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Christian Aid policy briefing

Participating in Dialogue?: The Estrategia Boliviana de Reducción de la Pobreza

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Introduction

Bolivia has long been viewed as the star pupil of international donors – a model student of the Washington Consensus. Its government has subscribed to the structural adjustment measures of the World Bank and IMF since 1985 so conscientiously that the President of the World Bank has talked of “the Bolivia model”. Consecutive Bolivian governments have embraced this model with diligence and enthusiasm, and continue to do so. At the same time inequality has become increasingly severe and wealth is concentrated in fewer hands¹. In 1997 the poorest 20% of the population held just 1.9% of wealth².

In recent years, as a greater emphasis has been placed on civil society participation by the international community, the spotlight on Bolivia has grown more intense and its efforts to broaden participation in policy making have been hailed as a strident success. Over the past two years this attention has been particularly focused on the process of developing Bolivia’s Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). The country wide National Dialogue 2000, which led to the formulation of Bolivia’s PRSP, the Estrategia Boliviana de Reducción de la Pobreza (EBRP), has been cited internationally as a glowing example of popular participation. This paper will analyse the various actors and processes at work through the National Dialogue 2000, the extent and quality of people’s participation in it, and its impact on the resulting poverty reduction strategy.

1. Participation in PRSPs

Bolivia was one of the first countries to enter the HIPC II³ process in February 2000, and as such was one of the first to embark upon the process of formulating its PRSP in order to access international debt relief. The World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) have been explicit in their call for the processes of PRSP formulation around the world to be founded on extensive participation by a diverse range of actors, particularly including poor people themselves⁴. The IMF states that PRSPs should ‘reflect the outcomes of an open and participatory process involving governments, civil society and relevant international institutions and donors’⁵. In fact, participation is one of the conditions that determine whether a PRSP document is approved by the Boards of the World Bank and IMF. The reality of people’s participation in PRSPs around the world thus far has been extremely mixed, but generally it remains limited and superficial⁶. Many PRSP countries lack the capacity, institutional framework, resources or political will to run genuinely participatory processes of policy formulation. Serious questions about the coherence of World Bank and IMF

¹ In 1989 the richest 20% of the employed population earned 52.6% of the total income created through urban economic activity. In 1997, this share had grown to 58%. The poorest 50% of the employed population received 19.3% of the total urban income in 1989 and by 1997 this had shrunk to 16.9% (Cf Hernando Larrazabal et al. ‘Ajuste Estructural y Desarrollo Productivo en Bolivia’ CEDLA, 2000)

² <http://development.goals.org/goaltables-poverty.html>

³ The Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC) is the programme of debt relief being offered to the most indebted poor countries by both multilateral and bilateral donors. HIPC I was launched in 1996, but broke down and was replaced by a more poverty-focused HIPC II in 1999 which was redesigned to deliver more debt relief more quickly. The HIPC has been criticised by Christian Aid and others for including too few countries, being conditional on structural adjustment programmes and not being sufficiently poverty focused. For more information see Christian Aid 2000, **Still waiting...**, Christian Aid: London

⁴ For a broader discussion of participation in PRSPs see ‘Ignoring the Experts: Poor people’s exclusion from poverty reduction strategies’, Christian Aid October 2001

⁵ IMF 1999

⁶ See Christian Aid 2001, SGTS and Associates 2001, IDS 2001

approaches, the extent to which participation is really permitted to influence policy, and levels of country ownership of development plans, have been raised by PRSP processes.

In Bolivia, civil society's participation in the EBRP was a mixed experience. In some ways it can be seen as very progressive and in others it remained extremely limited and exclusive. Initially many in the government were extremely reluctant to permit participation in policy making, and there were disagreements between various factions as to whether the National Dialogue 2000 should take place at all⁷. In the end it did and has subsequently been celebrated somewhat simplistically by the international community, with little attention being given to some of the harsher lessons learnt and mistakes made. Bolivian government and civil society actors have developed a wealth of experiences through their efforts to design and implement a participatory strategy, which hold important lessons for other governments and civil society groups embarking upon PRSP processes around the world. It is important, then, to present a balanced and realistic view of the process and to identify its weaknesses as well as its strengths, in order to learn from this extremely significant effort.

2. Bolivia's political context

The specific historical and governance context of Bolivia is absolutely critical to a full understanding of the National Dialogue and EBRP formulation process. It wasn't until 1982 that Bolivia was finally rid of its military dictatorship. Since then governments of the new multi-party democracy system have opened up varied levels of political space. Perhaps as a result of the population's history of struggle against ruling regimes, levels of political participation are relatively high in Bolivia and civil society has a strong awareness of its right to assert political influence⁸. Set within this context and despite its persistent limitations, the current governance regime in Bolivia can be viewed as a large improvement from the past:

“Bolivia is making big steps towards becoming a better democracy, even if the political system is currently corrupt. In relation to our history, Bolivia has come a long way and we should acknowledge that and be proud of our progress” (Miguel Urioste, Fundación Tierra).

However, fundamental problems with the governance system do persist and Bolivia still lacks a clear institutional framework or a strong culture of democracy. Fragmentation of political parties and the nature of the Bolivian electoral system has meant that since 1982 national government has frequently operated through coalitions, which, although a pragmatic solution to a problematic political context, has had huge implications for the legitimacy of ruling regimes. In 1997 for example, Hugo Banzer was voted into power with less than 23% of the total vote. Bolivia is also deemed to be one of the most corrupt country in the world⁹ and the population have watched their resources drain out of the public purse and into private pockets for far too long. The combination of these and other governance issues have generated high levels of scepticism among the population and made them more and more reluctant to participate in government-run processes.

In August 2001 the ex-dictator Hugo Banzer resigned from office on health grounds and was replaced by a seemingly very different leader, Jorge Quiroga. This shift has marked a tipping

⁷ The old school or 'dinosaurs' feeling that the 1997 National Dialogue had already opened up a dangerous Pandora's box in which all interests in civil society felt free to assert their demands and undermine government authority. Conversely, however, others in government felt that a public dialogue was essential to inform the PRSP and was fitting with the spirit of decentralisation (Eyben 2001: 6-7)

⁸ 64% of the population took part in Bolivia's last election.

⁹ Transparency International 2001

of the balance between the right wing old guard and the modern technocrats of the ruling Acción Democrática Nacionalista (ADN) party. Quiroga's first address to the nation focused on the need for increased and appropriate forms of production, poverty reduction and debt relief, and there is widespread public optimism about his leadership. His short term in office¹⁰ will have further implications for Bolivia's standing in the international community, as Quiroga was previously one of the country's chief negotiators vis-a-vis the Bretton Woods Institutions and therefore is likely to be a popular choice with them.

