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Parliaments and the PRSP Process

K. Scott Hubli and Alicia P. Mandaville

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Summary

The PRSP process is continually evolving as countries and their development partners learn from early experience. In the January 2002 Comprehensive Review of the PRSP Process, a number of donors and democracy organizations indicated concern with the relatively weak involvement of existing democratic and representative institutions in PRSP formulation, implementation, and evaluation.¹ Previously, legislative involvement had occurred mostly informally through participation of individual legislators acting in their individual capacities as political leaders: thus, knowledge of the PRSP process by legislators and legislative staff remained generally weak. However, as implementation of a country's PRSP often requires the legislature to approve national budgets and pass legislation, lack of parliamentary awareness in PRSP formulation can lead to problems in PRSP implementation over time.

This annex is designed to assist those involved in poverty reduction strategies with identifying and implementing activities and programs that will integrate existing democratic institutions, namely the national assembly or parliament, into poverty reduction efforts, thus strengthening the impact and sustainability of each country's PRSP. As such, it is intended to be a tool for Bank and Fund staff, national PRSP commission members, members or staff of parliament, or other actors seeking to unite a country's economic and democratic transitions. Through analysis, checklists, and activity options, the annex highlights specific mechanisms by which parliaments can strengthen the PRSP process and reinforce its positive outcomes, including through greater involvement in poverty diagnosis, policy development, PRSP implementation, and evaluation/monitoring. For ease of use, it has been organized in keeping with the PRSP cycle. Consequently, sections two, three, four, and five address opportunities for legislative involvement in poverty diagnosis, policy formulation, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation, respectively.

It is worth noting that while numerous mechanisms for parliamentary involvement are detailed in the following pages, the specific activity level relevant to a particular national parliament must be determined by its own characteristics and capacities. Rather than detail an explicit plan for enhancing parliamentary engagement with the PRSP, this annex intends to provide a menu of options, from among which appropriate activities may be selected.

¹ As noted in the Main Findings Document of the Comprehensive Review of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) Approach a number of development partners (notably the Utstein group of bilateral donors) have expressed concern over the fact that, "the role of parliaments in the preparation, approval, and monitoring of country strategies has generally been limited and is a concern that has been expressed." (Main Findings document; prepared by the staffs of the World Bank and the IMF, approved by Gobind Nankani and Masood Ahmed, March 2002).

1. Rationale for Integration of Parliaments into PRSP Process

State institutions have a key role to play in the growth or stagnation of any national economy. In recent years, global studies examining the possible correlation between specific political institutions and fiscal outcomes, financial market regulation, and trade regulation have demonstrated that countries with adequate institutional checks and balances are more likely to enforce national financial regulations and policies.² In this light, the role of the legislature as an institutional check on executive branch policy decisions and PRSP implementation takes on added importance. Greater parliamentary involvement in the PRSP process helps to ensure that a country's poverty strategy is generated, implemented, and evaluated through national institutions with adequate political legitimacy to ensure ownership and sustainability. This section explores the benefits, as well as challenges, of greater parliamentary involvement in the PRSP process. It moves on to discuss entry points for strengthening parliament's role with respect to the PRSP.

1.1 Parliamentary Involvement Reinforces Core Principles of PRSP

An examination of the core principles underlying the PRSP demonstrates how effective legislative involvement reinforces the potential for efficient, sustainable economic development.³ Although limited parliamentary capacity in most PRSP countries limits legislatures in their ability to make significant initial contributions to the PRSP process, incremental efforts to involve the legislature can gradually strengthen the practices needed to actualize core PRSP principles.

- **Participatory, country driven and owned:** Under most constitutions, legislatures are the most representative element of a country's national government. Although in many cases this representative potential has been latent or underutilized due to political conditions or lack of resources, parliaments remain a mechanism for channeling citizen's input into national poverty reduction policies and ensuring cooperation from a variety of political actors. Depending on popular perceptions of the parliament and MP credibility, the representative responsibilities of parliament, as assigned by each country's constitution, may provide a greater level of ownership and legitimacy than other participatory methods.
- **Results-oriented:** The PRSP process is grounded in the idea that the creation of a strategy for poverty reduction will establish realistic targets and clear objectives to pursue in implementation. Once the strategy has been solidified however, enabling legislation or legal reform may be required before executive officials can pursue implementation. In countries where legislatures have significant budgetary role, the national assembly has even greater potential to affect a country's adherence to established poverty reduction strategies through its allocation of resources to implementing ministries.
- **Comprehensive:** Considering the geographic spread, political composition, and sector-specific committee structure of national parliaments, legislatures (and legislative structures) offer a

² The World Bank, *World Development Report 2002, Building Institutions for Markets*, Washington DC, September 2001. p104

³ *Clarification of terminology:* While acknowledging the differing role of the legislative branch in presidential and parliamentary systems, for purposes of linguistic variety, this document uses the terms "parliament" and "legislature" interchangeably. It is important to note however, that the constitutionally mandated role of a national legislative assembly varies from country to country, and has great impact on the nature of that branch's involvement in the PRSP process.

potential space in which to debate a nationally comprehensive view of poverty and impacts of poverty reduction initiatives. Even if parliamentary debate is motivated by geographic- or constituency-specific interests, the airing of such views can contribute to a more comprehensive national poverty reduction strategy.

