

POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY PAPERS (PRSPs) – WHAT CAN THEY DELIVER FOR CHILDREN IN POVERTY?

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1. INTRODUCTION

Donors, governments and many civil actors increasingly agree, at least at the level of rhetoric, on the vital importance of tackling childhood poverty as part of broader poverty reduction efforts. Whether inspired by moral outrage or more instrumental arguments about the potential of action in childhood to break poverty cycles, the importance of doing so is rarely overtly disputed.

At the same time, the best ways to achieve this remain contentious. This reflects the fierce debate about approaches to poverty reduction, roles of state and market, globalisation or local sovereignty among other issues. It also reflects a widespread scepticism that specific action to tackle poverty among children is necessary, beyond adequate health and education services and measures to raise household income. ‘There’s no such thing as child poverty – only family poverty’ is a common response to raising questions of childhood poverty.

The situation and prospects of children in poverty are very clearly related to family, community and state poverty. However, at least two factors suggest a case for a specific focus on childhood poverty, within this broader context. Firstly, there is accumulating evidence that poverty in childhood can lead to poverty, ill-health and other forms of ill-being in later life (see Yaqub, this volume, 2001), and to this poverty being passed on to the next generation (Harper et al, 2002). Secondly, children and young people in poverty often emphasise certain aspects of their experience as most damaging – typically those related to the denial of opportunities that others enjoy, and insecurity of livelihoods, neighbourhoods and social relationships. Just as a focus on realities and priorities of poor adult men and women through participatory policy research has expanded policymakers’ understandings of poverty and approaches to tackling it, so tackling some of the specific issues children in poverty face can lead to more holistic, inclusive and ultimately more effective poverty reduction policy.

Despite this, measures to promote children’s wellbeing being are often equated with (relatively low status) social policy, rather than viewed as an essential element of the now high priority, and relatively well funded, poverty reduction strategies. As such it is often considered that children’s wellbeing can be taken care of via ‘add-ons’ to mainstream policy, and the ways in which mainstream policy may lead to or entrench child poverty virtually ignored.

This paper takes as a point of departure the view that reducing or eradicating childhood poverty requires both general development policy which promotes the livelihoods and wellbeing of the poorest groups, and specific services and support programmes which promote the development and wellbeing of children, young people and their families (see Mehrotra and Jolly, 1998 and Mehrotra and Delamonica, this volume). We also suggest that achieving this requires substantial changes in the power relations of international

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development – with greater national control, greater inputs from disadvantaged people themselves, and an end to global economic policies and structures which systematically advantage rich countries people and corporations.

Initiated by the IMF and World Bank in 1999 as a new policy framework, and increasingly supported by the rest of the international community, Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) processes are potentially of enormous significance for children in low-income countries. This paper explores what PRSP processes are likely to deliver for children in poverty, with a particular focus on three areas: the potential impact of broad development policy measures; the implications of specific measures focused on children; and the potential of PRSPs to change policy processes. While the principles underlying PRSPs, such as national ownership and involvement of disadvantaged people in decision-making in poverty reduction policy are not new, PRSPs are one of the largest-scale and highest profile attempts to institutionalise them in national and international development action.

Changes in global economic structures are clearly beyond the scope of national poverty strategies. However, PRSPs operate within the context of, and reflect IFI conditionalities, which reinforce current global economic policies of liberalisation and privatisation and which may serve to increase inequalities both within countries and between the poorest and better off countries. Analysis of PRSPs' potential impact on children needs to take both these broad trends into account.

The argument is often made that PRSPs should not be concerned with detailed policy with respect to particular groups, but rather should set a broad framework for poverty reduction policy. While sympathetic to the aim of avoiding excessive complication, we argue that to be meaningful a certain degree of detail is indeed needed – it is the detail of policy choices and their implementation rather than the spirit that is crucial in terms of their impact on the ground. Secondly, where policy is not concerned with specific differences between social groups, marginalised groups are often either left out or disadvantaged by development processes, with the risk that their poverty is increased and entrenched. Finally, preventing transfers of poverty over the life-course or between generations is vital for reducing poverty overall, and thus some specificity as to how this will be achieved is warranted.

