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Participation, planning and natural resources in Bolivia: from fiction to practice?

Lorenzo Pellegrini

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Participation, planning and natural resources in Bolivia: from fiction to practice?

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Abstract

In this paper, we focus on participation in the main planning documents produced in Bolivia in the first decade of the 2000s: the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) and the National Development Plan (PND). We analyze how these planning instruments have been able to capture popular participation through diverse mechanisms and how these practices fit in the current mainstream participation discourse. Special attention is paid to natural resources because of the predominant role they have in the Bolivian economy and because of their substantial contribution to the state budget.

The Bolivian experience shows an apparent paradox: while the process leading to the PRSP followed participatory guidelines and the PND did not, the resulting PRSP failed to include the most pressing demands of social movements, while the PND succeeded in including them.

This case shows how the articulation of political processes escapes simplistic characterizations and the application of 'out of the textbook' participation might result in highly exclusionary outcomes. It also shows that the voice of social movements can take unexpected paths and have a profound influence on political events that go well beyond the possibility of standardized participatory processes.

Keywords: National Development Plan, Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, Participation, Natural resources

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INTRODUCTION

Participation through the 1980s and 1990s has become one of the keywords in development discourse and its principles have influenced policy design and implementation throughout the world (Chambers, 1983; Cornwall and Eade, 2010). Concomitantly with the rapid spread of participatory methods, concerns have been raised on whether participation has been defeating its original purposes –ultimately contributing to the establishment of tyrannies rather than to people's empowerment– and/or whether the mainstreaming of participation has been mere talkatism with little effect on practices (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). These debates have especially focused on developing countries, since development institutions are the ones that have embraced participation more wholeheartedly (e.g. World Bank, 1996). In this paper, we focus on participation in the main planning documents produced in Bolivia in the first decade of the 2000s: the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (approved in 2000,Gobierno de Bolivia, 2001) and the National Development Plan (approved in 2006; Gobierno de Bolivia, 2006). The purpose is to analyse how these planning instruments have been able to capture popular participation through diverse mechanisms and how these practices fit in the current mainstream participation discourse. Special attention is paid to natural resources because of the predominant role they have in the Bolivian economy and because of their substantial contribution to the state budget.

Bolivia offers a fertile ground for analysis because the country has been undergoing deep transformations in the period since 2006 when the country –that was traditionally ruled by a conservative establishment marked by political instability– experienced the ascendency of the political group 'Movement Towards Socialism' (Movimiento al Socialismo, MAS) and the election of the first indigenous president –Evo Morales. The MAS –as the name already suggest– is not a traditional political party, but rather a political movement and President Morales became first known as a trade union leader of coca farmers opposing neoliberal policies and US-sponsored anti-drug policies, rather than through electoral politics.[1] The changes marking the new administration are evident in many policy choices and manifest themselves also in the approach to participation. Here we scrutinize how participation has been reconfigured by analysing the process to elaborate and the outcome of planning instruments in the country.

Planning activities do not have direct bearing on policy results and are often met with some degree of scepticism. This attitude is even more prominent and justified in countries –such as Bolivia– where political instability renders the medium to long planning horizon well beyond the interest and influence of most governments. In this context of ephemeral policy-making and limited planning, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) was of exceptional importance because its approval was a condition for debt relief and has coincided with the release of funds that were otherwise used to service debt. The availability of these funds increased considerably the policy space of national governments, hence the PRSP was a planning document bound to have immediate effect.

The National Development Plan (PND) was equally, but diversely, important: the Morales government ascended to power in January 2006 and the PND –approved shortly afterwards– was prepared to give an articulated sense of direction to public policies beyond the announcements of the electoral period. Furthermore, the approval of the PND coincided with the nationalization process of hydrocarbons that resulted in increased public revenues that fed the state coffers. This increase was already announced in the PND and the spending and investing of these revenues is further given direction by the PND; in other words, this planning instrument became effective when the flow of financial resources to the state was to greatly increase –in accordance to what was indicated in the PND itself– and expenditure decisions were urgent. The role and relevance of the PND is additionally enhanced by the fact that since 2006 Bolivia has experienced a remarkable degree of stability if compared to the previous decades.

