

# **Using PRSPs in conflict affected countries**

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## List of abbreviations

AIV	Advisory Council on International Affairs
CDF	Comprehensive Development Framework
CRU	Conflict Research Unit
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
DFID	Department for International Development
DMV	Human Rights and Peacebuilding Department
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
DVF	United Nations and International Financial Institutions Department
FEWER	Forum on Early Warning and Early Response
FYROM	Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
GMV	Good Governance, Human Rights and Peacebuilding
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
IDA	International Development Agency
IFC	International Finance Corporation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
I-PRSP	Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
JSA	Joint Staff Assessment
JVP	Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MINALOC	Ministry of Local Government and Social Affairs
MIGA	Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PRS	Poverty Reduction Strategy
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
PSIA	Poverty and Social Impact Analysis
SSR	Security Sector Reform
UN	United Nations
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDG	United Nations Development Group
WANEP	West Africa Network for Peace-building

## Introduction

Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) have become key documents in development co-operations. Through these papers, developing countries formulate their poverty reduction plans. For poor countries, an adequate PRSP is instrumental in accessing extensive donor funding. Ideally, the papers serve as a mechanism to coordinate donor assistance.

Assistance through PRSPs constitutes a hands-off approach. While the government and local stakeholders take the primary responsibility of identifying the nature of poverty and devise plans to combat it, donors take a more distant position. They provide macro-level support on the basis of a general judgement on the PRSP process and content.

Many of the world's poorest countries suffer from intra-state conflict, regional instability or the heritage of a conflict. Increasingly, PRSPs are used in these countries as well. It is to be expected that conflicts have a large impact on the nature of poverty in these countries, on the functioning of the state and the political space for non-state stakeholders to voice their views. Expectably, this creates both risks and opportunities for the use of PRSPs in these countries. Risks, because the PRSP approach to development may not work out well in conflict affected countries. Opportunities, because PRSPs could possibly provide an entry point for conflict prevention or peacebuilding.

In an attempt to explore these risks and potentials, this paper deals with the following three questions:

- What difficulties does the PRSP approach face in conflict affected areas?
- What potential does a PRSP approach have for conflict prevention or post-conflict peacebuilding?
- What are the entry points for the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs to deal with these risks and optimise opportunities?

## PRSPs in Short

In the words of the World Bank, 'Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) describe a country's macro-economic, structural and social policies and programs to promote growth and reduce poverty, as well as associated external financing needs. PRSPs are prepared by governments through a participatory process involving civil society and development partners, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF)' (World Bank 2004a).

One of the most important aspects of a PRSP is not mentioned in this definition: a PRSP that is approved by the World Bank and the IMF is the key criterion for accessing debt relief and other forms of assistance.

Throughout the history of development co-operation, two principles seemed to cause continuous difficulty: ownership (not the donors, but the developing country should 'own' the development process) and coordination (among donors). Arguably, it is exactly these two principles that the PRSP approach tries to accommodate. The country 'owns' the formulation process of the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS), while donors can choose to subscribe to it. In this way, an ideal typical PRSP becomes the coordinating strategic document that incorporates all donor contributions, thus preventing duplication or lack of donor coordination.

To assess whether a PRSP qualifies for funding, the IMF and the World Bank employ five criteria. A PRSP needs to be:

1. Country-driven (with broad-based participation by civil society and the private sector).
2. Results-oriented (focusing on outcomes that would benefit the poor).
3. Comprehensive (recognizing the multidimensional nature of poverty).
4. Partnership-oriented (involving bilateral and multilateral donors as well as non-governmental organisations (NGOs)).
5. Based on a long-term perspective for poverty reduction.

Using these criteria, a PRSP is assessed through a Joint Staff Assessment (JSA), which is executed by the joint staff of IMF and World Bank. Following the JSA, both agencies formally approve the PRSP in the Board. After approval of the strategy, the country receives funding and is obliged to annually report on the progress made. When the conditions of a country are not yet suitable to engage in a PRSP process, it may be requested to initiate an Interim PRSP (I-PRSP), which has a one year time span. The requirements with regard to the analysis and a participatory formulation process are less stringent for an I-PRSP. The interim strategy should devise a strategy towards the formulation process of a full PRSP (which has a time span of three years).

PRSPs are no longer confined to the world of the Bank and the IMF. They have become the key document for multilateral and bilateral aid at large. In addition to the two development giants, many bilateral donors take PRSPs as the starting point of their support and select a component of the PRS to channel their funds.<sup>1</sup> Even the UN Development Group (UNDG), which traditionally had

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<sup>1</sup> The use of PRSPs as the coordinating mechanism for all donor support is part of the World Bank Comprehensive Development Framework (CDF).

strong and persistent disagreements with the Bank, has embraced the PRSPs as a key element of its strategy and an essential mechanism for reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

## Criticism Towards a PRSP Approach

The PRSP approach has met a lot of criticism since its inception in 1999. Both radical activists and more moderate academics and policymakers have cast their doubts. Some of them had fundamental difficulties with the approach itself; others have suggested improvements for the practical handling of PRSPs. The main dimensions of criticism can be categorized under three headings:

### **Process of Strategy Making: Lack of Inclusion**

The most prominent line of criticism refers to the process through which PRSPs are formulated. In theory, the strategies come into being through a broad-based process of consultation with stakeholders, in order to establish national ownership of the strategy. In practice, critics argue, inclusion is limited. The process is not transparent enough, essential documents are not accessible or translated in all necessary languages and stakeholders are not equipped with the proper information. Most of these views apply to civil society organisations, which are insufficiently included or too dependent on the government and foreign donors.

