

**АЙРАПЕТЯН АЛЬБЕРТ АРМЕНОВИЧ**

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## ПРОБЛЕМЫ УЧАСТИЯ В РАЗРАБОТКЕ СТРАТЕГИЧЕСКИХ ПРОГРАММ В АРМЕНИИ

**Аннотация.** В рамках данной статьи автор пытается выяснить на сколько разработка стратегических программ удалась в Армении. Это и является той главной задачей, которая рассматривается в данной статье. Для достижения этой цели следующий вопрос был выдвинут: "На сколько эффективно было участие в разработочном процессе стратегических развивающихся процессах?" Для наиболее результативного обсуждения этого вопроса была выдвинута следующая гипотеза: "В создании проекта стратегических программ должны участвовать гражданские и общественные организации". Для этой цели были проведены семнадцать интервью с представителями правительственных агентств, гражданскими общественными организациями и с донорами способствовавших в разработке развивающихся программ. В дополнение к этому, автором было проведено аналитическое исследование стратегических программ. В заключении автор суммирует, что процесс разработки программ развития в Армении, несмотря на определенные трудности, связанные с Программой устойчивого развития, был совместным. Кроме того, результаты исследования показывают, что в ходе разработки планов развития положительные результаты, последствия превышают негативные побочные эффекты, такие как продолжительность подготовительных работ.

**Ключевые слова:** стратегические программы, участие, общественные и гражданские организации, доноры, собственность, прозрачность.

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## THE ISSUE OF PARTICIPATION IN THE DRAFTING OF THE DEVELOPMENTAL PROGRAMS IN ARMENIA

**Abstract.** The article discusses whether and to what extent the drafting of the developmental programs was participatory. For that purpose, the following research question was put forward: "How effective was the participation in the drafting process of the strategic developmental process." To effectively tackle the research question the following hypothesis was formulated: "Civil society organizations effectively participated in the drafting process of the developmental programs." The research is of a qualitative nature. In particular, to answer my research question I did a content analysis of the developmental programs. Moreover, 17 in-depth interviews with those representatives of governmental agencies, civil society organizations and donors who contributed to the drafting of the developmental programs were conducted. It is deduced that the overall process of drafting the developmental programs of Armenia, in spite of some glitches related to the Sustainable Development Program, was highly participatory. Moreover, it is found that the positive impact of participation outweighs the side effects, such as the prolongation of the drafting process of the developmental programs.

**Keywords:** Developmental programs, participation, civil society organizations, donors, ownership, transparency

### **Introduction**

Prior to the independence from the Soviet Union (21 September 1991) Armenia was a regional hub of manufacturing, industry and construction. Most importantly, poverty was not among the top priorities of the nation a fortiori it was not as acute as nowadays. The overall pattern significantly worsened after the independence. The newly independent country had to bear the burden of 1988 earthquake, the undeclared war of the neighboring Azerbaijani Republic and the loss of erstwhile economic ties and privileges. Those challenges were coupled with the monetary reforms and the need to transform from state-led to market-driven economy. Under those circumstances Armenia became among the poorest countries of the world.

To effectively tackle the issue, the government was strategizing developmental programs. Hitherto, three developmental programs were strategized: Poverty Reduction Strategic Paper (2003), Sustainable Development Program (2008) and Armenian Development Strategy (2014). As it is illustrated below in the literature review section it is important for the developmental strategies to be “of people, for people and by people”. In other words, it is strongly important for such programs to be a product of the national (not solely of government) ownership and involve as many stakeholders as possible during the drafting process.

### **Literature review**

As the President of the World Bank James Wolfensohn mentioned:

“It is clear to all of us that ownership is essential. Countries must be in the driver’s seat and set the course.” [1, pp.184-187]

The idea behind the “country ownership” concept is that now only the government, but also a plethora of stakeholders, inter alia; NGOs, think tanks, INGOs and eventually the poor people must be involved in the drafting of the PRSP. Kamruzzaman citing the documents produced by the IMF and the World Bank states that the PRSPs according to them must have the following essential characteristics: [19, pp.61-71]

1. It must ensure consistency between a country's macro-economic, structural, and social policies and the goals of poverty reduction and social development.

