



## PRSPs in Africa: Parliaments and Economic Policy Performance

## Les DSRPs en Afrique: Parlements et résultats des politiques économiques

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Eschborn 2005

## PUBLISHED BY

Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische  
Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) GmbH  
Postfach 5189, D-65726 Eschborn  
Internet: www.gtz.de

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Commissioned by the Federal German Ministry  
for Economic Cooperation and Development

Photos: Rainer F. Steußloff, Corbis, Uwe Rau

Cover design and layout:  
Salt Corporate Communication  
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Printed by Studio 84, Rödermark/Germany

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## INDEX

### PRSPs in Africa: Parliaments and Economic Policy Performance

Foreword .....	4
Executive Summary .....	5
1. Background and Introduction .....	7
2. Analytical Framework .....	9
3. The Early Challenges in PRSP Performance .....	11
4. Analysis of Parliamentary PRSP Strengths and Weaknesses .....	13
A) Connecting to the Poor and Relating to Civil Society .....	13
B) PRSP Policy Measures and Parliaments .....	14
C) Gender Equality and PRSPs .....	15
D) The Budget Cycle Process and Parliament .....	16
E) Monitoring and Evaluation of PRSPs .....	18
5. Conclusions .....	20

### Les DSRPs en Afrique: Parlements et résultats des politiques économiques

Avant-propos .....	22
Résumé .....	23
1. Contexte et introduction .....	25
2. Cadre analytique .....	27
3. Les difficultés initiales associées à la performance des DSRP .....	29
4. Analyse des forces et des faiblesses du rôle des parlements dans les DSRP .....	32
A) Rapprochement avec les pauvres et la société civile .....	32
B) Actions gouvernementales autour du DSRP et parlements .....	33
C) Égalité entre les sexes et DSRP .....	34
D) Parlements et cycle budgétaire .....	36
E) Suivi et évaluation des DSRP .....	39
5. Conclusions .....	41

## Foreword


**Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs)** appear to be the key development strategy with a promise to moving most developing countries out of their current 'development stalemate'. 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.

Most discussions are focused on developing PRSPs and ensuring that developing countries get debt relief in order to implement the strategy. But the most important and crucial element for ensuring proper implementation - the check on the Executive - seems to have received little or no attention.

It is against this background that the Parliamentary Centre and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and its executing agency GTZ, are focusing their attention on the important but often forgotten role that Parliaments and Civil Society groups can play in ensuring greater accountability in PRSP implementation. With support from GTZ, the Centre conducted a rapid appraisal of PRSPs in Ghana, Niger, Malawi and Tanzania; the results of which are contained in this report.

The report highlights very critical issues that are central to the success of the PRSP implementation. Parliamentary role in the PRSP process has largely been limited, mainly because of Executive dominance in the policy process. But this trend is changing. Most elected officials are beginning to take on the responsibility of ensuring that governments remain accountable to the poor. But, there is growing concern that: (a) pro-poor spending is generally not performing as projected because of budgetary implementation weaknesses; (b) to a significant degree there is also a failure in budget-management to integrate HIPC resources into pro-poor spending frameworks consistent with PRSP plans; and (c) above all, it has taken much time to develop effective monitoring systems for PRSP activity.

It is hoped that this initiative will help jolt donors into action in order to ensure the success of PRSPs by supporting Parliaments across the developing world to perform their oversight functions effectively.



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# Executive Summary

**PRSPs, the last-born** in a long line of development efforts to reduce poverty have gained in recent years considerable support in Africa. The guiding principles of the PRSP include not only that they be country-led initiatives but also that they be developed in a participatory manner promoting involvement from the poor to parliamentarians. With that in mind, a rapid appraisal review was conducted in four PRSP countries (Ghana, Niger, Tanzania and Malawi) in order to examine the strengths as well as the emerging significant performance weaknesses so far in the implementation of national PRSPs. Moreover, another focus of the appraisal consisted of identifying the possible roles that parliaments can play to improve PRSP performance.

The findings presented in this report demonstrate common emerging challenges faced by the four African countries in regards to the PRSP process:

- PRSP pro-poor spending is generally not performing as projected because of budgetary implementation weaknesses. The goal of moving toward operational MTEF budgets has also not yet been achieved.
- To a significant degree there is also a failure in budget-management to integrate HIPC resources into pro-poor spending frameworks consistent with PRSP plans.
- A third major concern is that it has taken much time to develop effective monitoring systems for PRSP activity.
- A fourth reality is that gender equality considerations seem to be massively underemphasized in these PRSP processes so far.

## A) The Budget Cycle Process and Parliament

There is a widespread Parliamentary focus on the budget cycle process and its key linkage to the PRSP process in the four countries reviewed. But if this represents an element of strength in the PRSP role possible for Parliament, the actual practice of parliamentary budget work nevertheless seems to represent, on balance, a weakness to overcome. Main weakness of Parliaments is that they spend very little time and devote few financial resources to detailed budget scrutiny:

- In Tanzania, MPs stressed how short the period was in Parliament for considering the budget;
- Budget adoption is also done very rapidly in Niger;
- Time limitations are a common complaint in the Ghana

and Malawi's parliament;

- Having input before the budget is presented is seen as a priority in Malawi, Tanzania and Ghana;
- The Parliamentary Audits so far completed in Africa all show that Parliaments feel their influence in setting budget priorities is very low, and they are unable to have much input into budget planning;

What results, therefore, in these four parliaments is limited effectiveness in impacting the budget cycle process, despite the recognition of its importance. Executive control over budget planning, formulation and implementation is virtually absolute.

## B) Connecting to the Poor and Relating to Civil Society:

An underlying principle of PRSP's refers to the commitment to engage more fully with those who actually are poor and as such emerged as a central concern in most of the countries involved in this review. Direct parliamentary outreach to and interaction with the poor was certainly not vibrant (and there were sometimes signs of alienation and antagonism.). But parliamentary relations with community-based civil society groups were solidly positive in most of the countries, even though such groups themselves were not always that strong. On balance, the evidence shows at least some signs of potential strength for a parliamentary PRSP role in this context.

## C) PRSP Policy Measures and Parliaments

In the starting years of PRSP work, Parliaments in general played limited roles in shaping policy directions and priorities. But the dynamics of ongoing political change can influence such realities, and there is some evidence of this happening in several of the countries examined by this review. Tanzania provides a great example with the successful expansion of basic primary education and important increase in enrolment rates in which MP's played a significant role by making education a priority and by mobilizing efforts in their constituencies. In order to build such a policy focus, as was the case with Tanzania, strong committee chairs seem important as well as developing consensus-building styles that encourage committee MPs to work together to achieve results. So far PRSP oversight committees have not focused much on macroeconomics, but there is evidence that policy concerns can become important elements in parliamentary committee

work and that there is a growing interest in macroeconomic dimensions of PRSPs and an increasing capacity to relate to the policy debates involved, leading to increasing potential for macroeconomic policy focus in the future.

#### D) Gender Equality and PRSPs

The assessment revealed the poor performance in practice of the national PRSPs with respect to gender equality concerns. One surprising finding with respect to all four parliaments was that the Parliamentary Caucus of Women MPs, which might have been expected to take some leadership on gender equality in PRSPs, did not seem to focus on this concern. Despite this gap, though, there was significant evidence in three of the countries of important parliamentary leadership on PRSPs and gender equality through the work of parliamentary committees. In Ghana, Malawi and Tanzania women-led committees were for instance most successful in strongly focussing on achieving PRSP gains for women and on taking on a leadership role on gender equality and the country's PRSP.

#### E) Monitoring and Evaluation of PRSPs

An important finding with respect to monitoring and evaluation reveals that the four parliaments reviewed have accepted their responsibility to work actively on this dimension of the PRSP process, and were pressing ahead to do so effectively. Among the actions identified by the different parliaments to ensure efficient monitoring and evaluation as well as better results of PRSP's are community-based hearings on the PRSP, the establishment of an independent "observatoire", working closely with ministries and developing a detailed PRSP monitoring framework for the country. Overall, this area is emerging as an element of strength for parliaments in the four countries examined.

