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## **SAPRI: Organising civil society to review structural adjustment policies**

### **1. GENERAL INFORMATION**

#### *1.1 Title of practice or experience*

Structural Adjustment Participatory Review Initiative: Organising civil society to review structural adjustment policies

#### *1.2 Category of practice/experience and brief description*

This study is about public education and mobilisation on development issues so as to influence the formulation of economic policy. The experience is drawn from the Ghanaian component of an ongoing global Structural Adjustment Participatory Review Initiative (SAPRI). The Initiative is a tripartite exercise involving the civil society organisations, the World Bank and Governments in a number of countries to review the impact of World Bank-funded structural adjustment programmes with a view to drawing lessons for future processes of economic policy-making. The Ghana experience so far provides valuable lessons on how civil society groups have organised themselves to participate in a dialogue process with the Government and the World Bank to review the controversial structural adjustment policies that had been widely perceived as having caused negative social effects.

#### *1.3 Name of person or institution responsible for the practice or experience*

Civil Society Coordinating Council (**for** SAPRI), abbreviated as CivisoC

#### *1.4 Name and position of key or relevant persons or officials involved*

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Dorcas Coker-Appiah, Executive Member, Ghana branch of WILDAF (Women in Law and Development in Africa) and Chairperson of PROWOG (the civil society Provisional Working Group for SAPRI)

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## **2. THE PROBLEM OR SITUATION BEING ADDRESSED BY THE PRACTICE/INNOVATIVE EXPERIENCE**

This paper looks at the process of building and structuring a representative and effective network of organisations of civil society (OCS), out of a diverse collection of groups with little history of working together, to participate in an innovative, time-bound research and advocacy project, based on a partnership with the Ghana Government and the World Bank. Ghana is one of seven countries taking part in a civil society-led Structural Adjustment Participatory Review Initiative (SAPRI) on the basis of an agreement between an

international network of OCS, the World Bank and the Governments of the participating countries.

SAPRI is basically an exercise in participatory research into the impact of structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) in the selected countries, focusing on a number of agreed issues and policies. It is meant to be a civil society-led exercise. This civil-society leadership is meant to at least balance out the traditional power relations around SAPs in which the Government and World Bank were in charge.

The whole exercise is scheduled to last 18 months in each country. At its core is participatory field research by a group of researchers selected by the Government, World Bank and OCS to evaluate the impact of some identified SAP policies, the effects of which the OCS, on one side, and the Government and Bank, on the other, disagree about. The research would be carried out according to a methodological framework agreed by the three parties. The research phase will be sandwiched between processes of broad-based consultation and discussion involving mainly actors from civil society. High points of the consultations and dialogue between the three SAPRI partners will be two National Fora: one just before the research stage, which will produce the research issues, and a second, after the research, at which the research findings will be presented and discussed.

The aims of the SAPRI exercise include: to legitimise local knowledge in the analysis of SAPs, to help local OCS effect national cross-sectoral mobilisation and form relationships with the Government around economic reform issues, to make space for and institutionalise grassroots involvement in macroeconomic decision-making, and to ascertain how the participation of local, broad-based OCS can improve economic policy-making and produce changes that can lead to significant improvements in people's lives.

SAPRI is a product of the many years of rising criticism by civil society groups around the world, especially in developing countries, of the negative impact of World Bank-IMF-designed SAPs on the lives of ordinary people. More immediately, SAPRI is the product of a global network of OCS accepting a challenge by World Bank President James Wolfensohn to come forward with suggestions on how the Bank and its critics could jointly evaluate the impact of SAPs.

To ensure the comparability of outcomes, the worldwide exercise is guided by Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) and Methodological Principles arrived at after discussions involving the civil society representatives and World Bank officials. The SOP deal primarily with the organisational dimensions of the exercise while the Methodological Principles concern the research stages. The SOP, among other things, provide for a tripartite national steering committee as well as a tripartite technical committee to oversee the research phase.

The members of the technical committee will be drawn from the technical committees established by each SAPRI partner. The definition of these principles involved considerable negotiation; following agreement on these, SAPRI was launched on 14 July 1997.

The Accra-based Africa Secretariat of the Third World Network (TWN-Af) was an active participant in this global process. TWN-Af is the Africa regional coordinator within the global civil society network (SAPRIN). Apart from Ghana, Mali, Uganda and Zimbabwe are the other African countries undertaking SAPRI.

Ghana's SAP, initiated in 1983, is the longest-running SAP in Africa. Until recently, it was held up as a model SAP by the World Bank and the other international financial institutions. The implementation of the most fundamental elements of Ghana's SAP took place under conditions where criticism of and opposition to any element of the SAP were either dismissed or repressed.

