

# **Access and Influence:**

## ***Tensions and Ambiguities in the World Bank's Expanding Relationship with Civil Society Organizations***

by

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Prepared for the project  
*"Voices: The Rise of Nongovernmental Voices in Multilateral Organizations"*

*Financial support from CIDA and the Aspen Institute is gratefully acknowledged*

second in a series of five

**The North-South Institute  
Ottawa**

**April 2002**

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Price: \$10.00

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## **National Library of Canada Cataloguing in Publication Data**

Nelson, Paul J., 1956-

Access and influence: tensions and ambiguities in the world bank's expanding relationship with civil society organizations / by Paul J. Nelson.

Part of North-South Institute's project on "Civil Society Voices and the multilateral organizations".

ISBN 1-896770-50-9

1. World Bank. 2. Poverty. 3. Civil society. 4. Non-governmental organizations. I. North-South Institute (Ottawa, Ont.) II. Title.

HG3881.5.W57N44 2002

332.1'532

C2002-901540-5

## Acronyms

<b>CIDSE</b>	Coopération Internationale pour le Développement et la Solidarité
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organization
<b>ESAF</b>	Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility, former IMF lending facility for low-income countries
<b>HIPC</b>	Debt relief program for Highly Indebted Poor Countries
<b>IBRD</b>	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the main arm of the World Bank
<b>IDA</b>	International Development Association, the World Bank's concessional lending window for low-income countries
<b>IFIs</b>	International Financial Institutions: the World Bank Group and IMF
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>I-PRSP</b>	Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
<b>NEAP</b>	National Environmental Action Plan
<b>NGO</b>	Nongovernmental Organization
<b>PRGF</b>	Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility of the IMF
<b>PRSP</b>	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
<b>SAPRI</b>	Structural Adjustment Participatory Review Initiative, joint World Bank-NGO-government review in seven countries, begun in 1997
<b>WB</b>	World Bank
<b>WDR</b>	<i>World Development Report</i> , an annual publication of the World



## **Executive Summary**

The nongovernmental “voice” at the World Bank (WB) has many different meanings and dimensions. Civil society organizations (CSOs) have taken an interest in the World Bank’s projects and policies, which have been an attractive source of leverage over borrowing governments. The World Bank, in turn, has vigorously promoted cooperation with NGOs in project implementation and has, in turns, tolerated, accepted, cultivated and occasionally required civil society consultation in various activities.

This paper is in two parts. Part I discusses the origins and dynamics of the World Bank’s liaison with CSOs. Questions arising in this broad survey are examined more closely in Part II, which focuses on recent World Bank efforts to encourage member governments to expand public participation in Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs).

### **Nongovernmental voices at the World Bank**

The World Bank’s wide-ranging contacts with CSOs are managed at headquarters by the NGO/Civil Society Unit, but contact is increasingly decentralized with the creation of NGO liaison persons in many national offices. Consultations are generally informal, advisory and not binding on the World Bank.

The number and variety of contacts grew rapidly during the 1980s and 1990s. Their variety can be seen in the following rough typology of interactions:

*Project cooperation* generally involves CSOs in implementing a component of a project designed and agreed to by governments and the WB. Project collaborations are relatively easy for governments to accept, and the legitimacy issues that arise focus on NGOs’ technical competence.

*Project conflict* involves efforts by CSOs to alter or block a project. CSOs have adopted a variety of political strategies, and conflictive scenarios are often sensitive for borrowing member governments. Project conflict raises legitimacy issues that focus not on CSOs’ expertise, but on their claims to be representative.

The 1990s saw a flood of *invited public consultations* on global and regional policies. Almost no public document is prepared without some form of public consultation, but the WB is rarely explicit about the responsibility it accepts to consider the views expressed.

*The Independent Inspection Panel* is the most formal and most fully institutionalized mechanism for CSO interaction and the most controversial and sensitive, arguably because the World Bank’s responsibilities are defined relatively explicitly.

In the case of *World Bank-sponsored consultations between citizens and member governments*, such as the Structural Adjustment Participatory Review Initiative (SAPRI), the World Bank facilitates engagement between governments and CSOs.

This growing liaison with CSOs is driven by the World Bank's desire to tap distinctive expertise or local knowledge; to win NGO political support or neutralize potential opposition; and to respond to demands for transparency and accountability. Consulting with community organizations is mandated only in two specific kinds of projects, major dam construction and projects with potential impact on indigenous peoples' land rights.

### **CSOs and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers**

Adopted in 1999, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) is the WB's and the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) joint framework for national poverty reduction strategies. The PRSP's stated objective is to encourage more effective anti-poverty strategies. PRSPs are also expected to be a framework for other donor assistance, and the basis for concessional lending and for debt relief under the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC). Even at an early stage, the PRSP highlights certain tensions and ambiguities in the role of the WB.

First, there is a tension between donor mandates and national ownership of a participatory process. The PRSP is mandated by the WB and IMF, but is to be "country-driven", managed and "owned" by governments. The paradoxical concept of "ownership" means that governments use a WB-mandated participatory process to develop a *national* plan that implements *international* anti-poverty objectives. The World Bank's solution has been not to specify detailed requirements, but to rely on "good practice" guidance.

Second, there is tension between the PRSP's anti-poverty and participatory objectives. Participatory processes build political support for policies, but *inclusion* in the PRSP process is also intended to compensate for the relative powerlessness of poor groups. This inclusion has limitations: many early consultative processes were inaccessible to many civil society organizations, and poor people themselves seldom attend the consultations, only making their voices heard, if at all, through Participatory Poverty Assessments (PPAs).

Third, in all consultative processes there is a gap between consultation and influence. It is not yet possible to say how influential CSOs' positions have been in the PRSPs, but there is no mechanism to ensure that priorities expressed by CSOs are seriously considered. Even extensive participation in the PRSP gives no assurance that regular policy processes—budget debates, for example—will be equally open to participation.

The PRSP scheme *re-orders the donor consultation process*, assigning United Nation (UN) and bilateral donors the role of stakeholders in a country-managed

consultation, which the WB and IMF oversee. The shift consolidates the World Bank's and IMF's leadership role, a shift which other donors question and appear to resist.

With the advent of the PRSP, a new dimension of World Bank-CSO relations comes into focus: the facilitation of government-CSO interaction in setting national development strategies. The PRSPs to date suggest that the WB faces tensions and contradictions in its role, particularly between the needs to motivate and facilitate participatory processes, and to maintain at least the perception of government ownership of the process. The record of the early PRSPs also suggests that the World Bank's call for systematic participation by civil society organizations has uneven and relatively limited influence.

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The World Bank (WB) was thrust into an unwanted public spotlight in April, 2000. As anti-globalization protesters paraded effigies of WB and International Monetary Fund (IMF) senior managers through the streets of downtown Washington—and across the TV screens of viewers around the world—the World Bank's long-standing and diverse relationship with civil society organizations (CSOs) entered a new phase.

It was a phase that World Bank managers hoped they had avoided. Less than a year earlier, WB President James Wolfensohn told *The Economist* that his organization's working relationships with civil society organizations would protect it from the slings and arrows that wounded the World Trade Organization (WTO) at its Seattle Ministerial. In the words of *The Economist's* columnist, the World Bank was safe “because it had coopted the NGOs” (“The nongovernmental order,” 1999).

Despite events on the streets of Washington, Prague and Genoa, few would contest Wolfensohn's assertion that the World Bank has developed working relationships and created a measure of openness to civil society organizations. It has created complex set of mechanisms, offices, liaisons and initiatives to accommodate citizens' voices in various aspects of the World Bank's operations.

