The Politics of Poverty Reduction
- Power Relations in the making of Uganda’s PRSP

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Margrethe Ellingseter
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Abstract

This thesis discusses the power-relations between donors, government and civil society in the making of Uganda’s PRSP. I argue that the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) represent a hegemonic development discourse, as it has moved beyond contests over meaning to unquestioned acceptance. However, as the strength of the hegemonic development discourse and whose interests it serves will depend on the configurations of power at national and local levels, I have focused on the Ugandan PRSP process. Uganda was chosen as the study area, because it has been portrayed as the showcase for the PRSP model. By taking a closer look at the “success-story”, my findings would therefore be significant for the whole PRSP project. Furthermore, the study will contribute to recent theoretical writings trying to analyse poverty policy processes involving stakeholders from both the international, national and local levels, invested with different degrees of power to fulfil their agenda. The findings are based on research done during the autumn of 2005, where I interviewed different stakeholders engaged in the latest revision process of the Ugandan PRSP. As the power of development ideology has much to do with its ability to frame ideas, the main body of the findings are structured around the ideas of poverty reduction, ownership and participation incorporated in the PRSP approach, and whether these ideas have altered the power relation between the donors, the state and civil society and made Uganda’s national development policy more “pro-poor”. The main conclusions are built around the argument that the ideas of poverty, participation and ownership have been successfully framed. They have been depoliticised in the sense that they no longer speaks of politics and power, but have become mechanisms for upholding the status quo and legitimising a technical-economic development blueprint, based on neoliberal assumptions. Considering the power of the development partners in Uganda, there is little space for the government or for NGOs to suggest another solution to the problem of poverty, despite the rhetoric about ownership and participation. However, while the Poverty Eradication Action Plan lack political ownership, the government has managed to aligned it with domestic political priorities, as it has alongside and intervened with the efforts of fighting poverty used foreign aid to uphold and expand its clientilistic networks. Politics have therefore interfered in the depoliticised discourse of poverty.
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List of abbreviations

CSO   Civil Society Organisation
IFI   International Financial Institution
IMF   International Monetary Fund
JSA   Joint Staff Assessment
MFPED Ministry of Finance Planning and Economic Development
NAADS National Agricultural Advisory Service
NGO   Non Governmental Organisation
NRA   National Resistance Army
NRM   National Resistance Movement
PAF   Poverty Action Fund
PEAP  Poverty Eradication Action Plan
PMA   Plan for Modernisation of Agriculture
PRSI  Poverty Reduction Strategy Initiative
PRSP  Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
RDSI  Rural Development Strategy Initiative
SAP   Structural Adjustment Programme
SEI   Strategic Export Initiative
1. Introduction

Ideology is never so ideological as when it is seen as natural, consensual and merely a technical matter (Craig and Porter 2006: 63).

Aim and Purpose of Study

The aim of this thesis is to discuss whether the ideas of poverty reduction, ownership and participation, incorporated in the PRSP approach, have altered the power relation between the donors, the state and civil society and made Uganda’s national development policy more “pro-poor”. In order to do this I interviewed different stakeholders engaged in the latest revision process of the Poverty Eradication Action Plan during a three months fieldwork in Uganda. I chose Uganda as my study area, because it has been portrayed as the showcase for the PRSP model. By taking a closer look at the “success-story”, my findings will be significant for the whole PRSP project. Furthermore, the purpose of the study is to contribute to recent theoretical writings trying to analyse poverty policy processes involving stakeholders from both the international, national and local levels, invested with different degrees of power to fulfil their agenda. The strength of the thesis is therefore that it, contrary to most studies, gives a holistic description of power-relations, where the interdependency of the different levels are analysed.

The Poverty Reduction Strategy Initiative

In the late 90s the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) were increasingly confronted with concrete evidence that the Structural Adjustment Programmes, with their neoliberal thrust in free markets and self-regulation, had not done much good for the poor and that top-down development blueprints rarely, if ever, worked in practice. Finding themselves in a legitimacy crisis they re-postured themselves around a new development approach which would be more focused on reducing poverty. This approach was named the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) by the World Bank and the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility Programme (PRGF) by the International Monetary Fund. This thesis will focus on the Poverty Reduction Strategy Initiative of the Bank, as most development agencies, including the UN, all the significant bilateral donors, and large NGOs have welcomed the initiative and are now
trying to align their development efforts with the programme. The Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, are “supposed to be `locally generated and owned,´ developed through `wide participatory dialogue´, and focused at both the micro and macro policy making levels, it is expected to `encourage the accountability of governments to their own people and domestic constituencies rather than to external funders´, whereby, `the poor become active participants not just passive recipients´” (Caroline M. Robb 2000 in Malaluan and Guttal 2003: 2).

As many of the donor agencies try to coordinate and align their aid support to a country’s PRSP it is expected that aid will become more effective in reducing poverty. As a means to reach these objectives the donors have started to experiment with giving direct budget or programme support instead of supporting particular projects (Cheru 2006: 370). The benefits of this are expected to be increased national ownership of the national poverty reduction policies, in addition to a strengthening of state institutions. Furthermore with the realisation that successful reforms depended on a national ownership that extended well beyond the technocrats in governments, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Initiative aims at creating a broad-based consensus for national poverty policies (Craig and Porter 2006: 78). This consensus is supposed to be reached by involving both national and local governments, the private sector, civil society and the poor themselves in the making of policies. By carrying out national Participatory Poverty Assessments as a joint venture of international consultants, staff from national ministries of finance and planning and NGOs, the poor are claimed to be given a voice, as the information gathered are supposed to feed into national development plans.

The elementary definition of civil society is that it is “composed of voluntary associations that occupy the space between the family and the state” (Baazara 2000: 4). Civil society has however mostly been represented by NGOs or what is referred to as Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in the PRSPs. These organisations are seen as legitimate representatives of the poor as they are conceived as having strong grass-root connections. CSOs, or NGOs as I will call them in this thesis are therefore encouraged by the donors to do policy advocacy. In addition, as civil society and political society are conceived as constituting two distinct categories, NGOs seen as representatives of civil society, are also expected to hold the government to account and cry out about badly implemented policy or corruption. The watchdog role of these organisations is important for the donors, since they, by giving budget support have less control over the money they are contributing with to the
government. Lastly these same CSOs are additionally supposed to cooperate with the government and help it implement policies.

The main critique against the new Poverty Reduction Strategy Initiative is that it is merely an attempt by the IFIs and the Group of 7 to regain their legitimacy in a time of crisis, as they continue expanding their intellectual hegemony as leaders of the development consensus (Craig and Porter 2006: 14). The response is therefore claimed to be a rhetorical fix that has left inequitable global and local relations of power and the root causes of poverty unchallenged, as the main aim continue to be to provide markets with the minimal regulatory and institutional support and social legitimacy needed for market-oriented reforms (Cornwall 2000: 1 in Brock 2002: 2; Craig and Porter 2006). As Craig and Porter (2006: 11) argue, “What the Bank knows, changes: true, but within crucial liberal parameters.” Thus, emphasis is still on conservative macroeconomic and pro-market policy-settings. However the new approach has also added on the “three-legged agenda of promoting economic opportunity through global market integration, and enhanced social and economic security and empowerment through innovative governance arrangements for local service delivery of health, education and other poverty-reducing services” (Craig and Porter 2006: 4).

**Main Arguments and Structure of Thesis**

The next chapter will justify why I chose a qualitative research strategy for data collection during my fieldwork in Uganda from September until December 2005. It will furthermore describe the tools used for data sampling, collection and analysis, and the reliability and validity of the study. Furthermore it will state the ethical considerations taken during and after the fieldwork.

Chapter three, “Where we are coming from”, shows that the political-economic history of Uganda have only allowed for a truncated form of civil society organisations to emerge, as they have been curtailed by extensive state control. The best chance of surviving as an organisation has therefore been to become co-opted in the political apparatus or co-operating with the state in service provision. This history has implications for which roles NGOs are most comfortable with today.
As the making of a national PRSP is a complex policy-process, involving stakeholders from different levels, I have built a theoretical framework that can enhance an understanding of power-relations between donors, the state and civil society. Taking a theoretical departure from Gramscian and Neo-Gramscian thinking, it starts with describing the concept of hegemony and how power can manifest itself both at international and national levels. I argue that the PRSPs represent a hegemonic development discourse, in a Gramscian sense, since as it has moved beyond contest over meaning to unquestioned acceptance. The power of discourses therefore depends on its ability to define the terms of the debate and “delegitimize competing conceptualisations of both the problem and the solution and so different policy approaches” (Sending 2004: 58). Furthermore, it depends on a successful framing of ideas. An idea is “a concept, which powerfully influences development policy” and it is successfully framed if it has lost its potential to achieve change, in the sense that it has been depoliticised and no longer speaks of politics and power, but becomes a mechanism for upholding the status quo and legitimising the existing world order. (Boås and McNeill 2004: 1).

However, I claim that focusing on the state, best assesses the strength of the hegemonic development discourse, as this will depend on the configurations of power at the national and local levels. The most important task of any government is to stay in power, and many African states have been labelled neopatrimonial, as their legitimacy to a large extent depends on nourishing clientilistic networks. Considering this, I argue that governments in developing African States have managed to uphold and expand its clientilistic networks alongside and intervened with the donor’s pressure for political and economic reforms. Therefore, as governments have to legitimise their power, development interventions do often not result in the donor’s expected outcomes. I then discuss whether civil society is best conceptualised as autonomous from the state. As I argue that it often is not, this has implications for whether civil society, represented by NGOs in the PRSP processes, can hold the government to account, as donors assume. At the end of this chapter I bring in the concepts of actors, knowledge and spaces, in order to operationalise my analysis of the complex poverty policy process.

Chapter five, six and seven are structured around the ideas of ownership, participation and poverty reduction and discuss my findings in relation to theory. I argue that these ideas have been depoliticised in the sense that they no longer speaks of politics and power, but have become mechanisms for upholding the status quo and legitimising a technical-economic
development blueprint, based on neoliberal assumptions. They have therefore not altered power-relations between the donors, the government and civil society, or made Ugandan policy more pro-poor.

In chapter five, I describe Uganda as a subordinate nation within a hegemonic world order, with the attributed characteristics of trying to implement elements of the hegemonic development discourse without disturbing old power structures. The International Financial Institution has portrayed Uganda, committed to a stable macroeconomic framework, experiencing prolonged economic growth and a sharp decline in the national poverty rate, as a success-story. This narrative, suggest that by pursuing the right policies, like adhering to macroeconomic fundamentals, liberalise and privatise, economic growth will commence and the market will apply its poverty reducing magic. However, questioning this narrative, I argue that the International Financial Institutions have used it to sell its technical-economic blueprint to other developing countries. Furthermore I claim that the idea of ownership has not altered power-relations between the donors and the government, as the donors are still very powerful policy actors and as the Poverty Eradication Action Plan seems to lack political ownership. However, the government have benefited from the PRSP initiative, as its “success” has made donors fund half of the Ugandan Budget for years. Funds, which partly have been used to legitimise a power that is based on a neopatrimonial logic.

Chapter six describe the participation of national NGOs in the latest revision process of the PEAP and discuss whether their participation has contributed to legitimising the hegemonic development discourse of the PRSPs or whether they by participating have been able to challenge it. Civil society’s contribution influenced the PEAP in some areas, but its inputs challenging the neoliberal assumptions of the PEAP framework were dismissed. The argument for rejecting their contribution was based on a rhetoric that civil society had not done their proper research in these areas. However, I argue that these inputs were dismissed because the World Bank is still the gatekeeper of what should be regarded as legitimate poverty knowledge. In addition the government conceive policy-making as best left to the politicians and have therefore been reluctant to take on arguments from NGOs. Therefore, participation has lent legitimacy to a poverty reduction policy that to a large degree is based on a neoliberal paradigm.
As the poverty reduction policies are implemented at the decentralised levels of governance, I move my analysis to the micro level in chapter seven. Arguing that decentralisation in Uganda has largely failed due to inadequate capacities at the lower levels of governance, insufficient fiscal decentralisation and a lack of accountability to citizens, the efforts of decentralisation has mostly served political ends rather than development needs. Furthermore, by looking at which kind of policies has been implemented on the ground, I raise doubts about the central government’s ideological commitment to poverty reduction, and whether Uganda’s development policy can be described as pro-poor. The thesis will conclude with some remarks on the politics of poverty reduction.
2. Method

As I in this thesis assess how the hegemonic development discourse surrounding the PRSP initiative influences and is used by the actors participating in the PEAP process in Uganda, I conceive ‘truth’ to be socially constructed. Furthermore, focusing on processes, power, knowledge production and how actors interpret their own and other’s actions I chose a qualitative research strategy. This chapter will give the reader insight into how I collected and analysed my data and how the findings can contribute to the already existing knowledge and theory. It is also the aim of this chapter to make the research process transparent to the reader in order to increase the study’s reliability and validity, in addition to showing that ethical considerations have been taken seriously.

Scientific Positioning and Research Strategy

Arguing that the PRSPs represent a hegemonic development discourse, I was during my three months fieldwork in Uganda interested in how this discourse influenced or was used by different actors within the Ugandan PRSP process. Therefore, my ontological starting point is that whatever happens in the real world with regards to the PEAP process, will be influenced by a socially constructed truth about development and the actors participating in it. Furthermore, concerned about power structures and aiming at understanding a complex process and how different actors interpret and give meaning to their actions epistemologically label myself both within interpretivism and critical realism (Mikkelsen 2005: 135). Due to my ontological and epistemological orientation I found a qualitative research strategy best suited for collecting the information I needed.

Sampling, Data collection and Analysis

Sampling

Before my fieldwork started in October 2005, I had been in Uganda for two months, taking a compulsory course of my Master degree at Makerere University. I used this time to get updated on the political situation in Uganda, and visited research institutions that were of key importance to my study. I attempted at getting interviewees by sending requests by email, but
this seemed of little use. The breakthrough with regards to getting contacts came when a fellow Ugandan student (who earlier had been a Youth representative within the National Resistance Movement) introduced me to one parliamentarian and a person within the Ministry of Finance. It is here important to state that many of the interviews in the first phase of my fieldwork was conducted together with a fellow student that had more or less the same research objectives as me for her thesis. We were both interested in the PEAP process and the relations between the government and the donors, but I had a particular interest in the role of Civil Society Organisations in the PEAP process, whereas her main focus was on the parliament’s role. As there were quite a few informants that we both had an interest in seeing, we, in respect for the informant’s time, decided to do the interviews together.

The two initial informants gave us further contact information based both on who we wanted to get in touch with and who they advised us to talk to, and so the snowball started rolling. The lesson learned was that the best way to get in contact with people was through personal relations, or more specific, by getting hold of people’s personal mobile numbers. The danger of this kind of sampling is that some units of the population are more likely to be selected than others, and that many of the informants have similar points of views. In order to correct this limitation I went to relevant offices in person and requested for an interview, where I felt that the snowball sampling did not lead me to informants relevant for the research questions. During the fieldwork I also passively participated in three conferences that made it easier for me to establish new contacts.

During the first phase of the fieldwork I interviewed a broad spectre of stakeholders involved in the latest revision process of the PEAP. This was done in order to get thorough background information about the Poverty Eradication Action Plan and why Uganda had been portrayed as a success-story. In addition I got an in-depth understanding of the revision process of the PEAP and many of my questions were focused on the relation between the donors and the government. Among the interviewees in this phase was two parliamentarians, an informant from the World Bank, three government officials based in the Ministry of Finance, an informant from the Bank of Uganda, two informants from the Economic Policy and Research Centre (EPRC) and an informant from Uganda NGO Forum, an umbrella organisation for NGOs in Uganda. The last interviewee was also one of the responsible for coordinating civil society’s input into the PEAP.
After a month I felt confident enough about the PEAP process and its background to move on to mainly focus on national NGOs and research institutions that had taken part in the latest revision process of the PEAP. The guide for this period of the fieldwork was to reach the objective of finding out whether the participation of NGOs were used to legitimise the exiting poverty reduction policy or whether they had the space to potentially transform and challenge it. To reach this objective it was crucial to gather information about how NGOs conceptualised and understood their policy space, constraints and opportunities met in the advocacy process and strategies to applied to influence the PEAP. During this period I interviewed a number of people from Kampala-based, national NGOs and research-based organisations. These included the Centre for Basic Research, Community Development Resource Network, Development Research and Training, Uganda Debt Network, Action aid, Oxfam, Forum for Women and Democracy, Uganda Women’s network, the Council for Economic Empowerment for Women of Africa, the Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment, Environmental Alert. In addition I interviewed a Daily Monitor journalist, and a civil society adviser within the UK Department for International Development and the leader of the National Organisation of Trade Unions in Uganda. At this point I felt that my research questions regarding NGOs involvement in the PEAP process had reached theoretical saturation, in the sense that no new viewpoint seemed to come forth. I therefore decided to move on to my last and final research objective.

In the beginning of December I went to two different districts in order to learn more about the relations between the government and civil society organisations at the decentralised levels. As the time for the fieldwork was coming to an end, I only spent one week in each of the different districts. It was my informant from the Ugandan NGO Forum that helped me get in touch with one district NGO network in the west and one district NGO network in the east. The rationale for choosing theses districts was to get geographical diversification, in addition the NGO networks in these districts worked quite well, and would therefore have the capacity and ability to help me establish further contacts. As one week was a short time, most of my meetings were arranged before I came to the field or had to be arranged at the first day of arrival, there was therefore little scope for reach theoretical saturation on my research questions and refocus on the basis of information gathered. However, my objective with these field trips were moreover to contextualise the content of several rapports, gathered from research-based organisations in Kampala, discussing the relationship between NGOs and government at district levels and below. During my stay in the western district I interviewed
the leader of the district NGO forum, three service delivery NGOs involved in HIV/AIDS, the leader of the district farmer fora and two officials in the district government. During my stay in the eastern district I interviewed the leader of the NGO network, an informant from an international NGO, four district government officials, the Focal point person for the Plan for Modernisation of Agriculture (PMA), the district coordinator of the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS), a NAADS coordinator at the sub-county level, two community budget monitoring groups at sub-county level and a two members of a group supposed to benefit from the NAADS programme.

Returning to Kampala I had approximately two weeks left of my fieldwork, and I used this time to supplement my findings. I interviewed three informants from the donor community, (the World Bank, the African Development Bank and the Danish International Development Agency) and two informants from national NGOs that had participated in the last PEAP revision process (Uganda Joint Christian Council and the Ugandan Development Network for Indigenous Voluntary Associations). The informant from the Ugandan Network for Indigenous Voluntary Associations was very helpful in the sense that this is an organisation that has been highly involved in issues surrounding local governance; so talking to this informant enabled me to probe my finding from the districts. As I had continuously analysed my findings, I also saw that the implementation of the Plan for Modernisation of Agriculture could become most relevant to my thesis and I therefore managed to arrange an interview with someone in the PMA secretariat and in the NAADS secretariat.

**Method of Data Collection**

The main tool of data collecting was semi-structural qualitative interviews. Having a fairly clear focus of what type of information I needed in order to answer the research questions, I developed an interview guide. All informants within the three periods of my fieldwork were asked about the same topics, which enabled me to compare their answers and interpretations of key concepts. However, I adjusted the interview guide to each informant, in order to take advantage of each person’s specific competence. By using semi-structured interviews I got rich and detailed answers and I could be flexible during the interview and pick up on issues that informants pointed out as relevant and important to my research. In addition to the semi-structured interviews, I had focus group interviews with two community budget monitoring groups. The focus group interview was chosen, because I was merely interested in the work
the groups were engaged in and how they interpreted and understood the monitoring role. It was therefore not necessary to undertake individual interviews, and in addition the focus group approach opened up for a more interactive discussion.

Most interviews were tape recorded and transcribed as soon as possible. I decided to record the interviews, as this allowed me to pay more attention to my informants, and only take notes where I needed to clarify something or follow up on some issue later in the interview. Recording also gave me the possibility to repeatedly examine the answers. This was useful, since the more knowledge I gained about the issues at hand, the more I could contextualise not only what the people had said, but also the way they had said it. It has also been an advantage to have the possibility of quoting informants, both because they provided me with sharp and clear comments and because they then appear more as subjects in the text, in the sense that they are not always spoken for or targets for my analysis.