Certainly one conclusion is that assessment of PRSPs so far must come to terms with the evidence that performance failures are widespread. However, findings from this review suggest that Parliaments can play a central role in helping correct PRSP performance:

- These four parliaments show their greatest potential strength to contribute with respect to PRSP monitoring, particularly in cases (such as Niger, Malawi and Tanzania)

where positive relations have been built between the parliaments and community civil society groups;

- The findings of this appraisal suggest that what is needed in the present context is leadership by women MPs on key committees that can insert themselves effectively in the PRSP oversight framework; increasing the number of women MPs in Parliaments is a first needed step toward this goal
- Parliaments are also showing some strength in picking up on key issues and pushing them ahead with extra determination and attention (as with education in Tanzania, and mainstreaming of HIV/AIDS action in Malawi).

On balance, the evidence of this review conveys two major areas of parliamentary weakness that have emerged. The first common problem is the lack of budget and financial control on the part of parliament. The second large challenge is building closer linkages between Parliaments and the poor. But the first of these challenges is one on which training, sharing lessons and working jointly may help. Certainly this area of budget work deserves to be a central focus for strengthening PRSP oversight committees. With the weaknesses of these Parliaments reduced regarding the budget cycle process, the potential to contribute to better PRSP performance will be even more significant in the future.

# 1. Background and Introduction

Rasheed Draman and Steven Langdon<sup>1</sup>

**PRSPs represent** the last-born in a long line of development efforts to reduce poverty in Africa. Nearly all previous instruments and processes have failed to achieve significant reductions. The PRSP approach differs perhaps in that it recognizes these previous failures and implies a modification of the processes undertaken. Though developed, and recognized so, as another generation of conditionalities for IFI debt relief and financial supports, the guiding principles of the PRSP include not only that they be country-led initiatives but also that they be developed in a participatory manner.

PRSPs are still too young to determine what long-term impact they may have. However, studies show that in some countries, the process has already had some impact on the way things work. According to a series of case studies commissioned by the Strategic Partnership with Africa in 2002, PRSPs have mainstreamed and broadened national poverty reduction efforts by shifting responsibility for countries' poverty policy to Ministries of Finance, thus upgrading poverty policy, and linking poverty reduction to discussions about budget priorities and the medium-term allocation of resources. Through the emphasis on consultative development processes, PRSPs have also opened new spaces for domestic policy dialogue on poverty, and NGOs and civil society organisations have mobilised to engage with the national policy processes.<sup>2</sup>

However, complementary reforms are clearly essential, especially in the area of public governance, if long-term sustained reductions in poverty levels are to result, based on significant economic policy reforms. The improved policy dialogue has tended to by-pass parliamentary institutions and procedures that are crucial to assuring that economic policy performance truly changes, based on:

- stronger budget implementation
- continuing political participation by the poor, and
- meaningful oversight monitoring.

A study undertaken by GTZ on the role of Parliaments in PRSPs in sub-Saharan Africa<sup>3</sup> has concluded that their involvement so far, when it has existed, has been limited mostly to minimal parliamentary debate, and the participation of individual parliamentarians in consultation sessions, without full institutional involvement.

The Parliamentary Centre, through its various programs in Africa, has been striving to strengthen parliamentary capacity to properly perform an oversight role, particularly as it relates to pro-poor spending. Currently, the Centre, through its Africa-Canada Parliamentary Strengthening Program (ACPSP), has set up an African Parliamentary Network on Poverty Reduction that brings together key Parliamentary Committees whose mandate falls within the overall rubric of poverty reduction oversight. The network, now involving 16 countries, aims to strengthen the accountability links between the Executive and the Legislature with the goal of making poverty reduction an operational objective, not just a rhetorical platitude.

In support of this network-building effort, a Centre research team, funded by GTZ, recently completed a rapid appraisal review of PRSPs and Parliaments in four African countries, examining the parliamentary role in: monitoring and evaluation, representation of the poor (including dissemination of information and creating understanding), and economic policy-making. Conducted from December 2003 to February 2004, the review was meant to identify strengths and weaknesses of parliamentary PRSP engagement so far, to provide a baseline against which to monitor results from parliamentary poverty reduction work in future years, to suggest priority areas for such future work, and to consider how PRSPs are actually working on the ground in the four countries (Ghana, Malawi, Niger and Tanzania).<sup>4</sup>

This study draws together the results of this research. The

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1) This paper is presented on behalf of the Parliamentary Centre Poverty Research Team: Rasheed Draman (Coordinator, Poverty Network); Steven Langdon (Director, Africa Program); Christine Ivory (Director, Asia Program); Anna Miller (Program Officer, Africa); Debra Violette (Program Officer, Africa); Sandra de Moura (Program Officer, Africa.)

2) David Booth, ed., *Fighting Poverty in Africa: Are PRSPs Making a Difference?* ODI: London, 2003, pp. 140-141 and 146-147.

3) GTZ, "Parliaments in Sub-Saharan Africa: actors in poverty reduction?", December 2003.

4) A broad methodology was utilized, comprising: background research and documentation; a preliminary visit to all countries to arrange committee partnerships for the review, establish civil society ties, and commission a back-ground paper from a local research/policy institution; plus a three person rapid appraisal mission to each target country, involving wide interaction with information sources and detailed discussions with the key parliamentary committee involved in the partnership. The key elements in the appraisal missions, meant to be catalysts for analysis, included a roundtable and field visits. In general, the missions led off with the roundtable involving parliamentary committee members, officials from government departments responsible for PRSPs, researchers, donors, civil society groups and other key stakeholders. In the case of Malawi and Tanzania, there were also parallel working groups to address specific issues such as the budget and PRSPs. In the case of Ghana, this roundtable was replaced by one-on-one meetings with the key stakeholders. Outreach initiatives were undertaken in each country by the PC team together with some MPs and representatives of civil society groups to interact with the representatives of the poor at the grass-roots level in order to: get a better understanding of poverty issues; evaluate the success/failure and impact of programs developed under the poverty reduction programs; interact with the poor directly and listen to their needs, concerns and proposed solutions; and facilitate exchanges and dialogue between MPs and the poor. These outreach visits focused on such key activities and issues as gender, HIV/AIDS, income-generating activities for the poor, micro-credit and education. (ctd.)



## 1. Background and Introduction

next section presents the analytical framework within which the work was undertaken. Then there is discussion of the overall PRSP performance in the four countries. This is followed by comparative analysis of the different cases, designed to identify key insights regarding parliamentary strengths and weaknesses in the PRSP context. Working conclusions drawn from the research and analysis are then summarized. An appendix presents detailed separate reports on the findings from each of the four countries.

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<sup>4</sup> ctd): Women, elders, youths and others contributed to the discussions. Thus, various actors involved in poverty reduction were invited to participate to ensure objectivity and to gather different perceptions on the issue of poverty reduction as well as to stimulate the debate. Research institutions and consultants in each of the four countries prepared background papers detailing the state of PRSP progress in each country so as to assist the roundtable and provide an external point of view. This step also aimed to strengthen advisory channels between poverty committees and policy institutes since the institutions in question presented their findings at the workshop to members of parliament.

## 2. Analytical Framework

The Parliamentary Centre and the parliamentary committees and other institutions with which it has been working in recent years have been developing the elements of a broad analytical framework for the consideration of PRSPs. The main elements in the framework include the following:

■ **Identification of the Linked Components of the**

**PRSP Process:** Workshops with Parliamentary committees in Ghana, Ethiopia, Cambodia and Eastern Europe have focused on distinguishing the separate elements in the process, of which five have been identified: poverty diagnosis and analysis; poverty policy priority decisions; the budget cycle process; policy implementation and service delivery; and monitoring/evaluation of results - linked together as in this diagram:<sup>5</sup>