How one interprets these varied relationships depends in part on which of them one examines. The World Bank defines “civil society” broadly and for functional (not theoretical) purposes, as “the space among family, market and state; it consists of not-for-profit organizations and special interests groups, either formal or informal, working to improve the lives of their constituents.” For purposes of this paper I wish to avoid the intricate and seemingly timeless debates over the proper understanding of “civil society”, I will use the term “civil society organization”, as does the WB, to refer to such organizations. I sometimes use “citizens' organization” interchangeably with CSO.<sup>2</sup>

The World Bank's relationship with CSOs has many dimensions, ranging from highly conflictive to cooperative. Some WB projects and policies have been the focus CSO advocacy on environmental and development issues. Cooperative relationships have grown in the implementation of individual projects, usually at the World Bank's initiative (Nelson, 1995; Malena, 2000; World Bank, 1999). Project cooperation has involved CSOs from all regions and increasingly focuses on CSOs based in borrowing countries.

The World Bank's encouragement of dialogue between governments and CSOs is emerging as a third and less widely discussed form of relationship. The WB has promoted such conversations on an *ad hoc* basis and in structured national consultations around National Environmental Action Plans and, more recently, the creation of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP).

The difference of views about the World Bank-CSO relationship is not only a function of its multifaceted nature. Perspectives on the World Bank/CSO liaison, and of the WB itself, are also rooted in highly polarized views of globalization and of the World

Bank's role in the changing global political economy. At the risk of caricature, one can identify three views, closely linked to contending perspectives on globalization:

- a state-centred, traditional view emphasizing bank-client relationships in which member governments are the exclusive holders of formal power;
- a partnerships model, with the WB at the centre of a set of global networks, coordinating cooperation among corporations, governments and CSOs;
- a model of global, coordinated action in which the WB, IMF and WTO cooperate to promote the legal and financial framework for rapid corporate globalization.

Each of these views—and of their many variants—has proponents within the WB policy-making process. Borrowing governments often argue that WB engagement with CSOs, especially with international NGOs, should be limited and subject to government approval. The second and third views are associated, respectively, with the WB and many of its CSO critics. Globalization, for the WB, is opportunity, and the increasing mobility of capital and divisibility of production processes create an urgent need for the WB to coordinate and disseminate knowledge about development practice. But in the third view, the World Bank's partnership with corporate interests is a threat, not because it erodes government's sovereignty, but (primarily) because it reinforces inequalities and diminishes citizen and community control of their economies.

Part I of this report largely describes the World Bank's interaction with CSOs, and interprets the overall record. Drawing on the extensive written record from the World Bank, NGO practitioners, and observers, I survey the variety of mechanisms for CSO input at the World Bank, noting the distinctive legitimacy and accountability issues that arise in the three broad types of interaction.

Part II examines the broadest of the World Bank's recent innovations in citizen consultation, the participatory PRSP processes. This disproportionate attention to the PRSP, and to the World Bank's involvement in facilitating governments' consultation with CSOs, is deliberate. Much has already been written about direct WB-CSO consultation, and much less about facilitating (and leveraging) consultations with national governments. Direct WB interaction with CSOs tends to bring debates into an international arena, but facilitating the same dialogue with national government returns the focus to national political institutions.

Encouraging, facilitating or requiring that member governments consult with CSOs in the creation of new national policies also raises fundamental tensions in the World Bank's operation, five of which are introduced in Part I and examined in Part II.

## **Part I — Nongovernmental Voices at the World Bank**

The World Bank's practical, instrumental approach to civil society means there is little attention to formal standing and little or no nongovernmental involvement in its governing bodies. Discussion centres instead around the viability of NGOs and CSOs as project collaborators, the varieties of popular participation in projects, the roles of transparency and accountability mechanisms, and CSOs' legitimacy, credibility and impact as policy advocates. The interaction also implies responsibilities and strategic issues for civil society organizations, which enter the dialogue without obligations to the WB, and are free to participate or not at any juncture. The important questions about their responsibilities as political actors (see Nelson, 1997; Jordan and Van Tuijl, 2000; Edwards, 2000), however, are secondary to the main focus of this study.

Five key questions for World Bank interaction with citizen organizations revolve around the themes of participation and ownership, inclusion, mechanisms, agenda, and influence:

1. Participation and national ownership: what should the WB require and specify?
2. Inclusion: whose voices?
3. Mechanisms: how and where do consultations occur?
4. Agenda and access: which decisions are open to CSOs?
5. Inclusion and influence: how are civil society views registered and considered?

These questions guide the investigation of the World Bank's record in Part I. But they arise even more acutely in the required participatory processes of the PRSP, and they are therefore revisited in some detail at the beginning of Part II.

### **The World Bank and CSOs: A typology of relationships**

The World Bank has developed a complex set of institutional links by which it informs, advises, debates and cooperates with CSOs. The links, at headquarters, in country offices and in cyberspace, serve a variety of functions and constituencies. At headquarters, the NGO and Civil Society Unit coordinates and facilitates the various links to CSOs with support from an active External Affairs unit. The NGO and Civil Society Unit coordinates a Civil Society Thematic Team that includes representatives from the regional and thematic staff "networks."

A civil society coordinator in each regional division in headquarters coordinates the work of civil society contact persons in the country and regional (field) offices. In Latin America and the Caribbean, for example, country offices in 10 member countries have designated CSO Specialists (with other duties), and a specialist based in Guatemala serves five Central American countries (World Bank, 2000).

But these official links give a highly incomplete picture of the relationship. Exchanges with CSOs grew rapidly throughout the 1980s and 1990s, both within and outside of established institutional frameworks. Their variety can be seen in a rough typology of interactions: project cooperation, project conflict, standing consultative mechanisms, invited consultations on Bank-wide policy, formal appeals such as to the Independent Inspection panel and WB-brokered meetings of citizen groups with governments. The issues raised by each are summarized in Figure 1, and outlined in more detail here.

### **Project cooperation**

*Project cooperation*, writes Malena (2000), is the most common but “least sexy” form of interaction. Cooperation involves local, national and/or international CSOs in either consulting about project plans, implementing a component of the project, or both. Opportunities for significant influence in project implementation are uncommon, and occur most often when both local and international CSOs are involved (Nelson, 1995; Malena, 2000).

Motivated by NGOs’ capacity to deliver social services where governments are constrained, the WB has systematically encouraged operational collaboration. The NGO liaison units (central and regional) have encouraged staff to collaborate, publicized “good practice”, assembled a database and managed trust funds (World Bank, 2000).

Because cooperation generally occurs in projects designed and agreed to by government and WB authorities, project collaboration is usually relatively easy for governments to accept, and the legitimacy issues that arise for CSO participation generally address the CSO’s technical competence and organizational capacity. WB staff usually initiate the contact, although NGOs have at times proposed new collaboration (Covey, 1998).

### **Project conflict**

*Project conflict*, in contrast, involves deliberate efforts by local organizations, national and/or international NGOs to challenge and revise or block a project. Local resistance to government projects of various kinds has a long history, but pressure through the World Bank intensified when international NGOs launched a concerted campaign in the early 1980s. Singling out individual projects for high-profile criticism has been a prominent strategy of NGO campaigns around environmental policies, involuntary resettlement and indigenous rights (Fox and Brown, 1998).

The World Bank provides no single channel through which CSOs are to express their concerns, and as a result CSOs have adopted a variety of political strategies. They raise issues through the news media, in protests at the project site, in communications to the staff responsible for the project and in letters to WB senior management. Responsibility for managing such issues has been shared among the External Affairs

department, NGO liaison unit and the responsible Operations department. Challenges follow no set course unless they are raised as appeals to the Inspection Panel (see below).

Compared to project cooperation, conflictive scenarios are more sensitive and problematic for member governments, and tend to draw attention at the World Bank at a much higher level. Conflict also raises a different set of legitimacy issues for the World Bank. In project implementation, NGO legitimacy has to do with knowledge and competence, but challenges to projects raise questions of representation. The WB and member governments increasingly apply a standard of transparency and accountability to national and international NGOs and call for greater clarity about who represents whom, on what agendas, in their advocacy work (Nelson, 1997; Edwards, 2000).

