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AFRICAN PARLIAMENTARY POVERTY REDUCTION NETWORK

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The African Parliamentary Poverty Reduction Network brings together parliamentary committees involved in the design, implementation and oversight of poverty reduction policies. The network promotes greater cross-Africa dialogue among committees and creates opportunities for improving effective implementation of poverty reduction programs, particularly through local monitoring with community-based civil society groups.

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Reflections on Two Years of Parliamentary Networking to Reduce Poverty

By Dr. Rasheed Draman, Coordinator, African Parliamentary Poverty Reduction Network

The African Parliamentary Poverty Reduction Network was born in Tamale, northern Ghana in November 2003. Tamale was chosen as the launch ground for two reasons: to give MPs from various parts of Africa the opportunity to witness the depth and magnitude of poverty in what represents one of the impoverished regions of Ghana; and to strengthen our relationship with the **Institute for Policy Alternatives (IPA)** – our strategic partner in building Parliamentary capacity in Africa. Since its launch, the Network has provided an opportunity for MPs to undergo training, dialogue, network and exchange ideas, share experiences amongst themselves and with researchers through a number of knowledge-sharing workshops.

The '*flagship*' of the Network – a community monitoring training program on poverty reduction delivered by IPA – has proved very useful and practical for MPs and their staff. To date, 77 people have benefited from the training - 36 MPs and 41 parliamentary staff and civil society leaders from 12 countries.

After almost two years of existence, the question that comes to mind is "has this networking made any difference in the poverty situation across Africa"? The Network was launched against the realization that domestic oversight is crucial if PRSPs are to make any difference in efforts to tackle poverty. To achieve this objective, there is the need for (1) strong parliamentary oversight in the budget process; (2) legislative leverage to ensure that the needs of the poor are met; and (3) ultimately oversee serious and effective follow-up of the commitments made in the national budget. For the past two years, most activities organized by the PC had this objective in mind.

Even as it is too early to judge the effectiveness of this networking effort, across the board, the past two years have seen a number of parliaments emerge as centres of activism in the area of poverty reduction; actively participating in the PRS process; and above all, strategically positioning themselves to monitor government action. Thanks to this networking effort, a number of parliaments have created local networks of MPs on poverty reduction while a few parliaments have seen their committees on poverty reduction play an active role in setting the PRSP agenda in their respective countries.

Key challenges remain, though. Building effective capacity in the budget process remains a daunting task; creating effective links with civil society groups continues to be an obstacle; while the treatment of gender issues is yet another impediment. The overwhelming task, however, is the partisan nature in which poverty issues are addressed in national parliaments.

Showcasing Poverty Reduction in Vienna

By Hon. Louis Chimango, Speaker of the National Assembly of Malawi¹

Many will remember the gathering of Parliamentarians and development practitioners in Vienna on June 11th to 13th this year, barely days before the G8 Summit in Gleneagles, Scotland. The Vienna Conference will be remembered for the parading by the



Hon. Louis Chimango,
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Malawi has the second
worst maternal
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United Nations

Bretton Woods Institutions, not to mention the involvement of the United Nations Development agencies and bilateral donor agencies. The developing world also paraded their new experiments at development networking in the form, of the African Parliamentary Network on Poverty Reduction, the Latin American Parliamentarians against Corruption and the Association of Asian Parliamentarians on Population and Development. Organizations that assembled were variedly categorized as: Parliamentary Organizations and Assemblies, Think Tanks, Institutes and Foundations, Multilateral and Bilateral Representatives not to mention Observers.