In addition, the role of parliaments has drawn attention. Since PRSPs usually need to be ratified or endorsed by national parliaments, they potentially constitute an excellent channel to empower parliaments and include people's representatives in the national poverty reduction effort. In practice, however, many parliaments have largely been excluded. By the time the strategy is presented, parliamentarians are under large pressure to accept the strategy, because a 'no' will delay the desperately needed foreign funds. The participation process has also been argued to be donor driven and *ad hoc*. Such a donor show results in inadequate and unsustainable patterns of inclusion. More fundamental changes in state structure and functioning would be required to enable parliaments and civil society organisations to defend their interests with regard to the poverty reduction strategy in a more powerful and sustainable manner, critics argue.

### **Role of Donors: Lack of Willingness to Subordinate and Adapt**

The emphasis on national ownership of a PRSP implies that donors are willing to let local actors call the shots. Subsequently foreign governments and agencies will subordinate their programmes to the larger framework established by a PRSP. This dream does not correspond with reality, critics argue. Governments must to a large extent adopt donor policies in order to access funding. 'Indeed, the idea of a "country-owned PRSP" is an oxymoron since any "national strategy" that needs endorsement by the Boards of Executive Directors of the IMF and World Bank is not a "national strategy."' (Alexander, 2003)

Donors are unwilling to adapt their policies and activities to national PRSPs, critics feel. They continue doing the things they always did, while receiving governments try to shape their PRSP

around these activities. In this connection, Western trade policies often come under attack. An adequate diagnosis of poverty would certainly identify trade barriers by donor countries as a core problem. Few donors, however, have shown to be amenable to this diagnosis.

More radical critics argue that the terms ownership and participation are abused to rubber stamp government and World Bank policies. They argue that PRSPs are basically Structural Adjustment Programmes with a different marketing strategy. Some even observe a sinister plan that allows the Bank and the Fund to continue their activities, while the final responsibility is shirked to receiving governments. PRSPs are thus a way to take away the blame from the Northern perpetrators of poverty and put it on the victims instead.

### **Quality of Analysis and Strategy**

A third set of criticism takes the PRSP product and expresses concern about the quality of the analysis and the suggested strategies. Poverty diagnoses have been criticised for being too simplistic and too economic. The multi-dimensional nature of poverty requires that a PRSP takes the social and political aspects of poverty into account as well.

There is a field of tension between the comprehensiveness of the strategy and the need for setting priorities. Many strategies are criticised for being overambitious and unrealistic, because they lack focus. By consequence, the PRSP become a façade, a document that has no bearing on the actual poverty policies.

In addition, it is argued that too few pro-poor choices are being made in PRSPs. In line with the traditional views of the Bank and the IMF, large emphasis is placed on macro-economic growth, while the direct impact on the poorer sections of society moves to the background.

There is an inherent contradiction between criticism on the PRSP process on the one hand and criticism on the product on the other. One cannot demand an open ended process with adequate stakeholder inclusion and in the mean time propagate views on what these stakeholders should decide. Since they can neither provide a 'carte blanche' on the process nor on the outcome, donors continue to juggle with this paradox.

## Dutch Policies

PRSPs are the guideline for the Dutch development cooperation policy. ‘Many underlying principles of that policy come together in the PRSP process: ownership; a comprehensive approach of poverty-related processes; the use of this analysis to develop a strategy and organise donor coordination; and finally basket funding, participation and empowerment.’ (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2001a: p. 21)

The government acknowledges that ‘(i)n reality, there are many obstacles along the way.’ (p. 21) ‘In practice, broad participation frequently appears to be a problem’ (p. 22) ‘The Netherlands accepts these criticisms, yet sees the PRSP as a major step towards greater ownership and participation.’ (p. 22) ‘Criteria for a Joint Staff Assessment (the joint evaluation of a PRSP by the staff of the IMF and the World Bank), which have been revised at the request of the Netherlands, are still too wide ranging. The checklist needs to be simplified and can, in the Netherlands’ view, be restricted to three main questions: Is the process sufficiently inclusive? Is the budget transparent? Are enough pro-poor choices being made?’ (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2001a:22)

### The Assessment of PRSPs Within the Ministry

The key responsibility for assessing and monitoring a PRSP lies with the embassies. In addition, both geographic and thematic desks in The Hague shed their light on the strategies. The United Nations and International Financial Institutions Department (DVF) takes the coordinating role with regard to PRSPs. This department is responsible for the instructions to the Dutch representation at the World Bank and the IMF, where PRSPs are formally endorsed.<sup>2</sup>

DVF also facilitates the steering group on PRSPs. It is in this forum that more general discussion on PRSPs and the way they are dealt with, takes place. One important initiative in this regard is the appreciation framework that was drafted to assist embassies in an adequate appraisal of the strategies. Through this framework, geographic and thematic desks communicate to the embassies which aspects of a PRSP require attention. For each aspect a specific checklist is provided to assess the extent to which relevant issues are addressed.

The following dimensions of a PRSP are mentioned in the appreciation framework: macro-economic policy, ownership, poverty analysis, monitoring and evaluation, poverty reduction policy, political legitimacy, good governance, public expenditure management, poverty and social impact analysis, donor responses to the PRSP and donor coordination. Though some of these dimensions are obviously related, conflict itself is not an explicit component of the framework. The promotion of stability (conflict prevention, post-conflict peacebuilding) is not specified as an objective.

