

Experience of PRSs in Asia

Executive Summary – Key Issues

- There are clear conceptual and paper links between PRSs and national development plans in many countries, but these are yet to be tested in practice and are likely to depend on the extent of PRS ownership beyond central ministries (presently low).
- Political actors and parties are currently disengaged from the PRS process in most of the countries surveyed.
- Preparation of the PRS is frequently the subject of ongoing tensions between Ministries of Finance and Ministries of Planning (epitomised by the historical split between the recurrent and development budget).
- Links between the PRS and the budget or MTEF are weak in most cases. Poorly prioritised and costed PRSs explain some of this problem as do underlying weaknesses in budgeting processes, but there are also specific problems in the way the PRS fits into the recurrent/development budget divide.
- Monitoring and evaluation is not a 'live issue' in many countries, but where it is there is a tendency towards indicator proliferation and a disconnection between PRS monitoring and MDG monitoring. Linking local information to central systems will be a challenge. Vague commitments to participatory monitoring are being made but not yet put into practice.
- Participation has been dominated by NGOs and large CSOs, although research and academic bodies have been more engaged than in other regions. The participatory process has drawn heavy criticism from some quarters; although there has also been high praise from others.
- At present the PRS is not providing a catalyst for greater donor coordination: where there was existing momentum in this direction, the PRS has provided an opportunity to strengthen it; where this momentum does not exist, the PRS is not being seized as an opportunity to address the problem. There is a temptation for donors to repackage their assistance as being PRS related – an easy option since PRSs are often poorly prioritised and cover a great deal of ground.
- There is a lack of clarity in expectations around the annual PRS progress report and the JSA process. The JSA process has been relatively closed to stakeholder engagement in most cases.
- The Bank (and Fund) are orienting themselves towards the PRS in most of the countries surveyed. But engagement with the PRS process does not automatically equate with support for greater country ownership.
- The Asian Development Bank is supporting the PRS process in most countries despite having doubts on the merits of the initiative.
- DFID's own assistance to the PRS process in Asia is generally part of a broader package of assistance. Direct support to the PRS process is often a very small percentage of the overall aid programme but this is expected to grow as PRSs move into the implementation stage.

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Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
APR	Annual Progress Report
CAP	Country Assistance Plan (DFID)
CAS	Country Assistance Strategy (World Bank)
CDF	Comprehensive Development Framework
CPRGS	Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy (Vietnam)
CSO(s)	Civil Society Organisation(s)
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office (UK)
GoX	Government of X
HIPC	Heavily Indebted Poor Country
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IFI	International Financial Institution
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INGOs	International Non-Governmental Organisation(s)
I-PRSP	Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
JSA	Joint Staff Assessment
LMDG	Like Minded Donor Group (Vietnam)
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MoD	Ministry of Defence
MoF	Ministry of Finance
MoP	Ministry of Planning
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding (DFID)
MPI	Ministry of Planning and Investment (Vietnam)
MTBF	Medium Term Budget Framework
MTMF	Medium Term Macroeconomic Framework
NGO(s)	Non Government Organisation(s)
NPC	National Planning Commission (Nepal)
NPRS	National Poverty Reduction Strategy (Cambodia)
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
PC	Planning Commission (Bangladesh)
PPA	Participatory Poverty Assessment
PRFA	Poverty Reduction Framework Arrangements (DFID)
PRGF	Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (IMF)
PRPA	Poverty Reduction Partnership Agreement (Asian Development Bank)
PRS	Poverty Reduction Strategy
PRSC	Poverty Reduction Support Credit (World Bank)
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
PSIA	Poverty and Social Impact Analysis
PSR	Preparation Status Report
RGC	Royal Government of Cambodia
RRR	Relief Reconciliation and Reconstruction (Sri Lanka)
RSL	Regaining Sri Lanka
SEDP	Social and Economic Development Plan (Cambodia)
SEDS	Socio Economic Development Strategy (Vietnam)
ToR	Terms of Reference
WB	World Bank

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Background and Purpose

This briefing note has been drafted by the PRSP Monitoring and Synthesis Project.¹ It is intended to provide an overview of current issues on the PRS process in Asia, covering seven countries where DFID is engaged (Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Vietnam).

This note draws primarily on a survey of DFID country office staff located in these countries, and is supplemented by other confidential DFID memos and notes relating to these countries. It also draws on a number of items in the public domain, especially civil society reflections on the PRS process in these countries and some independent research work.

Summary Status of PRSs in Asia

There is a wide variety of experience with the PRS process in Asia, and it is important to acknowledge the complexity of actual circumstances. Countries themselves are in very different circumstances across a number of dimensions:

- **Size:** Pakistan and Indonesia, both large countries, are undergoing substantial processes of decentralisation. Smaller countries such as Cambodia face different challenges in terms of size and scale.
- **Aid-dependence:** Cambodia and Nepal, as highly aid dependent countries, have quite a different relationship with donors than does Bangladesh (where only 2.4% of Gross National Income was from aid in 2000²) or Vietnam.
- **Conflict:** Nepal faces ongoing conflict while Sri Lanka is dealing with a recent ceasefire and beginnings of peace talks after nineteen years of civil conflict. In Sri Lanka the government has a Relief, Reconciliation & Reconstruction (RRR) framework. There are uncertain links between this framework and the PRS – donors that are trying to support a national plan are not clear which of these should be supported. Other countries in the region also have a recent history of conflict (Pakistan, Indonesia).³

Countries in the region are also at different stages of the formal PRS process, as Table 1 below shows. This note attempts to draw out some themes in the experience to date, but the variety of circumstances means that there are, of course, few clear generalities.