Vienna will also be remembered for its action and follow up oriented approach. This promises more learning and more working together. The Parliamentary Network on the World Bank is a good example of what this will be about. In less than five years of its existence, this Network has spearheaded visits by parliamentarians to projects funded by the World Bank in diverse jurisdictions like Kenya and Vietnam. There are also other equally challenging experiments which organizations/networks such as the E-Parliament, Parliamentarians for Global Action, and the Canada based Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption (GOPAC) that were represented. It is beyond the scope of this article to detail the agenda of all these. Suffice to say that Parliamentarians now know how to go about a number of concerns and interests. There are best practices, options and above all excellent examples of collaboration. Quite often, a Parliamentarian pursuing a development issue meets challenges. Networks are a sure source of encouragement, and a pointer to what like-minded Parliamentarians may have been wrestling with and are recommending as approaches. I should add in this respect the Helsinki Process as an example of collaboration between the North and the South which Parliamentarians may be interested in².

Then came the showcase session. The organizers had requested participants to present aspects of their work that they felt could be of interest to others. This session took place in a crammed room where each presenter was offered a medium size desk. The participants displayed publications of their organization, reports, plans, research material, all very rich and carefully thought out.

The IMF desk caught the attention of many participants. Besides their publications (one can summarize them as revelations of a born again) described how the Fund is now a proponent of the cause of the poor. This had already been known from their recent barrage of publications, which appear on the IMF web site. Most delegates though were seen to frequent the IMF show because, true to the Washington Consensus approach to issues, there were carrots/incentives to take home in the form of a calculator, an executive pocket size leather note pad and ball point pen appropriately engraved!

In the course of searches for a way out of the poverty in sub Saharan Africa the present writer became active in the experiment of the Parliamentary Centre (PC) that under CIDA has established a Poverty Reduction Network for Parliamentarians in response to the G8 and NEPAD Kananaskis meeting. The G8, it will be recalled, pledged support to African economic development through strengthening Parliaments in its governance and oversight responsibilities *inter alia*. The contacts of the Parliamentary Centre took the writer, among other destinations, to the Institute for Policy Alternatives, a think tank if you like, which is managed by Dr. Sulley Gariba in Tamale, in northern Ghana. The Institute emphasizes that a lot of development is to do with tuning in to the ground, going out there to see, measure, and listen to what is or is not working.

The writer's contribution in Vienna thus was to showcase the work of 'bare feet' primary and secondary school leavers, Miramba Youth HIV/AIDS and Maternal Health

Support Organization, in his constituency. This is a voluntary association of some thirty primary and secondary school leavers (15 girls and 15 boys) some 30-40 kilometres outside Lilongwe, the capital in Malawi. Mention should also be made that IPA is well known for buttressing the importance of networking with civil society and monitoring of interventions on the ground in the communities. Back home the writer came to know of the White Ribbon Alliance, (Malawi Chapter) and was persuaded to become a member of the board of its trustees. The President of the Alliance is regularly invited to make presentations to the Budget and Finance Committee of the Malawi Parliament to make the case for increased awareness and support for safe motherhood interventions.

It is a matter of extreme regret that Malawi's maternal mortality rate is *feared* to be at 1800 deaths for every 100000 live births, up from 1120 deaths in the last few years, which figure is in itself an 83% increase from 620 deaths out of 100000 live births that was reported in 1992. Malawi signed for the Millennium Development Goals and is committed to reducing maternal mortality to around 220 deaths per 100000 live births by 2015.

After last year's general elections the traditional leader in the community called the writer, their Member of Parliament in the area, to sample the activities of the group and to solicit support for their work. The group was formed initially to help spread community health and sanitation messages through songs, dance and drama, which quickly attract men, women and youth. More recently it has requested them to include messages on safe motherhood, which they readily agreed to despite the complexities of such an engagement for a youth group. The group tours and visits various parts of their neighbourhood within an area of 10 kilometres radius on foot and using meagre funds generated from the sale of small agriculture produce for transport and snacks.

The showcase material to Vienna thus included write ups and live music and dance on video in vernacular which the community understands. These explain how HIV/AIDS is spread, how to prevent it and the symptoms of the infection, using catch phrases such as "believe in Jesus" as well! Some reference is made to traditions in the songs, e.g. ritual sex play with the widow of the deceased, widow inheritance, and virginity breaking rituals that require a girl to submit to sex. There is absolutely no cure and the consequences of HIV/AIDS include increasing number of orphans and low agriculture output. To combat stigmatisation the songs and drama state that there is no cross infection. The end scene is a funeral scene now a regular occurrence because of HIV/AIDS.

