ALPS in Action:
A Review of the Shift in ActionAid towards a new Accountability, Learning and Planning System

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July 2004

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Acknowledgements

This review was only possible through the time and effort invested by a large group of people in organising meetings, in submitting to my relentless questions, in responding to my requests for ever more documentation, and in transporting me around Kenya and India. Schedules kept changing with little or no notice, and I am grateful for all those who, at the last minute, made time available in person or on the phone (see Annex 2 for a full list of people and groups met).

In particular, I would like to thank Antonella Mancini for her kind, open and flexible facilitation of the ALPS review process. Ethlet Chiwaka and Renee Kantelberg never let an email slip by without prompt response. I would also like to thank the Taking Stock II Review team – David Cohen, Kamla Basin, Simon Matsvai and Alex Jacobs – for absorbing me as a team member despite my separate assignment and 'here-again, gone-again' presence. I learnt and laughed much from our interactions.

I hope the ideas offered in the review will give all those in ActionAid that I met and their colleagues the energy to continue down the ALPS path. I am convinced it has much to offer ActionAid in sharpening the quality of the work it undertakes and supports.

> "If we think about the vast majority of human problems, both on a personal and on a worldwide scale, it seems that they stem from an inability to feel sincerely involved with others, and to put ourselves in their place. Violence is inconceivable if everyone is genuinely concerned with the happiness of others."
>
> *Mathieu Ricard - cellular geneticist turned Tibetan monk and French translator for the Dalai Lama*

Executive Summary

From March to June 2004, a review was undertaken of ActionAid International's Accountability, Learning and Planning System (ALPS). The review had three aims:

1. Assess how and in what way ALPS has supported the agency in operationalising *Fighting Poverty Together* (FPT) through its core requirements and seven key principles.

2. Identify key achievements, lessons and gaps in the system.

3. Provide a set of practicable recommendations for changes and improvement.

Short visits were undertaken to five countries (Kenya, Italy, Brazil, India and the United Kingdom), additional telephone interviews were undertaken and dozens of documents were read. My appreciation is great for the time and frankness with which views, concerns and achievements were shared by all I met, without exception.

ALPS is, in many ways and parts of the ActionAid complexity, is alive and kicking. It was introduced, in parts, mainly in 2000 and 2001 in almost all AA countries. Ways of dealing with 'balanced multiple accountabilities' have received particular attention, and within that financial in particular. Less clear and less attention is given to the strategic and impact accountability. Across the board, the need for planning with the people who are to live with the changes is well understood and community-level plans are created with considerable investment made by ActionAid to bring together diverse voices through inclusive methodologies. There is ongoing learning, at least at operational level, and in some places at the strategic level – and certainly no lack of change. Many efforts are invested to continually question the core directions through PRRPs, partner meetings, thematic assessments and function assessments, performance appraisals. ALPS-related processes are themselves also subject to reviews and improvements in some countries and at certain levels. This global ALPS review is one obvious example.

However, ALPS is not yet being applied systemically or systematically within each country or across the countries, themes and functions. There are some critical gaps in the ALPS logic and in its implementation.

Clarifying ALPS in ActionAid

ALPS is relatively new so some confusion, fuzzy areas and gaps are understandable, particularly given that AA's identity and structures have changed considerably in recent years.

1. *Promote ALPS as a stool with three equally important legs:* 'core requirements' as the minimum procedures, 'principles' as minimum quality standards, and 'attitudes and behaviours' as core success factors. Currently core requirements are still the most obvious 'face' of ALPS.

2. *Identify and clarify recurring contradictions and ambiguities.* Notable among these is resolving the tensions between the CP and global level about whether or not Annual Reports are needed for the global level and whether or not all CPS need to deliver core information to help assess progress against global goals and objectives. Another ambiguity is how CSPs and 3-year rolling plans relate to each other. Finally, it requires some terminology clarification, notably how M&E relates to ALPS.

3. *Critically assess the core requirements.* Given that the core requirements were largely based on a 'CP and DA/DI logic' of ActionAid and that internationalisation will herald more rather than less diversity, the currently non-negotiable core requirements need some scrutiny.

4. *The original set of principles requires some reassessing.* It is not clear what the 'true' set of principles is. What would a revised list of principles look like, given AA's four years of experience with FPT, RBA and ALPS?

5. *Clarify the location of ALPS in the management structure* to help embed it as a cross-cutting responsibility. It will be critical to ensure an integrated ALPS function exists at international level that integrates the intentions of the Shared Learning initiative alongside the current A, L, and P functions.

Supporting the Ongoing Uptake of ALPS

Current levels of support for ALPS are largely inadequate. While the spirit of ALPS calls on people's creativity, not everyone should have to reinvent the wheel and much hesitation and rushed attempts could be avoided by more time to think before acting.

6. *Fill the gaps!* See Section 6 for details on the key gaps (issues and contextual factors, governance and functions). Do not only fill the gaps related to core requirements but also for the principles and attitudes and behaviours.

7. *Identify the most appropriate types of support for ongoing implementation.* Different types of opportunities are needed for staff to reflect on implications, dilemmas and concerns they might have. What are the priorities for support per region, per function (national and international), and per country that can allow ALPS to thrive?

8. *Invest where your priorities lie.* Appropriate levels of investment commensurate with what are presumed to be equally important principles are critical to strengthen the current weak areas of RBA, gender equity, facilitation skills, experiential learning and participatory M&E.

9. *Align the content and quality of capacity-building events with ALPS.* If training events are considered an important means, then the content and quality of training events on related skills such as RBA, facilitation skills, MIS, etc, should align with ALPS and not be left up to the methodological preference of hired consultants or in-house staff.

Improving the Quality of ALPS

Currently the core requirements do not define what constitutes good quality accountability or learning. Although they describe the desired content of planning processes, they do not detail the quality of these processes.

10. *Explore the potential of ALPS health checks to guide the analysis of implementation quality and identify mechanisms for undertaking these or some other type of quality audit.* Responsibility for this function should be clearly allocated, as is that of financial accountability.

11. *Launch focused learning efforts to address existing ALPS dilemmas.* Many AA staff members struggle with ALPS in practice. Establishing one (or more) active learning groups across the CPs that identify critical gaps in understanding, and then collect and

share 'good practices', should not be difficult. AA has precedents for this type of learning process.

12. *Streamline focused reports.* Obligatory core reports vary enormously in quality and quantity. Much clarity would be gained by providing clearer guidance on simple reporting options, thus enhancing the likelihood of quality uptake of ALPS.

13. *Seek innovations and <u>share</u> them continually.* Continued conscious efforts are needed to identify gaps at all levels of the AA system, pursue innovations, document and share the findings. Do not seek 'best practices' – good ones will do just fine.

14. *Validate and invest in all principles as <u>equally</u> important.* It appears that in ALPS, the principles are not all equally weighted. Much more energy has been invested in, for example, the accountability and transparency principles than in those relating to power/gender analysis and devolved decision-making.

Setting Clear ALPS Agendas

While the Impact Assessment Unit in UK has its own strategy and ALPS goals, it has only limited reach in AA. More efforts are needed to set organisation-wide ALPS targets, which could increase the likelihood of ALPS embedding itself more solidly and creatively in AA.

15. *Set A, L, and P goals.* CPs, functions and themes can review the quality of their ALPS work and, where quality is lagging, set themselves annual or biannual learning, accountability and/or planning goals.

16. *Improve tracking of ALPS implementation and innovations.* At the moment, it is not possible to know who has complied with which part of their core requirements and with which quality. Knowing this can help pinpoint follow-up support.

17. *Provide open access to strategies and reviews.* With little effort, documents related to the core requirements, for example, can be posted to the web, which would be in line with AA's 'Right to Information' Policy and could help to track the implementation of recommendations. Documents related to ALPS innovations could serve as inspiration.

Specific A, L, and P Recommendations

18. *Clarify what the 'A' of accountability means* for Northern CPs, international functions, national and international policy work, and the regional level, given that accountability to marginalized citizens is a critical feature of ALPS yet hard to envisage implementing beyond the DA/DI level.

19. *Clarify what learning means in AA.* Currently, it is used to cover any kind of reflection and change. More conscious efforts are needed to look critically at the idea of 'lessons' and what quality/content lessons should have if they are going to help shape strategic rethinking.

20. *Consider the question 'who is doing the learning'* and assess whether reflective processes include those who could benefit most from learning.

21. *Invest in strategic planning.* Planning abounds in AA but not all of it is strategic. What (non-negotiable) quality criteria can be used to structure planning that ensures it is strategic?

1   About the Review and its Process

1.1   Purpose

The introduction of ActionAid's strategy *Fighting Poverty Together (1999-2005)* (FPT) demanded organisational change to align internal processes and systems with organisational goals. A key change was the introduction in September 2000 of ActionAid's Accountability Learning and Planning System (ALPS)[1]. ALPS replaced the 'Annual Planning and Reporting System' (APRS), which had been in operation since 1988 and emphasized standardised planning and reporting. APRS was complemented, at that time, by the financial reporting system and the sponsorship system.

This review is the first close look at ALPS since its introduction. Now that FTP is nearing the end of its current phase and with internationalization heralding large-scale changes, questions need to be asked to ensure that ALPS supports and does not hinder the development processes for which AA International stands.

The review has three main aims:

1. Assess how and in what way ALPS has supported the agency in operationalising *Fighting poverty together* through its core requirements and seven key principles (see Section 2).
2. Identify key achievements, lessons and gaps in the system.
3. Provide a set of practicable recommendations for changes and improvement.