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[1] For a critical take on the change and continuity under Morales' governments see Webber, 2010.

In this paper we examine in particular the different shape participation has taken in the PRSP and in the PND. We examine how the processes leading to these planning documents and how the results of these processes reflect different understandings of and approaches to participation. By juxtaposing processes and results we see that participation was high in the agenda of donors and prominent in the PRSP process, but largely absent in the discourse surrounding the PND.

Participation in the PRSP of Bolivia has been the subject of numerous studies (e.g. Komives *et al.*, 2003; Vos *et al.*, 2003; Booth and Piron, 2004) and the policy changes and performance of Morales' governments are also under close scrutiny (e.g. Webber, 2010), however no study so far has analysed the changes that relate to the ascendancy of Morales by concretely comparing the PRSP and the PND from the participation perspective.

The contribution of this paper is threefold: it produces a critical comparison between the PRSP and the PND of Bolivia adding to the emerging literature on policy changes that marked the ascendancy of Morales and it does so by focusing on one specific planning instrument rather than providing more general/generic discussions on policy changes; it provides the first comparative analysis of the PRSP and the PND from a participation perspective focusing on the natural resources component of the plans; finally, it adds to the discussion of participation by unveiling –in a case study setting– some of the intricacies of applying participation models in practice.

The collection of primary data for this article took place between 2006 and 2011. Government officials, members of non-governmental organizations, social movements and academics have been interviewed and the existing literature has been analysed to produce this article.

The next section introduces the concept of participation in social sciences with a focus on development. Section 3, introduces the PRSP of Bolivia analysing both the process and its outcome and Section 4 analyzes the PND. Section 5 compares and puts the results into context with the methodological discussion (presented in Section 2). The last section concludes.

PARTICIPATION IN DEVELOPMENT DISCOURSE

Participation was introduced in social sciences as a counter-hegemonic discourse instrumental to achieve empowerment and popular democracy (Chambers, 1983; Leal, 2010). In development studies in particular, participation is characterised as a necessity to understand poverty. Given the primary role of knowledge, participation is proposed for its transformative power: it would change the role of outsiders vis á vis those living in the periphery in the learning process, and promote the articulation of policy objectives based on the rights of marginalized people (Chambers, 1995; Kanbur and Squire, 2001). In this context, participation –or putting the last first– is instrumental for empowering the poor –previously unseen and unknown– to tackle their condition and improve their lot through self owned strategies (Chambers, 1983; 1995).

Starting from the 1980s and throughout the 1990s participation has been mainstreamed in development discourse which has been coupled by a silencing of its most eminently political characters (Hickey and Mohan, 2004). Participation and participatory approaches have been embraced by numerous organizations to the point of becoming a new hegemonic discourse –if not an actual practice– in development.

The process of recognition of participation and participatory methods involved the large development players; many of them have adopted participation in a instrumental and non-political version– as it helps achieve the objectives of public policies and can facilitate efficiency (Francis, 2001: 72). Among the endorsers of participation there are multilateral financial institutions, for example the World Bank defines participation as 'the process by which stakeholders influence and share control over priority setting, policymaking, resource allocations, and/or program implementation' and in the context of poverty reductions strategies 'can help build ownership over the strategy, make it more equitable to and representative of various stakeholder interests, increase the transparency of the policy formulation process, and, ultimately, make the strategy more sustainable' (Tikare *et al.*, 2001: 237; World Bank, 1996; cf. Cooke, 2004).

Participation has further developed into one of the key buzzwords and fuzzwords of development studies and practice (Cornwall and Brock, 2005; Leal, 2010). The meaning has been watered-down and participation has entered the mainstream development discourse, becoming a new rule, or even a tyranny.

Participation is imputed to have been transformed into a tyranny in three distinct senses (Cooke and Kothari, 2001: 9-10). In the first sense, 'decision-making and control' participatory processes replace alternative, legitimate and socially-endorsed policy-making and accountability mechanisms. A second sense is the 'tyranny of the group', where participatory processes selectively further empower elites. The third sense is the 'tyranny of the method', where participation methods prevent other –more effective or more acceptable– methods from being used in research and decision making.

