

Inclusive Circles Lost in Exclusive Cycles

An ActionAid contribution to the first Global Poverty Reduction Strategies Comprehensive Review

Based on experiences of ActionAid staff and partners
in Haiti, Kenya, Malawi, Nepal, Rwanda, Uganda and Vietnam¹

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25th January 2002

"There is broad consensus among our civil society sources in Ghana, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia and Bolivia that their coalitions have been totally unable to influence macro-economic policy or even engage governments in dialogue about it."

***Assessing Participation in Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers:
A Desk-Based Synthesis of Experience in sub-Saharan Africa, IDS-Sussex, 2002***

"We don't wish to second guess the Fund. We prefer to give them what they want before they start lecturing us about this and that. By doing so, we send a clear message that we know what we are doing – i.e. we believe in structural adjustment"

*Finance Minister quoted anonymously in Cheru F. Human rights assessment of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP)
UN Commission for Human Rights, 2001*

"The government owns the reform program but the program is based on IMF-World Bank conditionality rather than local participation.

***Interview with Uganda Debt Network and Uganda Manufacturing Association, Kampala 1999 in
Devarajan S. and Dollar D. et al Aid and Reform in Africa, 2001.***

Letters confirming Kenya's commitment to reform - supposedly written by top government officials - were actually drafted by the donors and then handed to him (the Minister of Finance) to sign. Mr. Okemo said the arrangement was "an open secret" and that the minister was told "to sign along the dotted line as an ultimatum." And he asked: "Is this not coercion?" "There is a clear need to reduce the intrusiveness of our development partners in domestic policy-making. We should not allow donors to micro-manage our economies through conditionalities," he said in a speech read by his deputy, Mr. Christopher Lomada.

Reported in The Daily Nation, October 26, 2001, Nairobi, Kenya

"PPAs and other consultative exercises, such as the PRSP, have created a lot of opportunities for government participants to learn more about the causes of poverty. This has led to national plans becoming more people-centered and pro-poor."

ActionAid Vietnam, December 2001

¹This brief is drawn from a seven-country review of ActionAid engagement of World Bank/International Monetary Fund policies with particular focus on Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS) written by Mishka Zaman, ActionAidUSA Associate and a written presentation on PRGF conditionality and the PRSP during the International Conference on Poverty Reduction Strategies made by Irungu Houghton, January 2001. The larger review document analyses the extent to which AA country offices and partners were able to facilitate the participation and involvement of marginalized and vulnerable groups in the PRS debate, the impact this engagement has had on social, economic and political rights, pro-poor policy-making and budgetary allocation (national, bi-lateral, multi-lateral) within the seven selected countries.

The review interviewed in-country ActionAid staff and partners (all of whom nationals) and reviewed extensive secondary literature. While primarily an assessment of senior AA policy analysts in these countries and ActionAid USA, the reviewers drew important lessons from the insights of the Malawian Economic Justice Network, the Haitian Popular Alliance for Development (PAPDA) and the Ugandan NGO Forum among other sources. We would like to acknowledge their primary role alongside other national umbrella groups in Rwanda, Vietnam and Nepal in enabling citizens participation and oversight in these countries.

INTRODUCTION

The re-introduction of poverty reduction as a major thrust of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund policies in 1999 responded to a number of critical accelerating pressures namely; popular demands for an end to the economic and social damage of structural adjustment programmes, a global movement for an end to the debt burden, internal demands for Bank decentralization to country offices and a willingness by a critical mass of Bank/Fund staff and Board for reform, greater information disclosure and public participation.²

Since 1999, a number of ActionAid offices have actively embraced the potential of new space around processes that had been largely unaccountable and closed in the previous policy framework papers and related loans documents and processes. With field and operational presence among over five million working poor people in thirty of the world's poorest countries, the renewed emphasis on poverty provided clear rationale for ActionAid to get involved.

The seven countries selected for this review reflect a diversity in terms of the intensity of ActionAid direct engagement, degree of democratic space/policy environment, size of Bank/Fund portfolio and lastly, blend of HIPC/ non-HIPC and IPRS/PRS. Of the seven countries, Uganda's PRS is the only one to have been "approved" by the Boards. The Kenyan and Malawian PRSs are now complete and await Bank and Fund Board consideration. Malawi's PRS has yet to be made public. Vietnam on the other hand, is in an interesting position having not completed its PRS but already having negotiated the PRSC.