1.2   Review Methodology and its Limitations

Three core and standard elements formed the basis of this ALPS review:

- *Short focused visits to five country programmes* (Kenya, India, Brazil, Italy and United Kingdom) with targeted interviews with key staff, some partners and local people working with ActionAid (see Annex 2);

- *Extensive documentation review* of both core literature and country-specific material (see Annex 3);

- *Written survey* (see Annex 4) sent to all country programmes, international functions and Northern CPs, of which the 21 responses were ably analysed by Renee Kantelberg and Ethlet Chiwaka.

The chosen methodology and the time frame in which it was carried out carries with it an inevitable set of limitations.

First, the five 'cases' were of varying lengths, at times frustratingly short, particularly for Italy, Brazil and United Kingdom. This meant not all key people could be met at length, or even at all. Snippets of interviews were snatched over quick coffees and long car rides.

The choice of country for the cases bears consideration. Two of the countries selected have the largest budgets. They are known within the AA family for having made significant strides with ALPS in recent years. Therefore, this provides impressions of diversity rather than a

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[1] In March 2000, Colin Williams (Africa Director), Ephraim Dhlembeu (Africa Programme Coordinator), Lubna Ehsan (Gender Policy Analyst, Pakistan), Nigel Saxby Soffe, (Director of Finance), Robert Chambers and Ros David met and designed ALPS.

conclusive representative perspective. It probably tilts the review towards a more positive impression that could have been tempered with a closer look at more problematic cases.

Third, a documentation review can, at best, only very superficially indicate how ALPS is being implemented. Evidence of the quality with which principles are pursued can emerge only from direct observations, for which there were too few opportunities. Not all documentation that exists within ActionAid programmes and functions and that relate to ALPS was read, although an attempt was made to read a considerable way through the pile.

In line with how ALPS manifests itself, it should be clear that the practice of ALPS becomes evident over time, through interactions with partners and marginalised citizens[2]. A closer look at the partners and time observing some of the core 'A', 'L' and 'P' processes would have been ideal, but was not possible in the timeframe and methodology.

Fifth, and importantly, ALPS constitutes a wide range of principles that require solid conceptual understanding of rights-based approach (RBA) and gender equity. It was not possible to examine the understanding of these two concepts in detail, and for this, therefore, make glad use of reports by two other reviewers, who covered these aspects - Kamla Basin on gender equity and David Cohen on RBA.

Finally, many people were not heard during the ALPS review. Notable by their absence are, for example, Board members, more one-on-one conversations with AA partners (although several group discussions were conducted), sponsors (only two were interviewed in Italy), and most staff in Country Programmes. Documentation compensated in part – but only meagrely. Particularly regretful was the absence of emergencies from this review. ALPS under situations of conflict or disaster differs greatly from ALPS under relatively stable conditions.

For these shortcomings, my apologies. Where I feel a significant issue or perspective is lacking in the document, I will indicate this in the report.

2 ALPS in a Nutshell

2.1 Layered Identities

> *"ALPS is one of our most important organisational innovations. Our Accountability, Learning and Planning System is our backbone. " (Bangkok programme workshop announcement, 2004)*

This statement contrasts sharply with the situation in AA in 1998, when the external review Taking Stock I concluded: "*ActionAid's systems are messy and bureaucratic. Virtually everything about the organisation can be simplified and made leaner.*" (pg 3). Internal criticism was not shirked: "*ActionAid's internal planning and reporting systems over-emphasised upward reporting, accountability to donors and sponsors and an over reliance on ActionAid's own interpretation of change*" (David and Mancini 2004 – the joint coordinators of the Impact Assessment Unit until mid 2003). ALPS emerged to address these problems but its vision was far more than simply rethinking internal reporting systems to help operationalise what was then the brand new strategy Fighting Poverty Together.

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[2] I have chosen for this term rather than that of beneficiaries or poor people as commonly used in AA.

In a nutshell, ALPS is an *organisational charter of values and procedures* that guide its planning and accountability strategies, the operational aspects, and the attitudes and behaviours it expects of its staff.

ALPS is **a layered concept**. In its simplest and most formal documented version, it is a set of core requirements for planning and accountability that all organisations operating under the name AA must fulfil (see column 1, Table 1 and Figure 1). In this, as several people in AA emphasised, it differs little from the planning, monitoring and evaluation requirements of other development organisations. It is interesting to note that the illustration of ALPS (see Figure 1) does not show the principles. What message does this convey of what ALPS is supposed to be? A more complete representation of, and therefore message about, ALPS could include two 'rings' around the core requirements - the immediate ring representing the 'principles' and the second one the 'attitudes and behaviours'.

Figure 1. The links between the key parts of ALPS (Source: ALPS Guidelines, p6)
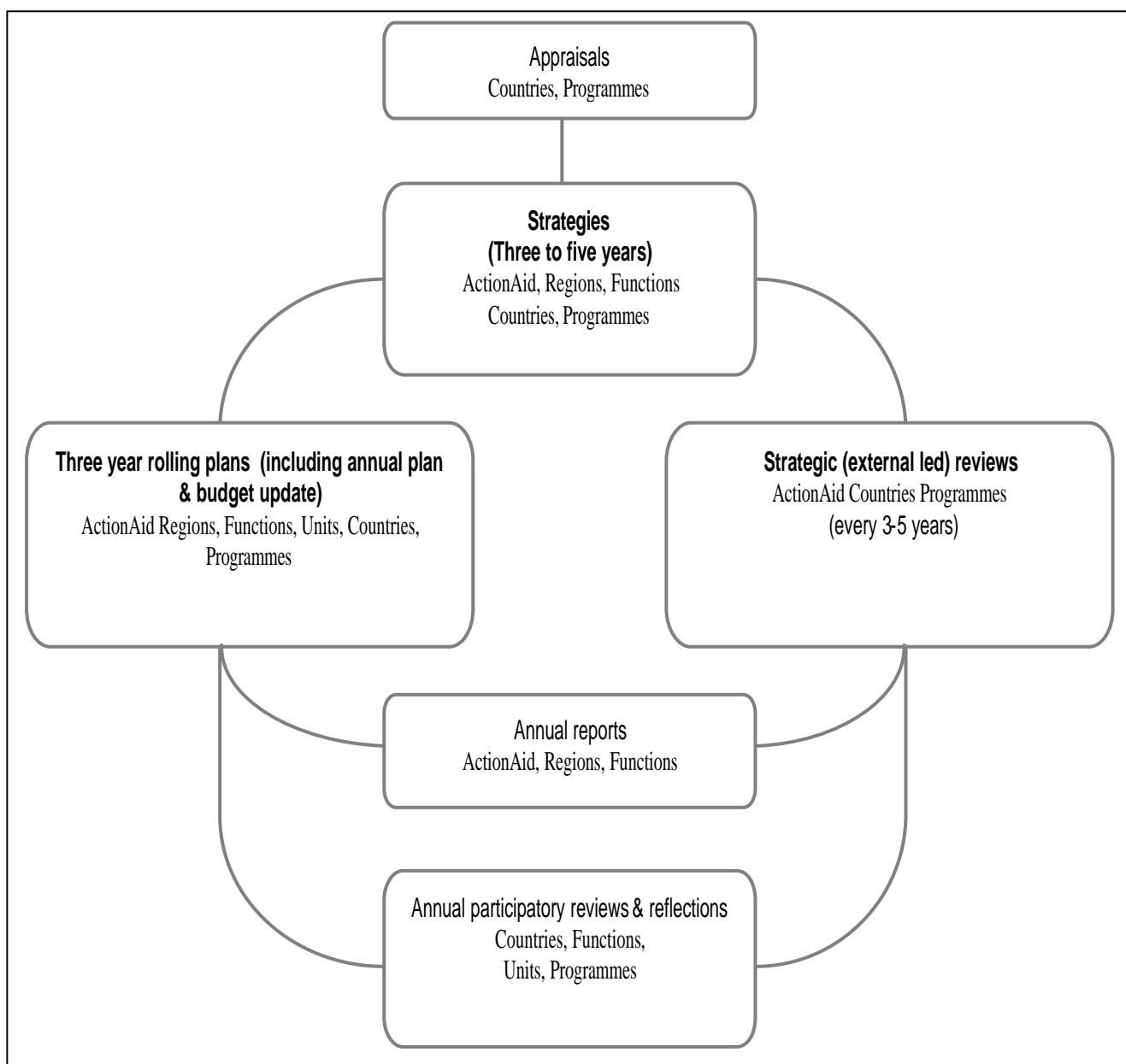
What *starts to distinguish ALPS from others* is the second layer, that of the principles (see column 2, Table 1). The principles describe how the core requirements should be met. In so doing, they act as quality markers, as norms for the core requirements with which AA would like to see all its operations pursued. These principles are the innovation that ALPS offers, despite the slight confusion about what exactly these principles are. The third layer can be considered that of organisational culture in which staff attitudes and behaviours are expressed. If the core requirements are fulfilled with full respect for the principles and supporting organisational mechanisms are in place, then AA can be considered to have a embraced the ALPS concept in its original intentions[3]. The third column in Table 1 lists a number of phenomena that I observed in parts of AA that manifest ALPS as a way of doing business, of 'being' as a learning organisation.