- **Prioritized for feasible implementation:** Prioritization of poverty reduction objectives may be the most politically charged element of the PRSP. While economic factors and rational decision-making can logically prioritize policy actions in favor of certain regions or sectors, such decisions have significant impact on popular support for the political parties or individuals in executive offices. Parliaments, which typically include a range of political actors and are vested with constitutional authority to serve as a check on the decisions of the executive, may serve to balance the ruling party's political interests in PRSP formulation. Engaging the parliament in the PRSP prioritization process acknowledges the political impact of economic decisions, which may result in more effective implementation.
- **Partnership-orientation:** Effective partnership between IFIs, other development partners, and PRSP countries depends, in part, on the transparency of the PRSP process. Through such standard legislative activities as committee hearings and reports, national assemblies may facilitate donor coordination by contributing to the transparency of the PRSP development, financing, and implementation process.
- **Based on medium- and long-term perspectives:** Despite MPs' tendency to focus on short-term perspectives, building non-partisan support for poverty reduction strategies among present and future national leaders can engender greater continuity in the medium- and long-term. Because the PRSP process takes place within a political environment, broad support for the PRSP by Members of parliament (MPs) from both governing and opposition parties is important in ensuring that the PRSP's success will not be derailed by changes in the political environment. In most PRSP countries, national parliaments include representatives of all major political factions, and therefore provide an ideal forum for multi-partisan inclusion.

1.2 Linking PRSP Activities with Existing Contexts and Capacities

When assessing the possible opportunities for legislative involvement in the PRSP process, it is critical to consider the specific context in which the parliament operates and to be realistic regarding technical and professional capacities. Legislative authority to introduce legislation, amend budgets or bills proposed by the executive, or even reject tabled legislation varies with a country's constitutional structure and tradition of political party discipline or control. Further, political and economic conditions mean that national legislatures in many PRSP countries lack the institutional capacities needed for effective engagement. In countries where dramatic political or economic changes have recently occurred (e.g., military coup, civil war or unrest, hyper inflation, death or removal of a dictator, unprecedented political opening or reform, etc), basic legislative activity is a challenge for nascent or evolving institutions and the people inside them. Lack of fundamental infrastructure (offices and office equipment, reference materials, staff, consistent utilities), restricted access to data or inaccurate information, scarcity of leadership experience by legislative bodies, illiteracy levels, and limited knowledge of sitting MPs all inhibit a parliament's ability to play an active role in the PRSP process. The extent and nature of parliamentary integration into the PRSP process must take these factors into account, lest PRSP requirements become an unmanageable demand on legislative resources.

While capacity constraints limit the legislature's contribution to the PRSP process, targeted technical support and incremental integration of standard legislative practices into the PRSP process not only deepens country ownership of poverty reduction strategies, but also enhances the parliament's eventual capacity to fulfill oversight and representative functions. For example:

- **Minimal capacity:** Even where nascent legislatures have little internal capacity to analyze the policies contained in the PRSP, the legislature can still serve as a forum to build parliamentary and public awareness of the PRSP. Support for formal briefings of legislators on the PRSP can improve the transparency of the PRSP, while at the same time increasing the awareness and capacity of legislators to contribute to the policy debate.
- **Limited staff resources:** Where committee systems have defined roles and assigned support staff but those staff lack the technical skills necessary to support meaningful committee work, committees can use experts drawn from civil society and the donor community to provide the legislature with needed technical advice. In addition to providing immediate technical support, this strategy can be an entry point for building staff capacity.

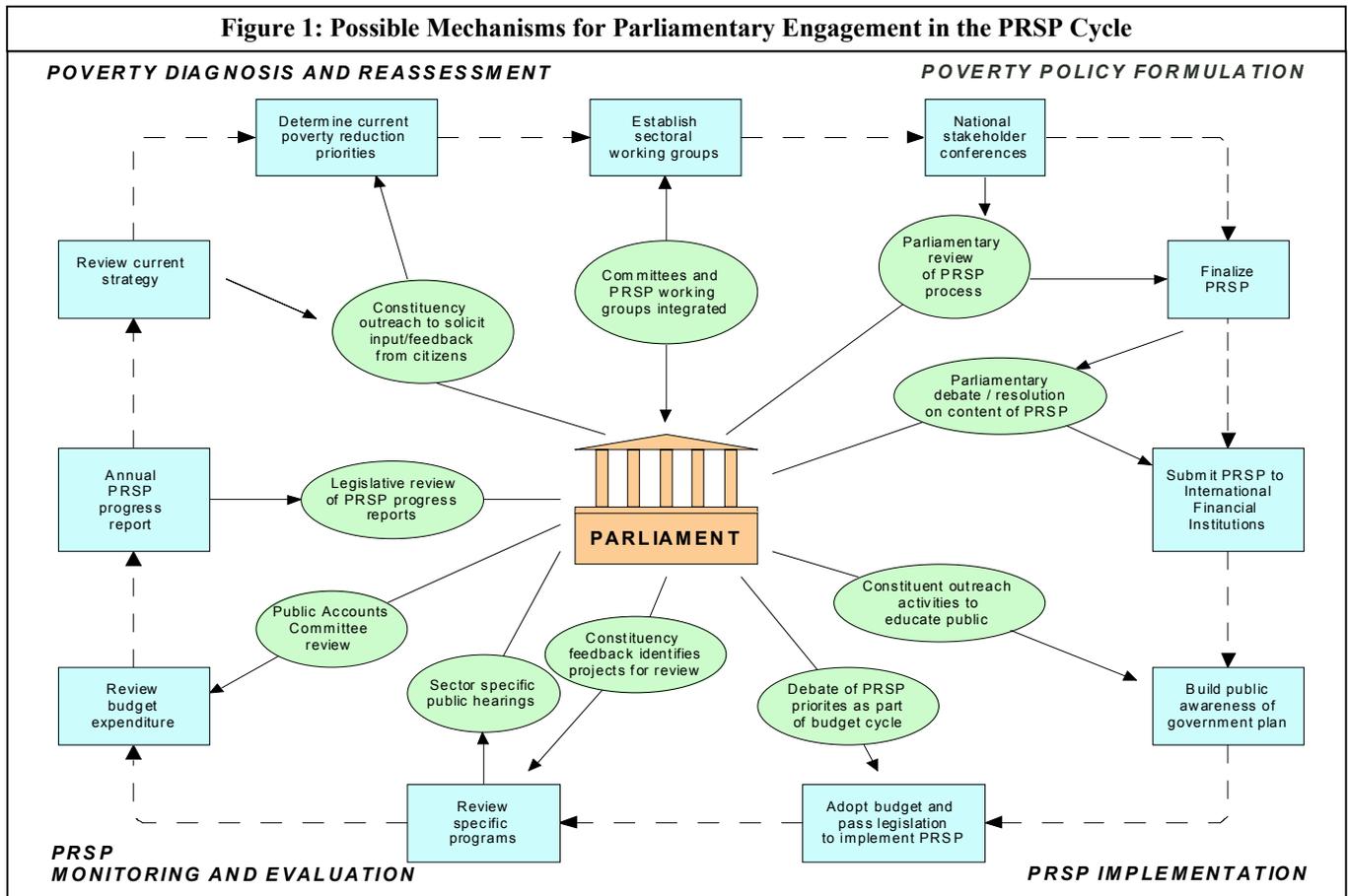
Limited member experience: Where limited member experience is a capacity constraint, committee briefing sessions that introduce such tools as spending ceilings or floors, notification, or reporting requirements can equip a committee with the tools needed to examine pending legislative activity and legislation against established PRSP priorities over multi-year implementation.