3. Bolivian Civil Society

Bolivia has a relatively numerous, diverse and forceful civil society. Its vibrant history of social movements and popular protest has resulted from deep social cleavages, inequality and the struggle against dictatorship. This history of struggle has led to a conception of civil society in Bolivia, as in much of the rest of Latin America, which broadly encompasses any groups that are in opposition to the government.

Bolivian social movements have traditionally been bolstered by a formidable trade union movement, led fervently by the mining sector. However, since the start of structural adjustment the mining sector has been deconstructed, numbers of state workers have been dramatically cut, and the trade union movement decimated. Other social movements, such as associations of street traders, are broad based and capable of mobilising huge numbers of people into street protests. However, social movements are infamously divided, both within and between groups, and have extremely diverse vested interests. This has prevented them from realising their full potential power and political influence. For example, both the coca growers of the Yungas and Chapare regions, and Aymara nationalists of the Altiplano are currently extremely radical and visible groups. However, they are rarely co-ordinated, pursue quite separate agendas, and are often conflictive and divided even within each movement. Some progress has recently been made in terms of co-ordination through the producers' organisation Comité de Enlace, which brought together co-operative miners, handicraft workers, small industries and campesino groups, in direct response to the National Dialogue 2000 process.

Further divisions within Bolivian civil society exist between NGOs and social movements¹¹. NGOs have very different memberships and styles of working to those of social movements, and tend to be run by highly educated middle class staff of mestizo or European origin. Social movements on the other hand are broad-based membership groups, which generally represent and are run by the majority indigenous population. Potential tensions between these groups become more and more pronounced as representation of 'the voice' of the grassroots becomes an increasingly valuable good, which many actors (and especially NGOs, as well as traditional intermediaries such as trade unions and political parties) seek to lay claim to.

The relationship between civil society groups and the state is as varied as the groups themselves. This dynamic had a fundamental impact on society's participation in the EBRP process. NGOs have tended to be perceived as oppositional and antagonistic by the state, due to Bolivia's history of political struggle and NGOs' tendency to work outside of formal governance structures. Conversely, the Catholic Church is perceived by other members of civil society as being closely aligned with the state, which meant that some groups were suspicious of their leading role in the Jubilee process¹². It remains a powerful force in Bolivia and still has a broad reach among the population, although other protestant evangelical

¹⁰ Presidential elections will be held in May 2002, and this term in Quiroga's office as President will only last until August 2002.

¹¹ Interview with Miguel Urioste of Fundacion Tierra, 18/09/01

¹² Interview with Yolanda Vargas and Cris .:logo Aleman, Causananchispaj, 20/09/01

churches are growing rapidly in number and influence. Civil society groups have tended to be sceptical of the government's willingness to permit participation. Juan Carlos Nunez of the Catholic Church's Jubilee programme identifies an increasingly dangerous separation between the political system and civil society which generate escalating conflicts.

4. Popular Participation in Bolivia

Bolivia has made more efforts than most countries over the past decade to institutionalise popular participation and to decentralise government, which has led to the interesting and pertinent context within which the EBRP formulation process took place. Its 1995 Law of Popular Participation marked the first attempt to institutionalise decentralisation. This was followed by the 1995 Law of Administrative Decentralisation, 1997 Law of Municipalities, and 2001 Dialogue Law. The latter of these was meant to provide the legal framework through which the results of the National Dialogue will be implemented. It stipulates that further dialogues should take place every 3 years and that HIPC debt relief funds are to be dispersed through municipalities. This decentralisation process has had the positive effect of entrusting more power and resources to municipal governments, in an attempt to close the gap between the government and its people. However, it has also had a few negative implications, such as the undermining of some national civil society groups that are not organised territorially.

Civil society participation is ever more central to the rhetoric of official institutions in Bolivia, as elsewhere in the world, and some efforts have been made to increase direct popular participation in government and donor strategies. This has been attempted both at the national and municipal level to some degree. The most high-profile initiative was the 1997 National Dialogue 'Bolivia towards the XXI century', which aimed to facilitate public input to the government's national development plan. As a first attempt at a comprehensive national consultation process, the National Dialogue of 1997 made some progress. However, it seemingly did not generate a genuine dialogue between the government and its people (being widely perceived as simply an attempt to please international donors) and failed to involve grassroots and marginalised communities. It was organised on a functional rather than a territorial basis and discussions were unfocused, meaning that it did not generate specific and realistic policy recommendations.

Criticisms have been made of these efforts to institutionalise participation in Bolivia, as being far too limited, politically motivated and in some cases dysfunctional. Felipe Quispe of the campesino movement CSUTCB (Confederación Sindical Unica de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia) claims that indigenous people have gained nothing from the legal changes around participation and that exclusion is as severe as ever. Luis Marcelo Renjel, Special Advisor to the Vice Minister for Popular Participation, admits that a contraction of the spaces within which resource decisions are made is currently taking place in Bolivia, and that these decisions are concentrated in the hands of fewer people. Ann Chaplin, independent development consultant, says, "We are currently seeing a vacuum of people's expression and a lack of space for participation. Imposed changes such as the Law of Popular Participation have not brought about any significant changes and still fail to provide a suitable structure for public involvement. Consequently, participation by civil society has been sadly lacking."¹³ This lack is the result of a complex web of governance factors, such as public scepticism about the political system, which makes people reluctant to commit time and effort to engaging with it. The UK's DFID representative in Bolivia, Ros Eyben, states that, "The formal democratic system is currently failing, as the majority of people do not have a voice in policy making and they do not feel represented by their elected representatives." This context makes efforts to improve popular participation in policy all the more pertinent and timely.

¹³ Interview with Ann Chaplin, 28/09/01

5. The National Dialogue 2000 and the EBRP

Bolivia's net external debt currently stands at US\$ 4,300 million¹⁴. The country was among the forerunners in the HIPC initiative when it joined in February 2000, and was one of the first to have its PRSP document approved by the Boards of the World Bank and IMF in June 2001. Bolivia's involvement in HIPC II will free up US\$ 1,300 million over the next 15 years for use on poverty reduction¹⁵, all of which will be channelled through municipal governments. This will result in at least a doubling of the available resources for most municipalities and up to a five times increase for others. As a result of the Popular Participation Law municipalities have been receiving 20% of national tax, which generated around US\$ 250 million, but after the release of HIPC funds this will total US\$ 450 million. In a country where 70 percent of the population live below the poverty line and 38 percent live in extreme poverty¹⁶, the incentive to secure quick and maximum debt relief is obvious. In order to do this, however, the World Bank and IMF stipulated that the Bolivian government should facilitate the involvement of its population in a debate of poverty reduction priorities.

