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**The Participation Conditionality
under Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers:
The Joint Staff Assessment -experience**

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under Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers:
The Joint Staff Assessment -experience**

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April 2005

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Contents

Abstract	4
Résumé	4
Introduction	5
1. The Joint Staff Assessments and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Initiative	7
2. The evaluations of the Joint Staff Assessments by the independent evaluation offices of both IMF (IEO) and World Bank (OED)	9
3 In-depth analysis of the Joint Staff Assessments of the participation processes in PRSPs	12
3.1 Research Questions:	12
3.2 Joint Staff Assessments Variables	13
4. Results	17
4.1 General Overview of the Findings	17
4.2 Three Research Questions	18
5. Conclusion	30
Bibliography	31
Annex 1	36
Date of submission of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and date of elaboration of Joint Staff Assessments	

Abstract

The Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) framework introduced by the World Bank and the IMF at the turn of the century goes well beyond the mainly macroeconomic conditionalities of the structural adjustment era by requesting that civil society participates in the preparation and the implementation of the strategy. Although constituting a significant shift in the international financial institutions' discourse, the difference in the way in which the traditional and the "participation" conditions are scrutinized for compliance, considerably reduces the compulsory nature of the latter conditionality. Whereas clear standards and criteria are developed to evaluate compliance with the economic conditionalities, such standards seem to be lacking in the case of participation. This paper reviews the evaluation of the civil society participation in PRSP documents by the Joint Staff of the World Bank and the IMF. This desk-based study of 35 Joint Staff Assessments (JSAs) finds these JSAs to lack both clarity and candour.

Résumé

Le plan échafaudé dans leur Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) (à savoir : leurs articles traitant d'une stratégie de réduction de la pauvreté) par la Banque mondiale et le FMI au tournant du siècle va bien au-delà des mises sous conditions, essentiellement macroéconomiques, de l'ère de l'ajustement structurel en demandant que la société civile participe à la préparation et à la mise en oeuvre de la stratégie en question. Quoique constituant un renversement significatif dans le discours des institutions financières internationales, la différence dans la façon dont les conditions traditionnelles et de « participation » sont minutieusement examinées pour voir si elles sont conformes, réduit considérablement le caractère contraignant de ces dernières. Alors que des modèles standards et des critères clairs sont établis pour évaluer la conformité avec les mises sous conditions économiques, de tels modèles et critères semblent manquer dans le cas de la participation. Le présent article passe en revue l'évaluation de la participation de la société civile dans les documents PRSP par le Joint Staff de la Banque mondiale et du FMI (à savoir : une équipe regroupant des représentants de ces deux institutions). Cette étude des textes de 35 évaluations du Joint Staff en question montre que celles-ci manquent à la fois de clarté et d'impartialité.

The author would like to thank Nadia Molenaers, Robrecht Renard and Nathalie Holvoet for their useful comments and suggestions. Any remaining errors are the responsibility of the author.

Introduction

The Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers were designed to rectify the flaws of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs). Whereas the SAPs focussed on macro-economic and monetary stability and economic growth, thereby imposing a host of economic reform measures as a condition for financial support, a new discourse is now being used. In order to receive debt relief under the enhanced Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC-II) initiative, a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper must be drawn up, which is country-grown, genuinely “owned” by government and citizens, and pro-poor in focus (IMF, 2004). Partly under the pressure from ever more active and powerful NGO lobbying, “civil society participation”, “accountability” and “ownership” became the new buzz words. This new emphasis does not replace the “classic” economic conditions, but is rather meant to make their implementation more likely. However, although central in the new IFI discourse, there is a striking difference in the way in which the participation conditionality is being scrutinized for compliance, compared to the economic conditions. This is revealing of the genuine importance attached to civil society participation by the IFIs themselves. Whereas clear standards and criteria are applied to evaluate compliance with the economic conditionalities, those standards seem to be lacking for the participation conditionality. Two independent reviews of the PRSP process, one by the IMF and one by the World Bank, both uttered harsh criticisms with regard to the Joint Staff Assessments of the participation processes in the formulation of PRSPs (IEO, 2004 & OED, 2004). Three main concerns can be distinguished. First, the JSAs are said to be unclear: there are no evaluation procedures specified in advance, nor is it clear whether all PRSPs are scrutinized according to the same criteria. A second critique reproaches the JSAs that they are not extensively known or used, except for a small circle of IFI insiders, notwithstanding that one of the main goals of the Joint Staff Assessments is to inform donors and the public at large. Finally, both evaluations found the JSAs to lack the necessary ‘candour’. Local stakeholders, if they are familiar with the JSA, find them to paint an overly favourable picture, particularly with regard to the assessment of participatory processes. The purpose of this paper is to provide a more systematic analysis of the quality of the assessment of the participation processes in the JSA documents. The questions raised in this paper are based on the criticisms of the independent reviews on JSAs of participation processes; namely the clarity of the questions at hand and the criteria with which to answer them, the “candour” of the assessments and the causes behind any possible reluctance of the evaluators to critically scrutinise the participation processes. A third element will be added by checking for possible variations over time in the way evaluations are conducted (criteria, clarity etc.).

In postulating our research hypothesis we started from the widely acknowledged fact that the quality of civil society participation in preparing the PRSP has differed considerably across countries. We postulate that although such variation will partly reflect random effects and local idiosyncracies, and

indeed reflect the difference in the success of the participation conditionality itself, it would be highly unlikely if differences across countries would not to some extent also reflect the difference in the pre-existing quality of the political system and civil society involvement. On this basis we expected to find at least some correlation between the quality of the participation reported in the JSAs and certain structural political variables of the country in question. We did not find any such correlation in our desk study, and we suggest that this testifies to the poor quality of the JSA assessments.

1. The Joint Staff Assessments and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Initiative

The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund launched a new initiative to improve the effectiveness of the development aid in reducing poverty in 1999, namely the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers. The idea of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper originated from the discussions, which led up to the formulation of the Enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative. The Enhanced HIPC framework came into being under pressure of international NGOs, academics and donors to make the link between debt relief and poverty reduction explicit, whereas this was not the case in the original HIPC framework. Although the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers were conceptualized as framework for the enhanced HIPC, they were soon seen as an overarching country-level policy document (Piron & Evans, 2004). The PRSP approach was inspired by the will to learn from the failures of previous development programmes. Often stated as among the main causes of the failures of the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) are the lack of national ownership, governance dysfunctions and weak public expenditure management (OED, 2002). Therefore some of these issues were taken into account when elaborating the PRS Initiative. The PRS initiative was based on the same principles as the Comprehensive Development Framework and as such could be perceived as an operationalisation of those principles. These five principles are: country-driven, result-focused, long-term, comprehensive and partnership-oriented (World Bank, 2003). The first principle states that the PRS process should be country-driven involving a broad-based participation. Furthermore, the result-oriented PRS process should be focused on outcomes that benefit the poor and be comprehensive in that it recognises the multidimensional nature of poverty and is comprehensive in the proposed policy responses. Moreover the partnership-principle requires coordinated participation of development partners. Finally, all the above principles should result in a strategy that is based on a long-term perspective for poverty reduction (IMF, 2004). These core-principles of the PRS approach prove that the new framework was intended to increase country ownership, enhance the poverty focus of the country programmes and strengthen the collaboration between donors in supporting country efforts. An important part of the PRS architecture is the Joint Staff Assessment. This document is drawn up jointly by the staff from the World Bank and the IMF, since it was believed that “dissociating the PRS into developmental and a macro-economic component, and evaluating these separately, would be illogical, seeing as they would succeed or fail together” (IMF, 2004, p37). The Joint Staff assessment (JSA) evaluates the strengths and the weaknesses of a country’s PRSP. It provides the Bretton Woods Institutions with an overall assessment by considering whether the PRSP provides a sound basis for concessional assistance for HIPC debt relief. Guidelines have been formulated indicating that “, *although the specific content of PRSPs will vary widely among countries, a PRSP will include four core elements: (a) a description of the country’s participatory process; (b) poverty diagnosis; (c) targets, indicators, and monitoring systems; and (d) priority*

public actions.” The guidelines then go on to specify that the assessment should attempt to succinctly answer the key questions related to each of those four core elements, giving the greatest weight to the priority public actions and to the arrangements for monitoring and evaluation of the PRS implementation. Furthermore due regard should be given to the country’s starting point (World Bank, s.d.). We will go into further detail regarding the specific questions specified in the JSA guidelines later on in the paper, but first we will zoom in on the rationale behind the conceptualisation of the JSAs.