As mentioned earlier, I passively participated in three conferences during the fieldwork, and this gave me an opportunity to establish new contacts. The first conference was a Workshop on the Paris Declaration and its implications for donor harmonisation and alignment and how this practise could be operationalised and implemented. The second conference was the Uganda Social Forum, where most national NGOs involved in advocacy arranged work-shops and seminars in their area of interest. The third conference was the mid-term review on the National Agricultural Advisory Services in Uganda. Participating at these conferences provided me with valuable background information, but have only to a small extent been directly been used in the text.

During the fieldwork I also got hold of many research reports produced by the organisations I was in contact with. This information was both a guide during the fieldwork and as a source of triangulation during the write-up of the thesis. As much of my thesis is concerned about the latest revision of the PEAP and civil society’s influence on this framework, *The Poverty Eradication Action Plan* published by the Ministry of Finance (2004/5) and the Civil Society’s input into the PEAP, *In Search of a new Development Path* published by NGO Forum (2003/4) have been of key importance. Especially in chapter six of the thesis, the information gathered from my information about areas of influence/not influence in the PEAP was supported by an in-depth content analysis of the two documents.
Analysis; relations between theory and data

The relation between theory and data can best be described as iterative, as the research process involved a weaving back and forth between data and theory (Bryman 2004: 10). My research has also been both deductive and inductive. It has been deductive in the sense that the data collection and analysis have been based on theoretical considerations about what is already written about the PRSPs and how selected authors have tried to conceptualise relations between donors, the state and civil society in complex policy processes. My research has been inductive in the sense that I have put weight on the implications of my findings to existing theory (Bryman 2004: 8).

Before I went to the field I read quite a lot of background information about the PRSPs in general and the main critique towards this approach. In addition I had made a preliminary theoretical review building on neogramscian conceptualisations about hegemony and relations between state and civil society. The literature used for this was Gramsci’s *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (1971), edited by Hoare and Smith, two articles by Cox found in *the Global resistance Reader*, (2005) the book *Global Institutions and Development. Framing the World?* (2004) edited by Bøås and McNeill and the article by Cornwall and Brock (2005), what do buzzword do for development policy? A critical look at ’participation’, ’empowerment’ and ’poverty reduction’, found in *Third World Quarterly* no. 7.

While this background information and theoretical departure influenced my interview guide and how I interpreted my informant’s answers, I remained open during the data collection process and had the possibility to refocus towards what the interviewees pointed out as important. Therefore, there was therefore a constant dialectic between theory and findings during the fieldwork. This enabled me to test the applicability of the neogramscian theory to my research objectives at the same time as remaining open in the research process allowed me to seek outside neogramscian theory, where I felt that this could enhance my understanding of the issue at hand. As the interviews were transcribed as soon as possible, I could reflect on the information gathered and new and important issues pointed out by my informants were soon incorporated in the interview guide. During the fieldwork I also read *The anti-politics machine. “Development”, depoliticization and bureaucratic power in Lesotho* (Ferguson, 1990), and *Unpacking Policy. Knowledge, actors and spaces in poverty reduction in Uganda and Nigeria* (2004) edited by Brock, McGee and Gaventa. These two books helped me
operationalise my theoretical framework. Additionally, I felt that a more thorough understanding of the Neopatrimonial state would help my understanding of what my informants often called politics. I therefore decided to read *Africa Works. Disorder as Political instrument* (1999) by Chabal and Daloz when returning from the field.

Back in Norway I coded my data, i.e. fragmented the material into component parts that were given names. The advantage of doing this is that it provides “a mechanism for thinking about the meaning of your data and for reducing the vast amount of data that you are faced with” (Bryman 2004: 409). In practise this meant that I arranged the information gathered in tables describing a particular topic or concept. Therefore, I could easily compare what my informants had said, and since whole sections of the interviews were cut out I could still bring with me some of the narrative flow and context surrounding the answers. It was these tables that have been most influential in the discussions of my findings, though my preliminary framework of course helped me structure and make sense of the data. By applying this approach I could distance myself a bit from the theoretical framework, and let the data speak for itself and be guided by what my informants had put weight on. After writing out my findings I again went through the theoretical framework and more explicitly incorporated the theoretical significance of the findings in the discussions.

**Ethical Considerations**

All research involves elements that are ethically questionable as the informants cannot be given all the details about what their information will be used to before the analysis of the data have been conducted and the conclusions written (Bryman 2004: 508). I have though tried as far as possible to stick to sound ethical principles during and after data collection. All interviewees were told about my research, and this ensured that they could take an informed decision about whether they wanted to take part or not. Before the interview started I told the informants that I would not make any references to them by name or by their office in the organisation they worked. However, I told them that it was important for my analysis to convey whether they represented the donor community, the government or NGOs. Most interviewees did not mind about the issue of confidentiality, because they felt they answered in accordance to the official position they inhabited. During the interview, personal opinions though often got expressed, and I therefore decided to stick to the confidentiality principle.
The informants were also asked about whether they would mind me tape recording the interview. This was usually not seen as a problem, and only one interviewee was not comfortable with this.

Almost without exception the persons I got in touch with were more than willing to be interviewed, although they had very busy time-schedules. As many of the interviewed had been students themselves and involved in research in one way or the other, they seemed to have a certain good-will to help a young student enter the research community. During the interview most informants showed engagement about the issues raised and hoped their answers would bring my research forward. However, it is probably the case that being a ‘Westerner’ opened up many doors. Being white and coming from a rich country may have fuelled expectations by a few that I could assist them by means of funding or by means of providing a network within the Norwegian NGO or academic environment. I could not be of much help in this regard, but I hope that some kind of reciprocity from my side will be given as I will send the final thesis to all the informants who asked for it and to the informants that I have the e-mail address to.

During the writing process, I have tried as much as possible to let the data collected speak for itself, and have naturally distinguished what the informants said from my interpretations. It is though inevitable that my prior knowledge and values have framed me during the whole research process, and as a researcher you use information gathered to bring forward your analysis and arguments. Some informants will probably not agree with my conclusions, but I hope they will not feel intimidated, as I have distinguished what they said and how I analysed what they said.

**Reliability and validity of data**

The replicability criterion has to be somewhat relaxed in qualitative studies as it is ‘impossible to ‘freeze’ a social setting and the circumstances of an initial study’ (LeCompte and Goetz 1986 in Bryman 2004: 273). As one grapples with understanding contemporary social phenomena, there are a lot of aspects that can change within a relatively short period of time, affecting the results another researcher got if trying to copy a qualitative study. In my case, the PRSP approach is constantly reviewed, the political system in Uganda is in a
transition period and people’s opinions are neither written in stone. Furthermore, research is not objective and neutral-free, as values intrude in every step of the research process.

However, the reliability of my study is strengthened as I have explicitly explained the methods used for data collection and how I analyzed the material. As mentioned, I have constantly moved back and forth between data and theory and have therefore achieved a high degree of internal validity as there is a good match between findings and theoretical ideas (LeCompte and Goetz 1986 in Bryman 2004: 273). Therefore, despite my initial ideas about the PEAP policy process in Uganda being colored by what I had already read, I have strived to obtain objectivity, in the sense that my conclusions are based on what the findings reviled. Furthermore, I argue that the study is generalizable, as it can contribute to further develop theoretical conceptualization about power relations between donors, the state and civil society as they interact in order to make and implement policies supposed to reduce the number of poor. The strength of the study is therefore that it takes a holistic perspective of policy-making processes, as it analyses the interrelationship between different actors descending from both the international, national and local levels. What may have been missed in depth or detail at the different levels is therefore gained in breadth. I would also claim that a thorough understanding of each level or each actor in the process could not be reached without seeing them in relation to each other.
3. Background: Where we are coming from

Many interviewees emphasised the importance of understanding where civil society organisations are coming from. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to show how the political-economic environment in Uganda have only allowed for a truncated form of civil society organisations to emerge, as they have been curtailed by extensive state control. The best chance of surviving as an organisation has been to become co-opted in the political apparatus or co-operating with the state in service provision. This chapter focuses on agricultural co-operatives, trade unions and NGOs, as part of civil society. This is because co-operatives and trade unions were the most developed and important civil society organisations during the two first decades after Uganda’s independence and NGOs engaged in service delivery became the most vibrant civil society organisations after the National Resistance Movement took over power in 1986. However, the history of these organisations can be taken as examples of how political and economic developments have shaped the environment in which civil society organisations in general have been operating in.

The Colonial Era and Years after Independence

Uganda was in colonial days a British protectorate. Its economy was to a large extent export-led and dependent on peasant agriculture. The regulatory framework was demarcated along racial lines, since Ugandans were excluded from both business and trade, to the benefit of an Asian commercial community of small traders and export processors (De Coninck 2004: 71). Regulations included control over labour supply through tax measures, the promotion of cash crop growing in selected parts of the country, and a land policy guided by the creation of a private land market, from which foreigners were excluded. Trade and marketing were also regulated through minimum pricing mechanisms, marketing boards and licensing regulations (De Coninck 2004: 52).

The most important civil society institutions in the colonial era were the co-operatives of export crop growers, initially established by the Buganda middle-peasantry in the 1930s (De Coninck 2004: 52). The peasant co-operatives were initially formed both as a response to European and Asian immigrant communities monopolising agricultural trade and to the low price the colonial state offered for their products (Baazara 2000: 10). Grievances felt by the
peasants further increased when the colonial government established the Coffee and Lint Marketing Boards, essentially a mechanism for siphoning off rural surpluses to prop up Britain’s declining economy after the Second World War (Baazara 2000: 11). Therefore, uprisings shocked the Uganda protectorate in 1945 and 1949, and among the demands put forward were that growers should be able to gin their own cotton and sell their products directly wherever they liked (Mamdani 1976 in Baazara 2000: 11). As some industrialization started to take place during the Second World War, trade unions also began to develop, and after a while workers started to organise and go on strikes.

As Baazara states, the colonial state responded by enforcing reforms that diminished the autonomy of these organisations. Co-operatives and unions were put under strict state control, as they had to register, while state officials were given the right to look into their finances and ensure that they were not used for political purposes. Furthermore as nationwide unions were banned in 1952, the colonial power succeeded in fragmenting the working class. Thus, co-operatives and trade unions lost their political significance as a voice of protest against national policies and transformed from being popularly based to essentially becoming organisations for the elite (2000: 11).

Uganda gained independence in 1962, and the Buganda monarch, Mutesa II, became the president, uneasily co-existed with an elected prime minister, Milton Obote (De Coninck 2004: 53). However, the system soon became altered as Obote’s armed forces, under the command of his ally Idi Amin, stormed the kings palace and forced the king into exile in 1967. A unitary constitution replaced the post-independence federal constitution and Obote was installed as the president, with the increased powers this implied (Twaddle and Hansen 1998 in De Coninck 2004).

At independence Uganda was viewed as one of the most promising states on the sub-Saharan African continent, due to its natural resource endowment and the way it had been utilized in the colonial period. Additionally, it had a relatively well-developed and efficient system of service delivery. (De Coninck 2004: 51). By making five-year plans mirroring the development discourse outside the country, colonial development policy was continued. The discourse was based on a developmentalist ideology, as the state was seen as an important actor in rural development. The main features of the plans were the expansion of export production, import substitution and infrastructural development (De Coninck 2004: 53). The
country met the expectations as it achieved an average economic growth on six percent per year from 1963 until 1970, had the fourth highest GDP per capita in sub-Saharan Africa, and in addition around 65 percent of children attended primary school (De Coninck 2004: 71).

Bazaara (2000: 12) argues that co-operatives during this period became an instrument for reaching the masses, making them grow export crops, and collecting rural surpluses from them, rather than for the advancement of peasant interests. Co-operatives were also seen as a good mechanism to generate votes for political parties, and were increasingly organised along political party lines. The involvement in politics undermined the autonomy of co-operatives and the leadership became more interested in gaining access to cash that could be invested in non-agricultural and political enterprises than in improving agricultural production. Many of the first political leaders in Uganda came from these co-operatives.

Civil society: from political activism to service delivery.

The late 1960s were characterised by lower export prices, growing capital outflows and increased reliance on IMF loans. Facing an economic crisis, the dominant position of the bureaucratic elite was maintained and advanced by state involvement in new areas as the manufacturing sector was monopolised by the state and parastal corporations proliferated (Twaddle and Hansen 1998 in De Coninck 2004). An economic crisis marked by high inflation, scarcities of consumer goods and a growing internal and international isolation of the Obote regime contributed to Amin’s military take-over in 1971.

In the beginning both Ugandans and foreign observers considered Amin an improvement from the Obote regime. However, this image did not last very long, as Amin began murdering his political opponents. Amin continued the development policy of the previous regime on paper, but as time went on an increasing gap between policy on paper and policy in reality became evident. By expelling the Asian community in an ‘Economic War’ and plundering public resources, the state apparatus that had been so central was reduced to its repressive form. Industrial production declined, as did the delivery of state services (Twaddle and Hansen 1998; De Coninck 2004). The economic situation was worsened as Uganda’s relations with its major donors such as the British and the Americans detoriated to the point where “their missions were closed and diplomatic ties terminated” (Oloka-Onyango 2000: 19). Isolated by the terror the regime unleashed, and as the small peasants retreated into
subsistence agriculture or engaged in export in the parallel market, the economic base of the regime shrank drastically.

In 1980 real GDP per capita was only 62 percent of that in 1971. The collapse of the industrial sector and the end of crop subsidies had eroded the influence of two historical pillars of civil society, trade unions and co-operatives. During the Amin period any form of political dissent organised by civil society was banned and civil society organisations were therefore confined to fill the gap in service delivery. The numerous NGOs registered during the Second World War and the subsequent decade declined to the point that only those that did not threaten state power, such as NGOs providing services related to health and education and vulnerable groups, remained (Barya 2000: 33; De Coninck 2004: 55).

The heightened use of repression led to the regime’s downfall, and Milton Obote returned to power in 1980. However it was not easy for Obote to return to power, as elections were regarded as fraudulent and following the Amin years, the economy was in a terrible shape (Twaddle and Hansen 1998). Yet, with the introduction of something that looked like a democratic order, international respectability and confidence were restored, and support from Uganda’s traditional donors picked up again. Western donors assumed the regime had distanced itself from its socialist paths of the 1960s and was now openly embracing the free market policies of the IMF and the World Bank (Oloka-Onyango 2000; De Coninck 2004). Uganda becoming one of the first experiments of the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), experienced some initial success, as inflation was brought under control, exports resumed and credit started flowing into the country again (De Coninck 2004: 56).

However, the economic policies recommended were not very appropriate. As foreign currency was made available to the Ugandan government, corruption increased, as did the civil servants’ salaries. With the increased salaries, inflation again went astray and together with the deteriorating security in the country during 1984-85, the economy was brought to a crisis resembling the post-Amin crisis of 1979-80. Due to these happenings the support for the National Resistance Movement’s guerrilla fight against Obote’s government in the early 1980s increased. The NRM gained further support as atrocities committed by Obote’s troops escalated and were publicised by Amnesty International and other human rights organisations (Twaddle and Hansen 1998).
The NRM Era: The impact of Political and Economic reforms on Civil Society

Political reforms

In February 1982, Yoweri Museveni contested the validity of the general elections from 1980 and launched a guerrilla war capturing most of the government’s attention. “As the recently arrived IMF and World Bank advisors barricaded themselves indoors during nights of widespread gunfire in the capital, black market and currency speculation flourished, and the army, under-resourced and deeply divided and undisciplined, ultimately proved unable to sustain the regime”(De Coninck 2004: 56). Museveni and the NRA took over power in 1986, and rebuilding the state was now imperative. This was achieved by extending the Resistance Council structure to all parts of the country. The Resistance Councils were under the guerrilla fight against the Obote regime used to mobilise the peasantry. The Councils were based on the separation of powers and popular checks on it and so replaced the old chief, fused with different powers and unchecked. Mamdani (1996: 215) is of the opinion that the creation of this structure was the most important political achievement of the NRA/NRM, as a grass-root democracy was promoted in stark contrast to the autocratic practises in the past. The new political system was all-inclusive, meaning that all Ugandans by birthright would be members of the National Resistance Movement. The new political system was however marked by contradictory tendencies, since political emancipation went alongside social conservatism. In Mamdani’s (1996: 210) words: “As indirect rule authorities were dismantled and the rights of peasant communities recognized, all strata and sections within that community experienced a newfound freedom, but as communities were reproduced, so were the internal hierarchies within these communities.” The spontaneous tendency of the movement therefore reproduced old power structures.

However the NRM did not link its participatory reform at the village level with a representative reform at higher levels (Mamdani 1996: 216). As the NRA’s organizational base was no more than a third of the country in 1986, when it gained power, and due to the plurality of forces in the country, the NRM created a broad-based government at the centre. It denied oppositional forces access to the central government by forbidding political parties and only allowing indirect elections beyond the village level. This political non-party arrangement was subject to much critique as Western countries, local political parties and urban civil
society put pressure on the government to allow for direct and multiparty elections. A growing external debt between 70 and 90 percent in the early 1990s, made it difficult for the government to ignore the external pressure for reform. At the same time a failure to follow up local state reform with an improvement in rural living conditions gave political parties an opening through which to address and mobilise the peasantry (Mamdani 1996: 210). The regime therefore had to look for new and more effective allies to prevent middle-class urban opponents from forging links with dissatisfied peasants.

The regime partly conceded to this combined pressure, allowing for direct but non-party elections to a constituent assembly, upholding the argument that Uganda was not yet ready for multiparty elections, and arguing that the Movement system was the only way to maintain unity and progress in the country (Hauser 1999; De Coninck 2004). Furthermore, Museveni argued that since Uganda mainly consisted of peasants, there was no proper basis on which to form political parties. Party politics was therefore only likely to contribute to vertical polarisation along tribal lines instead of a horizontal polarisation based on different classes or socio-economic interests. He thus stated in the debate around the Constituent Assembly that: ‘What is crucial for us Ugandans now is for us to have a system that ensures democratic participation until such a time as we get, through economic development, especially industrialisation, the crystallisation of socio-economic groups upon which we can then base political parties’ (Baazara 2000: 5). The donors accepted the argument on the basis that “Ugandans should be the ones to decide which political system they wanted” (Hauser 1999: 629), and since the 1990s donors have funded large parts of Uganda’s state budget.

According to the 1995 constitution, the movement system would continue the first five years after the new government was elected in 1996, and a referendum would be held in 2000 to determine which government system Ugandans wanted. The elections in 1996 were deemed open and transparent, although irregularities took place, and Museveni and the NRM were elected. The referendum in 2000 reconfirmed that most wanted a continuation of the Movement system. The presidential and parliamentary elections in 2001 also extended Museveni and the Movement’s governing position until 2006. (De Coninck 2004: 59) In July 2005 there was a referendum about whether Uganda should transit to multi-party elections, and the people said yes. As a result multi-party elections were held in February 2006, and Museveni and the NRM secured their power for another period.
According to Hauser (1999) donors have chosen to use a tactic of dialogue and persuasion instead of political conditions for aid, as used in other countries. Choosing this tactic emphasis was put on the destruction Uganda was attempting to recover from. In addition donors felt that NRM officials were willing to listen to their ideas about political and economic reform. They also recognised that the NRM government had put in place some political reforms, which meant an improvement from the past. Furthermore, Uganda was seen as an `island of stability´ in the region in the first half of the 1990s, despite the still ongoing civil war in Northern Uganda. President Museveni, who had proved to be a reliable partner to the West in the post-Cold War era, could thus still be used for foreign policy goals, especially in light of continuing civil war in Sudan, anarchy in Somalia, massacres in Rwanda and Burundi, and uncertainty in Kenya (Hauser 1999: 634). However, Hauser claims that the most influential factor determining this special treatment of Uganda has been the country’s success with economic liberalisation policies and the need of donors to have an African success story.

**Economic reforms**

The NRM initially adopted a hostile approach to the multilateral institutions, as it came to power on a statist, quasi-socialist and radical left-wing agenda and emphasised self-reliance and internal sustainability (Barya 2000). Initial attempts were made at raising the value of the Ugandan shilling in the foreign currency market and barter trade was set up with communist countries like Yugoslavia and Cuba. However the attempt to revalue the Ugandan shilling failed and the barter trade could not be upheld due to the economic and political collapse of the Soviet Union and disintegration of Yugoslavia. It thus seemed that there were now only two alternatives for saving the Ugandan economy: “accepting the advise offered by the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the Paris Club quickly, or accepting it less quickly” (Twaddle and Hansen 1998: 7). Structural adjustment, privatisation, and liberalisation again became the order of the day, concretises in the 1987 Economic Recovery Programme (ERP). The aim of the programme was to restore economic stability, establish more realistic prices for primary products and rehabilitating the productive and social infrastructure of the country. A distinct feature of the policy proposed was the heavy reliance on NGOs and community based rural organisations in the implementation of projects directed at the poor, due to the government’s limited capacity. The policies also aimed at relying more on the private sector where it was seen that this sector had advantages, in production, marketing and distribution. The state should be reduced to `creating an enabling environment,
political stability, human rights, a sound policy framework aimed at strengthening the working of the markets, and rehabilitation of the economy and social infrastructure needed for development’ (Latef 1991: 40 in Twaddle and Hansen 1998: 9).