■ **Embedding the PRSP Process in the National Political Economy:**

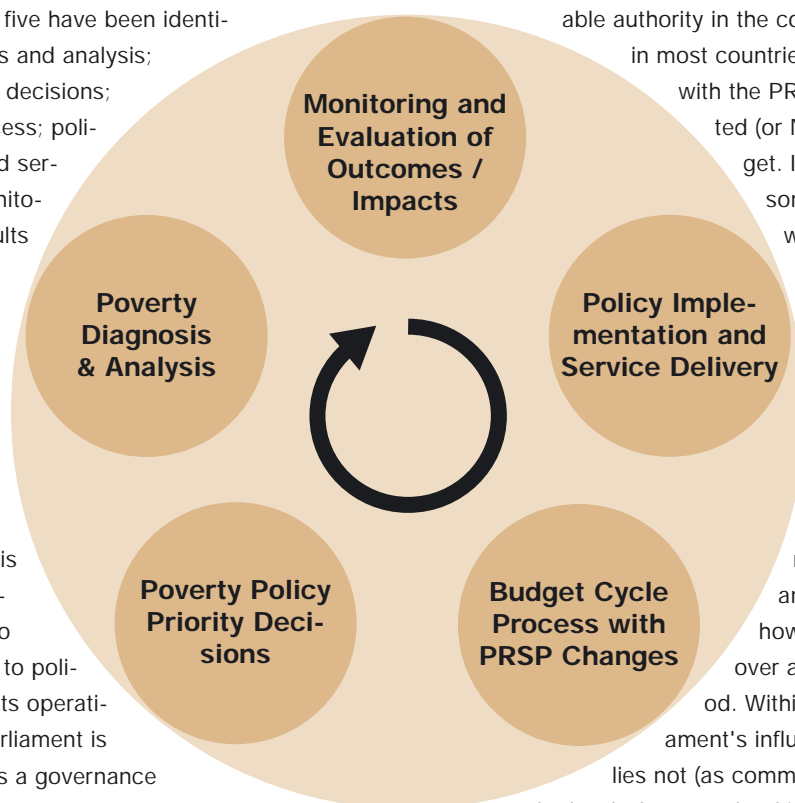
In turn it is crucial in understanding how this poverty reduction process moves forward to connect these stages to political economy elements operative in each society. Parliament is seen in this context as a governance institution separate from and interacting with the government (the executive,) with particular responsibilities in the PRSP process (a) for interacting with civil society and the poor regarding the poverty diagnosis, (b) for direct involvement in the budget cycle to see that poverty policy decisions are reflected in appropriate macroeconomic budget strategies and spending and revenue details, and (c) for crucial oversight of the whole PRSP process, especially to assure effective implementation and solid ongoing monitoring of results. The Parliamentary Centre's ongoing training work in partnership with the Institute for Policy Alternatives in Northern Ghana is based on the notion that this important monitoring role of Parliament can only be

undertaken effectively in conjunction with community-based civil society groups at the local level.<sup>6</sup>

■ **The Budget Cycle Process and PRSPs:** Much work in dealing with PRSPs has concentrated on the Budget Cycle process, that set of interlinked steps that take place each year in the development of budget ideas, their translation into particular expenditure and revenue details, implementation of these details in actual allocations and taxation levies, and monitoring of results. Parliament has considerable authority in the context of the budget cycle

in most countries, and connects directly with the PRSP process as it is reflected (or NOT reflected) in the budget. In recent years (and to some degree in conjunction with PRSPs) the budget cycle process has come to be placed in some countries in a 3-5 year perspective, rather than a single year, via introduction of Medium Term Expenditure Frameworks that permit more deliberate identification of policy and budget priorities and how these will be achieved over a more realistic time period. Within such a framework, parliament's influence on the cycle usually lies not (as commonly thought) mainly at

the level of approvals of individual expenditure and revenue items - since these are subject to longer-term policy commitments being played out over the medium term, and there are often constraints on how freely Parliament can change expenditure levels. Rather, the influence of parliament is likely to be greatest at the planning stage, in interaction with the executive and the public service, and at the monitoring stage where a somewhat independent governance institution is needed to honestly assess



5) The diagram and its components are outlined more fully in World Bank Institute and Parliamentary Centre, Handbook for Parliamentarians on Policies to Reduce Poverty, (Washington and Ottawa, 2002,) pp. 6-7

6) The PRSP community monitoring training led by IPA relies on techniques of "Community Score Cards" and "Citizen Report Cards" that have been summarized in a CD, "We the People" - Training Programme on Community Monitoring of Poverty Reduction, Institute for Policy Alternatives, Tamale, Ghana, 2004.

results that are appearing on the ground. The parliamentary input at the policy analysis and review stage could have particular significance with respect to the macro-economic policies being pursued by the government, and that is why the Poverty Network's interaction with the MIMAP Network (dealing with macro-economic policy and its micro level effects) is potentially so important.<sup>7</sup> This budget cycle framework also points again to the crucial role of monitoring for Parliament, underlining again why the community-based monitoring thrust of the Poverty Reduction Network is stressed. The Africa Development Bank is one of a number of sources that has emphasized that this is crucial: "Parliament should be proactive, working with civil society on how to monitor and watchdog PRSP commitments to see that they are met."<sup>8</sup>

■ **Treatment of Gender:** This is an area where the Centre has also done work with Parliaments, including workshops on gender budget concepts. It must be acknowledged that women in Africa comprise a high proportion of those who are poor, and separate social and economic factors affecting them deserve special analytical attention. In many areas in Africa, women experience such constraints as: lack of ownership and control over pivotal economic resources such as land; poor local infrastructure resulting in much time spent in search of water and firewood; lack of access to credit facilities; inheritance laws which treat women as property inherited by the deceased spouse's relatives; laws which prevent women from inheriting the family's property; discrimination against the girl child in terms of access to education; poor representation in decision-making positions and in Parliament; family responsibilities performed without payment (care for HIV/AIDS patients and orphans); women's health compromised by childbirth; and displacement resulting from security problems. Given these gender-related sources of poverty among women, it is crucial to track carefully the budget allocations to ministries/organizations involved in programs designed to address gender issues, and the results of these allocations.

Flowing from this analytical framework, there were specific questions underlined during the appraisal research, reflecting the different components in the PRSP process, the key ways that Parliament connects to that process in a broad political economy perspective, the complex dynamics of the budget

cycle process (often seen in MTEF terms,) and the importance of gender equality considerations in understanding poverty in Africa:

- What role does parliament play in connecting the poor to the PRSP process?
- How does parliament relate to civil society in the PRSP process?
- What policy issues do parliaments influence effectively in the PRSP process?
- What role does parliament play regarding gender equality and PRSP?
- How do parliaments handle budgets in relation to PRSPs?
- What is parliament's role with respect to monitoring and evaluation of the PRSP?

7) The MIMAP network is supported by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and includes economic research components in Benin, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mali, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal. This network has instituted a partnership with the Poverty Reduction Network; the first joint activity was a workshop in Dakar in February, 2004, bringing together 29 MPs from 14 countries with 13 of the MIMAP researchers from their 8 countries. For commentary on this meeting, see '2004: Atelier de renforcement parlementaire sur la réduction de la pauvreté', IDRC Website ([http://network.idrc.ca/ev.php?ID=55844\\_201&ID2=DO\\_TOPIC](http://network.idrc.ca/ev.php?ID=55844_201&ID2=DO_TOPIC)) - this provides media accounts of the workshop from nine sources in Senegal, Benin and Ivory Coast.

8) Quoted in Handbook for Parliamentarians on Policies to Reduce Poverty, p. 40.

### 3. The Early Challenges in PRSP Performance

**Various fundamental** concerns have been raised in these early years of institutionalization of PRSP strategies throughout poorer countries. One key level of debate has concentrated on whether there has been enough attention to accelerating growth as part of the poverty reduction emphasis. Another perspective has expressed serious concern that redistribution of key assets, such as land, has not been analyzed as a potentially crucial requirement in seriously tackling poverty. Other critics of the PRSP process have stressed the inability to develop authentic participation by the poor.

This four-country appraisal review highlights a different concern: significant performance weaknesses so far in the implementation of national PRSPs.

These four countries are quite different cases. Tanzania has had a very positive growth record for some years, and a growing mineral sector providing new structural changes and investment in the economy. Malawi has experienced major food production problems, falling incomes and certain important internal political conflicts. Niger is one of the poorest countries in the world, and is hard-pressed to identify new growth opportunities of any kind (yet does benefit from the macro-economic stability associated with membership in the CFA-monetary zone.) Ghana has experienced higher levels of currency instability, yet has gained from recent increases in cocoa and gold prices and from high levels of earnings remission from abroad.

Despite these differences, the PRSPs for the four countries are quite similar. All stress that pro-poor spending is to be increased significantly; all emphasize macro-economic stabilization goals; all are committed to significant reductions in proportions of people in poverty within quite a short timeframe; all identify rural development priorities as very important in achieving these goals; and all say they attach major importance to gender concerns in their various plans.