### **Formal, standing consultative mechanisms**

The most visible formal venue for the World Bank-CSO dialogue has been a standing NGO-World Bank Committee, created in 1982 and sustained by the WB and some 25 NGO participants into the new millennium. NGO participants arrived at a united approach in their 1987 meetings, but the committee never became a highly effective forum from the NGOs' perspective.

The NGO Working Group (NGOWG) dialogue was decentralized in the late 1990s, moving from Washington-based or global meetings to regional and national exchanges. The shift was motivated in part by the relocation of some WB country directors from headquarters to national offices. Among CSOs, organizations not represented on the NGOWG had become increasingly frustrated with its unrepresentative nature and its failure to communicate with other CSOs. In 1997 the NGOWG restructured itself, placing most authority and initiative with the regional groupings, and mandating members in each region to link more strongly to other CSOs (NGO Working Group on the World Bank, 1999).

At the end of 2000, participants in the NGOWG made a more decisive change, and the Committee was quietly shelved, in favour of a commitment to an annual, thematic World Bank-Civil Society Forum. The Forum is to involve a wider range of CSOs than the NGOWG, including "NGOs, community organizations, religious groups, women organizations and other[s]..." (Joint Resolution, 2000).

The official dialogue with NGOs can be traced to two sources. The prospect of growing collaboration in the early 1980s was the positive incentive for the WB to create a standing consultative mechanism. The intense pressure on environmental policy and on specific projects, usually involving forestry or infrastructure, was the second. The WB saw development NGOs as a possible counterweight to the highly vocal environmental NGOs who were dragging it into the world of public-interest advocacy.

### **Invited consultations on Bank-wide policy issues**

Consultations about development policy issues and WB sector policies multiplied in the 1990s. From controversial policy issues (involuntary resettlement, dam

construction) to the technical details of project interaction (procurement rules, cash flow to contracting NGOs), and even to the development of publications that represent its position in the “marketplace of ideas”, the WB made consultation the norm rather than the exception. The WB has also sponsored talks with specific civil society constituencies including trade unions and religious organizations.

The NGOWG was usually not the venue for these discussions. Some consultations had their origins in NGO initiatives or campaigns, some of which have in turn been linked to contested projects (Fox and Brown, 1998). NGOs have maintained initiatives on educational policy (Oxfam International, 2001), indigenous peoples (Gray, 1998), forestry (Seymour and Dubash, 1999), mining (Chamberlain, 1997), micro-enterprise lending, structural adjustment, debt and governance issues.

“Consultation” has become an obligatory feature in collecting information and opinion on policy issues. Almost no public document is prepared without some form of public consultation, transforming WB policy-making from a relatively closed process as recently as the early 1980s.

Consultations are generally advisory, not binding. The consultations rarely have a formally defined role in the governance of the World Bank, which has avoided the tendency in much of the UN system to create formal observer status and privileges. The WB accepts formal accountability to NGOs only where contractual relationships exist, and in the context of the Independent Inspection Panel, where management and the board are bound by a schedule of actions laid out in the panel’s rules (World Bank, 1994).

**Box 1—Selected international consultations**

*Standing consultative groups*

World Bank/NGO Committee, 1982-  
External Gender Consultative Group, 1996-  
Consultative Group on Assisting the Poor, 1995-2003  
International Forum on Capacity-Building, 1998-

*Consultations and joint working groups*

Participation Learning Group, 1992-96  
Forestry Sector Policy, 1998-99  
Indigenous Peoples Policy, 2001-02  
Development Gateway, 2000-  
Consultation on Information Disclosure Policy, 2000  
Consultation on Independent Inspection Panel, 1999  
Private Sector Development Strategy, 2001  
*World Development Report* 2000/2001 (Poverty)  
Structural Adjustment Participatory Review Initiative (SAPRI), 1996-

*Electronic conferences and consultations*

Globalization and Development, 2000

Learning to Partner with Civil Society, 1999-2000

Civil Society Partnership Information Mall (Latin America/Caribbean)

Indigenous Peoples Development Network, 1999-

Global Forum on Agricultural Research, 2000-

Global Peacebuilding Network, 1998-

Land Policy and Sustainable Development, 2001

Consultation with CSOs on Bank-wide policy issues appears not to be a highly sensitive practice for borrowing member governments. Compared to country-specific consultations, these Bank-wide meetings, committees and electronic forums have drawn little attention from governments. When governments objected to some NGOs' practice of releasing documents to the media before Board consideration, management agreed to exclude from consultations those NGOs that "are not willing to play by mutually agreed rules" (World Bank, 1998:15-16).

The legitimacy tests applied to CSOs vary between two types of consultations, which I will call "expert" and "open". Expert consultations are selective, involve invited participants, with the stated purpose of learning from external perspectives or to help persuade staff or management, as in the Participation Learning Group. Broader, open consultations for which the WB doesn't apply a standard of expertise—as with electronic consultations or public meetings held at the time of WB Annual Meetings—are less likely to persuade WB staff, but can create a record of inclusion.

In either case—expert or open consultation—the World Bank carefully limits the responsibility it accepts to consider the positions expressed. In consultations on draft sector policies, for example, "the principal [sic] is to carry out open-minded consultation, not to enter into negotiation on text with external parties" (World Bank, 1998:15, n22).

Ambiguity about the status that outside input will have in a WB policy or publication can create disagreement and frustration. Extensive consultations leading to the *World Development Report (WDR) 2000*, for example, were to build a record of diverse expert opinion and experience regarding anti-poverty strategies. The many consultations with academics, NGOs and other practitioners created the impression that the *WDR* would seek to reflect a consensus wider than WB policy. But Project Director Ravi Kanbur resigned abruptly months before publication, charging that WB management and US officials insisted on altering findings relating to globalization and poverty (Bretton Woods Project, 2000).

Kanbur's departure raised profound concerns for NGOs. The London-based Bretton Woods project, which had organized consultations on the *WDR*, concluded that

the WB was unable to accept “dissenting opinions”, and called the resignation “a major blow for an institution trying to position itself as a ‘knowledge Bank’ and a ‘listening Bank’” (Bretton Woods Project, 2000).

### **Independent Inspection Panel**

Appeals to the *Independent Inspection Panel* are the most formal and most fully institutionalized mechanism for CSO involvement. Created in 1993, the panel has a carefully defined, specific mandate to hear appeals by communities affected by WB-financed projects, who claim that the World Bank’s failure to implement its own policy and procedures have harmed them materially.

The panel is the most controversial and sensitive of the mechanisms, arguably because the World Bank’s responsibilities are defined relatively explicitly. Legitimacy is defined in quasi-legal terms: appeals must come from communities of persons claiming to suffer direct material harm. The inspection panel’s rules establish its investigative powers in detail, and prescribe a process of decisions and reporting by the panel, management and the Board that establish responsibilities more clearly than any other mechanism.

The panel has received 25 requests for investigations. One full investigation has been conducted, four are in process at this writing (World Bank, 2001a), and proposed investigations have led to revision of other projects (Udall, 1997). The panel’s investigative powers were challenged and successfully restricted by a review initiated by the governments of India and Brazil in 1999 (World Bank, 1999).

Citizens concerned about projects supported by the World Bank’s affiliate the International Finance Corporation (IFC) have a separate option, the IFC’s Compliance Advisor/Ombudsman (CAO) office. Created in 2000, the CAO’s powers to investigate complaints are to be agreed on a case-by-case basis with the World Bank Group President (IFC, 2000)

### **World Bank-sponsored consultations between citizens and member governments**

The preceding three forms of consultation—standing forums, invited consultations and the inspection panel—involve primarily the WB and CSOs. But the WB also facilitates engagement between governments and CSOs. National Environmental Action Plans (NEAPs) called for participation in designing national environmental policies in the 1980s. More recently, the WB encouraged consultations on the Peruvian government’s 1999 National Dialogue on Poverty Reduction, and in a dozen countries during the pilot stage of the Comprehensive Development Framework (World Bank 2000m:15-16).