Since 1992, however, the political situation in Ghana has been considerably liberalised under a liberal democratic, multi-party Constitution. There has been an explosion of free expression but concerted expression by all sectors of civil society on economic policy matters has not been achieved. Also, despite political liberalisation, the Government's policy-making process was still heavily imprinted with the less democratic culture of the past years. The challenge of building an effective civil society network was therefore compounded by the official policy-making culture.

### **3. DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE/INNOVATIVE EXPERIENCE AND ITS MAIN FEATURES**

Through a process initiated early in 1997, the broadest network of OCS in recent Ghanaian history has been put together to serve as the organisational framework for Ghanaian civil society participation in SAPRI.

The network, headed by a 25-member Civil Society Coordinating Council (CivisoC), brings together the main Ghanaian labour organisations – the Trades Union Congress (TUC), the Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT), the Civil Servants Association (CSA) and the Ghana Registered Nurses Association (GRNA) – the main business organisations, associations of farmers and fishermen as well as the national students' organisation (NUGS), diverse local and international NGOs, and religious (Christian and Muslim) development organisations.

The network headed by CivisoC is unique on several counts:

- (a) The main innovation is the unprecedented cooperation involving six types of social organisations with virtually no history of collabora-

tion. These are the NGO sector, the business organisations, the labour movement, the organisations of agrarian producers (i.e., farmers' and fishermen's associations), religious development organisations and the student movement.

- (b) The network is the first such broad civil society structure for institutionalised policy dialogue with the Government.
- (c) In addition to the innovative collaboration among different types of OCS, another novelty is the geographical breadth of participation. The composition of CivisoC combines representation based on organisational categories as well as representation according to geographical zones. Historically, the three northern and poorest administrative regions of Ghana (Northern, Upper East and Upper West) have tended to be excluded from or marginalised in most supposedly national processes. The CivisoC representation formula has overcome this marginalisation. Notable in this regard is the participation of the pioneer northern NGO umbrella, the Northern Ghana Network for Development (NGND). The network groups 45 NGOs and community-based organisations (CBOs): 15 from each of the three regions.
- (d) CivisoC, as the apex structure, is underpinned by a number of sub-committees, which allows the widest participation of groups in the network. These include a media committee which works with the CivisoC Secretariat to deal with public relations issues. Creating room for the widest possible participation is a critical issue, given the weak bonds between most of the organisations prior to collaboration under **SAPRI**; without such involvement, many organisations would easily drift away from the exercise.

#### **4. DESCRIPTION OF THE INSTITUTION RESPONSIBLE AND ITS ORGANISATIONAL ASPECTS**

The creation of the civil society network has been led by the civil society Provisional Working Group for SAPRI (PROWOG), CivisoC, TWN and the Integrated Social Development Centre (ISODEC, which serves as the CivisoC Secretariat), as well as a number of leading members of CivisoC such as the TUC and GNAT.

**ISODEC** is a national NGO involved in service delivery and capacity-building as well as advocacy on economic and social development issues. ISODEC, which has offices around the country, has been responsible for a number of innovations. It set up the first NGO-owned national newspaper, a weekly, in 1994. It is also responsible for the creation of the NGND, the first umbrella organisation of NGOs and CBOs in the three northern administra-

tive regions of the country.

The establishment of the Northern Network has given an important boost to the participation of OCS from these traditionally marginalised and poorest parts of the country in national processes. ISODEC also has considerable experience in advocacy work at both national and international levels.

ISODEC also hosts the TWN Africa Secretariat. ISODEC and TWN played the initiating role in the creation of the network. TWN was involved in the global processes that created SAPRI while ISODEC is a member of the World Bank NGO Committee. It was the two organisations which, in April 1997, convened the first formal meeting of Ghanaian OCS to discuss SAPRI.

**The TUC** is the most important labour organisation in Ghana and has played a leading role in important national political and economic events in the country's history. The TUC, made up of 17 national unions, has an estimated 500,000 members in both the private and public sectors, and an organisational structure throughout the country. The TUC has had years of internal debates and involvement in research on the impact of the SAP. A deputy secretary-general of the TUC chairs CivisoC.

The TUC has been in the forefront of civil society criticism of how SAP policies were formulated and implemented as well as of their impact on social development and the lives of people. The TUC's membership numbers have suffered under the SAP. Lay-offs and sackings have reduced the organisation's membership by more than 200,000 since the initiation of the SAP. Conflict over the erosion of job security and declining wages has been a constant element of Government-TUC relations.

**GNAT** groups more than 100,000 teachers and has a nationwide membership and organisational network. Apart from protecting and advancing the interests of its membership, GNAT has been actively engaged in public discussion about social, particularly education, policy and also in dialogue with the Government on these matters. Radical and controversial measures have been implemented in the education sector under the SAP and it is no exaggeration to say that the rising cost and falling quality of education have been some of the most prominent issues in public discussions of the impact of the SAP.

