



# Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and Water: Failing the poor?<sup>1</sup>

## DISCUSSION PAPER

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In September 1999, the IMF and World Bank agreed to increase the amount of debt relief on offer to eligible low-income countries through the Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) initiative. This was conditional on countries developing a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). Forty-one countries were included in the initiative, 32 of them in sub-Saharan Africa.



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<sup>1</sup> This paper draws on preliminary research into full PRSPs in five African countries: Malawi, Zambia, Uganda, Kenya and Madagascar. The research was done in collaboration with the Overseas Development Institute-ODI, UK, WaterAid programmes in these countries, and local NGOs Maji na Ufanisi, Kenya and Reseau Eau, Madagascar, with support from the UK Department for International Development. Opinions expressed in this paper do not necessarily reflect the views of either ODI or DFID.

**When poor people are directly asked about poverty, they identify the lack of access to water as one of the key causes of poverty**

Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers are essentially about prioritising budget allocations in order to achieve poverty reduction objectives. As such, the development of PRSPs presents an important opportunity for those working for water supply and sanitation (WSS) improvements, which historically are poorly prioritised and inadequately funded by governments. The PRSP must be based on an analysis of the multiple causes of poverty and target integrated

strategies on addressing these causes. These strategies include social sector programmes, actions to promote growth and capacity building, rural development, local infrastructure, increasing participation and good governance.

Involvement in the PRSP presents challenges to the water supply and sanitation sector, not least because it requires clear and recognised links between WSS interventions and poverty reduction. It is not enough to show that

The principles that guide PRSPs are:

- ▶ **Country-driven:** with governments leading the process and broad-based participation in the adoption and monitoring of the resulting strategy;
- ▶ **Results-oriented:** identifying desired outcomes and planning the way towards them;
- ▶ **Comprehensive:** taking account of the multi-dimensional nature of poverty;
- ▶ **Long-term in approach:** recognising the depth and complexity of some of the changes needed;
- ▶ **Based on partnership:** between governments and other actors in civil society, the private sector and the donor community.

(IDS, 2000)

the poor often suffer from lack of access to water and sanitation. It is more important to argue how and what improvements in access directly reduce poverty. Finally, PRSPs will determine outcome indicators, monitored through participatory processes. This would require specific changes not only to indicators that the sector monitors, but would also require innovations in the sector's ways of monitoring.

## Potential funding for water and sanitation

The PRSPs are matched by a national-level medium term expenditure framework (MTEF), where poverty reduction priorities are clearly earmarked. Initially only accounting for debt relief and national revenue, in future MTEFs will seek to include donor assistance. Gradually, the MTEFs and PRSPs could be the basis for all donor assistance, which would be non-specified to any programme. For a sector that relies so heavily on external donor assistance (in many countries in Africa, anywhere from 50-90% of all spending on water and sanitation comes from donors), clearly the MTEF presents a challenge as well as an opportunity.

PRSPs could help to unlock government and other resources for water supply and sanitation. But this would require better data on the sector as well

WaterAid's participatory impact assessment, *Looking Back*, cites the following connections between water projects and different aspects of poverty:

- ▶ Improvements in livelihoods and productive time
- ▶ Minimising the costs of healthcare due to significant reduction in diarrhoea and other water-related diseases
- ▶ Reduction in infant and maternal mortality and morbidity
- ▶ Improved mental health
- ▶ Increased school attendance, especially for girls
- ▶ Improvements in quality of family life
- ▶ Increased participation in social/community activities and observance of religious obligations
- ▶ Enhanced self-esteem of individuals and communities

(WaterAid, 2001)

as information on the investments needed for expenditure projections. (In many countries, the investment gap in water and sanitation is unknown and unknowable due to poor data.) In future there is potential for more resources but with this comes the need for tighter and transparent monitoring of disbursements, spending, and their outcomes and impact. The sector faces the challenge of cleaning up its act and rooting out endemic corruption.

Moreover, through the MTEF, allocations for poverty reduction could be stabilised, with spending agencies confident of their ability to plan to a known resource package and assured that these resources will be available to carry out those plans. Overall, the PRSP has the potential to make government planning and budgeting more transparent and implementation and disbursements easier to monitor.