2. It should serve as the basis for designing Bank and Fund lending operations, and as a framework with which all ESAF and Bank-supported programs should be consistent.

3. It must be produced in a way that includes transparency and broad-based participation in the choice of goals, the formulation of policies, and the monitoring of implementation with ultimate ownership by the government. [19, pp.61-71]

The first two are the minimum requirements for the PRSPs. The whole process has to be under the guidance of the international financial institutions. [19, pp.61-71]

First and foremost, an attempt was made to figure out why the major international financial institutions changed their policies. The answers were found in the paper by Cordella and Dell’Ariccia. They point out the limit the pros and the cons of the conditionality. They argue that conditionality works when the aims of the donor countries (organizations) and the recipient countries coincide. [9] When they do not coincide, the aid programs might become a tool to influence the policy of the recipient countries. When there is no effective control, the donors has to choose the recipients with the highest “social commitment”. [9] However, the rub is the asymmetric information associated with choosing the “the most socially committed government”. The most important conclusion of the research is that foreign aid can reduce poverty only when there is a “program ownership” by the recipient country. The findings of the research are anchored upon mathematical models and their output formulated around abstract cases. The weakness of the study is that it lacks empirical data to support the findings.

Afterwards, the role and impact of certain financial institutions on the process of PRSP “production” was identified. It turned out that the IMF and the World Bank do not show equal interest in ensuring the participation. The World Bank and IMF see participation a process of national debate through which “stakeholders influence and share control over priority setting, policy making, resource allocation and/or program implementation” [19, pp.1205-1221] and from which “a national consensus is formed around the policy priorities.” [14, p.29] Blackmon [4, pp.179-202], Cammack [7, pp.189-211], Crocket [10, pp.270-275] argue that the IMF is not as sensitive regarding the issues of participation as the World Bank. In particular, they argue that IMF is more focused on macroeco-

conomic stability issues discussing it with the traditional actors, i.e. the governments and the central banks. Whereas, the programs of the World Bank are more development oriented and keen to include “the voices of the poor”. Blackmon encourages the IMF to broaden the scope of its partners and include those who are most affected by the poverty.

Generally, the shift from the idea of conditionality to ownership was welcomed in the academic community. Nevertheless, it is also important to see the arguments of the critics and the skeptics. As expected, their arguments are mainly predicated upon conspiracy theories. Tan [23, pp.1040-1045], Joseph [18, pp. 37-41], Fraser [13] criticize the phenomenon of the goals of the PRSPs. They are in consensus that PRSPs are just tools for global governmentality, i.e. the donors who are the major powers to dictate their will to the poor nations. Joseph posits that major powers use international organizations as a tool to promote neo-liberal agenda. [18] He further argues that PRSPs reflect the neo-liberal aspirations of the donor nations. He substantiates his viewpoint on the policies of the World Bank and IMF citing the following:

“When a government presents a PRSP to the executive boards of the World Bank and the IMF, it is accompanied by an assessment by Bank and IMF staff. The Joint Staff Assessment (JSA) makes an overall assessment for the executive boards as to whether or not the strategy presented in the PRSP constitutes a sound basis for concessional assistance from the IMF and the Bank.” [18, p.40]