Yet what is the reality? In all four countries, it would appear (in these early years, at least) that national PRSPs are in serious trouble. The divergence is large between what poverty plans said should be done and what has actually been happening. The four country review found serious emerging challenges for the PRSP process in all four countries.

■ PRSP pro-poor spending is generally not performing as projected because of budgetary implementation weaknesses. In Tanzania, for instance, the budget envelopes in many poverty-related ministries are much under-utilized because of cash constraints that emerge throughout each year, and available cash is often allocated subject to short-term political pressures rather than PRSP priorities and plans. In Malawi, a similar cash-budget allocation system means spending has not taken place in various key areas (such as mainstreaming HIV/AIDS policy measures throughout all ministries,) but has gone to finance initiatives of the President's Office (such as communications and publicity initiatives.) In Ghana, budget spending is far more concentrated on staff salaries and benefits than was planned, leading to under-expenditures in important pro-poor spending areas such as health services, especially in poor regions in the north of the country.<sup>9</sup> The goal of moving toward operational MTEF budgets has also not yet been achieved. Tanzania and Malawi continue to operate on cash-based systems that cannot seriously offer three-year projections of spending; and Ghana has seen earlier moves toward MTEF stall. Niger is building its capacity to implement MTEF budgets, but has had to delay any clear steps toward such an introduction.<sup>10</sup>

■ To a significant degree there is also a failure in budget-management to integrate HIPC resources into pro-poor spending frameworks consistent with PRSP plans. It is especially ironic to find such weaknesses, since PRSPs are supposed to be crucial elements in achieving HIPC eligibility and then proceeding through the required period successfully to the completion point, at which full-scale HIPC access is achieved. However, as research shows in Malawi, HIPC resources in that country are allocated by the cabinet under their own authority, and have been used to divert funds to non-priority areas while there have been decreases in promised pro-poor PRSP spending, in areas such as rural water supplies and feeder roads.<sup>11</sup> In Niger, the Special

9) Details are provided in Yongmei Zhou, "Review of Budget Performance: A Few Questions to Ask", Pre-Budget Video-Conference for Ghana Parliamentary Oversight Committees, Presented by World Bank Institute and Parliamentary Centre, Accra, Oct. 2003. In the first half of 2003, for instance, ministries such as education that concentrated close to 100% of their spending on salaries spent 54% of their budget allocation, while the Health Ministry had spent only 33% of its appropriation. (p. 6)

10) See Niger: PRSP Annual Progress Report, Government of Niger, December, 2003, p. 33.

11) See "Pre-Budget Report, 2003/04" Budget and Finance Committee of Parliament, Malawi National Assembly, Lilongwe, July, 2003, pp. 15, 18; "Report on the 2003/04 Budget", Budget and Finance Committee of Parliament, Malawi National Assembly, Lilongwe, July 14, 2003, pp. 7-8; Perks Ligoya, "The PRSP Process in Malawi: Reflection of Poverty Reducing Strategies in Malawi's National Budget", Economic Association of Malawi, Lilongwe, January 2004, pp. 23-29

### 3. The Early Challenges in PRSP Performance:

Program of the President also operates outside the PRSP framework to allocate HIPC resources, and is seen to be shaped by short-term political interests. Ghana has seen HIPC allocations become a point of particularly angry political conflict, as allocations are made outside the budget framework, have been distributed counter to the Ghana PRSP strategy of concentrating pro-poor spending in the much poorer northern regions, and is seen by HIPC Watch (that is doing civil society monitoring of allocations) to be significantly subject to political manipulation. Only in Tanzania has HIPC funding been incorporated into the regular budget framework for straightforward consideration in the context of all government spending.

■ A third major concern is that it has taken much time to develop effective monitoring systems for PRSP activity. In Malawi, the IMF and World Bank reported late in 2003, "a workable monitoring framework was not established in time for the first review."<sup>12</sup> Tanzania has also recognized its failures in monitoring, noting in November 2003 that "in relation to monitoring progress towards achieving the poverty reduction goals major shortcomings have been identified in sectoral data collection systems."<sup>13</sup> Tanzania and Malawi are only now developing organizational frameworks for monitoring, 2-4 years after the start of PRSPs in each country. In Ghana, the only serious monitoring seems to be going on under the auspices of a civil society group, SEND (Social Enterprise Development Foundation of West Africa,) that is running HIPC Watch. In Niger, too, monitoring gaps have led analysts to call for the establishment of a full-scale "observatoire" for tracking PRSP results. There has also been serious criticism from the International Financial Institutions of Niger's delays in developing PRSP monitoring procedures.<sup>14</sup>

■ A fourth reality is that gender equality considerations seem to be massively underemphasized in these PRSP processes so far. This has been noted as a key problem in the case of the Niger PRSP, despite much discussion in the document itself: "La SRP n'a pas encore opérationnalisée de manière effective les préoccupations liées au Genre."<sup>15</sup> The World Bank-IMF Joint Staff Assessment of the Ghana PRSP in March, 2003, also identifies problems in how gender is handled - with no specific measures targeted to reduce gender disparities.<sup>16</sup> The outreach sessions with

civil society groups, too, found serious gaps on the ground so far as the involvement of women's groups with PRSP processes in Tanzania and Malawi. In Tanzania, local women's groups reported virtually no gender equity activity on the ground in the Mtwara region. In Malawi, women community activists were the lead speakers in the session in Mchinji, and attacked how TIP agricultural input packages were given to top officials rather than the local farmers who needed them most; they also stressed poor services at local hospitals, "pathetic" roads, missing books and supplies for local schools, and the government's decision (under IMF pressure) to privatize the Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation functions that the women felt served their social needs.

Overall, then, the evidence from these four countries raises serious questions about the record so far of PRSPs as poverty reduction strategies. The evidence seems strong in most countries that knowledge of PRSPs among the poor is absent (commentary in Niger, Ghana and Tanzania pointed to major knowledge gaps amongst poor people's groups.) Evaluations of PRSP results in most cases also point to continuing difficulty actually to make a difference for the poor on the ground. There is much discussion now in Tanzania of this difficulty in tackling poverty outside the main urban areas, despite high economic growth rates in Dar Es Salaam.<sup>17</sup> In several cases, too, the IMF and World Bank have suspended expected financial supports for a period despite the PRSP (Ghana and Malawi,) and this had disrupted economic policy plans significantly, hurting the poor. There were also strong echoes of discontent over continuing neglect on the part of poor people's groups met in both Mchinji, Malawi and Accra, Ghana.

12) See IMF and IDA, Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper - Progress Report: Joint Staff Assessment, October 3, 2003, p. 6.

13) Vice President's Office, Guide for the Poverty Reduction Strategy Review, United Republic of Tanzania, November 2003, p. 8.

14) See Niger: Staff Assessment of PRSP Annual Progress Report, IMF and IDA, December, 2003.

15) Cabinet National d'Expertise en Sciences Sociales (CNESS-Bozari.) Bilan Diagnostique de la mise en œuvre de la SRP ... au Niger, Niamey, Janvier 2004, p. 27.

16) Mohammed Abdul Nashiru and Issifu Lampo, The Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy: Implementation Challenges, Achievements and Prospects for Long-term Sustainability, Institute for Policy Alternatives (Ghana), Accra, Jan. 2004, pp. 12-13. See also "Women Look at GPRS with Gender Lenses", HIPC Watch, Vol. 2, No. 5, Apr.-June, 2003, pp. 1, 5. This workshop of northern women in Bolgatanga cited low levels of consultation with women in the GPRS, said very few women would benefit from PRSP food crop policies, and called for reforms to increase access of women to agricultural land.

17) See Guide for the Poverty Reduction Strategy Review, Tanzania, Vice President's Office, November, 2003, pp. 4-8. For an early example of this theme see Research and Analysis Working Group, Poverty and Human Development Report, 2002, United Republic of Tanzania, Dar Es Salaam, 2002, pp. 11, 67-69.

## 4. Analysis of Parliamentary PRSP Strengths and Weaknesses

**To what degree** can Parliaments and Parliamentary Committees contribute to redressing certain of these emerging weaknesses in the PRSP record? That is the fundamental question that the African Parliamentary Poverty Reduction Network is facing. This section examines the findings from the four countries reviewed to better analyse this question, and begin to identify possible roles that parliaments can play to improve PRSP performance.