Assessment Checklist for Country-Specific Parliamentary Involvement in PRSP

- ✓ What are the constitutional responsibilities of this particular parliament?
- ✓ Is there a coalition government or a single party executive with a parliamentary majority?
- ✓ Can governing and opposition parties collaborate on issue specific initiatives or is the relationship too combative?
- ✓ What historic events or attitudes might preclude citizen or executive trust in parliament? What relationship does parliament have with national media? Civic groups?
- ✓ What is the level and locus of corruption?
- ✓ What is the status of parliamentary capacity and/or resources? Do members or staff have access to computers and the Internet?
- ✓ How are parliamentary staff allocated among committees, caucuses, and individual members?
- ✓ Is there staff to support committee hearings and briefings?
- ✓ How often does the legislature meet? What portion of the year do members spend in the capital? What portion in their constituencies? Do members of parliament have office space in the capital?
- ✓ What is parliament's role in budget processes?
- ✓ How does the committee system function, particularly regarding economic legislation or policy?

1.3 Overview of Entry Points for Parliamentary Involvement

With the understanding that parliamentary involvement can reinforce the core principles of the PRSP, much work has been done to identify the conceptual role that parliaments can play in PRSP processes. These potential points of involvement for parliaments in the PRSP process will vary from country to country and across the four components of the PRSP cycle: 1. Poverty diagnosis, 2. PRSP development, 3. Implementation of PRSP, and 4. Monitoring of PRSP implementation and evaluation of PRSP priorities.



Note: Multiple actors are already involved in each stage of the PRSP process - civil society, IFIs, local government, the ministry of Finance, Sector-specific Ministries, even the academic community each have specific roles to play. In an effort to highlight just a few of the points at which a national legislature might strengthen the PRSP through their own activity, this diagram has been highly simplified. Though the basic order of the PRSP process has been preserved, the actions of other players has been omitted.

However, if the participatory elements of the PRSP are to become an enduring part of any country's policy process, engagement of existing governing institutions (such as the legislature) is eventually necessary at all stages.⁴

⁴ See *Review of the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRSP) Approach: Early Experiences with Interim PRSPs and Full PRSPs*, section on participatory processes; prepared by the staffs of the World Bank and the IMF, approved by Gobind Nankani and Masood Ahmed, March 2002. The European Commission and Utstein group of bilateral donors were particularly concerned that greater integration of parliaments was necessary for "real and effective" country ownership.

2. Parliaments and Poverty Diagnosis

Understanding the Non-quantitative Aspects of Poverty

Poverty diagnosis is the first step in any country's development of a full PRSP; before determining the most appropriate strategies to reduce national poverty levels, efforts must be made to understand which factors create or reinforce conditions of poverty. To understand how parliamentary involvement could improve the accuracy of a country's poverty diagnosis exercises, one must view legislative involvement in light of a multi-dimensional definition of poverty. For purposes of PRSPs, a person living in poverty lacks: opportunity (due to low consumption or income); capability (due to poor health or education levels); security (due to exposure to economic shock); and empowerment (due to inhibited access to power).⁵ The representative responsibilities of national assemblies mean that, particularly in nations where local or regional governments have limited authority (or are currently undergoing decentralization processes), MPs have a role to play in the empowerment of citizens and citizen groups. In these instances, parliamentarians may provide the only political representation for large numbers of citizens from specific geographic or demographic constituencies; thus, an accurate diagnosis of the roots of poverty in a country could include parliamentary input regarding poverty's non-quantitative aspects.

Ghana and Nigeria: Parliamentarians Seeking Diverse Input

Though at different points in their respective PRSP processes, in 2002, parliamentarians in Ghana and Nigeria identified new activities to ensure that the PRSP process included varied geographic and demographic groups.

In Ghana, MPs' on parliamentary committees concerned with the PRSP have been involved in a number of efforts to ensure the process garners broad participation. Not only were civil society-parliament workshops undertaken in the poorer northern part of Ghana to assess how to make the PRSP process more responsive to local communities there, but MPs also explored how gender concerns could be reflected better by participating in workshops on gender budgeting.

In Nigeria, a workshop originally intended to explore methods to promote legislative-executive communication on the PRSP led MPs to launch a deeper discussion of how diverse geographic input might be included in the participatory process. As a result, MPs proposed to collaborate with state level authorities to solicit input from each of the six geopolitical divisions.

