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Participatory Approaches to Country Assistance Strategies: Lessons from Africa

As the Bank continues to develop expertise in collaborating with civil society to achieve country-specific development goals, lessons are emerging from the formulation of participatory country assistance strategies (CAS) and their implementation. This note focuses on the experiences in four African countries of using a participatory approach to allow borrower counterparts and ordinary citizens to influence the CAS priorities and strategies. While it demonstrates that each process needs to be tailored to the specific situation of a given country at a particular time, it also highlights significant commonalities.

In Kenya, for example, the current CAS is focusing on public sector reform because the Bank found that key segments of civil society wanted to address the issue. The continued involvement of members of civil society in implementation will help insure transparency and accountability. In an unstable, post-conflict environment in Sierra Leone, the CAS process assisted government officials in ascertaining the development priorities of local stakeholders. Government officials at all levels are now working with NGOs to carry out mutually

agreed upon poverty reduction strategies and continuously monitor results. They are utilizing the same techniques and local facilitators used in the preparation of the CAS.

A social analysis undertaken locally helped to sharpen the focus on youth employment and risk assessment in the Senegalese CAS. The result is a shift in the new assistance strategy away from physical infrastructure to social and rural development. Field exercises with villagers, community-based organizations, and NGOs provided validation for the Bank/government planning process at the national level in Uganda, but highlighted the importance of including different regional approaches to poverty reduction in the CAS. The exercises helped government officials to appreciate the importance of listening directly to the poor.

Background

A review of the Bank's experience with civil society participation in CAS processes in FY97-98 states that there has been a significant increase in its use during the last two years.

There is striking consensus among staff that the benefits of the consultative CAS process exceed the costs. These benefits are most broadly seen in policy formation, but they are also observed in institutional development and issues of governance.

Reasons for undertaking CASs in a participatory manner include:

- Improving Bank understanding and the quality of the CAS document by tapping into local knowledge to ensure that concerns of communities and the most vulnerable groups are heard and being addressed
- Helping to increase transparency and public understanding of Bank/government partnerships
- Enhancing stakeholder participation in lending and non-lending operations, including implementation of CASs.

Preconditions identified for the use of civil society participation in the CAS process include government acceptance of consultative approaches, mechanisms to enable local stakeholders to make meaningful contributions to the debate about national development priorities, and ongoing dialogue between civil society and the government.

Some Approaches Used in Africa

Given the poor performance of the Bank portfolio in Kenya, stakeholder insight into the problem was sought. Meetings were held with groups such as the Federation of Kenyan Employees, the Central Organization of Trade Unions, a government working group, attendees at an arid lands conference, an NGO consortium, journalists, and community groups from several districts. Findings highlighted government mismanagement of resources, increasing inequalities, and a lessening of cohesion within the country. Based on these findings, the CAS team proposed a strategy to strengthen the

Participation Leads to Reduced Lending Level in Kenya

A result of the participatory CAS process in Kenya that addressed public sector reform is that the Bank's lending level has gone down significantly. Remarkably, this outcome met with acceptance by civil society representatives because, they said, they weren't seeing results from the money already committed.

government's accountability to its own citizens and to achieve sustainable good governance.

Involvement of civil society stakeholders in the CAS process enabled the Bank to better diagnose the problem of disappointing results from its lending. It also legitimized the strategy that the Bank proposed. Continued interaction with civil society groups through an iterative process will help to ensure that adjustments are made to planned activities as new realities emerge during implementation of the strategy.

In Sierra Leone, the CAS planning process began with a joint Bank/government design retreat to develop a strategy for bringing the perspective of civil society into the process. Government officials expressed uncertainty about how to proceed. A role-play exercise enabled participants to articulate a series of "do's" and "don'ts" for listening behavior.

Following the retreat, officials soon had an opportunity to practice their new listening

Use of Citizen Feedback Mechanism in Sierra Leone

Before the Bank/government finalized development priorities for the CAS, public information campaigns using street theater and rural radio programming were organized outside Freetown to raise people's awareness of different development options. These were followed by consultative meetings with local officials, including traditional chiefs. "Next time," the chiefs told the CAS team, "give us time before you come to 'hang heads' with our people so we know their wishes."

skills as they made field trips to three provinces to hear the views of community leaders and representatives of civil society. A two-day national consultative forum was held where stakeholders representing many different groups worked together to identify key outcomes and strategies for poverty reduction and economic recovery. An innovative “budget game” was developed to bring closure to the forum proceedings and document the diverse group’s development priorities. Provincial and district-level focus group meetings were then undertaken to affirm or modify the priorities identified. These local meetings also used the budget game to record villager priorities and aggregate results. As a result, the CAS document focuses on the five most critical development issues identified in the consultative process and outlines the specific assistance that the Bank is providing to address these priorities.