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<sup>2</sup> The Dutch influence within these institutions is limited. Voting power is directly linked to the financial contribution, which in the case of the Netherlands is 2,21 percent for IDA (and similar figures for IBRD, IFC and MIGA). The Dutch executive director represents eight countries in addition to the Netherlands: Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, Georgia, Israel, FYROM and Moldova. Together with the Netherlands these countries have a voting power of 3,63 percent.

## **Dutch Conflict Policy**

The Human Rights and Peacebuilding Department (DMV) is hardly involved in the PRSP appreciation process. The department is included in the steering committee, but has so far provided input on governance issues, rather than on conflict issues. Though there may be specific exceptions, we may conclude that the ministry in general does not take a conflict perspective with regard to PRSP appraisal.

This is peculiar, because conflict as a theme within Dutch foreign policy at large has been on the rise in the past decade. From the 1990s onwards, conflict and development have been looked at in relatively close unison. The document 'A World in Dispute' (1993) was the first hallmark of this change in policy. The latest comprehensive policy note – 'Aan elkaar verplicht' – identifies violent conflicts as one of the main challenges to the Millennium Development Goals and states that stability is a prerequisite for development (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2003a: §5.1). The policy document puts emphasis on the African continent, particularly on the conflicts in the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region.

The recently published Africa Memorandum – Strong people, weak states – identifies peace, security and stability as one of the five central themes. The document links conflict and stability to many other development issues like governance and the use of natural resources (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2003b). The creation of a 'stability fund' is another manifestation of the increasingly central place that conflict is taking in Dutch foreign and development policy. The fund is specifically aimed at financing peacekeeping missions executed by developing countries, facilitation of peace negotiations, security sector reform, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of combatants and de-mining.

Stability has thus become the centrefold of Dutch integrated foreign policy. This has also resulted in increased financial spending on conflict prevention and management. The ministry links conflict to many aspects of development and sees stability as a prerequisite for development. In this connection, the relevance of PRSPs has also been recognised.

In 2001, the Ministry acknowledged the relevance of PRSPs for conflict prevention and peacebuilding. In the policy note on conflict prevention it says. 'In the formulation of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP's) the consultation with civil society is at central stage, which leads to a dialogue and consensus building and can thus contribute to the prevention of conflict. In Rwanda, the PRSP process has been called the foremost means of reconciliation.' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2001b: 18-19. original text in Dutch, translation by author) With regard to the position of minorities and the prevention of conflict, 'processes aimed at the joint formulation of a Poverty Strategy Reduction Paper (PRSP) may play an important role in the sharing of power and the allocation of government assets.' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2001b: p. 20)

However, the recognition of the relevance of PRSPs for conflict prevention has not resulted in a different way of dealing with them. The appreciation framework for PRSPs has not been adjusted. At first sight, this seems to be an omission in Dutch policy. The following paragraphs will discuss in more detail the risks and opportunities of working with PRSPs in countries affected by conflict.

## Difficulties Regarding the Use of PRSP in Conflict Countries

A PRSP approach implies a ‘hands off’ attitude of donors. There is a dialogue on macro-level issues and the funding is made available on an agreement on the general strategy. In this sense, the approach differs from more hands on types of assistance (support to specific parts of the government, specific regions, activities or civil society organisations). The underlying logic of the Dutch policy on development co-operation is that successful aid requires partnership. Only when the donor supports the general policies and practices of a government, aid can have an adequate impact.

By consequence, it is required for successful PRSP-based assistance that there is:

- a capacity of the receiving government to implement a PRS;
- a commitment of the receiving government to poverty reduction;
- some sort of trust relationship between the donor and the receiving government and some level of consensus on the nature of poverty and the actions to be taken;
- political space for non-governmental stakeholders to voice their views and defend their interests with regard to the national poverty reduction strategy.

The Bank and the IMF deny that there are ‘minimum conditions’, but drawing from policy documents, it can be distilled that these assumptions apply to both multilateral institutions as well.<sup>3</sup>

### The Countries at Stake

Until mid 2004, about fifty countries have drafted an I-PRSP or a full PRSP. Many of these countries may be qualified as conflict-affected countries. They are running a serious risk of facing the outbreak of conflict, they are currently suffering from violent conflict, or they are in a fragile stage of post-conflict development. A large portion of these countries receive Dutch assistance. These countries form a heterogeneous group that is spread across the globe: the Balkans, the Caucasus, West Africa, the Great Lakes region, Southern Africa and South Asia. Table 1 provides a more complete overview.

**Table 1**  
**Countries with a PRSP, Dutch funding and conflict**

Country	PRSP status (with date of acceptance)	Aid relation with the Netherlands	Conflict/instability
Armenia	I-PRSP (5/01)	Partner country	Nagorno Karabakh in relative ease after 1994 ceasefire.
Burkina Faso	PRSP (6/00)	Partner country	Relative stability despite poor governance. Instability and involvement in neighbouring Cote d’Ivoire and Liberia.
Democratic	I-PRSP (6/02)	Structural	Long history of conflict. Central position in regional war,

<sup>3</sup> A study by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) made a similar observation (ODI, 2003: p. 4).