The Structural Adjustment Participatory Review Initiative (SAPRI) is the most sustained example of such a structured dialogue on national development policies. Initiated by NGOs in Washington, SAPRI involved governments, NGOs and the WB in national discussions of adjustment policy in Ghana, Hungary, Uganda, Zimbabwe,

Ecuador, the Philippines and Bangladesh. SAPRI encouraged national CSOs and governments to debate adjustment policies and their impact, and sponsored research into the impact of adjustment, with the WB and international NGOs as facilitators and global rapporteurs.

In Ecuador, for example, a two-day national forum was convened January, 1999 involving "...200 people representing indigenous and peasant organizations, unions, small-business associations, NGOs, urban neighborhood organizations and a wide variety of other sectors..." (Ecuador Opening National SAPRI Forum, 1999). Participants agreed to a series of meetings and inquiries with the overarching objective of improving "living standards of the poor and middle income groups." They also identified four themes, relating to the income and consumption effects of fiscal reform, trade and investment liberalization, labour reform and monetary and financial reform, which were reviewed in a series of further public meetings during 2000.

Participants in some PRSPs have noted that precedents and lessons could be drawn from SAPRI. But SAPRI, unlike the PRSP, did not result in any binding policy documents, nor was it a condition to any WB finance.

The structure and location of consultations vary widely. Dialogue about a project often occurs in the project locale or national capital, initiated by WB missions seeking CSO opinions or assistance. Sensitive and controversial projects provoke discussions at headquarters particularly when international NGOs join in the discussion. The WB often uses *ad hoc* meetings to solicit input for revisions of sector policies, new thematic initiatives, and publications, but it has also created standing advisory groups of NGOs (as well as of representatives from the corporate sector), including the NGO Working Group on the World Bank, and groups on gender, capacity-building, and micro-finance. Electronic consultations are increasingly common in global discussions (Box 1), but are not a significant tool in national processes, where building trust and working toward consensus are, at least in theory, as important as the content of participants' input.

WB planning processes generally permit rather than mandate citizen participation. The exceptions are policy areas that have already become highly conflictive: projects, for example, must involve local consultations if dam construction or indigenous peoples' land rights are involved. This permissive approach is consistent with the World Bank's de-emphasis on detailed mandatory policy guidance for staff.

### **Motives and justifications: Why civil society?**

The development literature of the 1990s is littered with statements justifying official donors' interaction with CSOs, and with cautions to CSOs about the dangers of becoming "too close for comfort" (Hulme and Edwards, 1997; Sogge, 1996; Fowler, 1999). Among multilaterals, the World Bank approaches the subject with zeal, documenting its engagement and promoting consultations by governments and other donors as well.

This section focuses on the motives for the World Bank's opening to civil society. The diversity of its activities and, to a degree, of its staff, means that there are many such motives and justifications, and critics tend to dismiss some stated justifications as intended only for external consumption. This section tries instead to consider the stated objectives in relationship to each other, and in the context of the World Bank's complex political environment. When viewed together, one can identify the tensions and contradictions that exist within some of the objectives, among objectives and among the objectives of CSOs.

**Figure 1— Characteristics of five types of nongovernmental involvement with the World Bank**

	<b>Project cooperation: Implement or assist with project components</b>	<b>Project conflict: Disputes over environmental or social impact</b>	<b>Invited Bank-wide consultation: Advisory groups or web-based</b>	<b>Quasi-judicial appeals: The Independent Inspection Panel</b>	<b>WB-sponsored citizen-government interaction</b>
<b>Sensitivity to governments</b>	Moderate	High: projects are politically charged	Low	High: intrusive investigations 1999 Board limits powers	High
<b>Issues regarding CSO legitimacy</b>	Expertise	Representation	“Expert” consultations: expertise “Global” consultations: none	Materially, directly affected. The clearest standard, quasi-legal standing	Tension between internal political issues and WB standards of legitimacy
<b>Location of consultation</b>	Project area	Project area; Washington	Washington; other capitals; cyberspace	Appeal and investigation process in country	In country
<b>Location of decision</b>	Washington; national capital	Washington; national capital	Washington; national capital	World Bank Board	
<b>Corporate involvement</b>	Corporations bid on project work, advertised by WB and governments	Peripheral target of protests	Sometimes participant; more often express views privately	Cannot be target of investigation; may request investigation	Often a stakeholder; consultations are often separate, parallel to CSO
<b>Obligations accepted by WB</b>	Contractual: WB will finance activities as designed	Usually not defined; may be negotiated or specified	Usually not defined; may be negotiated or specified	Investigation Findings Publication Remedy	WB usually plays facilitator role
<b>Issue areas in which consultations have occurred</b>	Social safety net Participation Natural resource management	Resettlement Energy Adjustment Indigenous land	Globalization Poverty reduction Civil society	Resettlement, Indigenous; sectors where policy is clear, well-known	PRSP NEAP SAPRI

## **Expertise**

“Knowledge”—local perspectives or technical specialized expertise—is the most frequently stated goal of WB interaction with CSOs. “Capturing expertise” is among staff’s most frequent reasons for consulting with NGOs in a Bank-wide review (Gibbs, 1998); in planning projects, staff sometimes seek out local knowledge of physical, institutional and social factors, or of the priorities and opinions of local populations.

Expertise in specific sectors—alternative energy sources, gendered analysis of social institutions, corruption, or judicial reform—appears to have motivated consultations with international NGOs in some circumstances. But expertise is often a fleeting advantage for NGOs, as the World Bank has hired staff or consultants to develop in-house expertise on many of these issue areas.

## **Investments and portfolio performance**

Internal discussion of civil society often revolves around the potential to improve project performance. Liaison with civil society is in this sense an instrumental strategy, justified for its potential to enhance economic performance. The internal Participation Learning Group was premised in part on the belief that staff and borrowing government agencies would encourage CSO participation if they were persuaded that doing so would improve project performance. Sectors in which projects are “close to the field” (World Bank, 2000m:3) are seen as the priorities for collaboration with NGOs.

## **Self-protection: Limiting contention over funding and projects**

Minimizing risk in its operating environment is an imperative for any organization. For the World Bank, CSOs have been both a key source of support and one of the chief sources of disturbance and risk. Liaison with CSOs allows WB management to manage these disturbances while encouraging support at key junctures, including funding debates in the US Congress. This need for support, and the presence of vocal CSO critics, sometimes leads the WB to shape the nature of input, facilitating and encouraging “constructive” input (World Bank, 2000m:2).

Attacks on public funding for the International Development Association (IDA) (Nelson, 1997), and on the World Bank’s private sector bond offerings (Center for Economic Justice, 2000) threaten to impinge directly and immediately on WB resources, and management has been eager to limit support for such attacks. Consultation and dialogue, which offer to CSOs the hope of influence and reform, are among the World Bank’s most effective tools in limiting attacks.

The importance of this goal is evident in the priority the WB gives to consultation in the kinds of projects that have generated the most public controversy. Consulting and negotiating with community organizations are mandated only in two specific kinds of projects, major dam construction and projects with potential impact on indigenous peoples’ land rights. At the other end of the spectrum of WB operations, NGOs have

“rarely” been involved in planning structural adjustment programs (World Bank, 2000m: 3).

### **Rights and obligations**

Citizens’ rights and government and WB obligations with respect to information and participation are conspicuously absent from the World Bank's extensive publications on participation. While NGOs and UN agencies have promoted citizen rights to access to information, participation and recourse (Economic Commission on Europe, 1999), the World Bank has rarely strayed from its practical and instrumental approach. Access to information is not discussed as a *right* or duty but as sound policy-making and project planning.