To reduce Maternal Mortality some of the songs appeal to husbands not to beat their wives during pregnancy and to relieve them from laborious chores. Pregnant mothers should eat nutritious foods and should be rushed to proper medical facilities and not to witch doctors when they are sick, and so on.

It is possible that many did not listen to the efforts of the poor themselves in their efforts to combat poverty and underdevelopment in Vienna. Vienna may therefore be a contradiction. Part of the battle against underdevelopment is to encourage and support for initiatives of the poor³.

1 The author was elected Speaker of the National Assembly of Malawi soon after returning from the Vienna Conference.

2 For details and conference papers of the Vienna Conference, see www.worldbank.org/parliamentarians.

3 To access the materials on Malawi and maternal mortality initiatives, call jurist@malawi.net; and wra@sdpn.org.mw



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tion Network

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In solidarity, MPs en-
circle the biggest tree
in West Africa



Fishing in Ghana remains one of the most significant economic activities of the country

“Ghana Parliament has made major progress by establishing a Parliamentary committee on Poverty Reduction in the Third and Fourth Parliament”



Parliamentarians from a dozen African countries participate in an inter-community interface in the Dangme East District in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana

The Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS): the role of Parliamentarians

By Gifty Adika, Information Resource Coordinator, PC Ghana

In principle the GPRS is expected to be the people-owned document, ensuring their participation in design, implementation and review. Parliament and Parliamentarians, the democratically-elected representatives of the people, are well placed to play a crucial role in ensuring the success of the GPRS, by performing their representational, lawmaking and oversight functions. However, the participation of Ghana Parliament in the GPRS to date can at best be described as limited as reflected in the role of Parliament as an institution and the experience of individual MPs with the GPRS.

Parliament as an Institution

The first GPRS document does not properly articulate the specific role of Parliament. Parliament's role can only be inferred from some portions of the document. Additionally, while the framers of the GPRS have indicated involvement of some parliamentary committees in the design of the first GPRS, most MPs have described this as insufficient, and would have preferred parliamentary involvement as an institution right from the start. Besides, most of the interactions with parliamentary committees were more of briefing sessions, than an opportunity for parliament to contribute to the document. Indeed, concerns have also been raised by some Members of Parliament and experts in governance about what is seen as the erroneous perception that Parliament has no role in policy formulation, which has resulted in not involving Parliament and limiting Parliament's participation to oversight at the implementation stage.

As an institution, Ghana Parliament set up an 11 member special committee on the GPRS in the Third Parliament to look at the GPRS document and perform oversight functions of the work of relevant government institutions, including the analysis of GPRS Annual Progress Reports. The GPRS document did not get to Parliament till June 2002 well after major agreements had been made with donors and with the governing bodies of the World Bank and the IMF, and the government had applied for assistance under HIPC. Additionally, the 2003 Annual Progress Report which was ready in July 2003 was not presented to the Parliamentary committee till later in the year close to the election period making it impossible for the committee to present its report to the house.

In the Fourth Parliament a 20 member special committee on Poverty Reduction (PR) was the last committee to be set up in May 2005 almost five months after the inauguration of Parliament sparking off speculation of lack of interest on the part of the Parliamentary leadership and the Executive in the work of the committee.

Another issue that has emerged relates directly to the composition of the committee itself. Questions have been asked as to why there is a high percentage of new Members of Parliament in this committee (65%).

Yet another issue relates directly to the hybrid parliamentary system practised in Ghana which makes it possible for MPs to be Ministers and part of the Cabinet. For instance, is it an advantage for Parliament to have the Deputy Minister in charge of Economic Planning as a member of the committee that is to oversee the work of that Unit? The system has been questioned extensively in recent times especially in relation to true separation of powers; these concerns emerged again in the recent findings of the African Peer Review Mechanism.

