



## [ALPE] Newsletter | April 2006

**Alliance for Poverty Eradication (ALPE)** is a programme of the Danish North/South Coalition and partners in Ghana, Honduras, Nicaragua and Zambia.

**Alliance for Poverty Eradication (ALPE)** focus on civil society influence on poverty reduction policies from a local empowerment and a gender perspective.

» [www.north-south.dk](http://www.north-south.dk) » [www.norte-sur.dk](http://www.norte-sur.dk) » [www.nord-syd.dk](http://www.nord-syd.dk)

---

active contents » press ctrl and click link to go to article

### [Contents]

- » [\*\*Welcome to the fourth ALPE Newsletter\*\*](#)
- » [\*\*African Network: Ghana & Zambia\*\*](#)
- » [Exchange visit underscore learning potential](#)
- » [Defining best practice – and sharing it](#)
- » [Putting the GPRS II to work: lessons for service delivery](#)
- » [\*\*Central American Network: Honduras & Nicaragua\*\*](#)
- » [Experience exchange shows great local potential](#)
- » [\*\*Influencing poverty eradication strategies\*\*](#)
- » [Western Honduras fights against poverty](#)
- » [FOSDEH watches over the PRS in Honduras](#)
- » [Influencing the ERCERP II in Nicaragua](#)
- » [IMF conditionality is wrong strategy for poverty reduction](#)
- » [\*\*Gender equality and poverty reduction\*\*](#)
- » [Poor ownership of the gender approach](#)
- » [“Being a poor woman is not like being a poor man”](#)
- » [\*\*Denmark\*\*](#)
- » [Africa high on Danish agenda after PM visit](#)
- » [Rally boost knowledge on MDGs in Denmark](#)
- » [Denmark Clash with Muslim World over Cartoons](#)
- » [Nigeria debt deal lucrative for Denmark](#)
- » [\*\*In and around the ALPE programme\*\*](#)
- » [ALPE a year ahead](#)
- » [Calendar](#)
- » [Recommended links & reading](#)
- » [Contact information](#)

## WELCOME to the fourth ALPE Newsletter

In this issue of the newsletter we present a number of important experiences and reflections primarily from Central America but also some from the African ALPE partners.

The Central American ALPE Network has already been meeting at several occasions and mutual learning from each others experiences has been initiated.

In Africa the first network meeting took place in February in Lusaka, Zambia, where a work programme was decided for starting the process of mutual learning. You can also read some news from the Danish scene.

Along with this issue of the newsletter we include a questionnaire, to ask our readers how the newsletter can be improved. We hope that many of you will take a few minutes to answer the questionnaire and return it to one of the three coordinators. [» back to contents](#)

### On behalf of the ALPE programme

[Rita Ambadire](#), Ghana, Regional Coordinator for Africa

[Ruth Aguilar](#), Nicaragua, Regional Coordinator for Central America

[Peter With](#), Denmark, International Programme Coordinator

## Exchange visit underscore learning potential

**Zambian and Ghanaian ALPE constituents met at an exchange visit in Lusaka in February. The visit, which also involved representatives of the Danish ALPE organisations, served to underscore the potential for mutual learning – not least with regard to civil society involvement in PRSP monitoring.**

By [Ronnie Nielsen](#), Assistant at the ALPE Secretariat

Zambia and Ghana have a lot to learn from each other when it comes to poverty eradication. The two countries have comparable experiences on a number of counts, but at the same time differences are significant enough to allow for comparison to be fruitful.

This was the background for an exchange visit in Lusaka which in February brought together Zambian and Ghanaian ALPE constituents with the aim of laying the foundation for future cooperation and exchange of experiences.

At the visit, which lasted a week and was hosted by the ALPE partner Civil Society for Poverty Eradication (CSPR), it became clear that the potential for mutual learning is particularly great when it comes to sharing the experiences of civil society involvement in monitoring of PRSP and similar strategies for poverty reduction.

The experiences in question were outlined and discussed at a one-day workshop entitled “Experiences in Monitoring on PRSP and HIPC”. Harriet Yeboah from the SEND Foundation opened the workshop with an introduction of the Ghanaian experience of involving local communities in the HIPC Watch. Gregory Chikwanka from the CSPR followed up with an introduction to the Zambian experience with PRSP monitoring. These presentations were followed by lively debate which left no doubt as to the importance of involving civil society in keeping authorities accountable on their promises.

Among the outcomes was a decision to undertake a study to compare similarities and differences between Zambian and Ghanaian experiences with involving civil society actors in the monitoring of poverty reduction schemes. This study – the terms of reference for which are currently being drafted – should be the basis for the next exchange visit, scheduled for October 2006. » [back to contents](#)



**[The next generation]** The exchange visit also involved visits to poor areas around Lusaka. These four children from the Mahobe area may be among the beneficiaries of more efficient community involvement in PRSP monitoring.

Photo: Peter With

» [Download the full report on the visit](#)

## Defining best practice – and sharing it

**An ongoing discussion in ALPE is how best to document experiences and learn from them in order to establish best practice guidelines. The approach below was presented at the exchange visit in Lusaka – and provoked raised eyebrows, questions and interest**

By [Peter With](#), ALPE International Programme Coordinator

How can we learn from successful projects and initiatives to improve our practice in advocacy on behalf of the poor? This is a key question in the ALPE programme where the ambition is to foster cross-learning among civil society organisations involved in empowering local actors to influence policies and implementation. May be the answer – or one of them – is to start using the best-practice approach and concept. From the outset of ALPE one of the outputs planned was the publication of a best-practice report with examples and analysis of project experiences and initiatives to serve as inspiration in ALPE and outside.

At various occasions during the exchange visit in Lusaka, Svend Laursen from the Danish union for youth and early childhood educators, BUPL, presented the concept of the best-practice approach.

