, the CPRGS process did clearly draw new voices into the Vietnamese policymaking process. A few Vietnamese

¹³ Vietnam embarked on the PRSP-process around mid 2000.

NGOs did participate in the drafting process and have expressed their satisfaction with what they gained through this engagement. The CPRGS also introduced new modes of participatory or consultative policy development to the Vietnamese political system, through the organisation by the Poverty Task Force of the 'consultations with the poor', in which community discussions around the policy content of the I-PRSP were facilitated at six sites in Vietnam. This effectively drew in citizens outside the Party-state structures (i.e. those who were not members of mass organisations or the Party) who would normally not have a voice in policymaking. Although it is debateable whether this alone has been enough to institutionalise direct consultation with the poor as a routine in Vietnamese policymaking, it built upon and helped to consolidate earlier innovative participatory policy research (the Participatory Poverty Assessments which went into the 1999 Vietnam Poverty Report), and helps, incrementally, to make the case for wider use of such consultations. In some cases, the absence of a mass organisation may even have made the drafting process easier. On those occasions when the mass organisations do assert themselves in policy, it is often along rather corporatist lines which are not necessarily in the interests of the poorest (Conway 2004). It is also worth noting that through the experience of this participation, the Vietnamese government started to work on a legal framework for national NGOs. More specifically on June 9th 2000, the National Assembly passed organic laws that 'ensure the legitimate rights and interest of organizations and individuals engaged in scientific and technological activities' (Law on Science and Technology, No. 21/2000/QH10, 9 June 2000). This law on Science and Technology recognizes professional associations as independent service organizations (Sabharwal & Than Thi Thien Huong, 2005). During our interviews with government officials in Viet Nam, the contributions of NGOs are particularly welcomed when they are technocratic in nature: evidence based inputs, technical know how and topical expertise are perceived as important. International NGOs confirmed this during interviews and added that political statements (on human rights, democracy and the ethnic issue) are very much a taboo.

Uganda is also an exception. The country has been able to achieve an impressive pro-poor change in spending patterns in recent years. Its home-grown Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP), first formulated in 1997, has been presented as the model for the post-structural adjustment Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) required by the international community (Mugisha & Barungi 2005:122). Also politically Uganda has been an exception in sub-Saharan Africa with its relatively liberal 'no party' democracy (1986 to 2006), and its emphasis on participatory 'grassroots' democracy (Braathen 2006:10). Since the presidential

and parliamentary elections in 2006 however Uganda seems to be on the path of becoming a multi-party democracy.

The 1997 PEAP was a three-year poverty eradication strategy and its formulation took two years of extensive consultations and participation of civil society organizations and development partners. An important part of the exercise were the Participatory Poverty Assessments which have had a major impact on government thinking about how best to support agriculture. The result was an increase in the budget for agriculture. In the agricultural sector, budget allocations have since increased from 4% to 12%, a change that some rural producer organisations acknowledge and welcome (Braathen 2006; Foster & Mijumbi 2002). The importance of rural productivity has also led the government to engage more with the private sector (including rural producer organisations). The views of the Rural Producer Organisations were solicited and presented by the Private Sector Foundation (PSF), although the level of participation was limited to submitting views. There was thus no joint decision making in the process (Mugisha & Barungi, 2005). It seems that Uganda has to some extent separated certain participative fora. Some spaces are more dominated by membership organisations, others are more dominated by NGOs. It could be that this lowers tensions and competitiveness between both strands of organisations.

Another achievement is the setting up a Poverty Action Fund (PAF), a virtual fund exclusively targetted for poverty interventions. The Ugandan Debt Network (UDN), a national umbrella NGO, initially extremely active as part of the international Jubilee campaign, was included in monitoring this fund since it functioned for channelled debt relief towards poverty programmes (Mugisha & Barungi 2005). Today several civil society organisations are heavily involved in the PAF and it contains elements of joint-decision making and monitoring. It is one of the most elaborated structures of institutionalised participation within the PRS context in which serious efforts are undertaken to establish a link with vulnerable groups. These groups participate in the PAF-Monitoring Committees (Eberlei 2007:8).

