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Rejoinder

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I want to begin by thanking Göran Holmqvist and Karin Metell Cueva for financing (on behalf of Sida) our independent research of the PRS processes in Latin America in the first place, and now in particular for taking up the challenge to respond to my doubts and criticisms of the PRS approach. They recognise that this approach has been too optimistic and, in particular, that too many goals have been attached to one single instrument. The proposal they put forward is interesting and worth discussing. I share their concerns about the continuing poverty and inequality in Latin America and agree that donors should focus their efforts on trying to reduce them. But I wonder whether their proposed solution to the shortcomings of the PRS approach is really so different from current practice.

First, I think they are still too optimistic about the possibility of a national consensus on a long-term vision on 'objectives and principles on how to reduce poverty and social injustice' (their Vi-level). If this vision is to have real content and practical meaning, it can only be expected from the currently elected government, for a period of four to five years (depending on the frequency of elections), and based on a majority – not a general consensus – in society. Otherwise, such a national consensus is likely simply to imply lip-service to donor ideas such as striving for good governance or attempting to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Requiring the participation of civil society and political parties to attain a social contract with this outcome and content fails to take domestic ownership and domestic politics seriously.

Secondly, I do not deny that donors have some influence in aid-dependent countries and can play a role in promoting democratic procedures and in involving representatives of the poor majority in consultations and debates on economic and social policies.¹ But in my view this means supporting a strong position for elected parliaments. Although Holmqvist and Metell Cueva do mention parliaments in their analysis, there does not appear to be a role for them in any of the three levels of their solution. The social contract (Vi-level) is to be the result of the involvement of civil society and political parties only. In my view, civil society can participate in debates, but decisions should ultimately be made by elected parliaments that are accountable to the population at large. Ideally, parliaments should take the lead in organising these debates, for example by organising hearings on specific topics.

Finally, I also think they are still too optimistic about the possibility and effectiveness of plans that are comprehensive, detailed and results-oriented (the first P-

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1. However, their reference (footnote 3) to Hefeker and Michaelowa (2005) to underpin the argument that process conditionality is more effective than content conditionality, is flawed. The model developed by Hefeker and Michaelowa simply assumes that donors are able to give political weight to the representatives of the poor (p. 164); there is no empirical proof of effectiveness.

level). Of course, these plans can be made – especially if donors provide the finance and technical assistance for them, as is now current practice – but they will most likely play only a subordinate role in actual policy implementation, as I pointed out in my article.