



INFLUENCING POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGIES AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS – A ZAMBIAN CIVIL SOCIETY EXPERIENCE

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1. Introduction

Development of national policies and strategies was previously the prerogative of the Government. The emergence of Poverty Reduction Strategy processes changed this in many countries. Zambia was no exception as demonstrated during the formulation of its first Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP)¹ in 2000/2001. The formulation process came with the requirement of participation of all stakeholders. As expected the definition of participation has differed between countries. Zambia's case however was a positive one, demonstrating that government can listen, but to do so, civil society must be effectively organized.

It must be established from the onset that Zambian civil society's engagement in national planning is not to say that civil society agrees with the source of all the concepts, neither do we participate just because it is a prerequisite. Civil Society participates because it recognizes the need for every Zambian to enjoy all basic needs by ensuring that good plans are put in place and are implemented accordingly.

2. A Government's Invitation to the Table & A Civil Society Engagement Strategy

Following Zambia's alignment to the HIPC process, the Government embarked on the process of preparing a PRSP in 2000. They invited civil society to participate and contribute to coming up with a poverty reduction plan for Zambia. In recognizing the need to get organized and coordinated to effectively influence the process, the non state actors formed a loose network, the Civil Society for Poverty Reduction (CSPR). The aim was to be pro-active instead of being reactive to what government had come up with.

The formal invitation was for non state actors to participate in the various working groups of the government (now called Sector Advisory Groups). However, in noting that the selection of CSOs to these was limited in number and choice, CSPR opted to complement the work of their counter parts on the working groups by conducting independent consultations, both within civil society (through thematic groups) and community consultations using participatory techniques in four provinces and districts² which were at that time rated the poorest in Zambia.

¹ The PRSP was conditionality for Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) for them to map up a strategy to reduce poverty as a way of them qualifying for debt cancellation. Most of the contents of the PRSPs were within a World Bank/IMF pre-set framework.

² Mwinilunga in North-Western Province; Senanga in Western Province; Petauke in Eastern Province and Samfya in Luapula Province.

In each of the districts visited, one peri-urban and two rural areas were selected. Discussions were held in each community with three different groups – men, women and youth, in which they identified their various needs through tools such as sequence ranking, seasonality calendars, Focal Group Discussions and interviews with key informers such as headmen, heads of government departments, etc.

Also, analyses were conducted in 10 thematic sectors of the PRSP such as agriculture, health, education, water and sanitation, gender and HIV/AIDS. The findings from the consultations and analyses were compiled into a civil society document entitled: “A Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) for Zambia; A Civil Society Perspective”³ which formed the submission to the PRSP. About two thirds of civil society’s submission was incorporated in the final government document. Civil Society does not agree with all the issues in the final PRSP, nor does it necessarily agree with the emphasis areas within the strategy, but they do agree that it presented a fairly good framework for beginning to fight the condition in which two thirds of Zambians live.

After the PRSP was launched for implementation, members of CCSR felt the need to remain coordinated and organized for advocacy around implementation based on monitoring and evaluation of the progress of implementation as well as raising awareness on poverty reduction issues. To successfully do this, skills of members were built to enable them effectively conduct the participatory poverty monitoring, expenditure tracking and advocacy work. Today, CCSR is made of over 140 civil society organizations from different parts of the country, formalized through a Memorandum of Understanding.

3. Civil Society During PRSP Implementation

The main activities of Civil Society around the PRSP have been implemented through the CCSR and its four programs: Governance and Institutional Development, Research and Policy Analysis, Civic Engagement and Advocacy and Information Management and Networking.

Among some of its PRSP work has been;

- Simplification of the PRSP into a popularized easy to understand booklet called “The Path Away from Poverty”. This booklet was further summarized into a brochure and translated in the seven major local languages.
- A baseline survey was conducted in collaboration with the Zambia Social Investment Fund in 2002. This formed a basis for future comparison of poverty monitoring. Thereafter, CCSR conducted Rapid Assessments to determine the impacts being felt by the poor every year in five districts of Zambia. Findings of the assessments have been compiled into a document entitled “Observing Poverty Reduction: A compilation of the 2002 to 2005 Poverty Assessments”⁴
- Conducted Expenditure Tracking exercises in identified poverty reduction programs. This involved tracking expenditures from budgetary allocations to disbursements down to utilization.
- Conducted annual pre and post budget analyses on the poverty reduction programs

³ This document and others can be accessed on www.ccsr.org.zm

⁴ CCSR, September, 2006

- Round table discussions with stakeholders including government, Members of Parliament, donors, on advocacy issues emerging from the poverty monitoring, budget tracking and budget analysis.
- A Civil Society Evaluation of the PRSP.
- Participation in Government Sectoral Advisory Groups (SAGs) at national level and the Provincial Development Coordinating Committee (PDCC) and District Development Coordinating Committees (DDCCs) at Provincial level.