Therefore, Marxist Joseph (his self-identification) exhorts to hamper global governmentality by limiting the role of the role of international NGOs and donors in the process of participation. Tan, completely on the same line with Joseph argues that PRSPs are envisaged to engage the third world countries in the global economy and to sustain the international law which was stipulated by the dominant states. [23] Like Joseph’s article Tan’s paper is full of a criticism of neo-liberal world order and discusses the issues from the angle of conspiracy. Tan further notes that PRSPs emphasize individual responsibility while undermining the global social responsibility. [23, 1052] In short, its main conclusion is that the role of “international” in domestic and social affairs should be evaporated. Notably, Tan’s remarks are stricter than those of Joseph as he calls for forsake the practice of PRSPs which envisaged for and fraught with the further impoverishment of the poor states. [23] Fraser, in his turn argues that PRSPs are tools for imperiling the sovereignty of the poor African countries and the local NGOs are nothing else but the Trojan Horses of the IMF and the World Bank which legitimate the intervention. [13] Like Joseph and Tan Fraiser also argues that the main destination of the international financial institutions is to secure the neo-liberal world order and run the domestic politics of the poor states.[13] However, it needs to be mentioned that all the three papers lack clear and consistent methodology and are largely opinion papers. Notwithstanding of the structural weaknesses, studying such papers are important to figure out the glitches of the drafting and the drafting and the content of the PRSPs.

After finishing the historical excursion aimed to understand the considerations behind the establishment of PRSP practice, the literature discussing the “producers” of the PRSPs was examined. These issues were critical to tackle the first research question. In general, was looking for to see scholars’ findings and positions on both broadness (how is included in PRSPs production) and effectiveness (is more broadness good or not) in the process of drafting the PRSPs.

Notably, there is no consensus in the scholarly literature regarding the effectiveness of the process of participation. However, it is must to note that very few scholars consider the introduction of PRSPs a benign phenomenon. The majority of them highlight the importance of broad participation and the failure to ensure it. The others see flaws in broader participation arguing that it undermines the process. Lazarus, for instance, argues that it works where it need not and does not works where it is necessary. [20, p.1205] He further notes for having a successful PRSP, it has to meet the following five criteria: country driven, result focused, long-term, comprehensive, and partner-oriented. [20] He argues that the PRSPs in general failed to qualify the mentioned criteria. Most interestingly, he corroborates his claims on the example of Armenia. In particular, he cites:

“NGOs are very often drawn into participation by the lure of material rewards. In Armenia, for example, as in many countries, NGOs are overwhelmingly 'economic survival strategies for many middle-class intellectuals and professionals'. 'Subordination of Armenia's NGOs has been financial but not intellectual'. While many Armenian NGOs have articulated developmental visions at stark odds with Washington prescriptions, only one organization has actually formally withdrawn from the

PRSP participatory process, reflecting the extent of financial dependence of Armenian NGOs and, therefore, their co-optation into the process. In spite of this dependence, most NGO representatives and their organizations remain committed ideologically to their alternative positions. "Though most pay homage to the Emperor, Armenian PRSP participants can see that he is naked." [20, 1211]

Kamruzzaman [19] and Whitfield [26] who conducted separate case studies Bangladesh and Ghana echo with the critics of the PRSP. Kamruzzaman argues that the ownership is likely to fail if it's a product of horizontal relations dominated by the IMF and the WB. The ownership and participation in his view were means rather than ends to continue attract debts from the international financial institutions. [19, pp.62-64] Participation, in his view is a good phenomenon, however, the rub is that in the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) the civil society is underrepresented. He concludes that in Bangladesh PRSP was designed in the highest echelons without the prescribed by the IMF and the World Bank, which, in others view is their traditional working style. [19] The reason is that HIPC are in a worse bargaining power with the donors. Almost identical arguments are claimed and conclusions drawn by Whitfield with respect to Ghana. [19]

As it has been already mentioned some scholars are critical toward chosen mechanisms of participation. Lazarus [20, p.1213], Brown [5, p.237] state that the democracy is undermined, because the donors, such as the World Bank, subjugate the national legislation of the recipient countries to the institutionalized participation. Hence, the institutionalized PRSP process has failed. [11] And again Lazarus as brings the example of Armenia writing the following:

"In Armenia, a country in which participation has been formally institutionalized to a far greater extent than most; PRSP committees are powerless and moribund." [20, p.1213]