In spite of the above questions and challenges with Parliament's participation in the GPRS process, Ghana Parliament has made major progress by establishing a Parliamentary committee on Poverty Reduction in the Third and the Fourth Parliaments. This initiative can be strengthened further by making the committee on Poverty Reduction a standing committee as suggested by a number of MPs.

Members of Parliament

Major challenges faced by individual MPs, as recounted from personal experience, include limited awareness of the GPRS, lack of involvement in the GPRS and a general sense of isolation. These challenges faced by MPs in participating in PRSPs have been confirmed in a number of reviews and studies including, The World Bank / IMF joint review, the Parliamentary Centre/GTZ review and NDI's work, to name a few. The reviews / studies have identified the following as major challenges: limited awareness, lack of capacity and executive obstinacy.

(1) *Limited awareness*: The reviews have shown that most MPs lack basic knowledge of PRSPs. The level of awareness of most members of the PR Committee is low mainly because most have been MPs only since January 2005 and have not benefited from previous training initiatives by institutions such as the WBI and the Parliamentary Centre. Unfortunately, the Parliamentary service has no systematic continuous training programs for MPs. To rectify this, the CIDA funded GPCSP II is currently planning a series of training initiatives, including video conferences on the role of Parliament in PRSPs.

(2) *Lack of capacity*: Most Parliaments are unable to undertake independent analysis and reviews of PRSP related issues so as to effectively play an oversight role. It is therefore important that Parliament continues to receive support to undertake research and analysis. In Ghana, the Parliamentary Centre through the GPCSP II and the ACPCSP Poverty Reduction Network has supported analysis of reports and offered capacity building in poverty reduction related issues. There is the need for continued support that would lead to development of institutional structures such as Office of Policy Analysis and an Information Resource Centre.

(3) *Executive obstinacy*: The seeming reluctance of governments to allow greater legislative involvement has been highlighted in these findings. In Ghana, as indicated earlier, the Parliamentary Committee on Poverty Reduction was not set up until five months after the inauguration of Parliament. Additionally, it is still really not clear how parliament is being involved in the current review of the GPRS.

Recommendations

On the way forward there are several proposed strategies, it remains to be seen which of these Ghana will take advantage of. Reviews from Parliamentary Centre, WB and NDI suggest strategies for improving Parliamentary participation in the PRSP process. These include:

(1) *Early consultation*: It is important to have parliamentary involvement early in the development and review process to ensure that the policy framework includes the people's voice. As demonstrated above, in Ghana there has been no systematic way of engaging with Parliament early in the process. This happened in the development of the initial GPRS and seems to be happening in the current review of the GPRS. It is therefore important that steps be taken to involve Parliament early in the process of consultation.

(2) *Through the budget cycle and processes*: Since funding for the implementation of PRSP related activities is closely tied to the national budget, parliaments are seen



Parliament of Ghana emblem

“Since funding for the implementation of PRSP related activities is closely tied to the national budget, parliaments are seen as key in ensuring compliance”



Ghanaian MPs take part in a workshop on the budget process, organized under the auspices of the Parliamentary Centre Ghana Parliamentary Committee Support Project II.



Primary school enrolment in Sub-Saharan Africa has increased but a third of children are still out of school

“The way forward for Ghana is to improve the timeliness of submission of the annual progress reports to Parliament and to ensure adequate information flow on developments with the GPRS”

as key in ensuring compliance. In Ghana, Parliament has to approve the government's yearly financial policy and therefore plays a role in ensuring that the budget corresponds to identified programs in the GPRS. This role can further be improved if the involvement of Ghana Parliament in the budget process is further enhanced through effective participation as is done in countries such as Uganda backed by a budget act. This will enhance parliamentary input in setting priorities and allocating resources.

(3) *Legislative backing.* In some countries laws were passed to support the approval of PRSPs; this created ample opportunity for debate of the document and for input from all MPs e.g. Uganda and Burkina Faso. This could be implemented in Ghana to give Parliament and the Committee on Poverty Reduction the opportunity to look at the GPRS document in detail.