Four Major Findings and Six Recommendations

The range of comments (some contained above) and plethora of papers and assessments show mixed reviews of the early experience of WB/IMF sponsored Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRSs). Based on our findings, we suggest that on the whole, space for public participation in policy formulation has indeed opened up in Kenya, Nepal, Malawi, Rwanda, Uganda, and Vietnam. In the case of Haiti, World Bank ambivalence (in the context of an almost complete donor embargo) on whether to constructively engage the Haitian Government or the voluntary sector has prevented a participatory strategy for developing a PRS from emerging.³

National, regional and district level PRS consultations have enabled a variety of voices and perspectives to be heard. These inclusive circles have, in varied degrees, allowed for frank exchange. On the other hand, our findings (detailed below) show frustration with three critical barriers in the comprehensive policy cycle that the PRS is intended to initiate. If left unattended, these barriers will continue to render the circles of inclusion impotent and ineffective.

² Very briefly, PRSs are documents whose preparation is mandatory for countries wishing to be considered for concessional lending and debt relief under the enhanced Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative. The Bretton Woods institutions have adopted the PRS as the primary tool for policy dialogue for *all* countries applying for concessional lending. Intended to cover a multi-year or three-year time frame, the PRS has replaced the "Policy Framework Paper" as the guiding instrument for policy setting and resource allocation. Launched two years ago in response to allay the stinging criticism received courtesy of the Structural Adjustment Programs, some 33 countries have completed the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategies (I-PRS) whereas 9 have prepared full PRSs by October 2001. In total, some 70 countries across the world are expected to develop national PRSs as a pre-requisite to qualify for concessional lending. The significance of PRSs for low income countries can further be gauged from the fact that July 2002 onwards, all World Bank Country Assistance Strategies (CAS) and Poverty Reduction Support Credits (PRSCs) as well as IMF Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF) in International Development Association (IDA) countries will be based on a PRS.

³ PAPDA's comments from Haiti: "Our June 2001 seminar was part of an effort to influence the emergence of a consensus within civil society. Unfortunately, the political crisis and the freezing of external funding have prevented us from taking advantage of the momentum we had succeeded in creating"

Firstly, while enlarging the circle of civic participation, there is insufficient space for discussion and approval by parliaments and endorsement by interest groups on the content of the final PRSs. In this way, it is unclear what Governments have omitted or included in the drafting and the reasons for this. This lack of feed-back on the final PRSs has short-circuited the principle of “country-driven” ownership. **Malawian** groups have expressed concern on the lack of transparency towards the end of the PRS formulation process.

Secondly, our findings also suggest an inverse relationship between the degree of domestic public accountability during the formulation process and the negotiation process with the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. The closer the document gets to finalisation and discussion with multilateral and bilateral institutions, the more it recedes into the opaque board-rooms of these institutions.⁴

Public accountability and participation in all seven countries (with the limited experience of **Uganda** where some attempt has been made) starts to collapse with development of the core loan instruments namely World Bank Country Assistance Strategies, the Government Letter of Intent, the IMF Poverty Reduction Growth Facility Arrangements, the Memorandum of the World Bank President and the Poverty Reduction Support Credits. By contrast, the formulation of national budgets preliminarily seem to show moderately higher levels of voluntary sector oversight and engagement.

In this context, more “process conditionality” on the part of the Bretton Woods Institutions and donor community will undermine an already fragile domestic process.

Lastly, with regards the content of the three PRSs (**Uganda, Kenya and Malawi**) and the three IPRSs (**Nepal, Vietnam and Rwanda**), the findings have been mixed. The quality and scope of poverty diagnostics appear to have improved particularly in Uganda, Kenya and Rwanda. This has led to changes in the social sectors most notably in health and education. Disappointingly however, core macro-economic and structural adjustment policies have largely been retained in the “post adjustment phase”.

It would seem from our findings that the following changes would be critical to **improving the content of policies and programmes flowing from the Poverty Reduction Strategies and the power relationships and process of formulating and realizing policy targets and public obligations;**

1. **Poverty Assessments have a stronger focus on impoverishment and wealth generation rather than poverty per se.** They identify the poverty and social inequity impact of past policies and outline alternative options and implications for enshrining certain basic entitlements and rights for all citizens. These can be considered for discussions around trade-offs. A starting point for this would be the elimination of indirect and direct fees for primary education, basic healthcare and water.
2. Public action choices contained in PRSs are drawn up by a process of consultation, **joint drafting and endorsement** by national and local organized interests.
3. **IPRSs and PRSs are no longer approved by World Bank and International Monetary Fund boards.** Instead, the Boards are informed of their contents and utilize them to approve Country Assistance Strategies and attendant policy processes.