Dijkstra on the example of Bolivia, Honduras and Nicaragua avers that in all the three countries the rule of law is subjugated to informal institutions and traditions. In her paper Dijkstra shows that the results of the process of participation were partially successful in Bolivia and failed in Nicaragua and Honduras. [11]

Dijkstra's claims regarding the differential approach were quite ardently supported by Edward R. Carr. [8, pp.728-730] He claims that the characteristics of the poverty are place-specific and not the same everywhere. Therefore, he argues that the measurements of the poverty should vary on case-by-case basis. This is the core idea of his essay:

"I seek to replace the narrative of a singular, universal poverty that informs development today with a new narrative which embraces heterogeneity in both our identifications of poverty and our means of measuring that which we identify as poverty. I do so not to dismantle development, but as a means of overcoming the limitations on development and poverty alleviation imposed by our understanding of poverty as singular and universal." [8, 99.730]

On the abstract example of a parochial leader in Africa who insists the community to move elsewhere to hamper the latter to accumulate wealth and to preserve his social status Carr claims that the knowledge of such local folkways are necessary prior to drafting the strategies. [8, 731] Hence, he suggests the PRSPs to be drafted from the "bottom", i.e. grassroots, rather from the top, i.e. governments and international organizations.

However, there are also positive remarks regarding the implementation of the PRSPs and thereof success. Driscoll and Evans [12, pp.10-12] consider PRSP a successful project. Particularly, Driscoll and Evans posit that PRSPs have made progress in the following areas: 1. Contributed to much stronger view inside the government, 2. engaged civil society in poverty policy debates on an unprecedented scale, 3. Focused attention on donor alignment and harmonization internationally and at a country level. [12, p.6] Nonetheless, according to them governments still need focus more on the institutional commitment, broaden civil society engagement. Moreover, they exhort the donors to more enhanced coordination of their programs to curtail the transaction costs and to be more consistent and punctual in direct budget support in order not to damage the anticipated expenditures. [12, p.10] Their conclusion is that PRSPs generally spurred good governance, effectiveness and poverty reduction.

### **Methodology and data collection**

To tackle the research question merely qualitative techniques were applied – content analysis of the developmental programs and the donor's feedback as well as interviews with the representatives of the civil society organizations (CSOs), donors and representatives of the governmental agencies of

the RA.

Overall, 17 interviews have been conducted (4 with the representatives of the governmental agencies, 8 with the representative of the CSOs and 5 with the representatives of the donor organizations) to find out the answer of the first research question. All the statistical data was taken from the official website of the World Bank. The statistical data was analyzed through Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software program.

The “umbrella” terms used in both research question and hypothesis are unbundled as follows:

- Participation- A procedure of drafting the developmental programs during which all the participants have equal opportunity to put forward initiative, participate in decision-making procedure and oversee the implementation of the adopted decisions;
- Effective- Successful in producing a desired or intended result.

#### **Content analysis**

Before starting the interview analysis I found necessary to look thoroughly in all the three developmental programs. It'll enable to analyze the official interpretation regarding participatory element of the process. Below, the information regarding the participatory process of each developmental document will be discussed one by one.

#### ***Poverty Reduction Strategic Paper (PRSP)***

At the very beginning of the PRSP it is mentioned that “the participatory component is one of its (PRSP’s- A.H.) most important components” [15] It is further noted that the drafting process of the document was carried out through a hierarchical structure. On the top of the structure was the Steering Committee (SC) headed by the Minister of Finance and Economy and comprised by various statesmen. [15, p.8] Its main task was masterminding and coordinating the whole process. Beneath the SC comes a Working Group (WG) comprised by both governmental employees and the civil society. [15] WG was in charge of day-to-day management of the whole process. The WG was performing its activities in line with Terms of Reference, where all the main purposes of the PRSP were articulated. [15] The work of the WG was assisted by five expert groups comprised of about 50 experts selected through a competition.

To fully grasp the whole process specific codes (descriptors) were chosen to calculate thereof frequency per page and interpret their meaning. The codes are derived mainly from the reviewed literature (see table 1).