Table 1. The Layers of ALPS

The minimum ALPS as core set of requirements	*The quality* ALPS as principles	*The way of being* ALPS as organisational culture (mix of mechanisms, attitudes/behaviours)
• Strategies at each level (programmes, countries, functions, regions, ActionAid) every three to five years	• Increased accountability to poor people, partners and other key stakeholders	• HR policies encourage learning fom partial successes and errors through 360 degree appraisals and personal development plans
• Three year rolling plans - with annual up-dates	• Encouraged greater participation of poor people and partners in planning, budgeting, monitoring and assessing the value of interventions	• Critical reflection on all organisational systems, including ALPS, leads to ongoing innovation and adaptation
• Annual participatory review and reflections at all levels, functions, themes	• Supported a better analysis of gender and power	• Spontaneous ongoing communication across interest groups, beyond country boundaries
• Annual reports for ActionAid globally, regional programmes and divisions	• Reduced burdensome reporting, and encourage learning, critical reflection and innovation	• Active efforts to ensure alignment and coherence of communication through interactions between areas currently still far apart, such as programme and fundraising
• Strategic/External (consultant led) reviews of work at each level after 3-5 years	• Promoted feedback loops and better management decision making processes	• Clear criteria used actively (and updated) for strategic prioritising during planning
	• Improved our understanding of the cost of interventions and their impact	• Clear learning agendas and well-defined discussion fora where exchange occurs openly
• Appraisals for new countries, markets, DIs	• Fostered a culture of transparency	• Continually seeking to identify 'sorries' alongside 'prouds', challenges along achievements
		• Solid investment in embedding ALPS principles in work through capacity-building ALPS champions operating at all levels, much as capacity-building accountants do in AA Kenya

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[3] Comprehensive overviews of the origins and early days of ALPS have been written by David and Mancini (2003) and Scott-Villiers (2002).

The layered concept of ALPS within AA has led to *multiple identities* and some confusion as to where main efforts should be invested. Some recognise it as the documented set of principles and guidelines that stipulate the spirit of the new 'downward accountability', 'reflective learning' and 'participatory planning'. While laudable, these words are not yet fully internalised by many. For others, it is very concrete: it is PRRP or participatory review and reflection process (or R&R, various acronyms are in use), the flagship 'tool' that encapsulates the inclusiveness and critical reflection that ALPS was supposed to drive in the organisation. For others again, it is also a way of working – a set of organisational values that guide the operational processes, whether they are for planning, financing, human resource management, or internal reflections. In its legal form, ALPS is a set of minimal obligations in the form of reports that enable programmes to have the right to funding.

The pervasiveness of ALPS as a system of values and procedures means *the boundaries of its reach are blurred*. Locating responsibility for its implementation with a single Impact Assessment officer does not do justice to the extent to which ALPS is (and should be) present in the human resource management area, in the social systems in the organization, and in financial matters.

2.2   Intended Goals of ALPS – A Challenging Combination

ALPS is supposed to support AA in fulfilling its mission. The intentions of AA with ALPS are to help move the organisation from a bureaucratic, unquestioning, development implementer to a critical and innovative catalyst that makes a strategic difference in genuinely serving marginalized citizens. By working along ALPS principles and fulfilling the requirements, the relationships with primary stakeholders and partners is expected to occur in such a way that planning and M&E processes are expected to lead to more effective impact on people's lives. "Through aligning *principles* of rights with *procedures* for accountability, ALPS offers an elegant procedural solution to making rights real." (Scott-Villiers 2002: 3)

ALPS is an attempt to *embed the idea of rights and justice* in AA's systems. The essential principles of ALPS are closely linked to ActionAid's mission and strategy: promoting greater accountability to the people on whose behalf money is raised, gender equity, transparency and empowerment of the poor. The system was supposed to give citizens, particularly the most marginalised groups, opportunities to influence and choose the direction of development that AA would take – and to hold AA accountable to their choices.

The ALPS Guidelines produced in 2000 by ActionAid does not talk explicitly about each of the principles but refers to the five core themes to which the principles relate: downward accountability, participation, learning, gender, and power and power relations. This makes it slightly difficult to know what is expected of staff in terms of the principles. Although the guidelines do provide some ideas, for example, how to deal with gender issues in the core requirements, they strongly encourage on-site innovations.

Three problems occur with the assumption that ideas from a set of guidelines will inspire and innovation will follow. First, many AA people appear not to be familiar with the ALPS set of guidelines. This is due to language limitations, lack of a copy of the Guidelines, or the absence of a reading culture. Second, leaving the interpretation of ALPS up to individual creativity is asking a lot from people who have often come from educational backgrounds that reward rote learning and often come from organizational cultures where implementation by the book is the main mode of operating. Finally, it is asking a lot of staff who are going out on a limb with RBA, dealing with marginalized citizens and some rights issues that are very tough to resolve, and then are also being asked to improvise methodologically as they go.

These are only some of the problems that occur 'in-house'. Working with marginalized citizens means that issues of time available and capacity also strongly affect the likelihood with which changed relationships will improve the quality of development. Thus methodological improvisation that goes against the grain of 'business as usual' demands much from all those involved. As Scott-Villiers wrote (2002, p 3): "Avoiding the two extremes of excessive bureaucracy and excessive freedom is a question of balance, requiring attention to detail, negotiation and resources." In practice this balance is still being sought.

3 Introducing and Supporting ALPS

ALPS was introduced in most AA countries at the end of 2000 and early 2001[4] (Kantelberg 2004). After ALPS was conceived and drafted, a *process called 'roll-out' was undertaken to introduce ALPS* to the country programmes. This involved, in some cases, a specific introductory workshop at national level, and in four cases accompanied by researchers (see Scott-Villiers 2002, Cornwall 2001, and AA Kenya 2001). Those involved in this process included all levels of staff and partner organisations (see Table 2). 'Roll-out' largely comprised the distribution of the documentation (see Table 3).

Table 2. Distribution of ALPS support among different groups (highest score possible = 220)

Type of staff group	No. of types of support provided by survey respondents
Programme Staff	107
Senior Management	95
Policy Staff	84
Partners	72
Sponsorship	64
Fund-Raising	63
Finance Audit	61
HR/OD	55
Communications/media	46
Administration/general support	33
Total	680

Table 3. Types of ALPS-specific support provided to AA staff/partners over past 3 years

Type of support	Numbers of groups supported
Given copy of ALPS document	63
Given copy of notes to accompany alps document	57
Training: participatory methodologies	50
Training: finance for non-finance staff	46
ALPS specific induction	43
Training: gender & power analysis	42
Alps workshop	40
New staff induction process	33
Training: M&E	32
Training: facilitating skills	20
Other: race/ethnic issues, team building, institutional design principles	21
Total	447

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[4] Zambia and Belgium (Brussels office) report that they have not yet started 'implementing ALPS' but it is possible that they already practice some aspects of ALPS. Source: Survey, R. Kantelberg.

Subsequent support for implementation took various forms for different groups of staff members and partners. A *total of 447 staff/partner groups were given support (see Table 3),* mainly by distribution of documentation, but also training events for specific skills and ALPS-specific introduction and ongoing staff inductions. The recipients of these were mainly programme staff and senior management (see Table 2). While sounding numerous, if all five groups in all 19 countries who answered the questionnaire had received all 11 types of core support, then the number of support instances would have totalled 1045. If all those who had answered the survey, had provided all types of support to all five groups of staff, then each row in Table 3 would have seen the number 100.

Some form of *adaptation of the original ALPS Guidelines and the 'Notes'* was also a significant part of the roll-out process (see Table 4) but was not widespread. However, considering that there are 34 Country Programmes and six Northern CPs, adaptations in all areas and responding countries would have shown a total of 40 countries. If the five International Departments had also undertaken some adaptation of ALPS for their use, then a full score would have been 45.

Table 4. Adapting ALPS (Source: ALPS survey)

Type of adaptation	Number of countries (% of CPS)
Incorporated into finance procedures/manual	8 (20%)
Translated	6 (15%)
Local guidelines on how to use the ALPS doc	6 (15%)
Incorporated into HR/OD procedures/ manual	5 (13%)
Locally rewritten manual based on ALPS doc	4 (10%)

One of the criticisms of the Taking Stock I Review was the almost total absence of dedicated M&E staff. This situation is now quite different. Currently, impact assessment and M&E is being championed by 18 full time staff members (8 female; 10 male) (see Box 1). Twelve of the 21 responses to the questionnaire indicated no full-time person – and included all four Affiliate Programmes and the two Latin American countries. By contrast however, there are 74 part-time staff (36 female; 38 male) dedicated to impact assessment and M&E. These are located mainly in Africa (44) but Latin America and Europe have 9 and 16 respectively.

These figures hide a much larger number of staff members with ALPS related responsibilities. Most finance staff, HR/OD staff members, programme staff and policy staff would be involved in many of the core requirements. The ALPS principles would be expected to pertain to them, as would the attitudes and behaviours articulated in the ALPS Guidelines.

Box 1. Roles of Dedicated ALPS Champions

These dedicated staff members fulfil a range of functions. In Kenya, the person responsible for ALPS undertakes induction of new staff, compiles the Annual Report, provides support to DIs on PRRPs, organises organisation-wide training on evolving requirements (for example on PRA) and undertakes some training herself. In India, the person responsible for ALPS also dedicates much of his time to methodological innovation and documentation of impact and change-related publications.

The introduction of ALPS within AA has been undertaken with considerable variation. However, *a continual and targeted skill-building process does not seem to be pursued* after this first organisation-wide introduction of ALPS. Induction processes on ALPS are not undertaken very thoroughly, if at all, with staff typically being requested to read the Guide and their quality may not exceed two hour 'this-is-ALPS' sessions. This includes Internal

Audit staff, who have the responsibility to assess whether ALPS is being undertaken well or not, and whose induction was of the 'read-the-Guide' type.

Follow-up training also varies, with facilitation skills that are arguably essential in PRRPs, receiving far less attention than, for example 'finance for non-finance staff' (see Table 3). For example, Kenya invests heavily in its own internal *and* in partner capacity to deal with financial accountability but gender/power analysis skills are weak both internally and with partners and do not receive a fraction of the attention and investment.