In general the PEAP process has increased the space for CSOs in general to become involved in policy influencing and making. CSOs have been involved in the development of the PEAP, and participation in policymaking and monitoring has been institutionalised. The 2000 PEAP revision process was further opened up to civil society participation: a CSO Task Force was set up at the initiative of GoU to provide inputs into PEAP revisions, and was supported by donors. It was composed of ten international and national NGOs and research institutes, and chaired by the Uganda Debt Network (UDN). CSOs (NGOs and a selection of membership based

organisations) have felt that government was open to their contribution, valued their input and even incorporated some policy suggestions. The 2003/2004 process appears to have been even more open, and over a longer timescale. CSOs have been better organised, submitted a joint paper to the revision process, and were able to undertake more direct consultations. Oxfam and other NGOs have worked closely together and with MFPED as part of the UPPAP (with an Oxfam employee seconded to MFPED). NGOs have been included in sectoral working groups, alongside donors and governments, and also attend and make statements at Consultative Group meetings (Conway 2004). In Uganda, two NGOs stand out due to their exceptional capacity to track budgets and to monitor government activities down to the village level: the NGO-forum and the Ugandan Debt Network. The Ugandan case seems to suggest that when government commitment to poverty reduction meets orderly established participation structures and a capacitated civil society, it holds extremely promising potentials.

Some commentators however note that the PEAP has created 'selective' or 'invited' policy spaces for nonstate actors to engage in national policymaking. They are invited to engage in policy discussions – but GoU does the selection. NGOs themselves note that they have been excluded from some debates, such as negotiations on certain loans like the PRSC, and other macro-economic issues. In addition, certain organisations are excluded altogether from technical consultations. Certain trade unions were excluded, but also the media, groups representing people with disabilities, religious organisations, and of course political parties. This is probably because some of these institutions pose a potential threat to the Movement as alternative sources of views and organising of political views. The political opportunity structure is thus not fully open. The NGO Amendment Bill proposed some further restrictions, including complicated registration procedures and the possible suspension of NGOs, including the imprisonment of NGO leaders. Organisations which are perceived as too close to political parties, such as the Uganda Joint Council of Churches, are usually less trusted. There is freedom of information in Uganda, but there have been significant incidents where press freedom has been denied (Mugisha & Barungi 2005).

Both Uganda and Viet Nam share one essential characteristic. They both come very close to developmental states with a strong development oriented political elite. Both countries were already doing PRSPs before the PRSP actually existed. In fact, both countries were a major source of inspiration for the World Bank. In both cases the concern for poverty reduction goes hand in hand with the want to stay in power. Participation serves both purposes and is therefore in both countries quite institutionalised, even though both countries are not democracies. The

institutionalised character of participation goes hand in hand with a certain degree of political control. Dissidence is not tolerated very much, hence participation in PRSP-like processes is stripped from its political meaning and becomes a technocratic instrument. As such the status quo is not altered, the system remains stable and good state performance rewards both the citizens and the elite. At the same time, each technocratic input holds promising political potentials. In both cases, the new PRSP as imposed by the Worldbank introduced and opened the floor to more NGO involvement. This was new for Viet Nam. It was not new for Uganda. In both cases there is mentioning about the fact that NGO involvement took place at the detriment of the membership based organisations and mass movements. The question is if this is problematic. For the case of Viet Nam very little information is available on what this evolution actually implies. For the case of Uganda, quite some of the NGOs have proven to do a very good job in terms of M&E, down to the local level (eg Ugandan Debt Network). In both cases the respective governments keep a very tight control over who is invited, who is consulted, which topics and which contributions matter¹⁴.

Both cases clearly show that the PRSP stimulates participation of NGOs more than participation of mass movements, producer organisations, membership based organisations. The idea that PRSP stimulates fluidlike pluralist patterns is confirmed by both examples. This might be in part be caused by donors as well. They are more comfortable cooperating with NGOs than with mass organisations. In part it might also be because membership organisations like trade unions, producer groups etc are probably more interested in economic issues (macro-economic frameworks, trade etd) which are somewhat less debated in the fora of PRSPs. There is however an interesting evolution going on where PRSPs increasingly emphasize the economic aspects. As stated before the food crisis has had an important role to play herein. The World Development Report 2008 also tackled the issue of agriculture and with it donors are increasingly reconsidering agriculture. This context might very well support a tendency away from looking at poverty from a needs-perspective towards looking at reducing poverty from a supply perspective. The latter would probably imply more room for the private sector and their contribution to growth and productivity, something that has been largely missing in the past generations of PRSPs. This could be a historic moment for certain economic sectors to get more involved.