The Independent Inspection Panel is the World Bank's closest brush with the discourse of rights and obligations. But the accountability requirements institutionalized in the inspection panel are defined carefully to exclude international civil, political or social rights standards. They implement accountability in a bureaucratic sense: the WB as an institution is accountable to its own policies and procedures. As the number of appeals to the panel has grown, borrowing member countries have succeeded in sharpening the panel’s focus on the World Bank’s implementation of its own policy, and away from governments’ roles in project management (World Bank, 1999).

### **Strengthen civil society, promote good governance**

The World Bank's agenda for promoting governance reforms, including transparency, accountability, popular participation and judicial reform, has been closely linked to promoting the capacity of civil society to participate in national political life (Nelson, 2000b). The World Bank's liaison with CSOs also advances this governance agenda, and, involves increasing efforts to create more permissive or enabling regulatory environments for CSOs in borrower countries (World Bank, 2000m; see Box 2).

#### **Box 2—Beyond civil society voice: Influencing national policies toward nonprofits**

In addition to creating access for civil society to its own decision-making processes, the WB also advises and attempts to influence national political processes and the engagement of CSOs with other donors. The controversial *Handbook* for NGO law and regulation, commissioned by the WB and drafted by the International Center for Nonprofit Law (1997), lays out principles and a template for national legislation and regulation of non-profits. Despite concerns about the guidelines’ potential threat to freedom of assembly (Armstrong, 2000), the draft *Handbook* is used as the basis for occasional national and regional discussions (World Bank, 2000m).

The World Bank, then, has a variety of reasons, officially expressed and otherwise, for cultivating relationships with CSOs. The diversity of these motives, and of the relationships, leaves them open to many interpretations. In the following section I argue that these interpretations, and views of the World Bank more broadly, can be linked to three broad, conflicting views of globalization.

### **Globalization and three views of the World Bank**

The World Bank, its borrowing member governments and many civil society organizations have each changed their understanding of the WB in the last decade. Despite the World Bank's concerted effort to promote an integrated, cooperative view of its role in a comprehensive development framework, these views are highly polarized at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Seen through the traditional, state-centric lens, the World Bank's policies and influence are a matter of Northern versus Southern interests and links to CSOs are an incursion against state powers, which borrowing governments resist and some donor governments encourage. From this perspective, CSOs see the privileged position of borrowing governments as one to be challenged; borrowers see CSOs' agendas as allied to Northern, especially US, governments; CSOs treat the WB as a tool for leverage over the policies of Southern governments. The state-centred view remains dominant among the World Bank's borrowers, and, in many ways, continues to be the framework for its daily work and governance.

The self-described "new" World Bank is facilitator of a network of development partnerships, and of a powerful and beneficial globalization. This view, promoted by the WB and represented by its Comprehensive Development Framework, places the WB at the centre of a network of organizations promoting beneficial, empowering global change. The "new" World Bank emphasizes its intellectual capital: it is the "knowledge bank", facilitating learning across organizational boundaries and promoting access to the accumulated experience and diverse capacities of development actors through the Global Development Gateway.

In this view, globalization is opportunity, and the World Bank's role is to make this opportunity accessible to all actors in the global political economy. It does so by facilitating development planning by all actors, with the state "in the driver's seat." The WB plays the role of honest broker, coordinates development finance and the policy dialogue, and leverages foreign investment.

The third view also sees the World Bank under transformation, but treats it as an agent of a profoundly different form of globalization. No longer a secretive, statist institution mired in bank-client privilege, the WB promotes a corporate globalization that is profoundly disempowering. Working in harmony with the WTO, the IMF and G-8, the WB finances and enables the integration of economies, a trend that is profoundly disempowering to consumers, labour and poor farmers, because of the commanding role that it allows global corporations and hyper-mobile international capital.

Seen through this lens, WB social programs and links with CSOs are not signs of a new anti-poverty agenda but only compensatory safety nets to quiet any disturbances created by the transfer of wealth and power. Its interest in mobilizing information is seen as a bid to get a handle on information exchange through the Internet, the aspect of globalization that CSOs have been best able to use to their own advantage.

The Global Development Gateway illustrates the split between these last two perspectives. The strength of some CSOs' opposition to the initiative, which coordinates the collection and dissemination of knowledge and information about development through the Internet seems to have surprised WB staff involved (Gigler and Garrison, 2000). The World Bank's coordinating role in organizing access to information on the Internet raised fears that an already pervasive orthodoxy on development will penetrate the democratic, even anarchic frontier that many CSOs consider an asset in their struggles against the World Bank's influence.

The Gateway is consistent with the World Bank's determination to expand its role as a purveyor of knowledge, and to exercise influence over national structures, the growth of civil society organizations and networks themselves, and the "capacity-building" initiatives of various donors.<sup>3</sup> In 2001 a Development Gateway Foundation was created to govern the Gateway project, independent from the World Bank, which has three representatives on its 10-person board (Development Gateway Foundation, 2001).

This split in views of the WB and of globalization is present in many World Bank-related policy debates. But nowhere is the split clearer than in debate over the PRSP. The paper's second part examines the role of civil society consultation in the early PRSP experience and highlights the real dilemmas that face the World Bank in attempting to facilitate national consultations on anti-poverty strategy.

## **Part II — The Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs)**

The Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) and its participatory national processes have drawn considerable attention from donors, borrowing governments and NGOs, and the stakes for each actor are high. For eligible governments, the PRSP is a prerequisite to access to concessional lending from IDA and IMF facilities, and to debt relief. For the donors, the PRSP threatens to consolidate authority over donor coordination and poverty reduction strategies with the World Bank and IMF. The PRSP process makes the World Bank and IMF even more central to the policy framework, and recasts the IMF's lending as part of an anti-poverty strategy (IMF, 2000:1; Grusky, 2000:7; Woods, 2000).

For participants from NGOs and citizen organizations, PRSPs represent an opportunity to influence anti-poverty plans and gain a place in debates over national development strategy. Despite some skepticism about the PRSP and World Bank and IMF intentions, the PRSP process remains near centre stage in global anti-poverty debates.

Even at an early stage of the PRSP, all five of the tensions and ambiguities in the World Bank's encouragement of public participation are intensified in its effort to introduce a policy process, designed in Washington, to governments of the world's poorest and most highly indebted countries. The World Bank acknowledges that many political, managerial, and technical issues complicate participatory processes in national policy formation (World Bank, 2000g:7). In the most recent joint IMF/World Bank review of the PRSP experience, several of the themes raised here are addressed explicitly, others referred to implicitly (World Bank and IMF, 2002).

The remainder of this paper explores the early record of civil society participation in the PRSP. After an outline of the PRSP process and the origins and political context of the participation requirements, the five questions introduced in Part I are applied to the World Bank's role in PRSP participation. The early PRSP experiences discussed in this paper, in Uganda, Kenya, Viet Nam and Honduras include some of the most successful early consultations, and illustrate the variety of experiences possible in donor-mandated national consultations.

### **Origins and design of the PRSP**

Adopted in 1999, the PRSP is the WB and IMF's joint framework for national poverty reduction strategies in the 79 low-income countries eligible to borrow from IDA. As designed, the PRSP framework is to be country-driven, results-oriented, comprehensive, based on partnerships, and long-term in perspective (IMF and IDA, 1999). PRSP's stated objective is to help governments develop and implement more effective strategies to fight poverty (IMF and IDA, 1999). PRSPs are also expected to become a framework for other donor assistance (IMF and IDA, 2000a), and the basis for concessional lending and debt relief under the HIPC Initiative.

Each government's PRSP is to develop a comprehensive understanding of poverty and its causes; choose public actions that have the greatest anti-poverty impact; and provide outcome indicators to be monitored through participatory processes (IMF and IBRD, 1999:2-3). Moreover, the PRSP should identify obstacles to poverty reduction; objectives and targets; an action plan; monitoring and evaluation systems; the role of external assistance and the external environment; and the participation process (IMF and IDA, 1999). These elements, the World Bank emphasizes, are not a blueprint, and PRSPs should reflect national conditions (IMF and IDA, 1999).