Table 1. PRS Status by Country

Country	I-PRS and JSA	PRS Preparation Status Report (PSR) and JSA	Full PRS and JSA
Bangladesh	I-PRS complete (March 2003).		
Cambodia	I-PRS completed October 2000. JSA complete 26 December 2000. Went to the Boards January 2001.	PRS complete December 2001. JSA complete 22 January 2002.	PRS completed December 2002. JSA complete 23 January 2003. Went to Boards February 2003.
Indonesia	I-PRSP published in October 02.		(Full PRS planned for mid 2004.)
Nepal	I-PRS complete but not presented to Boards.		PRS complete April 2003. No JSA or Board date set.
Pakistan	I-PRS complete November 2001. JSA dated November 15 2001. Went to Boards December 2001.	PRS Preparation Status Report complete 30 January 2003. JSA of PSR dated 31 January 2003.	Draft subnational PRSs in place. Draft federal PRS in place.
Sri Lanka⁴	None.		PRS complete December 2002. JSA made available late-March 2003. Went to Boards April 2003.
Vietnam	I-PRS complete March 2001. JSA dated 21 March 2001. Went to Boards April 2001.		PRS complete May 2002. JSA dated 6 June 2002. Went to Boards July 2002.

Four Asian countries have full PRSs (three of these are recently completed), one is drafting a PRS, and one has just completed its I-PRS, while two are in the process of drafting an I-PRS. The documents are clearly taking some time to be drafted which may reflect a variety of factors, including lower aid dependence in some countries, lack of an incentive through HIPC, or civil society influences. In Bangladesh, for instance, CSOs successfully campaigned for an extension to the original deadline.

The term PRSP is not widely used by adopting countries as the examples below indicate. However, throughout this briefing note these documents and others are referred to as the national PRS for ease of comparison.

- **Bangladesh:** A National Strategy for Economic Growth, Poverty Reduction and Social Development
- **Nepal:** Summary of The Tenth Five Year Plan from 2002 – 2007
- **Sri Lanka:** 'Regaining Sri Lanka' (Part I is 'Vision of Growth', followed by Part II 'Connecting to Growth – Sri Lanka's PRS')
- **Vietnam:** Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy (both the CDF and the PRSP)

Conflict

Although several Asian countries have a history of conflict, Nepal and Sri Lanka are both seriously affected by recent and ongoing conflict. Besides the impacts of conflict in other respects, this has some ramifications for the PRS process for both government and donors. In addition, the World Bank's Country Assistance Strategy (CAS) does not mainstream conflict sensitivity within its programming for Sri Lanka. Although it states that the base case for lending will require a 'dramatic change in peace prospects' this is not specified in detail. In Nepal, the PRS notes that conflict constrained the consultation process in some areas of the country.

Bureaucratic Ownership of the PRS

One of the main issues for governmental ownership of the PRS process in Asia is the (pre-existing) tensions between the Ministry of Planning and the Ministry of Finance in some countries (often linked to control of separate development and recurrent budgets). Whichever ministry is leading on the PRS process, the engagement of other key central ministries is a significant challenge for ownership with implications for linking the PRS with the budget (Cambodia, Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh).

- **Cambodia:** the Ministry of Finance does not tend to include the Ministry of Planning in its work, which has a number of impacts on policy processes in general and on the PRS process in particular. The PRS was formulated by an inter-ministerial group under the chair of the Ministry of Planning. The Ministry of Finance is showing more interest in the PRS process now, but they were not centrally engaged with the PRS process.
- **Bangladesh:** For much of 2002 the PRS process was led by the Economic Relations Division of the Ministry of Finance, a body responsible for dealing with external assistance. In January 2003, responsibility for the PRS (and monitoring of implementation) was handed to the Planning Commission, a body which also has the function of ensuring that external assistance is in line with national priorities. Weak linkages and tensions between the Finance Division and the Planning Commission are problematic for the future of the PRS.

The involvement of the main line ministries in the formulation of the PRS⁵ is variable. In several cases such involvement has been poor (Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka). Lack of line ministry involvement in the drafting process is seen to have adverse consequences for the content of the PRS and ownership of the sectoral commitments outlined in the PRS, and possibly exacerbates difficulties in reconciling the PRS and the pre-existing national planning process.

- **Bangladesh:** Major ministries such as education and health have not engaged with the PRS process. However, smaller and less powerful line-ministries such as environment, disaster management and women's affairs, have seized the possibilities of the PRS process and ensured a good cover in the I-PRS document for their concerns.

However, in some cases the PRS process has fostered somewhat better line ministry involvement, which is seen as a positive development (despite imperfections) with potentially wide ramifications.

- **Cambodia:** The network NGO Forum is of the opinion that the PRSP process has been notable for its inclusion of government officials in the process of preparing sectoral matrices. However, it also notes that those working on sectoral plans in line ministries were generally different than those in line ministry PRS teams. One source characterised the PRS as having involved broad but shallow central government input from line

ministries.

- **Vietnam:** 'Knowledge of the CPRGS is somewhat shallow, with limited engagement of officials within Ministries... [but] there is some evidence that the process has empowered line ministries – and innovators within them – in their dealings with the traditionally dominant Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI). It has at least encouraged greater intra-Government co-ordination, with sectoral ministries sitting down with MPI and MoF to debate overall policy direction: this is appreciated by at least some of the line Ministry staff members who have been involved in the process. The CPRGS might thus have had some effect on the nature of competition between Ministries, with competing claims for financial resources played out in a more open forum and with reference to overarching policy objectives, rather than through complex and untransparent bilateral negotiations between line Ministries and MPI.⁶ (Conway, T. Forthcoming 2003)
- **Nepal:** The 10th 5 year planning process was firmly led by Government – line ministries drafted chapters and the 10th Plan team then redrafted these. The PRSP (10th Plan Summary) was drafted by the NPC and drafts were circulated among (and revised by) line ministries.

There are two notable cases where subnational bodies were involved in the drafting process. Pakistan has made a clear commitment to involving subnational bodies through requiring provinces to draft PRSs of their own – although this has now been carried out, the extent of provincial ownership is not clear. In Vietnam, province and commune-level officials have been involved through a number of consultative exercises and in discussing drafts, but ownership of the pre-existing planning process is stronger. In most cases, however, there has been very little engagement of subnational bodies in the drafting process (except through regional workshops), which observers note will have important consequences for implementation of PRS policies (Bangladesh, Cambodia, Nepal, Sri Lanka).