The method aims at defining a set of criteria or questions to serve as guidance in order to find out which types of projects are the best and most promising to adopt and “replicate” in other settings, and to find ways of improving project approaches, when they are applied elsewhere. The idea is to find a set of tools to use when projects and approaches are discussed, with the aim of ranking them into categories. The following is an example of how the concept can rank projects and experiences through various steps:

***Innovations → State of the Art → Better Practices → Best Practices → Principles***

Each arrow indicates a process of lessons learned to move from one level to the next. Other key words are:

***Transferability*** – an approach is of interest only if it can also be applied elsewhere.

***Measurability*** – it must be possible to assess or measure the success or outcome.

***Developability*** – an approach should be capable of further development.

Svend’s presentation of the concept was based on a guideline for best practises developed in another setting (relating to HIV/AIDS and youth issues) and he suggested that this guideline in a revised and improved form could be adapted to ALPE. He invited interested members in the ALPE Network to join the process of developing a guideline.

The presentation of the best practice concept gave rise to a number of questions during the exchange visit: Is the BP a new form of evaluating the projects initiated in ALPE – which we have not been introduced to before? What about the projects which are almost coming to an end? Can you use one approach on a lot of different projects, should it not be tailored to types of projects or initiatives?

Some answers were provided in the debate: One can say that the BP can be used to evaluate a project, but it can also be used in an appraisal of a project proposal. The aim is not to be a type of evaluation control, but to determine what interventions are promising or interesting enough to learn from. “If something is best-practice, something else must be less-best practice,” as Svend Laursen emphasised. In the ALPE setting the idea is to use the approach in a process to select which project experiences to present in the report to be published at the end of the programme. In stead of employing an editor to “hand-pick” one or another project according to her own preferences, the idea is to use the BP guideline to discuss in the ALPE networks which projects are most relevant to serve as examples.

After the meeting in Lusaka, Svend Laursen has sent out an invitation to participants interested in further developing the approach, and already one member from Zambia and two from Ghana have already decided to join. The approach will be further presented for the participants at the programme workshop scheduled for June, where also the Central American ALPE members will be present and take part in the discussion. [» back to contents](#)

## Putting the GPRS II to work: lessons for service delivery

**The GPRS II is considered a step towards achieving growth, poverty reduction and gender equity in Ghana. But its predecessor has suffered from a number of serious shortcomings – particularly when it comes to the disbursement of funds earmarked for poverty reduction and service delivery.**

By [Luke Atazona](#), Centre for Budget Advocacy (CBA), ISODEC

Much is expected of the scheme for growth and poverty reduction in Ghana known as the GPRS II. The strategy promises to deliver on participation, reduce poverty and to pave the road towards a structural transformation of the Ghanaian economy. But the original GPRS suffered from a number of serious shortcomings that are likely to affect the implementation of the present scheme as well. Therefore now is as good a time as ever to carefully consider what challenges have presented themselves so far – and what lessons should be deducted from these.

Some of the greatest challenges to the implementation of the original GPRS have been associated with the disbursement of resources earmarked for poverty programmes and service delivery. Financial leakages and deviations, low productivity and poor targeting, and the absence of disaggregated data at the grassroots level all remain unattended to and are likely to serve as serious impediments to the implementation of the GPRS II as well. The GPRS implementation process has also been affected by weak databases at district and regional levels, excessive extra-budgetary funding, and constraints on technical and institutional capacities.

Resource leakages and deviations unfortunately remain a characteristic of poverty-related expenditures, as has been documented by several research findings. A study by Killick (2004) on budgetary politics in Ghana found that the deviation between budget estimates and actual expenditures in the education and health sectors averaged 42 and 68 percent respectively. Transparency International estimates that more than half of health-related expenditures do not make it to their intended beneficiaries. And a review of the user fee exemption scheme in the health sector indicates that *less than one percent* of the budget was spent on the poor.

Poor targeting and low productivity are additional factors disturbing the potential gains of the GPRS II. Large sums earmarked for poverty reduction go into personal emoluments at the expense of Service and Investment. Data from the Ghana Expenditure Review (GER 2004) reveal that over two thirds of poverty-related expenditures are wages and salaries (especially on education and health care). For instance, 96% and 84% of all GOG poverty-related expenditures went personal emolument in 2003 and 2004 respectively.

Inadequate disaggregated data to properly track progress at national and local assembly levels can reinforce existing targeting and productivity problems through a misleading picture about the impact of programmes and expenditures. For instance while expenditure on health has increased significantly in recent years, most health indicators – such as infant and maternal mortality or the incidence of malaria or other diseases – have either stagnated or worsened. The lack of disaggregated data also explains why it is so difficult to properly track utilization of resources earmarked for poverty eradication.

Similar analysis can be made of the lack of participatory monitoring, large extra-budgetary funds, and technical and institutional capacity constraints.

Thus it would seem that although the GPRS II in principle may have made laudable pronouncements on how to stimulate participation and make progress towards growth, poverty reduction and gender equity, these constraints pose as serious challenges to the achievement of its objectives. Fortunately they are not at all insurmountable – if only recognized and attended to. [» back to contents](#)

### **[Background: What is the GPRS II?]**

The turn of the millennium saw a shift in aid delivery from the old-day project and programme aid to a more coordinated and purportedly country-owned and broad base participatory poverty reduction strategy.

This aid instrument is known in Ghana as the Ghana/Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS). Ghana adopted this strategy in 2003 and completed the first phase in 2005. The second phase (GPRS II) has just begun and will last till 2009.

The GPRS II is the main framework defining economic and social policy in Ghana at the moment.