The paper is based on an analysis of the content of six full and seventeen interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (respectively PRSPs and I-PRSPs), carried out in mid to late 2001 (Marcus and Wilkinson, 2002), broader evidence of the impact of particular social and economic policy choices in a broader set of low-income contexts, on author involvement with Tanzania's PRSP process (Marshall) and on discussions with representatives of various civil society organisations involved with PRSP processes. We recognise that PRSP processes encompass ongoing reviews and are inherently linked to budgeting processes. However, space constraints, and the lack of documentation for many of the countries whose I-PRSPs and PRSPs are examined here, prevent discussions of insights from PRSP progress reports or reports from budgetary review processes. Where PRS implementation is further advanced, as in Tanzania, these processes have proved important in refining strategies, and consolidating resources for implementation. In this case, however, they have not as yet significantly changed overall analysis of poverty or the emphases of the strategy.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 discusses the potential of broad macro policy choices for reducing poverty among children. Section 3 examines the extent to which tackling childhood poverty is highlighted as a particular priority in twenty countries' PRSPs and I-PRSPs, and the ways these strategies propose to do so. Moving away from the policy documents themselves, Section 4 comments on early indications as to how far PRSP processes may be leading to a new way of 'doing development' and what the implications of this could be.

2. MACRO DEVELOPMENT POLICY –PRO-POOR, PRO-CHILD? ²

As suggested above, much of the potential impact of PRSPs on children lies in the implications of general development policies for family livelihoods and social services. Despite different emphases in different strategies, and despite a rhetoric of national ownership, the broad directions of development policies in the I-PRSPs and PRSPs we examined are strikingly similar. Unsurprisingly, in a context where poverty reduction strategies must be approved by the World Bank and IMF to qualify for debt relief and concessional loans, these institutions' priorities are reflected in I-PRSPs and PRSPs. Specifically, the strategies we examined: aim to raise incomes through economic growth associated with liberalisation; stress the importance of improving basic services, particularly health and education; and many emphasise measures to reduce vulnerability to natural disasters, improve governance or to strengthen social safety nets.

Overall, this sounds broadly positive. However, this headline description encompasses a wide variety of measures, some overtly pro-poor, some overtly pro-middle class or elites, and none demonstrate a convincing set of commitments to the poorest groups. Furthermore, very few of the strategies we examined (only Honduras's and Nicaragua's PRSPs) explicitly recognised that particular sets of economic policies could have differential impacts, and in some cases, negative impacts on different groups of poor people. Nor did any of these initial papers propose definite measures or structures for assessing the impacts of particular policy choices. It remains to be seen whether the emerging poverty monitoring structures, continued Participatory Poverty Assessments, and pilot Poverty Reduction and Social Impact Assessment exercises will lead to sustained institutionalisation of a differentiated analysis of this kind, and if so, how far this will influence future policy choices. In Tanzania, for example, there is considerable optimism among a range of actors that this can be achieved, and appreciation of the potential of research, monitoring and evaluation as a means for improving poverty reduction policy.

Economic growth and equity

Most of the PRSPs and I-PRSPs we examined give absolute priority to economic growth as a means of poverty reduction, aiming for annual growth rates of between 6 and 8 per cent. Surprisingly, given the growing consensus on the importance of reducing inequality for effective poverty reduction,³ there is very little discussion of how to bring about 'pro-poor' or equitably distributed growth. Only two of the strategies we examined (Mali's I-PRSP and Burkina Faso's PRSP) recognised that growth does not necessarily reduce poverty, and that poverty and child malnutrition had actually increased during recent periods of economic growth.