During this period Uganda’s economy grew at an average of about 6 per cent per annum and macroeconomic stability was achieved. However in the early 1990s the government recognized that economic growth did not trickle down to the poor, and therefore started formulating a Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP). The PEAP was in place in 1997, and had the goal to reduce poverty from 44% in 1997 to 10 % in 2017, by identifying strategic areas in which increased budget allocations would lead to poverty reduction. The first revision of the PEAP in December 1999 coincided with the IFIs’ Enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Country (HIPIC) initiative, which required the preparation of a PRSP by governments receiving funds from the International Development Association of the Bank. At the government’s request the PEAP was recognized as Uganda’s PRSP (Piron and Norton 2004). With the PRSP approach emphasis was put on good governance and accountability as a prerequisite for the success of economic policies and poverty reduction, and it is in this context that the World Bank, the IMF and bilateral donors have come to include civil society and in particular NGOs or CSOs, as they are now called, in the development process. Civil Society Organisations are now allocated the roles of holding the state to account, assuring good governance and participating in policy-making processes both at national and local levels.

**Civil society organisations**

The structural adjustment policies and the political environment had a large impact on the formation of civil society organisation in the NRM period. The increase in NGOs was formidable. In 1986, when the NRM came to power there were only 160 registered NGOs, but in 2000 their number had grown to over 600 in 1990 and 3500 in 2000 (De Coininck 2000: 15 in De Coninck 2004: 72). There are two main reasons for the proliferation of NGOs that I would like to throw attention to. The first is the structural adjustment policies that led to a decreased state support for social services and retrenchment of workers, especially in the state bureaucracy. The second has been the increased donor channelling of funds through NGOs in the belief that they are “more flexible, grassroots-based, less bureaucratic and more effective than the state” (Bazaara 2000: 41). Donors and the NRM initiated NGOs as a mechanism for
reducing the discontent of those marginalized by structural adjustment policies. In addition unemployed, and in particular graduates, formed NGOs as a means of survival since they were now not automatically granted entry into the government bureaucracy. Some NGOs were also formed by individuals in parliament or in government with the purpose of mobilising the population for political support (Baazara 2000: 41). However, the National Resistance Movement period has not been favourable for the co-operatives and trade unions. The implementation of Structural Adjustment Policies, with its emphasis on liberalisation has exposed co-operatives to severe competition and reduced their profitability, while workers’ unions find it hard to survive, since their membership is shrinking due to downsizing and retrenchment (Baazara 2000: 14). Trade unions have also been weakened as the idea of the free market promoted by the structural adjustment policies do not favour these organisations, and little donor resources have therefore accrued to them.

**Where we are coming from and where we are now**

As shown in this chapter, civil society organisations have been curtailed by extensive state control as soon as they have questioned the policies of the state. The best chance of surviving as an organisation has therefore been to become co-opted in the political apparatus or co-operating with the state in the implementation of policies.

During the colonial era the co-operatives and the trade unions became strictly regulated by the colonial state as they started to put forward popular demands on behalf of their members. The result being that co-operatives lost their political significance as a protest instrument against national policies, and essentially became organisations for the elite, while the trade unions basically remained economistic. The colonial power thus successfully fragmented the working class and a potential alliance between the urban and the rural segments of civil society. After independence the co-operatives were used to promote the state’s agenda of turning peasants into export-crop growers and were in addition used to collect votes for political parties. As the co-operatives increasingly became politicised, the leadership of these organisations became more interested in gaining access to cash that could be invested in non-agricultural and political enterprises than about improving agricultural production. However, during the violent regime of Amin, the activity of co-operatives and trade unions were again restricted and any form of political dissent organised by civil society was banned. Due to state
suppression of autonomous organisations, only those that did not threaten the state power, such as NGOs providing services related to health and education and vulnerable groups remained.

As Obote regained power from Amin in 1980, and something that looked like a democratic order was restored, the support from the country’s traditional donors picked up and Structural Adjustment Programmes introduced. Though the SAPs had some initial success in restoring the economy, Uganda again found itself in an economic crisis in 1985. Museveni came to power in 1986 and was in the beginning a severe critic of the World Bank and the IMF, but soon came to be one of the most outspoken supporters of the SAPs. As Uganda became portrayed as the African tiger due to its economic success, failures in other African countries could “be attributed to lack of cooperation by recipient governments, rather than to problems with donors’ programmes” (Hauser 1999: 634). According to De Coninck the two most important effects of this period on civil society were “the lasting association-even equation-of ‘civil society’ with NGOs, while its other components, trade unions and co-operatives, were being undermined by structural adjustment, liberalisation and retrenchment;” and “the tendency for NGO growth to be driven by the availability of donor funding rather than the need to provide a direct answer to specific locally rooted social and political imperatives” (2004: 58).

Despite structural adjustment policies and the new PRSP initiative the state has shown no sign of withering away, on the contrary it seems that the number of people depending on the state’s continued existence has grown. The Ugandan state is still fragile according to De Coninck (2004: 62) and depends on “a well-resourced repressive apparatus and access to foreign resources” in order to remain in power. With the introduction of the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP), the heydays of the NGOs were over, since many donors now give general budget support to the government instead of project support. In addition to providing services, donors would like to see CSOs take on the roles of holding the government to account and influencing policy. However, the role may not be taken up easily by civil society organisations, due to “its immaturity, its limited self-awareness, its fragmented and apolitical nature and, more specifically, its development in an environment where its existence has been seen as supportive to the ruling order” (De Coninck 2004: 63).
4. Theoretical Framework

Due to the complex process of making a national PRSP, involving a range of different actors at different levels, this chapter builds a theoretical framework that enhances an understanding of power-relations between donors, the state and civil society. Inspired by Gramscian and Neo-Gramscian thinking I begin by explaining the concept of hegemony and show how power can manifest itself both at the international and national levels. The central question is how those in power can create the least path of resistance to their rule. Defining the international institutions as the realm in which hegemonic ideology is developed today, I claim that the PRSPs represent a hegemonic development discourse. Furthermore I argue that key ideas taken onboard in this discourse, are depoliticised in the sense that they no longer speak of politics and power, but become mechanisms for legitimating the status quo.

However, I claim that focusing on the state, best assesses the strength of the hegemonic development discourse, as this will depend on the configurations of power at the national and local levels. The most important task of any government is to stay in power, and many African states have been labelled neopatrimonial, as their legitimacy to a large extent depends on nourishing clientilistic networks. Considering this, I argue that governments in developing African States have managed to uphold and expand its clientilistic networks alongside and intervened with the donor’s pressure for political and economic reforms. Therefore, as governments have to legitimise their power, development interventions do often not result in the donor’s expected outcomes. I then discuss whether civil society is best conceptualised as autonomous from the state. As I argue that it often is not, this has implications for whether civil society, represented by NGOs in the PRSP processes, can hold the government to account, as donors assume. At the end of this chapter I bring in the concepts of actors, knowledge and spaces, in order to operationalise my analysis of the complex poverty policy process.
Hegemony and the manifestations of Power

For Gramsci the first element of politics is that there exist rulers and ruled, leaders and led. In order to stay in power, the rulers have to find “the most rational lines along which to proceed if one wishes to secure the obedience of the led and ruled” (Gramsci 1971: 144). Furthermore Gramsci argues that the exercise of power is always achieved through a combination of consent and coercion. Consent manifests itself by the acceptance of the great masses to “the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group”, while the coercive form of power is exercised by the state “which `legally` enforces discipline on those groups who do not `consent`, either actively or passively”(Gramsci 1971: 12). Gramsci also states that the most important function of the state is “to raise the great masses of the population to a particular cultural and moral level, a level which corresponds to the needs of the productive forces for development, and hence to the interests of the ruling classes” (Gramsci 1971: 258). Therefore, the state promotes an ideology that serves the economic interests of the class that provides it with its power base (Cox 2005: 41).

Due to the two manifestations of power, Gramsci does not provide a clear-cut distinction between the state and civil society. Instead he conceptualises them as two major superstructural “levels”, where civil society is broadly defined as the ensemble of organisms commonly called private, and the state is defined as political society. Furthermore he argues that any satisfactory analysis of the relation between the state and civil society needs to take into consideration “the two forms in which the State presents itself in the language and culture of specific epochs, i.e. as civil society and as political society”(Gramsci 1971: 268). He therefore argues that the definition of the state will vary according to what kind of relation it has with civil society. When there is a close connection between the state and civil society consent is the most predominant aspect of rule and the state can be defined as both political society and civil society. In such cases Gramsci applies the concept of hegemony, which is seen as a passage from a specific class interest to the building of institutions and ideologies, that appear universal, and will so “give some satisfaction to the subordinate groups while not undermining the leadership or vital interests of the hegemonic class” (Gramsci 1971: 258). The concrete historical mechanisms that contributed to constricting this consent to the hegemonic social order are state institutions like the church, the educational system and the press.
When hegemony prevails, it becomes meaningless to limit the definition of the state to the administrative, executive and coercive apparatus of government, since the government is constrained by the hegemony of the leading class. A proper definition of the state would therefore include “the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules” (Gramsci 1971: 244). The hegemony of the dominant class therefore builds a bridge between the conventional categories of state and civil society, categories that now only have a certain analytical usefulness but that do not correspond to separable entities in reality (Cox 2005: 37). This way of conceptualising power furthermore frees power “from a tie to historically specific classes, and gives it wider applicability to relations of dominance and subordination” (Cox 2005: 37).

Gramsci does not say a lot about international relations, but acknowledges that in an analysis of the relations of force at the international level one has to distinguish between powerful states and less powerful states. The former have a relative freedom to form their foreign policy according to domestic interests, while the latter do not possess the same ability to do so. The economic life of subordinate nations, therefore gets penetrated by and intertwined with that of powerful nations (Gramsci 1971: 183 in Cox 2005: 42). The powerful countries that have undergone a profound social and economic revolution, like the USA, will have an effect on the subordinate nations. Changes in the subordinate nations do then not arise out of ‘a vast local economic development’ but is instead ‘the reflection of international developments which transmit their ideological currents to the periphery’ (Gramsci 1971: 116 in Cox 2005: 42).

Cox (2005: 42), amongst others, has tried to apply the concept of hegemony to international relations. He argues that in order for a state to obtain world hegemony, it has to found and protect a world order that appears universal and is based on consent, in the sense that most states finds it compatible with their own interests. World hegemony starts as an “outward expansion of the internal (national) hegemony established by a dominant social class” and subordinate countries that have not undergone this social transformation try to incorporate elements from the hegemonic model, without disturbing old power structures (Cox 2005: 43). This characteristic of the subordinate nations may explain why they are less able to adopt new political models than economic and cultural features. These nations therefore become caught
up in a stalemate, a kind of revolution-restoration dilemma since neither the new or old order manages to triumph. In such cases the industrial bourgeois is not able to achieve hegemony and a stalemate with the traditional dominant social class creates a condition for a passive revolution, where changes in society do not lead to protest among the masses. The bearer of the new ideas in this context would not be a national group trying to create a new economy based on a different structure of social relations, but intellectuals that take on new ideas from a prior foreign economic and social revolution (Gramsci 1971: 117 in Cox 2005: 42). As follows, the world hegemony in the peripheries becomes filled with contradictions while it remains more consistent in the core countries. Hegemony at the international level is therefore not only about an order among states, but also “an order within a world economy with a dominant mode of production which penetrates into all countries and links into other subordinate modes of production” (Cox 2005: 44). Hegemony thus encompasses the spheres of the social, economical and political structures.

Cox (2005) is of the opinion that the Gramscian concept of passive revolution, together with Caesarism and transformisimo can give us insight into the relation between state and civil society in industrialising Third World countries. Caesarism, means that “a strong man intervenes to resolve the stalemate between equal and opposed social forces” (Cox 2005: 38). A progressive form of Caesarism would lead to a strong rule presiding over a more orderly development and a reactionary form of Caesarism would stabilise the existing power relations. Another typical feature of passive revolution is transformisimo, i.e. a co-optation of potential leaders of subalter groups into the existing order. It is thus “a strategy of assimilating and domesticating potentially dangerous ideas by adjusting them to the policies of the dominant coalition and can thereby obstruct the formation of class-based organised opposition to established social and political power” (Cox 2005: 39). The concept of passive revolution is thus a counterpart to the concept of hegemony, because it describes a society where no dominant class has been able to establish hegemony.

According to Cox there is no identifiable regime of dominance at the top today, but it is possible to portray it as “a nascent historic bloc consisting of the most powerful corporate economic forces, their allies in government, and the variety of networks that evolve policy guidelines and propagate the ideology of globalisation” (Cox 2005: 109). Harvey (2005) argues that the world hegemony today is spun around the rhetoric of neoliberalism. He says that we can either interpret neoliberalisation “as a utopian project to realize a theoretical
design for the reorganization of international capitalism or as a political project to re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power of economic elites” (Harvey 2005: 19). The latter seems to be the case as evidence suggests that “when neoliberal principles clash with the need to restore or sustain elite power, then the principles are either abandoned or become so twisted as to be unrecognizable” (Harvey 2005: 19).

The neoliberal revolution is usually attributed to the political programmes of Thatcher and Reagan after 1979. Though responding to elite interests, they had to construct “political consent across a sufficient large spectrum of the population to win elections” (Harvey 2005: 39). They did this by disguising political questions as cultural ones, and were so able to portray the answer to these questions as common sense. Neoliberal theory claims that privatisation and deregulation combined with competition, “eliminate bureaucratic red tape, increase efficiency and productivity, improve quality, and reduces costs, both directly to the consumer through cheaper commodities and services and indirectly through reduction of the tax burden” (Harvey 2005: 65). The measures it suggests are seen as both necessary and sufficient for the creation of wealth and improved well-being of the population at large, but as Harvey (2005: 7) states, they reflect “the interest of private property owners, businesses, multinational corporations, and financial capital.” However, he also states that it is difficult to clearly identify the class forces behind the shift, as it has not necessarily meant the restoration of economic power to the same people, as class can have different meanings in different contexts. As the upper class is constituted of different people in different places, most states have only taken the neoliberal turn in as far as it has also been compatible with elite interests.

The power structure of the world today is upheld outside the state through a global policy consensus, the influence of global finance on state policy, and from within the state by those who benefit from neoliberalism. World hegemony is furthermore expressed through “universal norms, institutions and mechanisms which lay down general rules of behaviour for states and for those forces within civil society that act across national boundaries – rules which support the dominant mode of production” (Cox 2005: 44). Cox further argues that international institutions are the realm in which the ideology of hegemony is developed. They have according to him four concrete roles:

(1) They embody the rules, which facilitate the expansion of hegemonic world orders; (2) they are themselves the product of the hegemonic world order; (3) they ideologically legitimate the norms of the world order; (4) they co-opt the elites from the peripheral countries and (5) they absorb counter-hegemonic ideas (Cox 2005: 44).
**How new and challenging ‘Ideas’ become Depoliticised in the Multilateral Institutions**

I argue that the Poverty Reduction Strategy Initiative represents a hegemonic development discourse, since it seems to have “moved beyond contests over meaning to unquestioned acceptance (Cornwall and Brock 2005: 1056). Crafted in a seductive mix of buzzwords agencies from the UN through all the significant bilateral donors and most large NGOs welcomed the new initiative and have been eager to engage in the process. The curiosity of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Initiative is thus how it has managed to align most development actors to one development approach. While the NGOs legitimised the process by bringing in their expertise of participation, the UN agencies brought their Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that would provide a set of tough indicators making it easier to measure the advances in poverty reduction (Cornwall and Brock 2005; Craig and Porter 2006). As many of the donor agencies try to co-ordinate their aid support and align this support to a country’s PRSP it is expected that aid will become more effective in reducing poverty. The donors have therefore started to experiment with giving direct budget or programme assistance instead of supporting particular projects (Cheru 2006: 370). The benefits of this are expected to be increased national ownership of the national poverty reduction policies, in addition to a strengthening of state institutions.

What a hegemonic development discourse does is an exercise of framing, meaning that it makes important development actors draw attention to a problem and ensures that the problem is seen in a specific way. Being hegemonic, it defines the terms of the debate and delegitimizes competing conceptualisations of both the problem and the solution and different policy approaches. (Bøås and McNeill 2004; Cornwall and Brock 2005: 1047). In order to understand how hegemonic development discourses are created and maintained many writers have in later years focused on how the use of language, key words, buzzwords or ideas justify development interventions. An idea should here be understood as “a concept, which powerfully influences development policy” (Bøås and McNeill 2004: 1). It is therefore more than a buzzword, because it has an intellectual basis, and can operate in both academia and policy domains. Ideas are central because they shape ideologies, manifest themselves in the political and material world and can become mechanisms for upholding the status quo and legitimise the existing world order (Cornwall and Brock 2005: 1047).
The hegemonic power of the multilateral institutions has much to do with their ability to frame ideas. A successful framing has taken place if ideas are depoliticised, in the sense that they have lost their radical potential to achieve change. According to Bøås and McNeill (2004: 2) both a strong and a weak claim can be put forward in order to explaining why and how such framing exercises occur. The strong claim is that:

The most powerful multilateral institutions, in terms of resources at their command, are controlled by the donor countries (and most particular the USA), promote neoliberal ideas, and are dominated by an economic perspective; any challenging new ideas that arise, if not directly refuted, are distorted, in keeping with this worldview (and world interest).

The weak claim is that:

Multilateral institutions are necessary consensual and technocratic; and that new ideas are diluted and distorted in the process of gaining broad acceptance for them, and putting them into operation.

The strong claim argues that multilateral institutions use ideas in order to promote and sustain the neoliberal hegemony in the world, where the agenda is to make countries most attractive for international capital and maintain a core state apparatus that can push through liberalisation. Consent to the ruling paradigm is created through a transformation, where elites within the South are co-opted and assimilated into a broader transnational historic bloc, and come to share the assumptions and class interests of the dominant fractions centred in the core countries (Taylor 2004: 124). This is then a form of passive revolution, where changes within countries take place without arousing protest among the masses.

The weak claim’s central point maintains that the pressure of reaching a consensus among the development agencies often leads to that conflicts and differences in views get hidden. Consensus should ideally be reached both “in analytical terms, i.e. a clear definition of the concept, and in policy terms, i.e., what needs to be done” (McNeill 2004: 52). What makes an idea so powerful is then that it can act as a bridge between research and policy, between different disciplines, and between apparently conflicting positions (McNeill 2004: 118). That there is a hegemonic development discourse does not mean, however, that competing ideologies cannot coexist within and among development agencies that are forming part of the development consensus. A consensus is reached because different actors have the possibility
of investing key development terms with different meanings (Cornwall and Brock 2005: 1047). It is also this characteristic that can make an idea lose its power, since the idea often loses it’s radical and challenging aspect, when it suddenly can mean everything to everyone.

What is common to both the strong and the weak claim is that potentially radical and new ideas are being depoliticised in the sense that they are “drained of any overt political content, even if they are not wholly drained of their power”(Bøås and McNeill 2004: 2). This distortion is merely technocratic and due to two distinct but related forces, neoliberal ideology and the economic-technocratic nexus. They explain the economic-technocratic nexus by emphasising that all multilateral institutions necessarily are technocratic, since concepts need to be operationalised. This characteristic in addition to the demand for a consensus involves “a process of ‘depoliticisation’, and a tendency for economics to become the dominant discipline”(Bøås and McNeill 2004: 2).

I agree with Bøås and McNeill that ideas challenging the conventional wisdom become distorted due to the processes of depoliticisation. However, in order to find out whose interest such ‘ideas’ serve, one cannot stop at the level of the multilateral institution, since the power of policies only effectively influences national policies ”if configurations of power at the domestic level can sustain such policies”(Bøås and McNeill 2004: 10). Therefore, as much as the PRSPs may represent a neoliberal agenda, the strength of this hegemonic development discourse has to be assessed at the national level, where the PRSP approach is put into practise. As stressed by Gramsci, the first element of politics is that there exist rulers and ruled, leaders and led, and the most important task of any regime or political party in power is to know the least lines of resistance that will enable it to stay in power.