## Experience exchange shows great local potential

**ALPE Central America arranged a workshop in January 2006 in La Labor in Western Honduras. The exchange was based on the procedures that ASONOG (Honduras) and FUNDEMUNI (Nicaragua) are undertaking in their areas, backed up by ALPE.**

By [Susanne Lysholm Jensen](#), Information Worker, ALPE Central America.

The exchange, which was very fruitful for the participants, showed that the work of these two members of the ALPE Central American Network is similar and at the same time complementary. ASONOG and FUNDEMUNI are both supporting the articulation between civil society organizations and local authorities, in Honduras through the transparency commissions and the Coalition of Civil Society Coordinators and in Nicaragua in the context of the County Development Committees and particularly through the gender commissions.

The topics which both organizations are developing are very important for ALPE, with ASONOG focusing on strategies for poverty reduction and FUNDEMUNI on enforcing the gender commissions in the County Development Committees, both mainly at the local level, but with perspectives for advocacy at the national level. For the Nicaraguan it was very inspiring to learn about the local experience with poverty reduction strategies and inter-county forms of organization. For the Hondurans it was particularly interesting to learn about the experience with gender focus in the work of the County Development Committees, as gender concerns are still lacking behind in the processes of participation in relation to poverty reduction strategies at the local level.

The meeting was not only an exchange between two countries, Nicaragua and Honduras. It also represented a rare opportunity for several blocks of counties from Honduras to get together and exchange experiences. In this exchange, everybody emphasized the role of the organizations that have taken a lead in the Civil Society Coordinators in Honduras, in processes facilitated by ASONOG. The Civil Society Coordinators in Western Honduras have played a leading role in relation to historical conquests by the social movements over the last two years. The Civil Society Coordinator from La Labor, it was pointed out as an example, led protests against a mining concession in a protected zone. [» back to contents](#)



### [Behind the organizations]

[The Association of Non Governmental Organisms \(ASONOG\)](#) was founded in 1988. Today it has a membership of 17 organizations and a stronghold in Western Honduras. Its main goal is to facilitate the participation of poor and marginalized people (at the local, county, provincial and national level) in processes that affect national development politics.

The Foundation for the Promotion and Development for women and children (FUNDEMUNI) was born in Ocotal, Nueva Segovia County, in the north of Nicaragua. Its mission is that women and children get a privileged place in the development of the county, with equity and equal opportunities and with respect to their human rights.

[» More background on the mining conflict \(Spanish, Word\)](#)

[» Report from the meeting \(Spanish, Word\)](#) [» Summary from the meeting \(Spanish, Word\)](#)

## Influencing poverty eradication strategies

Civil society organizations in Nicaragua and Honduras are trying to influence the national poverty reduction strategies. But the national governments do not respect the participatory processes involved – and the pressing question (particularly given the conditionalities involved in the IMF programs) is whether the national poverty eradication strategies really make a difference to the poor. [» back to contents](#)

## Western Honduras fights against poverty

By [Susanne Lysholm Jensen](#), Information Worker, ALPE Central America.

Western Honduras is one of the regions of the country where civil society, besides following the poverty reduction strategies at the national level, has been promoting the participatory processes of the local poverty reduction strategies for several years. These processes are articulated through so-called *commonwealths* – entities that work above the county level for lobbying and coordinating in a more efficient way to satisfy the basic needs of the local population and advance other common interests such as the building or maintenance of roads, development of tourism, farm development and protection of environment.

For the small counties of Honduras, this form of organization brings substantial benefits, as the pooling of resources and the coordination of activities allows them to aim for objectives that they could never have dreamed about if acting on their own. For instance it has become possible to lower the vulnerability to natural disasters and stimulate sustainable development. The coordination of work in a larger territorial area with a bigger population has been rewarded by a higher level of response from the central government and the international community.

The main actors that promote and give a follow up to the local processes of the poverty reduction strategies and the incorporation of these in the national Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) are the so-called Voluntary Promotion Teams. The members of these teams are elected in Civil Society Assemblies at county level and later ratified by local authorities.

The commonwealth of the counties in Western Honduras has pronounced itself about the PRS. It has demanded that the recognition of the commonwealths and the Voluntary Promotion Teams as key actors when it comes to prioritizing funds at the local level. It has also demanded that the civil society representatives in the Consultative Council working with the PRS involve themselves in regional processes and bear in mind that their work at the national level should remain linked to the regional and local levels.

The Association of Non Governmental Organisms (ASONOG), part of the ALPE Central American Network, is closely following the local processes of formulating poverty reduction strategies in Western Honduras. In 2005, they worked with capacity building in relation to the formulation of projects at commonwealth level – which allowed the region to come out well positioned in a consultancy prior to the distribution of funds earmarked for poverty reduction. Western Honduras presented a total of 35 project proposals, ten of which were approved by Congress. The present challenge, according to ASONOG, is to ensure through mechanisms of social control that the projects are actually executed as they were approved. [» back to contents](#)



**[Garbage dump]** These poor children have not benefited from the poverty reduction strategies. Instead they continue to live and work at the garbage dump of La Churaca outside Managua.

Photo: Susanne Lysholm Jensen

[» See Declaration of Western Honduras: The PRS has to include local demands \(Spanish, Word\)](#)

# FOSDEH watches over the PRS in Honduras

By [Susanne Lysholm Jensen](#), Information Worker, ALPE Central America.

The Honduran Social Forum for External Debt and Development (FOSDEH) distinguishes between *poverty reduction* and *combat against poverty*. They see *poverty reduction* as referring to a series of measures that aim at social improvement without altering the dominant model of society. Consequently they embrace the term *combat against poverty* in the sense of a committed struggle to provide lasting solutions to the structural problem of inequality.

Although FOSDEH promote the *combat against poverty*, it does not isolate itself from the spaces where *poverty reduction* is being debated. The Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) and the eventual release of resources stemming from debt relief are some of the topics that FOSDEH pay particular attention to. FOSDEH also insists that prioritizing of the programs and projects of the PRS should be based on the regional *strategies for combating poverty* – alternative strategies designed through well-attended participatory processes in five regions of the country.