(4) *Parliament's oversight responsibility.* Parliament through the performance of their oversight responsibility can ensure effective expenditure for priority activities identified in the GPRS. The way forward for Ghana is to improve the timeliness of submission of the annual progress reports to Parliament and to ensure adequate information flow on developments with the GPRS.

(5) *Representation role of parliament and its multiparty nature.* This offers an opportunity for building consensus ensuring electoral mandate. Debates in Parliament will serve as a useful platform for incorporating the concerns of the citizenry.

(6) *Sustainability of PRSPs* and (7) *Linkages to constituents.* These require continued input from the constituents, which can be achieved through efficient public hearings and continuous engagement of MPs with their constituents especially to highlight challenges to implementation of the PRSP as well as improved information flow on what the GPRS is.

(8) *Ensuring consistency of legislation with GPRS priorities.* In this regard, MPs have the unique opportunity to review bills and draw attention to inconsistencies if any with outlined priorities of the GPRS.

Ghana has a unique opportunity now of improving participation through effective involvement of the legislature as it reviews the GPRS. The above suggestions on how to improve involvement of the legislature can be implemented in the current review process, to increase and institutionalize participation and to strengthen monitoring and evaluation of outcomes of the GPRS.

The Roles Of Civil Society Organisations in Poverty Monitoring: The Experience of the National Poverty Monitoring System in Tanzania

By Donald Mmari, Research for Poverty Alleviation (REPOA)

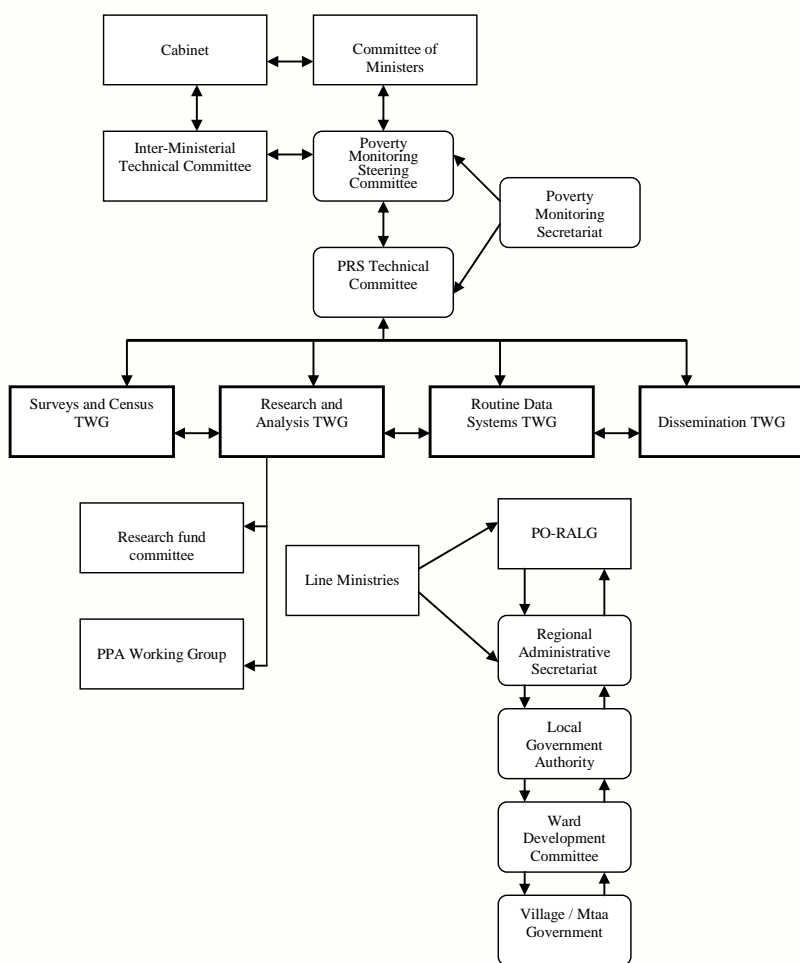
Tanzania, like many other developing countries has since the mid 1990's and the early 2000 implemented policies and strategies focused on poverty reduction. While Tanzania had taken national policy initiatives such as the National Development Vision 2025 and the National Poverty Eradication Strategies in the late 1990s, the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) articulated in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) became a more focused, shorter term operational plan to implement the Vision, with clear targets and a financing plan. Moreover, the PRS provided a focal point for the joint development partner's efforts to direct development efforts