The Impact Assessment Unit (globally focused but based in the UK) played a pivotal role in questioning the original APR system, in facilitating the construction of the ALPS alternative, and in outlining ideas for operationalising the huge implications. Soon after ALPS was introduced, the IA Unit formulated a three year plan of support in which consultants were to provide in-country support to adapt ALPS locally. However, these plans were rejected by the International Directors, who were keen to limit any sense of a UK-driven and imposed change agenda. Instead, they asked the IA Unit to focus on global ALPS processes, so the unit was unable to respond to the many requests for support that it received from the CPs. The publication IA Exchanges also had to cease, for unclear reasons, although this had been a key mechanism for stimulating discussions on the topic. As ALPS was picked up, not surprisingly given the scale of change, as David and Mancini write 'some welcomed the space… other floundered' (2004, p12).

Now that the political climate has shifted, decentralisation has largely occurred and UK-centric allergies have abated, there appears to be more public acknowledgement that the lack of initial support has hindered the uptake of ALPS. The time appears ripe to reactivate the importance of focused support. See Section 8 'Recommendations' for ways forward on supporting ALPS.

4   The Implementation of ALPS

In general, *ALPS appears alive and kicking* in many ways and parts of ActionAid International. Ways of dealing with 'balanced multiple accountabilities' have received particular attention, and within in that financial in particular (less clear/less on strategic/impact accountability). This is no mean feat as AA is asking itself to be held accountable to a tough combination: rights-based work - with its related difficulties, ups and downs, unknowns, difficulties of attributing impact, with the issues it deals with – complex and entrenched inequities on which to book advances, such homestead land deeds in India and female genital mutilation in Kenya, plus the target group - those often with less self-esteem, fewer capacities, less access to information, less time available beyond making a living, etc. Across the board, the need for planning with the people who are to live with the changes is generally well understood and community-level plans are created with considerable investment made by ActionAid to have a diversity of people and inclusive methodologies. There is ongoing learning at least at operational level, and in some places at the strategic level. Many efforts are invested to continually question the core directions through PRRPs, partner meetings, thematic assessments and function assessments, performance appraisals. ALPS-related processes are themselves also subject to reviews and improvements in some countries, including this global review.

However, ALPS is *not yet being applied systemically or systematically* within each country or across the countries, themes and functions. Furthermore, there are various critical gaps in

ALPS logic and in the quality and extent of its application. It has clearly been more straightforward at a DA/DI level, and progressively more difficult further up the system.

4.1   Assessing Progress with Core Requirements

The introduction of *ALPS did not mean an entire free-for-all.* A defined set of processes and related reports were maintained as the documented backbone – the core requirements (see Table 4). This is the clearest part of ALPS. In the Guidelines, these requirements are identified, time-bound, specified per level/function/theme, and accompanied by clear thoughts on the types of questions to answer for each requirements. Currently, internationalisation and the planning of the next global strategy after FPT has thrown the timing of some requirements out of sync, with new Northern CPs having to produce strategies earlier than expected. However, these anomalies will eventually sort themselves out.

As there is no tracking of which country, level, theme and function has undertaken which core requirement and not account of what should have been undertaken, it is *not possible to gain a clear overview of the extent of compliance with core requirements.* From the survey, the impression is that most countries are producing most of the required CSPs, PRRPs, Annual Reports and Reviews (see Table 5). The global IAU tracks the CSPs reviews and strategies, all of which are on schedule. Overwhelmingly, the image of ALPS is that of DA/DI Strategies and, to a lesser extent, of DA/DI PRRPs, hence these requirements are, by and large, understood. In contrast to this, Northern CPS have found it particularly difficult to interpret what ALPS means for them.

One area of the core requirements that remains unclear is how the 3 year plan/budgets relates to the CSP. In Kenya, CSP is the basis for the Annual Report, while in others, the 3 year rolling budgets are increasingly central. In some countries, the 3 year budgets seem to only be of value to the financial staff, while in others, staff members appreciate the continual revision of plans that this accommodates.

Despite the intention of ALPS to reduce burdensome reporting, the requirements still constitute quite a long list (see Table 5) although these are not all required each year. Nevertheless, in practice, one single requirement can, particularly at the DA/DI level represent an enormous amount of work. For example, in Balangir (Orissa, India) alone, the DA/DI strategies required 344 micro-level planning exercises and an equal number of annual PRRPs. Many requirements relate to the country levels, placing a heavy burden on them in particular.

Furthermore, there is *no complete clarity about the exact set of core requirements.* For example, in the ALPS survey several countries indicated that function reviews were 'not applicable' to them, when function-focused R&Rs are applicable at all levels. Aspects/areas currently missing from the list of core requirements, not fulfilled systematically, and without clarity about their obligatory status, include:
- policy/campaign reviews at the country level;
- annual partner reviews;
- in larger countries, with sub-national regions, all the requirements for DA/DIs are also undertaken;
- peer reviews that are starting to be undertaken at the national level, and which involve a mixed group of peer country directors, affiliate programme directors, trustees, and international theme coordinators in a strategic progress review;
- Mid-term Reviews of DAs/DIs.

Table 5. Core requirements of ALPS per Region

CORE REQUIREMENT	ASIA	AFRICA	LAC	EUROPE	*Total*
As needed					
Appraisal	72	18	4	16	*110*
DA/DI level					
DA/DI Strategy	448	36	26	0	*510*
DA/DI (Programme) Review	36	25	9	0	*70*
DA/DI (Programme) PRRP	54	75	30	0	*159*
Function/Division					
Function/Division Strategy	30	9	3	6	*48*
Function/Division Review	10	14	0	3	*27*
Function/Division PRRP	25	18	4	8	*55*
Function/Division Annual Report	0	26	0	19	*45*
Country level, including Northern CPs					
3 Year Plan & Budget	24	22	8	25	*79*
Country Strategy	11	7	5	10	*33*
Country Review	11	6	2	0	*19*
Country (national office) PRRP	26	19	0	5	*50*
Affiliate Country Annual Report	2	3	5	5	*15*
Affiliate Country PRRP	0	0	5	0	*5*
Regional level					
Region Strategy	6	9	2	0	*17*
Region Review	22	9	0	0	*31*
Region PRRP	0	23	0	3	*26*
Regional Annual Report	8	23	0	3	*34*
International Level					
International Strategy	0	0	1	1	*2*
International Campaign Strategy	0	6	3	6	*15*
International PRRP	0	0	0	0	*0*
International Campaign/Thematic Review	0	5	0	0	*5*
International Annual Report	0	5	0	0	*5*
International Review	0	2	0	0	*2*
Total	*785*	*360*	*107*	*110*	*1362*

Perhaps the most problematic level thus far has been the *regional level*. The 'region' within AA has not yet established a clear identity and set of roles. Furthermore, the regions are difficult to compare, with Latin America encompassing three countries, Asia encompassing 11 and Africa dealing with 20 countries. Many vacancies have existed in the Africa region for some time, thus prohibiting clear development of any roles that have been tentatively identified. One ambiguity lies in the reporting. As the Africa Regional Report for 2003 states: "*While ALPS calls for regional and functional annual reports, we would like to recommend that the 2004 review of ALPS takes a deep look at how these reports are produced, utilised and relate to the Global Annual Progress report. Our experience so far suggest duplication of effort in the production on various reports. We would like to propose that future regional annual reports just focus on the regional level policy and programme level work and OD work at the same level without duplicating work reported in CP PRRP outputs and annual reports.*" (pg 24). The lack of clarity about Regional roles makes fulfilment of core requirements a guessing game and one that appears to duplicate efforts at times.

ActionAid *International's themes* come a close second in terms of problem children with respect to the fulfilment of core requirements. There are currently four (HIV/AIDS, Food Rights, Gender, Education), with a possible fifth one emerging on participatory methodologies. The Education thematic group has undertaken the most comprehensive of review processes, largely due to a reasonably coherent working group that maintained its momentum and had an identity, plus the persistent efforts of a small group of theme leaders. The lack of clarity of organisational structure for the International Themes has greatly hindered the possibility for convening a mandated group to define lines and forms of accountability, strategising/planning, and collective learning. The occasional external review, triggered in an ad hoc manner by the International Directors, has been the main mechanism through which AA has invested in making the thematic work accountable.

Considerable hesitation to undertake their own version of PRRPs has been seen by functions and European countries in particular. For example, finance in Kenya held a PRRP but HR has yet to do so, although other mechanisms have been used thus far by HR in Kenya to get some feedback (anonymous surveys and biannual 'Jadilis' for mid and senior management). This reluctance by functions and European countries comes more from lack of familiarity with such processes and how to interpret the Guidelines for their purpose, as the Guidelines provide examples for the DA/DI type of context, than with resistance to the principle of regular self-assessment. Scott Villiers (2003, p9) summarises it well: "Inbuilt assumptions, based on years of experience of the working culture, meant that many people thought that the system was only for field programmes. Human resources managers, finance directors, sponsorship staff and policy advocates, did not initially get involved even though the idea was to integrate organisational procedures with accountability and change."

Functions are gradually developing an understanding of what ALPS might mean to them. Some parts of the organisation feel responsible for and want to undertake reviews and planning processes, despite not being recognised in the core requirements (see Box 2).

Box 2. Communication takes on PRRP

> The European fundraising and communications groups identified a felt need to undertake a self-assessment as they had been left out of the Taking Stock II Review. They describe their own process as follows.
>
> "*The style of the Fundraising and Communications Taking Stock 2004 at all levels is 'self-assessment'. The process, information gathering and report structuring and editing has been led by consultants, but the contents are totally the work of the four ActionAid International country fundraising teams, in their own words. … We can truthfully say that this amount of detail, in a comparable format, has never before been compiled by ActionAid, and thus you have a unique opportunity to learn about this important part of ActionAid International…."*

Despite the generally positive fulfilment of core requirements, two additional gaps can be identified besides the problems discussed above.