The government choose to ignore this process and instead went on to promote its own consultancy – which resulted in about 25.000 ideas for different topics and work areas. Based on these inputs, the Consultative Council developed a methodology for the distribution of debt relief resources. In spite of a pledge to give around 4.500 million lempiras (the rough equivalent of USD 238 million) to poverty reduction, the government designated only 2.500 million lempiras (USD 132 million) – a sum which is not even guaranteed to be distributed.

Some of the projects that came out of the consultancy were incorporated in the national budget for 2006. Some of them are aims at reactivating the economy through support to agriculture and small to medium size businesses. However, significant resources were designated to social infrastructure projects – which served to relieve state institutions of some of their own budget responsibilities.

The resources from debt relief designated to poverty reduction projects are very limited in relation to the demand.

At the same time, a significant portion of these funds are designated to projects that are lacking in transparency and have never been consulted with civil society organizations. The total amount of resources earmarked for poverty reduction that have been added to the national budget is unknown, but it is estimated that 85% of these resources have not been subjected to participatory processes.

## [Living up to the promises]

On November 27, 2005, Hondurans celebrated elections for the Presidency, the National Assembly and Local Governments.

The liberal Manuel Zelaya was elected president by a small margin. Zelaya had campaigned on a platform promising to deliver on citizen participation in political life; transparency in the public sector; free primary education; lower gasoline prices; and the freezing of taxes.

The challenge for organized civil society will be to keep him up on his promises.



## [Watchdog]

[Honduras Social Forum for External Debt and Development \(FOSDEH\)](#) started in 1995 as an initiative by ASONOG.

Today the organization has become a point of reference in the national and international scene in relation to external debt and public politics.

It has taken part in important national forums, such as the Council for Poverty Consultation and the National Council against Corruption.

It also edits a bimonthly bulletin aimed at stimulating debate on poverty related issues.

FOSDEH denounce that a large number of the projects that should have been executed in 2005 are still in the pipeline. They also point out that during the recent election campaign, neither the main candidates nor the small parties showed any commitment to deepening the PRS. For FOSDEH it is vital that the state and the political class not only commit themselves to respect budget allocations and effectively implement approved projects, but also allow for effective social control through the establishment of credible legal mechanisms. [» back to contents](#)



# Influencing the ERCERP II in Nicaragua

By [Susanne Lysholm Jensen](#), Information Worker, ALPE Central America

Nicaragua is, according to the Social Watch report from August 2005, the second poorest country in all of Latin America and the Caribbean. It has not been possible to improve this situation in spite of the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) approved in the year 2000 by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The National Development Plan (NDP) approved in 2003 by the Nicaraguan government and intended to complement the poverty reduction strategy known by its Spanish initials as ERCERP is based on the assumption that economic growth and increased competitiveness will eventually benefit the poor and reduce poverty through a spill-over effect. This model advantages the business sector and put less emphasis on the social dimensions involved. Responding to critiques raised by civil society and donors, at the end of 2004, after a substantial consultancy process at the departmental level, the government released the operative NDP, which put much more emphasis on poverty reduction. The plan was, however, not discussed adequately at the national level, so there is little awareness and appropriation of it.

The operative NDP reaffirms the postulates on economic growth and increased competitiveness as conditions for poverty reduction. The ERCERP and the NDP do not take into account the social and gender differences in the population. Their proposals therefore do attend to the full range of necessities, interests and potentialities of the different sectors.

Since the NDP was made operational in the so-called Operational Development Plan, which has been subjected to constructive critique from international donors and the World Bank, the government has been elaborating an ERCERP II based on the operational PND with some modifications.

According to the South-North Advocacy Group (known as GISN by its Spanish initials), the processes have been characterized by poor participation and lack of inclusion of proposals and needs of the important social sectors of the country, such as civil society organizations and the local governments. For this reason the GISN, as an intersectional alliance, has set out to participate directly in the processes of formulation and implementation of the economic politics of the country, endorsing a conception of development founded on the capacities and local potential for human development.

GISN has just started a process of analyzing the ERCERP II in order to identify the changes in relation to its predecessor, and the degree of inclusion of the proposals elaborated by the local government and the civil society organisations. As concrete results of this process they expect to visualize the projects or activities prioritized by the government in the ERCERP II, and elaborate the first proposals that should be included in the ERCERP II and the operative NDP, but remains to be formulated by the local governments and civil society.

It is the hope of GISN to stimulate discussion and reflection, so that the regions can take a stance before the implementation of the ERCERP II. This would put the regions in an advantaged position when it comes to influencing through advocacy efforts not only the PRS, but also on other policies of the government. [» back to contents](#)

## [Behind the abbreviations]

PRSP and ERCERP are central concepts in relation to poverty reduction.

Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) are national strategies for poverty reduction prepared through participatory processes. The concept was introduced in 1999 by the World Bank and the IMF. Today it is a common precondition for loans and aid.

The Revised Strategy for Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction (ERCERP by its Spanish initials) is a poverty reduction strategy elaborated in the framework of the PRSP by the national governments of the southern countries.

# IMF conditionality is wrong strategy for poverty reduction

By [Susanne Lysholm Jensen](#), Information Worker, ALPE Central America

According to the Hague-based [Institute of Social Studies](#), there is not enough clarity about which politics are more effective in the fight against poverty. The institute nevertheless points out two determinant factors for the poverty reduction strategies to have impact: the changes of government and the conditionalities related to external aid.

A litmus test for the appropriation of the strategies and their sustainability is the survival capacity that the strategies have to changes of government. Nicaragua has failed to include the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) in the basic processes, like budgeting, which would have provided more immunity against changing political winds. Honduras, on the other hand, has passed laws that guarantee consistency between the PRSP and the national budgets, although the effectiveness of this change has yet to be tested in practice.