*Table 1:*

**Codes describing the participatory process of the PRSP**

<b>Code (descriptor)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Participation	10
Transparency* <sup>1</sup>	5
Monitoring	1
Constraints	1.5

The first descriptor implies that the overall process was highly participatory, including the government, local governmental bodies its ministries and agencies, NGOs, private sector, trade unions, political parties, donors and international organizations, university lecturers and scientists, mass media and even organizations from Diaspora.[15, p.2] It proves that at least on the formal level the participation was really quite broad. Here is a part from the PRSP fully elucidating the process of participation:

“more than 100 written recommendations were received. These were mainly incorporated in the draft PRSP. More than 1800 people participated in events organized within the framework of the participatory process. Overall, about 700 recommendations were recorded based on questionnaires completed at the end of discussions.

Although it is difficult to produce a numerical assessment of the incorporation of recommenda-

<sup>1</sup> The code is unbundled, i.e. looking for not only the code, but also for a variety of ways of its interpretation, such as distribution of a leaflets, media broadcasting, etc...

tions, it can be stated that about 40 % of the recommendations received have been included in the PRSP, and about one-third were taken into account at least in part.” [15, p. 12]

In addition, the participation process was not confined merely to the experts selected through competition, but it was also open to other interested parties in accordance to the tripartite agreement between the government, UNDP and the World Bank. [15, p.9]

The second descriptor implies that the WG was responsible for the transparency of the whole process. Furthermore, the process was publicized through the mass media, especially special TV programs dedicated to PRSP process. Furthermore, all information was available in the webpage of the PRSP (which does not exist currently). The third code implies that the results were monitored by the civil society organizations (CSO). It paves a way for long-term cooperation between the government and the CSOs. The last code implies that the overall process was hindered by several factors such as:

“a lack of faith in the implementation of the PRSP; difficulties of accessing information (small number of copies of the press and their not being affordable for the poorer groups of the population); a “Soviet” mentality, especially among middle-aged and senior citizens; the low level of institutional development of society; lack of knowledge on fundamental democratic values and their alienation in communities; the inactive mid-level governmental structures; the prevalent reluctance in the attitude of governmental bodies toward public participation...”. [15, p.12]

After briefly summarizing the part referring to participatory process of the PRSP I started the analysis of the donors’ official feedback regarding the first PRSP of Armenia. It is fully articulated in the Joint Assessment of Poverty Reduction Strategic Paper jointly published by the World Bank and the IMF. [27] The two mentioned donors conducted both interim and final assessments. The main codes found in all the assessment documents regarding the first PRSP are illustrated in Table 2.

Here anew the frequency of all the descriptors was measured in consideration thereof appearance per page. All the synonyms and expressions with same or almost similar interpretations were encapsulated in single codes.

The first code implies that in all four [27, 28, 29, 30] annual progress reports (2001, 2003, 2004 and 2005) the donors (WB and IMF) consider that the participatory process has being ameliorated over time. In all the reports it is mentioned that CSOs had a significant contribution to the process. Furthermore, it’s mentioned that after the inclusion of the CSOs the steering committee became more democratic and participatory. In each following report the improvement of participatory process was recorded.

Table 2:

**Codes found in the donors’ feedback**

Descriptors/Codes	Frequency
Improved participatory process, dialogue	5
Country ownership	3
Concrete priorities, other programs deriving from PRSP	4.5
Risks	1
Monitoring/evaluation	2.5
Alignment	1.5

The second code implies that the donors consider the final PRSP a national ownership. In every report it was mentioned that the PRSP was drafted with based on the principles of priorities (third descriptor) and all other programs such as budgets and mid-term expenditure frameworks were derived from the PRSP.

In the interim report (Report No. 22131-AM) only several risks (the fourth code) are mentioned by donors that might hinder the PRSP implementation. Among them is likely insufficiency of the governmental revenues, immature democracy, regional instability, debt sustainability, etc.[28] Fifth and sixth codes imply that CSOs were largely involved in the monitoring process (the fifth code) and the actions of the major donors were aligned and harmonized (sixth code).