A few PRSPs (Burkina Faso, Nicaragua, Honduras and Uganda) explicitly mention social equity as an important principle. This is principally discussed in terms of disadvantaged groups or regions, and much more rarely in terms of structural socio-economic or class inequalities. Similarly, most attempts to promote equity focus particularly on human development, in particular, facilitating disadvantaged children's school attendance. While this might involve considerable state spending commitments, and may well have positive outcomes, it rarely involves redistributing tangible assets directly to poor people, and is at best a medium-term strategy for reducing poverty and inequality.

² Space only permits discussion of a few policy priorities. Other key areas with important implications for child wellbeing, such as environmental protection, governance or HIV/AIDS reduction cannot be discussed here.

³ White and Anderson, 2000; Hanmer and Naschold, 1999.

Liberalisation policies

Further liberalisation is the main means by which most PRSPs and I-PRSPs seek to promote growth. In Tanzania, for example, liberalisation reforms are to be accelerated, including relaxing restrictions on foreign investment, while Uganda's PRSP states categorically that the future of the country's industry relies on competition in the open market. Under the right conditions certain kinds of liberalisation can of course provide a stimulus for poverty reduction. However, there may be substantial trade-offs, especially for the poorest people, if liberalisation results in imports which undermine the prices of local products, and leads to unemployment or lower returns to labour. Additional strains on poor people's livelihoods such as these can lead to children dropping out of school, taking up harmful work, or inadequate diets.⁴

Privatisation and public sector reform

Privatisation and private sector development are seen as key engines of growth in countries as diverse as Kenya, Burkina Faso and Vietnam. Entities to be privatised include state-owned productive enterprises and parastatal organisations, land and public utilities, such as water, electricity, and telecommunications, and some strategies invite the private sector to run parts of the civil service (Malawi, Honduras), and the health sector.

While privatisation is believed to enhance efficiency, the record on this is at the very least, mixed (Martin, 1993), and the costs can be enormous. Private management of public services and utilities, often involving a transfer of ownership to outside the country, can increase costs to users and thus reduce access to the poorest families. Low-income families in the Mauritanian capital, Nouakchott, for example, now have to spend up to a fifth of household budgets on water alone (World Bank, 2000), while in Cochabamba, Bolivia's third largest city, water prices doubled overnight after privatisation. This meant that for those on the minimum wage, water bills suddenly accounted for close to half their monthly incomes, leading to demonstrations and the ultimate cancellation of the water privatisation contract (Bendana, 2001).

Land privatisation may lead to increased productivity; it may also run the risk of creating an asset-less class in contexts where unemployment rates are already very high, and thus stimulating further emigration from rural areas. The efficiencies gained in state-owned enterprise, parastatal or civil service reform often come at the cost of substantial job losses, and only three of the strategies we examined discussed compensatory or transitional social security measures (Albania, Kenya, Vietnam). In Togo, for example, where such arrangements were not put in place, half the households of retrenched civil servant withdrew one or more child from school (World Bank, 1996).

Social Sector Investment

All I-PRSPs and PRSPs commit additional resources to health and education services, and many to water and sanitation, either through budgetary increases or reallocation of expenditure. At the same time, unsurprisingly since most PRSPs are being developed in the context of debt relief provisions, but surprisingly given high projections for economic growth, most strategies make commitments to fiscal tightness. In social sectors, such tightness generally reduces a budget allocation already insufficient for reaching the current PRS targets, let alone the Millenium Development Goals. For example, Tanzania's PRSP states that

‘financing of acceptable levels of healthcare in Tanzania would cost about US\$9 per head. However, [this]..... would entail a doubling of the present budget allocation for

⁴ These policies have led to widespread impoverishment among vulnerable farming communities in countries as diverse as Mexico, Uruguay, Zimbabwe, Kenya, India and the Philippines (Hilary, 2001)

the health sector. Budgetary provision for the sector had, therefore, to be constrained to available resources, implying that the delivery of health services under the present circumstances would fall below acceptable levels in the short term' (Tanzania, PRSP, p.23)

One consequence of this continued pressure to contain fiscal deficits is an ongoing reliance on user fees for social services in many countries,⁵ which in many places have contributed to reduced access to services, lower school enrolments and increased morbidity and mortality (Sims et al, 2001).