External development aid is still dominated by the macroeconomic short term policies of the IMF. This tendency on behalf of the donors is understandable given their doubts as to the real commitment of the governments to continue with the poverty reduction strategies – whose implementation is affected by weak local institutions in the first place. But the tendency, however understandable it may be, serves to further weaken the sense of ownership and commitment to the strategies of governments and civil society actors alike.

This calls for reflection on the efforts of civil society actors and international donors to promote the active participation of the population in development processes at the local and national levels. These efforts are in vain, as long as the national policies of the HIPC-countries are tied by IMF conditionalities to an extent that makes it meaningless to talk about the promotion of democracy, transparency and citizen participation. [» back to contents](#)

## [What does HIPC mean?]

HIPC, the short form of Highly Indebted Poor Countries, is a multilateral initiative aiming at relieving the debt burden of a number of poor countries.

It is a precondition for receiving debt relief through HIPC that the liberated resources be committed to poverty reduction.

Nicaragua and Honduras are both included in the initiative.

---

## Gender equality and poverty reduction

**The challenge of the poverty reduction strategy known as ERCERP is to stop perceiving gender equality as an issue that relates only to women – and begin to really understand how it affects every aspect of development.**

It is hard to find a program or a strategy in Central America that does not mention the importance of gender. Increased focus on gender has for years been a decisive condition from donors when considering a project. But it would nevertheless appear that gender is not considered a relevant category when it comes to the analysis of poverty and the design of poverty reduction strategies.

Men and women must be treated according to their respective needs. Gender equity implies the possibility of using different procedures to correct the initial inequalities. Poverty is in itself a difficult condition, but for poor women the situation is even worse. The social discrimination implied by poverty is accentuated by gender discrimination. [» back to contents](#)

## Poor ownership of the gender approach

By [Susanne Lysholm Jensen](#), Information Worker, ALPE Central America

According to a 2004 report from the Hague-based [Institute of Social Studies](#), the Revised Strategy for Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction (ERCERP by its Spanish initials) contains a fruitful discussion of the factors that determine low economic growth of Nicaragua, but it does not provide an analysis of the dynamics or structural causes underlying poverty. Most importantly, the strategy omits mention of inequalities in the distribution of income, power and opportunities; different modes of exclusion; and the uneven impact of the structural adjustment packages.

The ERCERP is also characterized by the almost total lack of gender perspective. It does not include a chapter or even a section on gender issues. There is close to no separation by gender in the statistical material provided, and the strategy does not integrate the gender dimension in the analysis of poverty. Gender simply does not seem to be considered a relevant category in the analysis of poverty nor in policy design or budget assignment.

It would appear that women only figure in the strategy as subjects of physical abuse. The importance of these omissions is clear. If the diagnosis does not take into account the special problems faced by women, it is highly unlikely that the strategy, based on that same diagnosis, will prescribe durable solutions to these problems.

According to the Social Forum of the External Debt and Development of Honduras (FOSDEH), the problem is that the topic of gender equity is one of the most mentioned, but least implemented in the ERCERP. Gender equality requires not that men and women be turned into equals, but that their different behaviours, aspirations and needs be considered, valued and promoted on the same basis. Therefore the empty rhetoric on gender equality in the ERCERP is of little value.

FOSDEH insists that there is no gender equality in Honduras. The gender equity approach implies the possibility of using different procedures to correct the initial inequalities. These measures promote equality in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities. The ERCERP should give priority to these measures because they help disadvantaged groups, in this case women and girls, to gain access to opportunities.

### [Did you know?]

Women continue assuming the social reproduction through domestic work that is not valued or recognized.

Studies from Nicaragua estimate domestic work carried out by women to represent almost one third of GDP.

In Nicaragua, women represent nearly 40% of the working population, but less than 10% of the male population takes part in domestic work.

The incorporation of women in the labour market has not produced a change in gender roles in Central America.

New modes of insertion in the global economy adopted by the governments is influencing negatively on gender equity.



**[Left out]** The special needs of this woman are not taken into account in the poverty reduction known as ERCERP. Therefore the strategy is also unlikely to prescribe solutions to them.

Photo: Susanne Lysholm Jensen

The statistics available to FOSDEH confirms that in Honduras there is a lot to be done to be able to talk about development, because it is only possible to speak about real development when all the human beings, women and men, have the possibility of enjoying the same rights and options.

The ERCERP is facing the challenge of getting past the prevailing perception of gender equity as an issue affecting only women – and instead begin to really understand how it affects every aspect of development. It is the approach known as Gender in Development that states the need to involve men and women alike in the definition of a new model of development that changes the existing relations of power based on the subordination of women. [» back to contents](#)

[» Download the summary of the report from the Institute of Social Studies \(PDF\)](#)

[» See the article by FOSDEH: “PRS and gender approach: equality or inequality?” \(Spanish, PDF\)](#)

## “Being a poor woman is not like being a poor man”

*By Alma, from the Movement of Women against Violence in Nicaragua*

Being poor is not easy anywhere. Central America is no exception to this rule. The unjust distribution of resources means that a large majority have no or little access to basic services and is being prevented from exerting their rights to education, health, justice and influence. However, if to being poor we add the condition of being a woman the situation gets worse.

Gender discrimination precedes social discrimination. The frequent stereotype of the women as weak, sentimental, dependant, with limited capacities, and the men as strong, powerful, capable and rational, facilitates to the latter the opportunities and gives them the upper hand – particularly when resources are limited.

Violence against women in countries like Nicaragua and Honduras does not only mean the deterioration of human development, but also that the contribution made by women to the development of those countries is being neglected.