Observers also highlight the use of consultants as a key issue for ownership. Although the use of consultants does not necessarily undermine ownership, there are elements of current practice in some countries that may give cause for concern.

- **Bangladesh:** Although there was some consultation around the draft PRS, observers noted that much of the document was drafted by two consultants and that little attempt had been made to integrate the PRS into existing government systems.
- **Cambodia:** NGO Forum noted that the World Bank adopted a 'hands off' attitude to the PRS until the first draft of the PRS was produced. However, the network criticised the Bank for producing '50 pages of comments' on the draft and for bringing in international consultants to prioritise the PRS and restructure the document according to the World Bank's comments. (NGO Forum on Cambodia, 2002)

Political Ownership

A realistic view of the political situation of any country will give a mixed view of the potential for political ownership of the PRS process, highly dependent on the political environment in question. For instance, the single party system in Vietnam has a number of implications for the PRS process. 'The potential for different actors to become engaged in policy development in contemporary Vietnam is fundamentally bounded by the rules of one-party politics. The extent to which the CPRGS process has to date or might serve in the future to draw in different political actors is thus somewhat more limited than it might be in a multiparty democracy.'⁷ (Conway, T. Forthcoming 2003)

In terms of minimal engagement in the PRS process by political actors such as the members of the national assembly or members of parliament, this is absent across much of Asia. The reasons for this absence are variable – sometimes it is a lack of inclusion on the part of those drafting the PRS, and sometimes a lack of interest or capacity on the part of the members of parliament themselves. (A notable exception is Nepal, where representatives of all major political parties were consulted at various stages and sat on the National Development Council which approved the Approach Paper for the 10th plan.)

- **Cambodia:** The National Assembly did not attend first public event on PRS despite being invited (NGO Forum).
- **Pakistan:** In a public letter rejecting the PRS, a group of CSOs observed that political parties were not involved in the drafting process at all.
- **Bangladesh:** Very little party political debate has taken place on the PRS, if any. Members of Parliament received individual copies for comment, but only one responded. Involvement may improve as there is now a parliamentary-level National Council for Poverty Reduction, chaired by the Prime Minister, which will receive reports on progress with PRS implementation.

In most cases the PRS was not debated in the parliament or national assembly, sometimes in direct contrast to the

pre-existing national plan. The reasons for this are not always immediately apparent.

- **Vietnam:** '[The CPRGS] does not appear to have been a major point of reference for domestic political actors: it was not, for example, a topic of the 9th Party Congress of May 2001, or debated in the National Assembly.'⁸ (Conway, T. Forthcoming 2003) Unlike the annual Socio Economic Development Strategy (SEDS), the CPRGS was not formally approved by the National Assembly (although this distinction may be less significant in future given that there are commitments for the SEDS to reflect the CPRGS from 2004). The National Assembly has recently requested that a publication on the CPRGS consultation process and findings be circulated to their members.
- **Pakistan:** There are plans to place the PRS before Parliament with the budget, but given the lack of parliamentary involvement in the drafting process some CSOs feel that this amounts to a 'rubber stamp'.
- **Cambodia:** The Social and Economic Development Plan (SEDP) went before parliament but the PRS did not.

Changes in government are also crucially important for the PRS process. Some feel that a change in administration provides a test for the degree of ownership (or consensus) underlying the PRS, while others note that in a competitive political environment continuity across administrations is unlikely. So far there is relatively little evidence on this question in Asia, but in Sri Lanka a change of administration has brought a significant redrafting of the former government's PRS. There are some concerns that the new GoSL has misrepresented the extent of consultation that underpins the present version.

Links to National Development Plans

Several governments are making good conceptual and paper links between the PRS and other relevant development plans.⁹ These governments achieve a good degree of consistency (though not complete consistency) between the major relevant plans and have clear understandings of the differing roles of the documents (Cambodia – though see Box 1 below, Nepal, Vietnam). They also tend to take the PRS to be an operationalisation of their own development strategy as well as a poverty-focused subset of the national plan (Cambodia, Vietnam). Links between the various strategies will be tested in practice as implementation begins.

- **Nepal:** There is a high degree of consistency between PRSP (the summary of the 10th 5 year Development Plan), the full 10th Plan, the Immediate Action Plan (the annual plan), and the MTEF. This reflects a substantial amount of negotiation between the donor community and the GoN to ensure the 10th Plan process and the PRS process are well integrated.
- **Vietnam:** The final CPRGS document is 'an action plan that translates the Government's Ten Year Socio-economic Development Strategy (SEDS), Five-Year Socio-economic Development Plan as well as other sectoral development plans into concrete measures with well-defined roadmaps for implementation' (VDIC, 2002). 'The CPRGS picks selected goals from the long list of aspirations contained in the SEDS and five-year plan, prioritises these and gives these priorities more concrete form, setting them against a timetable for achievement and a (rough) estimation of the resources required.' (Conway, T. Forthcoming 2003) The next PRS will be produced to converge with the 5 year planning cycle. The annual SEDS will also reflect the PRSP from 2004.