## Water and poverty

When poor people are directly asked about poverty, in the majority of cases they identify the lack of access to water as one of the key causes of poverty and improving access to water as one of the top priorities in reducing poverty. However decades of developments in water infrastructure involving billions of dollars have not only largely excluded the poor from benefiting from these investments but have exacerbated their lack of access to this precious resource. Hence the catchphrase at a water conference in Delhi, marking the end of the UN International Drinking Water Decade in 1990 of "*Some for all, not more for some*". At the UN Millennium Summit, sustainable access to safe water was included in the Millennium Development Goals as contributing to achieving poverty reduction.

The relationship between water and poverty is multi-dimensional. Water is a basic necessity for survival. Poor quality water and its handling have debilitating and sometimes fatal consequences, usually for the poor. Water is a productive asset, which is essential to many livelihood activities of the poor. Access to adequate quantities of it, the costs of access, and the quality of the water itself can all directly enhance or deter the poor's capability to work themselves out of poverty. Poor management of water resources affects the poor directly: in the extreme, floods, drought and pollution destroy livelihoods and lives, while mismanagement of the various demands on water resources often means that the poorest sections of communities are unable to access it. Poor people's access to water is dependent on a whole range of political, environmental, social and economic equations, often beyond their control.

All of the above tells us three things. Poor people's water needs have to be addressed comprehensively in any strategy that aims for poverty reduction. Of the various water needs of the

poor, gaining access to safe drinking water and sanitation has to remain a top priority. The approaches, action plans and allocations arising out of the poverty reduction strategies have to be clearly targeted at the poor. This requires effective participation by the WSS sector in the processes of developing, implementing, monitoring and reviewing the PRSP.

## Participation in PRSP processes

The introduction of the PRSPs in 1999 promised to create concrete opportunities for national and local civil society groups to represent the interests of their constituencies at the highest level of national policy making. Never before has the role of civil society in policy making been formally legitimised in this way, nor has it been so high profile. However in reality the participation processes in PRSPs have not lived up to the optimistic rhetoric. A recent report from consultant SGTs and Associates for the UK Department for International Development (DFID) identified that: 'In the majority of countries, participation by civil society in the PRS process has, as yet, been limited and superficial'. Even where space was provided for civil society groups to voice their opinions, these did not have an impact on resulting policies.

In the water supply and sanitation sector, civil society involvement was particularly limited. When it did happen it was uncoordinated with other civil society action on PRSPs and was active only towards the end of the process.

Unfortunately, even in Malawi and Zambia, where considerable effort was made by governments to undertake wide-ranging consultations among stakeholders in many sectors, the water sector was an exception to the rule.

### Malawi

In Malawi, NGOs and other civil society groups, all with considerable direct experience of water supply and sanitation activities at the community level, were not included in defining sector priorities. Information from central government ministries responsible for the sector was not forthcoming, nor was it sought by government from water and sanitation sector non-state stakeholders. Civil society groups in the sector did not enjoy close links with their counterparts in other sectors, so even when these groups were active in the PRSP development process, no information filtered through to the sector.

There was also a general lack of co-ordination or cohesion between implementing organisations within the sector and between them and government agencies. This led to fragmented and inconsistent attention to policy priorities. In the opinion of some, it is unlikely that the various



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Ten-year-old Robert Chusale drinks water in Mzalule village, Malawi

stakeholders in the water sector in Malawi would regard the priorities laid out in the PRSP as an agreed plan that they could jointly follow or contribute towards.

### Zambia

The experience of participation in Zambia was only slightly better, mainly because of the existence of an informal WSS multi-stakeholder network formed

#### Types of participation in PRS processes

Participating in the consultation process for the PRSP can involve a variety of actions, depending on the capacity of the organisation, including:

- ▶ membership in sector working groups or technical teams to deliberate and draft text for PRSP
- ▶ independently contributing background papers, information and analysis to the drafting committee, especially from perspectives of poor people
- ▶ feeding back or commenting on consultation documents and drafts
- ▶ running workshops to provide information on PRSP and/or solicit information
- ▶ mobilising other organisations to contribute to, or comment on drafts
- ▶ co-ordinating and facilitating the response from sectoral networks to drafts of the PRS
- ▶ disseminating information on contacts and updates on the PRS process – being an information hub for others
- ▶ attending national and zonal meetings and workshops, which bring together government officials and civil society, to advocate particular issues

by those who contributed towards the sector reform consultation processes in the past year. But the participation of this informal network was initially hampered by the absence of any attention to water issues during the early stages of PRSP development. Water was designated as a cross-cutting issue, so no working group was set up with the task of leading the deliberation and drafting water priorities.