The examples of Uganda and Viet Nam seem to suggest that that it is not corporatism as such which ensures succes, but rather the way in which the model

¹⁴ Just to give an example, in Vietnam, the government was not open to discuss poverty issues relating to the ethnic minorities living in the highlands.

succeeds in accommodating political legitimacy and developmental effectiveness. Both countries manage to score relatively high on both dimensions. When the model succeeds in combining both, then adding gradually more fluid like patterns of participation can bring out interesting new dynamics (like citizen participation in Vietnam, like monitoring committees in Uganda). Interesting to note is that both cases also suggest that these PRSP induced fluidlike participation processes take place outside the regular governance structures. Although Putzel (2004:9) argues that this is probably the biggest shortcoming of the PRSP approach because it undermines the normal channels of governance and representation, one might imagine situations where this actually gives the pro-poor dimension a bigger chance of coming through, especially when the 'regular spaces' are captured by other (not so pro-poor) interests.

3.2. Bolivia and Senegal:

On the other side of the spectrum we find some countries where political opportunity structure was very open at the time of the introduction of the PRSP, and where participation was also already a well established characteristic of the democratic political regime. Interestingly enough however the processes and its outcomes were not considered as structurally moving towards pro-poor development. We refer to two cases: Senegal and Bolivia¹⁵.

Bolivia has been, during quite an extended period of time, a donor darling and a model pupil of the Bretton Woods Institutions. The country has however not witnessed the high rates of growth. Bolivia is the poorest country of South America and one of the poorest in the western hemisphere (Booth & Piron 2004).

Bolivia was one of the pilot countries for the Comprehensive Development Framework, and then one of the first countries considered under the enhanced HIPC Framework for multilateral debt relief after 1999. In 2000–01, Bolivia produced one of the first PRSPs – the Estrategia Boliviana de Reducción de la Pobreza (EBRP). Bolivia was also a country which had experienced nation-wide participation processes before the PRSP was introduced (Molenaers & Renard 2003).

The honeymoon period with donors ended in 2005 with the victory of Evo Morales, who won the presidential elections. Morales, one of leaders of the traditional mass movements, was very much against the PRSP and the participation processes it entailed. During the different participatory exercises, violent confrontations took

¹⁵ In this paper we mainly refer to Bolivia when Evo Morales was not yet in power, because it was mainly in the period 2000–2005 that the PRSP process was taking place. After Morales came in power the PRSP processes stalled.

place between these movements and the state. It is ironical that in a country where the PRSP participation process has been enthusiastically applauded and hailed as a best practice, those same mass organisations that did not participate, managed to mobilise large segments of the poor and excluded indigenous groups to elect Evo Morales into office (Molenaers & Renard 2003).

The Bolivian PRSP case is a complex and multifaceted one. It is surely impossible to tackle it in full in this paper, but it is important to emphasize a couple of things which were striking during the participative processes. The participatory process (National Dialogue) under the PRSP (at that time considered a best practice) involved a myriad of actors (NGOs, the Church, private sector organisations, ...) and it has produced important gains¹⁶. The quite fundamental downside was that the participatory framework and its agenda stood isolated from all the 'hot' topics that were actually pressing political issues at that time. More particularly, social unrest and political upheavals related to the management of natural resources in Bolivia and the struggle around the coca-production. With these topics banned from the participatory agenda, large segments of the country's poor, namely the peasants and indigenous communities were defacto excluded (Molenaers & Renard 2003; Painter, 2002). Therefore the period between 2000 and 2005 witnessed regular outbreaks of violence and growing political instability. Bolivia's political elite at that time was unable to sustainably address these issues. As a result, in 2005, the groups that did not participate in the PRSP consultations, took power by the ballot and voted Morales into the presidential position.