The Joint Staff Assessment was designed to fulfill three functions. Firstly it was meant to provide feedback to the governments of the recipient countries and other domestic stakeholders of the weaknesses and strengths of the PRS, as perceived by the joint staff (*feedback and outreach function*). This information can be helpful in determining how to improve the effectiveness of their efforts in reducing poverty. Secondly, the JSA should also provide input necessary for the executives of the World Bank and IMF to decide upon concessional support (*internal governance function*). Finally, these reviews could prove to be useful for other donors to adjust their development policies to the assessments provided by the joint staff (*partnership function*). The JSA signals to the donor community whether or not, in the view of the Bretton Woods Institutions, this particular country is found worthy of support and what are the main weaknesses or strengths to take into account.

2. The evaluations of the Joint Staff Assessments by the independent evaluation offices of both IMF (IEO) and World Bank (OED)¹.

Recently, the independent evaluation departments of both the World Bank (OED) and the International Monetary Fund (IEO) conducted an evaluation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Initiative. These evaluations both included a review of the Joint Staff Assessments. Both institutions did a part of the evaluation jointly. Another part was done separately². Both institutions were highly critical regarding the effectiveness of the current format of the joint staff assessments. First a number of general shortcomings resulting from these evaluations will be briefly reviewed. Subsequently, the specific constraints concerning the assessment of the participation process will be presented.

Both reports list a number of general weaknesses of the JSAs. First, public awareness of the JSAs is restricted to a small circle of government officials, thereby reducing the possible usefulness for donors, recipient governments as well as the public at large. As was stated earlier, one of the main functions of the JSA was to provide feedback to domestic stakeholders. The JSAs fail to fulfill this function. As is stated in the report of the Independent Evaluation Office: Although all the JSAs are in the public domain...

“It is not clear that JSAs are de facto widely available. This is in part because the BWIs themselves typically do not make them available on their websites in languages other than English, and in part because active dissemination on the ground largely rests on the authorities. Our case studies suggest that in most countries civil society stakeholders-along with a number of government representatives-are unaware of the JSAs” (IMF, 2004, p 42)

Moreover, even donors do not rely on JSAs as was foreseen at its conception. The independent evaluation found that acceptance of the JSA in the role of a common reference for donors is limited. In several case studies donors were found to question the clarity and the candour of the assessments as well as regretting the lack of inclusion of the views of donors outside of the Bretton Woods Institutions.

Secondly, both institutions criticize the direct link between the lending modalities of the Bretton Woods Institutions and the Joint Staff Assessment. The fact that a positive assessment by the joint staff is a *conditio sine qua non* for HIPC debt relief in fact forces the staff to, no matter what the performance of the country, come up with a positive sum at the end. This effectively reduces the space for candid evaluation.

“The clarity, candour and comprehensiveness of the assessment is uneven [...] this partly reflects a built-in bias to reach a “yes or no” signal- which is always yes in practice, encapsulated in standardised language.” (IMF, 2004, p9)

¹ The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) is the independent evaluation unit of the International Monetary Fund. The Operations Evaluation Department (OED) is the evaluation unit of the World Bank.

² The evaluations are based on workshops, desk-based studies and case studies (surveys, focus group sessions and in-country stakeholder surveys). Ten countries were selected as case studies, reflecting a variation in both economic situation, human development, geographical dispersion and progress in the prsp process. Four countries were assessed jointly by staff from IMF and World Bank (Mozambique, Nicaragua, Tajikistan & Tanzania). The IEO conducted its own analysis on two more countries (Guinea and Vietnam). OED collected data on Albania, Cambodia, Ethiopia and Mauritania.

Furthermore the evaluation departments conclude that the JSAs suffer from large differences among assessments in analytical quality as well as an insufficient focus on the in-country processes rather than on the quality of the documents such.

The evaluations go further into detail regarding some particular issues which the assessments touch upon. We will limit ourselves to the participation process. The World Bank Operations Evaluation Department (OED) ascertain that in nine out of the ten case studies the factual treatment of the participatory processes by the joint staff was overly optimistic or incomplete regarding the value and the contribution of the participatory process. Similarly, the Independent Evaluation Office of the IMF (IEO) deplores the fact that critical scrutiny is lacking in the assessments. The IEO assessment found 16 out of 22 assessments to highlight the participation process as one of the main strengths of the PRSP. The IEO's evaluation then goes on to point out some of the obvious country examples in which they feel that the Joint Staffs Assessment has been too lenient. According to the evaluation unit the key reason why JSAs are insufficiently critical is because they tend to focus on who was consulted and how without giving much information on either the content of contributions or the impact. When reviewing the 28 JSAs³ on their clear and candid assessment of the four key areas, each key area was assessed according to a four- criteria scale, assigning quality ratings to those key areas (Table 1).

The clear and candid assessment of "*Ownership and Participation*" has received a median score of two, meaning that an "incomplete discussion of country ownership and participation" has taken place. The mean score of 2.43, although it is higher than the median, still tends to point more towards the direction of an incomplete discussion (category 2) of the topic than a good description (category 3) of the "*Ownership and Participation*". When compared to the second key issue "*Targets, Indicators and Monitoring*" the difference between the two issues' evaluation becomes painfully clear. Whereas "*Ownership and Participation*" was rated "an incomplete discussion", "*Targets, indicators and Monitoring*" is valued as in between a good description and some assessment (category 3) and a full description and good assessment (category 4). The second key issue "*Targets, Indicators and Monitoring*" has however received the highest scores of all four key issues. Nevertheless, even in comparison with the other two key issues, the clear and candid assessment of ownership and participation is rated substantially worse than the other key issues of the JSAs.

³ A desk-based study of twenty-eight Joint Staff Assessments of full PRSPs was conducted. OED (World Bank) reviewed eleven issues, whereas IEO (IMF) reviewed an additional five issues not handled by the OED. The Independent evaluation unit of the International Monetary Fund carried out the review of the participation process.

Table 1: OED's Evaluation of the JSAs of participation processes

Clear and Candid Assessment of These Subsections	Mean	Median
A Ownership and Participation	2.43	2.00
1. Little or no description of participatory process and no discussion of ownership at all		
2. Incomplete discussion of country ownership and participation		
3. good description of participatory process and discussion of ownership		
4. Extensive description of country ownership and participation and its impact on the content of the strategy.		
B. Targets, Indicators and Monitoring	3.36	3.50
1. Partial description without assessment		
2. Good description but no assessment		
3. Good description and some assessment (1 or 2 criteria met)		
4. Full description and good assessment (3 or 4 criteria met)		
C. Priority Public Actions		
C1 Macroeconomic Framework	3.04	3.00
C2. Fiscal Choices	3.14	3.00
C3. Financing Plan	2.79	3.00

Source: (IMF, 2004, p 97)

Based on the case studies and desk-based reviews mentioned above, both the IEO's and the OED's evaluation harshly criticize the current format of the JSAs. Nevertheless, the arguments or analysis to back up these observations mentioned above were not included. We feel the evaluations of the JSAs lack the necessary transparency to go further into detail on one particular issue (participation), let alone falsify the analysis that has been made. Therefore we feel the elements mentioned above require further analysis. As "Ownership and Participation" is rated the least clear and candid assessment we find it necessary to dig a bit deeper, in order to complement the existing reviews with our own analysis. This paper will endeavour to be as transparent as possible in presenting our analysis and its results, clearly stating the numerous constraints inevitably linked to this type of research. It is important to retain that we will go into depth in the Joint Staff Assessments, not so much to ask ourselves which assessment is incompatible with the country reality, but rather we ask ourselves what can we learn about the depth and consistency of the evaluation and the possible reluctance of the evaluators to scrutinise the participation processes.