**PROWOG:** The Provisional Working Group was created in April 1997, at the first formal meeting on SAPRI, to oversee the steps agreed towards the convening of a more representative national meeting to discuss the way forward on SAPRI.

**CivisoC:** The network of civil society organisations has created a Civil Society Coordinating Council (CivisoC) as the lead organ of the network. Its

25-person membership is composed on an organisational and geographical basis. It is chaired by a deputy secretary-general of the TUC with two vice-chairpersons — one a nominee of the women's organisations and the other a vice-president of the Association of Ghana Industry (AGI), which is the umbrella grouping for Ghana's manufacturers.

For the purposes of SAPRI coordination, the conference grouped and divided the country's 10 administrative regions into six zones with allocated places on CivisoC. The zoning and allocation of seats did not give too much weight to the population or politico-economic importance of a zone; rather, it gave priority to geographical size and ease of communication within zones. The six zones are: Central & Western Regions, Ashanti & Brong Ahafo, Volta, Greater Accra & Eastern, and Northern, Upper East and Upper West Regions.

All the zones have a place each on CivisoC, except the northern zone, which has two. Although the least populous area and the weakest economically, the zone is the biggest and has the poorest communication network. The zonal members of CivisoC serve as organisational co-ordinators for SAPRI within their zones. Apart from one place on CivisoC going to the lead organisation/secretariat, the remaining seats were allocated according to organisational categories/groupings adopted by the national conference.

The following seat allocations and groupings form the basis of CivisoC membership:

- (a) 7 seats – Labour movement (comprising the TUC (2), GNAT (1), GRNA (1), NUGS (1), University Teachers Association of Ghana / Polytechnic Teachers Association of Ghana (1));
- (b) 2 seats – Business sector (comprising Association of Small Scale Industries (1) and Association of Ghana Industry (1));
- (c) 2 seats – Farmers and fisherfolk, represented by the Ghana National Association of Farmers and Fishermen;
- (d) 2 seats – Women's organisations;
- (e) 3 seats – NGOs (comprising International NGOs (1), Development NGOs (1) and Environment NGOs (1));
- (f) 2 seats – Religious development associations, with a seat each for Christian and Muslim organisations.

Given the size and geographically dispersed nature of the CivisoC membership and therefore the difficulty of the full body meeting at short notice and frequently, a smaller management committee has been created. It has the immediate responsibility of overseeing the work of the Secretariat. CivisoC has a number of sub-committees – finance, media and organisational sub-committees. There is a full-time SAPRI secretariat at ISODEC.

## 5. PROBLEMS OR OBSTACLES ENCOUNTERED AND HOW THEY WERE OVERCOME

The process of organising Ghanaian OCS for SAPRI benefited from the guidelines in the already mentioned SOP negotiated between the World Bank and the global civil society steering committee. The SOP contain broad principles on how to ensure the broadest and deepest levels of civil society mobilisation, organisation and participation in SAPRI as well as the development of effective tripartite engagement among representatives of civil society, the Government and the World Bank.

Among other things, the SOP set out the purpose and structure of national-level reviews of Adjustment Policies; and guidelines for outreach work by lead civil society organisations, such as ISODEC, and for the structuring of the civil society steering committee (CivisoC in the Ghanaian case). Particular national experiences are always going to be important in establishing how much of a generally applicable framework the SOP are for the diverse countries in the SAPRI exercise, and therefore how much innovation may be required to build up the mobilisation and involvement required for SAPRI while remaining true to the principles of the SOP.

The civil society mobilisation and organisational process in Ghana has been faithful to the SOP even as, in practice, the letter of the SOP has had to be stretched without violating its spirit.

With the hindsight of experience, one of the most striking things about the SOP is the implicit assumption they make about the (high) level of popular readiness or eagerness to participate in SAPRI and therefore what they assume to be the demands (mainly initiating the process and some fairly undemanding coordination) that would be placed on the lead civil society organisation as well as the other leading structures of civil society.

### MOBILISATION AND ORGANISATION

In fact, the primary problem faced at the start of the network-building process was how to raise awareness about SAPRI and convince the OCS of SAPRI's uniqueness and innovativeness and therefore of the opportunity and challenge that it represented. The problem had a number of dimensions. An important dimension was the fact that over the years of the SAP being in place, a certain 'adjustment fatigue' had set in – 'fatigue' in the following senses:

- (a) After more than a decade of being excluded from participation in the formulation of far-reaching economic policies, many critics of the SAP were deeply doubtful about the likelihood of a radical change in

the practices of the Government and the World Bank towards working together meaningfully to review the SAP.