Box 1. Cambodia's PRS and the SEDPII

In Cambodia the link between the PRS and the constitutionally required Second Social and Economic Development Plan has been resolved after considerable difficulty. The problem was linked to difficulties in the relationship between the World Bank (supporting the PRS) and the Asian Development Bank (supporting the SEDPII). Agreement was eventually reached that the full PRS would be based upon an improved version of the SEDPII (Focus on the Global South). The Prime Minister has committed to merge the PRS and SEDP processes and these will be presented as a single document in 2005. The PRS states:

'The NPRS builds directly on recent planning documents with a poverty reduction focus, including the IPRSP, which was a road map for the full strategy, and the SEDPII. However, the NPRS goes beyond both documents in several respects in seeking to more clearly define and operationalise the government's approach to poverty reduction. First, it incorporates a more comprehensive set of performance indicators and establishes mechanisms for tracking progress in achieving these targets over time. Second, it attempts to cost the Government's priority poverty reduction policies and programs and relate these cost estimates to the overall budget. Importantly, implementation of this strategy will be closely linked to the national budget. Third, the NPRS was developed on the basis of a broader participatory process than was used to develop either of these predecessor documents. It is also noted that the NRPS is not intended to be as comprehensive as SEDPII, particularly in its coverage of line ministry activities. Instead, it identifies and focuses on a subset of policies and programs that were ranked as most critical for poverty reduction. The NPRS gives attention to those policies and programs that contribute to overall economic growth with an emphasis on those that directly enhance the likelihood that the poor will share in the fruits of rapid and sustainable economic growth. It is envisioned that the next Socio-Economic Development Plan and the corresponding NPRS will be developed and presented as a single document in 2005.' (CSD, 2002)

However, in a few cases, even the conceptual and paper links with other development plans are less clear cut.

- **Pakistan:** The PRS draws on both the former Social Action Plan and the Planning Commission's Poverty Reduction Programme 2001-2004, and references the important Debt Management Strategy. However, the draft PRS does not appear to refer to the PC's 10 Year Plan.
- **Sri Lanka:** The key national strategies are the RRR (Relief, Reconciliation & Reconstruction) Framework and RSL (Regaining Sri Lanka, which contains the PRS as well as the economic reform program for growth). Although the RSL does refer to the RRR at appropriate points, there is a need for greater attention to ensuring working links, particularly as a number of donors are keen to support a common fund.

In most cases, other national strategies such as national health, education or governance strategies are not well linked to the PRS process (Bangladesh, Nepal, Cambodia).

Links with Budget

Many observers feel that the link between the PRS and the central budget is the crucial test of ownership of the PRS. There is often a general need to improve budgetary processes, but commitment to reform is often lacking or patchy (Sri Lanka, Vietnam) and capacity can be a serious constraint (Bangladesh, Cambodia).

One important feature in some Asian countries is the Medium Term Expenditure (or Macroeconomic or Budget) Framework. These are being introduced in order to expedite links between the budget and PRS-type processes, although it is understood that this will take some time. Links to date are primarily on paper and the quality of even paper links is variable. In all cases, practical applications are expected to test the links.

- **Nepal:** The PRS is well-linked with the MTEF and co-ordination between the MTEF and Tenth Plan processes was good (see Box 2).
- **Bangladesh:** Although the Medium Term Macroeconomic Framework (MTMF) provides a link between the PRS and the 3 year rolling plan, there is some confusion over their roles and relationship.
- **Cambodia:** The MTEF is not well-linked to the budget, and neither is well-linked to the PRS.

Given that most Asian countries have not yet gone through a budget cycle with a full PRS in place, evidence on the degree to which PRS priorities have affected resource allocations is slim. In Vietnam, where the PRS has been in place for over a year, it has few linkages with the annual budget and there is currently no MTEF.¹¹ The current Public Investment Plan (PIP) is significantly at odds with the PRS despite being drafted by the same unit in the Ministry of Planning and Investment. 'Donors and INGOs are divided in whether they see this inconsistency as rendering the CPRGS fundamentally worthless, or merely as a serious problem which should nevertheless not distract from the achievements of the CPRGS'.¹² (Conway, T. Forthcoming 2003)

In all countries, there have been some efforts made to prioritise and cost PRSs¹³; although the resulting documents usually fall short of (donor) expectations¹⁴ they are often a significant improvement on national development plans. In Asia, recurring themes appear to be confusion over the place of dedicated costing work, the separation of the development and recurrent budgets and the relationship of donors to the development budget in aid-dependent countries.

There appears to be confusion over whether costing the PRS takes place in normal budgetary (or MTEF) processes or whether a dedicated costing exercise is required. In some countries this question was not addressed until rather late in the PRS formulation process, and dedicated costing work was undertaken that sits rather uneasily alongside existing means of assessing costs.

- **Pakistan:** There appears to be rather piecemeal costing exercises underway in health, education and monitoring. In the work on monitoring, there was an explicit decision that the MTEF will be used in future but that short term needs required a dedicated costing exercise.
- **Vietnam:** The PRSP reflects two separate approaches to costing: 1) costing the 5 year plan, which was undertaken using normal processes and appeared in a draft of the PRS, and 2) estimating overall expenditure requirements and then priority actions, which was undertaken using a dedicated exercise and only partially displaced the results of the former exercise.
- **Bangladesh:** The current draft of the MTMF does not contain details of PRS costs, an omission which reflects a lack of connection between the MTMF and the PRS.

In much of Asia, responsibility for the development budget and the recurrent budget is separated between Planning and Finance. In several countries, observers note this as a serious difficulty in linking the PRS to the budget, not least because of institutional rivalries between Planning and Finance (Bangladesh, Cambodia,

Pakistan, Vietnam). In these cases, the PRS process exposes these difficulties rather than providing solutions for them. However, the MTEF process in Nepal seems to be playing a positive role in addressing this problem (see Box 2 below).

Box 2. Nepal's MTEF

In Nepal, the MTEF (which deals primarily with the development budget) is seen as the bridge between the PRS (led by the National Planning Commission) and the annual budget (led by the Ministry of Finance). The MTEF prioritization drove the budget framework (and vice versa), and there was considerable collaboration between the two institutions. This was partly because of personal interactions among key individuals, but also because of mutual recognition of the need for both tighter budget framework and for the budget itself to focus on 10th Plan/PRSP priorities.

The MTEF represents the 'first serious effort to prioritise the public expenditure program in Nepal.' ¹⁴ (PRS) The MTEF introduced a project screen system where development projects have to be scored and justified on the basis of poverty-related criteria. This has contributed to a prioritisation process in which between 50% and 70% of sector budgets are allocated to so-called PIs and should be protected from mid-year cuts. There should be (and seems to be) a link between the compilation of these lists of PIs and the sector strategies embodied in the Tenth Plan.