The fundamental problem with the participatory process linked to the PRSP was not the 'openness to participate', but rather the way in which the government set the agenda for participation. This showed that it is not a neutral agent who mediates between different groups which seek influence over policies. Quite the contrary. The government cautiously steered away from two delicate systemic features: the root causes of poverty and inequality in Bolivian society, and, the root causes of

¹⁶ The National Dialogue consisted of three 'tables': the social agenda, the economic agenda and the political agenda. Each agenda had its own set of stakeholders. With regards to the social agenda a consensus was reached that 70 per cent of the HIPC II resources would be distributed on the basis of poverty indicators favouring poorer municipalities, with the remaining 30 per cent being distributed equally among the nine departments, and further down to the municipalities. The municipal governments would be responsible for the administration of HIPCII resources. Secondly, civil society was granted the right to participate in the monitoring and evaluation of the use of these resources. This was legally translated into the 'Mechanism of Social Control' (Mecanismo de Control Social) in which the Church is set to play a major role. Thirdly, it was decided that the National Dialogue would be institutionalised. To this effect, the 'Law of National Dialogue' (Ley del Dialogo Nacional) was enacted, which among others stipulates that the consultation exercise is to be repeated every three years. Finally, it was accepted that political parties would lose their political monopoly in fielding candidates for elections. The economic agenda was less successful and did not result in a national agreement, among others due to large disagreements amongst the representatives of the private sector. The political agenda, in which several larger CSOs, political parties and government participated, remained stuck in preparatory seminars and never made it to the national round table.

developmental underperformance (ie the failure to deliver development for all Bolivians) (Molenaers & Renard 2003).

Bolivia's main population groups are indigenous (Aymara and Quechua speakers) and they have historically been concentrated in the Andean highlands. There the main sources of economic dynamism were once the fabulous mineral wealth and the sophisticated agricultural systems, but these are in steep decline for centuries. The plains of Santa Cruz, on the other hand, have developed spectacularly. Although there were substantial population movements between the altiplano and the plains, this has not prevented the birth of a huge mismatch between settlement patterns and the main sources of economic dynamism. This resulted in a deepening of economic and social inequalities (Smith 1983, cited by Booth & Piron 2004). The national state has had immense legitimacy problems in Bolivia due to two reasons. On the one hand because the state is the legacy of the colonial heritage, which, with its racial and discriminatory tendencies, ruled over a population which in its majority was indigenous. From Spain, colonial and independent Bolivia inherited a centralist, corporatist tradition in which the dominant socio-economic groups have strong powers over the state. On the other hand, legitimacy is low because the state only has limited presence and authority across the territory. Both factors combined contributed to the making of a state that has quite a limited capacity to deliver even basic guarantees and services to the national population. This has brought the Bolivian state under continuous pressure, while having to face recurrent outbreaks of protest and social violence. Government has traditionally tried to socially incorporate these groups through spoils of clientelism. This has prevented the emergence of state policies and capabilities that might have resulted in the timely resolution of fundamental structural problems of development (Booth & Piron 2004). Much in this same way the PRSP participation process was set-up. The most open participation, from the national to the local level, took place around the following question "what are we going to do with the extra money coming in?". This resulted in a wishlist, a Christmas Tree PRSP with little or no real priorities and no real agenda for change.

Another strong tension during the PRSP participation process took place between membership based organisations and NGOS. Membership bases organisations regularly questioned the legitimacy and representativeness of large intermediate NGOs specialized in advocacy and lobbying: on behalf of whom are they claiming access to resources and are they participating in decision-making processes? Who has given them a mandate? How many people do they represent? To whom are they accountable? These specialized organizations do not always have direct relations with the local level, yet they try to influence politics and compete for resources on behalf of certain groups. In other words, according to membership

based organizations, legitimacy is about the numbers one represents and the fact that one is held accountable by them. Advocacy organizations on the other hand draw upon normative or moral grounds for legitimacy; for them, gender, human rights, ethnicity, the environment, or poverty are in themselves legitimate issues, because of the moral weight or the public good aspects these topics carry. Accountability in these organisations is a complex issue and is mostly linked to the source of financial support: donors (Molenaers & Renard 2003). Interestingly enough, the civil society organisation that enjoyed the highest levels of legitimacy in Bolivia is the Catholic Church. Not less than 82 per cent of the population expresses trust in the Church (Latinobarometro 2000) – but quite some CSOs are uncomfortable with the large role that has been assigned to this religious institution. The Church often raises its voice in political debates, acts as an intermediary in social conflicts, and is widely respected by the political class. On the other hand however, other members of civil society perceive the Church as being too closely aligned with the state (Christian Aid 2001:3).

Senegal is considered as one of those rare examples of political stability and democracy in the African region because there is freedom of association and expression, but more importantly it has witnessed real alternation of power. There is a well-informed and dynamic press and the political debates are lively.