3 In-depth analysis of the Joint Staff Assessments of the participation processes in PRSPs

Currently 40 countries have finished their Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers. The joint staff has already reviewed 37 of them⁴. Therefore we have conducted our review based on the analysis of 35 joint staff assessments⁵(Annex1). Each staff assessment consists of four paragraphs (participatory process, poverty diagnosis, monitoring and targets & indicators and public priority actions) in which the various aspects of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper and its formulation process are evaluated. For reasons explained above, this review will only focus on the evaluation of the participation process.

3.1 Research Questions:

In our analysis we will try to further analyse and clarify two criticisms made by the independent evaluations. Why do the same analysis over again? First, the scope of the analysis will be broadened up to 35 countries, whereas the independent evaluations had a more limited scope.⁶ More importantly, unlike the independent evaluations, we will try to present our analysis in such a way that it can be falsified by others. Furthermore, our only focus is the participation process. Hence, we will go more in-depth in this one particular issue, hoping to add new insights to the existing data. Distilled from the critiques of the independent evaluations we formulate three research questions.

A. Are the design and the objectives of the evaluation of the participation process by the joint staff clear?

First we will focus on the issue of the unclear nature of the assessment by the joint staff. One could argue that in order to have a clear assessment of a process first of all the right questions should be asked. Therefore this will be our first inquiry. “Are the right questions being asked?” Besides answering the right questions, one should expect these questions to all be answered in a consistent manner across all cases. In an ideal case, a checklist of criteria should be specified in advance. All countries’ JSAs should then be evaluated according to each of those criteria. If our review finds that these conditions of a clear evaluation (the right questions and a consistent manner of checking the answers on these questions across cases) are not fulfilled in the assessment of the joint staff, we can conclude that the joint staff assessments lack clarity.

B. Do the assessments made by the joint staff lack candour? If so, why?

The second assertion to tackle is the allegation that the JSAs are overly optimistic in their assessment, as expressed by the independent evaluations. This is however a very difficult hypothesis to test. In order to

⁴ Bhutan's, Bosnia Herzegovina's and Serbia's PRSPs have thus far not been reviewed.

⁵ At the time we have started this review Djibouti's JSA was not yet available, which brings the total available JSAs at thirty-six. Uganda's Joint staff assessment was not considered due to a different nature of the assessment (Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper Progress Report Joint Staff Assessment).

⁶ The independent evaluation of the IMF Operations Department has included 22 countries. The evaluation of OED presented a review of 28 countries.

falsify this hypothesis, we should find a discrepancy between the assessment made by the joint staff and the reality of the participation process. Hence a variable quantifying the assessment made by the joint staff will be constructed. These ratings of JSAs should then be compared to the actual value of the participation process. We do however have no ratings of the real quality of the process. We will therefore reverse the reasoning. One could argue that certain basic socio-political conditions (basic liberties, freedom of organization, of speech...) are conducive to participation processes. By contrasting the JSA scores with these indicators of the socio-political situation in a country, the absence of any relation between those variables could question the accuracy of the joint staff assessments. For, if both IFI's agree with the fact that those basic socio-political conditions are conducive to a participation process and we find that there is no relation between those socio-political variables and the assessments of the participation processes made by the joint staff, this could suggest that something fishy is going on.

C. *Do these previous results (JSA score and the number of criteria used) vary over time?*

Finally, the evolution of the critical nature and the analytical quality over time will be explored. These two questions will give us an idea of the possible changes in time regarding the JSAs.

3.2 Joint Staff Assessments Variables:

For conducting our analysis of the assessments of the participation processes by the joint staff we have constructed a number of variables. These variables are all based on the information available in the Joint Staff Assessment documents. We have gathered all relevant information in one table, which can be provided on request. Below, a fragment of the table is presented to clarify which information it contains. This table depicts five variables:

A. *Date of the full PRSP:*

The second column states the date of submission of the full Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper. This variable will be conducive to determining any variation in evaluations over time. When comparing different periods in time, these classifications will be based on the date of submission of the full PRSP. It would also have been possible to use the date of submission of the joint staff assessment. We have however opted to use the date of the submission of the PRSP, since this date is the closest date to the actual participation process. Although the participation process has taken place before this date, we will, because of data availability, treat the process as if it had taken place in the same year as the submission of the PRSP. Worth noting is the fact that the JSA usually is organized no more than a few months after the submission of the PRSP.

Therefore it probably would not lead to very different results if the date of the JSA was used to demarcate time categories instead of the date of the submission of the full PRSP

Table 2: Fragment of the Table

Country	A. Date of full PRSP	B. Participation mentioned as one of the strong points of the PRS Process (yes or no)	C. Quality of Participation process 5= good, 3=moderate 1= poor	D. Positive aspects of the participation process	D. Negative aspects of the participation process
Nepal	10/1/03	No	1	+ this process of consultation demonstrates openness of the government to stakeholders' feedback and concerns	-limited description of how poverty strategy has been modified as a result of the consultations - intensification of the security problem reduced the capacity of the government to engage wider civil society groups ... the staff recommends reactivation and institutionalisation of mechanisms for continued participation - translation in Nepali would be beneficial for effective dissemination

B. Participation mentioned as one of the strong points of the PRS Process

The third column requires turning to the actual text of the assessment. Almost every Joint Staff Assessment starts with a general overview in which the strong and the weak points of the strategy and the process are enumerated. Based on this general overview the question “Was the participation process explicitly mentioned as one of the strong points of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper’s elaboration process?” will be answered, thus creating a dichotomous variable (Yes/No). Thus the joint staff assessment did not explicitly mention the participation process as one of the main strengths of the PRSP in Nepal.

C. *Quality of Participation process as perceived by the Joint Staff:*

In order to evaluate the candour of the JSAs, we need to compare the assessment made by the joint staff with a number of socio-political variables. Hence a rating of the assessment of the joint staff is needed. We will therefore attempt to translate the assessment made by the joint staff into a numerical variable. A five item-scale was constructed:

How did the Joint Staff evaluate the participation process in Country X? As being...



How was this 5-item scale created? First, we started by test-reviewing the assessments and categorizing them into three categories: poor, moderate and good. While reviewing the JSAs we felt that there was another category needed to distinguish more accurately between the category “moderate” and the category “poor”. Therefore a score “2” was introduced. Basically this difference is based on the amount of criticism that is expressed by the joint staff, combined with a limited number of positive arguments or very vague arguments. For example the JSAs of two countries can have been attributed the same (vague) positive arguments by the joint staff, but when they differ in the extent or severity of their criticisms, they should have a different score. Thus, roughly speaking, a JSA with a score “1” should have been either more heavily criticised or have less positive statements than a JSA rated “2”. The same line of reasoning holds for the difference between “2” & “3” and “3” & “4”. Crucial in the attribution of these scores is that the scores are not based on a simple subtraction of the number of negative arguments from the number of positive arguments, for not all criteria are equally vital to an acceptable participation process. So weights should have been assigned to every criterion to reflect the relative importance of this criterion for a good participation process. Thus far, to our knowledge, no such weighted checklist of criteria for participation processes is available. This is where the personal interpretation of the researcher comes in. In the example in Table 2, Nepal has been rated “poor”, thereby exemplifying a rather critical assessment of the JSA. This variable will be referred to as the JSA score. Ethiopia is an example of a JSA score 2. Whereas some genuine critiques were uttered concerning the participation process in Nepal (for example the security situation), the evaluation of the participation process in Ethiopia was far more “vague”. Few general positive and negative remarks like “*a broad-based participatory process*” and “*intention to further deepen the participatory process for implementation and monitoring*” were made. Bolivia was rated “moderate”, 3 on our 5-item scale, since some negative comments were made alongside strengths that were explicitly mentioned (“*vulnerable groups were well represented, specifically women and indigenous people*”). In our fourth category we find countries like for example Rwanda, because the joint staff was very positive in its assessment and no clear negative aspects were stated. The fifth category

(“good”) was created for the one assessment that stood out among the others. The assessment stated that various elements of the participation process “in comparison to other countries” were “very advanced”. Only one country’s evaluation (The Gambia) was attributed this score (Annex 1).

