

# WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE OPTIONAL MODULE ON INCLUSIVE OWNERSHIP AND WHAT IS THE WAY FORWARD?

## INTRODUCTION

In Accra, development partners acknowledged the need to define ownership more broadly, i.e. beyond the executive branches of central governments. Consequently, in the Accra Agenda for Action, partner countries committed to work more closely with state and non-state stakeholders [AAA §13a, 20], while donors committed to strengthen country ownership by supporting demand-driven efforts to increase the capacity of all development actors [AAA §13b].

To shed light on the progress against these commitments, the 2011 Survey on Monitoring the Paris Declaration included - for the first time - a set of optional questions on the extent to which national stakeholders participate in the stages of the planning cycle of the national development strategy - i.e. formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation - and the quality of this participation.

This set of optional questions constitutes the “optional module on inclusive ownership”, which 14 out of the 78 countries participating in the 2011 Survey on Monitoring the Paris Declaration decided to complete (see table 1).

Despite the relatively low number of responses collected, the module is a unique source of information on how stakeholders participate in the policy dialogue around development processes at country level. Responses highlight that, in most cases, state and non-state actors have been involved in the processes around the national development strategy, mainly in its formulation phase and through information-sharing and consultations. Different groups of stakeholders participated to different degrees in the various countries. However, the quality of this participation strongly depended on capacity, sustainability and political will for effective engagement.

In some countries the module was completed through consultations among various stakeholders; in such cases, the module served the purpose of collecting data, but it also catalysed dialogue and a reflection on ownership at country level.

What follows is an illustration of key findings from the module, together with a short discussion on the limitations as well as the lessons that this module bears. As it remains imperative to keep the momentum high on broad-based development processes, it is crucial that development partners discuss how to monitor efforts in this area most effectively. The dimensions to monitor and how to monitor them – for example relying on other existing indicators- will have to be further discussed and agreed. Monitoring these efforts can help promote development processes that - by bringing together a wide range of national stakeholders - lead to greater and faster growth and equality in partner countries.

## WHO ANSWERED THE MODULE AND HOW?

The optional module on inclusive ownership consists of 14 qualitative questions that look into three specific areas:

1. The mechanisms established to facilitate the participation of national stakeholders in the national development strategy, and how these mechanisms are positioned in relation to the overall institutional framework and existing permanent consultative/participatory processes in the country.
2. The nature and quality of participation of specific groups of stakeholders.
3. An overall self-assessment of the participatory process around national development strategies at country level.

Out of 78 countries participating in the survey, 14 decided to complete the module. Seven of the responding countries are from Africa, one from Asia, two from Europe and four from Latin America.

<b>Europe (2)</b>	<b>Africa (7)</b>
Albania and Moldova	Gabon, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Niger, Togo and Zambia
<b>Latin America (4)</b>	<b>Asia (1)</b>
Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador and Honduras	Nepal

The module is voluntary and based on self-reporting. There was no standard procedure to complete the questionnaire; in some countries answers were mainly provided by governmental offices or by a consultant hired for this purpose; in others, answers were provided through consultations that involved government officials, donors, representatives of CSOs and other stakeholders.

In the latter case, answering the module has been in itself a participatory process, an opportunity for a wide range of stakeholders to sit together to discuss their views and agree on a common position. Respondents in El Salvador highlighted that the module has been a means to create space for consultations on subjects of national interest and to strengthen policy dialogue in ways that positively affected the broader process of defining a common agenda for national development across stakeholders.

#### BOX 1: WHO COMPLETED THE SURVEY?

**KENYA:** *“This survey has been completed by Government with input from the Kenya Women Parliamentarians (KEWOPA). The answers were validated in a workshop held on the 22nd of March 2011, which was attended by government agencies, donors and academics, as well as private sector representatives”.*

**MOLDOVA:** *“The survey was drawn up in a group composed of representatives of a number of civil society organizations involved in the process of the National Development Strategy development with participation of representatives from the Government and donors”.*

**NIGER:** stakeholders decided in a preliminary meeting that the Nigerien civil society would take the lead in responding to the module. Hence, a group of three civil society organisations was set-up and prepared answers to the module that were then presented for validation during a plenary meeting where all national stakeholders participating in the 2011 Monitoring Survey (core part) were invited.

