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Child Rights in Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers - Evaluation of two PRSP-studies, published by Kindernoithilfe and Werkstatt Ökonomie in 2004 and 2005

Summary

To ensure that the resources, freed up by the debt relief under the HIPC II initiative, are really used to fight poverty in the heavily indebted poor countries, a new political instrument was adopted at the 1999 Cologne World Economic Summit, combining macroeconomic structural reforms with socio-political strategies.

The Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) differed significantly from traditional conditions for concessional loans. They were supposed to be based on a "comprehensive approach" and take into account cross-sectional issues. Most importantly, they were expected to emerge from participatory processes, involving various civil-society actors and persons affected. These principles gave rise to high expectations regarding the promotion of democracy in the creation process and the poverty-reducing effects of PRSPs.

However, PRSPs have been controversial among the international civil society right from the beginning because, already after the presentation of the first preliminary PRSPs, it turned out that the macroeconomic dimension of the country papers was targeted mainly at liberalisation and remained largely unaffected by participatory processes. In 2002-2007, when the major part of the first- and second-generation PRSPs were drawn up, the international debate centred around the chief criterion of the PRSP processes, participation. It was questioned in how far the poor were heard in the PRSP process and involved through civil society organisations.

PRSPs and the rights of the child – Studies by Kindernoithilfe

Against this backdrop the rights of the child and the efficient participation of children and youths failed to receive the desirable attention in the development political debate about PRSPs. Among the few publications on the question in how far the PRSPs a) promote the rights of the child and b) involve children and youths as political protagonists, the two studies "*Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers – blind to the rights of the (working) child?*" (2004) and "*Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers: Children First!*" (2005), published by Kindernoithilfe and Werkstatt Ökonomie, are of particular importance. The studies, that drew the interest of experts in Germany and abroad, corroborated that the rights of children and youths hardly play any role in the PRSP processes. When it comes to involving children and youths, the participatory processes had substantial shortcomings in many countries. The studies mark the initial point of the present evaluation. 20 years after the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), on the one hand, and ten years after the launch of the debt relief campaign, on the other hand, the effects of the studies were supposed to be examined and recorded. For that purpose Kindernoithilfe's subsequent work on the topics of the rights of the

child and PRSPs was evaluated together with secondary material. In addition, representatives of official development aid (ODA) organisations, the civil society and from the fields of science and politics were met for interviews.

Impact

Both topics – a) the promotion of the rights of the child for their active contribution to the shaping of society and b) the poverty reduction strategies in their 10th year of existence – are currently not very high up on the development political agenda. So it was difficult to weigh a (direct) impact of the studies on PRSP processes and the rights of the child from this small topical intersection.

There is limited evidence of a direct political impact of the studies beyond the attention given to their contents. This includes the technical discussion with German federal MPs (2006) that culminated in substantial decisions about a child rights perspective in strategic poverty reduction. However these decisions were not put into practice in the following. On the other hand, there is reason to assume that debates, strategy papers and political guidelines of the development political community were influenced indirectly by the studies as well. This includes firstly the reception of the claims, made in the first study, by the World Bank that published them on its website, secondly the explicit and repeated reference to the first study in the Global Report of the International Labour Organisation (ILO 2006) on the abolition of child labour and thirdly unequivocal reference to the results of the studies in a Fact Sheet of the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) drawn up in 2008.

The fact that the responsible editors of the studies published various technical articles in professional journals constitutes another dimension of the impact. As a consequence, the development political community took much notice of the study and, above all, of the topic of "poverty reduction and the rights of the child".

Kindernothilfe's promotion of the rights of the child in PRSP processes was complemented by events dealing with the specific topic and expert discussions with various—and partly high-level—representatives from the field of politics and federations. In cooperation with Werkstatt Ökonomie, the German NGO Forum against Child Labour and VENRO, the second study was a) presented to the Federal President Horst Köhler in a highly visible act in September 2005 right after its publication, followed b) by a technical discussion with German federal MPs in January 2006 and c) by an internal seminar of the Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), a so-called 'Midday Discussion', in February 2006.

Conclusions

The evaluation of the contributions made by Kindernothilfe during the last 50 years in an attempt to strengthen children and their rights shows unmistakably that the efforts have not been solely geared towards reducing poverty, but that they have also been focused on structural approaches to a development policy that really takes children into account. Both studies about the national PRSPs managed to catch the attention of the professional public at the right time, highlighting the importance that PRSP processes in the context of international cooperation have or can have to improve all aspects of the child's situation - if they are shaped accordingly.

The difficulty to deduce a direct and broad effect of the studies from the small topical intersection of PRSPs and the rights of the child is primarily due to the fact that PRSPs have lost their weight in the international political debate. Although they are meanwhile part and parcel of the operative ODA, the political attention of the development political community is currently focused on a reform of the development aid architecture, emergency relief and global crisis management. Moreover, there are other specific reasons that apply not only to child rights organisations:

- *"The rights of the child are treated like children themselves: They are not taken seriously"*: This assessment of the child rights experts goes back to the more comprehensive criticism that the paradigm shift from the aid efficiency to the human rights approach is still far from effective in international development cooperation.
- *"The introduction of the rights of the child as a cross-sectional topic is one of the claims in development cooperation. Instead, it is felt to be an overload"*: In the daily life of the institutions, the growing political demands that the development cooperation faces can often be solved by prioritisation alone. However, concerning the claim to treat the "rights of the child" as a cross-sectional topic, there are no assessment criteria or parameters to measure the child rights effectiveness of development projects.
- *"The development political civil society tends to consider poverty reduction as a structural issue and is losing sight of the poorest of the poor"*: Development policies are structural policies—not only for the governments' ODA. Especially protagonists from the civil society can lose sight of their advocacy work in favour of children and their right to protection, provision and participation, as the political discussion scales up and macro-political questions are put on the agenda.
- *"Public and non-public actors should cooperate more closely"*: In addition to the policy of broad alliances and networking among the civil society, the dialogue between child rights advocates from the public and non-public sphere of development cooperation should become more steady and make use of synergisms.

Most essential recommendations

- A **request in writing** to Germany's ODA steering and implementing organisations concerning programme and country evaluations, so as to find out whether and in how far the rights of the child and the participation of children play a role in local processes aimed at strategic poverty reduction.
- The **organisation of an expert round table** of child rights advocates by Kindernothilfe to consider the importance of the rights of the child in the light of the reform of the development cooperation and the economic crisis, starting from the results of this evaluation.
- The realisation of a **comparative case study** (two countries) on the above mentioned scenario of the reform of the development cooperation, so as to compare the bottlenecks, challenges and good starting points for the mainstreaming of the rights of the child in partner countries. What development do the processes of aid vs. development effectiveness take with regard to the rights of the child?
- Strengthening the development political **"action research"** and liaising with the Centre for Advanced Training in Rural Development (SLE) in Berlin for the purpose of realising local case studies. The annual learning groups could work on topics proposed by Kindernothilfe ("Climate change and children's rights" or "Donor harmonisation and children's rights").

Publisher of the Evaluation: Kindernothilfe
Editor: Dr. Birte Rodenberg

Berlin, October 2009

Translation: Barbara Kochhan (April 2010)