In a public act organized by the Network of Women against Violence in Nicaragua last November, it was mentioned that until October the newspapers had announced that more than 60 women and girls had died from gender-related abuse during the last ten months. These women had in common that they belonged to the part of the population that survives in poverty and do not count on the states protection from abuses such as violence in the household.

Not even statistics of this sort have led to the inclusion of the fight against gender-related abuses in the Poverty Reduction Strategy. This is all the more upsetting, as the violence against women is clearly a factor adversely affecting the economic, social and cultural growth of a nation.

Honduras also appears in the list of countries where women are murdered with an alarming rate of impunity. According to statistic information from the Center for Women’s Rights, in a monitoring made in three national newspapers, the episodes of violence from 2002 to 2004 showed a total of 442 women killed by male aggressors.

In Nicaragua and Honduras these women died because of the violence exerted by their partners, former partners, stepfathers and other males, whose abuse ended the lives of women and girls whom they considered their property. Neither government recognizes gender-related violence as a national problem that deserves to be ranking next to poverty on top of the national agenda.

Poverty reduction was part of the Beijing Platform to improve the economic conditions of women, but women still see their rights to employment on equal terms being violated, as governments are still not recognizing their international commitment to promote gender equity. As the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women from the UN Commission of Human Rights has pointed out, poverty is a way of economic violence against women.

68% of the homes with only a single parent are subjected to extreme poverty. As in most of Latin America, the mother is the one assuming responsibility for offspring. Women therefore often find themselves immersed in the informal sector of the economy with all the social and economic problems that this implies. This means that the homes headed by a woman have less income because of the gender inequality that implies less job opportunities and less income.

The situation of women in the labour markets of Nicaragua and Honduras – and particularly of the majority of women that find themselves in poverty – cannot be properly understood without bearing in mind the multidimensionality of poverty. [» back to contents](#)



**[Low income]** Households headed by women have lower incomes due to gender discrimination.

Photo: Susanne Lysholm Jensen

[» Read more on the insertion of women in the global economy \(Spanish\)](#)

[» Read more on violence against women in Honduras y Nicaragua \(Spanish, Word\)](#)

## Africa high on Danish agenda after PM visit

**Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen returned from a historical visit to Tanzania and Mozambique last October. The visit was followed by a rise in Danish development aid to Africa and the selection of Mali as a new focus country. But not all are equally impressed.**

By [Ronnie Nielsen](#), Assistant at the ALPE Secretariat

A massive effort on behalf of Western donors and the African countries themselves is needed if Africa is to benefit from globalization and achieve sustainable growth. This was the key message from Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen during and after his visit to focus countries Tanzania and Mozambique last October. Fogh Rasmussen specifically pointed towards market access, good governance, services and environment as key areas of concern and intervention.

The visit by Fogh Rasmussen – which followed the G8 Gleneagles meeting in Scotland and seems to be part of an international trend towards putting Africa back on the agenda – has high signal value. Not only is it the first visit of a Danish head of state to focus countries in Africa. It also coincides with a rise in Danish development aid to Africa and the selection of Mali as a new focus country.

Fogh Rasmussen declared that in the future two thirds of the Danish bilateral development aid should go to Africa. Danish bilateral aid to African countries is projected to rise from 2.1 billion DKK (roughly USD 350 million) in 2006 to 2.5 billion DKK in 2006. It is, however, part of the story that Danish development aid has experienced dramatic cuts while Fogh Rasmussen has been in office. For instance the bilateral aid to Africa has fallen from a high of 2.6 billion DKK in 2001 to a low of 2.1 billion this year. This has prompted part of the opposition to accuse Fogh Rasmussen of hypocrisy – as he is in fact only proposing to reverse a trend initiated by his own government.

Nevertheless the bottom line is that there now seem to be a sincere desire on behalf of the Danish government to give higher priority to the ambitious goals set out in the Danish Africa Strategy for 2005-2009. This is good news. Because – as the Fogh Rasmussen himself has repeatedly pointed out – a massive effort is needed if the African continent is to be lifted out of poverty. [» back to contents](#)

[» Download the Danish Africa Strategy for 2005-2009: “Africa: development and security” \(PDF\)](#)

[» Download the analytical framework behind the strategy: “Africa in the 21st century: an analytical overview” \(PDF\)](#)

## Rally boost knowledge on MDGs in Denmark

The proportion of Danes with some degree of familiarity with the Millennium Development Goals rose from 10 to 25 percent in just ten days, as two Danish entrepreneurs drove a white Porsche with 2015-placards 4.500 kilometres through Kenya and Tanzania.

By [Ronnie Nielsen](#), Assistant at the ALPE Secretariat

“I guess that we were the only ones to believe in this right from the start,” says brothers Mads and Søren Kjær, who are both very satisfied with the outcome of their participation in the East African Safari Rally last December.

They came in as number 22 out of 30 finishing cars after 4.500 kilometres of dusty country roads. While reaching the finishing line in a desert classic like this may be a small achievement in itself, it wouldn't have called for much attention, had it not been for other circumstances.

The two brothers – who not only share a passion for rally, but also run a successful family enterprise that has made high ethical standards an integrated part of its brand – had come up with an unprecedented idea. They wanted to use the East African Safari Rally as a platform to direct attention towards the Millennium Development Goals – in Denmark referred to as the 2015-targets. To that end they equipped their white Porsche with 2015-placards and allied themselves with private companies and media before receiving the endorsement of the Danish development agency. They called their concept “Rally with Purpose”.