We would like to stress participation tyranny in a fourth sense where participation is used as a rhetorical mean to legitimize outcomes favoured by powerful agents. In this context participation could easily be interpreted as a meaningless exercise of window-dressing; however the instrumental use of the participation rhetoric is rather consequential. The participation rhetoric is deployed precisely because it provides external justification for specific processes and outcomes and to serve purposes that are in contrast with the participatory ideal. As such, this rhetoric provides further justification to the choices made by policy makers and further ammunition to silence oppositions. The outcome of processes that employ participation rhetoric are more legitimate because they can be presented as the 'voice of the people' and are not solely the product of government (or any other decision body) decisions. Furthermore, participatory processes –however flawed– provide a chance to be included and if some individuals and organizations opt for non participation, their legitimacy as critics of the outcomes can be jeopardized. Ultimately, participation as a rhetorical tyranny, further empowers the discourse of policy makers, silences the opposition and creates an obstacle to dialogue. In the longer run, this tyranny will also undermine the stakeholders' trust in genuine participatory methods.

PARTICIPATION AND PLANNING IN BOLIVIA: THE POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY PAPER

The 'Highly Indebted Poor County' (HIPC) debt initiative –launched in 1996 and broadened in 1999– is a joint World Bank-International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme 'to ensure that no poor country faces a debt burden it cannot manage'. The ultimate purpose of the programme is to enhance poverty reduction.[2]

Several conditions have to be met by countries to qualify for debt relief in the HIPC initiative, among them the requirement to design of a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP).[3] If compared to the standard conditions applied by multilateral financial institutions for disbursing loans, the approval of PRSPs represents a different type of conditionality oriented to country ownership, rather than to fulfil the demands of the donors. The whole process should make sure that the resources that are freed up through debt relief are effectively invested in poverty reduction-oriented activities. These activities should follow a strategy that has been drafted through an inclusive participatory process in the 'recipient' country.

Bolivia has been one of the first countries to go through the HIPC and elaborate a PRSP. The PRSP of Bolivia was produced in a special context conditioned by the existence strong social organizations (social movements and NGOs, including many indigenous organizations) that characterize the country. Furthermore, the presence in Bolivia of many development cooperation initiatives (whose discourse and practices had already embraced participation in the early 1990s) and the numerous social organizations resulted in several initiatives promoting participation that anticipated the PRSP and that set the stage for the process (Molenaers and Renard, 2003).

In particular, the so-called second generation reforms of the 1990s (contrasted to the first generation reforms of the 1980s related to meeting the macroeconomic policy conditions associated with the structural adjustment programs) included the Law of popular participation (Ley de partecipacion popular, Gobierno de Bolivia, 1994). One of the outcomes of the law was the initiative to start national dialogues. The first national dialogue took place in 1997 and resulted in a plan for sustainable growth, social development, institutional strengthening, and eradication of drugs.

The second national dialogue –launched in April 2000– took place during the formulation of the PRSP and the dialogue was considered the instrument to achieve the approval of a strategy that would be the result of an inclusive participatory process.[4] The dialogue was carried out through roundtables that took place at the municipal, departmental and national level and it involved more than 2,000 people from 318 municipalities (UNDP, 2004:3; Morrison and Singer, 2007). [5,6]

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[2] http://www.imf.org/external/np/exr/facts/hipc.htm

[3] http://go.worldbank.org/TGL85HNSP0

The dialogue did involve numerous social organizations, however other organizations that were involved in the first national dialogue did not take part because of their disillusionment with the previous participatory process and its outcome (UNDP, 2004). These self-excluded organizations comprise farmer unions and indigenous confederations that are prominent political actors in the country.[7]

The resulting PRSP was marked by the plan to implement financial decentralization (at the departmental and municipal level) and the prioritization of disbursement in municipalities characterized by higher poverty levels. (Gobierno de Bolivia, 2001). These policy changes are eminently linked with the results of the Dialogue. At the same time, the secretary (Secretaria Tecnica del Dialogo) that organized the Dialogue was composed mostly by Bolivian professionals belonging to the *Municipalista* tendency – endorsing decentralization at the municipal level. Essentially, the adherent to this tendency argue that municipalities are better governance institutions –if compared to central governments– because they are closer to the people (Komives *et al.*, 2003: 25). Furthermore these policies are also in line with the global decentralization trends and with the Bolivian processes linked with the Law of Popular Participation and the decentralization processes of the 1990s.