in the context of the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiatives (HIPC). At present, Tanzania is implementing a five-year National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty (NSGRP). The NSGRP resulted from a nationwide consultative process of review of the PRS in 2004.

As part of the process of implementing the PRS, a national Poverty Monitoring System (PMS) was established to monitor achievements of the implementation of the PRS. This is a broad based and an inclusive process that involves the Government, Civil Society Organisations (CSO's), development partners, research and academia. This was an important turning point for wider consultations and involvement of local stakeholders in direct monitoring of the implementation of national policies and strategies. The PMS was established through a consultative process that designed the system and determined priorities. A major output of the consultations was the Poverty Monitoring Master Plan (PMMP), which described the objectives, institutional arrangements, indicators, targets, budget for implementation of monitoring activities, and the funding arrangements.

The Institutional framework consists of Committee of Ministers responsible for scrutiny and approval of the PRS at political level. At implementation level, the framework consists of National Poverty Monitoring Steering Committee (NPMSC), PRS Technical committee (PRSTC), Poverty Monitoring Secretariat, and four Technical Working Groups. The NPMSC provides overall guidance and oversight of poverty monitoring

Organizational Structure of the National Poverty Monitoring System



Source: www.povertymonitoring.go.tz/secretariat.htm

activities and is comprised of members representing the Government, development partners, CSOs, academic institutions, and major faith groups. It is chaired by the Permanent Secretary in the Vice President's Office, which is charged with poverty reduction portfolio.

The PRSTC provides technical advise to the NPMSC, and consolidates inputs from the Technical Working Groups (TWGs). It constitutes members from all the PRS priority sectors and sectors in charge of cross cutting priorities. It is chaired by the deputy Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Finance.

The Poverty Monitoring Secretariat provides services to the committee of ministers, the NPMSC and the PRSTC, and is formed by key staff in the Vice President's Office, Ministry of Finance, and the President's Office for Planning and Privatisation.

The four Technical Working Groups (TWG), are the Surveys and Census TWG; Routine Data Systems TWG; Research and Analysis TWG; and Dissemination, Sensitisation and Advocacy TWG. All of these four groups are formed by representatives from the Government, development partners, CSOs, and research/academic institutions, depending on their mandate and areas of expertise.



CSOs play a critical role in generating information, conducting research, analyzing data and disseminating information originated from the poverty monitoring system

“CSOs are important stakeholders in identifying research gaps and in setting priorities for research in the context of the NSGRP monitoring”

The Census and Surveys TWG is responsible for coordinating production of poverty –relevant data through surveys and population census, and for developing a multi-year survey programme for generating various socio economic data. The Routine Data TWG is responsible for managing the quality of existing routine data systems, overseeing the implementation of the local government monitoring and evaluation system, and enhancing the capacity of key actors in local government to use evidence on poverty in decision making. The Research and Analysis TWG is responsible for setting priorities for poverty-related research and preparing annual report on poverty and human development. The Dissemination, Sensitization, & Advocacy TWG is responsible for establishing a base for information from the poverty monitoring system and other relevant information, developing appropriate channels for dissemination, and facilitating the empowerment of stakeholders to use information for decision making and advocacy.

This poverty monitoring system described above has been implemented in a period of four years, during which lessons and experiences from each year of implementation were used to strengthen subsequent year’s activities. Much of the activities of actors in the national poverty monitoring system have focused on monitoring component as opposed to evaluating in its strict sense¹. CSOs have increasingly become important actors in the poverty monitoring, through their role in the generation of data, research and analysis, and dissemination of information.