The country's economic track-record is less successful, however. Senegal remains ranked among the poorer countries in Africa with the current purchasing power per citizen lower than it was at the time of independence. Poverty in Senegal is largely a rural phenomenon with over 80 percent of poor households located in rural areas (PRSP Senegal 2002). The rate of poverty varies between 72 percent and 88 percent in rural zones compared to 44 percent-59 percent in urban areas (MDG Progress Report).

Senegal has produced a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) in early 2002, and although civil society was involved within the drafting of this PRSP, it has not resulted in the institutionalisation of participation (Cidse 2004). According to Entwistle et al. (2005) Senegal has an active and dynamic civil society. It has well established pressure groups, such as the Islamic brotherhoods and trade unions, and well-organised networks grouping a large number of associations. The PRSP has added to vibrance of NGO-life since a number of organisations were founded in order to participate in the process. Some were created for the purpose of monitoring the PRSP, others like COLUPAS (with over 700 members) were created to coordinate the participation of Senegalese civil society in the PRSP.

There is however quite some discontent at the level of the donor community with Senegal. The problem of Senegal, we heard repeatedly, is not about the quality of policy making. The problem lies in its implementation. The state does not succeed in realizing the reforms needed for improved economic performance and poverty reduction. According some of the donors we interviewed during our field research, pro-poor performance requires a series of reforms relating to the number of civil servants, the structure of public salaries, the system of recruiting civil servants, control of the labour market, legislation regarding government procurement, commercial law for the private sector, reform of higher education, reform of the rice sector and the role of certain public enterprises, to give just the most striking examples. Rouis (1993:289) argues '*(...) the authorities are increasingly reluctant to oppose the interest groups that have the most to lose from the reforms. These groups are primarily the labor unions, the civil service, and religious leaders (marabouts)*'.

The case of Senegal points to a tension between pro-poor development and political legitimacy. As we have argued before (Molenaers & Renard 2006) the elements in Senegalese society which ensure political stability constitute at the same time, the biggest obstacle to pro-poor development.

Much like Bolivia, Senegal's political life is caught between modernity and traditionality. Senegals' first universe is urban, with a tradition of a constitutional state, civility, vibrant social life and democratic electoral representation (Vengroff and Magala 2001, Galvan 2001, Patterson 1998). The second universe is where the poor and illiterate live in a traditional and conservative cultural universe. Both universes are linked together through patronage links between the political elite and the Muslim brotherhoods, the *Sufi* (Galvan 2001:10-11). These brotherhoods play the role of mediators between the political class and the citizens, particularly the poor living in a traditional cultural environment. Political leaders use the brotherhoods to connect with these urban and rural populations to ensure their electoral support and the religious leaders, in turn, negotiate the terms under which said support is granted. Viewed in this way, the deep-rooted brotherhoods, which are able to defend the interests of their members, represent their followers indirectly, as is done by many interest groups in stable democracies. Within certain limits, it could be imagined that the *Sufi* brotherhoods not only contribute to the development of the democratic system, but even constitute a force which might be strongly in favour of pro-poor development.

This is however not the case. Literature suggest that the brotherhoods often have very specific economic interests. The production of peanuts– a major source of

income and export product for Senegal– is dominated by the *mouride* and *tidjane* brotherhoods (Magassouba 1985:23; Haynes 1995:98). In land conflicts between earthnut farmers and nomadic shepherds, the marabouts sided with the former, thus contributing to the economic and social marginalisation of the latter (Gunning 2004:16-18). The earthnut no longer has the same importance for the Senegalese economy and, in this respect, the influence of the marabouts has, no doubt, waned. However, on the other hand, the Islamic leaders' ability to politically mobilise people is still very strong, and in secular matters the brotherhoods have reoriented themselves as a result of an important participation in the informal sector, which employs large part of the urban poor population (Beck 2001:612). The brotherhoods do not defend the economic interests of the small earthnut farmers or of the inhabitants of the more popular districts of the big cities. The marabouts include large landowners and important economic players, who have managed to gain control over a large part of the assets that were deemed 'fit for privatisation' by the central government. Given these hierarchical, even oligarchic relations at the heart of these brotherhoods, it would in fact be surprising if a major part of these advantages did not benefit the marabouts themselves. The conclusion that seems to be emerging is that the system that considerably contributes towards social cohesion and political stability in Senegal, is, at the same time, an obstacle for pro-poor development. The role of the brotherhoods is to maintain the established social order (Copans 1988: 231), and this established order in traditional Senegal is hierarchical in nature, with great inequalities and an extraordinary power of religious leaders.