1. *What constitutes good quality for the core requirements, notably the PRRP?* There does not appear to be clarity about the standards that a good PRRP or planning process should fulfil. Should DIs, for example, commission external reviews or can they be left internal. Kenya undertakes external DI reviews to get a fresh perspective and inform plans/strategies. Other quality questions arise in Affiliate Programmes. For example, in Italy the first trial of a PRRP involved all staff in sharing achievements and concerns across all the functions. However, the second PRRP was a diluted effort

of divisional reporting with no time dedicated to discussing the findings to identify patterns and related problems or achievements. While the ALPS Guidelines suggest core questions for some of the procedures, this document does not live for many people. The question then is how quality standards are developed and maintained. Particularly important is the interpretation of the 'P' of participation in those cases where there are no 'beneficiaries' to comment on the quality of the work undertaken.

2. *How should different levels interact with respect to the core requirements?* The example of the Africa Regional duplication of annual reporting efforts is one example of this. Another example of the lack of clarity on how different levels interact was made clear to me in Balangir (Orissa, India). The DA/DI reviews started in early July 2004, leading to budgets and strategies. These then travel to Orissa regional office, to the national India office, to the Asia office, to London and all the way back down the chain before being 'approved' in late December this year. There appears to be no strategic use of the DA/DI analyses on its long journey around the globe.

4.2 Assessing Progress with Principles

Despite the information caveats, progress with core requirements is relatively straightforward to assess. *The principles that form the unique feature of ALPS are considerably less clear to assess.* Some confusion arises from the question of what the actual principles are. Table 6 lays out two versions. While the principles do not contradict each other, they are sufficiently different as to understandably cause some confusion as to what they are. A single set of principles would help ensure basic clarity.

Table 6. Comparing two versions of the principles

From ALPS Guidelines (pg 3)	From Survey (formulated by the Impact Assessment Unit, UK)
▪ Strengthens ActionAid's main accountability, which is to the poor and marginalised women, men, boys and girls and our partners with whom we, and they, work.	▪ Increases accountability to poor people, partners and other key stakeholders
▪ Strengthens ActionAid's commitment to gender equity.	▪ Improves our analysis of power and gender
▪ Applies to the whole organisation at all levels, and covers horizontal and downward relationships.	▪ Encourages greater participation of poor people and partners in planning, budgeting, monitoring and assessing the value of interventions
▪ Information must be relevant and useful to the people who produce it, receive it and who need it to make decisions. It should be written in the language spoken by the majority of users and translated, usually in summary form, where necessary. It must be approved, in most cases, only one level up in the line management.	▪ Ensures that decisions are taken as close to the point where their consequences are felt
▪ Requires that the information provider must receive feedback. Approvals should be given in a non-bureaucratic manner.	▪ Brings the concerns and aspirations of poor people into the centre of our decision making
▪ Aims to make best use of staff time by cutting down the amount of written information needed. It also promotes learning, which in turn improves skills and programme quality.	▪ Reduces burdensome reporting and creates space and opportunities for critical reflection and analysis that has improved programme and advocacy actions
▪ Recognises the need to relate financial expenditure to programme quality.	▪ Improves our understanding of the cost of interventions and their impact
▪ Promotes critical reflection that enables us to learn not only from our successes but also our failures.	▪ Fosters a culture of transparency and openness

Discussions during field visits, in telephone interviews and responses from the survey all indicate that the principles of ALPS have been instrumental in generating more innovative ways of learning, which have contributed to the decentralisation processes within AA. Many people stressed that the new ways of developing strategies and reviews offered more frequent and more focused shared learning within the organisation and with partners, placing the emphasis on poverty analysis and RBA.

1. Increased accountability to poor people, partners and other key stakeholders

Clearly visible throughout AA is an ethic of being accountable to communities and partners. This is in marked contrast to many other INGOs where this is not (yet) commonly accepted, understood or practiced. Field visits and the ALPS survey indicates that this principle is healthily on track (see Table 7).

Table 7. Survey results related to accountability principle

Extent to which this principle has been achieved	No of responses (n = 21)
- Not at all	0
- Only just beginning to see changes	6
- Significant change has taken place but is not widespread	9
- Widespread and far reaching changes are taking place	3
- Don't know	3

The key vehicle for this has been the PRRP and, as part of that, being transparent about financial information. This financial openness towards communities and partners (NGOs, CBOs, and networks) has acted as a powerful symbol of intent at transparency, and appears to trigger improved quality of relations. AA has certainly stood out in the development world in this respect, as many partners noted, and has started to set a new norm for development NGOs. In the CPs visited, it was clear that such innovations relied heavily on the personal commitment by the finance coordinators to making the difference. It has required them to travel extensively and be creative with translating financial data into meaningful presentations. Per year in each DI, in Kenya, this downward accountability requires three to five days as it is undertaken with clusters of communities and only then at the general DI level to ensure that information reaches as many as possible.

Other processes in ActionAid support this principle. For example, Internal (and External) Audits are an institutionalised form of upward accountability, mainly for funding agencies, Trustees and peers in AA. Each country programme receives an internal auditor once per two years on average. They focus on financial issues for about 40 or 50% of their time but also manage to include a brief look and mention of ALPS. They look at compliance with ALPS as part of AA's risk management processes, i.e. ALPS enables AA to know its impact, which is critical for its ability to raise funds and plan its future. Hence, not fulfilling ALPS (at least in the impact assessment aspect) could expose AA to a risk. The Internal Audit therefore looks to see if this is carried out. However, they have reduced ALPS to 'impact assessment' and look for evidence that DI PRRPs are being undertaken as 'sufficient'. They would be happy to hand over the ALPS audit aspect, if there were other mechanisms in AA that could cover that part of the organisations' risk analysis/management.

However, accountability still seems to be mainly interpreted as a financial issue. During the PRRPs, AA holds itself (and its partners) accountable to the objectives set with the partners. However, not all aspects of AA's work appear to have clear objectives (not all functions or themes), which makes this form of accountability impossible. Furthermore, evidence of

holding the organisation accountable to its values and core concepts, such as RBA and gender equity, was lacking[5]. It was not possible to establish if RBA and gender equity concerns are also used by AA to hold itself accountable to its goals. The Taking Stock II Review has noted widespread limitations of conceptual understanding of rights work and gender. This hinders AA's ability to assess its performance vis-à-vis all aspects of ALPS.

2. Brought the concerns and aspirations of poor people into the centre of our decision making

3. Encouraged greater participation of poor people and partners in planning, budgeting, monitoring and assessing the value of interventions

The second and third principles are very similar in nature and will be treated together.

Kantelberg's (2004) analysis of the survey responses states: *"The most widely held response … is that there has been a remarkable shift in bringing the voices of the poor into our work, facilitated open dialogue and learning with staff as well as stakeholders and enhanced transparency through horizontal relationships. The PRRP process has been a major catalyst in changing the behaviours of AAI staff and has contributed to greater participation of the poor and interaction with the local communities. Due to this, the poor are able to plan, monitor and measure the impact of projects in their communities making AAI address and identify the real needs of the community."*

The presence of local-level planning as the basis for DAs/DIs and (sub-national) regional plans is clear. There are conscious efforts to engage communities and partners - and to work with partners in improving how they work with communities. During, village visits in India and Kenya, tribals gave clear and elaborate presentations of the rationale behind their plans, and to a critical assessment of progress against locally set objectives. AA appears to invest substantially in capacity-building of partners to undertake participatory local level planning.

Dealing with principles 2 and 3 create a bit of a conundrum for Northern CPs, as 'poor people' for them are too physically distant and partners are often funding sources who would just expect the normal forms of accountability. AA's global 'themes' also face a challenge in this respect but can still turn, to some degree, to CP level policy issue analyses that emerge from local reflections.

Interestingly, the second principle (see Table 8) fares marginally worse than the third (see Table 9). This may be due to the many operational decisions that are still undertaken by staff, as compared to the sea of change brought about by the PRRPs in increasing people's participation in planning, M&E. Many of the improvements seen with principle 3 would also be a result of the capacity-building work of AA staff with partners and community groups (see Section 5).

CSPs appear in many cases to be the result of elaborate consultative exercises involving a wide range of stakeholders, building up the analyses from local level strategies. It was not possible for me to assess how 3 year rolling budgets are developed. In cases where rolling budgets are developed only by AA staff and are taking over the strategic role that CSPs play, this could represent an undermining of this principle.

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[5] At the global level this has partly been undertaken by the Taking Stock II review team focus on RBA and gender.

Table 8. Survey results related to people at the centre principle

Extent to which this principle has been achieved	No of responses (n = 21)
- Not at all	0
- Only just beginning to see changes	6
- Significant change has taken place but is not widespread	7
- Widespread and far reaching changes are taking place	5
- Don't know	3

Table 9. Survey results related to 'people's participation in planning and assessing value' principle

Extent to which this principle has been achieved	No of responses (n = 21)
- Not at all	0
- Only just beginning to see changes	4
- Significant change has taken place but is not widespread	10
- Widespread and far reaching changes are taking place	4
- Don't know	3

4. *Reduced <u>burdensome</u> reporting and created space and opportunities for critical reflection and analysis that has improved programme and advocacy actions*

This principle is essentially about stimulating learning. It consists of two parts that imply a causal relationship between reporting and reflection - by spending less time at the desk, there is more time for direct contact with communities. However, the review findings indicate that burdensome reporting has, at best, been marginally reduced. And yet opportunities for critical reflection have increased considerably. Hence it might be useful to reconsider the formulation of this principle.

