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WOMEN AND PARTICIPATION IN THE HIPC DEBT RELIEF INITIATIVE: A GENDERED ANALYSIS OF THE UGANDA PRSP

By

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ABSTRACT

Research has consistently demonstrated that due to stratified socio-economic inequalities and gender-based disadvantages women from low-income countries and Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPCs) specifically, experience extreme impacts from poverty. Such feminization of poverty has been accentuated, especially in Africa, by the spiraling debt crisis and high levels of absolute poverty, which intersect and interact with gender-biases and macro and micro dimensions of international development assistance. In particular, the negative impacts and limited success of structural adjustment programs (SAPs) have contributed to women's further disempowerment and marginalisation, through the cutbacks they conditionally prescribe for budgetary allocations in the social sectors.

To address these shortcomings, the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) launched the HIPC Debt Relief Initiative in 1996 which was subsequently enhanced in 1999. The HIPC Debt Relief Initiative has been introduced as a coherent strategy for assisting the economic development of poor countries linking debt relief funds to the reduction of extreme levels of poverty. A key element of the HIPC initiative is the required participation of all social groups and stakeholders in the activities and processes of national development and poverty eradication strategies.

By undertaking a gender analysis of the Uganda PRSP/PEAP, this dissertation examines the extent to which participatory processes have included women and gender concerns within the PRSP framework of intervention. Such examination and

analysis has involved the application of a comprehensive Gender and Development (GAD) analytical framework, focused on the empowerment approach. The initial findings indicate that although specific gender concerns continue to be neglected within the Uganda PRSP document, nevertheless the participatory process allowed the space for voices, especially women's voices, previously silent and invisible, to be heard within the corridors of power.

The study concludes that there exists within the PRSP framework, spaces for more effective gender integration due to the inbuilt flexibility of the process, and the broadening of the consultative process through the ongoing revision of PEAP/PRSP policy. Additionally, there is the continuous monitoring, assessment and evaluation of the impacts generated by the country's poverty reduction plan and associated budgetary allocations. The analysis of the extent to which gender has been mainstreamed in the PRSP process has yielded outcomes and lessons that can be built upon for the attainment of equitable and sustainable development in HIPCs in Africa.