The Bolivian National Dialogue was a government-led, countrywide consultation process implemented from June to August 2000, involving government, civil society, business and international actors. It was conducted through municipal, departmental and national level government structures, using round table discussions on economic, social and political themes. Its objectives were the following:

- Determine, between government and civil society actors, the specific nature of the struggle against poverty in the regions and municipalities, in order to set public policy guidelines, so that a state poverty reduction policy may be formulated in a participatory way.
- Identify, through a participative process, the current obstacles to poverty reduction.
- Devise a participatory mechanism for the allocation of HIPC II funds.
- Devise a mechanism to institutionalise and ensure the continuity of the Dialogue process as a means of monitoring HIPC II funds, assess the implementation of the EBRP and incorporate those critical issues identified in the Dialogue 2000 process as obstacles to poverty reduction in future dialogues¹⁷.

The process was led by the Vice-Ministry for Popular Participation, within the Ministry of Sustainable Development, which selected an independent Technical Secretariat of external experts to design the process. The Technical Secretariat explicitly sought to involve people who experience poverty in their design of the National Dialogue¹⁸ and placed greatest emphasis on municipal level round tables in an effort to ensure that this happened. The whole Dialogue process was founded on the assumption that municipal governments are close to their citizens and are aware of their priorities and the resource allocations required to eradicate poverty. Although the Technical Secretariat was aware that in a heavily clientelist system this is a gross assumption to make, municipalities were still felt to be the most representative channel – because they are democratically elected; because poor people's organisations are often poorly organised; and in order that the Dialogue would obtain national coverage through the municipal structure.

¹⁴ Luna 2001: 88

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ International Monetary Fund and the International Development Association, 2000

¹⁷ Proyecto Dialogo Nacional 2001: 49

¹⁸ Interviews with Carlos Carafa (17/09/01) and Fernando Medina (18/09/01) of the Technical Secretariat of the National Dialogue

In total 2,423 people took part in the Dialogue 2000 process (273 at the national level, 935 at the Departmental level and 1,215 at the municipal level)¹⁹, out of a population of 8 million. The structure of these discussions is illustrated in Annex 4. At the Municipal level participants were comprised of the local mayor, the vice president of the municipal council, the president of the Vigilance Committee²⁰ and a woman from civil society selected by the Vigilance Committee. These round table groups in each of the 314 municipalities then elected representatives to send to Departmental and National level dialogues. Sectoral civil society groups, NGO networks, Jubilee 2000 representatives, producers, trade unions, parliamentarians and government ministry officials were also present at the national and departmental level round tables.

Discussions at the municipal level were focused around very concrete questions concerning the priority populations and issues for poverty reduction, distribution and control of potential debt relief resources. Groups were divided up according to the following themes:

- Poor people and poverty from the municipalities and the region;
- Mechanisms for allocating resources to combat poverty;
- Citizen's participation and control of the use of resources for poverty reduction;
- Institutionalisation and the continuation of the Dialogue.

The 'metaplan' methodology used small group discussions focused on very specific and concrete questions, and only permitted proposals to go forward from the group if consensus had been reached²¹. At the municipal level the Technical Secretariat felt that this had been a very successful approach. At the departmental and national levels, however, they felt that issues had been too vague and the presence of sectoral representatives had weakened the legitimacy of participants as they were farther removed from local issues.

International co-operation agencies were extremely involved in the Dialogue process and played an important role in encouraging and funding civil society participation. Donors allocated grants of \$300,000 among eight civil society organisations in order to support broad-based participation²².

The formal National Dialogue process was supplemented by other independently organised initiatives, such as the consultative process conducted by the producer's organisation Comité de Enlace. They conducted a series of sectoral seminars with their member organisations. This comprehensive process, which the Comité de Enlace estimates involved about 32,000 people in total, culminated in a national level workshop and written proposals which were submitted to the Dialogue. Initially the Comité de Enlace was not invited into the National Dialogue process, and embarked on a fervent lobbying process to demand space to present their policy processes.

6. Foro Jubileo 2000

¹⁹ Proyecto Diálogo Nacional, 2001

²⁰ Vigilance Committees are part of the municipal authority structure, consisting of independent citizens who monitor fund management by the municipal council and mayor.

²¹ The results of the metaplan method distinguished between an issue where consensus had been achieved (which meant that it could be put forward to the Dialogue as a concrete proposal), a trend where most participants had been in agreement but not all, and a singular issue, where an individual or small number had supported it.

²² McGee et al. 2001, Annex 3: 2

The most high profile of these other independent initiatives was the Catholic Church's Jubilee Forum. This was an ambitious process with national spread, which involved a broad range of civil society organisation and community representatives. It preceded the National Dialogue and in a way set the precedent for the government's process²³. Discussions were structured around eight thematic tables in local areas (employment and income, structural adjustment and macroeconomics, land and productivity, rural health, human rights, urban health, rural and urban education), and from these departmental and national representatives were then elected. The process took place between February and April 2000, culminating in a three-day national forum, which also included government and donor officials. The objective of the process was to raise awareness among communities of the debt relief process and to gather communities' views on how these funds were to be allocated:

"We aimed to enable those who are excluded from this globalised system to have influence on the public policies that affect them. There was a complete lack of confidence in the government and the political system, therefore social organisations felt that they couldn't just leave it to the government to spend the debt resources."
(Juan Carlos Núñez, CARITAS)

The format of the Jubilee Forum was intended specifically to enable discussions on the overall structural causes of poverty, as opposed to dividing up the discussions into political, social and economic, as in the National Dialogue.

The Jubilee Forum aimed to involve a very broad range of actors, but particularly the poor themselves. It did succeed in covering a huge geographical area at the community level and in involving some new sectors that had not traditionally been involved in the debt issue, such as women's groups. However, it did face significant obstacles. The government and the Dialogue's Technical Secretariat initially viewed the Jubilee process as unnecessary in the light of their own National Dialogue, and felt that the Church should simply play a leading role in the official government-run process²⁴. Other groups from civil society, such as trade unions and NGOs were also suspicious of the church's motives and it was some time before they felt ownership of it. This did change as the process gathered momentum and the spectrum of participants broadened, and the church proved itself to have far more convoking power than the state. The Jubilee Forum succeeded in facilitating greater representation of poor people than occurred in the formal National Dialogue²⁵.

However, some significant gaps remained - most starkly the limited involvement of popular movements and the feeling among some representatives that their names had been used to legitimise the process but their involvement had only been nominal²⁶. It seems now that through the Social Control Mechanism the church is seeking to learn from these limitations and is genuinely trying to involve grassroots people in the monitoring of debt relief funds²⁷.