In PRSP countries at varying levels of political development, parliamentarians already gather information relevant to poverty diagnosis. Although limited staff, resources, capacity, and political space all inhibit MPs' interaction with citizens and citizen groups, deputies can be a logical conduit for gathering demographic data from sector specific NGOs, or more basic information on popular perceptions of poverty, through constituency relations, collaboration with local NGO's, or even meetings with local groups or individuals. While MP access to accurate statistical information may be limited, in part because PRSP country parliaments are unlikely to have sufficient staff resources to devote to gathering or reviewing demographic data, deputies are well positioned to communicate the perceptions of citizens and citizen groups in their home districts. In many places, MPs' direct contact with constituents or personal experience in their electoral district provides them with a more accurate sense of how poverty is felt in specific regions and among specific demographics. In countries where the capacity of civic organizations is severely limited due to economic or historic constraints, MPs may also serve as a conduit through which to ascertain specific geographic or demographic perceptions of poverty outside of the capital city. Furthermore, technical assistance to enhance the representative capacity of legislators provides an excellent entry point for gradual insti-

⁵ Poverty as defined by Overview Chapter 1.

tative capacity of legislators provides an excellent entry point for gradual institutionalization of the PRSP.

Where legislatures use committee hearings or other public forums to include NGOs in legislative debate, parliaments also offer a natural inlet for existing poor people's organizations that might have relevant information on poverty in specific regions or areas. Such groups, who may already be active in advocating the local government or MPs themselves, could include parent groups, housing associations, health organizations, or other local issue groups. Asking MPs to be an information channel for groups already active in sector-specific areas not only reinforces natural, democratic processes of citizen issue aggregation through civic organizations and elected representatives, but also makes the PRSP process more participatory. Access to

statistical data gathered by local organizations may also make poverty diagnosis more accurate. These kinds of outreach activities may be undertaken by individual MPs hoping to ensure that their districts are adequately affected by PRSP initiatives, but to cement parliamentary involvement in an improved PRSP process, this engagement must become more institutionalized. Appointing a number of MPs to the poverty diagnosis working group, or institutionalizing a plenary hearing on the findings of the poverty diagnosis report would be one way to formalize the parliament's role in poverty diagnosis.

**Constituency Outreach That May Reveal
Non-Quantitative Aspects of Poverty**

- Tracking and categorizing citizen complaints.
- Recording access and security issues raised by constituents during office hours.
- Meeting with grass-roots leaders to discuss communal or village issues.
- Listening for reoccurring problems when communicating with local representatives of organizations, unions, or business.
- Observing internal district variations in infrastructure or access (depending on size of constituency or circumscription).
- Maintaining regular communication with local or regional CSOs that have issue-specific expertise.

3. Parliaments and PRSP Development: Pro-Poor Policy Formulation

Direct engagement with legislators in the policy development of the PRSP process can lead to greater consensus on poverty reduction strategies and pave the way for smoother implementation over time. In addition to enhancing country ownership of the PRSP through inclusion of the structure constitutionally responsible for popular representation and relevant legislation, parliamentary engagement also provides the PRSP with an existing body of politically active national leaders and staff of varying skill levels and interests. Parliamentary committees may be tapped for issue specific knowledge or experience; individual MPs may be tasked with hosting public forums to discuss policy formation with citizens (especially poorer citizens); and parliamentary leadership could be invited to hold public, plenary debates on a draft PRSP, thus testing the document's national resonance prior to submission. Further, parliaments, through their committees, caucuses, staff, and individual members have the capacity to be involved as a body in prioritization processes for the duration of the PRSP development, and thus provide an already existing mechanism for including the full spectrum of political actors. Although the depth of a parliament's contribution to the PRSP is predicated on its own internal capacity, a legislature's potential to reinforce the medium- to long-term sustainability of the PRSP make it a practical partner in the policy formulation phase. This legislative engagement may take several forms; a few are detailed as follows.

3.1 Balancing Comprehensive PRSP Priorities

Public or Constituency Outreach

Outreach to Invite Feedback on PRSP Priorities

- Site visits or road shows to solicit feedback outside the capital.
- Inviting non-urban citizens to attend “town hall” or village meetings to discuss poverty priorities.
- Using constituency offices as information centers for PRSP initiatives.
- Regional public hearings on PRSP priorities.
- Committee hearings with NGO testimony on sector-specific issues.

As outlined in section two, MPs, as well as parliamentary issue caucuses, who undertake constituency relations activities may be a logical clearinghouse for regional or rural perceptions of poverty and its impact. In countries with longstanding democratic traditions, MPs know that their re-election hinges in part on popular perception of them as individuals able to secure necessary assistance for their district’s population. Although this understanding is less pervasive among MPs in many PRSP countries, ongoing legislative strengthening programs typically strive to reinforce or build MP awareness that popular attitudes toward the MPs themselves, or toward their political party, is

based on representation, service, and the passage of legislation that benefits their home district. Where this recognition exists or is being cultivated, MPs have an interest in making sure the needs of their voters are addressed in any national poverty reduction program. Consequently, public outreach by MPs (as individuals, or as members of such parliamentary groups as party caucuses, issue caucuses, or committees) may play a role in soliciting and aggregating public input for policy formulation by holding public meetings or hearings to invite citizen feedback on poverty reduction policies.

Although increased constituency outreach by parliamentarians improves the participatory nature of the PRSP by encouraging citizens to provide input through a country’s existing democratic institutions, one danger is that it may also reinforce certain cultural tendencies to view representation largely in terms of the representative’s ability to win resources or patronage for his or her particular geographic constituency. In certain countries, elected or appointed officials from a particular clan or region may be expected to assist in securing jobs or benefits for other members of the group; in other countries, substantial contributions from a particular industry or interest group may be seen as a way to obligate the official to use his or her position to a group’s advantage. While opportunities for parliamentary patronage certainly exist, inviting all MPs to communi-