Within a few months of the finalisation of the full draft of the PRSP the drafting committee found itself with a gaping hole, which it quickly tried to patch up resulting in a weak water chapter. At the final public consultation to review the draft, members of the informal network successfully demanded a redraft of the chapter and extended the consultation period. However, the time-frame for the whole redrafting process was limited to a matter of weeks (compared to other chapters which took months), so there was no opportunity to debate the specific interventions set in place.

### Kenya

In Kenya the PRSP process brought about intensive activities in the districts and stakeholder dialogue took place in various meetings and workshops, which involved NGOs and other civil society organisations. Civil society organisations made inputs during the planning and priority setting stages of the PRSP. Special groups advocated for the inclusion of project activities that would assist in the well being of vulnerable groups. The initial focus was the development of inter-sectoral objectives and implementation methods that integrated the interests of various groups. However this could not be done in the water supply and sanitation sector, as civil society organisations had not been working in close collaboration with each other in a systematic way.

### Uganda

Where there was strong and healthy collaboration among sector stakeholders, opportunities for stakeholder involvement in the PRSP process were taken up. For example, in Uganda, water supply and sanitation civil society groups initially were not involved in the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) development and review stages. At the final stages of the PEAP review a WSS civil society network, Uganda Water and Sanitation Network (UWASNET) was formed to coordinate the activities of NGOs. Currently, 172 NGOs have registered with the network. UWASNET then became instrumental in bringing a civil society and community perspective to the WSS priorities during the final review. UWASNET has since become a member of the Water Sector Working Group which prepares the Medium Term Budget Framework papers, reviews quarterly progress reports and co-ordinates the reporting to government and donors, including reports to the Poverty Action fund and PRSP teams. (Cong and Arebahona, 2002)

### Madagascar

Where there is no tradition of participatory processes, little rapport exists between government and civil society. This hampers civil society involvement in the PRSP development process. In Madagascar, the government went to considerable effort to involve civil society in the PRSP consultation exercises, but only included representatives from the provincial level. The Government chose the organisations it would consult with, but these were not representative of the variety and experience available in civil society. No civil society organisations in the water sector were included in the consultation process, despite the existence of the network, Reseau Eau.

The research has found that where water sector multi-stakeholder alliances or civil society networks were in place, they were generally able to ensure the participation of civil society in the consultation processes and, to some extent, could influence the final PRSP documents. In countries where actors in the sector were more fragmented or had no working relationships, it was difficult for stakeholders to comment coherently and consistently on the water supply and sanitation components of the PRSP. The challenge of linking up and organising remain crucial issues for the WSS sector.

On the other hand, the ability of these networks to ensure their members' involvement depended on the willingness and capacity of governments to involve civil society in policy-making, priority-setting and planning. Here, Uganda leads by example. Given the tight timeframes for development of the full PRSP that all governments worked under, this willingness and capacity were severely stretched. So where governments have tended to view the participation of non-state stakeholders in the PRSP



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**Captain Siamajele puts his hands in the cracks of the dried up riverbed in Kademaunga village, Zambia. His wife spends eight hours a day collecting water. "If we had water we could make gardens and grow more crops. We could form a village cooperative to sell the crops and make money."**

development as adequate, stakeholders have viewed opportunities for participation as generally inadequate and poor.<sup>2</sup> Relationships between government agencies (at central and local levels) and civil society groups active in the water sector need to be strengthened to improve co-ordination and consultation throughout the PRS processes. Co-ordination among different water and sanitation sector actors enables those working closely with local communities to bring their vast experience, and the voices of the communities themselves, to the attention of policy makers and implementers in the country.

The quality of civil society participation in PRSP processes also requires attention. Where groups are part of broader poverty networks with some analytical strength the quality of their interventions is enhanced because of the access to better quality and more timely information and the shared analysis of others. It is not surprising that civil society groups were involved from the start of the process in those countries that had the longest established networks, often dating from the debt relief campaigns.