D. *The positive and negative aspects of the participation process*

The two last columns of Table 2 list the arguments that we felt were used to discuss the quality of the participation process. The positive and respectively the negative arguments are enumerated separately. From here on we will use the word “criterion” to denominate these arguments that have been extrapolated from the texts of the assessments. Although a criterion requires to be specified in advance as a factor that is going to be actively checked, this is not the case with these arguments. As such, in our example of Nepal (Table 2) “*this process of consultation demonstrates openness of the government to stakeholders’ feedback and concerns*” is a positive criterion used by the JSA, whereas “*translation in Nepali would be beneficial for effective dissemination*” constitutes a negative criterion.

The above categorization was based on a rather arbitrary personal interpretation of the positive and negative comments of the joint staff. Re-evaluation of all JSAs by another scholar could have partly rectified this flaw. Seeing it is a quite time-consuming endeavour to evaluate all JSAs, this remedy was not effectuated due to time constraints. We are aware that this shortcoming seriously compels this research to temper the generalization of its findings. Nevertheless, we find this exercise worthwhile, as it provides us with interesting, unavailable information on the depth, scope and consistency of the JSAs of the PRSP participation processes.

4. Results

First we will take a look at the distribution of the variables we have constructed based on our JSA-reviews. More specifically the distribution of both the “*Participation process was explicitly mentioned as one of the strengths of the PRS*”-variable and the “*Quality of Participation process*”-variable is presented in the first part. A second part zooms in on the three research questions that were articulated in the previous part. For all three research questions the analysis is presented and the findings are interpreted.

4.1 General Overview of the Findings

A. Distribution of ‘Quality of Participation Process

As explained above, all JSAs are attributed a numerical score ranging from 1 to 5 as presented in the table below. The table shows the scores of the JSAs skewed towards the “poor” end of the continuum of assessing the participation process, with almost two-thirds of all JSAs rated below moderate.

Table 3: Distribution of JSAs scores over the different categories:

Category	5 = good	4	3 = moderate	2	1 = poor
Number of JSAs N=35	1	3	8	18	5

Furthermore, the fact that the second category “2”, with 18 JSAs, is by far the largest group, seems to point in the direction of the findings of the World Bank and the IMF’s independent evaluations; namely that JSAs suffer from a lack of clarity and candid evaluation. Those JSAs fiercely criticizing the participation process will not be found in this category. Those types of JSAs will be found in the first category “poor”. On the other hand, the JSA that adulates the participation process in a particular country will not be found in this category either. Therefore, this category will not accommodate very pronounced statements.

B. Distribution of “Participation process was explicitly mentioned as one of the strengths of the PRS”

Let us now turn to the distribution of the second variable: “*Is the participation process explicitly mentioned as one of the strong points of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper’s elaboration process?*” As is portrayed in the table below 24 out of 35 assessments report the participation process to be one of the strong points. The more “poor” the JSA score becomes, the less the participation process is mentioned to be one of the main strengths of the PRSP, hence the difference in percentages towards the “poor” end of the continuum. This is what could be expected. However, not mentioning the participation process as a strong point does not necessarily mean that it is mentioned

to be one of the weaknesses of the PRSP. In some assessments, for example (Ghana, Burkina Faso) there was no mention of strong points whatsoever.

This finding is similar to what the independent review of the IMF has found (16 out of 22 assessments mentioned the participation process to be one of the main strengths of the PRSP). When almost seventy percent of all JSAs explicitly mention the participation process as one of the main strengths of the PRSP, this finding provides another picture of very positively evaluated participation processes.

Table 4: JSAs scores and the number of times the participation process was explicitly mentioned as one of the strengths of the PRS

Category	5 = good	4	3 = moderate	2	1 = poor
Number of Countries N=35	1	3	8	18	5
Number of times the participation was explicitly mentioned as one of the strong points of the PRSP process N= 24	1	3	7	12	1
% of all assessments that mentioned participation as one of the strong points in this category	100.0	100.0	87.5	66.7	20.0

4.2 Three Research Questions:

A. *Are the design and the objectives of the evaluation of the participation process by the joint staff clear?*

In this paragraph we will try to determine to what extent the critique put forward by the evaluations of both the World Bank and the IMF that the assessments of the joint staff are not clear, is correct? What criteria are being used to assess the participation process? Are they used in a consistent way on all the countries' strategies?

What are the questions the Joint Staff Assessments should be answering? Do the JSAs provide a satisfactory answer?

Guidelines were drawn up for the joint staff to evaluate the PRSPs by. It is however very remarkable that these guidelines prescribe a thorough evaluation of the other three main sections (poverty diagnosis, targets & indicators and priority public sanctions) but only require a description of the participation process. This could be interpreted as a first sign of the reluctance to critically scrutinise the participation process. This is clearly illustrated by the questions as they are prescribed in the JSA guidelines (Table 5). The first two questions, rather than asking to evaluate the process, demand an evaluation of the description of the process. Whereas the guidelines ask for an evaluation of the PRS document with regard to the participation process, the questions related to the poverty diagnosis definitely demand an evaluation of the diagnosis itself. This in itself is a very crucial difference. The guidelines do not

explicitly ask for a candid evaluation of the participation process. They only stipulate the need for a description of the process and a summary of the issues raised and the impact on the process.

The last two questions (questions 3 & 4 Table5) concerning the evaluation of the participation process are however not formulated as an evaluation of the document rather than the process, thus leave some room to evaluate these issues. These issues are nevertheless of a far less “sensitive” nature. The reluctance to scrutinize the participation processes should however not come as a surprise. The World Bank does not consider making political statements as being part of their mandate (Piron & Evans, 2004). The review of a participation process however typically demands taking political factors into account. This combination will inevitably lead to “technising” political assessment and being vaguely optimistic about the progress being made given the often difficult circumstances.

Table 5: The questions prescribed by the joint staff assessments guidelines:

Participation Process	1. Does the PRSP describe the participatory process that the government conducted to design and to build ownership for the strategy?
	2. Does the PRSP summarize major issues raised during the participatory process and the impacts of the process on the content of the strategy? How has the participatory process evolved over time?
	3. How closely is the PRSP related to any other current government documents that set forth national or sectoral development plans and/or budgets?
	4. What are the plans for public dissemination of the PRSP?
Poverty Diagnosis	How adequate are existing poverty data?
	To what extent have the growth and distributional impacts of past policies and programs been assessed?

Source: (World bank, s.d.)

Consequently one could conclude that a first step in obtaining clear and candid answers out of the JSA process would be to ask the right questions. If an evaluation of the participation processes is truly wanted then the guidelines should be altered into questions regarding the participation processes rather than the quality of its description in certain key documents. This issue is inextricably linked to the fact that all PRSPs needed to be rated acceptable. If the participation processes themselves rather than their description were scrutinised, it would be even more difficult to let them all be marked “acceptable”. Therefore in order to really alter these questions, the built-in bias to provide an approval should be tackled (Thomas, 2004). Furthermore, in accordance with the critique of the independent evaluations, we found that not all of the questions in guidelines are consistently answered for all JSAs.

What are the evaluation criteria used by the Joint Staff to evaluate the participation process?

A second dimension in determining to what extent it is clear how the assessments take place, is to have a look at the benchmarks or evaluation cri-

teria that were used. However, no explicit benchmarks or evaluation criteria were specified. Nor did the guidelines prescribe what criteria to use. Since no explicit criteria were mentioned, we have tried to extrapolate the criteria that were implicitly used, by listing the different arguments that were used to assess the participation process. A list of positive and negative criteria was made for every assessment. Table 6 shows the frequency with which the criteria were used. At the positive arguments side, “*Wide extensive participatory process*” was used in 17 of the 35 cases. This sentence was almost used as a standard opening line, much like the assertion that participation was one of the strong points. A similar logic emerges from the negative criteria.

The argument ‘*Need for deepening and institutionalising the participation process*’ was used fifteen times. This argument is rather vague and very politically correct, since most participation processes, even the ones that have performed quite well can still improve the institutionalisation of the process. The second most frequently used critique is the ‘*Need to enhance the role of parliamentarians*’, which in our opinion is a much more clear, critical and verifiable criterion. At the other end of the frequency table we find criteria like ‘*time constraints*’ and ‘*Macro-economic issues were not discussed by all stakeholders*’, issues that are nevertheless invoked time and again by both nongovernmental actors and recipient governments.