Republic Congo		humanitarian aid	external military involvement and large parts of the country outside the control of the government.
Ethiopia	PRSP (9/02)	Partner country	Aftermath of war with Eritrea and communal conflicts
Georgia	I-PRSP (1/01)	Partner country	Large internal political tension, separatist movements in Abchazia and South Ossetia. Instability in neighbouring countries.
Guinea Bissau	I-PRSP (12/00)	Assistance for governance, human rights and peace building (GMV).	Aftermath of conflict and the <i>coup d'etat</i> . Alleged involvement in lingering Casamance conflict, weak state, ongoing demobilisation, ethnicisation of politics.
Macedonia	I-PRSP (12/00)	Partner country	Successful peace, also thanks to large scale international involvement and pressure. The position of the Albanian minority remains troublesome.
Moldavia	I-PRSP (12/00)	Facilitation of PRSP-process, human rights and governance.	Declared independence in Transniestr republic (and potentially among Turkish minority). No large scale violence, but unresolved political stalemate.
Mozambique	PRSP (9/01)	Partner country	Legacy of civil war that ended in 1992, domestic politics fragile.
Pakistan	I-PRSP (12/01)	Partner country	Militias in Kashmir, conflict with India, military coup by Musharraf, communal violence, instability in neighbouring Afghanistan.
Rwanda	PRSP (8/02)	Partner country	Aftermath of genocide, unresolved war crimes and lack of justice, military involvement in DRC and regional instability.
Senegal	PRSP (12/02)	Partner country	Persistent (low level) tension in Casamance region.
Sierra Leone	I-PRSP (9/01)	Structural humanitarian aid	Immediate legacy of long lasting civil war. Instability in neighbouring Liberia, war economy and demobilisation remain troublesome.
Sri Lanka	PRSP (4/03)	Partner country	Ceasefire between government and LTTE since 2002, crisis in political resolution, legacy of violence by Marxist party JVP.
Uganda	PRSP (5/00)	Partner country	Long history of violence, involvement in DRC and continued rebellion in North and West.

*NOTE: The countries listed are those with an accepted (I) PRSP (World Bank, 2004b), an aid relationship with the Netherlands (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2004)<sup>4</sup> and with a significant level of instability or open violent conflict. Obviously, the last criterion is somewhat subjective. Additional countries that fulfil the first two criterion are: Benin, Bolivia, Yemen, the Cape Verde Islands, Kenya, Mali, Mongolia, Nicaragua, Tanzania, Vietnam and Zambia.*

From the table above, we may conclude that most countries that receive Dutch funding on the basis of a PRSP are affected by violent conflict. The conflicts these countries fell prone to cannot be disconnected from their patterns of governance, regional tensions, group grievances, the distribution of economic assets and processes of political decision-making. By consequence, the general criticism on the PRSP approach applies to these countries in particular. The quality of inclusive decision making in the process of formulating a PRSP, the poor content of the strategy and the inability or unwillingness of donors to adjust their programmes to the locally formulated strategy may be particularly troublesome in countries affected by conflict.

<sup>4</sup> So-called exit countries (where aid is being phased out) are excluded from the table. In the future, the following Dutch partner countries may be of relevance: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bosnia, Colombia, Egypt, Eritrea, Indonesia, Palestine, South Africa. These countries have so far not commenced the PRSP process, but they may in the future. Obviously, most of them are highly conflict relevant.

Put more strongly, one may argue that PRSPs are unsuitable, because the basic prerequisites are not in place. In many conflict-affected countries, at least some of the four assumptions listed earlier are highly debatable. Simple categorizations, however, are inadequate, as there is a fine line between peace and conflict. Many countries go through a long phase of no-peace-no-war and they may relapse into conflict afterwards. They may have a functional government and many basic characteristics of a stable country, while violence, instability and emergencies persist in other areas. There may be geographic pockets of peace, while other parts of the country are in full-blown war. Case by case analysis remains crucial. The following three dimensions form the main cornerstones of such

#### **Lack of territorial control in Georgia**

In some countries, the state is not merely contested. There are simply parts of the country where the government has no control. Georgia is an example. In the PRSP of 2003 the government acknowledges this problem.

“As a result of ethno-territorial conflicts, the Government of Georgia is still unable to control the regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali (South Ossetia). Hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons cannot return to their houses. The post-conflict situation inflicts immense political and economic losses – assistance to the displaced persons bears a heavy burden on the Government, endangers political stability, the ways of transportation are blocked and the economy of the regions is destroyed. Moreover, the conflict zones represent the source of smuggling, thus hampering the economic development of the country considerably. The impact of the mentioned conflicts on the Georgian economy is not duly estimated. It is necessary to set up the relevant informational base which will enable us to forecast the development of the country in the event of resolution of these conflicts.” (Government of Georgia, 2003: 21)

In latter parts of the document, the government has included some ‘Strategic Objectives’ to remedy the situation. With regard to Abkhazia and South Ossetia, rehabilitation and resettlement of displaced people are mentioned. Activities going beyond these forms of ‘symptom treatment’ do not appear. Mostly, the Abkhazia and Tskhinvali issues are seen as a risk that the government can’t do very much about within the PRSP context. ‘[E]xacerbation of territorial conflicts’ and ‘military actions and conflicts in the vicinity of the borders of Georgia’ are mentioned in the section ‘internal risks and external factors influencing the implementation of the program’.

analysis.

#### **a. Contested or Incapable State**

A PRSP requires a functional state. However, in many countries the state is part of the problem. Many conflicts are born in the failure of the state to properly address the needs of different population groups. Local parties may consider the state illegitimate. Frequently, the state is a party to the conflict. It may not be committed to peace, or only in a half-hearted manner. It may not have full territorial control and the borders of the country may be contested.