Apart from these financial points linked with decentralization, also the issue of social control as defined in the strategy and sanctioned in the Dialogue law, appears to be an answer to the concerns raised by social organizations in the process. The objective of the social control mechanisms is to improve governance through accountability. Nevertheless, the prominent role in these mechanisms given to the Catholic Church is also a reflection of the power of certain institutions –such as the Episcopal Confederation– in the workings of the Dialogue and their influence on the results.

On other parts of the PRSP, the lack of relation between the results of the dialogue and the final strategy has been denounced by many observers and participants in the process (e.g. UNDP, 2004; UNDP, 2006; Komives *et al.*, 2003). On the one hand, this lack of relation was already present in the conclusions of the dialogue itself, where participants complained about several problems with respect to the process of the dialogue, including the fact that a narrow agenda had been set before the dialogue started. An additional preliminary problem –possibly associated with any participatory process– is that many social organizations did not participate. Also, some actors that did participate *en masse* –most notably members of political parties and the Catholic Church– were able to dominate the process. Furthermore, there were some difficulties because conclusions and recommendations achieved at the local level, were not sufficiently discussed at the national level nor included in the final account of the dialogue (UNDP, 2006).

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[4] The national dialogues became also formalized in a subsequent law (Gobierno de Bolivia, 2001), that was followed by a third national dialogue in 2003-2004 (see http://info.worldbank.org/etools/docs/library/96919/Boli_0304/Bo_0304/DIALOGO-2003D.pdf; Morrison and Singer, 2007).

[5] The process itself was also financed by the donors, through a coordination of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) that disbursed 300,00 USD to social organizations, most notably the Episcopal Conference of the Catholic Church, to finance their involvement in the dialogue.

[6] The methodology used in the dialogue is the ZOPP (in German 'Zielorientierte Projektplanung', in English 'Objectives-Oriented Project Planning'), widely applied by the World Bank. See http://go.worldbank.org/JYYZRSVG10.

[7] A shared conclusion of organizations of civil society that participated in the 1997 dialogue is that the results reflected more the thinking of technocrats and of the government rather than of society (Komives *et al.*, 2003 :24).

When it comes to the inclusion of the recommendations coming from the dialogue into the PRSP, we note that the staff that coordinated the dialogue was not in charge of drafting the strategy. Overall, some of the organizers of the Dialogue 2000 conclude that the PRSP was the 'antithesis of the dialogue' (Komivez et al. 2003: 38-41) and that there were considerable discrepancies between the results of the dialogue and the PRSP (Booth and Piron, 2004; Eyben, 2004; Vos *et al.*, 2003).

Most importantly, several participants to the Dialogue and also the drafters of the PRSP noted that the primary purpose of the strategy was to obtain debt relief. Since the decision on the relief would be taken by the IMF and World Bank personnel, the whole PRSP was geared towards that audience and had to fulfil the requests of the donors. The strategy eventually was based mostly on inputs from the donors (bilateral and multilateral) and the government rather than on the results of the dialogue (Komives *et al.*, 2003 : 38).

In any case, the process leading to and the resulting PRSP were considered satisfactory by the World Bank and the IMF. The completion point letter accepts that some limitations in the participatory process were present, but note also that such limitations pertain to any process and continue to praise the PRSP for the depth of its analysis and its remarkable ambitions (IMF and IDA, 2001). On the basis of these considerations the decisions that the HIPC process had reached the completion point (and debt relief was hence granted irreversibly) was taken (IMF and WB, 2001). Other observers –especially staff from bilateral donors– involved in the PRSP process was much less impressed specifically with respect to the shape taken by the participatory process and by the lack of government's commitment to genuine inclusive dialogues (Molenaers and Renard, 2003).