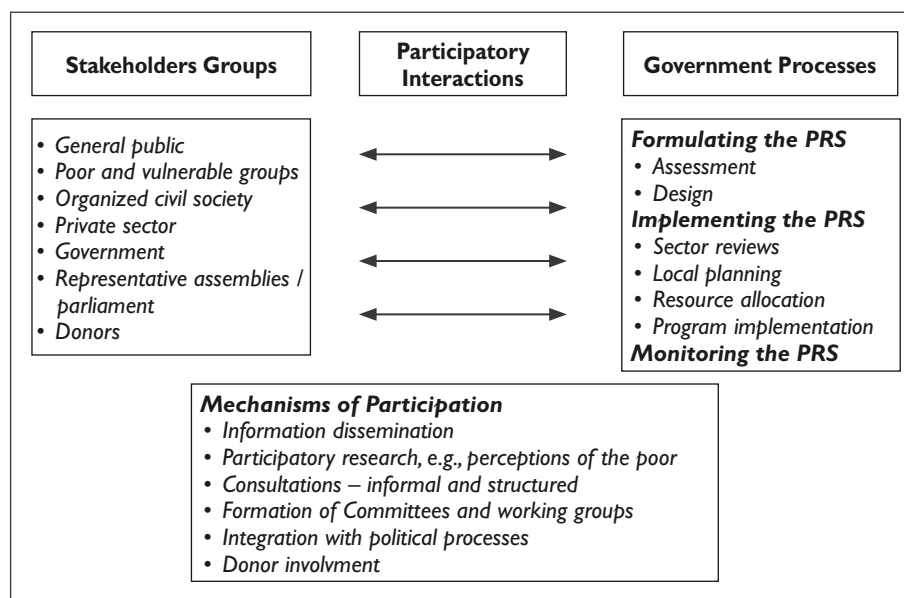
Table 6: Evaluation criteria:

Positively Evaluated Criteria		Negatively Evaluated Criteria	
Wide extensive participatory process	17	Need for deepening and institutionalising the participation process	15
Document was approved by parliament	4	Need to enhance the role of parliamentarians	8
High responsiveness of government to stakeholders' views	3	Need to further develop a participatory framework for the monitoring and evaluation of the PRSP	7
Good information dissemination	3	The poor were not sufficiently involved in the participation process	4
Availability in local languages	3	Government experienced capacity constraints	3
Inclusion of women in the process	3	Women's participation was not adequate	3
Good partnership with ngos	2	Participation of people from rural/ remote areas was limited	3
Participation is being institutionalised	2	Capacity constraints faced all relevant players	2
Inclusion of political parties	1	Problems with translation of documents	2
Participation also in discussion of macro economic issues	1	Limited capacity of civil society	2
Inclusion of ethnic groups	1	Limited inclusion of cross-cutting issues as for example gender	2
Inclusion of local authorities	1	Skepticism among population	1
Participation as joint decision making	1	Problems with security Situation	1
Reaching the poor	1	Time constraints	1
Inclusion of participants across the political spectrum	1	Macro-economic issues were not discussed by all stakeholders	1

To be able to assess more accurately which criteria were used to evaluate the participation process and to find out what the main obstacles and successes were, we have listed 99 out of 147 arguments used to evaluate the process either positively or in a negative way.⁷ Although some of these arguments as well as their label as either positive or negative criteria are debatable and not uniformly assessed by academia (for example the inclusion of political parties as a positive or negative criteria), we feel it would be possible to compile a list of criteria to be systematically checked for each PRSP. Based on the scheme below, provided by the PRSP Sourcebook's chapter on participation, it would not be impossible to construct a rudimentary checklist of criteria to use in order to evaluate the participation process. This checklist should encompass criteria assessing the extent to which different stakeholder groups (Figure 1) were involved as well as regarding the mechanisms of participation (Figure 1). The different dimensions of participation (information sharing, consultation, joint-decision making etc.) should also be incorporated. Furthermore, the PRSP Sourcebook's chapter on participation makes a list of the key inputs they recommend when designing a participatory process; included are for example a public information strategy, national workshops, participatory choice of antipoverty actions, preparation of alternative PRSPs or policy proposals. These criteria have been mentioned occasionally in the JSAs but were never consistently checked for all JSAs. Compiling such a checklist of criteria is nevertheless not in the line of this paper, since this would require an extensive review of all literature regarding participation processes and as such constitute a whole new research question.

⁷ In 9 out of the 35 JSAs relative criteria were used (Albania, Azerbaijan, Cambodia, Chad, Ethiopia, Malawi, Mauritania, Mozambique and Niger). In reality this means that the assessment was based on the starting position of the country. For example, in the Albanian review the joint staff states, "given Albania's history, the government was open to public participation". Two remarks should be made concerning these relative criteria. First, the use of relative statements seems to point in the direction of the findings of the World Bank and the IMF's evaluations; namely that JSAs suffer from a lack of clarity and candid evaluation. These relative statements could easily obscure the weaknesses of a participation process by concentrating on the fact that "given the circumstances" the actual participation was quite an achievement. This loophole could explain why this "fuzzy" type of assessment is used nine times. It would be very interesting to relate these relative assessments with measures of change over time. If, as stated in the Albanian JSA, the participation has induced an openness that is considerable when compared to the openness before this process, this should be reflected in the change in variables like "voice and participation". However the availability of recent data and the fact that most PRSPs are still recent inhibits this kind of research; comparing variables before and after the participation process. Secondly, these relative statements pose a problem. Relative statements cannot be compared or correlated with absolute statements. Seeing that it is only applicable on nine arguments (out of a total of 147), these relative arguments will be omitted as either positive or negative criteria. Moreover, we will attempt not to let our rating be influenced by those arguments. Thus only absolute criteria are to be used as a basis for our research.

Figure 1: Participation in Government Processes

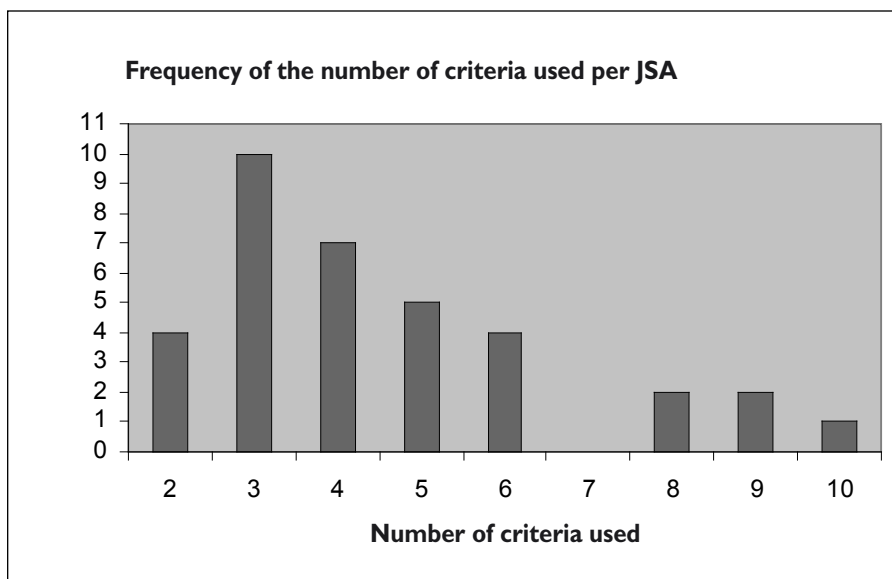


Source: World Bank, 2003, p238.

Returning to our research questions, there is not only an important difference in the amount of times certain arguments are used to rate a participation process as successful on the aggregate level (for example “document approved by parliament” was mentioned 4 times), there is also a substantial variation in the number of criteria used in each JSA.

As is depicted in the graph below, the number of criteria used, varies between two and ten. The average number of criteria used per JSA is 4.54 criteria, including both positive and negative criteria. In forty percent of all JSAs no more than three criteria are used to evaluate the participation process, whereas in 14.3 percent of the cases eight criteria or more are listed. Using the number of criteria per JSA as a proxy for analytical quality, these findings quantify the criticism of the independent evaluations, namely that there are large differences in analytical quality between assessments. If some countries are assessed on a mere two criteria, others are screened more thoroughly by checking up to ten criteria. Hence, the clarity of the procedure might be enhanced as an equal number of explicitly mentioned criteria were to be analyzed for all JSAs alike.