The Jubilee Forum has been criticised on a number of counts. Firstly, for relying too heavily on the church's own structures as a conduit for the participation process, which was seen by some NGOs as excluding the broad majority of community members²⁸. Secondly, for the church being too closely aligned with the state and therefore reticent to criticise the National Dialogue and EBRP more fervently. Conversely though, Rosalynd Eyben of the UK's DFID

²³ Interview with Fundacion ACLO, 21/09/01

²⁴ Interviews with Fernando Medina (18/09/01) and Carlos Carafa (17/09/01) of the Technical Secretariat

²⁵ Interview with Rosalynd Eyben, DFID, 18/09/01

²⁶ Interview with Felipe Quispe, Confederación Sindical Unica de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia (CSUTCB)

²⁷ Interview with Ann Chaplin, independent development consultant, 28/09/01

²⁸ Interview with Yolanda Vargas and Crisológo Aleman, Causananchispaj, 20/09/01

is concerned that the church's Social Control Mechanism will further undermine formal governance systems by creating parallel structures rather than seeking to improve the existing ones. The National Dialogue team also criticised the Jubilee process for only involving intermediary organisations rather than permitting genuine grassroots engagement, and that its recommendations formed an unrealistic wish-list of short-term proposals rather than realistic policy recommendations.

Ultimately, there was good co-ordination between the National Dialogue and Jubilee processes, although there were a number of clashes over approach and the government's handling of the social protests. Jubilee representatives were invited to represent their findings to department and national level round tables of the Dialogue. The Dialogue Technical Secretariat showed its support for the Jubilee Forum by providing funds through the Social Consultation Fund, which also supported groups such as the *Comitø de Enlace* and the Federation of Indigenous People of the Lowlands to make their own proposals.

7. Positive aspects of participation in the EBRP

The National Dialogue was certainly a very ambitious and courageous move by the Bolivian government. Its achievement in conducting multi-stakeholder consultations involving representatives of local government, civil society and the private sector in all of Bolivia's 314 municipalities, was significant. The process was made a political priority by the government and enjoyed a high profile in the press. As part of its accompanying media strategy, some efforts were made to raise awareness of the process among traditional Aymara and Quechua communities via local language TV and radio channels. Through the National Dialogue process participation was placed at the centre of national public debate and to a certain degree this led some actors to a new realisation of their right to participate. Consequently, many commentators feel that in the National Dialogue an open and participatory process was realised and that this marked a further milestone in the shift towards decentralised government.

The design of the process was by all accounts a vast improvement on the 1997 National Dialogue. Many of the Dialogue's 2000 Technical Secretariat had previously been involved in 1997, which meant that institutional learning was utilised. The 2000 Dialogue's methodology of small group discussions and consensus-building, worked well in terms of inclusiveness and agenda formulation, at least in the municipal level round tables. Also, the fact that the National Dialogue was implemented through the formal governance structure has gained a lot of support among official actors²⁹, in that it sought to reinforce the existing system despite its flaws. Rosalynd Eyben of the UK's DFID, sees this as a brave and positive move, in contrast to the actions of many international and civil society groups, which tend to opt out of the formal governance system.

Some of the outcomes of the National Dialogue were remarkable and brought about real policy change. Arguably the most significant of these is the fact that for the first time Bolivia's resources will now be allocated according to positive discrimination criteria, favouring the poorest municipalities. The forthcoming Dialogue Law stipulates that 70% of debt relief funds will be allocated to the poorest municipalities, and the remaining 30% distributed equally between all 9 departments. This policy was a direct outcome of the National Dialogue, Jubilee Forum and intensive follow-up lobbying by civil society groups, and shows that these processes did permit a certain degree of policy influence by participants.

²⁹ Interviews with Rosalynd Eyben, DFID 19/09/01 and Luis Marcelo Renjel, Vice Ministry of Popular Participation, 17/0901

8. Limitations of participation in the EBRP

Many civil society organisations have been strongly critical of the Dialogue process and the development of the EBRP. José Rejas of Fundación ACLO claims “The government is presenting this strategy to the outside world as if it is the outcome of a truly participatory process, but from the perspective of the grassroots this just is not true.” Whereas Pablo Solon of Fundación Solon goes as far as to say that, “The Dialogue process was a show. It did not permit real participation. The outcomes of this show have simply been the imposition of more conditions on Bolivia” (Pablo Solon, Fundación Solon)³⁰.

- **Where were the poorest?**

The first and most important flaw of the EBRP process in Bolivia was its failure to directly involve poor people in genuine dialogue, and to permit their influence over the consequent poverty reduction strategy. The National Dialogue was designed on the assumption that by organising through municipalities poor people themselves would automatically be included and empowered by the process:

“They think that when they have spoken to the Mayors they have heard from the rural people, but they have not. The results of the National Dialogue did not reflect the voices of poor people.” (Yolanda Vargas, Causananchispaj, Potosi)³¹

The structure of the Dialogue process did not ensure that participants of municipal level round tables were obliged to communicate with, nor were accountable to poor communities themselves, the primary stakeholders of the EBRP. In a few cases representatives of popular organisations participating in the process organised consultations with their own constituencies in preparation for the Dialogue. However, this did not happen often and generally very little contact was made with grassroots communities. Few measures were put in place specifically to facilitate participation by the poorest and most marginalised groups. There were no efforts to use participatory methods such as PRA³² at the community level to elicit the views of poor people³³. Consequently, participation did not go beyond the municipal level.

The Dialogue process failed to address the specific requirements of indigenous people’s participation. Although indigenous people make up 70% of the population of Bolivia, they are marginalised from political and economic power. Felipe Quispe, the radical leader of campesino communities claims that “Bolivia’s 6 million indigenous people are excluded from everything, treated like 4th class citizens”³⁴. The Dialogue process totally failed to relate to traditional structures, such as the Ayllu system³⁵. It also took place in Spanish rather than local languages, which particularly precipitated against women’s involvement. Once again many indigenous communities felt they had been excluded from official processes.

³⁰ Interview with Pablo Solon, Executive Director, Fundación Solon, 24/09/01

³¹ Interview with Yolanda Vargas, Causananchispaj, 21/09/01

³² Participatory Rural Appraisal

³³ In some countries, such as Rwanda, community level PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal) tools were used to hear community views and feed them directly into the PRSP.

³⁴ Interview with Felipe Quispe, CSUTCB, 28/09/01

³⁵ The Ayllu system is an intricate and representative structure of community management and leadership, still operating in Quechua and Aymara communities since pre-Colonial times.