State capacity to offer essential services is often limited. Given that a government fails to fulfil one of its most elementary duties – providing security – failures in the field of economic management, social services, basic administration and the rule of law may be anticipated. There may not be a functional state in certain policy fields (due to lack of capacity or interest) or in certain parts of the country (in case a rebel movement controls part of the territory). In extreme cases, one may argue there is no state, but only a façade that serves the basic needs of the ruling elite. In such circumstances,

it would be a mistake to adopt a strategy that takes the state for granted and looks at technocratic ways of building peace and alleviating poverty.<sup>5</sup>

#### **Acknowledging legitimacy**

Some PRSPs make explicit mention of the deeper causes of conflict. The government of Guinea Bissau acknowledges the legitimacy of the grievances that underlay the conflict.

“The 1998/99 armed conflict revealed military problems and social concerns and claims stemming from deep feelings of exclusion and unfairness. Our Government places the consolidation of peace, national reconciliation, and social cohesion at the center of its concerns.” (Government of Guinea Bissau 2000:15)

Though the PRSP describes a lot of good intentions with regard to governance and participation, it is obviously quite difficult to address these ‘deep feelings’. It is through the PRSP, though, that the government publicly acknowledges these problems and its responsibility in addressing them. Whether this constitutes a real change or just a pass for the test ‘mastering donor language’ remains to be seen.

#### **b. Exclusive Decision-making**

Democracy is under pressure when national security is threatened. The security sector may gain dominance in political decision-making, governmental transparency usually decreases and civil and political liberties are often restricted by (temporary or structural) emergency decrees. Political assassinations and intimidation by the state or armed factions occur.

Broad-based inclusion of parliament, civil society and private sector in the PRSP process may be troublesome in this context. A government in dire need for external funding may easily be tempted to bypass dissonant voices and given the short time frame of a PRSP formulation process, it may be a rational choice not to await the proper instalment of consultation rounds, let alone the emergence of some sort of consensus.

Non-state actors may abstain from participating because they denounce the government and refuse to serve as a rubber stamp for legitimacy. Alternatively, they may fear casting a critical voice given their dependence on financiers (be it government or donors) and their proneness to repression.

#### **A PRSP in the remnants of war**

The following fragment from the I-PRSP of the DRC raises the question whether the country is ready for PRSP-based development assistance.

“Several sources observed that in the east and center of the country, rape is used as a tactic to prevent women from working in the fields. Also, children cannot be vaccinated because their mothers are not wearing decent clothing. Some men, too, only work at night for lack of clothes. Prostitution and sexual enslavement are widespread. Plunder and theft of harvests by (unpaid) armed groups are commonplace. This situation has added to the disruption of subsistence farming and increased the already severe malnutrition.” (Government of the DRC, 2002:17)

#### **c. Contents of the Strategy**

In conflict affected countries, many of the issues covered by a PRSP may be highly contested. Disagreement about the distribution of development assets is a common cause of conflict. Weighing

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<sup>5</sup> There is vast discussion on state models, state functioning and state failure. Clearly, the notion of a state that is generally practiced in Western countries does not apply all over the globe. For reference, the forthcoming paper on these issues by Suzanne Verstegen (Clingendael) may be useful.

the importance of short-term rehabilitation and resettlement of displaced people against macro-level economic growth and stability may be a political minefield.

In addition, a government may not have adequate data and analytical capacity at its disposal. Especially in cases where the government does not have full territorial control of the country, this may be problematic.

Finally, longer-term planning of a PRS may be difficult, because conflicts are volatile. As the situation in a country may change drastically in a short period, multi-year planning may be illusionary. These risks may be explicated as assumptions in the PRSP or in documents assessing the strategy. A study on Mali and Burkina Faso shows that these assumptions (relatively stable international prices, no social uprisings, political stability) were rightfully identified. Due to the crisis in Côte d'Ivoire most of the explicated risks became reality. The relevance of these strategies may be questioned when the major factors in the context change so drastically. (CRU, FEWER and WANEP, 2003). The box below on Sri Lanka is relevant in this connection as well.

#### **Political volatility in Sri Lanka**

Sri Lanka provides an excellent example of how difficult it is to do long term planning in an unpredictable and volatile situation. In the Joint Staff Assessment of the IMF and the World Bank of March 2003 it says:

“The first and foremost risk is associated with the peace process. While the length of current ceasefire is unprecedented, which is highly encouraging, there may still be risks of fallout resulting in reversals on many policy fronts. Over the medium-term, there is also the issue of how smoothly the demobilization of forces on both sides is carried out. Second, the political uncertainty arising from the President and the Government belonging to opposing parties, as the former is vested with powers to dismiss the Government and call for elections. This poses a threat to political feasibility of reform implementation, including its predictability and continuity.” (IDA and IMF, 2003:12)

Such explication of risks is a common part of PRSPs and JSAs. It is also quite common that these risks come true. In the Sri Lankan case, the president did indeed dismiss the government and acquired a fragile victory in the subsequent elections. With that sequence of events, the country's PRSP seems to have lost ground. Critics may say it has become completely irrelevant.

## **The Positive Potential of PRSPs in Conflict Countries**

From the previous paragraph, we should conclude that the use of PRSPs in conflict countries is highly problematic. A conflict may have a large adverse impact on the strategy, the way it was drafted and on the functioning of the state in general. A conflict sensitive approach to PRSPs in these countries would be advisable.

Having identified some of the risks a PRSP approach may be confronted with, this paragraph looks into the opportunities of PRSPs in conflict areas. Because a PRSP is in different ways related to the conflict, it could possibly also be used as a mechanism for conflict prevention or peacebuilding. This paragraph provides four ways of using the PRSP in this manner. These suggestions are potentials, very often not a reality.