The survey (Kantelberg 2004) indicates the absence of evidence that ALPS has significantly reduced the amount of time planning and report writing (see Table 10). Exceptions exist. Gomes Silva (2003) writes that, by consolidating the annual report and work plan into one report and other simplification, the new system reduced the number of documents that partners presented to AA Brazil per year from 11 to six. The surveys generally expressed that burdensome reporting still existed but not to the same scale as before. All reporting is, in some way, burdensome and in Kenya and India, when asked, staff recognised that most current reporting was necessary. This does not preclude, of course, the possible merit of further streamlining of reporting requirements.

Table 10. Survey results on 'burdensome reporting and critical reflection' principle

Extent to which this principle has been achieved	No of responses (n = 21)
- Not at all	0
- Only just beginning to see changes	8
- Significant change has taken place but is not widespread	7
- Widespread and far reaching changes are taking place	3
- Don't know	3

AA Nepal's response to the survey question about reporting burden was clear: "*The reporting load that was to be lessened by ALPS has not been effective. There are various requests from the different functions e.g. asking for impacts on HIV work, policy work, reflections, which take up considerable time of concerned staff.*" In a follow-up phone call, staff stressed that

ALPS had a rather AA-centric vision of reporting. It did not consider the non-negotiable information needs that certain contexts demand. AA Nepal, for example, uses a gender, generation, class and caste segregated coverage table with past cumulative coverage that summarises data that is needed for annual reporting to the national Social Welfare Council. It is not in the ALPS frame, but it is necessary and time-consuming.

In the other version of the principles, see Table 6, one of the principles includes the statement: "Information… must be approved, in most cases, only one level up in the line management". I got the distinct impression that information was indeed not circulating up the system to the extent that it seemed to happen. Several times when I asked to see documents related to the core requirements, people referred to a level closer to the field than where they were. This is a positive sign for an organisation that had been known for being hierarchical and requiring approval of much field-level documentation. However, the reduced circulation of documentation can also be a signal of reduced learning, if other mechanisms for sharing insights do not exist.

The 'learning' seems to happen in all aspects of the organisation – community, regions, partner relations, themes, functions, international. There is learning about simplifying and improving operations, about strategic shifts, and about how to learn about learning (see 'Innovations' below). It is fed, in part, by the culture of PRRPs that has taken hold. The recent Africa Partnership survey states (p 9), "Some fundamental issues have come up through various reflection processes (PRRPs, partner forums, leadership retreats, OD documentation, etc.)." But this depends greatly on the questions asked (see Box 3 for one example of a PRRP). If advocacy-related questions are not asked, then advocacy-related analysis will not happen.

There are also learning cascades. For example, the Kenya DI reviews in 2003 had highlighted very little impact in the DI work. This finding was then fed into the March 2004 Jadili (bi-annual mid/senior management discussion forum), which sought to rethink AAK's DI interventions. Questions tackled included: 'What makes a community/group organisation/movement successful?, What does it require from us?', What makes groups dysfunction/dependent/unsustainable?'. The discussions included many critical reflections on personal attitudes and behaviours.

Box 3. Clarifying expectations of a PRRP to ensure accountability, learning and power analysis, AA Brazil

A two to three day PRRP will summarise the annual work plan, activities and financial aspects. Debate should focus on verifying the following:
1. *Where are we?* Identify project advances and limitations in relation to the annual plan.
2. *How are we?* Construct a picture of the relations of inequity and power in which the project is embedded. Who are and how are the allies and adversaries (in relation to the project)?
3. *What is needed to move forward?* Steps for making advances and overcoming limitations?

The PRRP is also expected to define indicators for monitoring and evaluating the project and identify needs for technical support and resources. AA staff, meanwhile, try to assess the partner's planning and monitoring systems, especially related to transparency and accountability. With the question "what needs to be done in order to move forward," the PRRP presents itself as more than just an evaluation but as a learning process.

Regular research as part of policy processes and reviews alike also feeds critical reflections, and thus contributes to learning. For example, before working on wildlife policies, AA Kenya undertook an extensive review of laws in the EA region from which to learn. The 2003 Education Review includes a discussion on recent education trends in AA areas. Stakeholders were assessed after Cancun and in Asia. Conscious attempts are to fill knowledge gaps through innovative action research projects, e.g. Stepping Stones and REFLECT in their early phases, Assessing Advocacy, etc. AA has recently woken up to the considerable levels of research it commissions. This material is being mapped by M. Buchanan-Smith as part of a discussion on how to capitalise better on the extensive in-house research practice for fundraising and for organisation-wide learning.

Various *aspects that affect the quality of learning* appear less well understood and implemented.

- Learning fed by information from an MIS is not happening, as there is a marked lack of MIS in most CPs. This constraint needs concerted attention. At the moment, opinions rather than quantitative data feed the reflections.

- Focused efforts are needed to gain insights on effectiveness of policy/advocacy strategies and processes, i.e. understanding not only if something worked but especially what made it possible.

- There appears to be little consolidation of learning. The PRRPs do not always automatically feed organisation-wide learning. This requires conscious efforts to construct horizontal dialogue to embed learning (across regions, across Country Programmes, but also from field offices to national offices).

- To consolidate learning requires mechanisms to identify shared learning needs, e.g. on networks as partners in India or on how to work on gender relations not just with women, etc. These mechanisms do not appear to exist.

- Good examples of simple reporting are plentiful, although they are not always analytical. The examples could be shared for those seeking guidance on how to write concisely and analytically (see Box 4 for one example).

Box 4. Example of simple reporting format (Uganda ALPS guidelines, 2000)

Quarterly report for....(programme)......for (period)
▪ Planned activities/objectives for the last quarter:
▪ Progress against these activities/objectives:
▪ Other achievements during the reporting period, including any innovation:
▪ Failures/challenges met and reasons:
▪ Are we making a difference? What difference?
▪ For whom?
▪ Main learning points (including those arising from quarterly fora):
▪ What "works" and what doesn't?
▪ Proposed changes for next quarter; suggestions for the future:

5. *Ensures that decisions are taken as close to the point where their consequences are felt*

This principle is closely related to the second and third principles. Here, however, I have considered it from an AA internal angle. The principle appears to relate essentially to decentralised decision-making and, therefore, advocates a management style that consistently tries to limit hierarchy. I did not encounter much information on how this principle is being

taken up, and so can say relatively little on this principle. It is certainly not as central to AA's concerns as the other principles and seemed to score least well in the survey (see Table 11), although why this is the case is not known.

Some contradictory examples can be offered that include uneven practice at best:

- discretionary spending power increased considerably in Kenya at the DA and District level, giving a large sense of freedom and sense of initiative down the system

versus

- in India, a six month journey for each DA budget right up to London and back down in what appears to be purely a financial exercise without any strategic function;

- sponsorship staff develop the communication plan (what themes, timing, format) with the sponsorship staff in CPs

versus

- the intention that sponsorship staff to use the PRRP process reports to communicate with sponsors, when in practice there is not a single report from CPs for either Child or Next Steps sponsorship that does not go back to the CPs asking for more or different information.

The added value of this principle in its current wording merits some debate. Greater precision about the intent of this principle might make it more straightforward to operationalise and to review.

Table 11. Survey results on 'decisions near consequences' principle

Extent to which this principle has been achieved	No of responses (n = 21)
- Not at all	0
- Only just beginning to see changes	7
- Significant change has taken place but is not widespread	8
- Widespread and far reaching changes are taking place	3
- Don't know	3

6.   *Improved our analysis of power and gender*

This principle is essentially the subject of the TSII reports on RBA (by David Cohen) and on gender (by Kamla Basin). While both Cohen and Basin are positive about some advocacy and gender equity activity, both also clearly indicate the current weak levels of understanding and poor analysis of power and gender. This coincides with my own insights - despite the fairly positive survey responses (see Table 12). I saw few examples of how gender and power relations are analysed as part of either accountability, learning efforts or planning processes. For example, in community visits in India and Kenya, the care taken to work with separate gender groups and to invest in some aspects of female empowerment was evident. However, if and how questions of power inequities or gender oppression are tackled in discussions remained unclear.

Table 12. Survey results on 'power/gender analysis' principle

Extent to which this principle has been achieved	No of responses (n = 21)
- Not at all	0
- Only just beginning to see changes	5
- Significant change has taken place but is not widespread	12
- Widespread and far reaching changes are taking place	1
- Don't know	3

AABrazil offers a clear and positive example about how ALPS should consider power and gender: *"The system [ALPS] should make possible an analysis of how the project is interfering in power relations, i.e. observing who will be empowered in organizations, communities and society. It should also observe whether conditions are being created in which, mainly project participants can develop their own capacities for analyzing power."* (Gomes Silva, pg 5). Analysing power and gender requires asking the right questions (see Box 5). Questions will help shape a learning agenda about AA's RBA and gender priorities. For example, a question such as, 'What are the key dilemmas that we face in our work on RBA and on gender equity and how are we addressing these?' could help focus the analysis globally, nationally, thematically, and per function.

Box 5. Questioning power and gender during a PRRP in Brazil (Gomes Silva 2003, p5)

Poverty – In order to break the cycle of increasing social inequities and poverty, what power relations must be changed? In what way is the work plan contributing to these changes?

Gender – What power relations generate inequalities between men and women? In what way is the work plan contributing to these changes?

Participation – What channels and spaces of political participation exist in the communities for encouraging interaction with public power? In what way is the work plan helping the local population to feel capable of occupying these spaces?