**When Politics enter the Technical-Economic Blueprint**

Most policies and statements coming from the multilateral institutions “are based on the functionalist logic that technical economic questions can be separated from politics” (Bøås and McNeill 2004: 4). There is though an inherent contradiction in this assumption, since development is in fact concerned with a planned social change and so necessarily has to involve politics (Bøås and McNeill 2004: 4). Ferguson (1990) acknowledged the contradictory role of the development agencies, that they are supposed to bring about social
change without getting involved in politics, in his much cited book *The Anti-Politics Machine. “Development”, Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho*. He also points out the depoliticising function of development policies coming from the international development actors by arguing that reducing poverty to a technical problem, and “by promising technical solutions to the sufferings of powerlessness and oppressed people, the hegemonic problematic of “development” is the principal means through which the question of poverty is depoliticized in the world today” (Ferguson 1990: 256).

International donor agencies have long been depoliticising the state by making a governmentalist assumption, where the state is “seen as a neutral instrument for implementing plans, while the government itself appears as a machine for providing social services and engineering economic growth” (Ferguson 1990: 194). Ferguson argue that donors often ignore that the government alongside and intertwined with the tasks of providing services to the people and achieving economic growth, uses the political apparatus to the benefit of individuals, cliques, factions, and class interests (Ferguson 1990: 194). The development apparatus in developing countries is therefore not necessarily “a machine for eliminating poverty that is incidentally involved with the state bureaucracy; it is a machine for reinforcing and expanding the exercise of bureaucratic state power, which incidentally takes “poverty” as its entry point – launching an intervention that may have no effect on the poverty but does in fact have other concrete effects” (Ferguson 1990: 255). This process is what Ferguson calls the instrument effect; i.e. “the institutional effect of expanding bureaucratic state power” and the “conceptualisation or ideological effect of depoliticising both poverty and the state” (Ferguson 1990: 256). To understand why this happens, Ferguson emphasises that the function of the development discourse is to set up a target for a technical, apolitical, development intervention that the international development agencies have the mandate to provide. The challenge for them is always “to find the right kind of “problem” that requires the “solution” they are there to provide” (Ferguson 1990: 70). Political realities are therefore ignored, and the development institutions fail to acknowledge that their interventions come to serve the “political operation of expanding bureaucratic state power” (Ferguson 1990: xv). Transformation then cannot occur, despite all the technical expertise of development agencies as long as the government, which arguably possesses the power to effect change, has no real interest in doing so (Ferguson 1990: 192).
Acknowledging that politics are important in understanding why development interventions fail to achieve its desired objectives, I here want to highlight the concept of neopatrimonialism, a term often used to explain how politics work in Africa. Chabal and Daloz (1999) in *Africa works; disorder as political instrument* argue that the sub-Saharan African state has not been institutionalised, meaning that it has not been emancipated from civil society. The formal political structures, they argue, are empty shells hiding the patrimonial and particularistic nature of power. The paradigm Chabal and Daloz (1999) propose is the political instrumentalization of disorder, where they argue that the political elite have much to gain from a weak institutionalization of political practices, as the state apparatus is most useful when it is least institutionalized (Chabal and Daloz 1999: 14). This argument is connected to the African political elite’s need to exploit governmental resources in order to nourish their clientilistic networks, and so secure legitimacy to their hold on power.

Power, according to Chabal and Daloz needs to be analysed in a wider context of dominance and subordination, detached from class. They (1999: 41) argue that even if a dominant class had achieved the economic means to create a hegemony, “any elite which became a ruling ‘class’ thus cutting itself from the rest of society, would rapidly lose prestige, influence and, thereby, legitimacy”. Acknowledging that the elite has its own interests and that it is continuously seeking to acquire resources by all available means, “it would be misleading to believe that it does so as an autonomous and all-powerful ‘class’, whose interest would be economically and politically antagonistic to those of the other social groupings” (Chabal and Daloz 1999: 41). The political actors and patrons are therefore both dominant and dominated and meeting constraints because they have to meet the expectations of their clients. The people at the bottom of the social order will therefore not find the material prosperity of their patrons reprehensible as long as they can benefit from the relation. The social relations between patron and client should therefore be analysed in terms of reciprocity, and not be conceptualised through categories like rulers and ruled, elites and populace (Chabal and Daloz 1999: 28). Given the present social and cultural expectations on the continent, they do not believe that the political apparatus will change, though many African states today are facing an economic crisis.

The economic crisis many African states face today is both a result of decreasing internal and external resources at the state’s command. The internal decrease relating to a limited tax-base seems to be the most serious, and thus makes it all the more crucial to attract foreign aid.
(Chabal and Daloz 1999: 118). Depending on external resources for their survival is nothing new to African states, since they have been doing this since independence. It could however be argued that it is these foreign resources that has been one of the chief instruments in enabling the African elites to stay in power and uphold the patrimonial system (Chabal and Daloz 1999). It thus seems that the political elites in Africa have been remarkably good at adjusting to the language of the donors, which in turn reinforces the belief that international donor agencies understand what Africa needs. As Chabal and Daloz (1999: 23) state “the source of finance have changed: the instrumentalization of foreign aid has not.” The Ugandan political system is also to a large extent based on the logic of patrimonialism, and according to Hickey (2003 in Brock 2004) “many of the common indicators of a neo-patrimonial state are increasing rather than decreasing.”

Civil Society and the State

Many donors emphasise “the need for political leaders to become more ‘responsible’ and to improve the efficiency of ‘public governance’” (Chabal and Daloz 1999: 37). Furthermore, they believe that greater political control by Africa’s ‘citizens’ would lead to a reform of the current political order. Within this paradigm much hope is attached to the transformative potential of civil society. Civil society in this context is most often taken to mean “those intermediary associations which are capable both of representing the country’s various interest groups and of countering the state’s hegemonic position” (Chabal and Daloz 1999: 19). It is often argued that “the most vibrant and innovative sections of society are those linked with Non-Governmental Organizations or associations of active citizens speaking for ordinary people and small-scale but dynamic business groups” (Chabal and Daloz 1999: 19).

However, there are many difficulties regarding the role given to civil society. The dichotomy between state and civil society does not reflect reality, since no meaningful separation between a well-organised civil society and a relatively autonomous bureaucratic state exists. Instead the two categories are often blurred and interpenetrate each other and alliances between members of the state and individual groupings within civil society can occur. (Chabal and Daloz 1999: 17) Civil society is therefore not necessarily a counter force to state power, since this would imply that civil society has the potential to politically organise and
challenge the regime in place. What need to be stressed according to Chabal and Daloz is therefore the linkages between “the political elites and their clientilistic networks throughout society” (1999: 26).

In Gramsci`s thinking civil society is both “the realm in which the existing social order is grounded; and it can also be the realm in which a new social order can be founded” (Cox 2005: 104). Civil society is therefore both shaper and shaped an agent of stabilization and reproduction, and a potential agent for change. Examining civil society can therefore help understand the strength of the status quo and find the emancipatory potential for transformation. The emancipatory potential of civil society lies in its ability to align the forces upon which the support for a new state and a new order can be built. “These forces operate in a social and political space, a terrain occupied by different conflicting forces as historical change proceeds – a terrain which is narrowed when there is a close identity between people and their political and social institutions (in Gramsci`s terms, when hegemony prevails) but which is widened when the identity is weak” (Cox 2005: 104). Thus, Gramsci`s conceptualisation of civil society does not contradict the argument of Chabal and Daloz, since he is also reluctant to define the state and civil society as two distinct categories.

Whereas the above-mentioned theoretical framework will guide the overall analysis of my findings, I will in addition use the concepts of actors, knowledge and spaces, developed by Brock et al. (2004) in order to operationalise the analysis of complex poverty policy process.

**Knowledge, Actors and Spaces**

My point of departure when analysing the PEAP policy making process is that it is a dynamic process, where the key elements are the different actors involved, the power they possess and the spaces where they interact. As Cornwall and Brock (2005) state, the PRSPs can be analysed at three levels. The first is the supranational policy space where the original idea of the PRSPs was crafted. The second level is the national policy process where a number of actors are engaged in the development of a national poverty reduction framework. At this level you have actors from the supranational level, the so-called development partners and agents of the national government, and national and international NGOs or CSOs. Beyond this is a third level where the national poverty reduction plans are implemented, involving agents
of decentralised government, service delivery CSOs, citizens, and at last the poor (Cornwall and Brock 2005). As I have analysed the supranational policy space above in this chapter, and since this is a level, which I have no personal access to, the coming chapters will concentrate on the second and third level of analysis.

All actors have their specific opinions and interests, and are embedded in an institutional and political culture. It is important to remember that the different categories like donors, government officials and civil society organisations also hide diverse interests and power dynamics (McGee 2004: 9). Additionally the distinction between the different categories can become blurry, since actors often belong to one or more networks that cut across different spaces in the policy process. How much influence a particular actor has in the policy process, will be decided by the actor’s power vis-à-vis the other actors in that particular space. Furthermore, ‘knowledge in the poverty policy process’ will also be of importance for how much influence an actor can be expected to have. ‘Knowledge in the poverty policy processes’ should not just be taken to mean factual knowledge about poverty and its causes, but also knowledge about political and policy processes and how best to engage with the other actors (McGee 2004: 11).

Poverty knowledge should be understood in a broad sense, since it encompasses “official knowledge constructed from national survey-based statistics, through poverty narratives woven and promoted by various actors, to popular knowledge based on people’s own experience”(McGee 2004: 11). The legitimacy of different kinds of knowledge varies, and the power to decide what kind of knowledge is legitimate at particular times in the policy-process is of key importance. The technical criteria for legitimacy often hide political criteria, for example who are and are not invited to participate in the policy-making process. Actors who align themselves with the dominant discourse and present a unified story more easily get acceptance than those who do not. A development discourse is defined by Sutton (1999 in McGee 2004: 13) as ‘describing a way of thinking and looking, a system of values and priorities that marginalizes other possible ways of thinking’. The construction and reinforcement of discourse requires a selective use of knowledge, meaning that knowledge that fits more easily into the discourse will be taken up, but knowledge that does not will be adjusted or even refuted. Narratives, as stories, also have a tendency to persist, despite being confronted with evidences that contradicts the assumptions of the narrative, since they

There are also many different dimensions of power. I will elaborate on what is referred to as visible, hidden and invisible power by Ssewankirianga (2004). Visible power is for example officially recognised power, as the power invested in a president by a constitution. Hidden power, often manifests itself in backstage spaces and informal relationships, “where powerful people and institutions maintain their influence by controlling who gets to the decision table and what gets on the agenda” (2004: 81). Finally invisible power can be understood as actors subconsciously accepting conditions as they are. This form of power also inhibit agency and decreases the power of certain actors.

The concept of policy space gives us a useful lens thorough which we can analyse the everyday politics and practise of actors and how their power is enabled and constrained when they seek to influence policy. It makes it possible to break down the policy process into observable elements, and raise questions about which actors gain access to which spaces, what they do there, what constrains or facilitates their actions, and what potential arises as a result of these. The spaces can also be used in different strategic ways: ‘new policy actors can be allowed into existing places to replace or mix with those who previously occupied them; spaces can be used to develop counter-narratives with which to challenge dominant discourses; or institutional shifts towards more deliberative, participatory and inclusive policy processes can be promoted’ (Keely and Scoones, 1999 in McGee 2002: 190). Thus, policy spaces are multiple points in time and space in the policy process and sometimes signify a transformative potential, and refers to observable opportunities, behaviours, actions and interactions (McGee 2004: 16).

According to McGee one can distinguish different kind of spaces, between closed, invited and autonomous spaces. Closed spaces are exclusive spaces that belong to the official, governmental sphere, where no participation of other segments of society is encouraged and powerful actors operate independently. Powerful actors like the World Bank and the central government create invited spaces by opening up the official policy sphere to other actors and autonomous spaces exist outside the official policy processes. Autonomous spaces are often created by less powerful actors that try to set their own agenda and initiate engagement with the more powerful. In these spaces a range of activities are established “independently of the
state, working in parallel, or sometimes in direct reaction to, official invited space” (McGee 2004: 19). The spaces then give different degrees of opportunities to change the course of policy through influencing its formation, its implementation or its monitoring or evaluation. However it is important to remember that power relations, competing knowledge claims and dominant discourses all influence the room for manoeuvring in such policy spaces.
5. Ownership

This chapter will begin by an in-depth description of the idea of ownership as part of the Ugandan success-story. In relation to ownership, special attention will be given to the key decision-makers, which spaces they occupy and how they use these spaces to influence development policy. Describing the donors and the executive branch of the central government as key power-centres in Uganda, I show that these actors interact in a number of official and unofficial spaces, which enable them to portray the policy-making process as consensual. It will also become evident that both the donors and the government have had an interest in portraying Uganda as a success-story. Additionally, I argue that the strong role of the Finance Ministry in the PEAP process, has contributed to strengthening the hegemonic project of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Initiative. Being technocrats and economists and moreover sharing the same assumptions as people working in the International Finance Institutions, they can be referred to as intellectuals, transmitting the neoliberal ideology from core countries to the periphery. Uganda is furthermore described as a subordinate nation within a hegemonic world order, with the attributed characteristics of trying to implement elements of the hegemonic development discourse without disturbing old power structures.

The Ugandan Success-Story

Uganda has been portrayed as a success-story, due to its achievements in the macroeconomic area and in reducing the income poverty rate (Brock 2004: 34). In addition Uganda’s PRSP is said to be more country-driven than other PRSPs, and the policy-making process has been celebrated for its involvement of civil society. The international financial institutions (IFIs) have presented the home-grown Ugandan Poverty Eradication Action Plan as the model for the post-structural adjustment Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). By showing to the Ugandan success, the IFIs have been able to sell their development approach to other developing countries, claiming that if governments follow the ‘right policy’, economic growth and poverty reduction can go hand-in-hand.

According to Piron and Norton (2004) there are three ‘projects for poverty reduction’ that have made the PEAP more meaningful than other PRSPs. The first is referred to as the President’s or the Movement’s attempt at pursuing poverty reduction as a political project that
can create national unity and security. This attempt is closely linked to the political legitimacy of the regime, which claims that development can erode the vertical structures of social organisation in Uganda and create the necessary conditions for a political system based on class interest more than ethnic affiliation. The second project is the national technocratic project of state building within the Ministry of Finance Planning and Economic Development (MFPED). The Ministry of Finance is sometimes referred to as the developmental state and has been instrumental in translating the political objectives of the Movement into mechanism and instruments that have satisfied key outside stakeholders. The last project is related to the international donor’s need for an African success-story. I will draw attention to all these three projects during this chapter.

When asking my informants about their opinion of the Ugandan success-story, most of them emphasised the uniqueness of the PRSP process in Uganda. They were keen to say that contrary to many other countries, Uganda started the process of making their own Poverty Eradication Action Plan before the PRSP approach was even in place, and that the Ugandan experience and initiative later inspired the PRSP approach. It is difficult to get a clear picture of what actually transpired in the initial stages of formulating the Poverty Eradication Action Plan, and who the key initiators were. The documentation about the process is poor, or at least hard to access. My interviewees did neither have a clear picture of what happened and put weight on different occurrences between 1995 and 1997. An informant from a national NGO stated: “although the documentation of the consultations between all of us remains that we participated one way or another, the documentation between 1995 and 1997 is very, very poor, even the Ministry of Finance I don’t think they will give you a very clear process of what transpired” (Interview).

At least two factors in my informants’ retelling are now taken as facts about why a national poverty reduction plan was initiated in Uganda. The first is that despite having an average economic growth rate of about 7 percent since 1987, little of this growth had during the same years trickled down to the poor. The second is the strong leadership of President Museveni and his personal commitment to poverty reduction. The narrative put forward by my informants about the initiation of the Poverty Eradication Action Plan can therefore be retold like this:

When the President was doing his election campaign after the drawing of the 1995 Constitution, he went to the rural areas, where people told him that they were very, very poor.
Hearing this the President engaged the Ministry of Finance when he came back to the capital, and they told him that the growth rate of the economy was around eight percent. The Ministry of Finance furthermore agreed that there may be a problem with poverty and decided to look into it. A seminar was then organised on the personal initiative of the President with the Ministry of Finance and the World Bank, and that is how the process of preparing the PEAP started.

After the seminar a national poverty forum was organised where a mutual consensus was reached between civil society, mainly represented by national NGOs, some development partners and government. They agreed that there was a gap in the way conventional programmes were being run in the country, so it was time to think outside the box. A Task Force was then formed to prepare the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) for Uganda in 1996-97. This Task Force included representatives of the central and local government, nongovernmental organisations and civil society, donor agencies and academia. In much of the literature however, many refer to the seminar held by the government and the World Bank as the origin of the PEAP, where concerns were raised about “lack of systematic consideration of poverty impacts in the Bank’s vision of growth in Uganda” (Piron and Norton 2004: 13).

So the PEAP was there in 1997, before the PRSP initiative, and in 2000 it was agreed that the PEAP should be accepted as the Ugandan PRSP. The fact that the PEAP preceded the PRSPs and had not been imposed on the country has according to most of my informants given Uganda more power in negotiating with the donors and especially the World Bank. A common statement was that “contrary to many other countries that have done PRSPs and simply followed a guideline that the World Bank has produced, it has been difficult for the donors to come and completely reschedule the PEAP, because there was already a history to it and the Government had put some thought into it” (Interview).

However some of my more critical informants from national NGOs and research-based organisations questioned if the PEAP was in fact unique. They saw the PEAP and the revision of it as a ritual that an aid dependent country must go through in order to receive debt relief and concessional loans from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. As an interviewee from a national NGO stated: “If you have it you are assured to have the next World Bank money of 100 millions or 600 millions of dollars. Every year you are assured of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Credit, so why don’t you develop it” (Interview)? Thus, some of these informants raised doubts about whether the PEAP would be recognised as a PRSP if the IMF and World Bank were not happy about it. They argued that an almost orthodox economic thinking drove the PEAP, and that if you read a few PRSPs, you would find out that
they were all quite similar. A case in point is this quote: “John McKinnon, he was the one; he was the lead person in developing the first poverty eradication action plan of Uganda as well as the PRSP of Rwanda. That is why; when you look at them they are a bit similar actually” (Interview). These informants therefore questioned what they called a fabricated discourse about ownership.

**Key Policy Makers and Spaces of Decision-Making**

**The contradiction of having a nationally owned policy that is donor funded**

Uganda, like most other developing countries has for a long time relied on foreign financial resources in the form of aid or loans to implement promised economic and political reforms. What most of my informants emphasised when asked about donor influence in the country, was the donors’ large contribution to the Ugandan state budget. Well above fifty percent of the Ugandan budget has for a long time been donor funded, although the percentage has declined in later years and came down to 42% last financial year. The interviewees placed in the Ministry of Finance stressed that the donor influence cannot be ignored, since they contribute to such a large portion of the state budget. Acknowledging several problems with this, one stated that the most obvious problem was that “50% of the decisions have to be coming from elsewhere. Now that is putting it statistically, but if you go to practise, maybe it will be a bit more” (Interview).

Rowden and Irama (2004) also argue that aid dependency gives the IFIs quite a lot of political power in the recipient countries. Furthermore, since the PRSP has to be screened by the Joint Staff Assessments (JSA) before they can be submitted for endorsement by the boards of the IMF and World Bank, it is argued that governments have tended to actively discourage debates on key economic issues, as they are engaging in some sort of self-censorship to avoid submitting a PRSP that would be rejected by the JSA. I will return to the different economic issues that have been discouraged in the next chapter, but here emphasise that the process of screening and endorsing a PRSP makes it legitimate to question to what degree borrowing countries can explore alternative economic policies (Rowden and Irama 2004: 7-8).
Aside from contributing to the budget, there are many official and unofficial spaces that donors can use to influence government policy in Uganda. The official spaces they can occupy and use are the donor sub-groups in each of the different sectors concerning the Poverty Eradication Action Plan, where the local economic donor group is of special importance, as is membership in the above mentioned Joint Staff Advisory board of the Bank and the Fund. The donors I interviewed all mentioned these spaces as crucial. Working through the donor sub-groups, together with the government and other relevant stakeholders it was easier to agree on what should be the priorities; priorities they say are mostly aligned with those of the PEAP. Ssewankirianga (2004: 82) also upholds that the donor sub-groups are important spaces, where donors can harmonise their efforts and get into a closer dialogue with central government officials. Occasionally the sub-groups invite top-level government actors like the permanent secretaries and directors and sometimes the government invite donors into their official spaces. Furthermore he says, “donors use sub-groups to have their way with government; but at the same time, government has a chance to read donor positions before policies becomes crystallised” (Ssewankirianga 2004: 82). This makes it easier to portray the policy-making process as consensual.

