



**Workshop on “Growth, inequalities and poverty”
Cotonou, Benin – March 1 to 3, 2005
REPORT**

Background

Work undertaken in the past year by the Parliamentary Centre in West Africa and other regions of the continent provided evidence of major gaps in the performance of parliaments in terms of budget control, poverty policy impact as well as parliamentary outreach and interaction with the poor. As such, these remain critical areas where capacity-building efforts and strengthening initiatives are greatly needed and should be emphasized. In order to increase MPs knowledge and capacity on poverty policy and budget analysis, a joint-workshop with IDRC was held in Benin from March 1 to 3, 2005. This second workshop organized in collaboration with IDRC focused on the relationship between growth, inequalities and poverty. It brought together parliamentarians and researchers from Benin, Burkina Faso, Niger and Senegal, countries in which the MIMAP research team have been quite active. The involvement of MIMAP researchers in such a workshop was to provide MPs with the opportunity to be informed of poverty-related studies and research initiatives taking place in their country and region, to gain knowledge and reflect on the findings of the studies.

Objectives

With the weaknesses of Parliaments reduced regarding budget analysis and poverty policy impact, the potential to contribute to better PRSP performance would be even more significant in the future. Hence, the MIMAP workshop was expected to increase committee policy-making knowledge and capacity on poverty reduction as well as to strengthened advisory channels between poverty committees and policy institutes through the following specific objectives:

- To connect a number of poverty-related Parliamentary Committees across Africa with MIMAP Network researchers in West Africa, in order to equip the former with an *accessible* and *understood* knowledge of the relationship between growth, poverty and inequalities as well as the macro-economic and micro-economic policy implications to take into consideration in the analysis and monitoring of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs).
- To enable MIMAP researchers, access to a number of key Committees engaged in PRSP analysis and monitoring in their regions of work, both for the purposes of facilitating a process of Parliamentarian ‘buy-in’ to the role of civil society research institutes in Committee hearings, and of developing lasting collaborative relationships with key MPs and Committee staff working on poverty issues.
- To provide a platform for MPs to share with researchers their committees research and policy advice needs which could provide researchers with guidance as to the areas of study where research is needed and could be undertaken, while researchers could share with MPs the findings and information already collected on key areas.

Highlights

The workshop was well attended with 15 MPs, a dozen researchers and 2 journalists taking part for the three full days. Mornings were devoted to presentations by researchers and plenary sessions while the afternoons were devoted to group discussions on topics covered in the morning.

A very comprehensive program was delivered addressing a variety of interrelated issues:

- The relationship between growth, inequalities and poverty;
- Growth vs. wealth distribution;
- Pro-poor growth: a new perspective;
- Corruption, good governance and the informal sector;
- Impacts of trade liberalization
- Tools and resources to analyse the impact of poverty reduction initiatives
- Mechanisms to involve the poor in poverty-related policies;
- Case studies on health and education.

On the outset, concepts of growth and redistribution in relation to poverty were clarified. It was demonstrated that inequalities tend to aggravate poverty and can counterbalance the positive effects of growth. Thus, instead of prioritizing one over the other, it is preferable to make determinants of growth and distribution both beneficial to poverty reduction. In order for growth to generate swift positive effects favourable to poverty reduction, growth needs to be generated in sectors where the poor are concentrated or through redistributive policies.

MPs seemed to have different understandings on what GDP was measuring and its impact for poverty reduction. It was explained that an increase in GDP does not translate into an increase of household revenues. Thus, an increase in GDP may not lead to reduction in poverty levels. Discussions revolved around agriculture and other commodities such as cotton that are seen as sectors where growth may have the most beneficial impact on the poor. To ensure that revenues from these industries trickle down to the poor it was recommended that policies be developed by permanently targeting the poorest and by looking at improving their well-being. To that effect, Benin, Burkina Faso, Niger and Senegal have not yet carried out an analysis of pro-poor growth and its effects on poverty. However, expected outcomes from these policies can be compromised by corruptive practices at the state level or private sector level for which sanctions should be imposed.

Discussions also evolved around the lack of investments by individuals in sectors such as agriculture. Greater investments could lead to diversification of activities and thus better risk management. Individuals need to re-invest in productive activities and encourage communities to embark on economic adventures.

On trade liberalization, most MPs felt that African countries were not benefiting from the trade agreements. African national products cannot compete with foreign products that are cheaper to buy which affects the growth of national industries. Furthermore, some trade regulations cannot be fulfilled which make trade opportunities almost inexistent. Africa's capacity to negotiate at the international level is weak. However, improved

measures should be developed to ensure greater and easier trade opportunities between African countries.

The workshop did not conclude with the elaboration of a list of recommendations, but instead with MPs and researchers from one same country establishing a realistic, feasible, low-cost action plan for better collaboration between committees and policy/research institutes on poverty-related work. Action plans were then presented to the group. The main actions to be taken in each country are to:

Benin

- Involve MIMAP researchers in Poverty day organized at the National Assembly
- Invite MPs to take part in field visits organized by researchers
- Have committees to request punctual studies by researchers
- Increase collaboration with local elected representatives
- Organize a dissemination workshop for MPs to present findings from studies and researches

Burkina Faso

- Organize a small workshop to share research results to a group of parliamentarians
- Collaborate with researchers on a joint monitoring and evaluation initiative on HIV/AIDS
- Collaborate with researchers in the formulation of a pro-poor project
- Involve researchers in a training on gender budgeting

Niger

- Have researchers inform parliamentarians on research activities and themes being pursued
- Work with researchers on themes and areas in which data is needed in order to assist parliamentarians in their committee work
- Jointly put in place a participatory monitoring system
- Sharing of results and findings with the executive, committees and development partners
- Have researchers work closely with the poverty reduction network and establish a calendar of joint-initiatives

Senegal

- Inform the NA on the conclusions of the workshop
- Organize a meeting between researchers and MPs for feedback
- Plan a program of activities for 2005-2006
- Draft a convention between NA and the MIMAP group
- Organize a workshop to share information for the second phase of the PRSP

Follow-up

In order to monitor the progress of the action plans and collaboration between MPs and researchers, it will be important to follow-up with participants from each country regularly. Moreover, in order to support these action plans the ACSPPS Poverty Reduction

Network has set aside a small budget available to parliamentary committees for work undertaken with researchers on poverty related issues. Committees will be made aware of this fund and will be able to submit a proposal for an initiative to be undertaken in 2005. Communication and exchanges with IDRC should be maintained. IDRC has also pledged to make funds available in 2006 for continued support to committees and MIMAP researchers' joint initiatives.

Finally, it is hoped that the trust and relationship developed through the workshop between MPs and researchers will continue to grow and that MPs will call more often on researchers for assistance on poverty related work and vice versa.