⁴ ActionAid welcomes the steps taken by the World Bank to revise its Information Disclosure Policy in late 2001 but notes that this Policy has not been promoted and supported actively by the Country Offices. In this way, PRS consultations remain uninformed by the new information and resources available to citizens groups.

4. **Participation Action plans and route maps in IPRSs are publicly negotiated and endorsed** by key apex and umbrella associations in each of the countries rather than simply being drawn up by Governments. These action plans outline standards for sharing of information publicly, consultative mechanisms, sequencing of processes and procedures for endorsement.
5. **CAS, PRGF, PRSC and any other external loan negotiation processes are discussed by country representative structures** with particular emphasis on the mechanisms developed by the process that nurtured the PRS and Parliament. Joint Boards approve these policies **after satisfactory and iterative public in-country discussions** of public expenditure and adjustment performance experience.
6. The **Fund should continue to scale back its interventions to external debt and balance of payments management strategies.** This suggests fewer areas but underpinned by social analysis of the costs and benefits of recommendations and advice being offered to Governments
7. **Donor assistance strategies are subjected to the growing ownership that has emerged around the PRS process** and address the poverty reduction strategies of Government and key organized groups with reduced emphasis on project based grant support.
8. Supported by the Fund, **donors should provide resources for the building capacity** in key institutions both within states and in wider societies to develop scenario and trade off analysis options

What has changed in the content of PRSs?

Significantly, in most cases it was reported that a shift had taken in the national government's understanding of the causes of poverty. For example, ActionAid **Kenya** perceived a change in the *“general understanding of the multi-dimensional nature of poverty and the need for multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral approach to eradicating it”*. This was not uniform with all. For Malawi, ActionAid **Malawi** felt *“the official definition of poverty is still related to access to resources rather than to issues of rights and inequity”*.

For this reason, we would expect that the solutions to poverty would also reflect a clearer departure from previous development strategies. Tracing the inclusion of civil society originated demands in the PRSs and subsequent national policies and budgets, suggests that despite the fact that no civil society representatives were members of PRS drafting teams, there has been a higher degree of voluntary organisation-led demands being included in PRSs than other national policy-making experiences. This has been more apparent in the area of social services more generally and health and education sectoral reform.

Unfortunately, our study does not dispel the common findings of several external assessments that query the inclusion of precise qualitative and quantitative indicators for trade liberalisation and privatisation that were not subjected to public discussion or worse still, introduced publicly (Ghana, Tanzania and Honduras).

The findings suggest that **Vietnam** and **Rwanda** saw most of their policy demands taken up for consideration within the PRSs, **Malawi** reported some inclusion of demands whereas **Kenya** reported a very poor response in this regard. All respondents were of the opinion that greater advocacy engagement and enhanced involvement and capacity of voluntary organisations and the poor may lead to more demands being taken up in future PRSs. In a number of these countries the fruit of demanding for the collective rights of people with disabilities (**Kenya**), peoples with HIV/AIDs (**Malawi**), rural

peasant producers (**Vietnam, Rwanda**), pastoralists (**Kenya**) and women (**Malawi, Kenya and Uganda**) was realized with important affirmative policies built into the PRSs.

However many of the recommendations that sought to subject the impact of previous macro-economic policies to poverty analysis (social and livelihoods impact assessments of trade liberalization, patenting of plants and herbal medicine for instance, retrenchment of rural agricultural extension civil servants) fell on deaf ears. Calls for legalisation of organized labor, even white collar workers, to enable their organized participation in discussions on privatization and retrenchment were largely ignored. Demands for a progressive tax structure in the IPRS that would generate resources in ways that would not hurt the working poor was responded to in the case of **Kenya** with one of the harshest VAT policies in recent Kenyan history in the 2000/2001 National Budget.

Moreover, since national budget-making is viewed as a strictly government-only exercise, very few civil society demands saw substantive change in the national budgets. Little attempt has been made by Governments to make the linkages between the PRS and the national budget. On the part of voluntary organizations, there seems to be few examples apart from **Uganda** and **Malawi** of a sustained campaign to follow where the money goes. In this regard, Governments, donors, and citizens must ensure the talk on poverty eradication is matched by the monetary allocations.