Social protection programmes

Two thirds of the strategies we examined explicitly discussed social protection as a means of reducing poverty and supporting the most vulnerable people, in varying ways and depth.

These include measures to: protect and promote incomes and livelihoods, subsidise consumption and improve access to services. In some cases, substantial programmes exist or are planned⁶; in others, a few isolated measures are discussed, but no plans suggest a holistic approach even to groups identified as vulnerable, and in some cases, the state may be giving with one hand and taking away with the other. While it is clear that such measures are often highly valued by their recipients, they are often too small scale to help people move out of poverty; rather, they manage to contain its worst effects.

Much of the social protection policy discussed in these poverty reduction strategies is aimed at children or their families. Its effectiveness is clearly likely to vary from context to context, depending on the scale of support provided and its coherence with other areas of development policy. However, overall it appears unlikely to play a major role in helping lift children out of poverty.

If the main development strategy choices appear to deliver mixed benefits for children in poverty - some improvements in basic services, but little to bolster the livelihoods of the poorest groups, who may be further impoverished - what of specific commitments to children?

3. SPECIFIC COMMITMENTS TO CHILDREN IN POVERTY – REDRESSING THE BALANCE?

3.1 Visibility of children and young people in poverty analysis

In several of the poverty reduction strategies we examined (for example, Albania's, Malawi's, Kyrgyzstan's and Tajikistan's I-PRSPs), children as a social group are considered vulnerable, either inherently, or because large numbers of children are living below the poverty line and in some cases constitute the majority of absolutely poor people. It is notable that these strategies are principally from transition countries, which have long developed specific policy to address child and family vulnerability.

In other poverty reduction strategies, particular groups of children, such as members of child-headed households (Uganda), orphans (Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Lesotho, Malawi, Nicaragua, Rwanda and Tanzania) and street or homeless children (Albania, Cambodia, Honduras, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan and Mozambique, among others) are identified as especially vulnerable. The other main way in which children feature in these poverty reduction strategies is in observations of the differential rates of school attendance among boys and girls.⁷

⁵ For example Burkina Faso, Malawi, Rwanda, Tanzania, Mali and Ethiopia

⁶ In Tanzania, for example, the PPA process is investigating vulnerability and appropriate measures to tackle it in depth.

⁷ This is also the main way in which gender issues are discussed in these strategies.

None of the strategies we examined made a comprehensive analysis of the dimensions of poverty among children and young people.⁸ Nor did any specifically discuss the long-term implications of poverty in this cohort for overall entrenchment or reduction of poverty. This may be implicit, underlying proposals and action, since arguably many of the actions proposed could help reduce poverty among children and break poverty cycles. The emphasis in several strategies, such as Kenya's I-PRSP on the importance of achieving universal primary education and increasing secondary school enrolment, is a case in point. There is some concern in Tanzania that the emphasis on sectoral analysis in the PRSP (as in many others) is perhaps limiting a more holistic analysis (Marshall, forthcoming).

3.2 Action to support children in poverty

As with many other groups, children are discussed more frequently in poverty analysis than policy and action. However, all the poverty reduction strategies we studied discuss a number of measures specifically intended to reduce the incidence and impact of poverty on children. These include measures to promote school attendance, make access to health services easier or to improve nutrition, action to support improvements to family/ household incomes or livelihoods, and in a few cases, specific measures to promote the wellbeing of 'vulnerable groups of children'. These need to be seen in the context of broader development strategies which, as we argue in section 2, may have varied and contradictory impacts on children in poverty.

School attendance

Recognising the financial barriers to children's school attendance, numerous countries propose either fee exemptions, bursaries or support in-kind, such as distributing uniforms or textbooks, or waiving the requirement to wear uniform. Several countries have also abolished certain kinds of school fees.⁹ In many cases, these measures are specifically targeted at girls or rural children (Kenya, Rwanda, Burkina Faso), or other groups with lower attendance rates, such as nomadic children, child workers, slum dwellers or orphans (Kenya). In others, they are simply targeted at poor children, regardless of gender or other characteristics (Kyrgyzstan, Lesotho). Measures of this kind need to be implemented sensitively. Where certain children are singled out for assistance on the basis of poverty, they may be stigmatised by others and even dissuaded from attending school (Narayan et al, 2000). The challenges for the quality of education created by fee abolition as class sizes increase rapidly clearly need addressing urgently.