Natural resources and the PRSP

When we analyze the participatory process leading to the PRSP even more telling than the content of the National Dialogue are the issues that have been included and the ones that have been excluded. Of particular significance is the glaring omission of natural resources in the PRSP. The overall importance of the primary sector for the national economy is difficult to overlook, and issues related to them were at the centre of several demands of social movements and conflicts that have generated 'resource wars' (Dangl, 2007; Hylton and Thomson, 2004).

The omission of natural resources in the PRSP is evident once we consider the importance of the primary sector in the Bolivian economy: essentially the economic history of the country can be summarized as a succession of export led booms and busts. The sectors leading these cycles in the last three decades include hydrocarbons and mining (e.g. Sachs, 2005). Overall extractive industries, next to commercial and subsistence agriculture form the base of the economy. In terms of agriculture, the issue of land tenure and distribution have been objects of contention for several decades (e.g. Pellegrini and Dasgupta, forthcoming).

Moreover, issues related to natural resources ownership and management are central to the historical demands of social movements: land, water, hydrocarbons and mining. The issue of land distribution and ownership –that was crucial during the 1952 revolution– continued to be a priority that the land reform of 1996 was not capable of addressing –primarily because of the lack of implementation. In the very days of the national dialogue, conflict related to natural resources escalated and the 'water war' broke out in Cochabamba. The clash spurred by water tariff increases associated with the privatization of water alliance, saw an heterogeneous opposition group of social movements that successfully demanded the re-publicization of water (Dangl, 2007). The simmering tensions, already evident at the beginning of the decade, deflagrated in the 2003 confrontations when natural resources and especially the issue of nationalization of hydrocarbons and mining played a crucial role (Hylton and Thomson, 2004).

On the one hand, the choice to exclude natural resources from the agenda of the PRSP can be motivated by the very fact that they are such a controversial issue and that their inclusion could have derailed the participatory process. On the other hand, this omission is indicative of the little commitment towards genuine participation in the process as well as signalling the inability of the Bolivian state to manage its natural endowments in ways that would be supported by the general population and by social movements.

PARTICIPATION AND PLANNING IN BOLIVIA: THE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The National Development Plan in many countries in an instrument for the implementation of the PRSP (e.g. in Nicaragua, see Pellegrini, 2011). However, in the Bolivian case the PRSP –together with the government that approved it– was short-lived and there was very little implementation of it. In this context, the PND is actually a new development plan that represents the most elaborated and comprehensive expression of Morales' objectives and policies to achieve them (Mendonça Cunha and Santaella Gonçalves, 2010).

The Bolivian PND is largely unexplored by the literature and while numerous critical assessments of the achievements of Morales' governments and of its development model are available (e.g. Kohl and Bresnahan, 2010) no author anchors them on the PND (for an exception see Webber, 2008; Mendonça Cunha and Santaella Gonçalves, 2010).

The specific issue of participation in the PND has been neglected even though Morales' election has been supported and in many ways is an expression of social movements. This absence of studies on the topic stands in stark contrast with the copious literature on the PRSP that focuses on participation. Furthermore, while the PRSP was never fully implemented, Morales had 5 years (to date) to produce policies that are (also) inspired by the PND.

Evo Morales was elected in December 2005 and became president in January 2006. The election of Morales was supported by a convergence on his candidacy by a large group of various opposition groups and social movements. The electoral program reflected many of the demands of these opposition groups and later was used as an input in the PND. The main lines of the PND have been presented and socialized in Bolivia, but there was no formal participatory mechanism before its approval. The PND was announced in April and published already in June 2006 (Sanjines, 2006, Gobierno de Bolivia, 2006), a very tight timeline for a new government presenting such an ambitious plan. The plan itself dictated that its content should be validated during its dissemination, however we could find no evidence of any participatory process of validation.