MP Outreach to Non-geographic Constituencies

Where members of parliament are elected from a single national party list, an MP’s decision to undertake public outreach activities is typically motivated by party-interest, rather than geography. This, however, does not preclude MPs from developing close links with segments of the population. In many PRSP countries, political party leaders are beginning to recognize the impact that visible, nationally-respected MPs can have on party popularity in subsequent elections and, in some cases, have begun to encourage MPs reach out to population groups regarding specific issues. In the long run, whether based on self-interest or party-interest, elected members of parliament benefit from communicating with the electorate regarding the issues that affect them most. Often these issues are intimately connected to national poverty reduction strategies. Further, technical assistance geared at enabling newly elected legislators to design and conduct effective outreach events (such as trips to specific locations, office hours, or site visits) provides an excellent starting point for capacity building with new or developing parliaments. Facilitating MP communication with the electorate helps to expose new MPs to the most basic aspects of legislative responsibilities by ensuring discussion of the issues that most affect citizen’s lives.

cate with their geographic constituency on long-term policy to alleviate chronic economic problems is one way to encourage citizens to see parliamentarians as an access point to institutional mechanisms for change, rather than an individual source of funds or other benefits for personal contacts. Moreover, a legislature that is actively involved in poverty policy issues is more likely able to serve as a check on ruling party or government patronage. In this way, keeping parliamentarians informed about the PRSP so that they are able to speak about it with citizens not only strengthens participatory aspects, but encourages transparency and may serve as a first step towards curbing endemic corruption.

3.2 Contribution to Sector-Specific Policy Formulation

Each country's PRSP process typically involves the establishment of working groups (or sub-commissions) to help develop the government's poverty reduction strategies in specific sectoral areas. The results of these working groups are then fed into the I-PRSP or full PRSP document. In many countries, MP involvement in the PRSP has tended to be ad-hoc or based on individual interest rather than institutional arrangement. To extend the political legitimacy of a country's PRSP and tap into issue- or region- specific expertise that MPs may have, parliamentary involvement in PRSP mechanisms must be more effectively institutionalized. This could include integration of MPs or parliamentary committees into PRSP working groups, the regularization of committee briefings by PRSP working group leaders, or the dedication of question time or interpolation to exploring PRSP formulation and priorities.

Integration of MPs or Parliamentary Committees into PRSP Working Groups

One logical mechanism for ensuring the PRSP process benefits from the involvement of parliamentarians already active in specific sectoral areas is to institutionalize a number of positions on each sectoral working group for members of parliament serving on relevant committees or representing relevant districts. Such direct participation lends electoral legitimacy to working groups otherwise appointed by the executive.

Alternatively, where direct MP participation in PRSP working groups is not possible, sector-specific parliamentary committees (health, education, finance, etc) can request hearings on priorities/targets, and/or request periodic (or specifically timed) briefings by PRSP working groups on I-PRSP, priorities, goals, targets, and indicators. A question and answer period held by the relevant national assembly committees would allow an opportunity for legislators to provide input into the development of poverty reduction strategies. It would provide the PRSP working groups additional perspective on potentially controversial issues, as well as offer an early opportunity to cultivate parliamentary support for PRSP priorities.

Serbia: MPs Form Formal Committee to Consult with PRSP Advisory Board

In Serbia and Montenegro, the production of a PRSP was complicated by the evolution of a federal structure around the two republics. Partly in response to this ongoing negotiation, Serbia announced that as part of its PRSP process, it would create committee of republic-level parliamentarians who would be responsible for providing feedback to the PRSP advisory board. In this way, parliamentarians elected to represent the Serbian electorate were able to play a formal, structured role in the debates and discussions which informed the poverty reduction strategy.

This formal group of MPs was created as one of five committees designed to provide input from key institutional stakeholders in Serbia's PRSP. As part of the participatory process, Serbia created similar committees of local government officials, ministerial officials, civil society, and international development partners.

Based on briefings by the working groups, committees or committee staff could determine appropriate legislative priorities for upcoming parliamentary sessions. By keeping parliamentary committees informed about PRSP priorities, working groups encourage a more streamlined legislative environment for the passage of key PRSP or PRSP-support legislation. Moreover, committee reports on national PRSP progress in light of other information available to sector-specific committees could be the basis for a parliamentary contribution to the periodic national progress report required by IFI's.

3.3 Parliamentary Review of the Draft PRSP Document

Filling Gaps in the Participatory Process

Although countries are expected to consult with all national stakeholders in the development of a PRSP, where parliamentarians believe that a particular actor or group of actors has not been adequately consulted, they may be able to facilitate inclusion of inadvertently excluded stakeholders. While capacity constraints may prevent many national legislatures from serving as the primary point of participatory integration (ie: a legislature with full technical capacity could be relied upon to conduct a large number of public hearings to investigate policy options or outcomes), parliaments could incrementally expand their role in the consultative process. Gradually expanding activities could include public committee hearings, the commissioning of a specific investigation, or tabling of a report to reflect input from civic actors. By providing an opportunity for opposition MPs to participate in such activities, the parliament's action may also build consensus on poverty issues across political divisions. In addition to the obvious impact on the PRSP's participatory process, such activities could encourage greater PRSP support from groups with the potential to disrupt implementation (parties currently in opposition but with the potential return to power in the years ahead) thereby promoting sustainability of PRSP strategy itself.

Committees and Caucuses May Provide Supplementary Information

Parliamentary involvement that adds greater transparency may also contribute supplementary information for consideration during a midpoint report, annual PRSP review, or Joint Staff Assessment (JSA). Information brought to light through a parliamentary review of any aspect of PRSP development or implementation could assist national or external assessment by providing an additional source of information. Consequently, if parliaments plan to share the findings of their investigation with IFI staff in country, this information may be of most use prior to the completion of the JSA. Similarly, Ministries may find that parliamentary review of PRSP components serve as a useful inlet for feedback on the impact of PRSP initiatives

Parliamentary Review of the Draft PRSP Document

Aside from the few countries whose constitutions require the parliament to ratify any multi-year economic plan, the PRSP process requires no formal parliamentary authorization. However, even where not mandated with ratification of economic policy, parliaments can strengthen the PRSP process through debate and resolution of support for proposed PRSP priorities. In light of legislatures' impact on national budget allocations and legislative priorities, public parliamentary support for established PRSP priorities could go a long way in establishing national ownership of poverty reduction

Parliamentary Mechanisms to Generate Constructive Public Debate on the PRSP

- Hold time-limited debate on PRSP priorities.
- Use parliamentary "Question Time" to request PRSP updates.
- Debate and pass a resolution in support of PRSP sectoral initiatives or priorities.
- Invite PRSP commission staff to brief MPs on PRSP issues.
- Hold committee hearings on sector-specific objectives or priorities.
- Table a committee report on the impact of a particular anti-poverty initiative.

strategies. By including multiple political parties, an opportunity for time-limited parliamentary debate on the PRSP prior to its submission could also strengthen the country's ability to adhere to a poverty reduction strategy over time. Finally, even where parliamentary debate regarding the PRSP leads to no formal resolution or motion, it would likely foster public awareness and debate about various aspects of the PRSP.