- (b) Given this history, there were some who feared that the offer of collaboration with the Government and Bank was the thin edge of co-optation of OCS by the Government-Bank alliance.
- (c) The Ghanaian socio-political landscape is a scene of endless seminars on all kinds of subjects, many of them funded by some of the international institutions which have been involved in shaping and funding Ghana's SAP, as well as involving a number of the very same organisations which were targeted for involvement in SAPRI. These seminars are increasingly passed off as merely representing some of the essence of 'participation'. Is SAPRI just another series of seminars initiated in the name of participation?
- (d) Since 1983, the World Bank has been perceived by some as a kind of shadow Government in Ghana as the scope of the country's SAP widened and its dependence on World Bank funding deepened. Today the World Bank is Ghana's biggest creditor, owed about half the country's external debt. In the Ghanaian mind, the World Bank has become synonymous with funding. An important perception barrier that mobilisation for SAPRI faced was making clear that this is not another World Bank-funded project, supposedly awash in money.

The preceding issues feed directly into the problem of generating and sustaining commitment among participating organisations and individuals participating in the SAPRI network. Other factors also influence the issue of commitment. These include:

- (a) The political attitudes of each of the participating organisations. Building and sustaining the network involves overcoming diverse assumptions about and attitudes towards Government policy.

Most Ghanaian OCS strongly espouse being 'non-political'. This usually means that they do their best not to get on the wrong side of whatever Government is in power and are chary of engaging in policy advocacy beyond a narrow range of issues.

Within this 'non-political' landscape, the various OCS have variously embraced and distanced themselves from the Government to varying degrees over the SAP in the 15 years since the launch of the programme. The nature of their links with the Government has been heavily shaped by the impact of the SAP. Broadly speaking, the business sector and the agrarian producers have had better, but by no means wholly unproblematic, relations with the Government. Workers, students and NGOs, on the other hand, have been the primary players among those whose relations with the Government have been abrasive, primarily on account of the impact of adjustment on workers and the

social sectors. **So** it can generally be said that the Government's relations with the former group have largely involved consensual dialogue while its relations with the latter have involved disputation.

(b) Initially, some organisations were strongly sceptical about the good intentions of both the Government and the World Bank. A hallmark of the Government's legitimating platform has been the claim to have offered Ghanaians a new and unique form of participatory democracy, something its critics strongly dispute. Why an interest in collaborative investigation now, after so many years of keeping the door shut, at a time when the negative impacts of the SAP have left deep social marks? Is there a larger, hidden World Bank-Government of Ghana project which SAPRI feeds into?

(c) The unusually long time frame of SAPRI, compared to the other commitments of time and persons that participant organisations would face. The demands of SAPRI are voluntary commitments while organisations could be involved in other things with immediate and tangible material benefits.

The last point is linked to a widespread perception of things involving the World Bank and the wider so-called 'donor community' as promising material plenty. This perception made it difficult for some organisations and individuals to accept the voluntary commitment of time and persons because of a suspicion that the lead organisation and some unspecified others were going to 'do well' out of SAPRI. Very early on in the exercise, some sharp battles were fought over what costs, incurred by organisations and individuals taking part in **SAPRI**, could be covered from **SAPRI** funds.

The scope of organisation required posed tricky challenges of how to draw together and maintain a network among NGOs and other OCS, especially the various organisations of the labour movement. Globally, the SAPRI exercise has involved a very broad-based network of **OCS**, albeit one that has been largely driven by NGOs, women's groups and trade unions. A successful bridging of this labour movement-NGO gap in Ghana was crucial for ensuring a credible broad base for the SAPRI exercise.

ISODEC/TWN's initiating role in Ghana was one dimension of the nature of the NGO profile in the process. **In** the Ghanaian context, however, there is not a long and strong tradition of NGO involvement in policy advocacy. Very few indigenous NGOs have the capacity for policy research in and also visible national status as articulating grounded critical opinion on development policy issues. Historically, the labour movement, in its various fragments, has been the lead organisation of civil society, as far as intervention on policy issues is concerned.

Prior to SAPRI, the working relations between the NGO community and the labour movement were weak. At least three factors account for this. The two types of organisations had tended to operate in different channels and

generally did not see each other as different branches of a generic entity, i.e. organisations of civil society. Secondly, NGOs perceived the labour movement as 'political' precisely because of its regular disagreements with Governments over the socio-economic implications of development policy choices such as the SAP. Thirdly, this NGO perception of the labour movement as tending to 'take on the Government' was complemented by inadequate understanding of NGOs within the labour movement.

How were these interrelated clusters of problems dealt with? The SOP advise that in its initial outreach work, the lead organisation should inform targeted organisations about the history, nature and objectives of SAPRI as well as its risks and opportunities, and the broader network that supports it globally. The initial mobilisation targeted organisations known to have a track record of at least some interest in policy advocacy on economic policy/SAP as well as those with broad national bases and spread to ensure that a reliable core was established for the whole network-building exercise.