There are also indications that the PRS is perceived in several countries as a document that is primarily about (donor) investment expenditure rather than (government) recurrent expenditure, and is aimed at providing donors with an investment wish-list (Sri Lanka, Cambodia). This has implications for prioritisation as well as costing, particularly in aid-dependent countries where donors essentially control the development budget.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Given that most countries in Asia have not yet begun PRS implementation, monitoring and evaluation is not yet a fully 'live issue' in most cases. It is worth drawing on early experience from elsewhere in the world for comparison with Asia and for identification of potential future issues.¹⁵

Most PRSs have chapters on M&E that are not yet fleshed out in a full monitoring plan (Vietnam, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh).¹⁶ However, there are a few early themes emerging from experience to date. For instance, a seminar in November 2002 that brought together Asian planners and statisticians was notable in that PRS monitoring and monitoring of the Millennium Development Goals were being considered separately. Also, it was clear that national statistical systems in Asia would need to adapt quite radically to the new demands of the PRS approach, but this would require more thought and strategising than was currently evident.

Some countries have chosen a unit to be responsible for overall monitoring and evaluation. In most cases, the Ministry of Planning is the main coordinating actor, with responsibility for drafting annual reports on implementation (Vietnam, Bangladesh, Nepal). Sri Lanka proposes a broad-membership Monitoring Team that will gather line ministry reports on key performance measures. This team will include representation from the team monitoring implementation of the RRR framework.

The development of indicators and targets (and identification of sources for data) for tracking PRS implementation has proved to be important elsewhere. Experience in Asia is mixed to date:

- **Vietnam:** The development of the Vietnam Development Targets was an important way of 'nationalising' the MDGs. However, the GoV has recently distanced itself from these, claiming they are not official targets.¹⁷
- **Nepal:** The PRSP does include a set of indicators, but the monitoring system is yet to be developed. This is being addressed in the Immediate Action Plan (which contains a checklist of activities and a timetable for the implementation) and through DFID, WB and UNDP engagement with the Poverty Monitoring System of the PRS.
- **Cambodia:** The PRS outlines approximately 85 indicators for monitoring implementation, states the data source, and states how often data will be collected.

Linking the central monitoring system with local-level information appears to be a weak point in several cases (Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, Vietnam).

- **Pakistan:** The GoP intends to use the Core Welfare Indicators Questionnaire (CWIQ) to generate district level service delivery information, but links between Federal Bureau of Statistics and provinces are not well established.

- **Vietnam:** Government participants in an ‘Attacking Poverty’ course with the World Bank Institute stated that ‘The existing system of using the administrative method of reporting by the lower level to the top was problematic and highly questionable in terms of accuracy, timeliness and accessibility.’ (CRP, 2002)

Some of the full PRSs take steps towards participatory forms of monitoring, though these are not well fleshed out in most cases. Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Vietnam all give space to NGOs, private sector, and the media as having a role in PRS monitoring. In Vietnam, the PRS states that line ministries and other official bodies will produce publicly available reports on their implementation of the PRS, while in Sri Lanka, NGOs and the private sector will be invited to join the Monitoring Team as well as contributing independently.

Pilots in Poverty and Social Impact Analysis (PSIA) have been carried out in Indonesia (rice tariffs) and Vietnam (reform of state owned enterprises).¹⁸ A few DFID offices are considering supporting PSIA work in future, such as analysis of IFI-driven reforms as in Nepal (fuel price reform) and Pakistan (electricity pricing or devolution). The World Bank may support work on land in Cambodia. In Sri Lanka, there is the possibility of conflict-sensitive PSIA work.

Participation

There has been little in-depth research on participation in Asian PRSs, and the following is drawn from a variety of sources which do not always give a reading of the quality of participation. It is worth noting at the outset that PRS participation compares favourably with participation in five year planning processes (Nepal, Cambodia, Bangladesh)¹⁹ although it may not be as deep or broad as might have been hoped.

It is clear that, as in other regions, international NGOs and larger NGOs/CSOs have been most active in the process in several countries (Bangladesh, Cambodia, Vietnam). This includes not only attendance at workshops, commenting on drafts and producing some analysis of the process, but also membership of drafting committees in Cambodia, Pakistan, and Vietnam. There are a few indications that some smaller, less well-networked, CSOs have felt excluded from the process. It seems that research bodies and academics have engaged with the process in Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam. The private sector has not been deeply engaged and there has been little media coverage of the process.

The participation process has however drawn heavy criticism (bordering on boycotts) from some civil society groups and networks.

- **Bangladesh:** Some CSOs have carried out alternative consultations and have discussed drafting an alternative PRS.
- **Pakistan:** An assortment of interested parties voiced strong complaints about the PRS process culminating in a rejection of the PRSP in an open letter circulated widely on PRS networks.
- **Sri Lanka:** A coalition of CSOs and trade unions published a critical paper on the PRS process.

Direct PRS participation can also have overtly political aspects, particularly in competitive political environments.

- **Bangladesh:** A major PRS event organised by NGOs was not attended by GoB or consultants for political reasons.
- **Pakistan:** Some CSOs have rejected the PRS on the grounds that the process has undermined democratic institutions and that the IFIs support the military government.

Despite regional workshops in most countries (Cambodia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Pakistan) participation was often heavily biased towards the capital city (Cambodia, Nepal, Sri Lanka). Pakistan’s provincial PRSs ensured some sub-national consultation processes.

The poor were not represented formally during participation since NGOs are not usually membership organisations (although in Vietnam, the mass organisations have strong links to the communes and were consulted to a degree in the process). Community level consultation exercises, or Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA) style exercises, took place in some countries which may provide some access to the opinions of the poor.

- **Vietnam:** An influential PPA was conducted as part of the PRS process and proved critical for stimulating debate amongst policy makers.
- **Pakistan:** A PPA was conducted but not directly under the auspices of the PRS process – it will hopefully be well reflected in the PRS. The Rural Support Programme Network undertook community consultations.
- **Cambodia:** The PRS draws on a 2001 ADB PPA.