Early childhood development

Though often perceived as a luxury only for better-off countries, early childhood development programmes can be very effective in promoting children's success in school, and ensuring adequate nutrition. However, only two of the strategies we examined, those of Kyrgyzstan and Mongolia, both countries with long traditions of kindergarten provision, mention this sector and make commitments to strengthening provision.

Accessing health services

Several of the strategies we examined plan to reduce the scope of user fees in health services or to strengthen fee exemptions, often specifically for children, pregnant women and poor families (for example, Ghana, Cambodia, Burkina Faso). Other strategies aim to ensure exemptions are enforced (Kenya) and to prevent illegal charging of fees (Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan). These are positive measures in intent; however, much depends on the implementation - exemption systems are often costly to administer and in some contexts may

⁸ This lack of disaggregation is mirrored in the lack of gender analysis or attention to other particularly disadvantaged groups.

⁹ Uganda, Tanzania and Malawi have abolished primary education fees, and Mongolia recently abolished the parental contribution to children's upkeep in boarding schools.

be open to abuse. It is clearly a matter of concern that several other countries intend to increase charges to meet financing gaps (for example, Rwanda and Malawi).

Improving Nutrition

Several strategies, though fewer than might be expected, identify nutritional supplementation for young children and pregnant women as an important measure. For example, Mongolia's and Malawi's I-PRSPs and Honduras's and Nicaragua's PRSPs all state an intention to develop child nutrition programmes. Lesotho intends to expand its Free Primary Education programme, which includes school lunches. The generally limited attention to these issues is surprising, given the relatively high levels of child malnutrition and of maternal mortality, part of which may well be nutrition-related, in almost all the countries considered here.

Income and livelihoods

Two Central American and two Central Asian strategies intend to enhance cash payments to low income families with children, by increasing the value of this assistance and targeting them more effectively to the poorest families with children (Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Honduras and Nicaragua). Several African I-PRSPs and PRSPs (Malawi, Lesotho, Rwanda, Tanzania) mention measures to support orphans financially, though the mechanisms for doing this are not specified.

Child labour

Surprisingly, given the high profile of child labour issues in recent years, only five of the strategies we examined mention child labour (Kenya, Tanzania, Nicaragua, Honduras and Cambodia), and then principally as part of their poverty diagnosis. Only Kenya's I-PRSP and Honduras's PRSP link this analysis to action, with incentives for working children to attend school proposed in Kenya. Honduras's PRSP draws on and makes explicit linkages to the National Plan of Integrated Attention to Children and Adolescents, which contains an action plan on child labour and poverty. This is the only example among the PRSPs we examined of specific linkages being made between the PRSP and existing plans and commitments for children.

This limited discussion may reflect the fact that child labour is still considered an insignificant issue by policy makers within the broader context of poverty, or something tackled by measures already laid out, such as those aiming to reduce household poverty and promote school attendance. It may also be a deliberate omission to avoid damage to a country's reputation and investment prospects.

Young people

In the few strategies mentioning young people as a specific group, policy emphasises employment or access to secondary or higher education. Burkina Faso's PRSP also contains a commitment to develop incentives to prevent young people from abandoning their lands. There is a notable silence on young people's access to HIV/AIDS education or prevention services or broader reproductive health services, and young people's access to housing is not discussed at all.

Ethnic minority children

Only four of the papers we examined (Vietnam's and Lesotho's I-PRSPs and Nicaragua's and Honduras's PRSPs) related ethnicity and disadvantage, other than in discussion of refugees or displaced people. As with other areas, analysis is stronger than commitments to action. Measures aimed at reducing ethnic minorities' disadvantage focus principally on investment in disadvantaged regions (including those where minorities are concentrated) and promoting school attendance in these regions. Specific measures, such as enhancing education in minority languages, are not discussed in the papers we examined.