Most participants to date have opted to meet their first HIPC deadline by preparing an Interim PRSP (I-PRSP). This interim document is to describe the main elements of the government's poverty reduction strategy (World Bank 2000e:5), but it differs from the PRSP in that participation, while suggested, is not required (IMF and IDA, 2000b:9). The I-PRSP is also to set out a plan for the full PRSP, including a participation action plan, stakeholder analysis, summary of existing participation processes, account of participation in the I-PRSP and a summary of major discussions.

The full PRSP is to involve broader and deeper participation: a Participation Action Plan; a detailed report on consultations, including the major themes discussed and the impact of the consultation on the contents of the PRSP (IMF, 2000:2).

As of January, 2002, 41 I-PRSPs and eight full PRSPs (Burkina Faso, Honduras, Mauritania, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Niger, Tanzania and Uganda) were complete. The World Bank and IMF anticipate completion of several more full PRSPs in the first half of 2002.<sup>4</sup>

### **The civil society voice in the PRSP process**

The *PRSP Sourcebook* defines participation as "a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources that affect them" (World Bank, 2000a:2). Civil society is one of six designated categories of stakeholders: the general public, government, representative assemblies, civil society organizations, the private sector and donor and international financial institutions (World Bank, 2000a:Box 5). While Eberlei (2001) makes a compelling case for multi-dimensional, institutionalized participation in the PRSP context, embracing parliamentary, sub-national governments, and CSO involvement, this paper focuses more narrowly on the mechanisms for civil society organizations' participation.

World Bank guidance envisions CSOs as participants in planning, setting priorities and choosing public actions (World Bank, 2000a:13), and calls on governments to decide when, where and how to promote participation in national level policy formulation, the budget process, monitoring and evaluation and/or in poverty analysis (World Bank, 2000f:2-4; IMF, 2000:2-3).

Several sets of pressure on the IFIs helped bring about the PRSP and its requirements for national participation. The failure of past national poverty reduction

strategies forms a part of the broad context, as does criticism of aid donors for undercutting national ownership of development policy. But three more immediate factors shaped the PRSP. First, donors needed a mechanism to assure themselves that debt relief concessions under an expanded HIPC would be applied to poverty reduction. Second, sustained criticism of the IMF's facility for IDA-eligible governments (Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility, or ESAF) contributed to the IMF and G-7's decision to re-package the ESAF. Third, the WB was determined not to lose influence over economic policy in the HIPC countries, once debt relief was granted.

The World Bank's central justification for civil society participation in PRSP is instrumental: participation leads to more effective policies for reducing poverty. Participation produces better policy, it is argued, because of its potential to build understanding of poverty; build partnerships and trust between government and civil society at all levels; clarify trade-offs with other development priorities; identify delivery mechanisms and partnerships to reach the poor; and enhance transparency and accountability in public decisions and actions (World Bank, 2000a:4).

But for many CSOs, participation is fundamental, not instrumental. NGOs worry that the IFIs will accept PRSPs with limited participation (CIDSE and Caritas Internationalis, 2000b; IMF and IDA, 2000b:14-15). The more worrisome possibility for the World Bank is that a PRSP could be completed with exemplary participation but might fail to “tackl[e] difficult, socially divisive issues and may in substance be less convincing” (IMF and IDA, 1999:16). The “bottom line” for the IFIs' boards is economic strategy and policy (IMF and IDA, 1999:17), not participation. Participation is a means to the end of effective policy, which can be achieved with or without consulting the poor.

### **Dynamics of participation in PRSPs**

Under these circumstances, the WB confronts several contradictions that strain the process of requiring national policy consultation. Five such tensions are discussed in the following pages; some are inherent in the politics of donor conditionality, others flow from the World Bank's position as the pre-eminent proponent of neo-liberal economic policies.

#### *1. Participation and national ownership*

“Ownership” by governments is now acknowledged to be essential to WB-financed programs. But the WB comes under pressure to encourage broad participation, and many on staff are convinced of its merits. Only in the best of circumstances—featuring strong commitment to the process by the national government—can an international donor hope to satisfy both the ownership and participation objectives.

The PRSP is in part a means to establish international confidence that debt relief and new lending will contribute to effective anti-poverty strategies, and its persuasiveness rests largely on the requirement that national civil societies participate in its design. The WB begins, therefore, from a fundamental contradiction: governments are to devise a program to which they are fully committed, and they are directed by the WB to do it in a

participatory manner. The paradoxical concept of “ownership” means, in the case of the PRSP, that governments adopt a WB-mandated participatory process to develop a *national* plan that implements *international* anti-poverty objectives.

The IFIs’ solution has been to rely on advice and “good practice” guidance rather than binding requirements on governments (IMF and IDA, 1999:12). “[I]t was not the business of the Fund or the Bank to prescribe to governments whom to ‘sit at the table’”, asserts an IMF representative, and to do so would “detract from PRSP ownership” (The North-South Institute, 2000).

The IFIs set no minimum requirements to govern the nature of participation, and did not make participation a criterion for endorsement of the PRSPs, even though a description of the participation process is required (World Bank, 2000e:6; IMF and IDA, 1999:17). Despite pressure for more specific requirements (CIDSE and Caritas Internationalis, 2000b; IMF and IDA, 2000b:32-37), the WB has been reluctant to articulate standards. Given this approach, and the emphasis on ownership, proponents of popular participation see the WB as unwilling to make “quality participation” happen in the PRSPs.

Some NGOs have proposed minimum standards to foster quality participation (Center of Concern, 2000). The standards would not prescribe a process but would act as a floor, and could be a condition for World Bank endorsement of a PRSP (McGee, 2000a:68). But there is no such floor, and the WB and IMF argue that there cannot and should not be rigid guidelines (World Bank, 2000e:6; IMF and IDA, 1999:17). The UN Development Programme (UNDP, 2001:2), on the other hand, argues that PRSPs are too strongly identified with the IFIs, and that there should be no formal “adjudication” of the plans; that is, that donors’ potential leverage over PRSP process and content should be weakened.

One result has been a marked unevenness in the degree of consultation. The IFIs report that the early experience featured “a much greater degree of participation in I-PRSP preparation than originally envisaged (IMF and IDA, 2000b:7-8, 9).” The WB and the IMF praise the completed Ugandan PRSP for its broad consultation with several levels of government and CSOs, and the involvement of the poor in the Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA) Project. Among the early PRSP countries, only Uganda and Vietnam made systematic participatory poverty assessments part of the PRSP strategy. Burkina Faso’s participation was less comprehensive, and the IFIs noted the absence of systematic consultation directly with the poor, and of any report on the issues raised in consultations (IMF and IDA, 2000b:9).

## 2. *Inclusion: whose voices?*

The World Bank’s anti-poverty commitments—particularly in the PRSP—suggest that civil society consultation should compensate for existing inequalities by giving privileged hearing to poor and historically excluded groups. But corporate and other interest groups, already likely to have greater influence in national economic policy, take advantage of access as well. The political viability of an anti-poverty strategy may rest

largely on the support of groups other than the poor, but the PRSP also envisions a process that gives voice to groups representing the poor. Consultation and participation that aims to serve both these purposes—political and distributive—will sometimes give priority to different, and conflicting, stakeholder groups.

Among the six stakeholders groups, CSOs have their opportunity for a voice mainly in the consultation meetings. In some cases, as in Kenya, civil society organizations had opportunities to submit written documents to the meeting (NGO Working Group on the World Bank, 2000). In Uganda, donors and CSOs are members of the working group that drafted the PRSP. (Participation in three such working groups is summarized in Box 3.)