In all of its work, Civil Society has taken cognizance of spaces created by government for it to engage in the national planning processes. CSPR has succeeded in advocating for participation of member organisations on the different SAGs, the PDCCs and DDCCs. However, inclusion in the SAGs comes with its own snags including untimely communication for meetings, unclear agendas etc. It is thus the prerogative of civil society to complement those organisations sitting on the SAGs as an avenue for feeding in issues emanating from organised debate within civil society groups.

4. Post PRSP:

The implementation of the PRSP was planned for 2002 to 2004. The PRSP was placed in a Transitional National Development Plan (TNDP), a broader development agenda and timed up to 2005, hence providing a bridge from the PRSP to the development of a new national strategy – the Fifth National Development Plan.

Before engaging with a new strategy, Civil Society through CSPR, decided to conduct an independent assessment of the performance of the PRSP to draw lessons for the next plan. This assessment was undertaken in 2005 and the following were some of the findings from the evaluation and prior work conducted by CSPR:

Accomplishments:

- The PRSP was a relevant guiding document for the purposes of national development planning and economic management and poverty reduction – a framework through which the poverty challenge can be addressed.
- An attempt to match resources for development activities in the national budget, unlike past development plans.
- The PRS approach has led to a sharper focus on poverty reduction and a more open participatory process by the government and donors than previously the case.

Areas for improvement:

- Low political will for implementation of poverty reduction programs. This was evident from the constant diversion of poverty reduction funds to other areas that civil society deemed not priority, such as unnecessary bi-elections.
- There was need for timely and full disbursement of poverty reduction funds. It was discovered through the years that poverty program allocations were usually disbursed late and not in full. This meant that even the little funds allocated to poverty reduction did not go to the intended projects. When they were, it was at the wrong time of the year or the funds were used for something else.
- Capacities of implementers and SAGs need to be improved – identification of poverty reducing projects; prioritization, resource disbursement, implementation and monitoring

- Unpredictable resource environment is a thorny issue that must be boldly tackled by government and cooperating partners.

Recommendations for way forward:

- There is need for a clear definition of poverty reducing projects/programs at both policy and implementation levels. Need to prioritise and ring fence poverty reduction funds
- Government funding to PRPs must reflect what is in each budget for every sector and funds must be released on time to enhance effective implementation.
- Government must institutionalize the participation of various implementation structures such as SAGs, PDCCs by giving them the necessary legal framework
- Begin implementation of the Decentralisation policy which is the only medium through which a bottom up approach to development planning is assured.
- Consultations should be done in suitable timeframes instead of rushed
- Donors must make aid flow more predictable by honoring their pledges on time. This can be done by aligning their aid to government development plan
- Civil Society should be involved at higher levels of planning e.g. Steering Committee and Technical Committee levels
- Civil society should be more pro-active in ensuring they participate in the broad based and open discussion of macro-economic policy alternatives with government and cooperating partners.
- Need to have an independent monitoring team

5. Towards a New Plan and a Civil Society Process

In April, 2005, government invited civil society to a consultative meeting where a roadmap for formulating the Fifth National Development Plan (FNDP) was presented. Civil Society was once again invited to be part of the process. In addition, civil society decided to play a complementary role by conducting an independent but monitorable consultative process to input to the plan.

Civil society engagement in the NDP process

In July 2005, ***a national inception workshop*** was held where two hundred and thirty (230) civil society representatives participated. At the workshop, government was invited to present their roadmap and give a rationale to the NDP process. At the same time, civil society discussed their proposed roadmap. It was at this workshop that civil society thematic groups were revived at national level and provincial groups also constituted. This included provinces that CSPR do not have a physical presence in. These groups were formed through CSPR member organizations that have a presence in these areas.