## KEY FINDINGS

### PARTICIPATORY MECHANISMS

Respondents in all participating countries stated that national development strategies were formulated through a participatory process involving - at least to some extent – the Parliament, local governments and non-state stakeholders (e.g., civil society, private sector, unions, donors and researchers). Although there may have been broad and effective stakeholder participation during the formulation of the national development strategy, according to responses, none of the responding countries possesses a systematic and unified mechanism to allow participation of all actors beyond government in the policy process. Furthermore, the respondent countries lack evaluation mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of the participatory process in a systematic manner.

Answers to the module indicate that the operational rules of the participatory mechanism were not designed through an ex-ante consultation/discussion with state and non-state stakeholders, and no special measures were taken to ensure a balanced participation of stakeholders (i.e. special attention given to women and other vulnerable groups). However, in most cases a wide range of stakeholders seems to have been invited to join the participatory process, including vulnerable groups.

In most countries, participatory approaches included information-sharing and consultation with stakeholders, but did not involve joint decision making. While non-governmental actors were involved in the formulation of national development strategies, participation seems to remain limited in implementation and monitoring activities. Only in one country - Mali - was the participatory process reported to have covered the whole policy cycle, from formulation and approval to implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Responses to the module suggest that - to some extent - processes (e.g. lobbying, advocacy, demonstrations, research-based proposals...) were established to either complement or challenge the official participatory process.

**BOX 2: WERE ALTERNATIVE PROCESSES ESTABLISHED (e.g. lobbying, advocacy, demonstrations, research-based proposals...) AND HOW WERE THEY PERCEIVED?**

**MALAWI:** “While some parallel processes were put in place because of the dissatisfaction of some donors and non-state actors with the level of consultation around the national development strategy, other parallel processes have come about due to inactivity or non-functionality of formal processes”.

**MOLDOVA:** Respondents highlighted that parallel processes strengthen the institutional participatory mechanisms and “played an important role in the formulation as well as the review of the national development strategy, and in the design of programs and interventions for special interest groups e.g. vulnerable women.”

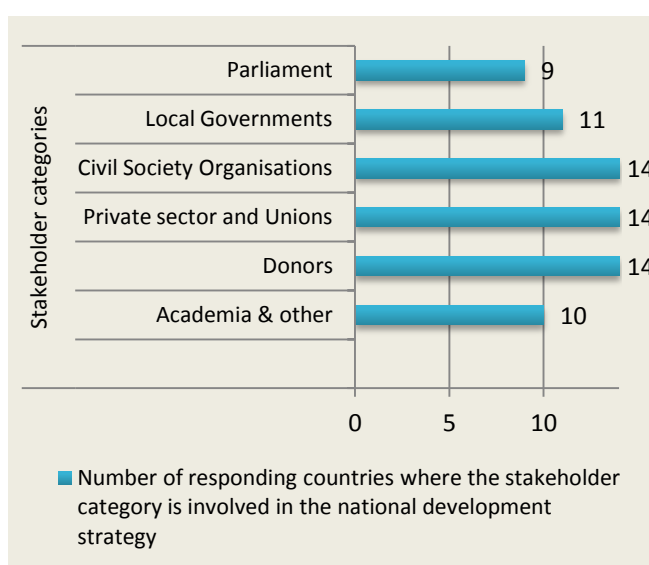
**NEPAL:** “GoN does not take such processes adopted by the non-state actors and donors as a challenge but rather as a complementary exercise. Some of the processes like aid mapping to identify donor-darling and donor-orphan sectors in Nepal were appreciated because these were rather new and innovative process. The outputs of such processes have been used by GoN policy makers; for example, the results of donor mapping jointly conducted by the WB and the MoF helped identify policy corrections and devise needful action plans”.