### A) CONNECTING THE POOR AND RELATING TO CIVIL SOCIETY

At the heart of the new approach to poverty reduction policy that the PRSP represents is the commitment to engage more fully with those who actually are poor; this emphasis on participation and the poor includes drawing community civil society organizations more fully into poverty policy analysis, implementation and monitoring. What contribution are parliaments making so far to achieving this change in governance?

Concerns certainly do emerge regarding parliamentary links with the poor in most of the countries involved in this review. In Niger, for instance, observers see the engagement of the poor with parliamentarians as quite limited. While in Malawi, encounters with representatives of poor people in Mchinji sparked extensive comments, critiques and suggestions to MPs, in Niger the communication was very much the other direction during the field visits, with the discussion mostly involving MPs and workshop participants asking questions and receiving answers but never the other way around. "It would have been interesting to hear the concerns and questions that villagers might have had for their elected officials," field notes reported, "but the opportunity was never given." In Ghana, discussions with poor fishmongers and head porters ("kayaye" from the north) revealed a strong sense of alienation from parliament, which some of the poor contrasted with relations in the past when their local MPs had been more responsive to needs they expressed. Tanzania represented a mixed picture, where certain activist constituency MPs discussed their close interaction with their people to help get them mobilized for local development efforts - but the relationship of MPs on the ground with poor women in Mtwara seemed less interactive.

In several countries, it was clear there was a difference in relations Parliament had with community civil society groups

as compared with poor people themselves. Malawi's Budget and Finance Committee, for example, has developed a good, close relationship with such groups as the Malawi Economic Justice Network, in which MEJN is drawn in to testify often to the committee and informal communication seems excellent. This is in contrast to the relationship which SEND, quite a similar activist civil society group, also doing community-based monitoring, has with the key oversight committees in the Ghana Parliament; despite many efforts on their part, SEND has never been able to access hearings that it wished to have with committees such as Finance or Gender and Children. In Niger, civil society groups seem weaker than in Malawi and Ghana, but their views of and relations with parliament seem quite positive. In Tanzania, too, community civil society groups seemed somewhat weak, at least outside Dar Es Salaam, but the relations of those that were active (such as the Society for Women and AIDS in Mtwara) seemed quite good with the Parliamentary Committee involved.

On balance, then, the evidence seems to show some signs of potential strength for a parliamentary PRSP role in this context. Direct parliamentary outreach to and interaction with the poor was certainly not vibrant (and there were sometimes signs of alienation and antagonism). But parliamentary relations with community-based civil society groups were solidly positive in most of the countries, even though such groups themselves were not always that strong. Only Ghana seemed to demonstrate more negative relations between parliamentary committees and civil society groups with respect to PRSPs.

In terms of improving PRSP performance, this relative parliamentary strength could be quite important. It could provide the basis for an active monitoring role for parliamentary committees in conjunction with civil society partners. It could give MPs and their committees more ability to develop insights into policy measures that could better overcome the persistence of rural poverty, based on the roots that community civil society groups have to understand their local areas and their needs. And it could help with implementation constraints, in the way that local civil society groups in Uganda, for instance, have been able to implement tracking surveys on various service expenditure flows that make sure money actually reaches the poor and improves delivery for them.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> See Handbook for Parliamentarians on Policies to Reduce Poverty, p. 43.2002, pp. 11, 67-69.

##### B) PRSP POLICY MEASURES AND PARLIAMENTS

In the starting years of PRSP work, Parliaments in general played limited roles in shaping policy directions and priorities. But the dynamics of ongoing political change can influence such realities, and there is some evidence of this happening in several of the countries examined by this review.

Tanzania is perhaps the most dramatic example of the four. During discussions with MPs in Mtwara, there were constant references to education as the most fundamental element in overcoming poverty, and MPs agreed strongly that this was the area where they had had their greatest positive policy impact. Expansion of basic primary education in Tanzania has been particularly dramatic, driven by the elimination of school fees as part of the PRSP; the Net Enrolment Rate of children aged 7 to 13 was 58.5% in 2000, rose to 65.5% in 2001, and then again to 85% in 2002 - combined with recruitment of some 7300 new primary teachers, and building of almost 13,000 new classrooms. This success story reflected MP mobilization efforts in their constituencies; the budget was 3 billion shs. to construct classrooms, but people needed only 1.7 billion because of this mobilization.

Malawi is another case where a focus on particular policy measures has emerged, in this instance the issue of "mainstreaming" action on HIV/AIDS in all ministries and agencies. With one of the highest incidence levels for HIV/AIDS in Africa (estimated in 2001 at 15% of the age group 15-49,) the Malawi PRSP called for a budget line item in all ministries "for workplace programmes and other HIV related interventions",<sup>19</sup> Parliament has taken up this policy area as one on which to place high emphasis, with continuing commentary about failures in government implementation in reports from the Budget and Finance Committee; "it is disappointing", the Committee said in its report on the most recent Malawi budget, that 17 ministries and agencies have not made provision for such HIV-related spending, and called for budget revisions to correct this.<sup>20</sup> The Health Committee of Parliament met with the Minister of Health specifically on this HIV mainstreaming issue, and was able to push successfully for use of those funds that had been allocated, but not utilized by ministries.

In neither Ghana nor Niger has Parliament carved out a similar policy focus. In both countries, the emphasis of parliamentary committee work has been much more on implementation

oversight and financial monitoring. A special poverty reduction committee has been established in both cases. In Niger, this committee has included members from all parties in the National Assembly, and has been doing outreach as an important part of its role - both electronic outreach by radio to communicate key elements of the PRSP to people across the country, and physical outreach in the form of visits to different regions to examine what is happening on the ground and educate people on PRSP plans. In Ghana, the committee has included chairs of key oversight committees and has aimed to interconnect these MPs to achieve more effective coordination on poverty issues. These recent, rather ad hoc origins for the two committees may help explain why neither has developed a strong policy focus, concentrating instead on process questions of participation and oversight.

Nevertheless, the Malawi and Tanzania examples do illustrate that parliamentary committees and parliaments can develop strength in terms of policy leverage and leadership. Strong committee chairs seem important in building such policy focus; both the chair of the Environment and Poverty Reduction Committee in Tanzania (Anne Makinda) and the chair of the Budget and Finance Committee in Malawi (Louis Chimanogo) are long-time MPs and former Ministers with significant leadership roles in their respective parties. They have also been able to develop consensus-building styles that encourage committee MPs to work together to achieve results. (In fact, through her leadership, Makinda has been able to mobilize the leadership of Parliament - the Chairs of all Standing Committees, to form a 'coalition' that will represent Parliament on the Steering Committee of PRSP in Tanzania).

The implications of this policy leverage role are considerable in analyzing economic policy issues within PRSPs. So far PRSP oversight committees have not focused much on macroeconomics, or the priority to be attached to economic growth in PRSP strategies. But the Tanzania and Malawi evidence shows that policy concerns can become important elements in parliamentary committee work. Moreover, the enthusiastic response of oversight committee leaders to the Dakar MIMAP workshop in February, 2004, suggests that there is a growing interest in macroeconomic dimensions of PRSPs and an increasing capacity to relate to the policy debates invol-

<sup>19</sup> Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, Final Draft, Government of Malawi, April 2002, pp. 86-8.

<sup>20</sup> Report on the 2003/04 Budget, Budget and Finance Committee, Malawi National Assembly, July 14, 2003, pp. 10-11.

ved, leading to increasing potential for macro-economic policy focus in the future. The chairs of key committees from the four countries were among 29 MPs at the workshop from 14 states.

### C) GENDER EQUALITY AND PRSPS

One of the most surprising and disturbing of the findings of the rapid appraisal review was the poor performance in practice of the national PRSPs with respect to gender equality concerns. Given the high emphasis on this consideration from the International Financial Institutions, and the reflection of this in the texts of all four country PRSPs, more attention and action in practice were expected.

What evidence emerged from the appraisal review about the contribution of Parliaments to overcoming this poor performance? This was a key area of concern in the appraisal and several insights did emerge.