One of the challenges of fostering participation around a policy draft is language barriers. In Asia, there is mixed experience of drafting popular or accessible versions of the PRS.

- **Nepal:** The final PRSP is being circulated in English and Nepali.
- **Vietnam:** All drafts of the CPRGS were written in Vietnamese but no popular version was created.
- **Bangladesh:** A network NGO translated the draft PRS into a Bangla popular version. Donors feel that the GoB would demonstrate its seriousness on consultation if it were to provide a Bangla version of the full PRS.
- **Cambodia:** The PRS has not been translated into Khmer despite repeated requests from civil society (NGO Forum).

Although there are hopes that participation in the PRS will lead to better policymaking and greater accountability, there is little collected evidence to date on the impact of participatory processes on the timetable or content of Asian PRSs. NGOs in Bangladesh and Cambodia have had some of their comments taken into account in subsequent drafts of the PRS, and in Bangladesh, CSOs successfully campaigned for a six month extension to the process.

Donor Coordination, Alignment and Harmonisation

It is important to remember that the possibilities for the PRS to improve donor behaviour are very much dependent on the starting point. For instance, in Cambodia and Indonesia, donor coordination is in very early stages and as such the alignment and harmonisation agenda is not well developed. In Pakistan previous attempts at greater coordination have left donors and government reluctant to make new efforts. In all these cases, as in Bangladesh, the PRS does not appear to be acting as a catalyst for changes in donor behaviour.

In Vietnam, however, there was some independent momentum around donor coordination before the PRS (especially with the CDF). The like-minded donor community in Vietnam wishes to align behind the PRS and to harmonise procedures (see Box 4 below on Vietnam). In Nepal, despite a poor environment for donor coordination, the PRS does appear to have provided some momentum for donors, and bilateral donors appear eager to align their programmes behind the PRS.

Box 3. Vietnam's Like-Minded Donor Group

The 'Like-Minded Donor Group' (LMDG) is an ad-hoc grouping of nine bilateral donors who are drawn together by a common commitment to use the CPRGS as a framework for:

- Promoting pro-poor growth (i.e. growth and poverty reduction)
- Aligning ODA planning and delivery
- Improving the coherence of the overall aid effort

...and to improve the quality of aid in Vietnam through the harmonization of aid management practices; participating in joint activities, promoting the use of Government systems; and introducing new aid instruments that lower transaction costs and improve effectiveness.

A number of the LMDG donors already co-finance the PRSC which they see as a means to support the broad poverty agenda of the PRS.

One of the danger areas is the temptation for donors to repackage existing development assistance as 'PRS-related' rather than seeking to align assistance in full behind the PRS, by amongst other things linking assistance to national budget and reporting cycles and ensuring that projects and programmes are directly reflective of PRS goals and priorities.

Deeper discussions on aligning donor cycles with PRS cycles are not yet in evidence (perhaps unsurprising given the youth of the process in most countries). Discussions around linking donors' performance assessment requirements to PRS monitoring requirements are also some way off. Those discussions that are taking place are aimed at sectoral level performance assessment (Cambodia, Nepal). Efforts to improve predictability of disbursement appear to be mixed and it appears that the PRS is not providing extra impetus in this regard.

PRS Process and Review

It appears that there are very unclear expectations across Asia around the use of the PRS annual progress report. In part this is because PRSs are not complete yet or are only just complete (but see Box 5 below on Vietnam). In PRSs completed to date (Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Cambodia), monitoring frameworks specify that an annual report will be produced but do not state whether this is to be used for both donor and domestic purposes.

Box 4. Vietnam - Annual Progress Reporting

DFID Vietnam: 'There are some indications that the annual progress reports will be used for domestic accountability purposes. The CPRGS team in MPI are enthusiastic (and probably too ambitious) in trying to get the rest of government to report against the indicators and targets in the CPRGS - all 140 of them. It is as yet unclear how signed up line ministries and local government bodies are - and how pertinent they find the targets to their work. There is a sense that some donor requirements may be driving this in ways that may result in a mechanistic approach that is insufficiently owned.' (ODI, 2003)

The JSA process appears to be somewhat closed in most cases. In both Pakistan and Sri Lanka, the JSA was produced without discussion by other donors despite requests to the Bank and Fund for opportunities to comment. In countries where the I-PRS is nearing completion (Bangladesh and Nepal), there are only vague plans for the JSA. Cambodia is somewhat unique in that there was a relatively open JSA process – consultation was informal but most donors were consulted as well as the Ministers of Finance and Planning (although only DFID provided comments).

IFI Behaviour

Both the Bank and Fund appear to have a good relationship with DFID at country level. The World Bank appears to be fully oriented towards the PRS in most cases, although capacity and commitment vary from country to country. Advance notice is given for some missions, although ToRs are only provided for those activities which DFID requests (if at all).

- **Indonesia:** The World Bank has been supportive of a PRS process, though not blindly so, and is discussing integration of sectoral work early on in the process.
- **Vietnam:** The Bank office has high capacity, and focuses its work on the CPRGS. At a recent CAS retreat donors felt that the Bank had done a great deal to foster a greater sense of partnership with other donors.

However, 'fully oriented to the PRS' can mean a variety of things, not all of which might be considered supportive of national ownership.

