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Parliaments and Poverty Reduction

Progress So Far

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Overview

- Background
- Why Focus on Parliaments?
- Recent Studies (PC + WBI partnership)
- Method
- What did we find?
- Conclusions and Implications for development policy



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Background

- Emergence of PRSPs as the key policy guides for poverty reduction
- Convergence of PC's and WBI's interest in Parliament's role in this new policy shift
- Previous joint work with WBI
- Previous PC work on Parliaments and PRSPs



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Why Focus on Parliament?

- Our mandate and interest as well as the interest of our key partner – WBI
- Parliaments are central to any discourse on development of which PRSPs are an integral part
- Underpinning PRSPs are the twin concepts of participation and country ownership
- Parliaments approve national budgets from which PRSPs are funded or not funded



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Recent Studies

- In partnership with and with funding from WBI, the PC carried out two sets of studies looking at parliaments' role in poverty issues
- 2006 in **Ghana, Niger, Tanzania, Malawi, Kenya, Senegal and Zambia**
- 2007 study, focusing mainly on Francophone countries - **Burkina Faso, Benin, Rwanda, Mali, Madagascar**



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Method

- Two-pronged methodology in first study
 - In-country assessment by PC researchers
 - Literature review, parliamentary audits and interaction with policy institutes
- In second study, in-country assessment for all case countries by PC researcher
- Administered questionnaire with questions on: Participation, Knowledge of PRSPs, Monitoring/Accountability, Linkages with Gender, the Poor and CSOs, and Policy Impact



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Our Findings – Good News

- Overall, Parliaments have a better score now than when PRSPs introduced
- Marked improvement in Parliament's role since our first study in 2003/2004
- Most Parliaments are beginning to assert themselves and are pushing for significant roles in poverty policy
- Parliaments willing to play active role when they are 'given' the opportunity



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Findings – Good News

- Budgets scrutiny, where it takes place, has a poverty focus
- Coalitions with CSOs are beginning to yield results
- Champions are beginning to emerge
- Consensus beginning to emerge among MPs about the need to take poverty policy seriously



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Findings – Bad News

- Executive dominance in budget policy. More pronounced in francophone countries
- A culture of secrecy/lack of transparency
- Questionable autonomy of Supreme Audit Institutions
- Disconnect with the poor and minimal CSO input, particularly in francophone countries
- Clear and serious gaps – lack of resources, skills etc. for Parliamentary monitoring



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Findings – Bad News

- Little or no parliamentary input in financial negotiations
- Very serious gaps in understanding and analysis of budgets
- Pro-poor policy allocations not being applied in budget implementation
- Political allocations still a key feature in economic policy in most countries



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Conclusions and Policy Implications

- Parliamentary role in poverty policy improving overall
- Parliaments' lack of firm handle on the budget process and control on spending – big concern to emphasize
- Lack of resources and meagre support to Parliament another area of emphasis
- Efforts should be devoted to creating linkages with CSOs
- Parliamentary development always work in progress so need for more players and long term commitment
- Parliaments are pivotal for development. That needs to be recognized but should start with Parliaments themselves