Graph 1: The number of criteria used per assessment:



The evaluations of both IMF and World Bank highlighted the need for clearer evaluations and the possible use of benchmarks to systematize the assessments. Our analysis of the criteria used by the joint staffs tends to agree with the critiques made by those evaluations. Using some of the criteria listed as a checklist and evaluating those in a same manner for all PRSPs could address the need for a clearer evaluation.

B. *Do the assessments made by the joint staff lack candour?*

If so, why?

A second question that needs to be verified is the question with regard to the candid nature of the assessments. As expressed by the independent evaluations the built-in bias of reaching an “acceptable strategy” as an answer, can prevent criticism. Not one assessment of the full PRSPs up until now has been rated “not acceptable”. Are the strategies and specifically the participation processes indeed all acceptable or do the joint staffs mask their shortcomings? One way to find out is to correlate the evaluations with certain socio-political indicators, approved or even constructed by the World Bank itself, and test the consistency of the assessments with those indicators. We will gauge the relation between our joint staff assessment scores and successively “civil liberties”, “political rights” and the “voice and accountability” of the respective recipient countries. We will conduct our research based on the underlying assumption that in reality there is a relation between the strength of some basic socio-political variables like “civil liberties”, “political rights” and “voice& accountability” on the one hand and the quality of participation processes possible on the other hand. Various scholars endorse this assumption. Elberlei (2001) acknowledges that institutionalised participation needs basic political rights as well as specific rights of participation within the concrete PRS context. He enumerates basic rights like freedom of opinion, information, media and association as examples of rights crucial to participation. Furthermore, political structures are considered equally important for dialogue between all stakeholders both at the regional and at the local level. Competences and rights need to be clearly stated. An open information policy of the government, which allows a comprehensive insight into the implementation of the PRSP is considered conducive to participation as well (Elberlei, 2001). The issues raised above are captured by the variables “civil rights”, “political rights” and “voice and participation”, the socio-political variables that will be used in our analysis. We do not pretend to be able to predict how strong this theorized relation should be. We do however feel that the absence of any relation would be a remarkable finding. The lack of any relation between those respective ratings and the evaluations of the joint staff will indeed therefore lead us to conclude that the candour of the assessments could be questioned.

Relation between the strength of the participation process and the civil liberties and political rights:

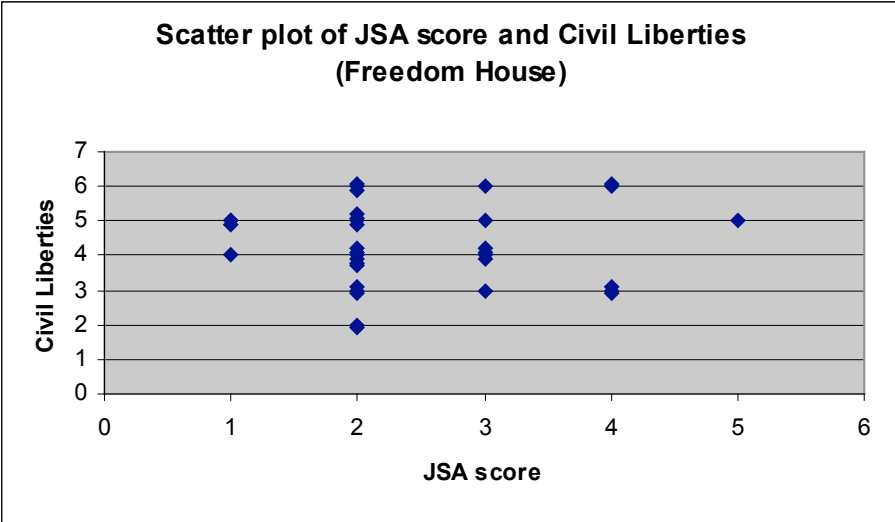
We now turn to the possible relation between the civil liberties bestowed upon individuals of a country and the JSA appraisal of its participation processes. The logic behind this analysis is the link between the JSA score and some basic conditions in order to assess a participation process as being ‘acceptable’. A first condition, which needs to be fulfilled, is a basic level of civil liberties. We shall use the definition put forward by Freedom House:

Civil liberties allow for the freedoms of expression and belief, associational and organizational rights, rule of law, and personal autonomy without interference from the state. (Freedom house, 2004)

Freedom house is a very highly valued data source, which is illustrated by the huge amount of studies, including those of the World Bank, using their indices of freedom as indicators. Freedom house assesses the civil liberties of 192 countries by attributing each of them a score between 1 and 7, with 1 representing high civil liberties and 7 very restricted civil liberties. One would expect, in accordance with Elberlei’s assertions, to find a substantial negative relationship between those two variables, because when civil liberties are very minimal (a high score on Freedom house civil liberties) the participation process will suffer from this lack of freedom of expression, organisation (a low score on the JSAs). However the Kendall’s rank correlation coefficient⁸ of “civil liberties” freedom house index and JSA score on participation process is -0.057. This does not represent a strong association between these two variables. On the contrary, this finding suggests there is no relation between both variables, thereby corroborating the findings of the independent evaluations.

Furthermore, the scatter plot does not seem to suggest a relation between the JSA score and the “civil liberties” in that country either. As stated above we do not pretend to know how strong the theorised relation between civil liberties and the quality of participation processes should be, but the clear absence of any relation constitutes a remarkable finding.

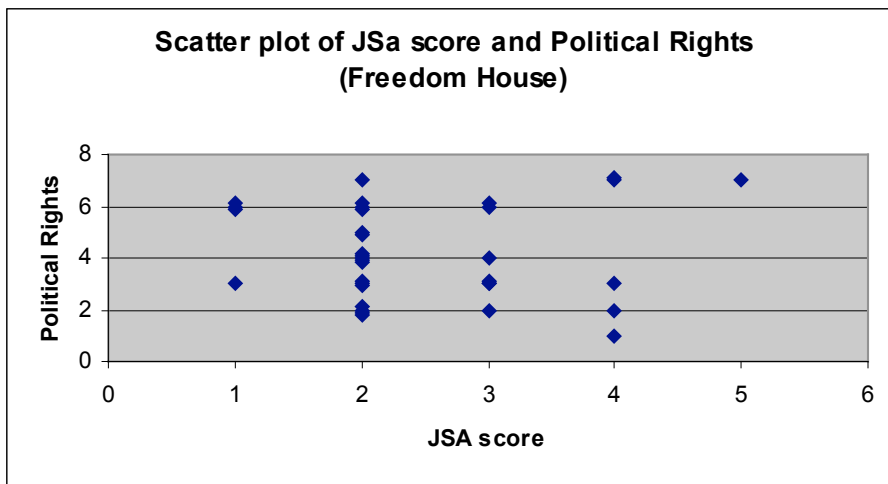
⁸The Kendall's rank correlation coefficient is a rank correlation coefficient used when both variables represent ordinal data in a limited number of grades, such as in our research for example the categories poor, moderate, and good, so that multiple samples can be assigned to each grade. The Kendall's rank correlation coefficient varies between +1 (perfect positive association) and -1 (perfect negative association). A correlation coefficient of zero means that there is no relationship between the variables.



A second indicator compiled by Freedom house is the index of “political rights”. Political rights are defined as:

Political rights enable people to participate freely in the political process. This includes the right to vote and compete for public office and to elect representatives who have a decisive vote on public policies. (Freedom house, 2004)

The political rights index attributes a score to each country on a scale from 1 to 7, with 7 representing the most restricted political rights. The same line of reasoning as with the civil liberties holds also for the political rights. A negative relation is to be expected based on our underlying assumption that political rights are conducive to the quality of the participation processes. However no relation is found between the JSAs scores and the political rights index (Kendall rank correlation coefficient = -0.033). The scatter plot does not seem to suggest an association between those two variables either.