“They use language as a barrier. The councilors know how to speak Quechua, but when they speak to us they speak to us in Spanish to make us feel small. It is much more difficult for us to express ourselves in Spanish.” (Ayllu leader, Chilma community, Potosí)

Unsurprisingly perhaps, during interviews it became clear that community leaders in Chilma, Potosí department, who are the main interlocutors with municipal governments, had never heard of the National Dialogue or of debt relief.

Poor communities need to be supported and encouraged to build their confidence in order to take part in discussions, but this support was not provided through the formal National Dialogue process. Relying exclusively on the municipal structure as the channel for poor people’s views was inadequate, as municipal governments seem distant to many communities. One interviewee claimed, “We are just a small community so the municipal government won’t listen to us. We have visited them many times to request help, but it has never achieved anything.”³⁶ Interviews in Potosí revealed a serious lack of confidence in the Municipal government, which is deeply troubling in the light of the fact that the Dialogue process was implemented exclusively through these structures:

“When we go to discuss our problems with the municipal officials they speak nice words but we never see the fruits of them. The Mayor made promises of things he would do, but these are just words. We don’t believe he will actually do them.” (Justiniano Noviera, President of the Ayllu of Chilma, Potosí District)

• Participation without power?

Although in many ways the National Dialogue 2000 was a positive and (although restricted) participatory process, it was devalued by the fact that its outcomes were only permitted limited policy impact. Many of the civil society representatives who took part felt disempowered and disappointed with the EBRP, as they felt the first draft bore little relation to the recommendations coming from the Dialogue process. Its content only shifted (to some degree) later on, in response to an outcry from the National Dialogue Technical Secretariat, international donors and civil society groups³⁷. José Rejas of Fundación ACLO claims that “the EBRP dilutes and doesn’t reflect the results of the Jubilee Forum and the National Dialogue”³⁸. Many of the policies and programmes contained within the EBRP are the same as those that were in existence prior to the Dialogue, suggesting that the participation process did not have a policy impact. The environmental network, LIDEMA, stated the example that specific sustainable development recommendations were proposed by all round tables in the Dialogue, but that these were not included in the EBRP document.

Many CSOs feel that the government, and international community had a pre-set policy agenda for the EBRP, which essentially preserved the structural adjustment measures already in place. They suggest that space for discussion was purposely restricted so that macroeconomic policies were not openly analysed. By firmly focusing the National Dialogue debate on debt relief resources, a broader discussion of the national budget and adjustment measures was avoided. Also, the division between social and economic agendas within the Dialogue structure, and the very selective invitations to participants for each round table meant that many interested parties were excluded from discussing economic issues. NGOs

³⁶ Community meeting, Potosi Department 20/09/01

³⁷ The Comité de Enlace declared an emergency because the EBRP document was so far from the recommendations of the National Dialogue. They mobilised their members and miners marched through La Paz. They had only expected about 3,000 miners and 12,000 turned up.

³⁸ Interview with José Rejas, Fundación ACLO, 21/09/01

that provide a more radical and critical analysis of development economics, such as CEDLA, were not invited to discuss the economic agenda, and were confined to social issues³⁹. As many CSOs consider neo-liberal policies to be a cause of poverty and inequality in Bolivia, it was a conspicuous absence from the public debate.

“There have been many studies clearly demonstrating the detrimental impact of most structural adjustment measures on poor people, and in particular on women, but these have not been taken into account in the EBRP. The policies of the EBRP are not going to tackle poverty and some are likely to actually exacerbate it.” (Diana Urioste, Coordinadora de la Mujer)

“The EBRP is framed within the same neo-liberal model as structural adjustment. This will not address poverty because it doesn’t address the causes of poverty.” (Pablo Solon, Fundación Solon)

Some commentators do feel that the EBRP reflects the outcomes of the National Dialogue process⁴⁰. However, there is also strong feeling that it was used simply to legitimise existing social and economic programmes and that in fact nothing has changed⁴¹.

- **A closed door process**

The EBRP is viewed as a government document by the population, despite government’s claims that it was formulated jointly with society through a participatory process. The lack of popular ownership of the document was a consequence of the writing process, which was undertaken by UDAPE, a government economic think-tank, with the help of consultants. Veronica Lopez Aguilar of the Environmental NGO network LIDEMA claims that the “drafting of the EBRP was a closed door process”, and political commentator Carlos Toranzo confirms that “the EBRP does not reflect a participatory process”⁴².

“When the government began to draft the strategy all participation stopped. The results of the National Dialogue were not respected by the EBRP. The Dialogue Law was also worked on behind closed doors.” (José Enrique Piñelo, Comité de Enlace)

It is clear that the Technical Secretariat of the National Dialogue played no part in the actual writing of the EBRP and they felt that inadequate links were made between the two processes. However, contradictory messages were given as to the level of UDAPE’s involvement in the Dialogue process, as Technical Secretariat members felt this had been non-existent⁴³ and that the UDAPE writing team was totally dominated by traditional economists who had not been able to utilise the results of the Dialogue⁴⁴. However, UDAPE representatives claimed they had taken part in the Dialogue and that it had been an extremely successful and useful process. Furthermore, UDAPE analysts said that the Dialogue had fundamentally informed

³⁹ The economic agenda Round Table was only attended by producers’ associations, business and government.

⁴⁰ Interview with Luis Marcelo Renjel, Special Advisor to Vice-Minister for Popular Participation, 17/09/01

⁴¹ Interview with Javier Gomez and Gustavo Luna, CEDLA, 17/09/01

⁴² Carlos Toranzo was the first Technical Secretary of the National Dialogue 2000 process, but resigned from this position in April 2000 due to the State of Siege declared at this time by the Government of Bolivia.

⁴³ Interview with Fernando Medina, Technical Secretariat of National Dialogue, 19/09/01

⁴⁴ There are very few social scientists or anthropologists within UDAPE, meaning that a heavy emphasis is placed on income poverty and macro-economic solutions to it.

the EBRP document (although they admitted that it had reconfirmed to them that their policies had been correct, rather than introducing new ones).⁴⁵

- **Women's participation in the formulation of the EBRP**

“Women at the grassroots do not feel that the EBRP is going to change their lives at all.” (Diana Urioste, Coordinadora de la Mujer)

The National Dialogue framework stipulated that at least 30% of participants should be women. To ensure that this was fulfilled, all civil society representatives at municipal discussions had to be women, in addition to which some of the mayors, vigilance committee and vice-presidents of the council were also women. However, there was no quota for women's representation at the departmental or national levels, so levels of representation were much lower. The Technical Secretariat estimates that in the end 35-38% of participants were women⁴⁶. However, despite these measures, participation by poor, indigenous or excluded women was inadequate, and even representatives of women's networks, such as the Coordinadora de la Mujer, were not invited to take part.