Has the paradigm of the Washington Consensus shifted?

Despite recent changes, the World Bank and International Monetary Fund continue to operate in disregard for international human rights law and standards.⁵ Both national governments and the Bretton Woods institutions continue to demonstrate skepticism to a rights and entitlements framework for the IPRSs and PRSs.

Calls for enshrining rights to essential services and assets such as land in **Malawi, Kenya** and **Rwanda** were not carried through the drafting process. In **Kenya**, attempts to include “The Charter for Social Integration”, a proposed bill for operationalising the right to education, health and public information under the already approved National Poverty Eradication Plan, was rejected.

The Bank has made public pronouncements on its obligations to support the framework of International Development Goals most notably in the area of “Education for All”. Between December 2000 and September 2001, the Bank issued statements on their reconsideration of education, water and health direct or indirect user fees as conditionality for loans.

Yet, even in the case of education where commitment seems strongest, this has yet to be translated into operational directives and change at country levels. Consequently, it is has fallen to voluntary agencies in Washington and selected countries to publicly keep the Bank to this commitment.⁶

Rather than a reconsideration of longstanding privatisation and liberalization policies, the development of a **Private Sector Development strategy** within the Bank and the content of the Bank/Fund approved IPRSs and PRSs clearly show that the old paradigm is alive and well.

The Fund has been quick to claim their streamlining of conditionality. While welcome, it is important to note that this is not reducing the overall package of conditionality that Governments and their citizens have to face. A number of the structural conditionality has not been eliminated, it simply moved across

⁵ The promise of the publication of the 1996 Human Rights booklet by the World Bank has failed to yield substantive change in most areas of the Bank’s work. Only perhaps in the recent HIV-AIDs strategy has there been a clear step to enshrine the rights of people within HIV/AIDs.

⁶ This was the case of the Tanzanian PRSP and the controversy around the Ghana PRGF in 2000.

the street to the World Bank. Greater coordination between the two has inevitably led to a tighter system of “**cross conditionality**”.

The increasing tendency to include criteria that must be completed prior to tranche releases “prior actions” has increased the pressure on deficit managing Governments to reduce debate that might produce alternative options and implement in a centralist manner.

Looking at trends within the bilateral and multi-lateral community most notably in the recommendations by the European Commission and the WTO/GATT international policy conditionality on regulations, the tendency towards “fewer conditionalities” becomes even more marked in their uniformity. The EC now proposes two key conditionality for countries namely; signature and satisfactory progress against IMF programmes and progress against PRSP goals and processes. It is unclear why these should be separated unless the EC does in fact see them as separate and distinct, thus reinforcing the concept of separate policy frameworks.

In this context, it is unclear at the beginning of 2002, that streamlining of IMF conditionality matters much for countries interested in pursuing macro-economic and fiscal debate of options. For instance, would there be a difference if the conditionalities were further streamlined to three; deregulate, privatise and liberalise?

What has been the experience of participation and process?

As per Bank and IMF guidelines, PRSs are intended to be country-driven, results-oriented, comprehensive, prioritized, partnership-oriented and based on a long-term perspective for poverty reduction.⁷

The Bank describes participation as “the process through which stakeholders influence and share control over priority setting, policy-making, resource allocations and access to public goods and services.” It believes participation increases transparency of decision-making, promotes governmental accountability, and thereby increases overall economic and governance efficiency.⁸ Participation is also understood to be a more meaningful, proactive, and results-oriented engagement whose key elements should include information-sharing, consultation, joint decision-making and lastly, initiation and control by stakeholders.⁹

The review reveals that robust participation in policy making depends on the political will of government to engage, the capacities of government, donors, and civil society to develop and implement an acceptable framework for participation, and the strength and vibrancy of the national civil society movement. Despite the fact that the guiding principle of the PRS is broad and meaningful participation, CSOs have had to devote immense effort to ensure civil society and the poor participated in national PRS exercises.

ActionAid’s experience in the context of participation in PRSs points to the fact that the only key element among the four listed above that was followed effectively was consultation. The remaining three were not followed with any level of consistency by national governments and WB/IMF in the seven countries under review. Civil society was not involved in **any systematic way in laying out the framework for PRSs formulation or made a part of key decision-making.**

⁷ *Introduction to Poverty Reduction Strategies and PRSs*, World Bank website, December, 2001.