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7.   *Improved our understanding of the cost of interventions and their impact*

Very interesting advances have been made in improving financial accountability (principle 1) and being transparent about it (principle 8). Discussions in AA are ongoing about how to cement the link between financial and programmatic information. David's 1998 memo on cost-effectiveness in AA outlines some key concerns with quantifying impact and comparing to other agencies. However, practical advances are less clear as the same questions she addresses are still asked with no resolution in sight (see, for example, Gatigwa 2004).

The financial presentations in some PRRPs are a very good start. In Kenya, DA residents were discussing the relatively high expenditure on training that the numbers showed and resolved to find cheaper training facilities. Kenya's social audit of SUCAM was an interesting attempt to relate costs to impact. Kenya's Financial review guidelines of 2003 explains three tools to track trend analysis, cost effectiveness and performance measures. Everyone I spoke with, from fundraisers and child sponsorship staff to DA and HR coordinators, was concerned about keeping costs low. These are the clear examples. However, not all money sent by AA is subject to these analyses, in particular the money disbursed via partners – as many partners find it difficult to open up accounts.

It did not become clear to me that the people I spoke with are also all asking if expenditure has been worthwhile. AA Brazil cautions, for example, that financial information is often technical and not discussed from a political or strategic perspective. When it comes to strategic decisions about if the money invested in gender equity is well spent, the data is not there. Discussions during TSII indicated that this is no easy matter to resolve.

What is of concern to me is that despite this limited progress with this principle, many survey respondents expressed that significant changes had been made (see Table 13). To what, I wonder, are they then referring? Is the essence of this principle actually understood beyond it requiring financial openness?

Table 13. Survey results on 'understanding expenditure-impact' principle

Extent to which this principle has been achieved	No of responses (n = 21)
- Not at all	2
- Only just beginning to see changes	6
- Significant change has taken place but is not widespread	10
- Widespread and far reaching changes are taking place	0
- Don't know	3

8.   *Fostered a culture of transparency and openness*

Kantelberg (2004) analyses: *"The increased nature of transparency at the organisational level has contributed to a more scrutinized and systematic focus on AAI's work considering impact and outcomes rather than outputs."* There is a palpable and widespread sense of openness to asking critical questions among those with whom I spoke. This aspect of AA is also clearly appreciated by partners and the marginalised communities where the work happens. AA staff rightly score themselves quite high on this principle (see Table 14).

Table 14. Survey results on 'transparency and openness' principle

Extent to which this principle has been achieved	No of responses (n = 21)
- Not at all	0
- Only just beginning to see changes	3
- Significant change has taken place but is not widespread	8
- Widespread and far reaching changes are taking place	8
- Don't know	2

The hard-hitting 'Taking Stock I Review' in 2000 was a very public example of frankness, and in many discussions during the review, staff were ruthlessly frank about AA's shortcomings and the desire to improve. Sponsor support staff in the UK regularly analyse their own performance, DA staff everywhere asked me 'Please tell me how you think I can improve my work', and Country Directors were raising questions well outside the organisational comfort zone. There are still exceptions, with AA The Gambia being the most public of examples. Not only did the PRRPs there hide irregularities, but Internal Audit recommendations were ignored and the subsequent Annual Report 2003 did not name the fraud directly and instead blamed 'miscommunication'.

In many CPs, management innovations had been made to facilitate more frequent and open communication among staff. There is no lack of reviews, both standard and thematic with additional reviews such as the recent partnership and stakeholder reviews thrown in to seek more insights on key topics. ALPS itself has been constantly discussed and the organisation has not shied away from sharing these reflections widely (cf David and Mancini 2004). AA Kenya provoked discussions during its bi-annual staff retreat through case studies on dilemmas related to accountability and transparency. There appears to be a constant stream of reflections that are feeding critical reflection.

Two considerations are worth mentioning:
- *The all important stance of senior management to make this happen*. The country visits clearly showed the central role played by a management savvy and open Country Director and other key staff, notably HR and Finance. Without these champions, this principle is stuck.

- *The means to transform the frankness into actionable steps and to track if recommended changes are being carried out*. In several instances, lower level staff expressed considerable frustration with the lack of space to genuinely voice their concerns. Either the forums are not there or they are not taken seriously, and they are left feeling that no action is taken despite the talking.

4.3 Assessing Progress with ALPS as Organisational Culture

ALPS as an organisational 'way of being' (see Table 1) *slowly emerged* in conversations during the review. The concern with which AA staff were willing to challenge themselves, their willingness to speak about their limitations and gaps, but also the noticeable problems that inhibit the uptake and evolution of ALPS helped to form a partial picture. I offer a few thoughts on this issue here. If deemed of value, perhaps this aspect of ALPS can be taken up more explicitly and thoroughly in subsequent interpretations of ALPS and ALPS reviews.

The values of AA are, in part, expressed through the principles but mainly through the 'attitudes and behaviours' expected of AA staff. These constitute an organisational 'way of being'. It was not possible, given the timeframe of this review, to assess the extent to which these attitudes and behaviours are understood and practiced by AA staff members. Instead, I offer here some observations about other more institutionalised 'behaviours' that together indicate signs of mixed health.

Communication forums among staff are crucial in ALPS - for trust to build, problems to be articulated, concerns and questions to be shared, innovations to be scrutinised and achievements to be celebrated. This is essentially an issue of management style and structure. Creating vibrant communication channels requires a grounded perspective and creativity. Box 6 lists several creative management mechanisms encountered in Kenya during the review.

Box 6. Management mechanisms in Kenya that foster ALPS as a way of being

> - 'Jadilis' are held twice a year for mid and senior mgt about 40 staff to update on concepts, discuss problems and dilemmas, etc.
> - There is a policy that maximum 3 people will operate at DI level (coordinator, community development facilitator, programme assistant). This forces working in partnership. In Narok they are piloting with a 1 person DI. This further requires listening, sharing of power, consultations, etc.
> - Staff develop their own job descriptions with their line manager. All Action Aid staff are expected to have four core competencies: continuous learner, policy advocate, defender of rights, capacity builder.
> - Gifts are often given to staff at Christmas. As not all staff hold positions that lead to such gifts being given, all gifts are all pooled and raffled at Christmas time.

Insufficient attention has been paid to communication among staff as a critical component of ensuring the success of ALPS. The recent case of fraud in AA Gambia highlights how PRRPs are no guarantee for honesty. Another example is AA Bangladesh, which has struggled with its implementation of ALPS, despite an elaborate local manual, but due to fraught management issues that make it impossible for clarity among staff as to what is being asked for. At a more trivial level, it is not uncommon for emails about good practices sent from the global level to never reach the DI offices where the information would make the real difference. A well-intentioned global initiative on Shared Learning (see 4.4 below) was one unsuccessful attempt to deal with this – the intranet is not how AA staff learns.

Especially in larger offices, communication channels pose a challenge. How to hold together a large and distance group of staff? Staff retreats are common in ActionAid. Kenya holds them once every two years, while India links them to the drafting of a new CSP. In India, however, recruitment policies have created a problem that greatly reduces the value of this retreat as a communication forum. A hiring freeze meant that AA can safely say it (still) has only 200+ staff. However, it does have 800 contract staff on the payroll. These people hold down full-time jobs with heavy responsibilities, such as coordinating REFLECT programme in Orissa. Only staff members attend retreats, so the large group of contract staff are kept out of valuable learning forums. All CPs could benefit from taking stock of their internal communication mechanisms and invest time in ensuring that communication problems typically perceived by those furthest away from the national office are matched with feasible solutions.

4.4   Innovations – Ongoing Adaptation of ALPS

ActionAid has been a *nursery for methodological innovations* for many years. It is well-known and respected for REFLECT, Stepping Stones, and the large-scale use of PRA-based micro-level planning. Recent methodological additions include citizen's juries and social audits as part of the rights-based deliberations and advocacy work.

There is also *considerable innovation happening with ALPS related processes and systems that well and truly carry the RBA values*. Examples include Kenya's far-reaching financial accountability capacity-building and social audit of campaigns[6], Vietnam and India's 360 degree appraisals, India's annual partner reviews, and the global peer reviews between countries. Nepal has moved towards a thematic structure of working at the DI level, with each DI producing up to three thematic position papers and no single DI strategy. While allowing for easier national level thematic consolidation, it has created considerable planning and reporting demands.

However, such innovations are *sporadic rather than systemic* and there is no systematic implementation of these innovations as yet. It appears that these innovations are not being widely shared within the AA system, or even within the countries. For example, in India the 360 performance appraisals undertaken in Orissa are not conducted in all the sub-national regions. The SUCAM social audit in Kenya of November 2002 appears to be a one-off in Kenya (see Box 7), and has not had follow-up elsewhere in the country or outside.

Box 7. SUCAM – the Sugar Campaign for Change in ActionAid Kenya (AA Kenya 2002)

The Sugar Campaign has moved from using coalitions to confront to using them to work on alternatives. It has implemented many innovations that embody ALPS. In 2002, after one year, a social audit was conducted. This aimed to assess how SUCAM had performed in its first year, evaluate 'value-for-money' and relevancy of actions, check if the campaign had lived up to its own values, assess how well campaign risks were understood and acted on, and identify lessons learned. Other innovations included its zero consultancy policy (no expenditure on hiring expensive consultants to do research so campaign members do it all), based on the idea that information should and would not be paid for, ensuring an open accounting systems on the Web, placing billboards in the DIs that are regularly updated, and using a range of different conduits for information dissemination.

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[6] The use of the term 'social audit' in AA is confusing. Kenya uses the term to indicate comprehensive participatory evaluations, while India uses the term to denote the public auditing government disbursement of earmarked funds for marginalised groups. Nepal uses the term for both types of processes.