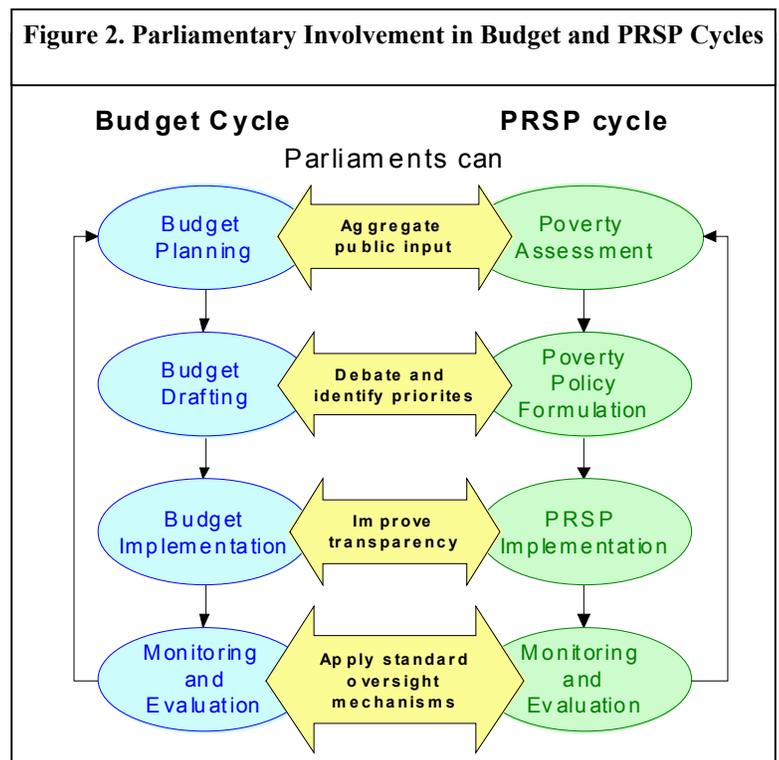
4. Recognizing a Role for Parliaments in PRSP Implementation Budget Allocation, Legislation, and Public Education

Because parliaments are ultimately responsible for passing sound legislation, the national assembly's ability to improve PRSP implementation is primarily rooted in aligning national legislation with PRSP priorities; in order for countries to implement their poverty reduction strategies, legislatures must approve PRSP-compatible budgets and pass PRSP-relevant legislation. Consequently, a parliament's ability to evaluate proposed legislation with an eye to PRSP priorities takes on added importance in relation to ensuring a results-oriented, comprehensive implementation of the strategy.

4.1 Budget Allocations

Because the PRSP sets the policy framework for poverty reduction efforts and spending, the annual national budget is the single greatest tool for PRSP implementation. In light of this, time for a legislative review of the PRSP should be built-in to the budget process to avoid last minute intra-governmental conflict regarding allocations. While periodic briefings of parliamentarians or committees build consensus among sector-specific actors, parliamentary examination of the full PRSP may have additional benefits. A parliament is much more likely to approve a budget that reflects already agreed upon PRSP priorities if it has been involved in the initial priority setting process; at the very least, a debate over PRSP priorities allows the government to identify those components which have insufficient political support to pass parliamentary scrutiny.

Figure 2. Parliamentary Involvement in Budget and PRSP Cycles



Effective PRSP Budget Analysis by Parliaments is Facilitated by:

- ✓ Timely access to PRSP and draft-budget
- ✓ Adequate number of staff
- ✓ Budgetary analysis training
- ✓ Access to economic analysis
- ✓ Computing/ research facilities
- ✓ Coordination between relevant committees

The impact of sharing PRSP progress with the parliament in advance of budget negotiations is directly related to the period of time allowed for parliamentary analysis of the PRSP. To ensure that there is adequate time for review and feedback, parliaments could request reports or briefings on the

content of the PRSP prior to its submission as part of the budget approval process. At the same time, steps must be taken to ensure that parliamentary committees have adequate staffing and technical capacities to engage closely with the more technical aspects of PRSP-specific budget analysis.

4.2 Legislation

In many cases, non-budgetary legislation may be required to implement a full PRSP; thus, PRSP-specific assessment of legislation can (and should) occur at multiple levels.

Table 1. Ensuring Legislative Compatibility with PRSP Priorities		
<i>Level of action</i>	<i>Description of activity</i>	<i>Can be supported by</i>
Plenary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Debate and approval of the budget • Debate and passage of legislation to support or implement the PRSP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early involvement in PRSP discussions • Advance notice of PRSP time tables • Facilitating rules of parliamentary procedure
Sector-Specific Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate committee member participation in sector- specific technical events (such as stakeholder workshops or sectoral editorial boards) • Review ministry-sponsored sectoral legislation against PRSP priorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open communication channels between ministries and committees • Advance notice of PRSP events and periodic briefing by working groups • Technical issue training for committee members (eg: health, agriculture) • Adequate numbers of technically trained committee staff
Anti-Poverty Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate review of legislation specific to the PRSP • Facilitate involvement of sector-specific committees or individual deputies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal creation of a Parliamentary Committee for Poverty Reduction • Leadership and technical skills training for committee members and staff • IFI willingness to interact with official sub-parliamentary groupings
Budget or Finance Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct public hearing to compare PRSP priorities with national budget allocations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordination of PRSP and budget cycles • Technical budget training for MPs and Staff
Parliamentary Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distribution of PRSP documents to relevant committees • Research and track ongoing PRSP issues/ programs • Summarize PRSP priorities and initiatives for review/debate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to information and documentation • Staff training on research and other technical legislative skills • May require supplementary staff with sectoral expertise