While the direct role for collection and compilation of official data is placed under the mandate of the Census and Surveys TWG through the National Bureau of Statistics, and the Routine Data TWG through sectors and local government authorities, CSOs play significant role in generating information to inform policy through research and assessment of area based programmes. In addition, they played an important role in implementing the Tanzania Participatory Poverty Assessment (TzPPA), a mechanism that was used to collect qualitative data on poverty based on the people’s own perspectives. The development of the current strategy, the National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty (NSGRP)² involved a much broader consultations of various constituents of CSOs.

CSOs have also played an important role in the analysis of data and information generated through the census and surveys and through routine data system. They participate in the research and analysis TWG, which tests the assumptions of PRS, assesses implementation of the PRS in producing the anticipated results, and identifies weaknesses and gaps that require further analysis. CSOs also carry research in the core areas of their activities such as education, health, and water, which contributes to policy dialogue and policy developments. In addition, CSOs are important stakeholders in identifying research gaps and in setting priorities for research in the context of the NSGRP monitoring. In the recent past, CSOs have participated more in the Public Expenditure Review (PER) process, which seeks to link the PRS with the public expenditure framework through reviews that provide inputs into the budget guidelines.

In terms of dissemination, CSOs have and continue to play a very critical role in the dissemination of information arising from the poverty monitoring system through various forums, consultation processes with their various constituencies, and through their advocacy work.

In general, the inclusive monitoring of poverty has contributed to learning, empowerment, and some level of societal accountability. However, the formal system of accountability through the budget process has tended to shape the extent to which CSOs can play a role in accountability. Societal accountability, which

concerns with the more informal role of non-state actors in demanding accountability of those with the authority to govern have witnessed much changes in recent years, though it is still relatively infant.

However, in order to make poverty monitoring and evaluation effective, and to steer accountability towards achievement of the national poverty reduction goals and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), a number of challenges would need to be confronted. First, the coordination between sector plans and activities, outputs of various TWGs, and the link between poverty monitoring and the budget cycles could be difficult to achieve, and more especially in the context of NSGRP that is outcome oriented and multi sectoral in its implementation setting. Much effort must be put to strengthening coordination of both implementation and monitoring. Second, while increased participation of broad stakeholders has been recorded, there remains a question of ownership and accountability, in terms of how decisions in implementing various NSGRP cluster strategies will be reached and how accountability will be assured. Third, while high and sustainable economic growth rate is acknowledged to be an important factor to ensuring income poverty reduction and attainment of other MDGs, there is a major challenge of ensuring that this shift is practically mainstreamed in the development process. The experience has shown that, most CSOs tend to advocate on enhancing well being and equity in social service delivery, creating the danger that the growth focus may lack strong champions during the course of strategy implementation and monitoring. Fourth, the experience of implementing the PRS monitoring has clearly indicated weak linkage between national level monitoring & micro level, just as participation of CSOs in monitoring has been more pronounced at the national level. Fifth, despite a notable increase in CSOs involvement in poverty monitoring and policy dialogue, a major constraint is related to weak capacities of many CSOs in undertaking informed, evidence-based dialogue and monitoring functions. For effective dialogue and monitoring, it is important that both state and non-state actors in strengthening the capacity of CSOs undertake deliberate effort. Sixth, while the recent thrust of widening stakeholder involvement in policy development, implementation, and monitoring has enhanced local ownership, it has also raised the risk of imbalance between multiple roles of various actors, especially the CSOs. CSOs are viewed as critical pressure groups to demand accountability and to monitor the delivery of the Government to its constituents. However, CSOs have increasingly demanded space to participate in the development of policies and strategies of the Government, including the NSGRP. The challenge then is how could CSOs monitor effectively, raise questions on critical assumptions, and demand accountability for development policies and strategies for which they were part of their development in the first place. Lastly, as the poverty reduction initiatives thrive around both national and development partner's interests, demand for accountability is driven by both national and international processes, often necessitating unbalanced accountability in favour of one. There is need to re-examine how the system of accountability for these initiatives can be placed within the formal system at national level, especially through the Parliament.