⁸ *Poverty Reduction Source Book*, Volume 1, World Bank, December 2001.

⁹ *Participation in Poverty Reduction Strategies: A Synthesis of Experiences with Participatory Approaches to Policy Design, Implementation, and Monitoring*, Rosemary McGee and Andy Norton, IDS Working Paper 109.

Civil society involvement was visible at the level of thematic and/or sectoral consultations, grassroots dialogues, and meetings with visiting WB/IMF missions. However, in all cases under review, while civil society membership was welcomed at the level of thematic/sectoral working groups, the final drafting committee was considered exclusively as the domain of national governments assisted by WB/IMF appointed consultants.

In the case of **Kenya**, it is telling that the civil servants leading the IPRS process were in most cases either former World Bank employees or continued to receive salaries provided by the WB to the GoK while working on these processes. This group was dropped soon after the delivery of the IPRS. In December 2000, the Finance Minister found himself out of office after a series of public statements which alleged that the IMF and the World Bank were forcing the Government to undertake unwanted changes. This in itself throws interesting light on the debate around “country ownership”.

With the exception of **Rwanda**, all other country programs reported a lack of adequate prior notice regarding meetings and consultations. Many were informed only 2 or 3 days in advance, and in the case of **Nepal**, a 24 hour prior notice was given on one occasion. With the exception of **Rwanda**, all country programs felt such last minute notification prevented them from preparing adequately for PRS consultations; lengthy reports and documents could not be commented upon and the views of community partners could not be sought.

Since the process was not initiated or controlled by all stakeholders, the immensely important task of consensus-building and joint decision-making on the part of voluntary organisations was grossly undermined. In the case of **Vietnam** and **Nepal**, ActionAid itself took the initiative to contact the relevant ministry within the government to express a desire to be part of the PRS process. Staff in a few countries were painfully aware that the space accorded to ActionAid was in some cases due to the perception of the agency as an international NGO and a donor.

With the exception of **Kenya** and **Rwanda**, none of the remaining five country programs reported the direct involvement of associations of the poor in PRS deliberations. Hence it would seem that whereas considerable effort has been made by NGOs to facilitate the participation of marginalized groups or to put forward their concerns in PRS consultations, very little emphasis seems to have been put on ensuring that poor people represent themselves through their own organizations. Governments appear to be far more comfortable with voluntary organisations playing the traditional role of “implementers” than of them providing policy solutions and options particularly on fiscal and macro-economic targets and goals. To them, the utility of voluntary organisations lies in their outreach and ability to organize grassroots consultations on the basic needs of the working poor and excluded groups. In many ways, despite the participation route-map, the logical next step of inviting associations of the poor to negotiating tables has not yet occurred.

With the exception of **Haiti**, all country programs were only moderately satisfied with the level of information sharing *vis a vis* the PRSs and CASs. Initial attempts at outreach by the World Bank around the CAS formulation in **Kenya** recently suggests an over-reliance on international NGOs rather than utilization of PRS thematic and geographical working groups.

Information-sharing in relation to PRSCs, PRGFs and national budgets remains highly unsatisfactory. Linked to the issue of information disclosure, the PRSs have clearly re-positioned the World Bank and International Monetary Fund as honest brokers at a country level. While this is a significant change from the past, it has obscured the significant role played by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund in the process itself.

With the exception of **Rwanda** and **Vietnam**, the review found that in the other five cases national government and the World Bank were only somewhat transparent when it came to decision-making around PRSs. The case of **Kenya** indicates both IMF and World Bank to be very secretive whereas in **Malawi**, the IMF was fairly secretive in its PRS related decision-making.

This is worrying as it is the case in all seven countries that **both the IMF and the World Bank continue to have direct influence and control** over the process and content of the PRSs and related policy processes. It is our position that this influence continues to manifest in the tight qualitative and quantitative loan conditions.¹⁰ It is disappointing and a betrayal of the vision of the PRS that the first generation of PRSs, PRGFs and PRSCs do not reflect a departure from their elder siblings, the PFPs, ESAF and Adjustment loans.

Tackling this reality takes us beyond the topical debate of “**conditionality versus country ownership**”. That the largely discredited adjustment instruments and targets have reappeared in the context of PRSs opens the PRS to the charge of new form, same substance and we might add, same impact on the working poor and excluded.