In Uganda’s case there are basically two large donors; the World Bank and the UK Department for International Development (DFID), and as one of my informants from a research institution highly involved in these processes were government and development partners meet said:

“Now, where those are not interested so much, it might be difficult for donors to influence that much, like issues of governance are mainly by the Nordic. You look at Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, those are the ones who want to press on, but they are not that sizeable group like the World Bank and the DFID. So the Government can easily say, as long as World Bank and the DFID and maybe the African Development Bank have an agreement with us, the rest will fall into line. So even they are building consensus.” (Interview)

Donor coordination and harmonisation therefore also makes the policy-making process appear more consensual, as differences in views often get hidden.

However, what most interviewees from national NGOs emphasised were not these official spaces, but the unofficial spaces where the donors and government cooperate and make joint decisions. As one of them stated: “by the time government has come up with a position, it has mainly harmonised with the donors behind the scenes” (Interview). It thus seems that the donors and the government have already agreed upon a position before the government
officially presents its views. This led some of my informants to question the autonomy of the government. Piron and Norton (2004) also acknowledge the power of donors in Uganda, not just because Uganda is extremely aid-dependent, but also due to the fact that the donors have developed sophisticated relations with the President, ministries and other government institutions as well as civil society organisations. The spaces above can be defined as closed spaces, since they are official or unofficial spaces reserved solely for the donors and the government. I argue that these statements about the official and unofficial spaces of decision-making in Uganda can partly explain the contradiction of why the PEAP is said to be both internally driven at the same time as the PEAP priorities mostly align with the priorities of the donor.

**Technocratisation and the dominant position of the Ministry of Finance**

A case in point regarding spaces for policy-making is the meetings between donors and the Ministry of Finance. The Ministry is taking the lead in the PEAP process and Piron and Norton (2004) say that it is sometimes referred to as the developmental state. In explaining the central position of the Ministry of Finance, I want to bring in a point raised by one informant attached to a research centre in Uganda. He said that since the PEAP is a PRSP and part of the IMF/World Bank policy framework, one should not be surprised that they “prefer a process that is bureaucratic” since they are “not interested in the political process, cause they think that their liberal, market policies are correct” (Interview). He therefore found it natural that they preferred to deal with people in the Ministry of Finance. The same informant also related the dominance of the Ministry of Finance to the nature of the political system in Uganda, the non-competitive no-party movement. He argued that since there has been “no political engagement about issues, policies and programs, it becomes easy for government to actually do things bureaucratically, and a few people on the top can determine the policy” (Interview). A similar point is raised by Piron and Norton (2004: 1) who argue that the Movement system “has given technocrats room for manoeuvre in pursuing the politically endorsed objective of poverty reduction.”

Whereas the technocrats and economists in the Finance Ministry seem committed to the PEAP, it lacks a broader political ownership. An informant from a research-based organisation said “people sometimes write it and the president signs on it, but he might not really value what is inside that document” (Interview). A similar point is raised by another
who stated “you will at times even hear the President criticise the PEAP, because he doesn’t know much about it, he is probably at the end of the day, asked to sign the foreword or something” (Interview). Based upon a number of similar quotes from my informants, I argue that the President and the rest of the leadership in the National Resistance Movement government do not necessarily endorse the content of the PEAP, and that had it not been for the large amount of money they receive from the donor community, they would pursue another development policy more focused on the objectives of modernisation and industrialisation. I will come back to this point in the last chapter. As an interviewee from a research based organisation said: “the government itself, or the movement secretariat did not even have a big input to the PEAP, and I am sure that some of the government people are not happy with some of these policies, if they had a way out” (Interview).

Many interviewees also emphasised the small involvement of the parliament and line ministries in the PEAP process, which seems to parallel the political process in the country. However, the lack of involvement of the parliament is not specific to the Ugandan PRSP. A study examining parliamentary participation in the drafting of PRSPs in 28 countries found that most parliamentarians are hardly aware of the PRSP process (Eberlei and Henn 2003 in Rowden and Irama 2004: 9). The PEAP thus stands out as a technical document, made by civil servants, that is there to guide the dialogue between government and development partners. Among the donors interviewed, only one raised concerns about the PEAP not being politically owned. She said, “it may be owned by bureaucrats, in the administration, in the Ministry of Finance, it might even be owned by some of the line ministries, but you still need to get the Ugandan government and the politicians to take a leadership” (Interview).

This lack of political leadership relates to a question raised by Piron and Norton about whether the MFPED, constituting the core of a developmental state in Uganda, has been a necessary institutional pre-requisite for the success of the Ugandan PRSP. If this is the case, the policy-making process has been depoliticised, in the sense that policy-making is not in the hands of the politicians, but in the hands of the technocrats and civil servants.
Shifting power-centres

There are basically two power centres in Uganda, the donors and the executive branch of the government. As this quote explains:

You know one of the problems of this country is that it seems it is only the president and the donors that are influential, the president, for instant, this seems political, but I think he has pushed out so many institutions and replaced them with himself, so, so many things cannot happen until he says them to happen, so he seems to be everything, and sometimes the donors can push him around, or sometimes he is very populist, because we are approaching an election, then he will listen to it. (Interview)

With regards to key national policy makers, most interviewees from the NGO community in Kampala emphasised the importance of the state house or the movement secretariat. Here the President is of utmost importance, and his spoken word is, at times, almost referred to as the law. Regarding key institutions that have been replaced by the President himself, many of my informants mentioned the lack of involvement of the Parliament in decision-making, leading many to describe it as a “rubber-stamp” Parliament. Having been overruled on many occasions, it even seems to have stopped trying to oppose. Many informants told stories about the President himself overruling the Parliament, or about decisions being made behind the scenes, as was the case with the process of privatisation. An interesting example is the parliament resolution, which opposed the privatisation of the Bank of Uganda. However, “the President wrote a letter over that very weekend, overriding the resolution” (Interview). In this regard it is worth mentioning that the Joint Staff Assessment from 2002 heralds the advances toward the privatisation of the Uganda Commercial Bank, and that the finalisation of the Bank’s sale was only depending on parliamentary approval. This is obviously an indicator that the Bank and the Fund, at least in some instances, are far more powerful in relation to the executive branch of government, than the elected representatives of the people. However, the process of bypassing the parliament when it comes to privatisation has also occurred in other developing countries. A study examining parliamentary participation in the drafting of PRSPs in 28 countries, found that “parliamentarians in borrowing countries might be particularly offended by the heavy hand of external creditors/donors in reshaping their domestic economies and interfering in their parliamentary process to do so”(Eberlein and Henn 2003 in Rowden and Irama 2004: 10).
The most outspoken and critical informants from national NGOs saw the process of weakening the parliament as part of the regime’s deliberate effort to tighten its grip on power. The process is seen as a result of the regime’s decreasing popularity, and thus its efforts to remain in power, where one tactic is to tighten its control over the decision-making processes and the management of resources. In this regard concerns about increasing corruption and less transparent decision-making processes was also raised by national NGO interviewees.

**A mutually beneficial Relationship**

As mentioned in the background chapter, the donor conditionalities have been somewhat more relaxed in Uganda than other developing countries. This is often related to donors and especially the World Bank and the IMF needed of an African success-story. They “allowed” Uganda to have a one party system since it seemed to bring stability and development to the country. That some civil, and in particular political rights have not been respected and that the war in the North is ongoing, has therefore to a large extent been ignored. In addition there have been several cases where there has been reallocation of resources even after the Parliament has approved the Budget. Such supplementary spending has, in particular, included the State House, i.e. funding of the Movement Secretariat and political activities and defence expenditures. As exemplified by an informant from a research institution:

> President Museveni woke up one morning and said that he wanted 30% of the budget for the army. He said I want everything except the Poverty Action Fund. He took it, and we expected the donors to pull out. No they didn’t react; they didn’t do anything, as it hadn’t ever happened. (Interview).

Although supplementary spending has not destroyed the overall macroeconomic stability guaranteed by the overall annual budget ceiling, sectors not protected by the Poverty Action Fund have suffered (Piron and Norton 2004). Despite these incidents, it has been essential for donors that Uganda remained a model for development, since “success” in Uganda can help “sell” models of interventions or technical solutions in other countries”(Piron and Norton 2004: 38).

Some donor informants acknowledged that the government had used donor money to fulfil other priorities, not complying with the PEAP. One said, “at the end of the day, government saw that kind of weakness, to the extent that they know, if they can move resources from one area to another, clearly, you comply, and they will tell you, yeah, I think we will try this programme and whatever” (Interview). However, what triggered action among the donors
were several political occurrences during the autumn of 2005, which caught international attention and made member countries of multilateral institutions and the government of the bilateral donors to ask questions.

It started off very well, one could say, with a national referendum in July, where people were asked to vote on whether they wanted the Movement system to continue or whether they wanted a multi-party arrangement. As mentioned in the background chapter, the political system in Uganda has increasingly been criticised both domestically and international for its lack of inclusiveness and political space (Piron and Norton 2004). However, vote turn out was low, and it seemed many thought the referendum was unnecessary since they believed a multi-party system would be enforced anyway, as even the movement itself encouraged people to vote for a multi-party solution. Shortly after the referendum, the President changed the Constitution, enabling him to sit a third term. After that, the main opposition leader was imprisoned and accused both for a rape committed in 1997 and for supporting the rebel group in the western part of the country. At the same time there was a large corruption scandal within the Ministry of Health regarding the Global Fund.

The World Bank was the first to withhold support to Uganda, but as it has no mandate to interfere in a country’s political affairs, it cut aid due to a skyrocketing public expenditure, much due to the creation of many new district units. The concerns about large and increasing public expenditures, were however not a new issue, as it has been a continuous theme in the Joint Staff Assessments (JSAs) from 2001 to 2005. The JSAs have furthermore pinpointed the slow progress in governance issues and in particular the fight against corruption. The UK Department for International Development also withheld aid due to the issue of public administration expenditures, and some of the other bilateral donors swiftly followed and withheld aid due to concerns of the political development in Uganda.

However, donors not providing budget assistance did not withhold aid. Considering it an interesting instrument, they expressed some caution, as their colleagues providing budget support were reconsidering the approach. This reconsideration was based on the recent political occurrences and the recurring theme of public expenditure. Some within the donor community therefore raised the solution of earmarking budget support, and applying some kind of graduated conditionality. However, this would violate the principle of country ownership in decision-making, and the whole idea of moving away from project funding. One of the key arguments favouring budget support is that it increases the government’s
accountability to its own citizens rather than to the donors. It is therefore a dilemma for the donors, deciding how far you go should go in the spirit of country ownership.

The interviewees from the donor community emphasised that the issue of public expenditure had been raised in one budget after the other, but that they had not been able to affect the government on this issue. Acknowledging that the creation of many new districts had to do with the political system in the country one of them said, “politically the government sees mileage in having many more political units, because it in some way is maybe remunerating a political club or friends, on the other hand, it is more or less like a divide and rule approach, they are smaller units which are not likely to generate sustained level of opposition” (Interview). It thus seems like the donors understand that the power and legitimacy of the government is partly built upon a neopatrimonial logic, and that this creates a challenge for them as aid agencies.

Many informants from national NGOs and research-based organisations also recognised that much of the public expenditure was used to expand the state’s bureaucracy and legitimise the power of the government. Some of them were therefore astonished that the donors had not reacted earlier, as the government clearly had not kept their part of the deal. Referring to the then recent withdrawal of aid, one said; “the government has failed to behave, but there was a period where people were saying that it is a learning process, let us allow to make mistakes. The tolerance continued for a while and now they are like oh! We thought these people had learned.” In my opinion this quote points to a continued donor tolerance, based on their need for a success-story. Many interviewees saw donor conditionalities as positive, since they were not convinced that the government would act in the best interest of the country. Why the government was not spending money in the best interest of its citizens were often explained by saying that “most African regimes are more focused on schemes that will allow them to stay in power as long as possible, than on schemes that can lift their people out of bad living conditions” (Interview). They therefore argued that most of the policies in the African states, in countries like Uganda, are led by politics of patronage, and that being a politician implies that “you are a giver and people are receivers, so every time they look at you, you are supposed to give” (Interview). My findings therefore support my argument that Uganda to a large extent functions as a neopatrimonial state, and that the political support of the Movement to a large degree relies on a system of patron-client relationships.
**Concluding remarks on ownership**

Much of the success story around the Ugandan PRSP is attached to the PEAP as a home-grown document. However, in this chapter I have, based on my findings, put huge question marks behind the idea of ownership. As the donors fund half of the Ugandan budget, it should be of no surprise that they are said to have at least 50 percent of the decision-making power. It is therefore legitimate to ask whether the making and revising of the Ugandan PRSP is no more than a ritual that, it, as an aid dependent country has to go through and whether or not the government could pursue another development policy. I have suggested that the contradiction between the ownership narrative and the strong donor influence in the country can be explained by the unofficial and official spaces the government and the donors use to harmonise their positions. This interaction has made it possible to portray the policy-making process as more consensual than it is. Furthermore, there seems to be little political support for the PEAP. Many of my informants suggested that the President and the rest of the leadership in the NRM government do not strongly endorse the content of the PEAP. In addition the parliament has to a limited extent been involved in the PEAP process. Ownership therefore seems to be limited to technocrats and civil servants in the Ministry of Finance. The idea about ownership has therefore lost its power and been depoliticised, as it has not fulfilled its initial promise of changing the power-relations between donors and government.

Yet, the Poverty Eradication Action Plan seems to have been at the centre of a mutually beneficial relationship between the donors and government of Uganda. Donors have gotten the chance to provide the world with an African success-story, which has contributed to legitimise and transfer the PRSP approach to other countries, while the government has gained much popular support due its focus on poverty, and has used foreign funds to nourish its patron-client network. Therefore, as a subordinate nation within the world hegemony, the Ugandan regime has managed to incorporate elements from the hegemonic development discourse, of the PRSPs without disturbing old power structures. As the people in the Ministry of Finance are technocrats and economists, and perhaps also educated in the West, they moreover share many of the same ideas as people working in the IFIs. They can therefore be referred to as intellectuals that contribute to transmitting the neoliberal ideology from the core countries in the world to the peripheries.
Furthermore, the role of the Finance Ministry has been one of strengthening the hegemonic project of neoliberalism, and could be compared to Gramsci’s concept of Caesarism, where a strong man or a political party intertwines to resolves the stalemate between equal and opposed forces. I say compared, as there is not yet a strongly organised counter-hegemonic force in Uganda. Additionally, power centres in Uganda, the donors and the executive branch of the government, have both benefited from the hegemonic project. There is therefore no clear-cut answer to whether this form of Caesarism has been progressive or regressive. It has been progressive in the sense that development partners and the Ministry of Finance have contributed to a national policy that favours capitalist interests and the creation of a new elite class in Uganda, while it has been regressive in the sense that the emergence of a new elite has not threatened the existing power of the political elite.
6. Participation

The point I am making is that from early 2000 to date, writing documents saying that civil society was consulted, we were working with civil society and the private sector; it is really a fashionable thing. So that is why I am saying, that the critical question is: How much civil society has taken advantage of those narratives to find a place for themselves at the policy table and in the implementation process. I think, in terms of evaluating whether civil society has been able to influence policy or not, I would look at these downstream issues, not on the narratives. (Interview)

This quote from an informant working in a national NGO partaking in the latest revision process of the PEAP emphasises the core of this chapter. As mentioned in the background chapter NGOs have only recently started to engage in policy-processes and advocacy. This shift from service delivery to advocacy has much to do with the current development orthodoxy, where Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) are seen as “crucial actors in poverty reduction and policy, transmitting the voices of ordinary people to decision-makers, creating a constituency to ensure efficient, demand-driven service delivery, and holding governments to account for their actions” (Brock 2004: 94). The orthodoxy implies that donor funding accrues more and more to CSOs who are willing to take on these new roles.

I begin this chapter by discussing areas where NGOs have been able to influence/not influence the Poverty Eradication Action Plan. Based on these findings I argue that the Poverty Reduction Strategy Initiative can be described as a hegemonic development discourse, since it seems to have defined the terms of the debate and delegitimized competing conceptualisations of both the problem and the solution to development in Uganda. Furthermore, I argue that the idea of participation, in effect, has contributed to legitimising a poverty reduction policy that to a large degree is based on a neoliberal paradigm. Additionally, doing advocacy is difficult, as the government seems to be of the opinion that policy making is a government role. NGOs therefore meet conflicting expectations from the donors and the government. I also suggest that the segment of civil society that has been invited to participate in the PEAP process, the national Kampala-based NGOs to a large extent represent an urban middle-class that are educated in the West, which share many of the basic assumptions of the donors and the government. It is therefore not appropriate to conceptualise civil society as autonomous from the state.
Assessing CSOs influence in the 2003 PEAP Revision Process

Most interviewees from national NGOs argued that the nature of participation in the 2003 revision process of the PEAP was different from the first PEAP revision process in 2000. The process in 2000 was marked by limited time, and to the extent that they participated, it was more a matter of window-dressing, as the government had to write that civil society had been consulted. In 2003, the process changed and more time was given for consultations with civil society. Additionally, many informants said they felt more prepared and able to actively participate this time. Civil society organisations (NGOs) were asked by the government to go and prepare their own position, and received funding from the DFID for this purpose.

In preparing their own civil society input a liaison officer position responsible for coordinating the work was established at NGO Forum, a national umbrella organisation for NGOs in Uganda. The NGOs partaking in the exercise decided to create a parallel structure to the 14 government sector working groups already working with revising the Poverty Eradication Action Plan. Each sector-working group had a lead NGO responsible for mobilising other organisations with the same area of interest and the lead NGO would also join the same government sector working group The different sectors received a mandate to undertake consultations and analysis. Eventually, they came up with a paper to be handed over to the NGO Forum, which was responsible for coordinating the different inputs and synthesize them into a consistent document. The civil society contribution to the PEAP was named, In Search of a new Development Path. Civil Society’s input into the PEAP, handed over to the MFPED, and presented at a workshop for all the stakeholders of the PEAP.

In assessing their own impact on the final PEAP document, most interviewees participating in the revision process felt that the government had listened to them and taken onboard many of the issues they raised. A central person who finalising the PEAP in the Ministry of Finance stated:

People will tell you, donors, the civil society will tell you that by and large, what they wanted in the PEAP is actually what got reflected in the PEAP, by and large, not what the donors actually wanted. And you can actually easily tell this by looking at the Civil Society contribution. (Interview)

Many interviewees from the NGO community in Uganda were proud as their contribution had not only influenced the content of the PEAP, but also the structure and number of pillars. The
old PEAP had four pillars; Fast and sustainable economic growth and structural transformation; Good governance and security; Increased ability of the poor to raise their incomes; and Increased quality of the life of the poor (Ministry of Finance 2001). The pillar of good governance and security was split in the new PEAP of 2004/5, and civil society was given the credit for this change. As one Ministry of Finance informants said: “In fact it was because of them that we even split, because of the work that they had done they were able to show that when you are talking about governance issues they are very different from security issues” (Interview).

The five new pillars in the PEAP are named; Economic management; Enhancing production, competitiveness and incomes; Security, conflict-resolution and disaster management; Good governance and Human development (Ministry of Finance 2004). Civil society suggested six pillars; Delivering quality and equitable social services; Enhancing Uganda’s productive capacity; Ensuring Democratic governance; Security, conflict resolution and disaster management; Maintenance of a good macroeconomic policy framework and Economic and corporate governance (NGO Forum 2004). It is apparent that the pillars suggested are quite similar, and I will now look into the pillars where civil society is said to has influenced/not influenced the PEAP document.

Areas of influence

The security pillar focus on protecting the internally displaced persons in northern Uganda, finding a peaceful resolution to the northern conflict and giving amnesty to those leaving the rebel groups. In addition it states that disaster preparedness will be strengthened along with the prioritisation of security for the population in general. As the government, for a long time talked of security only in military terms, CSOs have in particular been given the credit for including conflict resolution as a viable path to peace in the country. In addition they are said to have brought in the issue of disaster preparedness.