Some critics feel that efforts to institutionalize popular participation have failed to involve women sufficiently, or that the gulf between men and women has grown as men's involvement, but has actually reduced women's relative participation⁴⁷. In Bolivia participation by women is hindered by lack of education, low confidence levels and their roles within the family. The Dialogue did not put in place specific mechanisms to facilitate women's involvement - timings of meetings were often inconvenient for women and limited use of local languages means that due to lower levels of education women are more likely to be excluded. Carlos Carafa of the Dialogue's Technical Secretariat, acknowledged that women participated far more in discussions when indigenous languages were used.

The gender analysis of the consequent EBRP was weak and there are no long-term strategic gender objectives defined within it. This was largely due to the lack of capacity and political weight of the Vice Ministry of Gender, which was not taken seriously enough to negotiate effectively with the Ministry of Finance. Diana Urioste of the Coordinadora de la Mujer, felt that the World Bank and IMF were resistant to fully integrating a gender perspective into the EBRP.

Carlos Carafa acknowledged that in future women should be better incorporated into dialogue processes, because they had made excellent contributions to the National Dialogue 2000. However, in order for this to happen effectively concerted efforts must be made to build the capacity of a diverse range of women to participate. Also, it cannot be assumed that when women participate they are willing or able to put forward gender-specific proposals. To state the obvious, women's participation levels must not be assumed to automatically result in gender sensitive policies.

- **Ownership: a Bolivian strategy?**

The extent to which Bolivian policy is nationally owned is a contentious issue. It is extremely difficult to distinguish between Bolivian government policies and those that are conditions of IFI funding. However, many interviewees for this research felt strongly that “public policies in Bolivia are determined by multilateral and bilateral international donors” (Miguel Urioste, Fundación Tierra), and that “the strategy (EBRP) does not present a Bolivian development model. It is a document that has been conditioned by international co-operation” (José

⁴⁵ Interview with Fernando M. Jimenez Zeballos, UDAPE, 26/09/01

⁴⁶ Interview with Carlos Carafa, Technical Secretariat of National Dialogue, 17/09/01

⁴⁷ Interview with Yolanda Vargas and Crisólogo Aleman, Causananchispaj, 20/09/01

Enrique Piñello, Comité de Enlace). Some interviewees felt that the decentralisation of health and education services was a clear example of a policy which came directly from the World Bank and IMF⁴⁸. Even some government employees admit that if Bolivia had presented an alternative strategy to the IFIs it would have risked losing its debt relief⁴⁹.

• **The participation process itself**

The effectiveness of participation in the Dialogue process varied greatly between national, departmental and municipal levels and between the various sectoral round tables. At the departmental level round tables did not work as well as at the municipal level, as participants did not have such good knowledge of poverty or of the people they represented, sectoral divisions were problematic, representivity of participants was questionable and discussions less focused and concrete⁵⁰. Some of the limitations of the process are the following:

- Although some efforts were made to disseminate information on the National Dialogue to indigenous communities using local radio and TV stations, this was not widespread, and no printed materials were made available in local languages such as Aymara, Quechua or Guaraní.
- Even leading CSOs involved in lobbying around the EBRP complained of a severe lack of information from the government⁵¹.
- As no participation was a requirement of the Interim PRSP, the agenda for discussions was set by the government and international actors. Pablo Solon, of Fundación Solon, criticised this approach: "Dialogue in its true sense cannot be simply the discussion of a document that has already been written by consultants. The National Dialogue was used to legitimize an existing strategy."
- The whole process from the start of the Dialogue, through the formulation of the EBRP, to the passing of the Dialogue Law, has taken little over a year. This is a very tight timeframe for such a comprehensive process, which meant that it was not possible to take discussions to the community level.
- No feedback was given to participants of the National Dialogue following the production of the EBRP, informing them of which of their proposals would and would not be incorporated in it.
- Participants were not provided with an opportunity to give their reactions to the final draft of the EBRP. The government claimed this could occur through the website, but most CSOs don't have access to the web and so felt excluded at this final stage of the process⁵².
- Due to the economic and political crises that accompanied the Dialogue process, policy progress and consensus was not possible on all issues. This was particularly the case on the political agenda, as the political summit that had been planned never took place, which left some participants feeling confused and dissatisfied.

• **Politicisation**

The Dialogue and the formulation of the EBRP were political processes, where critical trade-offs on resource allocations were debated. Although the explicit intention was for municipal participants to represent a range of political parties, in many cases vigilance committees were not independent of local government and were chosen because they were allies of the mayor. A number of reports, even from the Technical Secretariat itself, confirmed that political

⁴⁸ Interview with Miguel Urioste, Fundación Tierra, 17/09/01

⁴⁹ Interview with Luis Marcelo Renjel, Special Advisor to Vice-Minister for Popular Participation, 17/09/01

⁵⁰ Interview with Fernando Medina, Technical Secretariat of National Dialogue, 19/09/01

⁵¹ Interview with Leonor Arauco, consultant and ex-Director of UNITAS, 24/09/01

⁵² Interview with Fundación ACLO, 21/09/01

interests had tampered with the Dialogue process in order to influence resource allocations. One of the critical areas where this occurred was over the question of whether to allocate a greater proportion of debt relief funds to the poorest municipalities, or simply according to the relative size of the population. A further issue was the fact that local government selected participants for municipal round tables meant that it was not a totally independent process⁵³.

- **Social protests**

“In September 2000, the emergence of a tremendous peasant movement revealed the limited perspective of the ‘National Dialogue 2000’. In fact, this mobilisation revealed the need for a more legitimate representation of social organisations and a wider focus on the demands to be considered in the poverty reduction strategy.” (Gustavo Luna, CEDLA Social Watch Project)

The National Dialogue took place at a time of extremely heightened social tension and turbulence. In April and September-October 2000 Bolivia was seized by a wave of social protests which brought the country to a standstill. In response, a state of siege was declared by the government in April, which in turn resulted in the (temporary) resignation of the whole of the National Dialogue’s Technical Secretariat who felt it was impossible to play their role in such a repressive context. It was not coincidental that this political turmoil occurred around the times of the Jubilee Forum and the National Dialogue, as these processes had begun to open up increasing space and generate expectations that were then not met. Indigenous groups and workers felt excluded from these processes and sought other routes to assert their demands. Many critics claim that the protests and the Dialogue were intricately linked:

“Traditional rural communities played no part in this so called National Dialogue. The people who took part are those who always participate – people from the city. We were totally excluded and that is why we decided to protest.” (Felipe Quispe, CSUTCB)

“It was a time of great conflict and demonstrated how the National Dialogue had been extremely superficial. The government’s only way of resolving it was to use repression and bullets.” (Waldo Albarracin, Asamblea Permanente de Derechos Humanos)

Gustavo Luna of CEDLA claims that the protests resulted from a total failure of the Dialogue process to address equity issues. Poverty was discussed there simply in terms of social policy, rather than involving a more thorough assessment of its political and economic causes⁵⁴. Undoubtedly social organisations and community groups felt suspicious of the state and its Dialogue process, and felt very little ownership of the debt relief initiative⁵⁵. In fact many continue to oppose the whole debt relief process because they view it as simply another way of the World Bank and IMF controlling their country.