There is a startling lack of a framework within which democratic, popular and public debate can be facilitated around which policy options could be pursued, who will bear the costs of this burden, for how long and with what short and long-term benefits. The legacy of closed discussions between the IMF and Ministry of Finance staff, which was so pronounced in the Policy Framework Papers, continues to have major impact on the PRS, PRGF and PRSC phase.

From the submissions to the PRS review it is clear that important constituencies are being excluded through the consultation design or their own lack of capacity. This as led to a) cynicism that PRS are SAPs by other parallel means b) space for Government officials to hide behind the shadow IFIs when challenged c) a disconnect between realisable resources and goals to be addressed and d) the Fund and Bank to retreat back into past prescriptions without subordinating them to the new poverty and growth goals.

In this sense, the derogatory use of the term of “wish lists” usually heard by our staff and partners by budget specialists is a double-edged critique. While challenging the lack of prioritisation within available and anticipated resources, it also reflects the inability of budget specialists to generate informed debate.

All cases interestingly, with the exception of **Haiti**, highlight the poor institutional capacity on the part of government, donors, and voluntary organizations. Capacity should be seen in terms of knowledge, expertise and skills, prior experience, outreach, and relationships. For instance, ActionAid **Nepal** reported that “*not all NGOs in and outside of Kathmandu are at the same stage of clarity and analytical ability*” and that there exists a “*lack of clarity in the Government, perhaps, on the ways in which they could link up with development organizations that have closer ties with rural communities*”.¹¹

The lack of capacity was further compounded by the fact that adequate time was seldom given to voluntary organisations to prepare and consult with their constituencies on draft documents, or to develop their own perspectives.

¹⁰In the case of the former are the prescriptions of cutting budget deficits, tariff reduction, privatization of public assets, promotion of export agriculture, nature of tax reform and in the latter are the plethora of fiscal targets (deficits, inflation, international reserves, domestic financing and government revenue).

¹¹ Questionnaire: ActionAid Nepal

Has country ownership emerged?

The PRSs have their origins in the lending frameworks of the World Bank and IMF, having been developed as an alternative to the Policy Framework Papers (PFPs). They were externally developed and, in most cases, have been driven by the promise of external resources. Although there is little disagreement with the concept of a locally generated poverty reduction strategy and plan, there is scant evidence to suggest PRSs have generated any substantive in-country ownership except perhaps among the bureaucracies that implement them.

Many voluntary organisations continue to view the process as conditional for successful loan negotiation and yet another sign of donor dependence. Policy analysts and activists in **Vietnam, Rwanda, Kenya, Malawi** and **Nepal** believed the PRS process had taken an inordinate amount of their effort and time. They were of the opinion that even more time would have to be devoted to the process to ensure worthy participation of the poor. Vietnam believed *“the process should be simplified to make it more relevant to the actual condition and more importantly to fit better the capacity of local staff and people. The process must be owned by the people who are affected most by the PRS itself.”*¹²

Besides WB/IMF officials and consultants, government bureaucrats connected with the PRS process appear to be the only well-informed actors in this process.¹³ Civil society and the poor are not engaged at the level where they can claim ownership. While there may be a semblance of government-ownership of PRSs, one cannot presently claim country-ownership for the process itself. This is particularly true in **Rwanda, Nepal** and **Vietnam** where the presence of autonomously organized, resourced and informed citizens groups is limited.

The concept of ownership is further skewed by the fact that nationally determined priorities for funding are subject to scrutiny and change at the hands of Joint Staff Assessments of the WB/IMF before these are put before their respective Boards for yet another round of assessing whether a certain “national PRS” may be funded as demanded. This hierarchy of approval pulls off the final disguise from the rhetoric of “country ownership” and reveals the PRS for what it is, yet another conditionality.

For further elaboration of this contribution to the review of World Bank and International Monetary Fund Poverty Reduction strategies please contact:

Irungu Houghton
US Programme Coordinator,
ActionAid USA,
1112 16th Street NW, Suite 610,
Washington DC, 20036
Email: irunguh@actionaidusa.org
Tel: 1-202-8351240 Fax: 1-202-835-1244

¹² Questionnaire: ActionAid Vietnam.

¹³ This is particularly significant given the shuffling of key Ministry of Finance staff and the Ministers over the last two months in Kenya and Malawi. High turnover of critical staff and politicians in the context of PRSs makes the need for broadened ownership more apparent.