

Civil Society Participation in Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers

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Abstract

It is widely known that many policies and programs of the World Bank have failed to reach the poor and even caused social and environmental damage.

Learning from its mistakes, The World Bank adopted in 1999 the Comprehensive Development Framework (CDF), which promotes a more holistic, participatory, and country-owned approach to poverty reduction. Embedded in the CDF is the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). PRSPs introduced the concept of “country-owned” and “country-driven” strategies to promote economic growth and reduce poverty. Governments are in charge of developing their own PRSPs in collaboration with civil society, the private sector, and development agencies.

A strong emphasis is placed on the importance of involving members of civil society, especially the poor, in the design of policies that will affect their lives. This has opened the political space for the participation of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), assumed to be intermediaries of the poor. However, the participation of CSOs in developing PRSPs hardly goes beyond consultation and very often is not representative of the poor. The purpose of this paper is to provide a critical examination of the participation of civil society in PRSPs. To what extent have different groups within civil society participated in developing PRSPs? Has the input of civil society been taken into account in the content of PRSPs? What are the lessons to be learned from the PRSP participatory process in Bolivia?