For example in Zambia, the Civil Society for Poverty Reduction (CSPR) that became a strong partner to the government in developing the PRSP, arose from the same organisations active in the debt campaign. The same holds true in Uganda, where the Uganda Debt Network became the focus for civil society co-ordination during the PEAP review. Importantly, these groups had developed a shared analysis of poverty and the interventions needed to reduce it at both macro and micro levels.

A challenge exists for civil society groups in the water sector to build their capacities to link their own issues to the broader poverty issues and have an understanding of macro-economic issues that impact on the sector and on poverty reduction. Linking up with existing broader poverty networks can only enhance the capacity of civil society groups in the water supply and sanitation sector.

## Water and sanitation in PRSPs

At a recent regional workshop on PRSPs and water, a key observation made was that in most African countries the water supply and sanitation sector was not well positioned to participate in the PRSP process. Unsurprisingly, this resulted in low prioritisation of WSS in PRSPs. The only exception to this is Uganda, whose wider civil society successfully lobbied government to prioritise those issues that poor people themselves, through the participatory poverty assessment (PPA) highlighted.

The water components of the PRSPs are treated in a number of ways:



- ▶ As strategies with the aim of increasing the ability of the poor to raise their incomes (for example Uganda, Zambia, focusing on irrigation)
- ▶ Strategies for directly improving the quality of life of the poor (for example Uganda, Kenya, Madagascar, focusing on water supply and sanitation),
- ▶ As strategies to help build an enabling environment for economic growth (Malawi).

In Uganda, Kenya and Zambia, lack of access to WSS is highlighted as a key issue and priority. Links between WSS, improvements in food security, other livelihood activities and employment, productivity, energy and the environment are recognised. However, overwhelmingly, the strategies pursued in the PRSPs emphasise building standard physical infrastructure (boreholes for rural water supply, dams and weirs for irrigation purposes) and privatisation of water services in urban areas. In spite of the rhetoric, the bottom line indicator for water is the number of physical water points constructed during the period covered by the PRSP. This construction priority is not complemented by similar attention to the creation of social organisations, such as user groups, to help ensure the sustainable operation and management of the built facilities, nor of the capacity building of government and other stakeholders to develop these user associations. And so there is a fundamental disconnection between acknowledgement of the role of water in poverty reduction and the water strategies considered to maximise poverty reduction.

There is common emphasis on the requirement to recover costs on the infrastructure as well as on

- 2 From forthcoming workshop proceedings of the Water and Sanitation in Poverty Reduction Strategies Regional Workshop, Nairobi, 17-19 June 2002. The view here is taken from responses to a questionnaire on multi-stakeholder participation in PRSPs administered to participants at the workshop, which included representatives from governments, civil society groups, external support agencies from 12 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.

## How can water and sanitation sector stakeholders' influence in PRSPs be improved?

- ▶ **Information sharing** – a basic requirement for participation and increased transparency. Key issues are *when* information is given and how accessible that information is
- ▶ **Focus** – scrutinise existing strategies to review pro-poor measures and prioritise a few key issues on which to advocate
- ▶ **Building effective coalitions/alliances** – think as widely as possible and consider the full range of civil society representatives which could bring additional community voices into the group as well as stronger analytical capacity
- ▶ **Consultation** – the challenge for civil society is to enter the discussions not just with criticisms, but with proposals too. Developing proposals requires consultation within civil society, coupled with targeted research, analysis if necessary and advocacy
- ▶ **Briefings** – short, clear and concise briefings with a few recommendations are an important tool in influencing government officials, politicians, other actors and the media
- ▶ **Key messages** – simplify complex messages. They should be framed in a compelling way, to be convincing, get the widest possible public support and win over policy makers
- ▶ **Meetings** – as a lobbying activity, prepare well for meetings, think through persuasive arguments, be well briefed and aim high
- ▶ **Media** – use both the print and radio media as an important ally in achieving your aims

the operation of water services, but no consideration of the possible need to subsidise those who may be unable to contribute to capital or operating costs. None of the PRSPs make the assessment of poverty in the populations to be served a prerequisite of any infrastructure development. Instead, there seems to be an underlying assumption that the infrastructure (whether domestic water points or irrigation dams and canals) will automatically be open and accessible to the poorest and equally used by them along with their not so poor and non-poor neighbours. Experience during the UN Drinking Water Decade, when WSS strategy was predominantly one of infrastructure building, demonstrates that this is not so. Yet none of the PRSPs learnt from this lesson.