The Poverty Eradication Action Plan of 2004/5 defines good governance as “the efficient, effective and accountable exercise of political, administrative and managerial authority to achieve society’s objectives including the welfare of the whole population, sustainable development and personal freedom” (Ministry of Finance 2004: 115). In order to achieve this, it emphasises democratisation. The PEAP and the civil society contribution both emphasise
that a democratisation process should contain a credible system of representation, free and fair elections, a system of checks and balances based on separation of powers, a vibrant civil society able to monitor government and private business and to provide alternative forms of representation, a free and strong independent media and civilian control over the military (Ministry of Finance 2004: 117; NGO Forum 2004: 72). The only point not taken up from the civil society recommendation is “consolidation of democracy by handing over power by one party to another formally in opposition” (NGO Forum 2004: 72). Furthermore, both documents have the same topic headings and raise issues relating to decentralisation and enhanced public accountability and justice, law and order.

When it comes to the pillar of Human Development or what is referred to as “Delivering quality and equitable services” in the civil society input, both documents emphasise education, health and water and sanitation. Both documents recognise the achievements made in these areas of intervention, and especially the increase in the enrolment rate of children in primary school, the improved outreach of health services and the increase in water supply. However it is acknowledged that there is a need to improve the quality of these services. Social protection of vulnerable groups is also mentioned. But whereas the civil society input suggests that the government should take specific measures to protect the marginalized and enable them to participate in the growing economy, the PEAP is more vague about what the government’s role should be, as it emphasises a strengthened community-based response to the vulnerable. In addition the civil society input, not surprisingly, emphasises the advantages CSOs and NGOs have in supplementing the government in the delivery of these services.

Areas of limited influence

When it comes to the pillars where discrepancies between civil society and the government could be traced, the Economic Management pillar or what the civil society input calls Maintenance of a Conducive Macroeconomic Policy Framework is a good starting point. The PEAP states that the main objective for the country is to achieve a strong, private sector-led growth at around 7% per annum that will be one of the conditions for reducing the poverty rate, (measured as one dollar a day), down to 10% by the year 2017. Uganda’s achievements in economic growth is emphasised and the growth of the industrial sector is said to “constitute the beginning of the process of structural transformation in the economy, whereby production moves away from subsistence-based agriculture to a mix of commercial agriculture, services
and industry as a result of shifts in demand and labour patterns in the economy” (Ministry of Finance 2004: 32).

In general civil society organisations do not question the need for a good and stable macroeconomic environment, and many interviewees indeed recommended Museveni and his government in this area of intervention. However they questioned the rigidity of the parameters attached to the macroeconomic stability, especially the inflation rate. The government is committed to keep the inflation rate below five percent, as high inflation is said to discourage private investment, be an incentive for subsistence production instead of commercial production and affect the poor negatively through an erosion of the value of savings. In addition, raising the inflation target would undermine the credibility of the government in the macroeconomic area, and so make the county less attractive for finance capital investments (Ministry of Finance 2004: 37-38). The civil society input on the other hand argues that low inflation reduces long-term investments in the economy, and that it can be harmful to growth. It highlight studies indicating the level of inflation slowing down growth is estimated at 1-3 percent for industrialized countries and 11-12 percent for developing countries. (NGO Forum 2004: 104). What seems to be at stake here, according to theories about inflation, is whether one should promote finance capital investments (low inflation) or whether one should promote productive capital investment (more flexible inflation rate). However this is not debated in any of the documents.

Both civil society’s input and the PEAP raise concerns about the increased fiscal deficit of the state, where increased government expenditure has been funded by an inflow of aid and not an increase in domestic revenues. The PEAP recognises that although the increase can be justified by increased social service provision in health and education, but that aid has also “diminished the need to scale back expenditure in non-priority areas such as public administration, leading to wastage, corruption and poor value for money in some areas of the budget” (Ministry of Finance 2004: 39). The PEAP also states that aid dependency impinges on the sovereignty of the aid recipient and constrains its economic and budgetary choices. Therefore, a reduction in this dependency is necessary for the development of a democracy where the government is more accountable to its citizens (Ministry of Finance 2004: 42). Something similar is found in the civil society input, which argues that a positive relationship between aid and growth only exists to a certain threshold and that the negative impacts of aid
can be the undermining of institutions and delay of necessary reforms (NGO Forum 2004: 104).

The civil society contribution also suggested an economic and corporate governance pillar, emphasising amongst other things; “an economic policy that protect the rights and interests of citizens; commercial and labour law reforms that protect the poor as they protect the investor and a strong civil society able to hold the government and economic operators to account”(NGO Forum 2004: 8-9). Acknowledging the private sector as the engine of economic growth, it states that private firm owners and managers tend to be exploitative of their employees. Therefore, they call for a clear regulatory framework to guide economic policy-making and execution that caters for the “rights and responsibilities of economic actors, sustainable use of resources and the protection of interest and rights of all citizens, including the poor” (NGO Forum 2004: 111).

The economic and corporate governance pillar also emphasises accountability, meaning “the ability of public officials, private employers or service providers to account” and “be answerable for their policies, actions and use of funds”(NGO Forum 2004: 112). In this regard they criticise the level of corruption in the country and its negative impacts on the economy and the poor. They argue that corruption harms the poor by diverting resources from efforts to combat poverty, as well as resulting in poor service delivery. They connect the high level of corruption to “moral decadence, weak legal sanctions and strong tolerance, weak administrative controls, poor salaries, and personal greed” (NGO Forum 2004: 113). The civil society organisations thus question the political will of the government to fight corruption, although “Uganda’s policies and programmes as well as the structures put in place to fight corruption are among the best in Africa”(NGO Forum 2004: 113). They therefore have the perception that “corruption is not only tolerated but is also institutionalised” in the political system (NGO Forum 2004: 113).

However, the pillar was dismissed, because the government felt it had accounted for this under the pillars about good governance and poverty (Interview, National NGO). Yet, little is mentioned about corporate governance in the PEAP, and promises of action are vague. It states; the government will review the labour legislation and where necessary ensure that it is consistent with international legal instruments; prioritise to consult with the private sector to review the issue of a minimum wage for estate workers; consider a revision of the Workers
Compensation Act to achieve a more effective system with lower burdens on employers and consider the role of labour inspections to protect worker’s welfare (Ministry of Finance 2004: 86). The PEAP acknowledging corruption and its negative impacts on the poor, also emphasise that improvement has been taking place, as Uganda went from being ranked as the 3rd to the 17th most corrupt country in the world. When it come to priority actions to fight corruption the PEAP emphasise strengthening the mechanisms of accounting at the district levels of governance and to developing a culture “in which no-one expects to pay or receive a bribe” (Ministry of Finance 2004: 128). However, corruption is not acknowledged as an institutionalised practise in the political system.

However, that the civil society contribution is in search of a new development path does not become evident before coming to the issue of agricultural development, taken up in the pillar about Enhancing production, competitiveness and incomes or “Enhancing Uganda’s Productive Capacity”. This chapter in the PEAP introduces “Government’s strategy for fighting poverty through increasing production, competitiveness of Uganda’s products and household incomes” (Ministry of Finance 2004: 51). The chapter recognises that since 90% of those below the poverty line live in rural areas, agricultural growth is critical for poverty reduction and rural development. The core of the development plan of Uganda is to increase agricultural production and shift it towards cash crops. The commercialisation of agriculture is expected to increase the demand for non-agricultural goods and services, and free up labour for use in other sectors of the economy. The plan also aims to export more agricultural products to international and regional markets, which it says will increasing the supply of basic food crops, thus lowering the price of food to urban consumers. Furthermore it states “increased agricultural commercialisation and export production is particularly important for poverty reduction, given the dependence of the majority of the poor on agriculture as their main source of income (Ministry of Finance 2004: 33)”. However, exactly how this will benefit the poor is not very clear.

The interventions addressing the objectives of agricultural modernisation and commercialisation are grouped under the Plan for Modernisation of Agriculture (PMA). The seven pillars of PMA (research and technology development, advisory services, rural financial services, rural infrastructure, agro-processing, marketing and sustainable natural resource use and management) are implemented through a multi-sectoral approach. Furthermore, the PMA
stipulates the withdrawal of government from direct service provision and divesture of all commercial activities to the private sector, including advisory services. It is also expected that CSOs should complement the government and private sector in delivering agricultural services and take part in policy advocacy and dialogue.

The civil society input also emphasises the importance of agriculture in fighting poverty and transforming the economy. However, they foresee many challenges before this would materialise. First, they state that although the agricultural sector “is a priority area under the PEAP, it remains poorly funded, constraining the fulfilment of its objectives” (NGO Forum 2004: 57). It was only allocated 2.6% in 2001/02 and 2.3% of the national budget in 2002/03, and though the allocations have increased to about 4% in 2006/7, it is still insufficient as most Ugandans depend on this sector. The main criticism is however directed at the role of the private sector and the market in the PMA, where they argue that the market has no interest in helping poor farmers. The PMA is therefore portrayed as a pro-poor policy, merely benefitting commercial farmers (Oxfam GB in NGO Forum 2004: 59). The civil society input therefore suggests a new development path:

A new development path that prioritises real pro-poor growth should carefully consider the appropriate roles of Government to create an environment that will enable the poor, with limited asset endowments, knowledge to competitively and sustainably enter the market economy. Liberalization of the market led to a fall in the real price of outputs, and a rise in the real price of inputs leading to crisis for the poor in the agricultural sector. Wholesale removal of government support and other provisions, particularly in the absence of institutions to enforce contracts, effectively disseminate information, and finance intermediation, affects participation of the poor adversely. (OECD 1998 and Rozell and Swinnen 2000 in NGO Forum 2004: 59)

Regarding agricultural policy in Uganda, it is interesting to note that there has been a debate in the Ministry of Finance, where some people are concerned about the lack of outcomes from government investment in the social sectors, as the relationship between these investments and the reduction in the income poverty rate is weak. Therefore, they would like to see more money allocated to the productive sectors, and especially agriculture. The new Finance Minister spearheaded the ideological battle as he urged the government to put its main focus on agriculture:

It is that ideological battle where the current Finance Minister believes that we must kick start growth in agriculture, because that is where the people are. Even if it takes government intervention, the market hasn’t worked, so there must be some calculated government intervention. Yeah, that is now the structural economist approach, but government has over
the past 15 years been filled up with monetarist economy, which say don’t bother with the market, the market will provide. Those are the macroeconomic fundamentals, do the fundamentals and people will emerge. (Interview)

Whereas the PMA is based on a free-market solution where it is expected that a sound macroeconomic framework and an enabling environment for the private sector will lead to economic transformation and poverty reduction, the new Finance Minister wanted to come up with a new rural development strategy that allowed for more government. To my understanding the ideological battle resulted in the development of the Rural Development Strategy Initiative (RDSI). However, the effect of the RDSI became minimal, as it in the end was equated with the PEAP and the PMA. As one of my informants from the Ministry of Finance said:

I don’t see any contradictions. The only thing, part we always make fun, and we always say that the rural development strategy is equal to the PMA plus some few missing things. Plus cooperatives, you know when you encourage people to come together in terms of marketing and what ever, and also plus provision of inputs. That is what the whole thing is. This one is bigger, it is really PMA plus. So in this case if we had really efficient implementation of the PEAP it would serve most of the issues under this strategy. (Interview)

An interviewee from a research institution said, the new approach could not go through in the Ministry of Finance; since there was such a strong establishment believing in a monetarist economy there. However, the representatives I talked to from NGOs welcomed the initiative of the new Finance Minister, and thought his views were pro-poor. They were therefore disappointed when little new came out of the RDSI and some even questioned if the initiative was created, because of the upcoming elections.

**Poverty Knowledge Production**

Based on the above findings, NGOs have to some extent been able to influence the PEAP. However, their input regarding macroeconomics, economic and corporate governance and agriculture and general cautions of liberalisation and privatisation of the economy only had a limited, if any, effect on Uganda’s Poverty Eradication Action Plan. Very few NGO informants discussed why their worries about these issues were not taken on-board, but a few thought these matters were reserved for the Ministry of Finance and donors such as the World Bank and IMF. As an interviewee from an international NGO said: “As you know, one of the challenges that we have with the Ministry of Finance is ideological, they are more free
market, neoliberal thinking, while Civil Society ironically say that we want more state involvement while the state is saying that they want to be out” (Interview).

An Action aid study assessing CSOs participation in the PRSP process, suggests that aid dependent governments discourage debate on key economic issues, as they are afraid their national PRSP will be rejected by the Joint Staff Assessment (JSA), which screen the PRSP before they submit it for endorsement by the boards of the IMF and World Bank. The forbidden debates that do not occur within the government-led consultations supposed to inform the PRSP are: Fiscal policy, monetary policy, financial liberalisation, privatisation, trade policy, land reform, labour policy, foreign investment regulations and domestic/public investment (Rowden and Irama 2004: 43-48). As mentioned in the theoretical review, Bøås and McNeill (2004) state that the hegemonic power of the multilateral institutions has much to do with their ability to limit the power of potentially radical ideas to achieve change, what can be referred to as an exercise of framing. Bøås and McNeill finds two explanations for why ideas become depoliticised; the economic-technocratic nexus and neoliberal ideology. My findings indicate that both processes have been at work in Uganda. I argue that the idea of participation has contributed to legitimise a development path in Uganda, which is based on a neoliberal ideology. Therefore, there is support for the argument that multilateral institutions use ideas to promote and sustain the neoliberal hegemony in the world, with the agenda of making countries most attractive for international capital and maintaining a core state apparatus that can push through liberalisation.

In the previous chapter I mentioned the strong dominance of the Ministry of Finance in the PEAP process, which definitely has contributed to making the PEAP an economic-technocratic document. In the process of deciding what should and should not be included in the document, the Ministry says it is guided by a principle that the PEAP’s content should be based on concrete evidence. As one interviewee from the MFPED responsible for finalising the PEAP explained:

If there are some issues that come up that are backed by well-researched information, we would take it strait. Now if it were some speculation, that one we would not necessarily take. Cause like especially NGOs, they are fond of speculation; someone comes and says things not backed by any, you know, research. (Interview)
Furthermore, this informant said that one of the contentious issues between the government and civil society had been macroeconomics. In this area civil society’s input was dismissed because they had not done “their proper research to justify some of the things they were raising, therefore what is written under the pillar of Economic Management is based on research that the government had done and what they as a government thought they should be doing” (Interview). However, another informant from the Ministry of Finance acknowledged that civil society could not influence the issues of macroeconomics: “most of the money in the state budget come from donors and since the macroeconomic framework is also driven by very big donors, like the Bank, the Ministry of Finance is bent on that one” (Interview). This interviewee therefore attaches the limited scope of civil society influence to the power of the donors.

Due to incidents where NGOs had been dismissed on the grounds that they had not done their proper research, several interviewees from national NGOs recognised that a strong research base was important when entering into the policy discussion. As exemplified by one:

> If you don’t have a strong research base you will be dismissed very quickly or they will just tolerate you, because they don’t have much to do, so they will just keep you around there, and report that you attended and participated. And some of us don’t want to be put in that category. Yes, so there is always that feeling, that it is the government responsibility to make policy. So, it is just not something government can give away willingly, no, you have to fight for the space, you have to fight to be there. (Interview)

Therefore, it seems to be a division between those organisations that are invited and those that feel their technical competence are appreciated and used by the government. This division, not surprisingly, are made by organisations claiming they are not invited to the policy table to legitimise the process, but because they are knowledgeable and contribute to make the policy more scientifically based. They are proud of providing well-researched information, since this gives legitimacy and recognition to the organisation. However, most find it hard to receive funding for research, and if they do, it is often not enough to generate large enough samples for generalising. Many CSOs also deal with variables that are difficult to capture.

As mentioned in the theoretical review poverty knowledge also encompasses knowledge about the policy-making process and who makes decisions. Again it was those organisations that had been recognised by the government as credible that had the clearest picture of the policy-making process, and who to talk to. This is most probably due to their expertise and
that they therefore frequently get invited by the government and donors to make comments.

Realising that influencing policy is more than providing information, one NGO informant said: “One of the lessons we learnt is that negotiations and discussions are a different ball game” (Interview). It is clear that there is an understanding that to really influence you have to reach the donors, especially the World Bank, IMF, Permanent Secretary of the government and the presidential advisers. These groups are not the easiest to reach and some NGOs said that they often felt disempowered and occasionally intimidated in this environment. Therefore, they would like to invest more in developing negotiating skills at these higher levels. Some interviewees said they had tried influencing policy by going through the Parliament, but as the Parliament had been disempowered, this was no longer so effective. In the last instance, which channel to use to a large extent depended on where you had personal contacts, as one of my informants said:

First of all you have to know that many of these things are on a person-to-person basis. It is not like the Ministry of Finance is a faceless person, you know this person there, you know this person there… If you have been around for some time, then you know who to talk to. That is one of the things we used in the PEAP, we used people, and you know that who is drafting this pillar so we shall get in touch with that person. But if you just fax something to the Ministry of Finance and sit back… (Interview)

McGee (2004) also argues that knowledge about poverty and the policy process is important for organisations wanting to influence policy in Uganda. Recognises that much power is vested in the actors who are in a position to define what is legitimate knowledge she mentions three factors determining the degree of legitimacy. The first is related to the question of qualitative versus quantitative data. Brock states that qualitative data is now recognised as useful and credible information, but not to the same degree as “generalisable data obtained from random samples”(McGee 2004: 124). The second factor is related to the political acceptability of the policy message, as knowledge seems more easily accepted if it does not question the core of the PEAP framework or is not too critical of the government. The third factor influencing the legitimacy and power of the knowledge provided has to do with whom it is coming from. McGee states that although the current development narrative sees knowledge originating from the grass-root as important in order to make the right policies, the common belief is still that “what the poor say they want is not necessarily what they should actually get” (McGee 2004: 128). She concludes by emphasising these continuities in whose knowledge counts: The gatekeeper of orthodox poverty knowledge still seems to be the World Bank; the government apparently embracing alternative perspectives sometimes has more to
do with political interests and maintaining good relations with key creditors and donors than with any real conviction of the reliability of such data, and the legitimacy of knowledge coming from civil society actors remains weak (2004: 128).

A triple Alliance or challenging the Status Quo

It is the government’s role to make policy

Regarding choosing a parallel structure to the government’s sector working groups reviewing the PEAP, a few informants from NGOs questioned whether this had framed their thinking. They said that the approach definitely had helped in terms of feeding into the PEAP, but were concerned that taking the PEAP framework as the starting point had encouraged more reactive than creative thinking around the question of development. The question was not how would you like us to develop Uganda, but how can we make the PEAP a better policy document. As one informants said, “When you get into my book and you find it arranged in a certain way, what are then the assumptions? You say that the ways I have arranged things are ok” (Interview). It is in this regard that some discussed the secret powers of the PEAP, i.e. that you don’t hear many voices in civil society that propose something radically different. Brock (2004) also claims that much of the NGOs response was reactive as they to a large extent respond to available resources for different activities and functions. Furthermore she argues: “This in turn limits their capacity to develop autonomous agendas and raises questions about where their accountability lies” (Brock 2004: 100). However, the majority of the interviewees from national NGOs did not complain about lack of space, but a few emphasised that so far they had only participated in invited spaces, where the government and the donors control the agenda. Therefore, some emphasised the importance of creating their own autonomous spaces in which they can invite the government and donors and set the agenda.

Furthermore, a few highlighted that the policy space gained was much due to donor pressure, and raised doubts about the political will of the government to genuinely open up the policy process. The government, being reluctant to take on arguments from civil society, exemplified these doubts. Many stated that although civil society brought forward good issues, they were sometimes not taken onboard directly as “government does not want to seem to be moving because civil society has pushed them, so they create that kind of resistance” (Interview).
Many, though considered the change in policy as positive, despite not being given credit for it. That parts of the government are reluctant to share the policy space is related to an argument about politics being best left to the politicians. The Ugandan government, together with many other governments preparing a PRSP therefore seems to be “more comfortable with CSO playing the traditional role of ‘implementers’ than of them providing policy solutions and options particular on fiscal and macroeconomic targets and goals” (Rowden and Irama 2004: 24).