### **PRSP as a Pressure Stick**

An endorsed PRSP means political recognition and the receipt of substantial donor funding. As such the PRSP can be used as a leverage on warring parties. Especially in cases of a hurting stalemate, a financial shortage and a large need to deliver to constituencies, governments may be willing to take a more pro-peace stance to qualify for donor funding.

Using the PRSP as a carrot has large limitations, though. Firstly, it works only with a government, not with non-state parties, because they are not normally eligible to direct bilateral or multilateral funding. Secondly, aid conditionality is a rather blunt instrument for influencing a government. A wide variety of considerations is brought together in one decision: to accept or decline the poverty reduction strategy. Frequently, donors have interests other than just peacebuilding that could force them to maintain their aid programme despite their hesitance to provide political recognition to the receiving government. Unity among donors is normally a problem.

This peace dividend approach has the largest chance of success when donors stand together, when it is used in combination with diplomatic pressure, support to mediation processes or to lower levels of peace dialogue. Finally, both the promise of aid and the threat to withdraw it must be credible.

### **PRSP as a Stepping Stone**

PRSP may be seen as a stepping stone for inclusive decision making, peaceful reforms, institutional development, a balanced distribution of assets and enhanced government performance. The functioning of the state, the distribution of socio-economic assets and political involvement are at the heart of many conflicts. From this perspective, PRSPs may be an instrument for conflict prevention. This, however, requires very close knowledge of the consultation process and the perspectives of different stakeholders.

This option fits within the broader plea to move away from an emphasis on the economic dimensions and include other – political, human, social and security – dimensions of poverty as well (AIV 2003; OECD/DAC 2001: 39). The World Bank has introduced a so-called Poverty and Social Impact Analysis (PSIA) to further embed PRSPs in the broader poverty context.

A comprehensive approach is admirable, but priorities are also essential. PRSPs run the risk of being torn apart by thematic lobbies. Adding conflict prevention to the list, may further dilute the focus of PRSPs on poverty reduction. In addition to poverty, health, education, environment, gender and enhancement of democracy, are we really looking for another ‘core element’ or ‘crosscutting theme’ on the list? Given that peace is not a separate Millennium Development Goal, criticism can be expected if conflict prevention takes a too dominant position.

#### **A stepping stone**

The IMF and the World Bank commonly identify weaknesses and risks in their Joint Staff Assessment. The following is an excerpt from the JSA on the I-PRSP of the DRC.

“The government has relatively little experience in either the design or implementation of development programs. The capacity for effective service delivery rests almost entirely with nongovernmental groups that have evolved in response to perceived community needs and the notable gaps left by the collapse of the State. Drawing up the interim PRSP has essentially been a learning experience for the national committee in charge of it. Through this process, the committee has begun the conceptual shift from a top-down planning approach to a participatory approach building on local initiatives; indeed the committee has made this latter approach one of the central features of the proposed strategy.” (IMF and IDA, 2002:2)

This positive phrasing of this paragraph illustrates how a PRSP can be seen as a stepping stone towards a better functioning state. Critics will argue that the JSA underestimates the complexity of a collapsed state. To them, the fact that the committee claims to have adapted a participatory approach would just be a sign that it is either giving a show to the donors or not grounded in local traditions and government structures.

### **PRSP as an Analytical Tool**

The most fundamental problem with conflict prevention is the question: how to predict a conflict? In recent years, this question has received significant attention and various quantitative or qualitative models have been designed. One of these models is the Stability Assessment Framework (SAF), which was recently adopted by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

This framework identifies a number of economic, social and political factors that matter in the prediction of violent conflict. Economic factors include uneven development along group lines and sharp, severe economic decline. Social factors are demographic pressure, displacement, humanitarian emergency, group grievance and human flight. Political factors are the criminalization of the state, deterioration of public services, poor rule of law and human rights violations, factionalised elites and external intervention.

Many of these factors are also a component of the analysis that underpins a PRSP. The strategy documents bring together a vast amount of information in the respective countries. PRSPs could thus potentially enrich analytical tools in an effort to prevent conflict. Such a tool could also be the basis of a dialogue with the government on developments in the field of peace and conflict.

### The positive and negative factors of reconciliation in Rwanda

The following table is taken from the Rwandan PRSP. It provides an example of how a PRSP can be used for conflict analysis and for communication about conflict causes with the government. (Government of Rwanda 2002:28)

Positive factors	Negative factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Equality of opportunity in education</li> <li>▪ The omission of ethnicity from the identity card</li> <li>▪ The inclusion of the former regime's soldiers in the national army</li> <li>▪ The repatriation of refugees</li> <li>▪ The creation of the various governance commissions and processes</li> <li>▪ The <i>gacaca</i> process</li> <li>▪ Transparent elections at local levels</li> <li>▪ Competition in recruitment</li> <li>▪ Equal opportunities for entry into the army and police</li> <li>▪ Gender equality</li> <li>▪ Solidarity in response to security threats</li> <li>▪ The return of illegally confiscated property to the owners</li> <li>▪ The reintegration of orphans into volunteer host families with the support of the Survivors of Genocide Fund and MINALOC</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Land disputes</li> <li>▪ Corruption in administrative bodies</li> <li>▪ IBUKA (a group representing genocide survivors) is perceived as sectarian</li> <li>▪ Hutus who died in the war have not been buried with dignity</li> <li>▪ The trial of those accused of genocide and the compensation of victims have been long delayed</li> <li>▪ Some people deny the impact of the genocide</li> <li>▪ Some people go into exile and attack the Government</li> <li>▪ Rumours from external media cause confusion</li> <li>▪ Continued insurgency</li> <li>▪ Segregation of orphans and widows</li> <li>▪ Salary arrears and arbitrary appointment of teachers</li> <li>▪ Corruption in judicial bodies</li> <li>▪ Conflicts between pastoralists and cultivators, when the animals eat the other's crops</li> </ul>

### PRSP as a Coordinating Mechanism for Peacebuilding Activities

Ideally, a PRSP acts as a coordinating mechanism for donor inputs. With a consensus on the general diagnosis and policy priorities, some level of coherence between donor programmes can be anticipated. Similarly, the strategy could serve as a coordinating mechanism with regard to peacebuilding activities.