**QUALITY OF THE PARTICIPATORY PROCESS**

Responses suggest that civil society, social partners (i.e., private sector and unions) and donors participated in the national development strategy in all responding countries. Parliament, local governments, and the academia were reported to have participated in the national development strategy in several, but not all, responding countries. (see Figure 1 below).

Participation of **Parliaments** in the national development strategies and the review of development budgets seems to remain limited. In around half of the 14 countries, respondents state that parliaments are involved in the formulation of the national development strategy. In almost one third of the countries, these strategies are not discussed in Parliament, and none of the countries reported having specific parliamentary working groups to oversee the national development strategy.

**Figure 1: Categories of stakeholders involved**



**BOX 3: PARLIAMENT PARTICIPATION**

**MALI:** “After its adoption by the government, the CSCR is submitted to the Parliament’s Finance Commission for examination. The same process applies for the annual review of the CSCR. As a result, every year, the Coordinator of the Technical Cell of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (CT/CSLP) answers the questions of the Parliament’s Finance Commission on the reports of the CSCR review [...] the Parliament’s involvement remains weak”.

**GABON:** “A Commission will take charge of the file in Parliament, and plenary debates are planned to enrich this strategy. The Parliament is demanding, this time, that the document be especially examined so as to reflect the deep aspirations of the people it is meant to represent.”

**COLOMBIA:** “Parliament is the institution that approves the country’s National Plan of Development through various debates, established in the House as in the Senate alike. Furthermore, parliament acts beyond the approval of budget, as discussions are held to approve the thematic components of the development plan.”

Responses highlight that **local governments** participated in the national development strategy in more than three-quarters of the countries that responded to the module. In most cases, participation of local governments has been active, and motivated – at least in part - by local governments' pragmatic interest to influence the overarching strategy that will affect the priorities of regional development programmes. Some countries stated that such participation stimulated better co-ordination among local governments and contributed to strengthening their capacities (e.g. Ecuador, Nepal). Other countries point to insufficient human and financial resources as a major limiting factor to a fuller participation of local governments in the national development strategy (e.g. Malawi, Mali, Togo).

#### BOX 4: LOCAL GOVERNMENTS' PARTICIPATION

**ECUADOR:** *"In earlier periods, some local governments, provincial and cantonal, put in place planning exercises and participatory budget under different schemes and methodologies, generally with limited participation and the involvement of consultants and technicians. These local development plans - which were not linked to national planning - were not fully implemented. On the other hand, in the consultations held in round-tables for building the NDP, the presence of local governments was very important."*

**NIGER:** *"During the meetings on the wording of the national development strategy, the regional technical managers had been invited, and their contributions were appreciated. [...] In the past, these participants had less tools at their disposal, but the situation today has changed for the better, especially qualitatively."*

**ZAMBIA:** *"One limitation to the fuller participation of local councils in the NDP processes is incomplete decentralization. The capacities of local councils are not strong enough for them to participate effectively in the formulation and implementation of NDPs. The CSOs also perceive that local governments' participation mechanisms are very weak.."*

Respondents noted that **civil society** participated in the formulation/monitoring of the national development strategy generally through networks and umbrella organisations that coordinate organisations operating in a wide range of domains, such as: health, gender, education, poverty, environment, etc. While in some countries it was noted that all major actors from the civil society participated in the national development strategy (e.g. Nepal, Mali, Togo), in others, important actors were not invited to the consultations or their contributions were disregarded. Respondents cite a number of reasons for limited participation by CSOs, including: insufficient financial resources, poor internal organisation, limited legitimacy, and lack of timely access to information concerning the participatory process. Respondents in five countries considered CSOs participation is now stronger than in the past, while in one case it was perceived as weakening (the remaining seven countries did not respond to this question).