***Sustainable Development Program (SDP)***

The sustainable development program (SDP) was the revised version of the PRSP and often is considered as PRSP-2. It was developed in accordance with the RA Government decree N 994-N which implies biannual revision of the PRSP. [22] The relations among the drafters were institutionalized through the PRSP implementation and partnership agreement signed in 2004. The contracting parties were RA government, communities, five groups of NGOs, Armenian Apostolic Church and trade unions. [22] Another novelty was an open forum, stipulated by the treaty, which was served as a platform for generating and discussing ideas. [22, p.16]

The codes found in the SDP and thereof frequencies that best describe the process are summarized in Table 3.

*Table 3:***Codes describing the participatory process of the SDP**

<b>Code/Descriptor</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Participatory process	12/5
Discussions	29/5
Surveys (voice of poor)	4/5
Public awareness	3/5

The first code implies that government considers the process broadly participatory with the inclusion of various CSOs. The government, according to the document, buttressed the process upon “bottom-up” principle, i.e. the revision of the first PRSP (the SDP) has to be started from the lowest tier of the society up to the government. Government also prioritizes broad participation in monitoring and evaluation process of the first PRSP.

The second code implies that discussions were taken place both on nationwide and regional (marz) level. The nationwide discussions were divided into two types - professional and public. During the formers more narrow and specific issues were discussed, while the latter was a platform for discussing broader areas such as judicial reforms. [22, p. 17]

The third code implies that all the discussions were anchored upon survey the results of social survey conducted by the 207 active participants. [22, p.16] The main goal of the survey was to hear the “voice of the poor”, i.e. to hear and consider the opinions and perceptions of the main stockholders- the poor people. The survey results were also used to set up the priorities of the SDP.

And finally, the fourth descriptor, as in all previous cases implies that the process was transparent and was elucidated through multiple sources; inter alia, website, leaflets, TV channels, newspapers, etc.

Like in case of the first PRSP, the joint feedback of the donors (WB and IMF) regarding the participation was very positive. In the Joint Staff Advisory Note on the Second Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (Sustainable Development Program) just one paragraph is dedicated to participation assessment. [31] It is mentioned that the process of participation was largely benefitted due to the institutional atmosphere inherited from PRSP-1. [31, 9] Especially, it is stated that:

“The staffs commend the government for new institutional arrangements that would allow for even greater engagement of civil society organizations (CSO) through a CSO board and secretariat with direct and regular access to the SDP Steering Committee.” [31]

Notably, most of the goals of the SPD were not achieved because of the global financial crisis of 2009 the impact of which was not considered during the drafting process.

***Armenian Development Strategy (ADS)***

In ADS, unlike other two developmental programs merely a paragraph is dedicated to the issue of participation. It is mentioned that ADS was a participatory process like its predecessors and that government prioritizes the agreement signed with Civil Society Cooperation Network (CNN). It's further noted that for the successful implementation of the program the involvement of the CNN in the stages of monitoring, implementation and evaluation is of a high necessity. [17] Any assessment by the

donors regarding the ADS was not found by me.

Overall, from the analysis above it becomes clear that the drafters of all the three programs (government and the CSOs) officially assert that the drafting process was broadly participatory and the final documents are not only the product of the government, but also an ownership of the nation. It is asserted in the all three programs that they were conceived through the nation-wise discussions. Among other things, the achievement of transparent drafting process was strongly stressed in all the developmental programs. Notably, the donors, especially World Bank and IMF share the viewpoint articulated in the developmental programs. The inference is that they are overall very content with the whole process of elaborating the developmental programs in Armenia. Whether the participation in all the three developmental programs was really effective and broad or merely formal will be double-checked through interviews conducted among the three most important “players” in the course of building the developmental programs, namely the representatives of the Government of RA, the civil society organizations and the donors.