- **Cambodia:** The WB office in Cambodia has lower capacity than offices like Vietnam and some civil society commentators feel that the Bank adopted a rather 'hands off' policy towards the PRS in the beginning which then changed suddenly to more intense engagement. The network NGO Forum has stated: 'However, after the first draft of the PRSP was released, the World Bank's 'hands off' policy came to an abrupt end. They sent in 50 pages of comments, and sent a staff member from Washington to help restructure and re-write the document. After the second draft, they sent another extensive set of comments.' (NGO Forum on Cambodia, 2002)

WB/IMF lending instruments show signs of greater alignment with PRSs in some cases. There is little indication that these have been designed with greater stakeholder involvement than previous instruments. Negotiations for new lending instruments such as PRSCs have not yet occurred in some cases (Cambodia, Nepal).²⁰

- **Pakistan:** The IMF has included PRS expenditure as an indicative target in its PRGF.²¹ WB Structural Adjustment Credits draw on I-PRS policies and targets. WB projects may be badged as PRS-related but there is some feeling that these would have taken place without the presence of a PRS.
- **Bangladesh:** The WB's new Development Support Credit is not based on I-PRS. The IMF has (notably) initiated working groups on monetary policy, balance of payments issues, and sectoral issues which should ensure that its programme is well-linked with the PRS.
- **Sri Lanka:** A PRGF is soon to be approved and appears to be aligned with the PRS. The WB is planning a

series of PRSCs to support the PRS.

- **Vietnam:** The PRSC is a crucial instrument for the bilateral donor community in Vietnam. Several members of the LMDG have agreed to co-finance the PRSC stating that this is a means of supporting the broad poverty reduction aims of the PRSP. The next PRSC has been designed on the basis of workshops aimed at translating the PRS policy matrix into concrete steps, and should be more strongly linked to the PRS than the current PRSC (which was approved on the basis of an I-PRS and is essentially a repackaged SAC).

DFID is engaging with the WB Country Assistance Strategy (CAS) process in several countries, offering comments and reflections to strengthen the CAS and bring about greater alignment with the PRS.

- **Nepal:** The World Bank is updating their CAS to reflect the PRSP. DFID and the Bank are doing this together.
- **Sri Lanka:** DFID has commented to the Bank that the CAS is not sufficiently conflict-sensitive.
- **Vietnam:** DFID and other donors attended a CAS retreat to offer comments.

Although the Asian Development Bank has its own Poverty Reduction Partnership Agreements (PRPAs) with governments, they are supporting the PRS process as well (Bangladesh, Nepal, Cambodia, Vietnam). The PRS process has given some momentum to improved relations between the ADB and the Washington IFIs.

- **Bangladesh:** The ADB (with a large and well staffed office and an influential Resident Representative) is interested in funding PRS monitoring with other donors
- **Cambodia:** After serious tensions between the WB and ADB over the relationship between the PRS and the SEDPII, there is now some progress - the ADB is leading on the MTEF process and working jointly with the World Bank on public administration reform.
- **Vietnam:** DFIDV: 'The ADB and WB do have differences about the role of the PRS but ADB are supporting the process and play an active role in contributing to it. Levels of dialogue between the WB and the ADB have increased as a consequence of the momentum of the PRS and harmonisation discussions have led to collaboration between WB, ADB and JIBC on rules and procedures.' ADB also joined the multi-stakeholder Poverty Working Group.

Box 5. DFID, WB and ADB in Indonesia

The emerging PRS has created the framework and space for discussion between the WB and the ADB. Whilst the ADB and WB have an MoU at the headquarters level for greater collaboration, practical work at the country level has proven very difficult. DFID has established a programme called the Poverty Reduction Partnership (PRP) programme support to increase the emphasis on poverty reduction in the agendas of Government, donors and civil society in Indonesia. The DFID programme will provide for (amongst other things) staff and resources for work with the World Bank to support the CPRS and related reform programmes, and resources for work with the ADB in support of the PRSP. In doing this the aim is to broker a more constructive involvement of ADB in and around the CPRS.

DFID's Support to the PRS Process

DFID's support to the PRS process in Asia has taken a number of forms (see Box 7). In many cases, DFID is involved in a number of other activities that it sees as closely (though not directly) related to the PRS agenda, such as the PPA and monitoring framework in Pakistan. In addition, some of DFID's support is classed as support to implementation of the PRS, such as sectoral work.

DFID's (direct) support to PRS process is generally not a high proportion of the overall aid package. The proportion varies from little or none (Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka) to about half (Indonesia) to about three-quarters (Pakistan) to all (Vietnam). The direction of change is not immediately apparent. A number of countries (Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal) will be going through a CAP process that will reorient their programme and offices are reluctant to prejudge the outcome of that process – however, the proportion of support to the PRS is expected to rise.

Programmatic approaches are gaining some ground with several sector-wide initiatives in place and two examples of general budget support (Pakistan and Vietnam). Most offices participate in some form of jointly financed activities, usually with (or channelled through) the multilateral agencies. Joint finance initiatives are not usually aligned with the PRS as yet (either in terms of policy content or process cycles) and it is not yet clear whether

there are intentions to do so. Vietnam and Cambodia have both placed secondments in World Bank offices.

Box 6. Examples of DFID's Support to PRS Processes

- Working with/chairing drafting teams and providing (joint) comments/assessments on drafts of the PRS (Bangladesh, Cambodia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Vietnam)
- Providing support to prioritisation (Bangladesh, TA in Nepal) and costing (Pakistan)
- Influencing governments informally on key issues for inclusion in the PRS (conflict in Nepal, gender in Bangladesh, environment in Pakistan)
- Funding PRS Units (possibly Bangladesh, Punjab in Pakistan)
- Funding document production and translation (Vietnam through WB)
- Commenting on the JSA (Cambodia)
- Support for consultations and participation (Bangladesh, Indonesia, Vietnam through WB)
- Supporting the development of a communications/dissemination strategy (Pakistan)
- Secondments to the WB for poverty specialists (Cambodia, Vietnam) and other relevant staff (Indonesia)
- Funding PPA (Vietnam), funding PSIA work (Indonesia, possibly Sri Lanka)
- TA on strengthening budget and expenditure planning (Cambodia), MTEF (Nepal), and strengthening capacity for budget oversight (Vietnam)
- Joint donor work to influence donor relations (Indonesia with WB/ADB, Vietnam with WB)

The coherence of UK policy towards recipient countries is most pressing in the conflict-affected countries of Sri Lanka and Nepal. In these countries, the overall HMG approach appears to be relatively de-linked from the PRS process.