Managing Legislation and Legislative Impact Across Sectors

Secondary legislation will often be needed in order to implement different parts of the PRSP. For example, a country might identify education as one of its sector priorities, with their PRSP indicating that the budget will allocate a series of block grants to local councils to be applied to education needs as determined by the local council. If however, decentralization of decision making authority and

financial responsibility for education has not yet occurred, legislation decentralizing these powers is necessary before the PRSP can be fully implemented. In addition to decentralization laws, parliaments may be required to address labor laws, tax codes, equal rights legislation, or trade policies to proceed with PRSP plans. A parliament that has already played an active role in the diagnosis and development of its PRSP will be better able to coordinate the passage of such legislation.

4.3 Educating the Public on PRSP Processes, Programs, and Impact

As in the policy development phase of the PRSP, parliamentary outreach to constituents can be mobilized to strengthen implementation by increasing public awareness of PRSP initiatives. Such outreach could be approached from a number of angles, and would in many cases, fit easily with outreach activities that MPs or parliamentary sub-groups have already-existing incentives to conduct.

Regular communication with citizens is not only key to popular awareness of and participation in, PRSP initiatives but also contributes to popular trust in democratic institutions by encouraging the perception that elected officials are working on citizens' behalf. Conversely, if deputies participate in poverty diagnosis and then do not communicate the result of citizen's earlier participation or inform voters about the actions being taken based on their expressions of concern, citizens will not only avoid the PRSP's participatory elements in the future, but the failure to respond to voiced concerns will also diminish citizens' faith in national governing institutions.

Niger: Parliamentary Public Outreach on PRSP Processes

Nigerian legislators' efforts to communicate with the rural poor about poverty reduction processes and initiatives shows a creative approach to parliamentary involvement in the PRSP. With limited rural literacy and nearly prohibitive travel costs, Deputies in Niger have turned to less traditional communications mechanism to reach out to the public. In mid-2002 and early 2003, a steering committee of legislators worked together with a national theatre troupe to create and produce a series of radio plays designed to inform the audience about the role of the national assembly in poverty reduction initiatives and the PRSP. These radio plays, which depicted a Deputy traveling through his constituency and explaining various aspects of the PRSP, were broadcast in multiple national languages with an emphasis on reaching rural areas. Deputies later visited some of these constituencies to discuss poverty reduction issues and initiatives in person.

<i>Objective</i>	<i>MP or Deputy Activity</i>	<i>Rationale</i>
Geographically targeted public education efforts on specific PRSP priorities and programs (eg: local infrastructure project, pilot micro-credit program)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Village or town hall meetings • Direct constituency service hours • Joint events on PRSP programs with local civic organizations • Joint events with municipal level officials or administrators 	Deputies whose home district have seen an increase in infrastructure or available financial support are more inclined to speak publicly about PRSP policies and initiatives
National or regional public education on general PRSP priorities and large scale government initiatives (eg: national education program, new transportation system)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public service announcements through various media • Cooperation with networks of regional governing bodies (or other participatory mechanisms) to explain new programs 	Deputies elected in a proportional representation system are more likely willing to do extensive public speaking as it improves their internal party profile
Advance public knowledge of new or controversial policies necessary for PRSP implementation (ie: price deregulation, closure of defunct industries)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plenary debate on new legislation • Committee hearings with NGOs, trade unions, etc • Media statements by parliamentarians in advance of legislation 	Gradual public education helps to avoid extreme public response (riots) to introduction of less publicly welcome policies

5. Aligning Parliamentary Oversight Mechanisms with PRSP Monitoring and Evaluation

Because the PRSP process is cyclical, several of the mechanisms for parliamentary strengthening of the PRSP during monitoring and evaluation phases are quite similar to those applied during poverty diagnosis and PRSP formulation. Information gleaned in this phase about the impact and performance of PRSP initiatives will eventually become the basis upon which countries adjust poverty reduction strategies, shift resources, or determine whether priority targets have been met. Parliaments, already constitutionally charged with providing oversight for executive branch implementation of legislation and budget policies, can be a natural clearinghouse for information on assessment of PRSP implementation from a variety of sources. Parliamentary oversight activities may also strengthen a country's capacity for self assessment of PRSP implementation by requesting evidence that the executive is pursuing activities in

Parliamentary Oversight and PRSP

While effective PRSPs include a plan for ongoing monitoring and evaluation, certain parliamentary practices may be leveraged to strengthen in-country monitoring or evaluation capacity.

- Parliamentary review or confirmation of key officials (commissions)
- Executive updates before committees (can be facilitated through inclusion of reporting requirements in PRSP text)
- Queries about PRSP initiatives or results during regular 'question time'
- Public requests for information from ministries or other executive bodies
- Committee request for findings of external auditing bodies
- Commissioned investigations into lack of adherence to PRSP priorities

keeping with PRSP priorities, or by posing sector-specific questions on the effectiveness of particular strategies or activities.