But this inclusion has limitations. Many of the early consultative meetings were held in national capitals, relatively inaccessible to local governments and local CSOs (Government of the Republic of Honduras, 2000:Annex B; SPA, 2000:4). Poor people themselves have not participated directly in consultations, expressing their views through Participatory Poverty Assessments (PPA) when one is carried out. Organized interests that the World Bank specifically suggests as possible participants, for example, trade unions in Uganda, may or may not be included (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, 2000).

If the goal of civil society participation is solely to give national policy a firm political base, this may not require the support of the poor or excluded groups. But a process that does not emphasize their participation does not accomplish the World Bank's stated objective about poverty reduction and inclusion. Such processes (as in Burkina Faso) (IMF and IDA, 2000b:9) have nonetheless been accepted by the IFIs.<sup>5</sup> Others, as in Bolivia, have included voices with a claim to represent poor people's interests, while conducting separate, parallel consultations on "Strategies for Economic Growth," engaging primarily corporate interests (Coventry, 9). Other patterns of inclusion in national PRSP workshops are surveyed in Box 4.

The question "whose voice?" arises among CSOs as well. International NGOs have played a highly visible role in advocacy with the World Bank, and their legitimacy and appropriate roles in country-specific (rather than bank-wide) policy is frequently challenged.

### *3. Agenda and access: which decisions are open to CSOs?*

As with any donor-mandated planning process, the link between the PRSP and the processes by which other development policies are set is vitally important. The PRSP process lies outside of governments' standard policy processes. The mechanism for consultation often differs from standard national representative institutions and decision-making processes. This extra-governmental nature of the PRSP is a seeming contradiction to the priority the WB assigns to improving the quality of governance.

The prospect of moving poverty eradication to the center of development policy is much greater if opportunities for CSO voices created in the PRSP are replicated or reinforced in processes such as the Country Assistance Strategy (CAS) and the national

budget. Consultations held during preparation of the PRSP are the only events at which CSOs can be confident of getting a hearing. The PRSP is a donor-inspired process, separate from national budgetary processes, and invited CSO participation offers hope but no assurance that CSOs' input will also be welcomed in the national policy processes that follow.

The European Commission (EC) has been the strongest advocate of consultations that continue beyond the PRSP process (European Commission, 2000a:13). But participation in the PRSP has focused on producing the PRSP document itself, primarily through consultative workshops that end when a PRSP draft is ready. Each PRSP is to be updated every three years, with annual reports, and any further consultative meetings or participation plans will be at governments' initiative.

Uganda's experience (see Box 5) suggests that a pre-existing participatory process is the most likely means by which civil society's role in the PRSP will be integrated into other political processes. Nyamugasira (2000:5) points out that when this does occur, "participation in developing national plans jointly with government curtails [civil society's] autonomy," as "it becomes much harder to criticize what one has helped to create."

### **Box 3 — Consultation and inclusion: Uganda, Kenya, Vietnam and Honduras**

Uganda's first draft PRSP was circulated widely to government staff, donors and CSOs, with workshops held in eight zones across the country. A second national workshop was held in the month following and a Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA) already completed at the time of the PRSP process, was drawn upon as a source of direct comment by poor people.

Vietnam's relatively broad, systematic consultative process was assisted heavily by external donors. Four PPAs were carried out in 1999 with assistance from the Vietnam-Sweden Mountain Rural Development Program, ActionAid, Oxfam Great Britain, and Save the Children. These provided a substantial empirical base (data from 6,000 households) for the poverty analysis. The UNDP and SIDA supported the collection of poverty-related information in the government Statistic Office, and the WB and Asian Development Bank (ADB) financed workshops on the Comprehensive Poverty Reduction Strategy (CPRS) in all 61 provinces.

A three-day workshop was held in July, 2000, attended by government officials, donors, the NGO working group, research institutes, mass organizations and local and international NGOs in Sapa District. When the draft CPRS was done, regional and national workshops were held to seek input from all ministries and all 61 provinces. NGO and donors conducting the four PPAs were invited to the donor meeting.

Kenya scheduled no consultation for the first draft, which went directly to the IFIs for comment. A four-day consultative forum, attended by 300 people, was held to comment on the second draft, which had been made public a few days before.

The Honduran government's efforts to elicit CSO views on the PRSP were constrained by a very short timeline in order to qualify for HIPC debt relief. Two consultation meetings were held. In the first, CSO representatives heard oral presentations from government ministries and had opportunity to comment, orally, on the same day. After the IFIs reviewed the first draft, a second round of consultations took place, but the government had a total of 21 days after receiving responses from the WB/IMF, to revise, print and circulate the document to CSOs for discussion.

**Sources:** Agrawal, 2000; World Bank, 2000h; DFIDEA, 2000; European Commission, 2000c; Government of Honduras, 2000.

**Box 4 — Directing the PRSP process: Participation in government coordinating bodies**

PRSP processes have relied heavily on workshops or other formal consultations to solicit civil society views. There has been some limited inclusion of NGOs and CSOs in the teams that coordinate and/or draft PRSP documents. In Uganda the Department of Treasury led the PRSP working group, which included donors and CSOs. The drafting team included Treasury staff, international and local CSO representatives. It was advised by a task force consisting of 10 national and international NGOs, research institutions, and other civil society organizations, led by Uganda Debt Network (UDN), a coalition of CSOs.

In Vietnam, NGOs were included, not in the drafting of policy documents, but in the ongoing poverty coordination working group. Eight government departments and agencies are represented in the drafting team for the PRSP, coordinated by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MOLISA) and Ministry of Planning and Investing (MPI). But the government's Poverty Working Group includes government, donor and NGO representatives. Co-chaired by government and donors on a rotating basis, the working group meets one day a month to address methodology, findings, and to review early drafts.

Kenya's coordinating process is the least open of the three, and is managed by the Treasury Department, involving other ministries but with no external representation on the drafting team or the topical working groups.

**Sources:** DFIDEA, 2000; Uganda Debt Network, 2000; Agrawal, 2000; World Bank, 2000b.

### **Box 5 — PRSPS and existing policy-making processes**

The process mandated in the PRSP takes place in the context of each government's pre-existing policy-making processes. Some of these processes also conform to donor requirements; others, such as the budget process, are formally independent of donors' concerns. The links between the PRSP and other political processes in Uganda, Vietnam, and Kenya have been varied.

All three countries' poverty reduction strategies predated PRSP. Uganda created its "Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP)" in 1997, and the PRSP draws on the PEAP and related Poverty Status Report. Vietnam's Comprehensive Poverty Reduction Strategy was developed for its five-year national plan. Vietnam has produced a thorough Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA) document, and the government is not planning a participatory PRSP process. Kenya's "National Poverty Eradication Plan," was completed in February 1999.

Only in Uganda is there evidence that civil society participation will extend beyond the PRSP into annual budgetary debates. The background 'discussion draft' was circulated widely in the context of the national budget process, linking the two and providing a forum for some consultation in each district. CSOs have been involved in the dialogue on priorities and spending commitments since 1998. The government has encouraged public debate in the media and through publishing an abbreviated version of the Budget Framework Paper, an annual "Background to the Budget", and a summary of the composition of expenditure for all sectors.

**Sources:** DFIDEA, 2000; Government of Uganda, 2000; Agrawal, 2000.

#### *4. From inclusion to influence?*

At this early stage in PRSP implementation, the record does not allow any judgement on the influence of opinions expressed by CSOs in invited consultative meetings. But there is no mechanism to ensure that the choices and development priorities expressed are seriously considered, and it is difficult to imagine an effective and appropriate way for a donor to make such a requirement.

Neither the content nor the process of consultation is ultimately a condition for World Bank endorsement of the PRSP. As in other forms of consultation, the weight given to CSOs' views may depend on the availability of the proceedings to the interested public, and on each CSOs' ability to impose some political cost if their views are disregarded.