1 Evaluation refers to ex-post analysis of the effectiveness of programs and projects, while monitoring includes a continuous assessment of programme outputs against targets.

2 The NSGRP have taken into account regional and international development frameworks such as NEPAD and MDGs.

Parliaments and CSOs collaborate on monitoring of poverty reduction

By Sandra de Moura, Program Officer, African Parliamentary Poverty Reduction Network

In the past year, parliamentarians from committees working on poverty reduction issues, parliamentary staff and civil society advocates from 12 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa have taken part in an extensive training programme on community monitoring of poverty reduction delivered by the Institute for Policy Alternatives based in Tamale, northern Ghana. The training provides participants with an understanding of the policy framework for pro-poor development (PRSPs, MDGs and NEPAD), concepts of social and public accountability and introduces them to participatory tools such as the Community Score Card and the Citizen Report Card, and provides them with skills to engage with communities, report on findings and ensure accountability.

Once the training programme is completed, each country group designs a pilot project activity that will involve parliamentarians, parliamentary staff and CSO advocates in monitoring a specific poverty reduction

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project implemented in a district or community of their country. The pilot project proposal is then reviewed and approved by the committees involved and finally implemented. Six countries (Burkina, Kenya, Mali, Nigeria, Rwanda, Uganda) out of 12 are monitoring a project on HIV/AIDS while the other 6 (Benin, Ghana, Malawi, Niger, Senegal, Tanzania) are monitoring projects on education, agriculture, microfinance and health.

The pilot projects are expected to strengthen the working relations between parliamentary committees and civil society groups in supporting and institutionalizing community monitoring of poverty; to facilitate the transfer of skills acquired to other staff and committees of Parliament; to enable participants to translate the skills acquired into practice; to demonstrate the viability of community-based approaches in exercising parliamentary oversight for poverty reduction; and to disseminate the results of community monitoring of poverty within Parliament and among civil society.

In the early stages of the pilot project implementation process, some positive signs already seem to indicate that objectives are on the way of being achieved. In Senegal and Benin, participants have taken the initiative to set up a small team comprised of MPs, staff and CSO advocates to oversee and coordinate the implementation of the pilot project. The teams meet regularly to prepare the activities, develop the monitoring tools, review the budget and ensure implementation is done in a timely manner. It is expected that such an experience will stimulate greater continued collaboration between Parliament and CSOs on monitoring of poverty. In the majority of the 12 countries, Parliaments through the Speaker, the Clerk or committee Chairs are providing their full support to the project and Parliaments such as Benin, Mali and Senegal are contributing

towards the pilot by providing extra funding or making human, physical or technical resources available to the pilot teams. Furthermore, experience in different Parliaments has demonstrated high levels of interest by other MPs and staff in acquiring the same skills as their colleagues, to take part in the fieldwork activities and dissemination process. This was apparent by the important numbers of MPs and staff present at the workshops organized by participants of the training to transfer skills to a wider audience within Parliament.

The Parliamentary Centre and IPA will provide continued assistance to the country teams entrusted with the implementation of the pilot projects until these are completed. The first monitoring reports and dissemination activities are expected to take place by the end of this year. Findings and outcomes will be shared among Network members, their Parliaments and partners through reports and possibly through a knowledge-sharing workshop.

The last round of training on community monitoring of poverty reduction will take place between October and December 2005 and will involve committees from 3 Parliaments, most likely Zambia, Zimbabwe and Botswana.

The Institute for Policy Alternatives (IPA) is a Ghanaian think-tank established to promote policy alternatives in Africa by combining the efforts of researchers with those of policy and development practitioners.

IPA undertakes research, training and development advocacy with a core principle of citizen engagement, emphasizing voices and perspectives of the poor, especially in rural communities.

Visit www.ipaghana.org