A third index is used by Freedom house to indicate the level of freedom citizens in a specific country enjoy; the composite index. This index is constructed as a non-weighted average of the two separate indices (political rights and civil liberties). Ranging from 1 to 7, countries are considered to be free (average from 1- 2.5 = F), partly free (average from 3-5.5 =PF) or not free (average from 5.5 to 7 = NF). When distributing the different freedom house categories among the various JSA categories, a much-dispersed image is obtained. We would expect that the “Free” countries would be at the “good” end of the JSA score scale, while finding more “Not Free” countries at the “poor” end of the continuum. Surprisingly, the highest score of the JSA scores (score = 5) is rated “Not Free”. Moreover, 75 percent of the JSAs of the two highest categories (score = 4 or 5) are rated ”Not Free”. Furthermore only one of the lowest category (score=1) JSA scores is a “Not Free” country. This table shows that no clear relation is to be detected between the JSA scores and the Freedom House composite index.

Table 8: Distribution of composite freedom house index over the five JSA assessments categories⁹

Category	5 = good	4	3 = inadequate	2	1 = poor
N= 35	1	3	8	18	5
	NF=1	NF=2	NF= 2	NF=6	NF=1
		PF= /	PF = 5	PF=9	PF=2
		F=1	F= 1	F=3	F=2

⁹ Freedom house Ratings 2002 F= Free= 7; Benin, Bolivia, Ghana, Guyana, Honduras, Mali, Mongolia PF= Partly Free= 16; Albania, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Georgia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Nepal, Nicaragua, Niger, Tanzania, Senegal, Sri Lanka, Zambia NF= Not Free= 12; Cambodia, Cameroon, Chad, Gambia, Guinea, Kyrgyz Republic, Mauritania, Pakistan, Rwanda, Tajikistan, Yemen, Vietnam

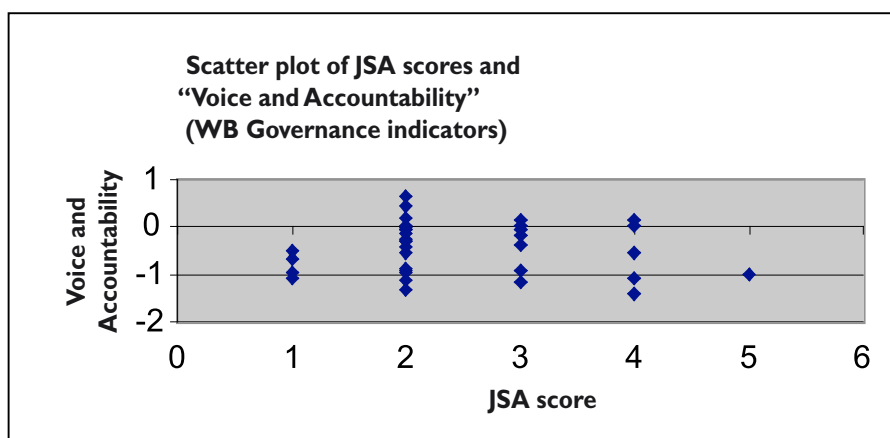
The results, the rank correlation coefficients as well as the scatter plots and the table, do not indicate a relation in either direction between the strength of the participation process and the freedom index of the country. Given the assumption based on Elberlei and other scholars, these findings seem to suggest a discrepancy between the evaluations made by the joint staff and what is the actual reality of the country, as it is measured by these indices.

Relation between the strength of the participation process and “voice and accountability”: (World Bank Governance Indicators)

Kaufmann, Kraay and Mastruzzi (2003) constructed as a World Bank Research Paper a database on governance. The governance indicator they constructed consists of six sub dimensions. One of those sub dimensions is ‘voice and accountability’. Voice and accountability as defined by the World Bank is “ the extent to which citizens of a country are able to participate in the selection of governments.” The World Bank finds it necessary for civil society and civilians in recipient countries to have sufficient ‘voice’ not only to influence the selection of governments but also to actively co-construct their national poverty reduction strategies. As mentioned above, the participation logic derives from this assertion that country ownership is crucial to enhance the effectiveness of development aid. To reach this country ownership a large scale participation of civil society should take place. When lacking voice, no genuine participation is possible. Therefore a minimum standard of voice could be seen as a necessary condition for genuine participation processes.

This indicator is a composite index of seven representative data sources¹⁰ and six unrepresentative data sources. One of the six representative sources is the Freedom house index used in the analysis above. However, the combination with the other eleven databases does constitute a new variable and thus worth analysing the relation of the strength of the participation process and “voice and accountability”. We would expect to find a strong positive correlation coefficient since more voice and accountability (score ranging from -2.5 to + 2.5) in a country should be conducive to the quality of the participation process (score ranging from 1 to 5)

¹⁰The seven representative sources are: Columbia University (State Capacity Project), Economist Intelligence Unit (Country Risk Service), Freedom House (Freedom in the World), State Department / Amnesty International (Human Rights Report), Political Risk Services (International Country Risk Guide), Reporters Without Borders, World Markets Research Center (World Markets Online). The six non-representative sources are: Afrobarometer Survey, Freedom House (Nations in Transition), Gallup International (Voice of the People Survey), World Economic Forum (Global Competitiveness Report), Latinobarometro Surveys en Institute for Management and Development (World Competitiveness Yearbook).



The Kendall rank correlation coefficient of the Joint Staff Assessments scores and the “voice and accountability” variable is -0.037. This coefficient refutes the possibility of a strong, positive relation between the two variables. In addition, the table does not contradict the lack of relation between the two variables. The lack of a clear positive relation between these two variables does seem to endorse the thesis that the assessments could be lacking candour, since there is no consistency between the “voice”- variable, which is compiled by the World Bank itself, and the assessments made by its joint staff, although theory predicts a positive relation between these two variables.

C. *Do these previous results (JSA score and the number of criteria used) vary over time?*

A final question we wish to embark upon is the time dimension in the critiques made towards the joint staff assessments. More specifically, two questions will be answered; First, do the assessments of the participation processes tend to become more critical over time or rather the opposite? Secondly, are the more recent assessments more nuanced, meaning that more criteria are being taken into consideration?

Did the assessments become more critical over time?

Various hypotheses could come to mind when theorizing about the possible changes of the nature of the Joint Staff Assessments over time. Two possible hypotheses will be presented briefly before analysing the data. We do however not pretend to provide an exhaustive overview of all possible hypotheses concerning this issue. A first evolution that could be expected is an evolution on the part of the staff. The staff of both World Bank and IMF is not completely isolated from outside critiques and input. It would be possible that being confronted with criticism from international ngo’s, donor agencies as well as from academia, renders the evaluators more critical. If this hypothesis were true, all else being equal, the JSA scores should become lower over time, since the evaluators are less lenient. The table below shows an accumulation of poverty reduction strategy papers in 2002 and 2003. Only one staff assessment was available from 2004 at the time we started with this analysis. With a view to evaluating the evolution in time of the JSA scores, the average scores for each year were calculated.

¹¹ Only until 09/02/2004

Table 10: *The JSAs score differentiated according to the date of the joint staff assessments*

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004¹¹
Number of PRSPs	2	4	14	14	1
Average score	2.00	2.75	2.79	2.21	1.00

The table does not present a clear pattern of a decrease in JSA scores over time. The evolution depicted in the table shows a steady rising of the JSA scores, respectively 2.00 in 2000, 2.75 in 2001 and 2.79 in 2003. In 2003 the average JSA score falls back to 2.21. Therefore we shall conclude there is no

evidence suggesting a change in the evaluation scores as suggested by the hypothesis of the evolution of the attitude of the staff.

