

Welcome to Capacity Building News No. 19. In this edition Jerry Adams, with input from Simon Forrester, outlines INTRAC's work with civil society groups in Kyrgyzstan, building their capacity to monitor and evaluate participation in the PRSP process.

Enabling Civil Society Organisations/Groups to Monitor Their Participation in the PRSP Process

An essential element of the PRSP process is for governments to develop poverty reduction strategies which are meaningful and relevant to civil society (CS). This is key to dealing with issues of appropriateness, effectiveness and sustainability. In addressing this the PRSP process involves CS groups in the development of the PRSP document through consultations, meetings and discussions. In Central Asia participation has been seen primarily as 'informing', with no emphasis or understanding of the role CS groups can and should play in the process. This article looks at a 2004 project which used a process of workshops, mentoring and field work with CS groups in Kyrgyzstan. The aim was to enable groups to analyse their participation in the current PRSP and to develop skills to participate more effectively in the next PRSPs due to start in 2005/6¹.

Background

PRSPs are prepared by governments in low-income countries, through participatory processes involving domestic stakeholders as well as external development partners, including the IMF and the World Bank. A PRSP describes the macroeconomic, structural and social policies and programmes that a country will pursue over several years to promote broad-based growth and reduce poverty, as well as external financing needs and the associated sources of financing.

Five core principles underlie the PRSP approach, including that they should be:

- Country-driven, promoting national ownership of strategies through broad-based participation of civil society;
- Result-oriented and focused on outcomes that will benefit the poor;
- Comprehensive in recognising the multi-dimensional nature of poverty;
- Partnership-oriented, involving co-ordinated participation of development partners (government, domestic stakeholders, and external donors); and,
- Based on a long-term perspective for poverty reduction.

A World Bank study of participation in PRSPs (Waglé et al, 2002) set out a number

of criticisms including: the confinement of information sharing and consultation to capital cities; the dominance of finance and planning ministries; a lack of inclusion of non-conventional NGOs (e.g. community groups and women's organisations); poor quality data; and, a lack of gender analysis. This is confirmed by a discussion during a roundtable meeting in Kyrgyzstan in September 2004, which raised the following main points:

- Only about 25% of indicators (to record progress towards objectives) are being used
- No resources are available to build an effective M&E system
- No understanding of or chance to collect and analyse statistical data
- Lack of qualitative information to understand any change taking place
- No mechanisms to promote learning
- Capacity weaknesses in key institutions (both state and NGO) and unclear functional relationships between central and local government and line ministries
- Little value attached to CSO inputs.

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) of Participation in the PRSP in Kyrgyzstan

An integral part of the INTRAC Central Asia Programme (ICAP) was the establishment of a participatory M&E system, which included training workshops to develop new skills. During a regional workshop, representatives from Kyrgyzstan recommended the piloting of participatory approaches in the monitoring of activities within the framework of the country's PRSP (2003–2005). As a result of this a project was developed (within ICAP) with the aim of:

- Evaluating the effectiveness of implementing projects or activities under the Kyrgyz PRS in selected geographical areas as per the objectives of the PRSP 2003–2005 and local development plans;
- Providing feedback and recommendations to the stakeholders on adjustments and additions to ongoing programmes;
- Providing a learning experience in the implementation of a PM&E system for the participating organisations; and,

- Demonstrating at an *oblast* (provincial) and national level the benefits of a participatory approach to monitoring the implementation of the PRS and programmes under the Comprehensive Development Framework (CDF).

The project, which ran from June–October 2004, was concentrated in an area away from the central decision-making hub and incorporated three smaller centres. Working with organisations selected on a competitive basis, the work consisted of formal training events, coaching and mentoring support, working group meetings and mini workshops.

The opening workshop achieved a number of objectives, including:

- Developing a common understanding of the importance of a participatory approach to M&E;
- Enabling participants to identify key issues around CS participation in the PRSP in Kyrgyzstan and how they might go about monitoring and evaluating responses to those issues; and,
- Allowing participants to review existing documents related to the Kyrgyz PRSP and to begin to identify gaps

Outcomes from this first workshop highlighted some important issues regarding the perception and understanding of the PRSP. These included:

- A reasonable understanding of the principles behind the PRSP process and a willingness to engage, albeit at times little collaboration between actors involved, with work often running parallel;
- The mechanisms employed to promote participation in 2001 were judged to be dysfunctional as activities initiated by local communities were co-opted by local authorities or initiated by local government but not followed through;
- A lack of information about the PRSP process; poor co-operation between local government and NGOs; low levels of social mobilisation; lack of transparency in decision-making; low awareness of rights and a corresponding low capacity

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to know how to enforce them; a lack of commitment from local officials to prioritise assistance to the poorest in society; and, no clear monitoring system defined ways in which CS could contribute;

- Issykul Oblast did not have a local development plan to show how the PRSP was to be implemented nor any formal mechanisms for monitoring or evaluating any *oblast* level development interventions³.

Participants created a logframe for developing and implementing a participatory M&E system to measure participation in the PRSP process. They met two months later to review and finalise the content of the 'model' logframe on participation in the PRSP, to develop practical plans regarding data collection and to develop skills and knowledge in the choice and use of different instruments for assessing involvement in the PRSP process. Following this preparatory work the teams returned to their areas and started the process of collecting and analysing data.

A final workshop, utilising an 'action-reflection' approach, reviewed the process and used the data that was gathered to assess the effectiveness of implementing projects or activities under the Kyrgyz PRS in selected geographical areas, against the objectives of the PRSP 2003–2005. It also provided an opportunity for participants to reflect on the process of using a

participatory M&E process. Prior to the workshop the participants specifically asked for input on issues relating to:

- Qualitative Sampling – how to choose a sample, different approaches
- Developing skills in choosing and using different data collection tools – in particular focus group discussions and note-taking
- Tools and approaches for data analysis
- Addressing issues of validity, reliability and credibility.

The conclusions from the final workshop showed that the project was very useful because it laid the foundations for future work developing the involvement of NGOs and CSOs in the PRSP process. The skills gained by the participating organisations will enable them to participate more actively and to provide a more analytical contribution to the process than had been the case four years ago, when involvement and engagement of CSOs in the PRSP process was very passive. The participants are now an important resource for enhancing knowledge and understanding of how participation in the PRSP can be realised as well as assessed by other NGOs and CSOs.

Whilst the events in Kyrgyzstan have delayed the preparation for the next PRSP the potential exists for making it more appropriate and relevant to the people's needs, building meaningful two-way participation between the State and civil society and having an appropriate and

effective system. It is encouraging to note that since the last training a Comprehensive Development Framework Resource Centre⁴ has been established under the National Statistics Committee, which has two local NGOs and INTRAC as founding members. Institutionally this will, hopefully, provide a 'home' for much of the learning on monitoring the PRS and related processes. With these elements in place the path will be laid for actions which are relevant and sustainable in the future.

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Notes and References

1. The timing of the 2nd PRSP will be adjusted due to political changes in Kyrgyzstan in early 2005.
 2. From IMF Factsheet on PRSPs (2005) www.imf.org/external/np/exr/facts/prsp.htm
 3. At national level the PRSP does have formal indicators for M&E purposes but no clear M&E system or strategy for implementing any monitoring activities.
 4. Legally speaking the Centre is actually a registered Public Association, with National Statistics Committee providing a venue and a paid secretariat.
- Waglé, S. et al (2002) 'Participation in Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers: A Retrospective Study', The Participation and Civil Engagement Group, Social Development Department, The World Bank, Washington.