The bulk of resources allocated to infrastructure development will go to the construction of irrigation dams and weirs because this is considered to have a straightforward and clear impact on raising poor people's income from agricultural production. This is a one-dimensional view of poverty. Despite recognition of the role that the lack of water supply and sanitation plays in the lives of poor people, especially women and children, WSS is effectively de-prioritised even within the water priorities of the PRSPs, not to mention, in relation to other PRSP priorities. Even in Uganda, where water supply and sanitation were prioritised in PEAP II (2000), the Directorate for Water and Development bewails the lack of emphasis on water supply and sanitation in

the Medium Term Expenditure and Budget Framework 2001-2005 due to the failure to recognise the direct effect that water provision has on poverty.

Equally, apart from general intentions to manage water resources in an integrated manner, there are no specific strategies to assist the poor in areas where the water resources are already degraded or under threat, or strategies to protect the water environment from degradation. As pointed out in the Kenya research, there is no specific geographical targeting, in spite of the clear differences of hydro-geological and poverty situations within the different regions and districts of the country.

There are also no strategies promoting and addressing sanitation and hygiene needs included in the PRSPs, apart from the building of sanitation facilities in institutions such as schools, health centres and in tourist areas.

The uniformity of these strategies across different countries is striking. More revealing, all the PRSPs investigated identify private sector management and operation of urban water supply provision as a strategy for poverty reduction. (In the Zambia PRSP, urban water supply is zero-costed.) This is regardless of whether there are enough viable and capable local private sector operators in these countries that can manage and operate water services in the cities and towns. Where contracting international private operators is a distinct possibility, the strategy to privatise does not consider whether the national economy and poor water consumers could afford the associated costs.

The share of national income commanded by water priorities, especially of water and sanitation generally has been limited to between 1% to 2% in developing countries, and in the countries investigated it has been declining over the years (Annamraju, et al, 2001). Despite the potential to increase resources to the sector, the PRSPs do not alter the prevailing trend. The key exception is Uganda, where allocations to WSS (prioritised within the PRSP) tripled from Shilling 44.9 billion in 1997/98 to Shilling 133.9 billion in 2000/01. The Government's share in this allocation rose five-fold, from 0.5% in 1997-98 to 2.4% in 2000/01 (Cong and Arebahona, 2002).

In addition, funds earmarked for water priorities through the PRSPs do not necessarily target the poor. For example, in Kenya, the majority of the country's poor live in rural areas. However, low-cost water supply and sanitation in rural areas will only receive funds equivalent to 9% of the amount earmarked for projects in urban areas, that will not necessarily benefit the urban poor and slum communities.

Without clear data on the investment requirements for WSS, it is difficult to determine whether these allocations are adequate to meet the medium-term targets under the period covered by the PRSP.

## Concluding observations

Pending further investigation, we suggest the following observations to explain the treatment of water in the five PRSPs investigated:

There is little accurate information on the state of water resources, size of demand by different users of water, sources of supply and providers held in the five countries. Most systems of monitoring data (especially water resource data) have collapsed due to inadequate and dwindling government investments in the past. Additionally, the indicators used in standard statistical surveys and routine administrative records used by governments do not adequately capture information. Pending improvements in data (perhaps through being prioritised under PRSPs), the strategies that governments would pursue for purposes of poverty reduction will be limited to untargeted infrastructure building.

Little, if any, poverty analysis is being conducted in the water sector, covering water supply and sanitation, water for food and production, and ecosystems' health. There is no analysis of the impact that water-related environmental disasters resulting from climate changes have on the poor. Weaknesses in poverty analysis in the sector prevent stakeholders from successfully advocating it as a priority in poverty reduction. Additionally, failure to understand the multi-faceted relationship between the lack of access to water and poverty hinders acceptance of non-physical infrastructure interventions as essential components of a water strategy for poverty reduction. In fact, in spite of lessons from the past about the absolute necessity of approaches such as building community capacity to sustain and manage their water supply, none of the PRSPs investigated included these as strategies for poverty reduction. No resources are allocated to building this capacity and it is not included among the actions and targets to be monitored.