Children with disabilities

Disabled people are mentioned in about half the strategies we examined, with two (Albania's and Nicaragua's I-PRSPs) making specific commitments to disabled children. These are respectively, community-based services (to combat a history of institutionalisation) and a special educational programme.¹⁰ Most strategies discuss disabled people without disaggregating adults and children, and propose financial support or food for work and 'general welfare services' to improve their situation.

Other issues

Several other important poverty-related problems facing children, such as child trafficking and sexual exploitation, or forced recruitment into armed forces, are ignored in these strategies. Though these generally affect small numbers of children, they represent serious violations of their rights and welfare, and are very likely to jeopardise their futures.

4. A NEW WAY OF 'DOING DEVELOPMENT'?

The longest standing PRSPs were developed in 1999-2000 and in many countries PRSPs are still under development. Even in the more established and better communicated PRSPs, such as that in Tanzania, the translation of policy targets into real action at grassroots level is limited. Local government structures have often been left out of central PRSP processes, and as a result may be unaware or confused about what the PRSP is and how it relates to other policies and programmes, and this, among other factors is constraining implementation in some countries. As a result, our observations in this section are of a preliminary nature. We explore how far PRSPs may be changing processes by which development policy is made, their impacts so far on the scope and coherence of poverty reduction policy processes and the implications this may have for children in poverty.

Greater national determination of poverty reduction priorities

The extent to which PRSPs represent a genuine opportunity for countries to set their own development priorities has been the subject of much debate. While representatives of the Bretton Woods Institutions and major bilateral donors argue that they are not setting agendas, many observers detect overt or covert influences, or suggest that World Bank and IMF agendas have been internalised to such an extent that policies departing from broad policy consensus are not proposed (Killick and Abugre, 2001; Christian Aid, 2001). PRSP-watchers also say that 'national ownership' is being interpreted by some as 'owned by the Ministry of Finance, rather than the IMF', and that neither central government line ministries, nor local government feel much 'buy-in', let alone citizens of the countries concerned.

On the other hand, it is clear that many donors are treating PRSPs as nationally owned plans, are using PRSPs as guides for their cooperation programmes process and are starting to provide resources, either for specific elements of PRSP plans or generic budget support. This could have beneficial effects, including reducing the 'transaction costs' to recipient governments, and thus potentially freeing human and financial resources for service delivery and other anti poverty action. However, where PRSPs' policy priorities are likely to deliver little for the poorest people, adults or children, this may not be such a welcome trend. The move towards PRSPs as guides to development cooperation should, however, be viewed in perspective - in any country, few donors are putting all their support through national budgets - many continue to fund particular ministries, civil organisations and specific projects, some of which are within the PRS.

Involvement of disadvantaged people in policy processes

¹⁰ This commitment disappeared when the PRSP was finalised.

Much has been written about the extent and nature of participation of disadvantaged people in PRSP processes.¹¹ Experiences have varied significantly, with substantial consultations with disadvantaged people in some countries and almost none in others. Where consultations have taken place, these have very rarely involved children and young people. In some contexts, members of civil organisations have contributed their views to wider discussions, though the legitimacy of such organisations as representatives of poor people is sometimes questioned. Occasionally this has resulted in specific commitments to children or a greater visibility of children in policy strategies. For example, in Honduras, civil society involvement in PRSP development led to greater attention to child labourers in the PRSP, and in Bosnia and Herzegovina, to specific commitments to Roma children's education, an area which had been excluded from initial discussions.

There is some indication, for example, from Vietnam and Mongolia that more participatory processes of policy development may be opening up policy processes. In Mongolia, consultations have taken place across the country as well as extensive consultations in Ulaanbaatar, though it remains to be seen how far these will influence PRSP content. In Vietnam, some observers suggest that there is an increased commitment to more participation, transparency and accountability in implementation of PRSP priorities. Sustaining commitment to PRS processes and realistic expectations on all sides of both processes and results are required. If this is achieved, this could lead to more effective delivery of policy which reduces childhood poverty.