For the inaugural SAPRI meeting, in April 1997, ISODEC/TWN invited NGOs and other organisations with which there were pre-existing links on World Bank/SAP and social development issues, and those with a proven record in policy advocacy and engagement with the Government on SAP issues. For example, OCS which had come together in February 1997 to prepare a statement for and to meet with the President of the World Bank when he visited Ghana were all invited to that meeting.

The April meeting, held in the national capital Accra, brought together a relatively small, but influential, number of organisations, mainly NGOs. Crucially, the TUC, GNAT and the NUGS also took part in the one-day meeting. The overwhelming reaction of participants was to acknowledge the importance of SAPRI as well as the organisational and political challenges that it posed. That meeting created PROWOG as an interim representative lead structure to oversee the wider mobilisation and organisation of Ghanaian OCS for SAPRI. With the creation of PROWOG, there came into existence a pool of organisations which could share the leading initiative with ISODEC and TWN.

Between April and June 1997, PROWOG oversaw the convening of a series of regional conferences around the country which considerably widened the organised participation of civil society in SAPRI. It was the outreach work done under the leadership of PROWOG which prevented SAPRI from becoming another instance of collaboration among old associates and made it a novel engagement among an unprecedented network.

Between April and June, four regional meetings were organised by PROWOG, rather than having the initiating organisation crucially aided by organisations which had taken part in the April meeting which had a presence in the particular region. The TUC and the NGOs were particularly important

in this exercise. The immediate responsibility for organising the meetings in Kumasi (Ghana's second city) and in the contiguous Ashanti and Brong Ahafo Regions (meetings were respectively held in Kumasi and Sunyani) was taken up by the Centre for the Development of People (CEDEP). The organisation is one of the largest indigenous NGOs. It has been involved not only in a variety of work which has built close relations with the community but also in SAP-related research and advocacy, including participatory research on poverty.

The Volta Region meeting, held in the regional capital Ho, was organised by VORANGO, the regional NGO umbrella organisation. In the Western Region (Takoradi), the TUC took responsibility for a meeting which brought together organisations from the Western as well as the neighbouring Central Region.

Apart from the facilitation of the organisational process, the lead role played by these organisations imbued SAPRI with the legitimacy that they enjoyed. Furthermore, their regionalised leadership also provided a grid to the emerging civil society network for SAPRI.

Organisations which normally would not have access to or be involved in a national advocacy exercise were drawn in, and lower officials and functionaries of some of the OCS, e.g., the TUC, became involved in ways that were not the norm in such institutions. The TUC and GNAT, for example, accepted that given their national spread and institutional capacity, they must accept specific responsibilities to lead in various parts of the country and draw smaller organisations around SAPRI.

These regional meetings continued the discussion of SAPRI organisational matters as well as SAP policy issues initiated by the April meeting. To ensure a continuity with the outcome of the April meeting, members of PROWOG and other persons who had taken part in the Accra meeting took part in the regional meetings as resource persons. The regional fora selected participants to the planned national civil society conference in addition to identifying issues which they wanted discussed in that conference.

In each of these meetings, SAPRI had to be 'sold' to some participants, who variously raised the issues identified above. The 'selling' was partly a process of explaining to people the connection between the concerns they expressed about their livelihood and the SAP and therefore SAPRI. It increasingly became clear that a conscious policy of building up civil society capacity for engaging with the World Bank and the Government was needed and the outreach work more overtly addressed this in subsequent meetings.

By the time of the June 1997 national conference, a broad-based ownership had been established for civil society participation in SAPRI. This was on the basis of the issues on the agenda of the conference having been gener-

ated from localised/regionalised processes and also because participants were representatives drawn from these meetings. The extent of ownership, after the initial barriers, partly had to do with a recognition of the opportunity SAPRI represented.

The civil society SAPRI national conference took place in Accra in June 1997. It was attended by nearly 100 persons from all over the country. The three-day meeting extensively discussed Ghana's experience of the SAP. Papers were presented by resource persons on a number of subjects: macroeconomic policy, agriculture, health and education, among others. These discussions resulted in a shortlisting of the SAP issues that participants felt should be the subject of the SAPRI research. Also, the meeting discussed and agreed on the structuring of the civil society network.

It must be remarked that the categorisation of organisations and the allocation of seats on CivisoC provoked intense debate and disagreement. Predictably, some organisations felt that the importance of those they represent was diminished by the criteria that were eventually agreed on as well as the number of places allocated to their grouping. Significantly, the national conference agreed on the need to continue reaching out to social groups that were present, including allocating them seats on CivisoC. These included the Association of Ghana Industry (AGI), the national grouping of large business organisations and the University Teachers Association of Ghana (UTAG).