#### BOX 5: CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION

**ALBANIA:** *Obstacles to greater participation are: "(a) citizens' general skepticism towards civil society organizations, which are considered as a tool for financial benefits rather than for serving public interest; (b) low level of civic participation since state-civil society dialogue and consultations are treated as a purely formal instrument by governmental actors; (c) further, civil society actors are still "building capacities" for active involvement in shaping policy processes (...) Lastly, political bias among some civil society organizations and representatives undermines their objectivity and hence public support to them."*

**KENYA:** *"The civil society participated in the formulation and continues to participate in monitoring the national development strategy. [...] The participation and awareness of civil society have grown stronger compared to previous national development processes. "*

**NEPAL:** *"The development process in Nepal is mainly driven by the government. The role of civil society and the private sector has increased in recent years[...] but structures for collaboration and consultation remain weak. [...] Civil society is one of the major stakeholders in Nepal, and the NPC does not exclude this segment in any type of participatory/consultative mechanism. Representatives from the civil society participated during the regional as well as national level consultations. In many cases they were invited in thematic group meetings. They also were asked to provide their inputs in written form where possible. Mostly, civil society participation is sought through their representative federations. Civil society activists are articulate and they can participate in substantive ways."*

All responding countries stated that social partners – **private sector and unions** - were involved in the national development strategy, but to different degrees. In a few cases, active participation seems to remain limited (e.g., Albania, Malawi, Moldova, Togo), especially for trade unions. In Kenya and Mali respondents noted that - as compared to previous years - the involvement of social partners has increased, while in El Salvador representatives from the private sector and Unions seem to have outnumbered other stakeholder categories in the policy processes.

#### BOX 6: PRIVATE SECTOR AND UNIONS PARTICIPATION

**ALBANIA:** *"While the business community has participated in the NSDI's formulation, labour union participation has been poor."*

**HONDURAS:** *"The Honduran Council of Private Enterprise was very active in the process around the development of national development strategies [...] No one can say that there have been sectors that have not participated in the approval process, or have not been included.."*

**TOGO:** *"Since there is no federation of unions, only the important ones were invited. Their participation was more or less slim."*

According to responses, **donors** have contributed to the development, implementation and monitoring of the national development strategy by providing both technical assistance and financial support. For example, in various countries donors have provided financial support to civil society organisations to allow them to participate in consultations. In all countries, donors have taken part in consultations around the national development strategy to express their views and impact on the outcome of consultations. While some respondents noted the benefits of such donor engagement, others pointed to what they see as excessive donor pressure in consultations and negotiations.

**The role played by the media** vis-à-vis the national development strategy was perceived by most respondents as mainly informative, as newspapers and TV broadcasts provided updates throughout the formulation and implementation of the national development strategy. According to most responses, media provided little or no critical analysis, and in one case, this was directly attributed to fear of political reprisals. The media was reported to have played a major role in stimulating debate around the national development strategy only in one country.

### OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF BROAD-BASED OWNERSHIP

Divergent views on the effectiveness of the participatory process of the national development strategy emerge from the module. In most countries that undertook the optional module, respondents felt that the views and needs of a broad range of stakeholders were taken into consideration and that the development strategy reflects a common vision, which builds on consensus. In other countries, however, respondents felt that consultation remained a formality providing few opportunities to help shape the national development strategy; either because some stakeholders didn't have enough information and resources to participate fully, or because the outcomes of consultations were not incorporated into policy decisions.

**Figure 2: Self-assessment of the current status of the participatory process**

Asked to score on a scale from 0 to 5<sup>1</sup> the current status of the participatory mechanism involving state and non-state actors in the national development strategy, no respondents graded a zero. This means that in none of the responding countries, do respondents consider that the national development strategy is designed, implemented and monitored by the government alone. In one country, respondents allocated a grade of 2 (= "element exists"), suggesting that the Government is making some efforts to provide information related