The prospect of consultation without accountability is many CSOs' greatest fear. Such a process not only fails to increase CSOs' influence, but also rubber stamps and

legitimizes a strategy that they have not really influenced (EURODAD, 2000a:2; Grusky, 2000:7). Nyamugasira, writing for the Ugandan Debt Network, argues that donors, government and CSOs alike have a responsibility to assure that the views “have been taken into account,” and that failure to do so makes PRSP participation “a disguise for drifting away from participatory politics” in national life (2000, 4).

#### *5. Whose voices? Reorganizing the donors*

The PRSP scheme re-orders the donor consultation process, assigning UN and bilateral donors the role of stakeholders in a country-managed consultation, which the WB and IMF oversee and endorse. The shift has two effects on donors: it consolidates the World Bank's and IMF's leadership role among official donors, and it assigns responsibility to governments to sort out and weigh input from donors as well as other stakeholders.

Not surprisingly, other donors question and resist this re-shuffling. The Asian Development Bank argues that besides placing excessive demands on governments, the new common donor framework conflicts with the ADB's belief in “competitive pluralism.” This pluralism, (real or imagined) permits borrowing governments to choose among competing strategies and financial options offered by different international financial institutions (Oxford Analytica, 2000:2). The European Commission (2000a:2-3) similarly argues for results-oriented conditionality, with greater choice for governments setting policy.

Donor coordination is often coupled in the PRSP papers with consultation with civil society, integrating external donors with other stakeholders in the consultation process. The European Commission (2000a:2) worries that insufficient attention is given to ownership and donor coordination, and points to the cursory consultations held with donors in Chad, Haiti, Mauritania and Burkina Faso. Mauritania's single meeting with donors was organized when the I-PRSP was already nearly finalized (EC, 2000a:2).

NGOs and some UN agencies worry about the leadership role assigned to the IMF (UN ECOSOC, Commission on Human Rights, 2001). Grusky (2000:7) questions the appropriateness of the IFIs' central role, and the *Coopération Internationale pour le Développement et la Solidarité* (CIDSE) suggests that the IMF be removed from its role in approving poverty reduction processes, to be replaced by broader groups of donors including the UN specialized agencies (CIDSE and Caritas Internationalis 2000a:1-2, 6).

This new role for the IMF, some argue, comes at the expense of those UN specialized agencies with expertise in poverty-related assistance. Grusky (2000:8) argues that the PRSP initiative could further weaken the UN role, particularly the UNDP's contributions in social development and donor coordination. The World Health Organization (WHO), however, while calling for greater transparency in the IFIs' interaction with governments, praises the PRSP for raising the political profile of “poverty issues” and encouraging CSOs to “engage with national policy processes in a more strategic manner” (WHO, 2001:Appendix 1, paragraph 3.6).

The UNDP has raised similar concerns, and argues that the World Bank is unwilling to make the concessions necessary to ensure genuine coordination among donors. Several UN agencies complain that they were not adequately consulted when the process was designed and that the WB has failed to keep them involved in implementing the strategies, which arise from the country development process (CDF) and PRSP processes (Oxford Analytica, 2000:2). The Strategic Partnership with Africa (SPA) confirms these views from surveys of 10 international donors in 21 African countries (SPA, 2000:4). Even the World Bank's remarkably positive summary of these donors' comments, a year later, notes that the donors remain concerned about "the role of the IFIs," and the PRSPs' threat to "greater national ownership" (Survey of SPA Donors Support, 2001).

The World Bank has entered into formal agreements with the UNDP and is formalizing agreements separately with the International Labour Organization (ILO) and UNICEF. The agreements are for particular countries (Guinea Bissau, Mali, Ghana), and are intended to foster collaboration between the World Bank and UNDP, minimize duplication of effort, and foster greater exchange of information and analysis.

UNESCO welcomes the World Bank's step away from its "economic approach to understanding poverty" (UNESCO, 2000: 2). But it notes that that "early evidence indicates that both national processes and the resultant strategies are relatively standardized, much influenced by international consultants, and not genuinely rooted in or owned by the country in whose name they are written" (UNESCO, 2000:5). USAID expresses similar concern that time constraints for developing PRSP and I-PRSP will lead governments to hire expatriate consultants to help prepare these documents, rather than follow "a genuinely country-owned process" (Babbitt, 2000: 2).<sup>6</sup>

Bilateral donors and the European Commission have also weighed in. USAID is most vocal among the bilaterals, cautioning that the World Bank is now a "fast moving train." The USAID position is ambiguous, declaring that it supports CDFs and PRSPs as new frameworks for development, but sees no need for multilateral frameworks to replace for bilateral country strategies (Babbitt, 2000:1).

## **Conclusions**

CSO participation has been variously tolerated, accepted, cultivated and occasionally required in the World Bank. Three principal levels of interaction—cooperation in project, conflict over projects, and consultation on matters of Bank-wide policy—have accomplished a variety of organizational objectives for the World Bank, and permitted some important if narrowly focused influence on policies and practice. The three forms of interaction have used distinctly different legitimacy tests for CSO participation.

With the advent of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, a new dimension of World Bank-civil society relations comes into focus: the facilitation of government-civil society interaction in developing national anti-poverty strategies. The brief history of PRSPs to

date suggests that the World Bank confronts tensions and contradictions in its role, particularly between the need to motivate and facilitate participatory processes, and the need to maintain at least the perception of government ownership of the process.

The World Bank will address these tensions as it proceeds with the PRSPs, whether by deliberate choices or by default. At an early stage in PRSP, the WB appears to be emphasizing “ownership” over mandating participation, endorsing PRSPs without reference to the quality of participation in their design. Governments appear to be leaning toward broad consultations rather than consultations heavily weighted toward the poor. And the World Bank has relatively few options, short of exerting its influence more strongly, to extend the participation that occurs in the PRSP process into governments’ budget and other major policy processes.

The early record of PRSP deliberative processes is mixed, and suggests that the World Bank's and IMF's requirements for systematic civil society participation have relatively limited influence. The PRSP processes vary widely, from relatively deep involvement by a broad array of interest groups and NGOs, to perfunctory consultations on strategies already largely completed and reviewed by the IFIs. The variation, and the reluctance of the IFIs to set standards for the extent of consultation and participation, suggest that despite voluminous guidance from the IFIs, the local and national initiatives of civil society organizations will dictate the degree of civil society inclusion and influence.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Earlier drafts of this paper benefited from comments by John Foster and Alison Van Rooy of The North-South Institute, members of the project review committee and Carolyn Reynolds of the World Bank’s External Affairs Department. Srirak Plipat provided valuable research assistance.

<sup>2</sup> The World Bank’s definition is followed by the following list of examples, which I am referring to as civil society organizations: “...research and policy design organizations, labour unions, the media, NGOs, grassroots associations, community-based organizations, religious groups and many others...” (World Bank, *Working Together: The World Bank’s Partnership with Civil Society*, 2000p, p. 8).

<sup>3</sup> On this dispute, see Alex Wilks, “A Tower of Babel on the internet? The World Bank’s Development Gateway (2001), and other commentaries at the Bretton Woods Project web site at <http://www.brettonwoodsproject.org>

<sup>4</sup> World Bank and IMF collaboration in the PRSP involves a division of labour that focuses WB staff on the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of poverty reduction strategies, and the design of sector strategies and social safety nets. The WB also advises authorities on how to improve effectiveness and poverty-orientation of public expenditures. World Bank-IMF joint committees that work on the I-PRSP and PRSP include the Joint Implementation Committee and the Joint Staff Assessment (which assesses in particular the I-PRSP processes).

<sup>5</sup> Burkina Faso’s I-PRSP process featured one discussion session with civil society and donors lasting an hour and a quarter (European Commission, 1999)

<sup>6</sup> The issue of time constraints in the formation of PRSPs and I-PRSPs is also raised in CIDSE, 2000a; European Commission, 2000a, “Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs).” Comments on the Joint Document presented to the IMF/WB Boards in December 1999. Brussels, February 2000; and SPA, 1999, “Chairman’s Summary.” SPA Partnership Meeting, Paris, December 7-9, p.8.