#### **ENGAGING WITH THE GOVERNMENT AND THE WORLD BANK**

The SAPRI exercise is predicated on a recognition of the imbalance in the capacities and power between OCS on one side and the Government/World Bank on the other. Effective engagement between OCS and the Government/World Bank requires not only a mutually agreed framework, as embodied in the SOP and the Methodological Principles, and effective cooperation and organisation by OCS but also:

- (a) building the intellectual/technical capacity of the representatives of civil society;
- (b) the actual creation and operation of the tripartite structures provided for in the framework documents; and
- (c) political legitimacy for the whole SAPRI exercise.

#### **Building intellectual/technical capacity**

Matching the intellectual and technical capacities of the World Bank and the Government represented a particular challenge for the civil society network. The problem has two main dimensions - engagement in the overall

political-organisation processes of SAPRI and in the more focused instance of technical/research collaboration. Not only did the Government/Bank side have a pool of persons dedicated to working on the SAP issues and making the policies but their control of information also placed them at an advantage.

Central to the weak advocacy capacity of Ghanaian OCS is a paucity of specialist intellectuals in these organisations as well as poor links with the intellectual community. It is arguable that one effect of the years of the SAP has been to make the building of such links more difficult, mainly on account of the donor-driven consultancy market it created. This not only priced intellectuals beyond the reach of OCS but also fostered an intellectual orientation that was not very compatible with the paradigm most OCS operated with. Getting a pool of intellectuals to work with CivisoC therefore posed challenges.

The majority of resource persons and members of the CivisoC Technical Committee are drawn from the academic-intellectual community. To that extent, SAPRI has been of innovative value in drawing out a pool of intellectuals ready for a sustained involvement with civil society organisations without being paid the dollar-indexed rates they could otherwise earn as 'consultants'. They have served as key resource persons in almost all the seminars organised by CivisoC and prepared the analytical papers on the SAP issues identified by the June 1997 national conference as well as being CivisoC's representatives on the tripartite Information Team which summarised SAP-related World **Bank** documents for use in SAPRI.

This group of intellectuals has played an important part in the capacity-building work carried out by CivisoC within an outreach programme aimed at preparing civil society representatives for the first SAPRI National Forum. The outreach work involved seminars in the ten administrative regions for a larger pool of civil society activists than had participated in the June 1997 conference. The idea was to enhance their general understanding of the SAP issues identified by the 1997 national conference so as to enable them to participate more effectively in the Forum.

### **Making tripartite relations real**

Under the terms of the SOP, the Tripartite National Steering Committee (TNSC) represents the institutional litmus test of how effectively CivisoC, the World Bank and the Government are working together. Early on in the negotiations over SAPRI, the World Bank informed SAPRI that Ghana's Finance Minister had indicated the Government's consent to the country's inclusion in the exercise.

However, by the time of the civil society national conference in June 1997, it was clear that the Government side was lagging behind the other two partners. World Bank representatives attended the conference as observers but there were no Government observers. By the time of the global launch in July, the Government had not yet composed its team for the TNSC. More importantly, there was no indication that the commitment to SAPRI was from the highest political levels.

One of the first concerns of the TNSC was to get a firmer political commitment from the Government to SAPRI. The concern was made more urgent by the fact that it became clear early on in the life of the TNSC that the Government representatives were not only temporary but were also not clear about their mandate.

The authority of the independent TNSC chairperson was invaluable in getting the Government side to sort itself out. The Government firmed its commitment to SAPRI when the Cabinet discussed and publicly announced the Government's acceptance of SAPRI. Under considerable pressure from the chair, including his direct contact with the Finance Minister, the Government composed a team drawn from not only the Finance Ministry but other ministries as well, including Education and Health, and also the National Development Planning Commission.

Despite these steps by the Government, the level of participation by its representatives has been somewhat desultory. Though the representatives are senior civil servants, it appears they do not have the full mandate to make commitments on every issue, giving the distinct impression that not only is SAPRI a burdensome addition to their substantial existing workload but that it is also not a priority concern. Despite the official pronouncements at the national launch, there appears to be even less active commitment to SAPRI at the highest political levels of government.

As of the time of writing, the Government had yet to form its technical committee. Furthermore, no work had been done to sensitise government officials other than the handful directly engaged on SAPRI on the exercise and its importance. In that sense, the Government is treating SAPRI as a project, with its nominees on the TNSC being the project managers. The poor quality of Government participation in SAPRI through the TNSC remains an unresolved problem.

There is a similar problem with the World Bank's participation in the tripartite structures. The Bank is represented by one of its most junior officers, its NGO liaison officer, who is not sure about the limits of the mandate under SAPRI. The problem of the Bank's participation also remains unresolved.