In all the countries investigated, the water sector is going through major reform – redefining the roles of and relationships between institutions, clarifying or strengthening the legislative framework, developing and mainstreaming new guidelines and approaches. To a large extent, there is a discontinuity between this reform process and its purposes (efficiency and effectiveness), and the purposes and approaches articulated by the sector for the poverty reduction strategy process. This may arise from the lack of a clear poverty reduction focus to the elements of sector reform. The poverty reducing potential of the approaches now being introduced as part of wider sector reform needs to be identified and maximised.

The PRSP is an ongoing process of development, implementation, monitoring and review – presenting continuous opportunities for improving strategies and influencing their focus. This provides good reason for sector stakeholders to continue to work together and to build common analyses of strengths and weaknesses of established approaches as well as innovation. To achieve this, sector stakeholders need to overcome certain barriers.

One of these barriers is the narrow service provider orientation of many sector stakeholders. Maximising the potential of the sector's contribution to poverty reduction requires for the sector's actors to build their capacity to understand and constantly monitor how their services impact on the poor, and what factors affect this impact.

At the recent Africa regional workshop on PRSPs and water, a group of participants from ministries of finance and economic planning pointed out that the sector actors did not have strong links with the central ministries and local government authorities responsible for planning and priority setting. The fragmentation and weakness in engaging with central planning systems may be the result of the historic financing structure of the sector. Most water interventions are funded by donors and most service providers, including central government line ministries, are naturally and of necessity orientated towards negotiations with and reporting on donor funded programmes.

Perhaps part of the reason why governments have been able to get away with allocating a tiny proportion of national income to water needs is because external support agencies fill in a big part of the financing gap. (For example, it is estimated that 90% of all rural water and sanitation activities in Kenya are undertaken by NGOs, with funding from external support agencies.) This donor orientation has both positives and negatives. And it would be interesting to see how vigorously all the actors in the sector will resist the change to a sector wide approach in the water sector, which the PRSP, for all its weaknesses, is heralding.

Country	Fund allocation
Kenya	3.04% allocated to WSS, or 18% of funds for Physical Infrastructure
Madagascar	No clear allocations yet
Malawi	13% of Pillar 1 funds, part of the 43% of Rural Infrastructure funds
Zambia	3.5% of PRSP budget
Uganda	US\$33 million per annum

## The way forward

It is apparent that for water and sanitation and other water priorities to be adequately included within PRSPs, the subsectors within the water sector (water and sanitation, irrigation and dams, ecosystems) need to form links and alliances with each other to strengthen advocacy for water priorities. Establishing these links could also be focused on developing a more integrated analysis of the poverty impacts of lack of access to water, and elaborating stronger, more integrated strategies for water to maximise its poverty reducing impact.

Sector stakeholders need to invest in more poverty analysis of interventions in the water sector, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the links between water and poverty. For example, a poverty and social impact assessment of particular chosen interventions, such as the privatisation of water services in urban water supply, or a borehole drilling programme, is required, as well as more and better understanding of the coping strategies of the poor in order to ascertain how best to address their water needs. Building and expanding links with research centres and other sectors focusing on

other causes of poverty, especially macro-economic causes, is necessary in building the poverty analysis of water interventions.

Capacity building of sector stakeholders is also required to enable effective coalition-building within and beyond the sector, to undertake research and analysis and to develop skills in advocacy in relation to the PRS processes. Resourcing this capacity building is key to making it happen.

As the PRSP process moves toward implementation, sector stakeholders need to consider how they can assist in developing the particular indicators for monitoring PRSP strategies in water. Attention also needs to be paid to monitoring resource allocation, disbursements, and actual spend for water priorities. These activities will help in understanding the investment needs and costs of the sector more accurately, and with better information, enable improved advocacy for water priorities within PRSPs.

Everyone needs water and sanitation to survive and to lead productive lives, but poor women and men do not enjoy these basic necessities. We are failing the poor by not prioritising these basic needs in PRSPs.

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## WaterAid – water for life

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