- **Nepal:** assistance provided by FCO, MoD and DFID is coordinated under the Global Conflict Prevention Pool which is not directly linked to the PRSP.
- **Sri Lanka:** DFID, FCO and MOD are working towards a joint HMG peacebuilding strategy for Sri Lanka which does not appear to have links to the PRS process.

Box 7. DFID Nepal's Support to the PRS

DFID Nepal: '[DFID's assistance to the PRS process] has been firmly based upon the principle that we respond to Government requests and simply pick up the bills (with appropriate safeguards) but that the terms of reference are set by Government and the inputs report directly to Government. We have been held as a trusted partner and have tried to resist temptations to push our own agenda directly. We have also provided timely, constructive comments on earlier drafts which seem to have been well received. And we have consistently provided moral support for the key reformers involved in this exercise. We have been successful in working with the Bank and in particular encouraging them not to take over the PRSP process or be too heavy-handed. The MTEF TA worked well with the Tenth Plan support provided by the ADB, in part because we encouraged the ADB (and Government) to generate synergies.' (ODI, 2003)

Future Issues

As more Asian countries come to complete their first PRS, the agenda will shift from questions of policy formulation to questions of implementation and monitoring. Some important themes are drawn out below, but there are likely to be other areas that also require attention.

- A priority issue for many country offices is the way that the PRS process is fitting (uneasily) into the split between MoF and MoP (and the recurrent and development budgets) with the various institutional tensions that this brings and the associated weaknesses in budgetary processes. It is not clear that the PRS process itself provides an opportunity for addressing this division. Related public financing management reforms are likely to be key.

- Strengthening links between PRSs and existing national development planning processes will require attention on several fronts. Building ownership of the PRS beyond the centre is a key step, as is fostering strong links between the PRS monitoring system and existing reporting and monitoring systems under the existing national plan.
- The PRS provides an opportunity to address the question of realistic and embedded monitoring systems to track progress of policy implementation and progress towards the MDGs. Ensuring that PRS monitoring does not become another forum for indicator proliferation and parallel processes will require diligence from all parties. It will also require some attention to build links between the PRS monitoring system and donor performance assessments, whether of sectoral programmes or the annual PRS progress reports required by the Bank and Fund.
- Pilots in PSIA have been carried out in some countries. Other countries may wish to adopt this tool to support governments in using *ex ante* analysis of policy impacts. Lessons from existing PSIAs are already being discussed and could usefully be reflected on.
- Several governments have made commitments to various degrees of participatory PRS monitoring. Building on these commitments may provide an opportunity for continuing the broader policy dialogue between civil society and the government. Supporting efforts to popularise the PRS could also be a useful next step.
- Ensuring greater clarity in donors' expectations around the PRS reporting and review process is likely to be critical in the coming months. The JSA review process is an important area for influence that bilateral donors may wish to exploit.
- The PRS is also an opportunity to improve aid management and reduce transactions costs in countries where this is a priority. Although joint finance and programmatic approaches have growing more popular in Asia, there are other facets of the aid efficiency debate that could be addressed such as predictability and off-budget aid. Donors may wish to exploit the opportunity of the PRS rather more strongly than has been the case to date.

Endnotes

- 1 This briefing note was drafted for the PRSP Monitoring and Synthesis Project by Erin Coyle and Alison Evans (see p. 2).
- 2 OECD DAC
- 3 Issues relating to the preparation of PRSs in conflict-affected countries in Africa are outlined in an earlier Synthesis Note by the Monitoring and Synthesis Project.
- 4 Note that Sri Lanka's first PRS-type document has been classified as a full PRS on the World Bank and IMF websites but there is not a preceding I-PRS.
- 5 Through, for instance, thematic working groups, the drafting of sectoral strategies, or commenting on drafts.
- 6 From draft case study: Conway, T 'Politics and PRSPs: issues for long-term sustainability Vietnam case study'. London: PRSP Monitoring and Synthesis Project, ODI (Forthcoming 2003).
- 7 Draft Vietnam case study, *op. cit.*
- 8 Draft Vietnam case study, *ibid.*
- 9 It is worth noting that DFID is conducting in-depth research into this area.
- 10 Draft Vietnam case study, *op. cit.*
- 11 A Public Finance Management Reform Project is close to approval, one component of which is the introduction of a Medium Term Fiscal Framework and an MTEF in 4 line Ministries. One objective is to improve alignment of the capital and recurrent budgets and to strengthen the link between (CPRGS) policy and the allocation of resources.
- 12 Draft Vietnam case study, *op. cit.*
- 13 See 'Briefing Note 4: Costing PRSs – Early Experience' (PRSP Monitoring and Synthesis Project) for more on this issue.
- 14 Except in the case of Nepal, where the World Bank's Vice President for South Asia commented that the PRSP is reasonably well prioritised.
- 15 See for instance 'Good Practice in the Development of PRSP indicators and Monitoring Systems', ODI Working Paper 172, David Booth and Henry Lucas (2002) and 'Synthesis Note 7: PRS Monitoring in Africa', PRSP Monitoring and Synthesis Project (2003). These papers discuss a number of features found in African PRS monitoring systems such as the heavy focus on monitoring final poverty outcomes (rather than PRS policy implementation or outputs, for instance), gradual recognition of the problems with routine data systems, and potentially duplicative institutional arrangements.
- 16 Although Pakistan is in the process of developing a full monitoring framework that integrates inputs, outputs and outcomes, the link from this framework to PRS implementation are not fully clarified.
- 17 Draft Vietnam case study, *op. cit.*
- 18 See <http://www.prspsynthesis.org> for PSIA documentation.
- 19 Note for instance that Chapter 2 of Nepal's PRS outlines the ways in which the PRS process is an improvement on the traditional 5 year planning process
- 20 It is interesting to note that Nepal's PRS contains details of alternative macroeconomic scenarios.
- 21 Note that this is somewhat problematic as it encompasses all social and poverty related expenditure - not only that

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