The following thematic groups were formed:

- (i) Agriculture and food security
- (ii) Disability
- (iii) Education, youth and Child Development
- (iv) Employment
- (v) Environment
- (vi) Governance
- (vii) Gender
- (viii) Health and Nutrition
- (ix) HIV/AIDS

- (x) Industry
- (xi) Information Technology and Communication
- (xii) Macro-economics
- (xiii) Mining
- (xiv) Social Protection
- (xv) Water and Sanitation and low cost housing

The **thematic groups and provincial groups** conducted analyses of the different sectors based on civil society consultative meetings with the communities, the PRSP evaluation as well as information from SAGs and Government progress reports and the prevailing situation. In August, 2005, a **consensus building workshop** was held for civil society where the different papers were presented and civil society in the meeting discussed and agreed on the issues presented. The different issues were then compiled into a document called **“A Fifth National Development Plan for Zambia; 2006-2010 – A Civil Society Perspective”**. The document was launched and presented to Government through the Ministry of Finance and the SAGs.

In July, 2006, Government finally released the draft FNDP document. Civil Society analysed the draft, comparing it’s submissions with what was in the draft document. This culminated into the **Civil Society Indaba** held on 12th July, 2006, where civil society agreed on a response to the draft FNDP. The comments were presented at the Government National Stakeholders Workshop held on 24th July and some of the **observations** by civil society are;

- There is need to show linkages with some key previous and on-going plans such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) and the Transitional National Development Plan (TNDP);
- Link the FNDP targets to those of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), including breaking them down into district annual targets;
- Specify further some broadly reflected strategies and outline the linkages between the plans, activities and strategies. This would make monitoring easier.
- The draft plan did not incorporate the provincial recommendations into the provincial chapters, an issue also shared by the local government officials at the Government meeting. This is crucial in that the FNDP emphasises bottom up implementation through the implementation of the Decentralisation Policy.
- The Monitoring and Evaluation institutional framework in the document does not explicitly show clear linkages from the sub-district structures all the way to the national level.
- On financing the plan, government must exhibit the highest show of political will by allocating and timely disbursing funds to the identified priority areas.

Achievements:

- The process was consultative and attempted to bring on board most stakeholders
- There is a concrete document to guide national development for the next five years – easier monitoring
- There is a monitoring framework outlined in the document

- Inclusion of some relevant chapters that were left out in the past, e.g., disabilities.

Areas of Improvement in the NDP

- The FNDP should clearly state the priority PRPs, especially in light of the anticipated debt relief resources from multilateral debt relief initiatives and these resources must be protected.
- The M and E institutional framework should explicitly show clear linkages from the sub-district structures all the way to the national level and these should include civil society and other key stakeholders.
- There is urgent need to streamline the various administrative and institutional arrangements at national, provincial and district levels.
- Government should align all existing policies to the NDP.

6. ALIGNING NATIONAL PLANS TO MDGs

It can be said that the MDGs are a set of goals that can be achieved if a government invests in ensuring the fulfillment of the basic needs of its people. Basic access to good health, education housing and employment, water and sanitation, etc, if realised, could put Zambia on the right path to the MDGs.

- There is focus, agreement and endorsement of the MDGs across all groups and sectors
- They present ends, not just means and are people centred, the essence of development
- They are holistic and integrated, covering environment, social, economic, health- there is a beautiful synergy
- They are simple, measurable, time bound – they can be monitored
- They are balanced – equally important for North and South
- PRSP, TNDP and FNDP in Zambia's case (short/medium term plans) are the operational framework for achieving the MDGs.
- MDG indicators are included in the list of PRSP (FNDP) indicators.
- It has been said that MDGs have been included in the FNDP as Goals for 2015

MDGs can be viewed as long term goals (2000-2015) while the PRSPs are strategies for countries to use as means to attaining the MDGs. They lay down programmes and targets to meet within specified timeframes. They also outline the institutions responsible for each activity. The PRSP are more elaborate and detailed in terms of specific activities. Activities are to a large extent country specific but all aim at meeting the MDGs as long term goals.

In formulating the FNDP, it has been observed that even though government alludes to the fact that they hope to move closer to achieving the MDGs by implementing the NDP, they do not show how they intend to do so. Civil Society did some advocacy around MDGising the FNDP but with insufficient impact.

Moreover, the budget of the NDP falls far short compared to a study conducted on how much it would cost to achieve MDGs in Zambia⁵. This can be seen from the finances allocated to the FNDP.