5.1 Committee Hearings on the Impact of PRSP Initiatives

Although statistical data on the impacts of PRSP initiatives is critical to assessing the implementation of a country's poverty reduction strategy, non-quantitative elements play a key role in evaluating the program's impact on quality of life for the poor. As in the poverty diagnosis phase of the PRSP process, one way for parliament to compliment ongoing efforts to gather information and monitor changes in the non-quantitative dimensions of poverty would be to solicit input from geographically or demographically specific areas through MPs' constituency outreach activities. As before, sector specific committees could ask MPs to solicit information on the impact of PRSP driven programs through office hours, casework, town hall meetings, surveys, or informal focus groups already being conducted, or could look to bring sector-relevant NGOs to testify before committees on the results of PRSP priority projects. Bringing citizens' feedback directly into parliamentary debates on the results of the year's PRSP implementation not only makes the whole process more participatory, but also creates sufficient transparency to allow international partners more insight into the soundness of the PRSP as it is being implemented. Further, by setting a precedent for legislative investigation into the policy implementation by the executive branch, this complementary activity helps to build a check and balance system for more sustainable anti-poverty initiatives over time.

Budget, Finance, or Audit Committee Reports on Adherence to PRSP Priorities

Just as parliamentary review of the budget in light of PRSP priorities was critical at the implementation phase, committee analysis of sector-specific correlation between the priorities articulated in the PRSP and actual expenditure on line items is a critical part of monitoring implementation of the PRSP. With its mandate to provide oversight for executive branch implementation, parliament has sufficient legitimacy to call agencies or ministries to task for excessive or insufficient expenditure levels. Through a series of public reports or hearings, such oversight could become one of the most effective means of strengthening domestic capacity to eradicate patronage and inappropriate use of poverty alleviation funds. Development and institutionalization of this oversight capacity in parliament could include hearings with ministries, office of budget management, external auditing agencies (where they exist), local governments, and/or citizen monitoring organizations.

Malawi: Civic Testimony Before Budget and Finance Committee

In Malawi, Parliamentary interest in monitoring the PRSP provided the opportunity for a historic first. On May 6 and 7, 2002 four civil society networks representing more than 80 Malawian NGOs testified at a public hearing before the Parliament's Budget & Finance Committee. These NGO representatives, the first in Malawi's multi-party history to testify before a parliamentary committee, presented documentation and testimony regarding the delivery of government services in key sectors of the economy including health, education, and agriculture. MPs from the Agriculture, Education, and Health Committees also attended the hearing. As a result, the Committee drew heavily on the findings of the networks' monitoring activities to table a 54-page Pre-Budget Report and issue a Post-Budget Report tracking expenditures for established priorities. These reports not only led to more informed participation by MPs in sectoral committees, but also generated significant media coverage, enhancing the probability of national public debate.

5.2 Legislative Review of Annual PRSP Progress Reports

It is expected that an annual progress report will be prepared by countries that are implementing a full PRSP. A parliament engaged in even a single phase of the PRSP process – whether that is de-

Methods for Parliament to Contribute to Annual PRSP Progress Reports

- Parliamentary committee reports to PRSP commission
- Sector-specific committee hearings on sectoral PRSP initiatives culminating in pre-report recommendations
- Plenary review and resolution in support of annual progress report
- Sub-parliamentary groups to gather civic input regarding specific sectors

termining the non-quantitative aspects of poverty, establishing legislative priorities, reviewing annual budgets, communicating with their constituents about PRSP initiatives, or exercising expenditure oversight and project evaluation – would be able to review annual PRSP reports. In addition to again lending greater participation through its representative nature, it is in these annual reports that adjustments to PRSP priorities or programs are made, thus parliamentary review provides an additional check on whether pending legislation and budget allocations are in line with current PRSP priorities. Some thought might also be given to the

implementation of a system of pre-report recommendations made by committees to the relevant ministries or working groups.

5.3 Integrating Parliamentarians or Parliamentary Committees into Monitoring and Evaluation Groups

As part of the PRSP process, PRSP countries may create Public Expenditure Management (PEM) groups or other groups to monitor performance. As with working groups during policy formulation, parliamentary interaction with evaluation groups would improve the sustainability of the PRSP process by lending the parliament's broader political legitimacy to groups otherwise appointed by the executive branch. Here, institutionalized parliamentary interaction with monitoring could take one of two forms: assign a pre-determined number of MPs serving on relevant sectoral committees to participate as observers in monitoring groups, or, establish a regular schedule on which evaluation teams brief relevant committees on their findings. Barring unusual constitutional or other political circumstances, the most efficient way of combining PRSP monitoring with parliamentary oversight responsibilities would be through an institutionalized schedule of briefings. This practice would also encourage transparency of general budget expenditure, again reinforcing domestic checks on patronage systems.

6. Consolidating the Impact of Parliamentary Involvement in the PRSP Process

While the national impact of enhanced parliamentary involvement in the PRSP will vary from country to country, one means of building on the achievements of a single legislature is through the regional and global parliamentary networks. On a regional basis, links between deputies confronting similar socio-economic challenges provide an opportunity to share experiences, successes, and lessons learned. More globally, parliamentary networks⁶ offer a means for deputies to survey and discuss universal challenges to democratic governance with their peers and colleagues. As a larger number of PRSP countries begin to implement and evaluate their own PRSP initiatives, the value of these cross-country exchanges will grow.

PRSP Processes May Be Strengthened Through Regional Exchanges on:

- Parliamentary public outreach
- Improving communication with the executive branch
- Coordinating monitoring efforts
- Contributing to annual PRSP reviews

Table 3. Supporting Global or Regional Parliamentary Network Activity

<i>Network Activity</i>	<i>May be Supported by</i>
Regional conferences for legislators on PRSP best practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-conference technical assistance to relevant committees or parliamentary sub-groups in-country • Post-conference consultations with participants on application of shared experiences at home
Parliamentary Exchanges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selection of participants in positions to apply experience • Pre-exchange briefings • Post-exchange in-country strategy sessions on application of experience • Technical and financial support for in-country programs based on experience gained out of country

⁶ For example, the South African Development Council Parliamentary Forum (SADC-PF), the Economic Community Of West African States (ECOWAS) Parliament, Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, etc. In addition to regional and global inter-parliamentary associations, the Parliamentary Network on the World Bank (PNoWB) is designed to foster greater parliamentary involvement in international development as a whole.

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