Expanding conceptualisations of poverty and improved poverty analysis

The major international emphasis on poverty reduction, and the resources devoted to PRSPs and associated research and poverty monitoring processes have led to improved poverty analysis and poverty analysis capacity in some countries. In Vietnam, for example, poverty analysis now includes information on unregistered migrants, ethnic minorities and children and includes a gender dimension. However, there is little evidence so far that this has translated into improved policy or action (Malaluan and Guttal, 2002). Tanzania has developed a comprehensive Poverty Monitoring System combining national survey and administrative data with other forms of research and analysis. One output of this monitoring system, the annual Poverty and Human Development Report, is intended to inform both policy makers and the general public. In all countries, to be effective such structures require genuine development of capacity rather than a reliance on external support. They also need to maintain a broad analysis of progress in relation to macro-economic reforms and the 'bigger picture', rather than simply in relation to the PRSP identified target activities.

Processes associated with PRSPs, such as Participatory Poverty Assessments and other research or consultative exercises have often highlighted the numerous dimensions of poverty perceived by those who live it. While what constitutes poverty and how it is best monitored or measured continue to be contested (strong arguments are frequently evoked for the primacy of income-related conceptualisations or measures), these processes have played an important role in opening up debates about poverty reduction priorities and criteria of success. Reflecting children's and young people's marginalisation from consultation processes, specific issues identified by children, such as fear of attack from gangs or criminals and thus constrained mobility, or equity for orphans are currently rarely identified either as policy priorities or as important issues for monitoring progress. However, there are initiatives which attempt to ensure these concerns are included in poverty monitoring. In Uganda, for example, Save the Children is working with the government's Poverty Monitoring and Analysis Unit to examine ways of ensuring children's concerns are reflected in PRSP monitoring.

Planning and delivery capacity

¹¹ See Christian Aid (2002); Jubilee South (2001) for some recent analyses.

The potential enhancement of capacity to plan, budget for and implement poverty reduction strategies is a frequently highlighted strength of the PRSP framework. For example, both government and civil society representatives in Ghana view increasing integration of government planning and budgeting associated with the PRSP as a positive step towards more holistic poverty reduction. However, coherence at this level must be coupled with policy choices that do not undermine poor people's livelihoods or access to services, and a real commitment to enhancing local capacity to deliver services and programmes if the situation of poor people is to be improved.

5. CONCLUSIONS

While it is too early to comment on sustained impacts, at their best PRSP processes may be raising the profile of and commitment to poverty reduction, enhancing capacity for analysis, planning and action, creating greater space for disadvantaged people to contribute to policy development and increasing accountability to them. Elsewhere, PRSP processes are more accurately characterised as 'business as usual', and institutional and political pressures reduce the extent to which they represent a real opportunity for changes in the way development is planned and carried out.

At the same time, overall economic policy strategies appear likely to deliver little for the poorest families and children, and in some cases may push them into more difficult situations. Though PRSPs should be considered alongside other national, regional and sectoral development strategies, none of the initial strategies examined by Marcus and Wilkinson (2002) referred to other plans systematically. Tanzania's first progress report indicates an increasing attempt to align PRSP content with other anti-poverty plans and sector policies and programmes.

Overall, it is by no means clear that either separately or with other plans, PRSPs represent comprehensive strategies to improve the situation of the poorest adults or children. While plans for additional social sector investment are welcome, it is questionable whether they are sufficient, and there are concerns that they may deliver little for children's health and education among the poorest groups. Our overall reading of these initial PRSPs suggests that while aspects are likely to benefit poor people, these benefits are likely to be haphazard, and do not, as yet, amount to a comprehensive or strategic approach to reducing childhood poverty or securing the wellbeing of future generations. With the proclaimed commitment of the international community to PRSP processes for the foreseeable future, it is up to all involved to make this happen.

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