Some people were at first sceptical of the concept of combining motor-sports with humanitarian purposes, but the spectacular impact put all doubts to shame: in just ten days, the proportion of Danes with some degree of familiarity with the Millennium Development Goals rose from 10 to 25 percent, as newspaper readers and radio listeners followed the car from start to finish – taking in background information on poverty figures and development goals along the way. [» back to contents](#)



**[Rally with Purpose]** The proportion of Danes familiar with the Millennium Development Goals rose from 10 to 25 percent in just ten days, as two Danish entrepreneurs drove this white Porsche with 2015-placards 4.500 kilometres through Kenya and Tanzania

Photo: [Rally with Purpose](#)

[» Visit the “Rally with Purpose” homepage \(Danish, highly visual\)](#)

## Denmark Clash with Muslim World over Cartoons

**Twelve cartoons published by a Danish newspaper have provoked outrage among Muslims the world over. Two Danish representations have been torched and several dozen people killed. We will give you a short introduction to the cartoon row, as seen from Denmark in late February.**

By [Ronnie Nielsen](#), Assistant at the ALPE Secretariat

“That’s a hypothetical question that will take us nowhere,” says Carsten Juste, Chief Editor of the conservative Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten when asked if he would have published the twelve cartoons had he known the consequences.

Last September, Jyllands-Posten ran a story on what they consider to be a growing tendency towards self-censorship among the European public when dealing with Islam. But the story wasn’t just any story. A Danish writer reported being at great difficulty finding an illustrator willing to provide drawings for a children’s book on the life of the Islamic Prophet Mohammed. The newspaper took the opportunity to ask Danish illustrators for caricatures of the Prophet. The newspaper printed twelve, most of them quite innocent by standards of Danish satire, but others striking controversial notes by – for example – depicting Mohammed with ballistic missiles hidden in his turban.

The cartoons led to protests from Danish Muslims, who at first seemed more upset with some of the stereotypes being reproduced than with the breaking of a centuries-old religious tenet against depicting the Prophet. The matter also led to heated debate in the media and among the public, but events didn’t gather steam until four months later.

In late January, following the republication of the cartoons in a Norwegian newspaper and a tour of the Middle East by a delegation of radical Danish Islamists, a boycott on Danish dairy products and other exports was announced in Saudi Arabia. In the following days the boycott spread and gradually turned into widespread protests and ritual flag burnings all over the Muslim World, as unfounded rumours spread that Danes were burning the Koran or otherwise manifesting animosity towards Islamic values. The tension only increased when a number of European newspapers reprinted the cartoons in a supposed act of solidarity. Events culminated when in early February the Danish embassy in Syria and the consulate in Lebanon were torched and Danish representations in other countries – notably Iran – experienced attacks from angry mobs armed with stones and homemade firebombs. Several dozen people have died in clashes between demonstrators and police – and the fury is not yet over.

This has caused what started as the publication of twelve cartoons by a private newspaper to turn into the biggest international crisis experienced by Denmark since World War II. Danish diplomacy is working overtime to harness international support and to communicate to governments, streets and bazaars that – while the Danish authorities do in no way approve of the cartoons – neither the Danish government nor the Danish people can be held responsible for what is printed in a private newspaper. The newspaper itself has already apologized, though in vague terms, but many Muslim protestors still call for it to be closed and for the far-reaching Danish freedom of expression to be restricted when “religious feelings” are involved.

Most Danes, who are used to seeing themselves as a peace-loving and tolerant people, are shocked of the way that events have unfolded and feel a strong desire for the calm to return. Nevertheless opinions remain divided with respect to the cartoons that caused the stir. Some blame the conservative newspaper for stigmatizing a minority, while others maintain that the violent protests have paradoxically made the protestors look increasingly like the caricatures themselves. » [back to contents](#)

» Coverage of the cartoon row can be found on the internet as can the now infamous cartoons

## Nigeria debt deal lucrative for Denmark

**The debt relief to Nigeria agreed upon by the Paris Club in October is a lucrative deal for Denmark – which will receive USD 220 billion worth of direct payments from Nigeria and write off the remainder over the ODA budget.**

By [Ronnie Nielsen](#), Assistant at the ALPE Secretariat

Based on research by [Peter With](#), ALPE International Programme Coordinator

When the Paris Club finally reached agreement on debt relief for Nigeria in October, few would have suspected that the Danish treasury would be among the beneficiaries. But the deal is in fact very lucrative for Denmark. Not only will the Danish treasury receive DKK 1.4 billion (the rough equivalent of USD 220 million) in direct payments from Nigeria over the next few months. Denmark will also write off the remaining debt at face value over the ODA budget.

The bottom line is that the Danish treasury will receive DKK 2.9 billion of the DKK 3.2 billion face value of a debt that dates back to the epoch of exports credits and can only be termed dubious – if not downright illegitimate. Part of the bill for this surprising arrangement is paid by Nigeria and the rest is passed on to the countries that normally benefit from Danish development aid.

For Denmark, the deal means at the same time money in the coffer and a polished donor profile – which in colloquial terms amounts to a free lunch. For Nigeria and a number of the world's poorest countries, the deal means that they will have fewer resources at hand in their efforts towards complying with the Millennium Development Goals. Thus the deal is carried out in a manner that runs counter to the stated first priority for Danish development aid, namely reducing poverty in the world's poorest countries.

The case of Denmark is unfortunately far from outstanding. It is – as frequently denounced by ALPE and other actors in the field – common practice among creditor countries to use debt deals as a means of securing dubious debts that could otherwise hardly have been turned into assets of any kind. When these dubious debts are written off over the ODA budgets, the poor of today are made to pay for the reckless lending policies of the past. » [back to contents](#)

» The Nigeria debt deal has been commented on our website and in the previous Newsletter

### **[Background: The Nigeria debt deal]**

When the Paris Club agreed on debt relief for Nigeria in October, it almost appeared too good to be true – and indeed it was.

The club agreed to cancel USD 18 billion of the USD 30 billion owed by Nigeria to its 19 member states. This represented – with the exception of the special case of Iraq – the biggest single debt relief deal ever. But there was a drawback. As a condition for the deal, Nigeria should pay the remaining USD 12 billion in just six months.