A second hypothesis worth taking a look at is that of the millennium rush. Time cannot only bring about changes on the staff-side, but timing could also play a crucial role in the type of countries applying for the PRSP-process. Could it be possible that at certain periods countries less fit for PRSP participation processes applied systematically more than in other periods? One possible explanation could be the millennium rush. This Millennium rush hypothesis has been put forward in the context of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC). The hypothesis states that there was increased flexibility of the implementation of this initiative at the beginning of the new millennium. Between 1996 and 1999 only seven countries became eligible for debt relief under the Original HIPC Initiative (O-HIPC). However, when approaching the turn of the millennium, pressure from international NGO-networks intensified. The pressure from these global ngo-networks combined with the impatience of the Development Committee, resulted in an Enhanced HIPC initiative, in which a clear relation with Poverty Reduction and debt reduction was made, as well as extending the list of countries that were eligible to embark upon this process. The World Bank and IMF promised to bring at least 20 countries to decision point by December 2000, in which they succeeded (22 countries by 27 December 2000). Based on this information it could well be possible that the first group of countries, the ones that were going to be admitted to start with the HIPC-process, have distinct characteristics from those countries forced into the process under considerable pressure. Although this hypothesis originated in the context of the HIPC debt relief and not within the context of PRSP and its participation conditionality as such, it might be interesting to check its relevance for the PRSP. In order to verify this hypothesis, we have constructed three groups, based on the HIPC status under which they have achieved decision point. A first group encloses all countries that were selected by the IFI's to participate under the original HIPC scheme. These countries are Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Mozambique, Uganda, Guyana, Mali and Côte d'Ivoire. Since Côte d'Ivoire has not prepared a PRSP document, given that it reached decision point under the original framework, it will not be included in our analysis. Uganda is not included in our research sample either. This group of five countries will be identified as "pre-millennium rush". The second group holds those countries that were in fact admitted under the enhanced framework before the end of 2000 (millennium rush group). This group consists of fourteen countries: Mauritania, Benin, Cameroon, The Gambia, Guinea, Honduras, Madagascar, Malawi, Nicaragua, Rwanda, Senegal and Zambia. The third group consists of all other countries ("post millennium rush").

In order to corroborate this hypothesis, our analysis of the JSA scores, divided according to those three groups, should show a high average JSA score for the first group, followed by a low score in the second group. What to expect of the third group based on this hypothesis is not completely clear.

Table 11: JSA score differentiated over time

Period	Pre-Millennium Rush	Millennium Rush	Post-Millennium Rush
N= 35	5	14	16
Average JSA score	2.4	3.0	2.0
Average FH civil lib	3.2	4.14	4.75
Average FH pol rights	2.4	4.43	4.69

The average JSA scores do not confirm the hypothesis of the millennium rush. In fact the average scores, which should have been higher for the pre-millennium rush group than for the millennium group according to the hypothesis, are exactly the opposite of what was expected. The millennium rush group has a higher average JSA score (3.0) than those countries, which were admitted under the original HIPC framework (2.4). However, both the scores of the Freedom House civil liberties and the political rights confirm the millennium rush hypothesis. On a seven-item scale, with seven representing the least civil liberties and political rights, the pre-millennium group is rated better than its millennium rush counterpart. Thus, although the pre-millennium group scores better on both political rights and civil liberties, as measured by Freedom House, the average JSA scores present us with a reversed image. This finding is a remarkable one.

Did the assessments become more nuanced over time?

The number of criteria used could serve as a proxy for the analytical quality of the Joint Staff Assessments. As one of the criticisms was the variation in analytical quality among the JSAs, it would be interesting to find out if there has been any improvement in this respect over the last few years. Consequently we have calculated the average number of criteria per assessment used to describe the participation process (“more nuance”) for each of the five years. The results are depicted in the table below:

Table 12: The number of evaluation criteria used and the date of joint staff assessments:

Year	2000&2001	2002	2003 & 2004
N= 35	2 + 4	14	14 + 1
Average number of criteria used to assess the participation process	4.83	4.36	4.60

Since there is only one observation of the year 2004 and only two in 2000, we will not consider these observations to be representative averages for the respective years. Therefore we have opted to add the observations of the year 2000 to those of 2001 and the one observation of 2004 to those of the year 2003. These results seem to suggest no substantial change in the number of criteria used to assess the participation over time. The analytical quality thus has not changed significantly over these years.

5. Conclusion

This paper started by presenting the critiques formulated by the independent reviews of both the World Bank and the IMF. The purpose of this analysis was to verify the critiques uttered by those evaluations and to deepen the analysis. We found that the allegations of the reviews were not contradicted by our analysis, in fact our findings seem to corroborate those critiques. The main findings and the main reasons for these shortcomings are summarised in what follows.

In order to provide a clear appraisal system, one of the first prerequisites should be a number of questions that correspond to the information you wish to obtain. This is not the case with the Joint Staff Assessments. While the independent evaluations criticize the lack of clarity and candid assessments, they should start by denouncing asking the wrong questions. Therefore, instead of evaluating the description of the process in the document, the participation processes themselves should be evaluated.

Moreover, besides asking the right questions, you should try answering in such a way that they are clear, verifiable and comparable among each other. Our analysis of the criteria implicitly used by the JSAs, finds that such clarity is lacking. Both the deficiency of clear benchmarks to assess the participation process, as well as the inconsistent manner of checking criteria (criteria used per country range from 2 to 10) contribute to the fuzziness and possible euphemisms that are instrumental in rating all PRSPs as acceptable. As became clear from the criteria listed in Table 6, the fuzziest arguments were the most frequently used. If the link between the joint staff assessments and the acceptance of the PRSP by the IFIs was dissolved or at least lessened, a more critical review might be possible, in which some clear criteria, which are publicly available, are used as benchmarks and checked with all countries' PRSPs in the same way.

This review also found the lack of any relation between basic socio-political variables, which are stated to be conducive to participation processes by various scholars and the actual assessments of those processes, remarkable. We feel that these findings can be interpreted as an indication supporting the theses of the independent evaluations; namely the assertion that assessments are not candid because of the need to provide a positive answer, even for those countries that do not allow their citizens some of the basic civil liberties, political rights or a climate conducive to a minimum of voice and accountability. Once again, the cause of the caution of the joint staff can be found in the constellation of the IFIs' conception of their mandate. How can one thoroughly scrutinise a participation process, without becoming "political"?

Finally, the evolution in time of these previous factors was analyzed. Neither did the evolution in time of the average JSA-score corroborate nor the "learning by the joint staff"- hypothesis, nor did it seem to endorse the "millennium rush"- hypothesis. Moreover, the number of criteria used in each joint staff assessments (as a proxy for analytical quality) on average remained more or less constant when diversified over the different years.

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Annex 1:

Date of submission of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and date of elaboration of Joint Staff Assessments.*

* The highlighted countries are not included in our deskbased analysis.

	Country	PRSP	Joint Staff Assessment
1	Albania	2/21/02	6/20/02
2	Armenia	11/20/03	12/2/03
3	Azerbaijan	5/14/03	5/29/03
4	Benin	3/6/03	4/29/03
5	Bhutan	8/11/04	/
6	Bosnia Herzegovina	3/1/04	/
7	Bolivia	3/1/01	5/10/01
8	Burkina Faso	5/25/00	6/7/00
9	Cambodia	1/29/03	1/23/03
10	Cameroon	8/12/03	8/29/03
11	Chad	7/17/03	10/6/03
12	Djibouti	3/31/04	5/12/04
13	Ethiopia	10/9/02	10/9/02
14	Georgia	8/27/03	11/7/03
15	Ghana	3/6/03	5/19/03
16	Guinea	7/17/02	8/23/02
17	Guyana	5/3/02	10/31/02
18	Honduras	9/27/01	10/15/01
19	Kyrgyz Republic	1/23/03	2/26/03
20	Madagascar	10/17/03	10/22/03
21	Malawi	8/6/02	8/30/02
22	Mali	2/27/03	3/11/03
23	Mauritania	12/13/00	5/15/01
24	Mongolia	9/3/03	9/22/03
25	Mozambique	10/1/01	10/1/01
26	Nepal	10/1/03	11/21/03
27	Nicaragua	9/13/01	9/19/01
28	Niger	1/31/02	2/12/02
29	Pakistan	2/9/04	2/12/04
30	Rwanda	7/31/02	8/9/02
31	Senegal	11/20/02	1/31/03
32	Serbia and Montenegro	2/18/04	/
33	Sri Lanka	2/26/03	4/22/03
34	Tajikistan	10/10/02	12/16/02
35	Tanzania	10/1/00	11/2/00
36	The Gambia	7/10/02	7/18/02
37	Uganda	3/24/00	3/9/01
38	Vietnam	5/31/02	3/8/04
39	Yemen	7/23/02	8/23/02
40	Zambia	5/16/02	5/23/02

Source: (World bank, 2004)