### Ensuring political legitimacy

At a formal level, SAPRI had political legitimacy in so far as the Ghana Government had agreed to Ghana participating in the process and Ghanaian OCS were organising for it. In practice, however, as the preceding section illustrated, these were not sufficient. As already pointed out, depending on how it evolved, SAPRI could end up being seen as another of the interminable series of donor-sponsored conferences, seminars and workshops taking place around the country. What guarantees were there that a Government long chary of serious and sustained policy dialogue with representatives of civil society would treat SAPRI with the same seriousness with which Ghanaian OCS were treating it? The same, albeit to a lesser extent, could be asked of the World Bank office in Ghana.

Very early on, CivisoC recognised that a higher public profile and wider public awareness as well as the Government's public commitment would boost SAPRI legitimacy and its representatives on the TNSC pressed for steps to be taken to achieve these. The official national launch of SAPRI by the Vice-President, Prof. J.E.A. Mills, in November 1997, was an important boost for the legitimacy of the SAPRI exercise. The national launch was an innovation not provided for in the international SOP but which the Ghanaian SAPRI partners agreed was important. Organising it was an instance of efficient tripartite cooperation.

The brief ceremony, chaired by the independent chairperson of the TNSC, was attended by members of civil society organisations, high-level Government officials and politicians (including the Speaker of Parliament and MPs from both sides of the House) and the diplomatic corps. In addition to Professor Mills' speech, stressing the important opportunity SAPRI represented, there was the unique spectacle of the World Bank Representative in Ghana, a Deputy Minister of Finance and the chairperson of CivisoC speaking on equal terms and explaining why the sides they each represented saw SAPRI as important.

The ceremony was extensively reported in both the electronic and the print media. The public commitments made at the launch and the accompanying publicity moved SAPRI from being another 'negotiation' in a corner and provided some levers for continuing to distinguish it from other ongoing 'participatory' activities.

## 6. EFFECTS OF THE PRACTICE/INNOVATIVE EXPERIENCE

Immediately within the SAPRI process, the construction of an effective network of civil society organisations made the Government and World Bank

realise the need to act and concretise their formal expressions of commitment to SAPRI. The organisational headstart gained by the CivisoC-led network also gave it a political edge in its relations with the Government and the Bank. In the functioning of the tripartite structure, CivisoC has had a preponderant influence. Given the already mentioned in-built advantages enjoyed by the other two parties, this political edge has given some substance to the casting of SAPRI as a civil society-led process.

The more general effects of Ghanaian OCS organising for SAPRI fall into two broad categories: (a) the effects on the OCS and (b) the effects on the relations between the Government/World Bank and Ghanaian OCS.

### EFFECTS ON OCS

Six main positive effects can be identified under this category as follows:

- (a) The experience has helped the participating OCS develop a better understanding of each other, this being the most sustained engagement amongst them in a common exercise.
- (b) It has considerably enhanced cooperation among Ghanaian OCS, especially on policy advocacy issues. The importance of this point can best be appreciated by referring back to the point made under section 5, 'Problems/obstacles encountered', about the obstacles posed by the weak traditions of collaboration among Ghanaian OCS. The long-term value of this cannot be overestimated. Should the SAPRI network find a basis for continuing beyond SAPRI, then the exercise would have wrought a far-reaching change in the OCS organisational landscape.
- (c) Participating organisations and individuals have gained valuable experience in networking among diverse organisations.
- (d) The relatively sustained work, with a large number of members of various organisations has improved OCS understanding of economic policy issues and built up their capacity for critical reflection on economic policy, especially on the issues which were selected by the June 1997 conference and have been the subject of sustained discussion. This improved capacity also means these actors can more confidently engage in policy dialogue with Government officials.
- (e) The sustained work which has enhanced the capacity of civil society activists benefited from the links built between a section of the intellectual community and the civil society network. The building of those links has strengthened the overall capacity of Ghanaian civil society.
- (f) The experience has helped improve the legitimacy of policy advocacy and reduced the perception of it as 'engaging in politics'.

## EFFECTS ON GOVERNMENT-OCS RELATIONS

The SAP has been a subject of sharp differences of opinion between the Government and some OCS. An important effect of the exercise has been to reduce mutual suspicion. It has improved government-OCS dialogue and exchange. In bringing the three parties together, SAPRI has helped to build direct human bonds between OCS on one side and the Government/Bank on the other. Fundamentally, in subjecting a central plank of government policy which has been shrouded in secret decision-making to a civil society-led review, SAPRI has struck an important blow for greater openness and consultation on the part of the Government in the policy-making process.

## 7. SUITABILITY AND POSSIBILITY FOR UPSCALING

Considering that SAPRI is a multi-tier research and advocacy process, ranging from local-level mobilisation through to global-level exchanges between the World Bank and representatives of civil society, there is little scope for upscaling.