The hopegiving tendency of the pluralist model of the PRPS in Senegal lies exactly in the diversification of players, and thus possibly some space to break the monopoly of these more powerful groups in civil society and the private sector. This is probably why donors have actively favoured the participation of NGOs in Senegal's PRSP. Since these organisations are included in the PRSP process to indirectly defend the interests of the poor, one might eagerly hope that they will manage to do so. As a result these NGOs play a double role, to keep out of harm's way from the two powerful lobbies, i.e. the brotherhoods and trade unions, and to successfully defend the interests of the poor, who, until present, have not had a great deal of influence on the political proceedings. However, the Senegalese NGOs meet the 'typical' requirements of most NGOs in development countries, which makes it difficult for them to achieve this double goal. The NGOs generally have an urban profile, with well-educated staff belonging to the middle classes, and they do not usually appear to be strongly rooted within rural regions. In these rural areas, there are usually dynamic, local organisations in place, but they are insufficiently integrated in the national networks. This is not only true for Senegal and is

generally acknowledged in the literature (Eberlei 2001 ; Edwards and Hulme 1996; Foley and Edwards 1996 ; Van Rooy 1998, World Bank 2002). However, in Senegal, the situation is no doubt more difficult than in other countries, simply because of the clear rift between the modern world and the traditional, informal world, and because the religious brotherhoods play such an important role within Senegal's unique political system. During our interviews in Dakar in 2005, various donors expressed their doubts regarding the pro-poor nature of many of the non-state groups established in Dakar or main villages. Added to that, participation processes can eventually always turn out in favour of those groups that were already powerful. During an interview, a trade union representative told us confidentially that the consultations with relation to PRSP greatly reinforced his organisation's negotiating position. The trade unions defend the interests of blue-collar workers in the modern sector, i.e. employees in modern companies and civil servants, who constitute just a minute part of the workforce. In such a dual economy as Senegal's, the blue-collar workers, as a group, are in a privileged position compared to those people who are forced to survive in the informal or rural sector (Molenaers & Renard 2006:12).

Both the Bolivian and Senegalese cases illustrate states which were unable to accommodate both political legitimacy and development effectiveness. Whereas the Senegalese state is able to produce political legitimacy through its links with the major interest groups through corporatist-like interaction patterns, Bolivia seems to have constructed those links with the 'wrong groups' and probably in the 'wrong regional places', resulting in low political legitimacy. Both the Senegalese case and the Bolivian case show the inability of the state to reach developmental effectiveness, due to strong, powerful forces in society which block the road towards the necessary reforms. Exactly in these cases the fluidlike participation patterns might stimulate a turn for the positive, if and when these effectively question the status quo and address the more structural challenges which hamper pro-poor development.

4. Concluding remarks

The four cases confirm the idea that the PRSP stimulates pluralist, fluidlike participation patterns, even in strong corporatist systems like Viet Nam. All four cases show that NGO involvement flourishes under this approach, while membership based organisations have more difficulties in finding their place and role in this new ball game. PRSPs also stimulate debate and policy influencing outside the regular structures of governance. Governments and donors might want to think about differentiating participation fora and styles, taking organisational

features of civil society organisations in account. Membership organisations (if and when interested in negotiating with government) might need different, other ways of being involved, in part because their structure often doesn't allow for quick interventions at this high level of policy making. Not because of capacity constraints (NGOs also lack capacities), but mostly because membership based organisations need more time to prepare positions and discuss alternatives within the own organisation. A lot of NGOs are less constrained in this sense. A recent study coordinated by Einar Braathen (2006) confirms this. Doing research in four South African countries, the researchers found that rural producers organisations often could not conduct deep consultations with lower levels within the organisation because of time constraints and because the discussions at that high policy level were taking place within relatively short time frames. The fact that those policy discussions were very often also quite technical did not facilitate deep intra-organisational consultation.