Government’s reluctantness to share the policy space with NGOs is also evident at the district level and below. The Local Government Act of 1997 stipulates that CSOs should participate in the planning process at sub-county and district levels. However, District officials are reluctant to inform NGOs about their meetings. This is, according to my NGO interviewees in the districts, based on a perception that policy-making is the government’s role. Those who are welcomed at the meetings are large national or international NGOs engaged in service delivery that can supplement the district budget or help them implement policies. In this sense then, there is a nice and cosy relationship between government officials and the NGOs. As one district official explained,

> We relate with them, we try to work with them, sometimes they implement some of our activities, like the NAADS (National Agricultural Advisory Program), we bring them in, some of them are service providers, so we have not a bad relationship at all. Like Plan of Uganda, they are helping us on our birth and death registration program, others construct schools, and water points or they provide some boreholes perhaps. Yeah they supplement us. (Interview)

However when some of the NGOs at the district level try to monitor or do policy advocacy tensions arise. As interviewee from a District NGO network stated “if you advocate for pro-poor policy or if you engage yourself in monitoring and utilisation of resources you stand the risk of being named the opposition. They will think you are monitoring them, you are witch hunting them, you are anti-government” (Interview). It is therefore not an easy task to take on these roles, as it requires real courage and commitment, as illustrated by the example below:

> We participated in the Constitutional review, and we submitted our views before the parliamentary government affairs, saying that the position of civil society organisations in this District is that: No third term for the President, no death penalty and we want a multi-party system. Those people mistook us to be part of the oppositions, or being funded by the opposition, by opponents to go and submit those views. We were told in the Parliament, that probably we think that you are groups of people who have been against the government system, being funded by the FDC (Forum for Democratic Change) to come and submit these views; we can’t believe these views are coming from you, civil society. You see, even the
As the monitoring groups I interviewed at sub-county level also discussed, monitoring was difficult. It was hard to access information needed to know how much money are coming to the sub-county and how these money are supposed to be used. The groups had been accused of witch-hunting and some members had even been threatened on their lives. Due to this some withdraw from the group, and only those who were “strong hearted and committed to putting things right, to transparency and accountability” stayed. However, the impact of monitoring at this level is relative small, as little action is taken in order to fight corruption at the district and central levels. The explanation they give for this is that these people are also corrupt, as they argue,

The district official says it is not much corruption, but he cannot out rule that there is corruption. For example there was this money coming to the sub-county for road construction. I asked him how far he had come up to now; I have not received any explanation up till now about that road money. They just divided the money amongst themselves; there is no road. You know corruption in Uganda today; when you tackle them from there they will just use another system. If the Budget monitoring could begin from the top that could help. (interview)

In general then, the political climate in Uganda has not tolerated divergent views, as critical voices of the regime and their policy have often been accused of being part of the opposition to the NRM. This is supported by an interviewee from the donor community sating: “When anyone tries to challenge the status quo, the power relations, the leadership, and then you are in the opposition” (Interview). This donor agency had in fact also been accused of supporting political parties disguised as NGOs from one person in the President’s office. Related to these experiences, many interviewees from national NGOs stated that they were afraid of appearing political, which they according to their own understanding of their role, should not be. To avoid affiliation with the opposition, it is therefore important that they are not too critical of the government, and instead make positive criticism. If they do not learn this art of making compromises, civil society organisations can lose the little policy space they have been given. An informant from a research institution said, “If things will begin to happen, government will shut you out of the meeting. The meeting is talking place, but they don’t invite you,
because they know when you come in you are always critical, you won’t say anything good and that kind of thing can happen” (Interview).

Easily accused of being affiliated with the opposition, some expressed dissatisfaction with the PRSP approach and the move towards budget support. As the donors give less direct support to NGOs, they increasingly have to apply for state funding. In this relation one informant asked, “if donors put their money in a basket, what if this basket becomes political, which is most likely and the government is not in favour of this and this, then these organisations will never access money, never” (Interview). The most common reason referred to for not accessing money was something like “the government will not raise voices to question them.” At the district levels and below it is even more difficult for NGOs to attract funds. Contrary to the national NGOs, the small NGOs and Community Based Organisations (CBOs) do not have many different opportunities with regards to accessing funds, and the increased funding through the decentralised levels of governance accruing to NGOs has large implications on which roles these organisations take on.

As Twijukye and Ruta et al. (2005) note, the donors have spearheaded a new trend of contracting out services traditionally provided by the government to NGOs and the private sector. The rationale given for this is the government’s insufficient capacity to deliver services. The argument is by no means new among the development partners, as they for a long time preferred to give direct support to NGOs that would help them implement their projects. However, with the coming of the PRSPs and the emphasis on building up government institutions, direct project support does no longer match the agenda. The trust vested in NGOs and the private sector is though still stronger than the trust in government, so the solution became to channel support through the decentralised system of governance and then involve NGOs and the private sector. So far sub-contracting have mostly been implemented in relation to health services and the Plan for Modernisation of Agriculture, and especially in the NAADS (Twijukye, Ruta et al. 2005: 1). However, subcontracting has severe impacts on the ability these same organisations have in doing policy advocacy and holding the government to account. Roles the donors want NGOs to take. Many NGO informants emphasised that there was a glaring contradiction between getting money from the same government that you are supposed to criticise. The contradiction was in reality so strong, that no one could see this happen in real life. As an interviewee from a national NGO stated,
You know, it is not working in real life, especially in countries like ours. If you are operating as a consultative firm, the moment you start doing these assignments, you are looking for the next opportunity, when I finish this one, will I get another assignment from this same client, so you are like, what does my client want to hear out of this assignment. So when it comes to service delivery it becomes worse, when you go to the district level, where people really don’t have a clue of what, of how important, or how relevant civil society is. So you are unlikely to get a contract from the district council, deliver it and go back and say that the city council is corrupt, it is not doing its work, forget about that, that is not possible. That is not possible. (Interview)

NGOs are therefore in a difficult position where the donor community and government confront them with conflicting expectations. As Brock (2004: 95) argues, participation of civil society organisations in policy-making processes in Uganda “is shaped not only by the preferences of international development actors, but by the historically situated dynamics of politics and power.” While many of the donors see NGOs as having a legitimate place at the policy table and have encouraged the government to create invited spaces for participation, the government is still not convinced that CSOs belong. The way NGOs handle these conflicting demands is by “turning the advocacy process into a technocratic process that has no political teeth” (Interview, Research-based organisation). Thus, instead of challenging the status quo, NGOs contribute to depoliticising the debate around poverty reduction, as they find it easier to advocate for technical and economic, rather than political solutions to the problem. It is in this regard that one of my informants talked about an undemocratic triple alliance making policy in Uganda, i.e. the donors, the government and the national NGOs.

A triple alliance sharing the same assumptions

In the previous chapter I argued that there was a mutually beneficial relationship between the donors and the government when it came to the PEAP experience. The donors have their success story from Africa, while the government is able to implement reforms without disturbing the status quo, at the same time as it receives foreign funds to up-hold its patron-client networks. Continuing, what have NGOs gained in this alliance? By participating in decision-making process they receive recognition and legitimacy as organisations, which make it easier for them to access funds and stay in business. In this regard it is noteworthy that many Ugandans join a NGO, not necessarily because they want change, but because they want a career. There are limited jobs for higher educated Ugandans, and the two most accessible career-paths are to join a political party or NGO.
However, there are other explanations for the non-existence of a larger debate about the PEAP principles. As previously mentioned, the political climate in Uganda has not tolerated divergent views, so if a NGO becomes too critical, it would be out of the game. Additionally, it is possible that part of the explanation lies in which part of civil society participating in the policy-processes. Civil society has to a large extent has been represented by an urban, western educated middle-class, that share many of the basic assumptions of the donors and government. It is also difficult to separate NGOs, and say that they are independent from the state, as one informant said, “Because essentially people like me and many of us are both part of civil society, government and everything else. So to draw a clear separation between the two is always a hard thing” (Interview).

Thus, people in government and national NGOs are the elite. One could even say they belong to the same class, not because they necessarily share a coherent political ideology, but because they share the same life-style. As an interviewee from a research-based NGO said, “the elite are people who appreciate certain life-styles, certain values, they want to buy a car, they want to use oil, and they want to send their children to the best schools”. (Interview)

Therefore, people in NGOs and the government are sometimes both part of civil and political society, and as they sort of belong to the same class, it is hard to argue that NGOs constitute autonomous and separate entities from the state. At the district level, relations between civil and political society are even more blurred and there seem to be an increasing practise of politicians forming NGOs to get hold of money coming from the centre. As an informant from an international NGO placed in the district explained:

There are also organisations, which have been started by politicians, out of some kind of self-interest. They want to further their political interests and get hold of money. You know now, they know that the government also tries to give quite a bit of money to CSOs in the rural community. So you will find that if there is a programme, in which there is a training component, the training component most times is subcontracted to a local NGO, so, you find at the district level here, the district councillors know about it and they know about the funding, so you find that quickly in their sub-counties, they are having a NGO, the training is going there, this NGO is going to quickly apply for funding to do a specific training, which training is not done well, so we have. If you have those started by a politician, it is always; most of them are for self-interest. (Interview)
Concluding remarks on participation

Based on my findings I argue that there is support for conceptualising the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers as a hegemonic development discourse in a Gramscian sense, since it has moved beyond contest over meaning to unquestionable acceptance. Being hegemonic, the PRSP approach has defined the terms of the debate and delegitimized competing conceptualisations of both the problem and the solution. The international financial institutions have promoted an orthodox development policy using both material (debt leverage and conditionality) and discursive strategies (e.g., the World Development Report) (Hickey 2005: 1003). Furthermore, as stated in the theory chapter the hegemonic power of the multilateral institutions has much to do with their ability to frame ideas, by limiting their power to achieve change, and by making them into mechanisms upholding the status quo and legitimise the existing world order. It is my argument that the idea of participation has been used for this purpose. The involvement of civil society in the policy-making process, lends legitimacy to a poverty reduction policy that to a large degree is based on a neoliberal paradigm. This suggests that applying technical-economic solutions can solve the problem of poverty. Furthermore civil society participation seems to mean NGO participation, and by applying a rhetoric that poverty knowledge should be evidence based, the civil society contribution have been dismissed in these areas; fiscal and monetary policy, financial liberalisation, privatisation, trade policy, land reform, labour policy, foreign investment regulations and domestic/public investment. Additionally the perception of the government that policy-making is best left to the politicians leaves little room for NGOs to challenge the development orthodoxy. Afraid of being omitted from the whole process, it seems the only way they can engage is by turning the advocacy process into a technocratic process that has no political teeth. I have also suggested that the segment of civil society that has been invited to participate in the PEAP process, the national Kampala-based NGOs to a large extent represent an urban middle-class that are educated in the West, which share many of the basic assumptions of the donors and the government. It therefore becomes difficult to see this part of civil society as autonomous from the state, as people in government and NGOs basically are part of the same socio-economic class.
7. Poverty Reduction

According to the current development narrative decentralisation is assumed to be the best way of implementing poverty reduction policies. Through administrative, fiscal and political decentralisation it is expected that one can improve the efficiency in service delivery and provide services that are tailored to local needs. Decentralisation is also supposed to form a cornerstone in good governance, as it should promote downward accountability between the electorate, and local politicians and transparency and empowerment of the local citizenry (Francis and James 2003). I begin this chapter by arguing that decentralisation in Uganda has largely failed due to inadequate capacities at the lower levels of governance, insufficient fiscal decentralisation and a lack of accountability to citizens. However, the creation of more district units, requiring a whole district political hierarchy, has contributed to expand and nourish the government’s clientilistic networks. Furthermore, by assessing Uganda’s progress in implementing the Poverty Eradication Action Plan and the Plan for Modernisation of Agriculture, I raise doubts about the central government’s ideological commitment to poverty reduction, and whether Uganda’s development policy can be described as pro-poor. To the end of this chapter I refer to a politicised debate about poverty in Uganda, where Uganda’s success in achieving poverty reduction is discussed.

The political Will to implement Pro-Poor Policies

Decentralisation and poverty reduction

The initiation of decentralisation in Uganda started in 1993 with the Local Government Statute, and was later followed up in the 1995 Constitution and the 1997 Local Government Act. Many informants referred to decentralisation as a rushed reform that was put into action before structures and capacities were developed at the lower levels of government. The results of this kind of rushed reform have not been without problems, as one of the MPs I interviewed said,

And you know we found ourselves creating these governments at lower levels, of people who didn’t have the qualifications, the expertise, the skill, you know to manage their own resources
and financial affairs. And we are paying the price for that, because there is a lot of shadowy work going on down there. There is a lot of wrangling between who is who, but I think with time we will perfect the system. But we have had to pay for that kind of rushed decision. (Interview)

That there were initial problems with the reform is confirmed by the District Officials I interviewed. One explicitly said that they had a lot of problems within the district administration in the beginning, and attributed these problems to the government, who decentralised too early. As there is still much corruption at the lower levels of governance, and since service delivery as a consequence becomes inefficient, some have questioned whether one should re-centralise and bring power back to the centre. However, there is not much power to bring back.

It seems principles of transferring decision-making power to local levels only exist on paper. Whereas the Local Government Act of 1997 discusses administrative, financial and political decentralisation, very little power has been transferred from the centre to the districts. For example, a common statement is that decentralisation, without the financial resources to respond to the needs of the local population, is not decentralisation. Taking into consideration that 90 percent of the funds transferred to the districts are conditional and should be used to implement national priorities, it should be of no surprise that although much is said about bottom-up planning in theory, in practise the reverse is true.

The PEAP acknowledges the amount available to implement local government priorities is small, as lower government levels can only spend 10 percent of the conditional grants on local priorities. In addition, the grants given under the Plan for Modernisation of Agriculture (PMA) and the Local Government Development Programme (LGDP) can be allocated by the Local Council at the sub-county level to a variety of activities. Earlier the districts could also collect local revenues through a graduated tax, but this tax was abolished during the autumn of 2005. The reason for abolishing the tax was attached to “serious problems in the administration of the tax”, which made the tax become “regressive in effect though not in design” (Ministry of Finance 2004: 137). The abolition of the graduated tax almost brought the local government levels to a standstill, as the staff could not be paid. One District Official said, “The morale is low, because people are not getting what they are used to” (Interview). This statements reveal, as stated in the PEAP, that unconditional grants and local revenues are “often used mainly to pay administrative costs, including councillor’s allowances, rather than to deliver services tailored to local needs”(Ministry of Finance 2004: 134).
Considering the financial situation of the districts, where the bulk of the money comes from the centre, accountability is upwards in the system. When I asked government officials at the district level what they understood by accountability and whom they were accountable to, they all emphasised the need to account for the money that they were given from the centre. In the words of an informant from a national NGO:

So what actually decentralisation has done is to create a hanging group of people, and they are hanging, the string that they are hanging on is holding them to the centre, they are just hanging there, they are not supported, and you have the population that see these people hanging around, and hanging around. A few drops fall on them as they hold on to the centre, but the point is that downward accountability is extremely poor, and where local politicians and local technocrats do not feel that they can be, or need to be accountable to the people themselves, then decentralisation will completely fall through, it will not work. That is were the biggest failure has been in implementing the PEAP. (Interview)

Many national NGO interviewees acknowledged that fighting poverty would not be the first priority of the government, as long as Uganda remained a neopatrimonial state. The only way to get the politicians to put the needs of the people first is by changing the entire political system, where people are elected on the background of ideology and not handouts, and so come to realise that there is power in vote. However, changing the political system is a long-term task, as it is deeply rooted and internalised in ordinary citizens.

As mentioned, the number of districts increased drastically from 56 to 72 districts during the autumn of 2005, and since every decentralised structure must have a whole district political hierarchy, the public expenditure post on the budget skyrocketed. This act of government formed part of the reason why some donors decided to withhold aid. The government must have expected some rumble about it, but went through with it anyway. I therefore argue that although the donors may find little support of public expenditure having a direct impact on poverty reduction, this is not necessarily how the population conceptualise it. The Poverty Eradication Action Plan may not say much about how more district units will impact on poverty, but as an informants from a national NGO said: “People here are looking at poverty eradication as being given an additional district, that is poverty eradication” (Interview). Taking into consideration how the political apparatus works, another informant from a well-recognised research organisation said, “the allocation of resources are coming from above, it is not coming from below, everyone sees being part of a decentralised unit as the only opportunity to harvest from above” (Interview). It is important to recognise that this way of
thinking is supported from below; people want their own district. As the story goes, an ethnic group in Tororo ate rats in order to show the President that they were serious in their claim of receiving their own district. The argument put forward for their demand was that resources coming from above only went to the District Chairman’s part of the district.

**Implementation of the Poverty Eradication Action Plan**

That the legitimacy of the political apparatus has more to do with nourishing clientilistic networks, than the ideology they peruse, also has consequences for the implementation of the Poverty Eradication Action Plan. Many interviewees from national NGOs doubted the political will of the government to implement the PEAP, as they saw a large discrepancy between the document and the budget. Some saw the PEAP as merely serving a populist purpose, while the budget showed the political priorities of the government. One informant from a national NGO stated, “I increasingly wonder whether the PEAP is not an enormous paper driven exercise, and that if we look at the reality of the ordinary Ugandan man and woman, we know that reality is much more dictated by other things, besides the PEAP” (Interview).

There was little understanding among local government officials about what the PEAP process and content means at local levels, but they confidently said they knew which areas the government emphasised, and that they followed the central guidelines. Therefore, there is little room for local governments to emphasise local priorities, as local governments do not basically make policy, but implement policy. Priority areas mentioned were Universal Primary Education (UPE), primary health care, rural feeder roads, water supply and agricultural modernisation. Piron and Norton (2004), as many interviewees, emphasised that poverty reduction policies being prioritised are moreover not primarily those described in the PEAP, but those that have emerged as a result of election campaigns. This was the case with the promise of free primary education to at least four members of each family in relation to the 1996 election campaign, and the abolition of cost-sharing in the health sector during the 2001 election-campaign (Piron and Norton 2004).

Additionally, all areas mentioned as the central government priorities are described within the chapter of Human Development in the PEAP, where provision of social services is in the
forefront. The Poverty Action Fund (PAF) funds these areas. The initiation of the Poverty Action Fund was conditionality for Uganda to receive debt relief under the Highly Indebted Poor Country Initiative. Today, the PAF constitutes 37% of the budget, is still funded by the donors and protected from budget cuts throughout the year. It is easy to measure progress in these areas by counting children enrolled in schools, people receiving health services, roads in kilometres and number of new water points. However, as mentioned in the previous chapter, there have lately been concerns at the national level, about the lack of outcomes from allocations to the social sectors. Some, in the Ministry of Finance and within NGOs, would therefore like to see more money going to the productive sectors, as this would have a more direct effect on people’s income. A key concern in this regard was the agricultural sector, which have been under funded for the past so many years.

**Implementation of the Plan for Modernisation of Agriculture**

The vision of the Plan for Modernisation for Agriculture (PMA) is to achieve “Poverty eradication through a profitable, competitive, sustainable and dynamic agricultural and agro-industrial sector”, while its mission is “Eradication poverty by transforming subsistence agriculture to commercial agriculture” (PMA Secretariat 2003/4: 6). Furthermore the specific objectives of the PMA is to: (a) increase incomes and improve the quality of life of poor subsistence farmers, (b) improve household food security through the market, (c) generate gainful employment and (d) promote sustainable use and management of natural resources” (PMA Secretariat 2003/4: 6). The PMA consists of seven pillars; research and technology development, advisory services, rural financial services, rural infrastructure, agro-processing, marketing and sustainable natural resource use and management. These pillars are implemented through a multi-sectoral approach involving different line ministries and other PMA stakeholders such as local governments, the private sector, civil society and development partners. The central government’s focus is primarily to develop policy and technical guidance, regulation, monitoring and supervision, while the overall implementation responsibility lies with districts and sub-counties.

However, there was also a lot of confusion around the objectives of the PMA. An informant from the PMA secretariat recognised that the name, the Plan for Modernisation of Agriculture, could be misleading, since “it is not a plan for modernisation of agriculture, it is actually a framework for transforming subsistence farming to commercial farming, and we are
also using that to eradicate poverty” (Interview). As stated in the previous chapter, many interviewees from national NGOs questioned whether the PMA was the right approach if reducing poverty was the government’s main objective. Furthermore if it is supposed to fight poverty, they said that the targeting is poor and the assumptions are grouse.