### **Interview analysis**

#### ***Is the game worth the candles?***

During the interviews, some representatives of the governmental agencies and donor organizations were mentioning that the broader is the list of participants the longer the drafting process endures and the effectiveness of the works sometimes decreases. Nevertheless, all the interviewees regardless of their affiliation were certain that regardless the final payoff the broad and comprehensive participation is a must during the drafting process of the developmental programs. The representative of Ministry of Finance, for instance mentioned the NGOs normally are better in revealing and raising the important social issues than governmental employees. He further noted that it is hopeless to expect the CSOs to propose solutions because of inadequacy of resources under their disposal. Other interviewees were stressing the importance of national ownership, accountability and transparency. They were certain that those goals are practically unachievable without the participation of the CSOs. Furthermore, an interviewee from donor organization who used to be engaged in NGO activities highlighted the participatory process, besides already mentioned benefits, strongly contributes to the professional advancement of the NGO representatives. She brought examples of several individuals who participated in the drafting process of the first PRSP and were upgraded professionally becoming university lecturers, researchers and experts. In her deep conviction participation is essential for making Armenian NGOs more professional. The representatives of the CSOs were even bringing cases when the governmental representatives along with their consultant private business company omitted to include a whole field in the developmental program (such as science for instance) and the field and its developmental strategy was included due to the CSOs. So, in a nutshell, the answer of the subtitle above is “yes”.

#### ***Decision making***

The decision making process during the PRSP was different from that of SDP and ADP. In case of PRSP the government announced a competition and two organizations were selected to participate in the drafting process. Although the participation was not limited those two NGOs, the government had some leverages to influence the process. In 2005, after the completion of the PRSP government adopted N43 decree according to which the “Coordination Council” of the PRSP was established. The Council was the highest decision-making body of the PRSP charged for monitoring and implementation. The interviewees were stating that in the Council the CSO representatives outnumbered the governmental ones and they were correct.[2] However, the decision-making mechanism was changed before the once the network of NGOs was established. The SDP-network was electing the NGOs within itself to represent the whole network in the Council. Most of the NGO representatives confirm that the selection process was fair and transparent; however the shift of decision-making mechanism entailed discrepancies among NGOs. Some NGO representatives stated that once the election results were announced, they ceased to (actively) participate in the drafting process of the developmental programs. One of the government representatives stated that governmental officials who were observing the election results (without having any influence) stated the winner NGOs were those with strong lobbying and networking skills. The interviewees’ statements that CSOs still have power to defeat any developmental program are they in unanimity leaves a room for speculations. The point is that in N657 decree of the Government of RA (update of N43) regarding the establish-



ment of the Coordination Council for SDP implementation, it is stated that NGOs have 11 representatives in the Council, while the government along 10 representatives. However, the National Assembly of the RA has also two representatives and together with the governmental ones they outweigh the CSOs. [3] The N657 decree was updated in 2015 upon the promulgation of N89 decree. [16] Here the pattern is even fuzzier. The number of the representatives of the Government and the Parliament is tantamount to that of CSOs. However, the Armenian Apostolic Church is also represented making the judgment even more difficult<sup>2</sup>.

### Quality of participation over time

All the governmental representatives and the majority of the donor representatives interviewed were claiming that the quality of the contribution of the NGOs has a decaying tendency. For instance, one of the governmental representatives mentioned that during the first PRSP the input of the CSOs was truly significant as government was participating in the selection process of the NGOs. He further noted the quality of the participation declined in the drafting process of SDP and ADP. He explained that the reason lie in the election mechanisms as the well-lobbying NGOs replaced the professional ones. Most of the NGO representatives who had a tangible contribution in the drafting of a concrete program were considering the overall process participatory. And only one head of NGO was stating that in case of all three developmental programs the participation of the NGOs was ineffective and mostly formal.