What next?

As US\$ 1,300 million debt relief will be freed up in over the next 15 years, a great deal of work remains to be done to raise awareness among communities of their right to apply for a share of these funds via their municipal authorities. Currently levels of community awareness about debt relief funds, their potential access and how to submit a proposal for funding are extremely low. Also, the structure through which applications must be made is still not properly established (such as the Departmental level project groups) although the deadline for project submissions for 2001-2 was at the end of September 2001. The process has been

⁵³ Interview with Fundación ACLO, 21/09/01

⁵⁴ Gustavo Luna, CEDLA Social Watch Project, Social Watch 2001 pp. 88-89

⁵⁵ Interview with Miguel Urioste, Fundación Tierra, 25/09/01

rushed and will need to be consolidated if it is to facilitate poor people's participation in the use of HIPC resources.

The EBRP is currently a broad development plan, rather than a specific, targeted and measurable poverty reduction strategy. It will need to be revised and more detailed sub-plans written in order to become an effective poverty reduction tool and to be monitored according to set objectives. Civil society groups are calling on the government to ensure that these revisions result in holistic, gender-sensitive and realistic poverty reduction goals, so that the government can be held accountable to society against them.

As the EBRP is implemented and monitored structures will be needed to support continued and improved people's participation at all stages of the process. The planning and design of these structures should involve civil society actors. Special efforts must be made by both government and civil society representatives to facilitate participation by poor communities. As the Social Control Mechanism is developed, efforts must be made to prevent its politicisation and to ensure it reaches community level. Civil society should be involved in making the links between the Single Management Fund, and the EBRP, and monitoring the use of international funds against the priorities set out in the EBRP. International donors who contribute to the Single Management Fund must be prepared to give up some degree of control over their funds in order to make this workable.

9. Conclusions and recommendations for people's participation in PRSPs

- Policy should be informed by the reality of poor people's lives. It cannot automatically be assumed that intermediaries are totally representative of poor people and efforts should also be made to engage with them directly as well as through popular organisations. Dialogue is a conversation, not the extraction of a list of demands, and in order for this to happen good explanations are needed of various approaches, so that people are able to make informed choices. Often focusing discussions around specific and immediate issues, such as local street lighting or transport services, can close this gap, as poor people are normally more engaged and animated on the topic of local issues that they can see affect their daily lives.

Recommendation: *Governments and the IFIs should invest more in finding appropriate ways of raising community awareness of PRSP processes and making connections between local realities and national policy if poor people's views are going to be sought.*

- Capacity building of both civil society groups and community members is needed if the Bolivian population is to monitor and critique the EBRP. Participatory methods such as PRA and economic literacy training should be used with grassroots communities who currently lack awareness of national policy processes and the skills to debate policy options. Many civil society groups, in particular women's organisations, also need to develop economic literacy skills, to critique the EBRP and ensure that a gender analysis is mainstreamed.

Recommendation: *Donors, the IFIs, government and NGOs should investment in and support economic literacy training with communities and civil society groups.*

- Links between civil society intermediary organisations and grassroots communities need to be improved. NGOs have economic analysis and lobbying experience, which could be imparted to popular movements. Whereas social movements have impressive mobilising powers and direct experience of poverty, which could be used to strengthen NGO analysis.

Recommendation: *NGOs, municipalities, communities and popular movements should make concerted efforts to deepen their relationships and share their skills and experiences.*

- As participation becomes increasingly institutionalised in Bolivia, community awareness of policy processes, the opportunities these present and people's rights to participate in them needs to be raised. For this to happen, information must be communicated in appropriate forms.

Recommendation: *Information should be communicated in local languages, using media forms that are appropriate to each community, such as short leaflets, dramas, video or radio soap operas.*

- Participatory processes must be permitted genuine influence over policy and not used simply to legitimise pre-set agendas. It is a waste of time, energy and resources to use dialogue as a way of legitimizing already designed programmes. It will also generate false expectations and break down relationships between different actors. If people are to be invited to participate their contributions must be permitted to influence the PRSP and its accompanying policies. Clearly there was political will behind the National Dialogue in Bolivia, but it is more doubtful whether political leaders would have been willing to permit a more influential process.

Recommendation: *Future dialogues must go further in permitting people's views to transform the development model where appropriate, supported by the political will of government and the IFIs to cede power.*

- Participation should occur at municipal, departmental and national levels, in order that citizens may feel greater ownership of policies and programmes, and are able to scrutinize them. In Bolivia most attempts to facilitate popular participation in resource allocation have thus far been at the Municipal level. These have helped to lay the groundwork for similar discussions at the national level, although this is quite a difficult shift to make.

Recommendation: *Governments should be supported to encourage participatory exercises at all levels.*

- Lessons must be learnt from the successes and failures of Bolivia's National Dialogue 2000 and used to improve future dialogues, which should now take place every 3 years. This learning would also be useful for other countries under-going a PRSP process.

Recommendation: *A comprehensive review of lessons learnt from the Bolivian National Dialogue and EBRP processes should be undertaken prior to the next future dialogue.*

Annex 1: Key words and Acronyms

CEDLA	Centro de Estudios para el Desarrollo Laboral y Agrario
DFID	Department for International Development (UK Government)
EBRP	Estrategia Boliviana de Reducción de la Pobreza
IMF	International Monetary Fund
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
SCM	Social Control Mechanism
UDAPE	Unidad de Anàlisis de Políticas Sociales y Económicas
UNITAS	National Union of Institutions for Social Action

Annex 2: List of Interviews

Many thanks to the following who contributed their time to share their views with the author:

Diana Urioste, Secretaria Ejecutiva, Coordinadora de la Mujer

Veronica Lopez, Coordinadora Programa de Gestion Ambiental, Liga de Defensa del Medio Ambiente (LIDEMA)

Fernando M. Jimenez Zeballos, Subdirector de Politica Macroeconomica, Unidad de Analisis de Politicas Sociales y Economicas (UDAPE)