One surprising finding with respect to all four parliaments was that the Parliamentary Caucus of Women MPs, which might have been expected to take some leadership on gender equality in PRSPs, did not seem to focus on this concern. In Ghana, this reflects the failure of the caucus to reconstitute itself after the 2000 elections, because of party conflicts over how to share the official positions in the grouping. In Niger, there is presently just one woman MP (in the 83 member National Assembly) and so no women's caucus or grouping exists. Both Malawi and Tanzania, however, have active women's caucuses. But the Caucus in Malawi is reported to play no role whatever in PRSP work. Tanzanian women MPs reported in Mtwara that the same situation existed in that country - there is an active Women's Parliamentary Caucus, and it does do work outside of Parliament; but it plays no role regarding the PRSP.

Despite this gap, though, there was significant evidence in three of the countries of important parliamentary leadership on PRSPs and gender equality. This came through the work of key parliamentary committees that deal with PRSPs:

■ In Tanzania, the key PRSP oversight committee (on Environment and Poverty Reduction) is led by a senior woman MP and former minister, Anna Makinda, and this committee has put notable focus on a key concern for women MPs in

dealing with PRSPs; the Tanzanian parliament elects most of its women MPs via "special seats" that are reserved for women, and these MPs have no obvious entry point to be able to influence PRSPs, since the main effective channel now is through District officials and councils at the constituency level (and these "special" MPs do not represent specific geographic constituencies;) this oversight committee is working hard for key changes in this situation, so there are local-level outlets of the Vice-President's Office through which all MPs can work - committee members describe this as especially important "since poverty is so rampant for female-headed households." (In fact, at a recent workshop - May 19, 2004 - in Dar es Salaam, Manakinda and her colleagues strongly recommended that "MPs need to participate fully in all committees of the District Councils, in particular Special Seats. Special Seat MPs who are currently barred by local law not to participate in such committees, especially in the finance committees of councils, must be allowed to do so".)

■ In Ghana, the Committee on Gender and Children (with chair Angelina Baiden-Amisshah and vice-chair Cecilia Amoah) has emerged as one of the most active PRSP oversight committees, with a strong focus on achieving PRSP gains for women (especially in the area of micro-finance development loans), and an active program of outreach to local communities throughout the country; the committee has been particularly active in the north, where poverty is greatest in Ghana, and the committee has been the Ghana parliamentary committee taking part in the community-based training in monitoring for leading committee MPs and parliamentary staff. This committee was also represented at the Gender Equality Network regional workshop on micro-credit in Mali in March, 2004 - reflecting the fact that the Ghana PRSP did emphasize micro-finance for women as its main policy step regarding women's economic empowerment. The committee is launching a pilot project on community-based monitoring of PRSP results in Ghana with support from the Poverty Reduction Network.

■ In Malawi, too, a woman-led committee, the parliamentary Committee on Social Welfare, is taking on a leadership role on gender equality and the country's PRSP. It has launched a study to apply gender budget principles in Malawi and try to probe seriously the extent to which women are sharing equitably in the budget outcomes associated with Malawi's PRSP. The Chair of this committee (Ms. Trifonia



#### 4. Analysis of Parliamentary PRSP Strengths and Weaknesses

Dafter, MP) has maintained good liaison with the main PRSP oversight committee in Malawi, the Budget and Finance Committee.

Overall, then, the evidence shows parliaments that are quite active on gender equality, in the face of limited PRSP performance. It seems particularly striking that all three of the parliamentary committees clearly taking leadership are led by women MPs (and also include other activist, articulate women amongst their memberships). On one level, this helps make the case that increased numbers of women MPs in Parliament are important, because it shows how female leadership of committees can in turn be associated with emphasis on broader gender equity concerns in society. At the same time, this key role played by women-led committees could also suggest that gender equity commitments have not yet spread fully to male MPs (even though male MPs working with these leading women MPs on PRSPs do seem in many cases to share gender equality views).

It should be stressed that the activism evident from these three significant committees has not yet led to broad-based improvement in PRSP performance on gender in the countries involved. But the potential for spurring better implementation via parliamentary pressure is clearly growing in these cases.

#### D) THE BUDGET CYCLE PROCESS AND PARLIAMENT

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.

The evidence on the ground in the countries examined, however, suggests that PRSPs adopted are not well-reflected in budgets formulated, budgets are themselves not solid indica-

tors of actions that are implemented, and results are themselves not being effectively monitored. Thus the performance of PRSPs seems in most cases to be flawed and ineffective.

What are Parliaments doing to respond to these budget cycle problems? This is an area where assessment is especially complex, because a complicated set of factors has been at work, as the analysis in section 3 suggested - ranging from financial sanctions applied by the IMF and World Bank in several countries, external shocks that have affected regions (such as drought in Malawi), cash-based budget systems that are subject to arbitrary inflows and outflows of funds to the Treasury, and politically motivated allocations of HIPC resources that were not anticipated in original PRSP planning.

Overall, these four parliaments all show awareness of how central budget action is in shaping PRSP results, and efforts to relate effectively to the budget cycle process are widely evident. The Malawi Budget and Finance Committee is particularly active in this respect. Outside analysts point to a strong core of 5-6 MPs on the committee who work well together and have achieved positive results for the committee on budget work; the committee has drawn in effective civil society allies such as the Malawi Economic Justice Network, the Institute for Policy Research and Dialogue and the Economics Association of Malawi (ECAMA); it has also arranged external technical support for its work from the US National Democratic Institute (NDI), funded by British DFID, USAID and DANIDA. The committee's activism has been reflected in publication of Pre-Budget Reports that analyse the links between the PRSP and the budget, provide recommendations on specific Ministries and their spending, and set out ways in which budget procedures and reporting should be improved. The committee has also held hearings with civil society groups on key issues, issued commentaries on budgets and their gaps when these are announced, and participated in Annual Reviews of how well the PRSP is doing. Committee meetings with the Finance Minister in the context of the latest Malawi budget led to increases in pro-poor spending to more closely approach PRSP projections.

The Tanzania Poverty Reduction Committee has also demonstrated good knowledge of the budget cycle process in that country, and the frustrations created by cash-based systems for any serious budget planning and implementation. During

the review of PRSP work undertaken with the committee, there was much focus on the need to improve the role of parliament in the budget cycle process as part of achieving better PRSP performance in the country. The Ghana Finance Committee, too, has developed a strong sense over recent years of the key role it should play in the budget cycle process, has worked to develop information resource people it could call on to improve its impact on budget work (via a Parliamentary Centre project to strengthen the Finance and Public Accounts Committees, funded by CIDA and the World Bank Institute), and has been in the forefront of parliamentary concerns expressed about the way HIPC allocations in the country are made outside the budget formulation and approval process. The Poverty Reduction committee in Ghana, however, seems more disconnected from work on the budget process. As for Niger, the special committee on the PRSP there at first was also quite unconnected to Parliamentary work on the budget, but there has recently been a linkage between this committee and the Finance Committee so that the recognized need for budgetary oversight of the PRSP can be improved; a larger network on poverty reduction has been formed in the National Assembly, involving both those MPs who had been on the special Poverty Reduction Committee and on the Finance Committee.

So there is a widespread Parliamentary focus on the budget cycle process and its key linkage to the PRSP process in these four countries. But if this represents an element of strength in the PRSP role possible for Parliament, the actual practice of parliamentary budget work nevertheless seems to represent, on balance, a weakness to overcome.

This reality of weakness appears on a number of levels:

- For the most part, these four Parliaments (despite their recognition of the importance of the budget cycle process and PRSP performance) spend very little time and devote few financial resources to detailed budget scrutiny. While some African Parliaments have economic policy or budget research offices (such as Uganda and Nigeria,) that is not the case with any of these Parliaments and committees. (Currently in Tanzania, SUNY is putting together an Experts' Group made up of Economists and Accountants to provide independent advice to the Finance Committee on the National Budget and how it reflects poverty concerns). In Tanzania, MPs also stressed how short the period was in Parliament for considering the budget. Budget adoption is also

done very rapidly in Niger, with the Finance Committee undertaking post-budget consultations with civil society rather than allowing for widespread input and possible changes before votes are taken. Time limitations are a common complaint in the Ghana parliament, too, where the Finance Committee does not play the leadership role in assessing the overall budget that (for instance) the Ethiopian parliamentary budget committee plays, but instead coordinates inputs from various other ministry-related standing committees that have to develop their budget assessments based on very short periods of hearings, usually with relevant ministers and their officials, rather than more widely with a range of civil society groups. In Malawi, the Budget Committee has also stressed its concern on timing - noting "very little time was allowed" to consider the 2003 Supplementary budget, and calling for 21 days for the annual budget scrutiny and debate, a recommendation made and rejected regarding the 2002/03 budget.