	Little action	Element exists	Action taken	Largely developed	Sustainable
ALBANIA				X	
COLOMBIA					X
ECUADOR					X
EL SALVADOR			X		
GABON			X		
HONDURAS					X
KENYA				X	
MALAWI			X		
MALI			X		
MOLDOVA			X		
NEPAL			X		
NIGER				X	
TOGO			X		
ZAMBIA		X			
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>

to the national development strategy to different stakeholders, but active participation of stakeholders is still very limited. Half of respondents allocated a score of 3 (= "action taken"), to indicate that a number of stakeholders are engaged in the national development strategy, but other important ones are still not involved, or the degree of their participation is still very limited. In three countries, respondents assigned a grade of 4 (= "largely developed"), suggesting that the participatory process is largely developed, as most of the stakeholders are actively involved in the national development strategy. Finally, in three countries respondents stated that the participation of all national stakeholders in the development strategy is inclusive, established and sustainable, assigning a score of 5 (= "sustainable") to the participatory process.

<sup>1</sup> 0 = there is no national development strategy implemented or currently in discussion in the country; 5 = the inclusive participation of all national stakeholders in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of the development strategy is established and sustainable.

## BUILDING ON LESSONS FROM THE OPTIONAL MODULE

The optional module on inclusive ownership was completed by a limited number of countries: 14 out of the 78 participating in the 2011 Monitoring the Paris Declaration Survey. Also, in a few instances the module was completed by a single group of stakeholders - for example only government officials - and thus may reflect the viewpoint of this specific group, rather than incorporating the perceptions of the other actors involved in the participatory process.

In other cases, however, a wide range of stakeholders sat together to complete the module, discussing their views and agreeing on a common position. In those instances, the module helped creating space for consultations on subjects of national interest and strengthening policy dialogue.

Therefore, despite some limitations, the module provides valuable information on stakeholders' participation in the policy dialogue at country level and has itself been a participatory process in several cases.

The module also bears many lessons:

- **We need to continue gathering evidence on the efforts made at country level to include a broad range of stakeholders in the policy dialogue:** Partner countries and providers of development co-operation have agreed on the importance of stakeholders' participation in the policy dialogue around development processes. However, data on the inclusiveness of policy dialogue at country level remain limited.
- **We need to keep the momentum high:** With differentiated roles and responsibilities, state and non-state stakeholders can and need to contribute to national development processes. This can only happen if countries set up institutional mechanisms allowing state and non-state stakeholders to define a common agenda for development. To bring the reflection on ownership forward and ensure that inclusiveness of the policy dialogue doesn't slip off the agenda development, actors need to manifest a clear intention to continue gathering evidence on efforts in this area.
- **We need to choose what to monitor:** When we talk about inclusive ownership, do we all mean the same thing? Supporting inclusive ownership should not mean creating parallel consultative mechanisms that undermine the democratically established configuration of institutional powers. Moreover, advocating participation *per se* is not enough if stakeholders are not put in the position to provide substantial inputs and truly voice their interests: supporting ownership also involves building capacities. Lastly, "inclusive ownership" may be something broader than what the present module captures, and broader than what a set of indicators can capture. Perhaps some of the present confusion around the concept of ownership will be dissipated if future monitoring efforts declare more clearly that they measure specific aspects of ownership, and specify which they are.
- **We need to choose how to monitor:** To understand how the principle of ownership is being implemented at country level and how this implementation evolves over time, gathering information on national stakeholders' participation in a policy dialogue is imperative. This is what this module attempted to do, but an optional module is not the only option. To reduce the burden on responding countries, the module could be sharpened and shortened, and its submission deadline set in such a way as to avoid overlapping with the deadline for the "core" Monitoring Survey. Alternatively, the participation of national stakeholders in the policy dialogue could be monitored by drawing on already existing indicators and databases designed to measure political leadership, voice and accountability, etc. These options should be pondered carefully, so that development partners agree on a proposal which, while making it possible to monitor efforts in this area, avoids duplication and excessive work load on partner countries.

The optional module contributed to a discussion around what inclusive ownership means in practice and what could be a good way to monitor it. Development actors need to bring this discussion forward and formulate concrete proposals to keep state and non-state stakeholders' participation in the development process high on the agenda of global development co-operation and promote development processes that - by bringing together a wide range of national stakeholders - lead to greater and faster growth and equality in partner countries.