The four cases also show that there is a mismatch between the pluralist assumptions on the state/playing field vis-à-vis the actual reality on the ground. Corporatists are right when they argue that government is never a neutral player, that the playing field is not open nor leveled, and that power is not evenly distributed in society hence influencing policies is not as open and competitive as the pluralist school assumes. From that perspective the corporatist assumptions are a better match for reality in a lot of low income countries, although this does not mean that corporatism as such is a perfect match for better, deeper forms of pro-poor participation. We have seen that corporatist interaction patterns, which were to some extent more or less present in all of the countries, can work in favour of growth, development and poverty reduction (like in Viet Nam), but also against it (like Senegal or Bolivia). Introducing fluid like NGO participation can strengthen certain institutions while at the same time they undermine other existing structures. NGOs can bring the pro-poor dimension to the spot light, or not. Basically everything is possible, and whether one direction or the other is good or bad depends on the context.

The argument here is that initially form doesn't matter a whole lot. More important is substance. And pro-poor substance can be delivered by both authoritarian and democratic regimes, by membership based organisations and NGOs, and thus by more strongly institutionalised interaction patterns and more fluid like forms of influencing. A lot of membership based organisations may very well have the ability to draw on large groups of populations and therefore claim legitimacy (like the Sufi brotherhoods in Senegal, or the Church in Bolivia), but this does not hold any guarantees on their poverty orientedness. In the case of NGOs, it could be the

other way around. They may not represent any members and thus fall short in terms of legitimacy, but they might be able to defend relevant poverty oriented issues. Pro poor participation under the PRSP is thus not so much about creating the openness to participate, but rather about being selective in a pro-poor sense in a given context.

Selectivity towards players (and/or contributions) is something we can learn from corporatists: preparation proceeds purpose. If policies have to be pro-poor, then the involved players have to be selected in such a way that they effectively represent that segment of society. The corporatist perspective does not make any naïve assumptions on the openness of the state, its neutrality and the distribution of power in society. It is acknowledged that corporatist settings mostly serve the stability of the status quo. One could thus argue that if that status quo is compatible with poverty orientedness, then in that case that particular corporatist set up serves the poor. If not, then poverty reduction will most probably not figure as a prominent goal in guiding actions and policies. In the same vein, it might be justified to neutralize the potentially negative impact of those groups in civil society that might jeopardize the pro-poor outcome. Civil society is just as much characterized by power differences and tensions as any other dimension in society (Howell, 2000:9), which suggests that special attention be given to the more vulnerable groups who are the intended beneficiaries of the new policies. If pro-poor participation is aimed at then the pro poor nature of regimes, interactions and stakeholders is never to be assumed.

In some cases this implies a somewhat corporatist approach in that a very specific bias in the selection of stakeholders is needed, or, that special weights are given to those that effectively represent the interests of the poor or have expert knowledge on poverty issues. This will however create tensions the state will have to deal with. Although strongly steered and biased participation is justifiable in terms of poverty reduction efforts, this might not necessarily be welcomed by those organisations which claim that they too have the democratic right to participate in all kinds of policy debates. In democratic settings, governments will most probably be more inclined to listen to organisations which are able to mobilize large group of potential voters, but once again, this is not guarantee for pro-poor orientedness. In such a setting, the pro-poor voice of certain NGOs can be very welcome.

All this implies that contextual analysis is more important than organisational blueprints. To start with contexts have their own image, face and definition of poverties. Urban poverty asks for other policies than rural poverty. Female poverty needs a different approach than male poverty. Children, disabled, ... they all need a

specific approach. Some poverty issues can be addressed through special targeted programmes while others can't. Especially for the latter a structural analysis of the root causes of poverty is indispensable. And this is what is often missing in chronically underperforming PRSP countries. Hence the necessary reforms are not identified, or not implemented. In such contexts, identifying the 'drivers of change' is vital, and utterly political. Just like Merilee Grindle (2005, 2007) argues, it then becomes a matter of identifying what works relatively good in a given setting (certain institutions or departments, certain organisations, certain state-society interactions) and seek strategies to support and gradually improve this. Models and blueprints can only be used for inspiration, providing a myriad of possible strategies. Which strategy to choose and push for (more NGOs or not, more membership bases organisations or not, institutionalize participation or not, introduce certain topics for participation or not...) will depend on the context, the regime, the stakeholders and their pro-poor nature. This means that donors must become much more aware that every development intervention is utterly political. And the new aid approach is about using resources as a leverage to build and support the right pro-poor alliances.

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