- One of the most important concerns expressed on budgets throughout the rapid appraisal review involves when parliamentary input is possible in the budget cycle process. As one woman MP stressed in Tanzania, there needs to be a change in how the budget is handled, so that ideas can be discussed by Parliament to go into the budget before it is framed; that is the way, others agreed, to have influence, not through votes on budget items once they are presented. Having input before the budget is presented is also seen as a priority in Malawi; the Budget and Finance Committee, in its Pre-Budget report for 2003/04 praises the government's pre-budget consultative meetings, but also stresses these must come much earlier in the year "when they can have an impact" rather than very late in the budget calendar.<sup>21</sup> This issue of early inputs during the planning stage of the budget cycle has been a continuing focus in Ghana, too; a recent study tour of three other parliaments (Kenya, Canada and New York state in the US) by leaders of the Finance Committee concluded that achieving such earlier involvement in the cycle was crucial in Ghana to assure an effective Parliamentary role in the budget process.
- What results, therefore, in these four parliaments is limited effectiveness in impacting the budget cycle process, despite the recognition of its importance. Executive control over budget planning, formulation and implementation is virtually absolute. This is especially clear in Niger. But parliamentary

21) Pre-Budget Report, 2003/04, Budget and Finance Committee of Parliament, Malawi, p. 10.

weakness was also stressed strongly in Tanzania; one MP noted that poverty reduction allocations look fine in the budget, but money cannot be released until funds are available, and then get spent on the most pressing matters (such as salaries if these have not been paid for several months;) other MPs agreed that this reality is what leads to problems in development in Tanzania - and underlined that there is nothing MPs themselves can do to enforce meeting budget allocation targets. Even in Malawi, where the role of the Budget and Finance Committee is quite well developed, many of the recommendations of the committee continue to be ignored or rejected by the executive in ongoing budgets. Both Ghana and Malawi show the continuing control by the executive of HIPC allocations despite committee recommendations that these newly available financial resources be made subject to parliamentary approval in their usage. The Malawi committee has added that, despite its efforts, the 2003/04 budget shows that the country "may be moving backwards as far as implementation of the MPRSP is concerned ... there is need for the Government to provide an analysis of how far this year's budget has gone in implementing the MPRSP:"<sup>22</sup>

One important implication of this relative weakness that needs to be underlined is that Parliaments place very little focus in practice on macroeconomic questions in their PRSP or budget work, despite the growing interest in such areas of consideration noted in section (a) above. The Malawi Budget and Finance Committee includes a review of the macroeconomic situation in its budget reports for 2003/04, but the material is mainly descriptive, covering domestic borrowing, inflation levels, interest rates and the depreciating value of the Malawi currency; there is little analysis of the implication of the macroeconomic stabilization strategy in the 2003/04 budget for PRSP performance. Neither Tanzanian nor Ghanaian PRSP oversight parliamentary committees have focused on macroeconomic policy concerns, either. In all four countries, policy issues that more activist committees would use stronger budget roles to advance seem likely to be more at the micro level - from rural development priorities in Niger, to HIV/AIDS emphasis in Malawi, to education improvements in Ghana and Tanzania.

There is, then, a complex mix of strengths and weaknesses evident in the budget oversight roles of parliament in these four countries. MPs and their committees are engaged in bud-

get work and see how it could improve PRSP performance; but they are also aware of the weaknesses of their committees in practice, and have certainly not been able to develop the leverage to act decisively within the budget cycle process. Some MPs see ways to improve their strength, through earlier interventions in budget planning, through stronger staff support and through longer periods for scrutiny and public hearings; but achieving those improvements is a long-term challenge.

#### E) MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF PRSPS

Of all the areas of PRSP activity examined by the rapid appraisal review, the clearest conclusions emerged with respect to monitoring and evaluation. Findings were unambiguous. Overall, the four parliaments had accepted their responsibility to work actively on this dimension of the PRSP process, and were pressing ahead to do so effectively.

In all four Parliaments, key oversight committees were working to see that Parliament played a major role in the monitoring process needed for PRSP results to be achieved. This is a major move forward from the early days of first PRSP work, when Parliaments were much less assertive and largely excluded from the PRSP process; the oversight responsibility of Parliaments is now being emphasized, with demands that there be detailed involvement of key committee members in technical and implementation levels of monitoring work:

- In Niger, the monitoring emphasis was expressed in calls for the establishment of an independent "observatoire" able to report to the National Assembly. The Special Committee on Poverty Reduction has also undertaken field visits to all 8 regions to monitor directly PRSP performance in those various settings, and is planning to do further outreach examinations in the future.
- In Ghana, there has also been commitment from oversight committees to hold community-based hearings on the PRSP in poorer parts of the country. The Committee on Women and Gender has already undertaken such monitoring; sub-committees of the Public Accounts Committee have gone into the field also; and the Poverty Reduction Committee is making similar plans.
- In Malawi, the Budget and Finance Committee has worked closely with the Malawi Economic Justice Network to give them a platform to report their monitoring results, from 1080 people in 6 districts, assessing PRSP results on ser-

<sup>22</sup> Report on the 2003/04 Budget, Budget and Finance Committee of Parliament, Malawi, pp. 5-6. .

vice delivery to the poor.<sup>23</sup> It has also interacted closely with the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development to persuade Monitoring and Evaluation officials to accept that Parliament is in touch with communities, and should be represented on the Technical Working Committee of the new PRSP Monitoring Framework so as to work out which Parliamentary committees should be represented on various monitoring committees being established to supervise data collection and evaluation work being done in the country.

- In Tanzania, the Vice President's Office (VPO) is taking the leadership in developing a detailed PRSP monitoring framework for the country; and the Environment and Poverty Reduction Committee has persuaded them that there must be a prominent place for parliamentary committees in the overall framework for the country, as well as at the ministry, District and constituency level. The Committee has just completed a workshop on May 19, 2004, under the auspices of the Poverty Reduction Network, with other key parliamentary committee leaders in Tanzania to work out detailed proposals to the VPO on how best to be part of the Institutional Framework for Monitoring and Evaluation. (One of the key conclusions of the workshop, at which the VPO was represented, was a strong recommendation that all Chairs of Committees, majority of whom participated in the workshop, should be the group that will represent Parliament on the PRS Steering Committee which currently does not have any Parliamentary representation. In fact, on May 21, 2004, there was a meeting of the PRS Steering Committee and Parliament was not represented. Parliament is pushing very strongly on this, and hopes to be very soon part of Steering Committee, which is now in the middle of a Review of the PRSP. This review is supposed to be completed by October 2004 and the product will be PRSP II. If Parliament missed PRSP I, they want to be active participants in phase II, during which they hope to push forward the very important recommendation of the May 19 workshop).

Besides supporting these improved institutional arrangements for PRSP monitoring, in which Parliaments would play important roles, four oversight committees from these countries have also moved ahead energetically on community-based training for lead MPs and staff to be able to act themselves on increased monitoring of PRSP performance. Based in northern Ghana and in Benin, this training has aimed to develop

committee expertise in the use of "community score cards" and "citizen report cards" able to give participatory field assessments of service delivery and policy results in key areas identified for action in national PRSPs. The training is provided in close cooperation with community-based civil society groups close to the poor, and has so far covered six PRSP oversight committees in the Poverty Reduction Network - the Special Poverty Reduction Committee in Niger, the Environment and Poverty Reduction Committee in Tanzania, the Committee on Women and Gender in Ghana, the Budget and Finance Committee in Malawi, the Commission on the Economy and Finance in Senegal, and the Commission on Finance and Trade in Benin. Each of these committees is in turn moving ahead with a pilot project in community-based PRSP monitoring in their countries.