Most of the countries at stake to some extent include rehabilitation and peacebuilding in their PRSP. Usually, however, they take a rather technocratic approach without touching on politically sensitive issues underlying the problems. Key issues like the reform of state structures, a correction of inequalities, recognition of minority rights and reform or demobilisation of the military are not typically found in a PRSP. Assistance to displaced people, reconstruction of war damage and vague activities under the banner of reconciliation are more likely to be found.

To the extent that activities are included in the PRSP, the strategy may be useful for coordination of donor efforts. It can facilitate a common agreement on priorities and a division of labour between development actors. With regard to more sensitive political issues – and many of the key issues will normally be sensitive – it will probably be illusory to use the PRSP for coordination.

### In Sum

Thus, there are various ways that a PRSP could be used in a conflict preventative or peace building manner. It needs to be emphasized that the four suggestions made above are *potential* ways of using a

PRSP. In practice, these strategies may be difficult to realize. Given the strong emphasis on the state, the rigid time frames, the difficulty of monitoring activities and the absence of 'political' issues from the PRSP, it may be a poor entry point for conflict prevention or peacebuilding.

## Options for Intervention Throughout the PRSP Cycle

Despite the somewhat sceptical conclusion above, there is an opportunity to sensitise a PRSP to conflict and optimise its peacebuilding potential. Drawing from the previous paragraphs, this section discusses the essential policy questions and options at the different phases of the PRSP process.

### Initiation

Support to the initiation of a PRSP is a political decision, because it implies political recognition and it constitutes a promise of large financial assets. Careful consideration is thus required to assess whether the initiation of the PRSP process is desirable at all. Formally, a country can not be prevented from drafting a PRS, but signals from the side of donors will be essential in a country's decision to commence the process or not.

In addition to the regular political and economic concerns, the specifics of a country's conflict may be a consideration with regard to the stance a donor takes. The legitimacy of the state, the expected impact of government centred funds, possible risks with regard to the war economy and the capacity of the state to take its responsibility in all sectors and in all parts of the country are relevant points of attention. If alarm bells start ringing with regard to these factors, more 'hands on' efforts, like support through UN agencies, may be more apt than PRSP-based assistance. Also, targeted funding of Security Sector Reform (SSR) and Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) of combatants, assistance to civil society, humanitarian assistance or diplomatic dialogue may be fields of activity when a country is not 'ready' for the commencement of the PRSP process.

In many cases, a PRSP may just be a reality to deal with for the Dutch government, whether deemed appropriate or not. In such a situation, the government may still resort to the alternative forms of assistance just mentioned, despite the presence of an acknowledged PRSP. However, such an *alleingang* may be unattractive both politically and from a development perspective. A combination of supporting and influencing the PRSP process and its implementation may be more fruitful.

### Formulation

Two main questions are at stake here: 1) are the parties relevant to the conflict represented in the formulation process? 2) are conflict relevant themes on the agenda? Giving a reasonable answer to these questions is hard. There may be good reasons not to include certain actors or issues. Especially within the time frame of preparation, some issues or actors just may be too controversial. Unnecessary exclusion of issues or people may have contra-productive effects, however. The PRSP may generate (violent) conflict. Making such assessments requires a very fine-tuned political awareness of the country.

Influencing the agenda of the consultation process may be the easier of the two. For example, a government can quite easily include a fairly innocent issue like reconciliation, if so desired by the donor community. In addition to agenda setting, technical expertise may be provided to aid the analysis, institutional development and policy formulation with regard to conflict relevant themes.

Influencing the inclusion of certain actors into the consultation process is a more sensitive affair. At a general level, transparency of the process and broad-based participation can be advocated. Pleading for the inclusion of one of the conflict parties may be rather controversial, though.

The expansion of the Dutch appreciation framework for PRSPs to include a section on conflict-related issues may be considered in this context. In reality, it may be difficult to successfully exert pressure on the drafting process. It requires detailed knowledge, a joint stance among donors and credible leverage. All three factors may be rather weak.

### **Acceptation**

From a conflict perspective, the question to be asked here is: will the implementation of the strategy further fuel the conflict or will it provide an impetus for peacebuilding? Does the strategy contribute to socio-economic equality between groups? Will it reinforce the war economy? Does it include the reform of political structures and governance mechanisms in a way that contributes to peace? The appreciation of the PRSP by specific organisations and population groups is essential in answering these questions.

Formally, PRSPs are accepted by the boards of the World Bank and the IMF on the basis of a Joint Staff Assessment (JSA) of both institutions. The leverage of individual donors is limited. With 2,23 % of the voting power for IDA (and a similar figure for IBRD, IFC and MIGA), the Netherlands has minor influence on the approval of a PRSP. Only in coalition with quite a number of other donors, effects can be expected. Also, by the time a PRSP is presented to the board, a rejection would be perceived as a rather harsh intervention. Casting criticism and influencing the PRSP throughout the formulation process may be more effective than causing political turmoil at the stage of formal approval.