Ironically, the PND –that was not the result of a formal participatory process—contains substantial mechanisms to improve participation in the governance structures of Bolivia and already in the introduction sets as one of the main objectives to 'deepen democracy' and 'the effective participation of social, communitarian, citizens' and productive organizations to eradicate poverty and social exclusion' (Gobierno de Bolivia, 2006). The PND is articulated in 4 strategic lines: social policies, democratization and decentralization, the economy and international relations. The strategic line on democratization and decentralization is the most relevant in terms of governance: the introduction of popular participation materialized in the recognition of indigenous and peasant organizations together with collective forms of representation, the possibility to recall public officials (including the president), and the introduction of referenda on international policy.

Natural resources in the PND

The PND contains multiple discourses and contrasting objectives that become evident in the way the plan deals with natural resources. The heterogeneity of discourses and objectives can be traced back to two contrasting developing models: the neo-developmentalist and the living-well (Zabala Vásquez, 2006, Mendonça Cunha and Santaella Gonçalves, 2010; Costoya, 2010). The neo-developmentalist model and discourse promote the extraction of natural resources and the appropriation of the revenues by the state in order to support social programs and investment towards socio-economic development. Essentially, this model endorses a re-allocation of resources –through which the national economy and especially the poor are benefitting vis a vis foreign multinational companies– but it does not change the structure of the economy. In contrast, the living-well discourse is a radical break with mainstream development models moving the focus from the objective of wealth creation through economic growth to the satisfaction of rights and dignity at the individual and collective level. In the living-well framework, the respect of nature is not instrumental to anthropogenic objectives, but rather an objective *per se*.

These contrasting discourses are an accurate representation of the tensions within the support groups that have converged to support Morales in 2005. The use of both discourses is a signal of the future tensions that would split the camp supporting Morales and have been borrowed selectively by different institutions in the government and government members of different ideologies.

These different discourses are manifest when it comes to natural resources. The neo-developmentalist discourse emerges when dealing with the 'strategic sectors' of the Bolivian economy and the living-well discourse is evident in the section of the PND dealing with the new development model.

The discussion of strategic sectors includes sections on hydrocarbons and mining. According to the plan, the presence of the state in these sectors will be increased in order to enhance national sovereignty and guarantee that sufficient resources will be available for the development of the country. An expansion of extraction activities is foreseen and should be coupled by a process of industrialization of natural resources in order to enter into processes that generate value added to natural resources and to abandon the position of exporter of raw natural resources. This orientation is confirmed by the presence of mega-projects that envision large investments on the industrialization of hydrocarbons and minerals.

The new development model –fitting in the living-well discourse– foresees a new understanding of welfare that is intrinsically linked with communitarian aspects of life and based on a harmonious relationship with nature. The living-well is based on the realization of objectives that are different from the western inspired access and accumulation of material goods and emphasises different meanings in the relationship between man and nature.

Finally, an encompassing approach –that transcends the neo-developmentalist and the living-well discourses– is the one of nationalization of the hydrocarbons and mining sectors. The nationalization of these extractive sectors at the same time generates revenues for the state, but is also seen as a necessary step to achieve sovereignty and break away from the colonial past.

COMPARING THE PRSP WITH THE PND

The processes and outcomes of the PRSP and the PND are contrasting. The PRSP process was instrumentally inclusionary since the process was aimed at the fulfilment of donors' requests of 'country ownership' and did involve the stakeholders in the formulation of the plan; however the way the agenda was set and the resulting document fomented the disillusionment with participatory processes. Our interpretation of the process is that the participation rules were being followed, but just with a rhetorical purpose. There were meta-rules of how a PRSP had to look (that were implicitly imposed by the donors themselves, manifest by the fact that PRSP across the globe followed similar formats) and conflicting interests across the parties that worked on the strategy (mainly the government, the technocrats and the social organizations present at the dialogues). Still –as evidenced by the fact that the PRSP was indeed approved by the donors– the ultimate objective of the PRSP was achieved and debt was forgiven. In other words, the process and the process was capable of fulfilling requirements and follow the accepted 'rules' of participation in the view of the donors.