Initially the Plan for Modernisation of Agriculture targeted small-scale poor subsistence farmers, but is now targeting the active poor, or what previously was named ‘progressive farmers’. An informant from a national research institution argued, “These farmers are neither poor, nor small”(Interview). Referring to a story he found in a PMA progress report, he illustrates that the PMA are not there to support the poor:

There was a farmer in Nakasongola, who had I think 80 heads of cattle, now they have helped him to increase to 200-400. And he has also been helped to acquire land from 40 hectares to 400 hectares. This is the anti-thesis of the PMA! Because by the time a farmer has 80 herds of cattle, that shouldn’t be a farmer for government to help, he is not poor. He already has 40 hectares of land, he is… But the moment they changed from the poor to the progressive, those are the bracket people who can… So you can imagine all the PMA and NAADS activity are focused on that farm in that area. Because he has now big valley dams and that is PMA money built to provide a service to a private individual who has fenced off his land. (Interview)

The policy makers at least acknowledge that the poor are not a homogenous group, and that the PMA cannot address all the different categories of the poor. The justification for targeting the active poor is that, “the very poor farmers cannot benefit from the program, since they have no assets and the more well off farmers do not need the programme” (Interview, NAADS Secretariat). The active poor are targeted because they have something to start with in terms of resources, and will therefore be able to respond to incentives given. As the passive poor cannot benefit from this initiative there was a common understanding, by informants dealing with agriculture, that the passive poor or chronic poor needed a social protection programme, including safety-nets and provision of inputs that could help them join the group of the economically active. Hickey argues that the term “economically active poor” is pervasive throughout state and civic policy actors in Uganda. The term, invested with different meanings by different actors, in effect excludes “the poorest groups from key poverty reduction programmes and a sense in which the poorest are both stereotyped as “unproductive” and somehow blamed for the overall problem of poverty in Uganda” (2005: 1001).
Whereas the narrative of the poor may contribute to legitimate the elites continued dominance over poorer groups, Hickey is of the opinion that this narrative illustrates the Movement’s political project of modernisation and commercialisation. The President, convinced that exports are the way forward, has spearheaded an ambitious export-oriented strategy, the Strategic Export Initiative (SEI), which attracts increasing budgetary resources. However, the Initiative is poorly integrated with the mainstream poverty policy in Uganda. The SEI, introduced in 2001, aim at “increasing competitiveness through stimulating value addition investments in selected sectors of the economy and removing bottlenecks that impede the private sector’s ability to take advantage of emerging trade opportunities” (Ministry of Finance 2004: 56). The selected sectors include coffee, tea, cotton, fish, livestock horticulture, Irish potatoes and information and communication technology and the programme has amongst other things included the distribution of coffee, tea and cotton seedlings and the importation of improved breeds of livestock in addition to the importation of processing equipment for the coffee and cotton sectors (Ministry of Finance 2004: 56). Recognising the discrepancy between the Strategic Export Initiative and the Plan for Modernisation of Agriculture, the PEAP stipulates that the SEI should be reviewed and synchronised with the activities under PMA. It also argues that the SEI should “minimise the production bias in the current activities” and to a greater extent “involve the private sector in the selection, funding and implementation of the interventions” (Ministry of Finance 2004: 56). Again, agents of the hegemonic development discourse, the technicians and economists in the Ministry of Finance, try to curb an initiative that is not coherent with the neoliberal paradigm.

Discussing the assumptions in the PMA, many within national NGOs were of the opinion that it has a priori assumed that liberalising the economy across the board is the best way to do development. It has also been assumed that there is a private sector and that privatisation improves service delivery. Liberalisation led to a crisis for the poor in agriculture, as it decreased the real price of outputs and increased the real price of inputs. The civil society contribution to the PEAP therefore argues that a pro-poor growth would include “Not opening the economy without a corresponding opening of external markets, or identifying necessary aspect of the economy for special government support in the short run to make them more competitive in regional and global markets” (NGO Forum 2004: 54). Furthermore, it argues that achieving stability in the transition from a subsistence to market production “requires a gradual phasing of liberalization that allows government to make provisions to stabilize entry into the market by allowing space for poor farmers and traders to slowly develop capacity,
networks and strategies for creating a vibrant market” (NGO Forum 2004: 59). The government should therefore consider the need to provide inputs such as credit, leasing of equipment, assurance of base floor prices, assurance of market, etc., in order to stabilize the entry of the poor into the market (NGO Forum 2004: 59).

Taking the above mentioned into consideration, both the President and NGOs would prefer more government intervention in the agricultural sector, and to protect certain areas of the economy from liberalisation in the short run. However, whereas the President seems to regard this as a policy to create large-scale commercial farmers, NGOs are more concerned with the positive effects interventions can have on the poor.

Regarding the involvement of the market and the private sector in the implementation of the PMA, the civil society contribution argues that since helping the poor will not be a profitable venture, only semi-commercial and commercial farmers will gain assistance. However, the private sector is hardly present in Uganda, and its involvement has therefore been small. As a person from the PMA steering committee stated, “I think the definition you might have heard; our small farmers are the largest private sector that we have in the country. What other, maybe other places call the private sector is small, it is coming up, and it is really in its infancy”(Interview). The assumption that private service providers will be able to deliver better and more cost-efficient services are also put to shame, as some point out that the private sector is as corrupt as the government and that they also can deliver sub-standard services. As one interviewee from an international NGO said,

The government wanted to prevent their own losses, because buying segment, buying bulldozers to go and provide these services, the bulldozers would end up doing other people’s work. The fuel would be sold, the cement would be lost, so they said let’s contract. The private sector will be charged with producing the product. So the private sector provides the product, but it is sub-standard. (Interview)

In fact, many interviewees from national NGOs, characterised the PMA as a complete failure, and questioned the political will of the government to implement it. As mentioned the PMA is supposedly implemented through a multi-sectoral approach, where the seven pillars should be implemented as a package. However, only the agricultural extension part seemed to be functioning. The National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS), spearheaded a new approach, built on a public-private partnership principle. The state will provide the funds and the private sector and NGOs will do the actual service provision. Furthermore, it is supposed
to be demand-driven, meaning that the farmers are supposed to request, and in the future also pay, for advisory services. The idea is that advises given should address the needs of the farmers, in addition to creating more accountable service providers that can be denied payment if the services provided are sub-standard. Farmers are therefore claimed to become more involved in the decision-making process. According to an interviewee from the donor community in Uganda, “NAADS is a well thought through and good model which has taken onboard the lessons that top-down decisions are not working in agriculture” (Interview). It is therefore pictured as a participatory approach. However, most informants from NGOs thought the concept of demand driven agricultural services were ridiculous, as it was assumed “that the poor would demand advisory services when they had to pay for it, when they had not demanded them in the first place” (Interview, Research-Based Organisation).

Why NAADS had performed better than other PMA pillars were by the interviewee from the NAADS secretariat also explained by it being well resourced, as it received extensive donor funding. In addition it was a fairly autonomous unit, as it is placed under the PMA secretariat, which again is placed under the Ministry of Finance. Additionally, NAADS is said to be better thought through than the other pillars, and it has a very committed team. As a person within the NAADS secretariat stated, “I can say that for me, this is the program I have been waiting for, it is the only way to help farmers, allowing them to have a say” (Interview).

When asked about donors influence, she continued,

> NAADS is not donor driven, but we let the stakeholders know what we are doing, which are fairly reasonable. When it is the time for the review, the pressure is there, because they need to have something that they can show their people. But they all believe that NAADS are built on sound principles and is the right way to do things (Interview).

It though seems “politics” have affected NAADS as well. The programme was extended to many new districts during the autumn of 2005, despite concerns that this would affect the quality of the programme, as it had not been allocated more money. As one of my informants said:

> Within NAADS you have technical people that are trying to do things. But in terms of major policy decision you find that it is never to sufficient clarity on how decisions are made, the question of NAADS going to so many districts, all of the sudden, it doesn’t remain only a question for the people, for the NAADS program or for the NAADS secretariat, it also becomes a question for the politicians, who are trying to pull all these goodies to go to their
constituencies. The question of funding for the NAADS program, doesn’t only become an issue for the NAADS secretariat, it is also an issue for the Ministry of Finance which publishes the ceilings for the Medium Term Expenditure Framework, it is also an issue for the donors, who are either putting money through the budget support, and other who are using project support (Interview).

Again, a donor-funded policy that is not necessarily endorsed by the political apparatus outside the Ministry of Finance, has successfully been used by the government to legitimise its power as a patron. The impact of the PMA is hardly felt by the farmers, as only one of the PMA pillars are going ahead. As an informant from an international NGO said, “a farmer doesn’t need knowledge. In fact the knowledge, without the other things are mockery. What is the point of teaching me, and then you are not giving me the tools, you are not helping me with the market, I think it is really, really mockery” (Interview). There is therefore no clear conceptualisation of how the PMA will reduce poverty, not surprisingly, as the poor were not necessarily the targets in the first place. As the key architect of the PMA stated in 2002:

…the poorest are deficient in agricultural assets, which brings into question whether or not the PMA will make any difference to the poorest… we envisaged that after initial success with commercialisation the poorest would provide labour on maize farms and agro-processing factories. But this was a wish statement. (Hickey 2005: 1001)

The Poverty Reduction Narrative revisited

There has been a highly politicised public debate in Uganda about whether it has been as successful, as the IFIs claim, in achieving poverty reduction. As mentioned the PEAP sets the long-term goal of reducing the income poverty rate below 10 percent by 2017, and seems to be moving towards that goal since the rate went from 55 percent in 1992 to around 35 percent in 2000 (Piron and Norton 2004). The debate was fuelled by a discrepancy between the UPPAP1 (2001) findings and statistics relied upon by the World Bank. The UPPAP findings, a qualitative study aimed at capturing the poor’s own views and definitions of poverty, indicated that poverty was increasing, while the figures of the World Bank showed that poverty was decreasing. This deviation led some influential World Bank and Government officials to dismiss and undermine the UPPAP findings (McGee 2004). As an informant, highly involved in the UPPAP project stated:

There was also a lot of resistance, because the first time when we did the poverty assessment for example, the World Bank was not very happy with us, because they were saying, look one
of the things that you have done is to say that the poor are getting poorer and the rich are getting richer, and they were saying if you look at the statistics that the Bank has collected, this is not true. So we had to defend our information, and say that look this is what the poor people themselves feel, whatever the World Bank says it doesn’t matter. If you go to the village they will tell you that this is what they feel, you have to understand that the poor people in the villages they don’t judge themselves according to statistics, they judge themselves according to the people they see in that community. So that is something that we talked about, but you could see it was a big thing, we even had to commission somebody who looked at the information and made it more confident. (Interview)

Therefore, poverty knowledge and the power to decide what legitimate knowledge is have also been important in the discussion about poverty reduction. An interviewee from the Ministry of Finance said: “People have different interest in terms of what type of information they want to generate. The issue is who wins the game at the end of the day, to have your data captured and that depends on where the money is coming from” (Interview). Most of the money previously came from the World Bank, who carried out studies in order to generate data to inform itself about the performance of its own policies. As the same informant referred to above stated “for so many household surveys we have had from 92, we have been getting money from the World Bank and they have really driven the whole process and determined what they wanted to see”(Interview). Lately, however, even the household surveys from 2002/3 have shown that income poverty is rising, as the income poverty rate went from 35 percent to 38 in 2003 (Piron and Norton 2004: 38). Therefore, the World Bank four years later emphasised their qualitative Poverty Assessment. The Joint Staff Assessment of 2005 stated: “While the observed increase in poverty between 1999 and 2002 remains a cause of concern, the trends are inconsistent with other measures of well-being. Evidence from the Poverty Assessment being conducted by the World Bank suggest that overall, the value of household assets continued to increase and that the proportion of households owning specific assets such as bicycles, radio, television, etc… increased between 1999 and 2002” (JSA 2005).

The content of the Joint Staff Assessments is more or less the same from 2001 to 2005, though the JSA from 2001 was in general more positive. They moreover express satisfaction with the economic growth rate, although they raise a minor concern about Uganda not achieving its target of an annual growth rate at seven percent. However, they recognise that this aim has not been easy to achieve as Uganda since 2001 has experienced detoriating terms of trade, due to a decline in the world-market price on coffee and the increasing price of oil. Yet, they see the seven percent growth rate to be necessary if Uganda is to achieve its aim of reducing the poverty rate to 10 percent by the year 2017. The JSA from 2005, based on the
revised PEAP of 2004, states that although the PEAP mentions possible explanations of the poverty trends, it does not have a thorough analysis of which factors have contributed to the recent decrease in the poverty rate and rising inequality. It then advises further research on how Uganda’s rapid population growth, vulnerability to various commodity price shocks, lack of accumulated savings to venture into different cash-crop production, and general suppression of economic activity, service delivery and insurgency affect poverty.

As stated in the chapter about ownership, the success narrative of the IFIs suggests that Uganda have experienced economic growth and poverty reduction, because it has followed the ‘right policy’. However, whereas stable macroeconomic frameworks may have effects on economic growth, poverty reduction has to a large degree been externally driven, depending on the world-market prices on various products. I suggest that the PRSPs are contributing to shifting the focus from international causes of poverty to national causes of poverty. Furthermore, it seems that national causes of poverty can be explained without emphasising power, politics and distribution of resources as it is suggested that poverty can be reduced by stronger economic growth, reduced fertility rates, vulnerability analysis and more savings. To a large extent then, the IFIs have again managed to define the problem of poverty as something that can be solved without challenging the status quo.

**Concluding Remarks on poverty reduction**

Summarising this chapter, decentralisation has to a large degree failed, in the sense that it has not brought more decision-making power to the districts and as accountability is upwards in the political system, services do not respond to local needs. However, the creation of more district units, requiring a whole district political hierarchy, has contributed to expand and nourish the government’s clientilistic networks. That the NRM’s legitimacy and hold on power, has depended more on the logics of neopatrimonialism than ideology, has also affected the implementation of the Poverty Eradication Action Plan. The PEAP priority areas implemented are those funded by the donors through the Poverty Action Fund, and policies that has given the government much popular support during elections, such as the Universal Primary Education Programme. However, the government’s most outspoken strategy to fight poverty, the Plan for the Modernisation of Agriculture, has only been partially implemented. Again, as it is only the NAADS pillar, receiving much donor support, which can be seen on the ground, the political commitment and ownership to the PEAP is questionable.
Furthermore, as many interviewees from national NGOs stated, if the PMA’s aim is to reduce poverty, the targeting is poor and the assumptions grouse. Targeting the economically active poor and relying on the market and the private sector, (which is hardly there) the initiative benefits semi-commercial and commercial farmers. To the end of this chapter I referred to a discussion about whether Uganda had been as successful as the IFIs have claimed, in reducing poverty. The battle was between the qualitative findings of the UPPAP and the quantitative statistics of the World Bank. The UPPAP findings to a large extent threatened the success narrative, as it claimed that poverty was not decreasing, and these findings was therefore seen as less legitimate than the World Bank’s own statistics.
8. Concluding Remarks on the Politics of Poverty Reduction

“Antipoverty interventions are rarely straightforward responses to poverty, but respond ‘to a larger arena of contestation where other issues are at stake and both national and international actors have a large say’” (Villarreal 2002: 83 in Hickey 2005: 997).

In this thesis, I have argued that the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) represent a hegemonic development discourse, as it has moved beyond contests over meaning to unquestioned acceptance. However, as the strength of the hegemonic development discourse and whose interests it serves will depend on the configurations of power at national and local levels, I have focused on the Ugandan PRSP process. Furthermore, the power of development ideology has much to do with its ability to frame ideas, and much of the success-story about Uganda is built around the ideas of poverty reduction, ownership and participation. I have therefore aimed at discussing whether these ideas have altered the power relation between the donors, the state and civil society and made Uganda’s national development policy more “pro-poor”.

Based on my findings, I argue that these ideas have been successfully framed. They have been depoliticised in the sense that they no longer speaks of politics and power, but have become mechanisms for upholding the status quo and legitimising a technical-economic development blueprint, based on neoliberal assumptions. Considering the power of the development partners in Uganda, there is little space for the government or for NGOs to suggest another solution to the problem of poverty, despite the rhetoric about ownership and participation. However, while the Poverty Eradication Action Plan lack political ownership, the government has managed to aligned it with domestic political priorities, as it has alongside and intervened with the efforts of fighting poverty used foreign aid to uphold and expand its clientilistic networks. Politics have therefore interfered in the depoliticised discourse of poverty.

The International Financial Institutions have portrayed Uganda, committed to a stable macroeconomic framework, experiencing prolonged economic growth and a sharp decline in the national poverty rate, as a success-story. The narrative suggests that these achievements have come about, because Uganda has pursued the right policies, and it is implied that if other developing countries adhere to macroeconomic fundamentals, liberalise and privatis
economic growth will commence and the market will apply its poverty reducing magic. Therefore, the hegemonic development discourse of the PRSPs, have been able to portray poverty as a problem that can be solved solely within the nation state, and left international power-relations and the economic structure unchallenged. National power structures are neither challenged, as poverty reduction can moreover be achieved through technical-economic fixes. Development has been detached from politics, as social change in the poor’s favour are supposed to be achieved without challenging the status quo.

I have raised doubts about this success narrative, as Ugandan government policies have had little direct effect on poverty. Education and health-services, roads, sanitation and water are by all means important to people’s well being, but the provision of these services has done little to increase the incomes of the poor. What have had a significant effect on the national poverty rate are the terms of trade, and in particular the world market price on coffee. Furthermore, as the donor-community has funded the pro-poor policies implemented, they are not necessarily proofs of a political commitment to poverty reduction. As my assessment of the Plan for Modernisation, the government’s key strategy to reduce poverty, suggest, the President and the political leadership seems more concerned about modernisation and commercialisation of agriculture, than the poor.

The idea of national ownership has been questioned, as the PEAP seems to lack political support from the President and the rest of the leadership in the NRM, and as the parliament has hardly been involved in the PEAP process. Ownership therefore seems to be limited to technocrats and civil servants in the Ministry of Finance and to the donors. The strong donor influence in policy-making processes is attributed to their economic contribution to the Ugandan budget. The contradiction between the ownership narrative and the strong donor influence can be explained by the unofficial and official spaces the government and the donors use to harmonise their positions. The interaction in these spaces makes it possible to portray the policy-making process surrounding the PEAP as more consensual than it is.

However, despite the lack of a political commitment to the Poverty Eradication Action Plan, the government has gained much popular support due to its focus on poverty, and has used foreign funds to nourish and expand its clientilistic networks, as exemplified by the creation of many new districts during the autumn of 2005. Therefore, as a subordinate nation within the world hegemony, the Ugandan regime has managed to incorporate elements from the
hegemonic development discourse, the PRSPs, without disturbing old power structures. However, had the legitimacy of the Ugandan state depended more on political ideology than this nourishing of clientilistic networks, the neoliberal assumptions of the PEAP would probably have been more debated.

Technocrats and economists in the Ministry of Finance can be referred to as intellectuals contributing to transmitting the neoliberal ideology from the core countries in the world to the peripheries. The role of the Finance Ministry could also be compared to Gramsci’s concept of Caesarism, and I argue that the form of Caesarism has both been progressive or regressive. It has been progressive in the sense that development partners and the Ministry of Finance have contributed to a national policy that favours capitalist interests and the creation of a new elite class in Uganda, while it has been regressive in the sense that the emergence of a new elite has not threatened the existing power of the political elite.

Civil society participation in the PEAP revision process seemed to mean inviting national Kampala-based NGOs to spaces where the government and donors set the agenda. This segment from civil society to a large extent represents an urban middle-class, educated in the West, and sharing many assumptions of the neoliberal paradigm. Furthermore, as people in the government and these NGOs basically are part of the same socio-economic class, it is difficult to conceptualise this part of civil society as autonomous from the state. These characteristics of people in the national NGOs can partly explain why there has not been a mega-debate about the principle of the PEAP. Taking the PEAP framework as their starting point also resulted in more reactive than creative thinking about development.

Civil society’s contribution influenced the PEAP pillars of Human Development; Security, conflict-resolution and disaster management and Good Governance, but its inputs to the pillars of Economic management and Enhancing production, competitiveness and incomes were dismissed, as they questioning whether poverty was best reduced by liberalising and privatising all sections of the economy. The argument for rejecting their contribution was based on rhetoric that civil society had not done their proper research in these areas. However, I have argued that these inputs were dismissed because the World Bank is still the gatekeeper of what should be regarded as legitimate poverty knowledge. Knowledge has therefore only been acceptable to the extent that it has not questioned the key neoliberal assumptions in the PEAP.
Furthermore NGOs have been operating in a contradictory environment, where they have met different expectations from the donors and the government. Donors fund and encouraged organisations that engaged themselves in policy advocacy and monitoring, while the government conceive policy-making as best left to the politicians and seems to be more comfortable with NGOs that help them implement services. As NGOs challenging the status quo have often been accused of affiliation with the opposition, most NGOs are still engaged in service delivery, and many of the NGOs participating in policy-making processes have had to turn the advocacy process into a technocratic process, that has no political teeth. Therefore, NGOs have had little space to challenge the development orthodoxy and their participation in the latest revision process of the PEAP have lent legitimacy to a poverty reduction policy that to a large degree is based on a neoliberal paradigm.
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