### **Funding**

Though donors formally accept a PRSP in its totality, they may exert some influence on the implementation by (not) funding certain sectors. In the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the donor and the receiving government, strategic choices can be made regarding the allocation of funds. Though this strategy may be defensible in certain cases, it contradicts the general policy on PRSPs and the underlying principle of partnership.

### **Implementation, Evaluation and Continuation**

Apart from the regular interaction with a government and monitoring of developments, there is little donors can do with regard to a PRSP, once implementation has started. The government can be held accountable through the annual reports it is to provide. Prior to the completion of the three-year

period, donors will have to make up their mind about continuation of their support. Similar questions and dilemmas to those mentioned above will come to the fore here.

## Conclusions

Conflict prevention and peacebuilding have increasingly become a central theme for Dutch foreign and development policy. Activities in these fields are closely linked to other dimensions of development cooperation. In some countries, they are indeed seen as a prerequisite for development.

The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs acknowledges the relevance of PRSPs for conflict prevention and peacebuilding. PRSPs have become the flagship of structural development relations. As the poverty reduction strategies link in many ways with the issues underlying (potential) violent conflicts, the conscious use of PRSPs for safeguarding stability and mitigating potential causes of conflict is only to be expected. So far, however, the ministry has not adopted a tangible conflict sensitive approach to PRSPs.

Such an approach would be advisable, because PRSPs face major difficulties in conflict areas. Given that the basic assumptions underlying a PRSP approach are highly problematic in most countries affected by conflict, a business-as-usual treatment of PRSPs could have large adverse impacts. The main problems can be summarised as follows.

- 1) The state is non-functional or poorly performing and the state itself is often part of the conflict.
- 2) Inclusive decision-making is under pressure and essential political issues will be considered too sensitive to be included.
- 3) The basic capacity and opportunities required to design an adequate multi-year strategy are absent.

These difficulties are so fundamental, that one may question whether a PRSP approach is a good idea at all in countries affected by conflict. Reality forces us to acknowledge though, that PRSPs are usually a *fait accompli* for the Dutch government. Countries may initiate a PRSP at their own judgement and key institutions like the World Bank and IMF have been supportive of PRSPs in countries like Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The acceptance of these two PRSPs is indicative of the gradual change that is taking place in the way donors are dealing with conflict and the division of labour between the World Bank and the UN agencies. The World Bank approach – relatively hands off, longer time frame, rigid financial planning – has in recent years been introduced in conflict countries as well. The UN, traditionally more involved in crisis areas, has accepted the PRSP as the key document and thus implicitly discarded its own UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF).

Given the ground reality in countries affected by conflict, an ideal typical PRSP approach (a hands off attitude, a blank cheque to the receiving government, and a three year time span) would be inadvisable. A more hybrid approach combining hands on activities (for example through on-the-ground UN agencies) with government centred assistance (underlining the responsibility of the government and strengthening government capacity) would probably be more constructive.

Whether a PRSP will be a useful entry point for peacebuilding efforts remains questionable. This paper suggested that a PRSP approach could be used as a pressure stick on the government, a stepping stone for the required reforms, an analytical tool and a coordinating mechanism. Given the

relative rigidity of the PRSP process and the hesitance governments will have to include sensitive political issues and actors, it may be hard to make these positive uses of a PRSP a reality.

Nonetheless, a conflict sensitive approach to PRSPs in combination with more hands on channels of assistance would be a step forward in dealing with the numerous countries that find themselves in the fragile phase between conflict and positive development.

## The Way Forward

This paper has mapped out the main risks and opportunities associated with the use of PRSPs in countries affected by conflict. It has placed these views in the context of Dutch development policy and made some remarks about the approach to be taken. However, major questions remain with regard to the concretisation of these views into operational policy. Having established the rough framework for discussion, the views and lessons of the Dutch ministry and other agencies need to come into the picture to make a reality check. Thus, it is proposed to take a two step approach.

First, there will be an internal discussion at the Ministry. The steering group on PRSPs would be a logical forum to host such a discussion. This paper could be used as an entry point, but during the discussion, the ball should be in the court of policymakers. It is suggested that DMV takes the lead in shaping the key issues on the agenda according to the current policy priorities. By means of suggestion, though, the Conflict Research Unit feels that the following questions could be relevant.

- What issues rise from this paper and what could be the implications for policy?
- Which issues can be addressed within the PRSP framework? What needs to be kept outside?
- At what stage do we move from operational UN type intervention to government based hands off World Bank type interventions?
- What are the key intervention points for the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA)?

There is a considerable risk that discussion on these questions remains very abstract and general. Thus, it is suggested to take two countries for case discussion. Georgia, the DRC, Sri Lanka and Rwanda would be interesting examples. When choosing the cases both the merits of these countries (I-PRSP or full PRSP, still in operation or already concluded, in conflict or at relative peace) and the knowledge within the CRU (or elsewhere) needs to be taken into account. The studies currently done by the World Bank (on PRSPs in several conflict areas) could also be useful.

As a follow up to this internal discussion, a wider round table discussion could be envisaged, if the Ministry deems that necessary. Apart from representatives from the Dutch ministry, relevant development actors such as Department for International Development (DFID), the World Bank, UN agencies and policy advisers should also take a seat at this round table. The lessons learnt by these agencies with regard to PRSPs in conflict areas should be one issue so the agenda. Otherwise, the questions at this meeting would have to be formulated on the basis of the previous one.

Drawing on the conclusions of these discussions, plans can be made for further research by the CRU or other policy inputs considered (for example a complement to the PRSP appreciation framework) if so required.

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