- The FNDP is estimated at **K65.2 trillion or approx \$18.6 billion dollars**. The current baseline for plan period is K57.6 trillion. FNDP Resource gap K7.7 trillion.
- The FNDP budget to the social sector is estimated at 800million dollars per year, while the MDGs costing study estimates that Zambia will need to spend 1.5 billion dollars per year on social sectors alone if we are to achieve the MDGs in 2015. This shows a deficit of about 700million dollars!
 - ** Need to ensure the estimate is based on MDG attainment (a lot of under budgeting)
 - ** Need to quickly look at the deficit of K7 trillion as this would be a huge deterrent in achieving the MDGs.
 - ** Annual Budgets should reflect priorities of the FNDP.

However, for Zambia to attain the MDGs,

1. **MDGising the National Policies:** Government must re-align Zambia's national policies to be consistent with the MDG related interventions. This should entail shifting resources and commitments from low to high priority areas in line with the MDGs. Indeed, savings from debt cancellation must be spent on programs and sectors consistent with achieving MDGs.
2. **Increased Investments in infrastructure:** The Commission for Africa and indeed the Millennium projects both underscore the need for increased investment in infrastructure to enhance regional economic development. It is thus recommended that government engages fully and pro-actively in the New Economic Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) and the African Peer Mechanism (APRM) so as to harness any regional investment opportunities that lead to increased investment in infrastructure and consequently competitiveness.
3. **Prudent Financial Management:** Government must improve financial and budgetary management to ensure the reliability and accountability of financial management, a first step to which should be the full implementation of the Integrated Financial Management Information Systems (IFMIS) reforms. If the Government of Zambia is to be able to implement its plan with a genuine commitment to achieving the MDGs, and if it is prudent and accountable in the use of national resources, then the unacceptable volatile and unpredictable donor flows must end.
4. To this effect: **Scaling of external assistance and fulfillment of the important international development compact:** we look to the official donors community to fulfill their pledge made at the Monterrey Financing for Development Conference and in the G8 Africa Action Plan that "no country genuinely committed to good governance and economic reform should miss out on achieving the MDGs through lack of finances". The estimates suggest that to reach the MDGs, government as well as

⁵ "The Cost of Meeting the MDGs in Zambia", October, 2005. A research report commissioned by the Civil Society for Poverty Reduction (CSPR), Jesuits Center for Theological Reflection (JCTR) and the Catholic Commission for Justice, Development and Peace (CCJDP)

cooperating partners must double their financing to this area between 2006 and 2015.

- 5. Donor Alignment and Conditionalities:** In support of the MDGs, much of the donor financing should increasingly come in form of Poverty Reduction Budget Support (PRBS). With improved budget performance in terms of transparency, participation and accountability, more cooperating partners should align their development assistance around the country-owned plan. In addition, we argue that the economic policy conditions associated with debt relief and with aid have a poor record of success in Zambia. Indeed, we are able to point to key areas where economic policy conditions have been particularly harmful to impoverished people. Any conditions set should be driven from below and foster local accountability of leaders to their people.

In addition:

** We advise governments to build capacity in negotiations with regards to concessional loans and that if such loans are obtained, they should not be utilized for consumption purposes but in areas of fast growth to enable us to repay the loans without falling back into the debt trap.

**It is imperative that the FNDP states the desire to ensure that all new loans are acquired through a popularly adopted loan contraction process, with parliamentary oversight.

7. Conclusion

Needless to say, we need to triple up efforts if we are serious about attaining the Goals. From the above, it is evident that MDGs cannot be achieved in isolation. It is the short-term national plans such as the FNDP or PRSPs that will eventually lead to the attainment of these goals and ultimately to poverty eradication. Governments world over thus have to ensure that MDGs are integrated into all public policy documents. This way, we can be assured of a world where all people enjoy all basic needs!

As UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan once said,

“So we urgently need you to do what you do best... Political will shifts only if there is national and local mobilization by the public, and only when leaders are held accountable.... What would really make a difference is if, at the local level, the Goals achieve a critical mass of support and even become “vote-getters”. You can and must help make that happen. If we do not, millions of people will die, prematurely and unnecessarily. That...should be a call to action.”⁶

⁶ Civil Society Forum, Sao Paulo Brazil, June 13, 2004