Overall, then, this area is emerging as an element of strength for parliaments in the four countries examined. It is true that performance has yet to match goals, in that the key parliamentary oversight committees involved are just starting to move into their activities, and national monitoring frameworks in which they hope to participate are just getting established. But in this context, there seems widespread agreement that oversight monitoring should be a key task for Parliaments; the potential is certainly there for close cooperation with civil society groups that can facilitate movement ahead; and the structural situation of parliaments, with their close ties with local communities and constituents, lends itself naturally to monitoring effectiveness.

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23) See Malawi Economic Justice Network, Results of the Service Delivery Satisfaction Survey, Lilongwe, 2003..

## 5. Conclusions

**The findings from** the rapid appraisal review provide a somewhat divided picture. The findings from the rapid appraisal review provide a somewhat divided picture. Section 3 raised serious and problematic questions about PRSP performance so far in the four countries examined. Implementation of budgets has not followed the PRSP plans made; related HIPC allocations have raised questions in most countries; gender considerations have been mostly ignored; monitoring has not been taking place effectively; and the poor do not seem to have been effectively reached. At the same time, section 4 does indicate that Parliaments are developing certain strengths in the four countries that suggest a growing potential to overcome these PRSP gaps. Key parliamentary committees demonstrate areas of growing policy engagement aimed at respecting PRSP commitments, there are some interesting signs of parliamentary leadership on gender equality, and expanding effectiveness is developing in monitoring of PRSP results, based in part on positive linkages with community civil society groups. Yet this increasing strength is combined with continuing weakness in handling the budget cycle process, and with signs of distance between parliaments and the poor.

What working conclusions can be drawn from this complex set of findings?

Certainly one conclusion is that assessment of PRSPs so far must come to terms with the evidence that performance failures are widespread. Reviewing existing PRSPs on a theoretical level and considering the logic in their economic policy approaches may be inappropriate responses to the operational failures in practice that show up in these four cases. Perhaps it is true that the economic policy approach is wrong, and that accounts for the operational difficulties. But the implementation weaknesses may be possible to counter, and the economic strategies may then show themselves to be more effective.

What about the potential role of parliaments in helping correct PRSP performance?

This review suggests careful answers must be given to that question:

- These four parliaments show their greatest potential strength to contribute with respect to PRSP monitoring, particularly in cases (such as Niger, Malawi and Tanzania)

where positive relations have been built between the parliaments and community civil society groups; there is an energy and enthusiasm evident among MPs to undertake such monitoring work, executive bodies seem open to cooperation and so do the community civil society groups, and MPs have the structural relationships within the governance system (linking constituents and the centre) that encourage such specific community-based oversight work; yet there are also strong indications that MPs and their committees will benefit very considerably from training to improve their capacity for such work (as shown by the high level of enthusiasm of MPs who have gone through the Poverty Reduction Network training on community score cards and citizen report cards in northern Ghana and Benin.)

- Three women-led parliamentary committees involved in this review also show commitment and capacity to contribute to more PRSP action on gender equity; this appears a crucial element on which to build for improving PRSP performance in a policy area of surprising weakness. But how should this building take place? The findings of this appraisal suggest that what is needed in the present context is leadership by women MPs on key committees that can insert themselves effectively in the PRSP oversight framework; increasing the number of women MPs in Parliaments is a first needed step toward this goal - since only with the increase of women MPs in Parliament which, for instance, Niger has now mandated for this year's election, will it be possible for women to capture the chair position of any key committee there; then that committee can be used to work for PRSP-related action on gender equity. Training and technical support to these women-led committees can be developed, too, to strengthen and sustain their ongoing impact (as with the CIDA support to the Social Welfare committee for gender budget work in Malawi, and the CIDA support to the Committee on Gender and Children in Ghana.) Increasing the role of women MPs on major oversight committees such as Budget and Finance in Malawi or the Finance Committee in Ghana also matters. But the evidence from this review points to particular women-led committees as the driving factors likely to make a more direct difference on PRSP gender equity work.
- Parliaments are also showing some strength in picking up on key issues and pushing them ahead with extra determination and attention (as with education in Tanzania, and mainstreaming of HIV/AIDS action in Malawi). The extra

focus on poverty reduction as a priority is in itself an example of this sort of policy-oriented activism in these four parliaments. Some parliamentarians also see their role very much in terms of building on such specific issues with their constituents and mobilizing them for greater community-based action to move the issues ahead at the local level, as some Tanzanian MPs have done with respect to constructing new schools in that country. Some Niger MPs also see their role in such terms, working to educate people at the local level on ways to take initiatives for community economic development. Sharing policy insights among key PRSP oversight committees emerges as an important priority in this context. Macroeconomic policy questions may be amongst the more complex to confront for MPs and their committees, but given their importance in shaping poverty reduction policy priorities, these seem necessary to underline in an agenda for policy discussion and learning for PRSP oversight committees.

There remain, however, two large challenges to Parliaments contributing to better PRSP performance. On balance, the evidence of this review conveys two major areas of parliamentary weakness that have emerged.

One common problem that the study identified across all the study countries is the lack of budget and financial control on the part of parliament. While this might partly be due to political manoeuvring on the part of the executive to by-pass parliament when it comes to matters of finance, this weakness is also due to the limited capacity on the part of MPs to implement detailed financial oversight with respect to the budget process. This is further worsened by lack of Parliamentary resources; as a result, MPs and their Committees do not get the necessary staff support to effectively perform their financial oversight roles.

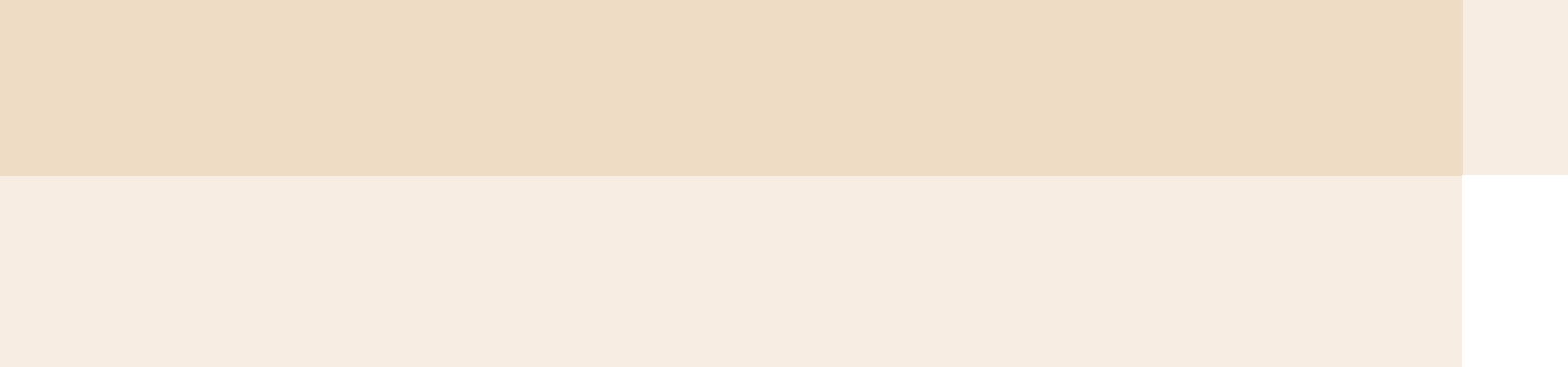
The second large challenge is building closer linkages between Parliaments and the poor. At the core of the PRSP concept is the commitment to participation by the poor. It is not a commitment that has been at all easy to operationalize in Africa, and the evidence suggests significant gaps for Parliaments, too, in reaching the poor and incorporating their voices into decision-making on PRSPs.

This second gap is a long term and major area of challenge for the whole PRSP process, and will not be solved by Parliaments alone. But the first of these challenges is one on which training, sharing lessons and working jointly may help. The Malawi Budget committee, for instance, has developed strategies in several areas from which other committees may learn. And inputs from Uganda and Kenya via the Poverty Reduction Network may provide support for injecting ideas earlier in the budget cycle process in the four countries under review.

Certainly this area of budget work deserves to be a central focus for strengthening PRSP oversight committees in the months ahead. There is need for training and capacity-building workshops on the budget process and oversight and on overall policy analysis, for members of Parliament as a group, and most importantly, for those in PRSP oversight committees.

With the weaknesses of these Parliaments reduced regarding the budget cycle process, the potential to contribute to better PRSP performance will be clear and significant in the future.

3rd. of June 2004









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Im Auftrag des BMZ



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