This means that the debt relief will result in a huge transfer of resources from Nigeria to a number of the world's richest countries.

But it doesn't stop at that. The debt relief will typically be written off over the ODA budgets – so that at the end of the day the world's poorest countries will have fewer resources at hand to combat poverty and achieve lasting development.



## ALPE heading into its last year

**The Alliance for Poverty Eradication is heading into its last year. The actual phase was recently extended until April 2007. But the Danish alliance partners have nevertheless decided not to apply for a new phase. Consultation and debate has pointed out some of the strengths and weaknesses of the programme.**

By [Peter With](#), ALPE International Programme Coordinator

The Alliance for Poverty Eradication Programme, started in August 2004, is heading into its last year. The funder, Danida accepted in February an extension by nine months until the end of April 2007, and recently – by late March – the Danish organisations behind the alliance-programme debated if they were prepared to apply Danida for a new phase of the programme from April 2007 and onwards. Before a discussion paper had been circulated and opinions from partners in the South had been solicited.

The outcome of the debate was that the programme in its present form – a broad alliance programme with many Danish organisations and operating across four countries and two language areas – will not continue. However, a number of elements in the present programme deserve to be carried forward, notably a number of activities at national level, and possibly some activities relating to exchange of experience within and across countries. In which form and funded by which sources these activities will be continued will need to be discussed in the coming months.

Among the many factors leading to the painful decision not to continue the programme beyond its present phase, the complexity of the set-up and the enduring difficulties involved in coordinating activities and exchanging experience between countries and across networks weighted heavily. It has proven particularly difficult to coordinate and exchange experience between Anglophone and Spanish speaking countries. Furthermore, the differences in national set-ups relating to poverty reduction have proven bigger than expected. And the coordination from the International Secretariat in Copenhagen has not been sufficiently replaced with genuine ownership by the structures in the South.

There were, however, also many voices stressing the merits of the programme and wishing for a continuation of the activities into a third phase. The strongest plea came from ALPE Ghana which have just established a national set-up for coordination on PRS policies and developed both a national and regional structure for this. They found that a lot of investment of money, as well as of time and efforts of Ghanaian organisations would be lost, if the programme does not continue. But at the same time, the feedback from Ghana was also critical of the programme in many ways.

The Committee found that it is important to carry on with the present phase, despite the many shortcomings listed, in order to make the most of it. Especially the need to use the experiences for exchange and discussions on best practice was emphasised, as well as the support for an international advocacy effort, with participation of several focus countries and with targets including international actors as the World Bank and the IMF. [» back to contents](#)

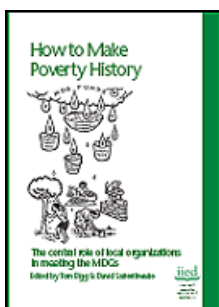
### [Behind a painful decision]

The most important factors leading to the decision not to continue ALPE beyond the present phase are the following:

- » It has proven difficult to make operative the decision-making structures across countries
- » It has been difficult to coordinate and exchange experience between Anglophone and Spanish-speaking countries
- » Only a few of the Danish organisations have engaged actively in the programme
- » Some Danish organisations do not find that they and their partners in the South have benefited sufficiently
- » The coordination from Copenhagen has not been sufficiently replaced with genuine ownership by the structures in the South
- » Coordination has been affected by differences in national set-ups in relation to Poverty Reduction Strategies
- » The set-up for small projects at national level appear unfocused to some of the Danish organisations involved
- » The institutional set-up is considered too complicated by some of the Danish organisations involved

## Recommended publications and links

With each edition of the Newsletter we will bring you one or more recommendations of links or other material that will not waste your time. This time we recommend:



### Involving local organisations

How can local organisations best be involved in the struggle towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals? This is the question posed by a recent report from the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) titled: "How to Make Poverty History: The Central Role of Local Organizations in Meeting the MDGs". The report – which is well written and aptly documented – is available for download from the IIED website. » [back to contents](#)

» [Download the report from the IIED website \(PDF\)](#)

---

#### [Contact data]

- » Inquiries on the **ALPE African Network** are best directed to our Regional Coordinator, Ms. Rita Ambadire, [alpeghana@yahoo.com](mailto:alpeghana@yahoo.com), based at the Labor College in Accra, Ghana, telephone +244-434131
  - » In **Zambia** you may also contact Mr. Rasmus Dawes, [cspr@zamnet.zm](mailto:cspr@zamnet.zm), or Ms. Ivy Mutwale, [ivy@cspr.org.zm](mailto:ivy@cspr.org.zm)
- » Inquiries on the **ALPE Central American Network** are best directed to our Regional Coordinator, Ms. Ruth Aguilar, [alperedgenero@turbonett.com](mailto:alperedgenero@turbonett.com), telephone +505-2225355 or +505-2224803.
- » In **Honduras** you may contact our EICP Facilitator, Ms. Dessiré Flores, [dfdubon@yahoo.com](mailto:dfdubon@yahoo.com)
  - » Inquiries on the programme and contributions to the newsletter are best directed to our International Programme Coordinator at our **International Secretariat** in Copenhagen, Denmark, Mr. Peter With, [pw@ibis.dk](mailto:pw@ibis.dk), based at the [International Development NGO Ibis](#), telephone +45-35200523

## Contact information

Please feel free to contact us if you wish to contribute to future newsletters or have something else on your mind. In the box you will find a selection of contacts. Additional information and contacts can be found on our web sites:

[www.north-south.dk](http://www.north-south.dk) (English)

[www.norte-sur.dk](http://www.norte-sur.dk) (Spanish)

[www.nord-syd.dk](http://www.nord-syd.dk) (Danish)

» [back to contents](#)