### PRSP

Firstly, it needs to be mentioned that not all the CSO representatives were a part of drafting all three developmental programs. Naturally, the one who were not participated in the PRSP process, for instance, were not able to tell a posteriori opinion, hence all their comments were disregarded<sup>3</sup>. PRSP was mostly drafted by the CSOs. One representative from governmental agency and one from donor organization pointed out that the final version submitted by the CSOs mostly lacked concrete figures and information regarding the financial means necessary for program implementation. Hence, the 1000-page long was optimized by a private consulting company. The final version (after major improvements and optimization by the consulting company) was accepted by the CSOs.

PRSP, according to the interviewees of all the three categories, was the best in terms of comprehensive and effective participation. Some interviewees even mentioned that Armenian PRSP was chosen the best PRSP by the World Bank (in terms of effective participation), something that was not rejected by the interviewee from World Bank office Armenia. The interviewees were asked to assess the participation<sup>4</sup>, effective contribution<sup>5</sup> and implementation<sup>6</sup> all the three developmental programs on 1-5 scale (1-very low/bad, 5- very high/good). The figures for the PRSP are the following: participation- 4.75, effective contribution- 4.125 and implementation- about 3.8.

### SDP

SDP was the most controversial program in terms of participation. Most of the NGOs were complaining that their voice was unheard. The reality is that SDP was just an update of the PRSP. Hence, it was just necessary to slightly revise a program which was mostly a product of the CSOs. The PRSP was did need to be revised as the periodical revision was a requirement mentioned in the document. One NGO leader even mentioned that the program was not truly “sustainable development program” as it was dealing primarily with poverty alleviation issue which merely one segment of sustainable development. SDP was elaborated by the private consulting company of the Government and was submitted to the CSOs and the donors. The government representative told that the CSOs had an opportunity not to allow the SDP adoption if they were unhappy with the program, but they did not do it. Overall, the average figures for SDP are the following: participation-1.15, effective contribution-0.8, implementation-0. As it was mentioned above most of the goals of the SDP remained unachieved because of the global financial crisis.

### ADP

Normally, the NGOs participating in the developmental process of the PRSP were not active in the ADP drafting process. Before the adoption, the sections of the ADP were discussed in the respec-

<sup>2</sup> Church was represented in the PRSP coordination Council, but was not represented in SDP coordination Council

<sup>3</sup> Normally those interviewees who did not participate in a concrete developmental program were not talking to much regarding it.

<sup>4</sup> Being a part of drafting.

<sup>5</sup> To what extent the viewpoints of the CSOs was considered and included in the final program.

<sup>6</sup> To what extent the goals of the programs were achieved.

tive working groups and afterwards in the Council of the CSO network. During the session of the Coordination Council, all the participating NGOs, according to the interviewees of all the three categories, adopted the program. The only exception was the group of "agriculture" that submitted a so-called "special opinion" thus expressing its disagreement with the program. Those NGO representatives who participated in the drafting process of the ADP were in consensus that the "Social Partnership Agreement of the Strategic Programs", signed by the Head of CSO Network of the Strategic Programs and the Minister of Finance of the RA (on behalf of the Government of the RA) in 23 October 2015, [21] would further strengthen the position of the NGOs vis-à-vis the government. However, the ones who are not a member of the network are quite skeptical. The average figures for ADP are the following: participation- 3.1, effective contribution-2.8, and implementation-N/A. At this stage it is impossible to assess the implementation since the program is anticipated for 2014-2025 period.

### Conclusion

The drafting process of the developmental programs of Armenia was highly participatory. The vast majority of the interviewees consider the drafting of the PRSP highly participatory. The CSO representatives participated in the drafting of ADP consider it also quite participatory.

Overall, it can be deduced that the voice of the civil society was heard in case of PRSP and ADP. The SDP-related issue can no way affect this conclusion as SDP is a slight revision of the first PRSP which was a product of the broad participation. That fact is also clearly articulated in the analyzed documents. Hence, if PRSP is a product of national ownership, consequently SDP also must be considered a product of the national ownership. Therefore, the hypothesis "Civil society organizations effectively participated in the drafting process of the developmental programs" is accepted.

*Աղյուսակ*

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