Raul Mendoza Patiño, Especialista del Area de Investigaciones Especiales, Banco Central de Bolivia

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Dr. Vladamir Gutierrez Pérez, Director General, Centro de Estudios para el Desarrollo “Chuquisaca” (CEDEC)

Miguel Urioste, Director, Fundación Tierra

Elisabeth Peredo B., Area Mujer, Identidad y Trabajo, and Pablo Solón, Director Ejecutivo, Fundación Solon

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Juan Condori Uruchi, Contador General, INCOS

Javier Gomez, Director, and Gustavo Luna, Proyecto Control Ciudadano, CEDLA

Felipe Quispe, Confederación Sindical Unica de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia (CSUTCB)

Yolanda Vargas, Directora Area Salud y Educación, and Crisólogo Aleman, Director, Causananchispaj

Coco Pinelo, Comité de Enlace

Rosalyn Eyben, Senior Social Development Advisor, Department for International Development, Government of United Kingdom

Hugo Fernandez, Executive Director, UNITAS

Leonor Arauco, Consultant and ex-Director of UNITAS

Many thanks to Sara Shields for her flawless interpretation during many of these meetings.

Annex 3: Contributing Organisations

This report was produced in collaboration with a number of Bolivian organisations that work in partnership with Christian Aid. We would like to acknowledge their very valuable advice, guidance, provision of information and contacts, and comments on drafts.

ACLO Loyola Cultural Action, established in 1966, is one of the largest rural NGOs in south Bolivia. It is committed to empowering and changing the situation of Bolivian campesinos and runs a communications programme involving the production of indigenous newspapers and a radio station for the rural population in the departments of Chuquisaca and Potosi.

Causananchispaj which means ‘to be able to live’ in Quechua, was founded in 1991 and runs an integrated rural development programme including agriculture, water, health, education and community organising with 21 rural communities in Potosi department.

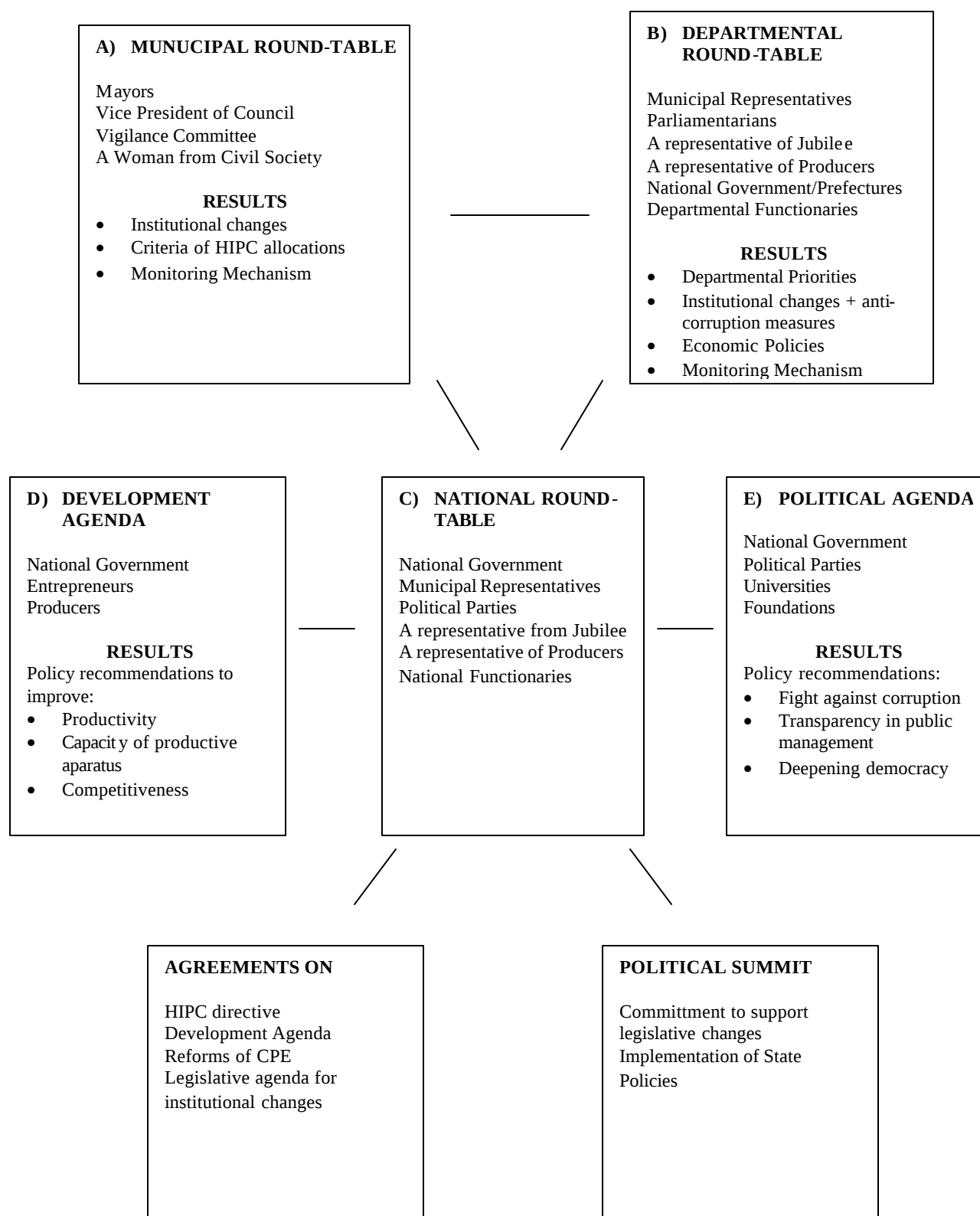
CEDEC, the Centre of Studies for Development ‘Chuquisaca’, was founded in 1986 to undertake research into the levels of development in Chuquisaca. CEDEC now works extensively on food security issues throughout the province of Belisario Boeto.

CEDLA, the Centre for Labour and Agricultural Development, has been working since 1979 on micro and macro economic issues, towards the realisation of economic, social and cultural rights by rural and urban working people. CEDLA is one of the leading research and advocacy NGOs working on economic issues in Bolivia.

Fundacion Solon, the Women, Identity and Work department of the Solon Foundation, named after a famous Bolivian artist, works for social justice. It promotes fairer working conditions for women domestic workers throughout Bolivia.

UNITAS, the National Union of Institutions for Social Action, is an umbrella organisation of NGOs in Bolivia. It provides a forum in which groups in this sector can discuss, collaborate and lobby on development issues at national level.

Annex 4: General Layout of the Dialogue Process 2000



Source: Adapted from Secretaría Técnica del Diálogo 2001, p16

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