The CAS process in Senegal was informed by an analysis undertaken by a Senegalese sociologist to link what is going on in the country with activities planned by the Bank/ government to address poverty, equity, and governance issues. The process was also aided by a series of focus group discussions designed to obtain a perspective on key issues facing the

country’s socioeconomic development and the potential role of the Bank to help. Focus group participants included representatives of the private sector, women’s organizations, NGOs/ CBOs, local government, trade unions, and the media. Each of the focus groups independently identified employment generation for young Senegalese as their top development priority. This is also a priority of the Government of Senegal’s 9th Development Plan. The social analysis significantly contributed to the section in the strategy on social and political constraints to growth. In reviewing the CAS, the Bank board commended the frank and upfront assessment of the risks.

Field exercises at the village level were included in the preparation of the CAS in Uganda. The process started with the government’s draft Poverty Eradication Action Plan, which had been prepared with Bank assistance and stakeholder consultation. More than 50 focus group discussions were held in two districts, and separate meetings in Kampala with NGOs, private sector representatives, and donors were organized. The purpose of these discussions was to ascertain how closely the government’s assessment of poverty issues and strategies for addressing them conformed with villagers’ own development priorities. The experiences of other rural stakeholders who work closely with the poor were also sought to identify appropriate strategies for local action. The process confirmed that the draft Action Plan focused on the right issues. Its priorities – roads, agricultural extension, education, health, and pro-poor economic policies – were high on villagers’ priority lists as well. In some cases, local priorities, however, reflected the more immediate concerns of daily living, such as food security and unemployment.

The Bank/ government team found that the villagers demonstrated a remarkable capacity for analysis and articulation of their development priorities. The Ministry of Finance was so impressed with stakeholder consultation and participation that the methodology is being incorporated in various

Bringing It All Together in Senegal

About 100 participants who had played an active role in the formulation of the CAS came together for a half-day restitution workshop. Participants were very appreciative of the fact that for the first time since the Bank opened a resident mission in Senegal, the CAS was formulated with the participation of stakeholders other than government officials. Both the Ministry of Finance and the Bank were thanked for organizing the workshop and sharing the final document. One participant said, “I’m starting to believe that words like transparency, decentralization, and fighting against corruption are not just rhetoric in the speech of the Bank.”

Civil society representatives stressed, however, that participation in strategy discussions wasn’t enough. They said that they didn’t want to be left along the roadside during implementation.

Bringing the Ugandan CAS into Sharper Focus

The field research provided a strong indication that while there is great need nationwide for social and other services, service delivery should be tailored to local situations and real community needs. Many groups, for example, indicated a preference for agriculture extension services to be linked to tangible assistance, such as credit, restocking of oxen, and the provision of seeds. In contrast, villagers saw a need for school curricula to be reoriented toward locally relevant skills, and they expressed interest in participating in local planning, allocating resources, and monitoring government programs.

initiatives, such as the Participatory Poverty Profile. Listening to the poor, officials are discovering, brings new ideas and approaches to poverty reduction, while making the voices of the poor heard by those who formulate or review policy.

Recommendations for Participatory CASs

- Have a supportive country team with strong leadership from the resident representative and country director.
- Ensure that senior borrower counterparts understand the implications of, and are committed to, a participatory approach to the CAS.
- Set up a joint Bank/borrower team to decide the mechanisms to be used to facilitate participation, which stakeholder groups will participate, and the timetable.
- Decide who will be responsible for coordinating locally the elements of the participatory CAS and seeing that the budget is sufficient to cover local costs.
- Utilize earlier strategic planning work done by the government, the Bank, and

other institutions and organizations as building blocks for the CAS (for example, hold CPPR reviews prior to a participatory CAS workshop to discuss key issues with civil society representatives).

- Start the process early enough to allow for discussion and debate to reach as far into civil society as possible and to avoid both tokenism and poor representation.
- Ensure a balance of gender, age, religious, and geographical representation in participants.
- Use a strong and capable facilitator, someone who knows the country and is well respected but is not identified with any one stakeholder group.
- Identify mechanisms for follow-up and continuous discussion when designing the process.
- Plan for the CAS process to be participatory through all the stages (including sharing of the final document, and monitoring CAS implementation).
- Have a strong and competent logistics team in the country.

Through participatory and consultative activities such as bringing representatives of civil society into the CAS process, NGOs and other civil society representatives gain greater understanding of the Bank's priorities and interests in their country. They also learn about upcoming Bank-financed projects and economic and sector work where they could potentially contribute to the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation phases of activities. Finally, and most importantly, participatory processes foster enhanced collaboration between government officials and representatives of civil society as they work together to understand the causes of poverty and to develop sustainable remedies.