## 8. SIGNIFICANCE FOR (AND IMPACT ON) POLICY-MAKING

The SAP has been the defining framework for socio-economic policy in Ghana for more than a decade. There is little dispute that its far-reaching policies were formulated and implemented with little participation by the population. For these reasons alone, a tripartite effort to undertake an evaluation of its impact is extremely significant. SAPRI would make an important contribution to the democratisation process in Africa.

Speaking at the Washington global launch of SAPRI, Charles Abugre, ISODEC's executive director and coordinator of TWN's Africa Secretariat, identified at least four reasons why SAPRI is significant for the policy-making process in Africa, including Ghana. According to Abugre, SAPRI is firstly an opportunity for Africa's Governments and OCS to work together and explore more democratic and inclusive ways of dialogue on how to move national economies forward. Secondly, SAPRI should aid domestic ownership of economic policies and thereby strengthen Governments vis-a-vis international financial institutions. Thirdly, the fact of civil society networks, grouping diverse interests, sitting face to face with the Government and World Bank sharply puts the issues of the distribution of the costs and benefits on the table. Finally, SAPRI offers an opportunity for the Government and World Bank to learn from civil society and possibly incorporate some of these lessons into the policies they design.

In the specific Ghanaian context, the points made under section 6 above are some additional relevant points with regard to the significance of the exercise for and its impact on policy-making.

## **9. POSSIBILITY AND SCOPE OF TRANSFERRING TO OTHER COMMUNITIES OR COUNTRIES**

In its overall character – a global tripartite review exercise – SAPRI is unique, something which also informs the scope and possibility of the experiences that are sought to be transferred. The substantial financial cost of the exercise severely limits transferability. However, the experience of implementation at national levels offers valuable lessons in a number of areas. The main lessons relate to civil society network-building for national-level advocacy. Another lot relate to the managing of relations with the state/Government in a collaborative framework which is rooted in divergence. More immediately, the Ghanaian experience has been valuable for the SAPRI exercise in some other countries.

### **NETWORK-BUILDING LESSONS**

The sharing of experiences and information among participating civil society organisations is a notable feature of the global SAPRI process. TWN-Af's active involvement in the global and Africa regional SAPRI process produced a two-way link between the Ghanaian and the wider SAPRI exercise. On one side, this has provided the Ghanaian civil society network with a varied and ready link with the wider global process beyond what is afforded by the useful role of the global SAPRI secretariat. From another perspective, TWN-Af's active involvement in the Ghana process offered experiences which were useful to its role as the Africa regional coordinating point. In addition, there has been direct interaction between CivisoC members and their Malian, Zimbabwean and Ugandan counterparts.

By the time of the June 1997 national conference, the Ghanaian SAPRI process was some way ahead of many of the other countries, certainly ahead of all the African countries. What had happened in Ghana therefore became a prototype from which Uganda, Zimbabwe and Mali sought to derive lessons. A meeting of civil society representatives from the African SAPRI countries, held in Zimbabwe in December 1997, was an important occasion for sharing experiences and drawing lessons from the Ghana experience.

In the other African countries, just like in Ghana, the initiating organisations faced the challenge of how to initiate and structure the civil society network. Even by December 1997, none of the other countries, despite the

progress made, had moved far enough to hold a national conference similar to that held in Ghana in June 1997.

The main lessons appear to be that the organisations initiating the process should meet the following criteria: they should not attract controversy; should be able to actively reach out to others which have advocacy experience; should reach out early to major civil society organisations; and should be seen to be engaged in the creation of an autonomous umbrella civil society structure.

Beyond transferability within SAPRI, what is the scope and possibility of transferring the Ghanaian practice? In most African countries, the traditions of sustained broad-based advocacy networks with national-level impact are weak. Seen from the perspective of good governance, SAPRI is a valuable landmark in the current trends of political liberalisation in Africa. The Ghana SAPRI network-building experience offers valuable lessons in how citizens' groups can diversify and strengthen cooperation for advocacy so as to give citizenship, with its attendant rights, greater meaning as the foundation of good governance. In all four participating African countries, building the SAPRI coalition has been a novel experience.

### **ENGAGING WITH THE GOVERNMENT**

SAPRI represents both a unique and a tricky context of advocacy engagement between OCS and the Government. The trickiness arises primarily because the parties are expected to move sharply from a former practice of virtually no dialogue on the SAP, made and implemented amidst repression, to a consensual process of reviewing the impact of SAP policies. How the demands of this shift have been managed and the associated difficulties offer rich lessons for other African countries engaged in political liberalisation where, in general, government-civil society relations are fragile and fraught with suspicion.

### **10. OTHER COMMENTS**

SAPRI is work in progress. The above analysis therefore represents a snapshot based on the experiences so far, experiences over a period of more than one year. Some elements of the snapshot are complete, for example, the process of building the civil society network. Others, such as working with the Government and the World Bank, are incomplete but the experience so far provides a picture, if not a trend, of a practice on which some conclusions can be based.