Even the achievements of the Dialogue 2000 and the PRSP in terms of decentralization and social control, cannot be identified with certainty as entirely genuine products of the participatory processes, because they fall squarely in line with the global development discourse at the time. It is all too easy to identify a relation between the global discourse on decentralization, governance and accountability and the position of the technocracts involved in the process as the leading forces beyond progressive measures contained in the PRSP and to see why the World Bank and IMF staff considered these positively in their assessment.

Considering the lack of formal participation in the PND, the process and the results stand in stark contrast. The MAS –that is, the government party– is itself channelling the voice of social movements and they do not require formalized participatory processes. Furthermore, the idea to have a standardized top-down participatory approach might be intrinsically flawed. Popular government is something that can exist only when it is demanded, while a top-bottom approach to participation –like the one implemented in the PRSP process– might simply be an oxymoron. In other words, we can think about participation as an exercise of freedom and as argued by Paulo Freire (1970) 'Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift' (see Leal, 2010).

The content of the PND is more eminently Bolivian if compared to the PRSP. This can be a result of the fact that the government was not promoting the instrument just to fulfil donors' requests, but was acting as its own initiative. Most notably, land, natural resources and nationalization are conspicuous absentee in the PRSP whose narrow agenda was not in line with the priorities of civil society and excluded *a priori* some of the most pressing issue in the politics of Bolivia at the time. Here the contrast of the PRSP with the PND could not be greater: while in the PRSP the participants to the dialogue were not allowed to discuss natural resources because they fell outside of the remit of the dialogue, these resources figure in the PND in several ways and are crucial in discussing the development model (the 'living-well') as well as the source of state revenues to be used for social policies and for national development (the 'strategic sectors' of mining and hydrocarbons).

From the participatory perspective, it is paradoxical to note how the trust in these processes was eroded in Bolivia because of the way the national dialogues were implemented and the contrast between the opinion of the donors and the Bolivian civil society on the practice of participation and ownership. We must also note that the Morales government did not manage (nor attempted) to include any voice from the opposition in the PND. This might be a reflection of the failure to build a hegemonic and inclusive discourse for the Bolivian society that marks the Morales administration and might be a source of (present and future) conflict.

Overall, the general experiences with the PRSP and the PND in Bolivia and the specific ways natural resources were dealt with, suggest that promoting participation in the form of standardized processes –as in the case of the PRSP– might result in processes that are characterised by 'cosmetic' participation. The resulting semblance of participation is not leading to any people's empowerment, but rather represents an instance of the tyranny of participation rhetoric.

CONCLUSIONS

The PRSP process in Bolivia was an implementation of participatory models without real participation and resulted in a technocratic strategy reflecting primarily the priority of donors. In contrast, in the PND social movements did not formally participate in the formulation process, nevertheless their priorities and visions –even when contradicting– influenced the plan. The contrast between processes and outcomes of the PRSP and the PND is evident once we note the saliency of natural resources in Bolivian socio-economic processes and the primacy of these resources in the claims and struggles of social movements. The participants of the PRSP process were essentially barred from discussing the subject and the PRSP does not deal with these resources, while the PND without a formal participatory process devoted the due attention to natural resources and was able to capture the essence of the claims over natural resources that were put forward by social movements. This contrast highlights how the articulation of participation in practice can be a complex affair and how the application of participatory methodologies –without the necessary participatory political environment– can result in establishing rules without participation. At the same time, highly original processes can produce results that are much closer to the desires of social organizations and we can have cases of participation without rules.

The experience of the Bolivian PRSP provides evidence on how top-down participatory approaches that follow pre-established schemes are difficult to implement. Furthermore, it shows a rhetorical implementation of participation in the development community that has further undermined the reliance on participation in Bolivia.

On the contrary, in the PND no formal participatory process was set up and the exclusion of certain parts of the population is implicit in the way the plan was formulated. Paradoxically, the result is more consistent with the priorities of Bolivian social movements and of the population at large.

Ultimately the Bolivian experience shows how the articulation in practice of political processes –in this case related to planning– escapes simplistic characterizations and the application of 'out of the textbook' participation might result in highly exclusionary outcomes. It also shows that the voice of social movements can take unexpected paths and have a profound influence on political events that go well beyond the possibility of standardized participatory processes.

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