Other *larger scale changes to ALPS have evolved or been attempted* since 2000. Two successful adaptations need mentioning. One such generally successful adaptation has been the *Global Monitoring Framework*. This constitutes a set of qualitative and quantitative indicators, supplemented by financial information, which aims to draw together information to systematically track progress against the global strategy FPT strategy goals and objectives. While this framework has seen many incarnations and only emerged after many meetings, it currently appears to work for the annual PRRP with the International Directors and for compiling the annual Global Progress Reports.

A second one is the action research initiative on how to assess advocacy efforts (cf Chapman 2003). Now in its last months of the current funding phase, the four case studies have focused on sharpening the understanding of what constitutes advocacy and its dimensions of success, and on the capacity-building needed to embed methodologies with those for whom they should be useful. Power analysis has been central to this initiative. It is hoped that the lessons from this work can provide much-needed inspiration on these issues.

Three other larger scale innovations have been initiated with less success.

- Various attempts have been made to develop an internal global *Management Information System*, so far without success. The intention was to identify and aggregate global AA information needed for key management decisions. However, no clarity exists as yet as to what this information would include and exactly how it would be used by whom.

- During 2002, a *Shared Learning Strategy* was developed to support the ALPS objectives of sharing learning. While it aimed to develop systems to facilitate this, it set up a false split from 'ALPS' by not being connected to the core IA unit. It invested its efforts in establishing the intranet as the medium for sharing and learning. In none of the country visits, however, did the intranet play a significant role, if at all, in either process. Inter/intranet is not a common access platform, certainly not for the programme DA/DI staff who would be the source of many of the experiences. Furthermore it assumes writing skills and time plus the assumption of an automatic match between supply and demand.

- *A Right to Information Policy* was written to guide staff on what information should be shared and what type of information AA's stakeholders can expect or demand from the organisation. Central in the policy is financial disclosure. This echoes the priority placed on capacity-building in financial accountability noted earlier. It has not yet been implemented consistently or aligned with ALPS.

These are all important, if not always successful, investments in improving ALPS. They testify to a conscious effort to address gaps and shortcomings of the current implementation levels and forms. Continued conscious efforts are needed to identify gaps at all levels of the AA system, pursue innovations, document and share the findings.

5   Partners and ALPS

Initially a direct service delivery, *AA now largely operates through a diverse set of partnerships.* Five types of partnerships were distinguished during the review:

1. The 'well-known to AA' local partnerships with CBOs (new or co-created or pre-dating AA's arrival) and federations of CBOs that are the mechanisms through which much DA/DI work is undertaken. These are of two types: with funding and now sometimes without funding but instead providing moral support, access to information and support on strategic planning, etc.

2. Networks or coalitions of CBOs and NGOs (e.g. the Drought Mitigation Network and the Disability Network in Orissa and e.g. SUCAM in Kenya) in which AA can have multiple roles – partly/wholly funding some of the network members, being a network member itself, undertaking capacity-building work of the network to enhance its potential for ongoing action.

3. National level 'partnerships' with AA as donor – short term or long term (e.g. one year vs. three years in Kenya) that largely put AA in a donor role but also involve other roles in the longer term relationships, funding some network-wide activities.

4. National level partnerships - with AA as a recipient of funding (e.g. with DFID in Kenya) or in implementation partnership with government departments or specialized agencies; in both these relationships AA often fulfils multiple roles.

5. Coalitions at national level in which AA is one of many others and has no particular, extra weight.

Each of these partnerships *represents different power relationships* (from strong to vulnerable - Raftopoulos and Mupawaenda 2004) and offers *different degrees of freedom with respect to the implementation of ALPS*. Not surprisingly, the link between ALPS and the partners is extremely varied, partly as a result of the different types of partnerships and partly as a result of different understandings of what ALPS is supposed to mean for partners. Where AA is one of many members of an alliance, AA staff members can only model ALPS through their own behaviour and may, at best, push for some kind of learned initiatives. Where AA is funding the effort, ALPS may be more prominent. For some, ALPS was supposed to be AA-internal - if ALPS 'rubbed off', then that was fine but certainly not necessary. Others give partners copies of the ALPS Notes and expected the core of ALPS principles (and some of the DA/DI level core requirements) to shape the quality of the work.

In many cases, however, *ALPS is part and parcel of the organisational strengthening work* that AA undertakes with its partners (e.g. with local NGOs and CBOs in Brazil, Kenya and India) (see Box 8). Where capacity limitations are perceived among partners, AA staff members consciously invest in improving skills. In the three Southern CPs visited, AA works on gender analysis or group management with partners showing such weaknesses, or provides funding for them to seek specific support. Kenya invests heavily in establishing and strengthening local CBOs, while India (Balangir region) undertakes annual reflections with each partner that identifies weak areas of practice. Where financial accountability is at risk, attention is invested there. ALPS principles are incorporated simply as part of 'good development practice', but without it being seen as a separate requirement. In these cases, ALPS has become more of a way of implementing organisational strengthening activities.

Potential conflicts over how to link ALPS to partners seem to have resolved itself naturally - whether to make ALPS obligatory (no CPs appear to do this), to embed it via careful partner selection, or simply to 'be' ALPS and hope it inspires others. Sharing these diverse strategies among those working with partners might benefit a speedier uptake in programmes where partnerships are less pervasive or less diverse.

Box 8. Assessing the Quality of PRRPs by Partners (Gomes Silva 2003)

AA Brazil was invited to attend ASSEMA's semester assembly that brought together 126 representatives to discuss 2001 activity and financial reports. Various quality issues were assessed. For example, the assembly clearly lacked data which limited its evaluation of shortcomings - 2001 data had no comparative 2000 data. Suggestions to improve participation were discussed

Using ALPS central themes: the assembly represents an example of 'accountability' as financial and activity data were presented to participants. However, the financial discussion was very technical and lacked the political depth needed for a discussion on resource allocation. It was certainly a 'participatory' event in the sense of many people present but the assembly favoured those most accustomed to public peaking with a microphone.

Almost only directors and technicians spoke. The organization's board and technical team got more out of the 'learning' what future actions to refine. There was a 'gender' balance due to the organization's policy of favouring female participation at its events. In terms of the 'power relations' within ASSEMA, the meeting represented a balance between the knowledge (and power) of the technicians and the leaders, while the topic of external power relations between ASSEMA and the municipal government was evaluated. We felt reasonably satisfied with our partner's PR&RP.

Nevertheless, *several partnership-related ALPS issues* merit more attention.

1. Partners would not pursue the more 'radical' aspects of ALPS on their own. Gender would remain a footnote for some, and disclosing budgets still remains a taboo for many partners. Time is needed to advance with these aspects. In Kenya and Nepal, staff said that the partners they fund find the PRRPs useful but a burden, as they must also fulfil more conventional M&E requirements of other donors.
2. Some said that working through partnership 'distorts the quality of our work'. In some cases, there is less control over process and product, while progress is slow. In other cases and countries, partners are miles ahead of AA on certain issues, notably gender and advocacy work. Expectations of the kind of impact that AA work should have will need to be adjusted according to the capacity levels with which a CP is dealing.
3. The quality of the process will only be as good as the understanding of the issues and processes by the people involved. AA's ability to strengthen power and gender analysis depends directly on its own capacities. Much leaves to be desired in these areas, as mentioned above.
4. Partner selection criteria can be shaped in part by ALPS principles. The Africa Partnership Review shows that these principles are not used as key criteria for selection Table 6, Raftopoulos and Mupawaenda 2004).

6 Critical Gaps

The form and focus of ALPS, as described in the Guidelines, appears to be largely based on the perception of AA as an implementing country programme and of the DA/DI level specifically, and assuming that child sponsorship is the sole source of funding. AA today is a far more complex kaleidoscope of faces and realities. What does ALPS mean for each of these issues, mechanisms, and structures?

Three types of gaps can be identified in the current conceptualization of ALPS: issues and contextual factors, functions, and governance. A fourth gap is the lack of attention to ensuring quality. It goes without saying that the gaps listed here represent critical areas for future improvements.

6.1   Gaps in Issues and Contextual Factors

A critical gap that is of great interest throughout AA remains the area of *assessing policy, advocacy and rights-based work*. The current ALPS guidelines provide no guidance on this. In part, this is being tackled through an action research initiative (see under 'Innovations'). But initial signs are that more work will be needed to spread the results, answer remaining methodological queries, and ensure coherence with other perspectives and information needs, such as child sponsorship. The notion of 'accountability' requires specific consideration for faceless campaigns that have no clear constituency with whom one can consult and to whom AA can hold itself accountable.

How does and should ALPS manifest itself in *areas of conflict and emergencies*? ALPS relies on the presence of communication channels, some initial trust and some time. None of these are abundant in conflict and emergency situations. What kinds of core requirements are useful, given that time is at an even greater premium? And what difficulties arise relate to the principles that might require some adjustments in the principles?

Although not mandatory as part of internationalisation, recent years have seen increasing effort by CPs to start raising funds in-country. This places ALPS amidst the A, L, and P requirements of *increasingly diverse sources of funding*. Reporting burdens for staff and partners are already known to have grown as a result of this, as parallel systems of information needs and planning methodologies will co-exist. What can be undertaken to provide a smoother fit?

Related to this last point is one well-known gap, the *lack of focused investment in MIS*. Throwing APRS out in 2000 was seen by some, initially, as a ticket to let go of all quantitative data tracking. ALPS places strong emphasis on qualitative information and narratives of change. MIS was relegated to an annex in the Notes. Some country programmes are now realising that MIS is necessary for reporting and strategic planning and for providing additional information to feed reflection and learn about what works. Some CPs have started creating/improving their MIS but more efforts are needed to reach a good balance between the analytical use of quantitative and qualitative information.

6.2   Gaps in Governance

Two areas of AA's governance are unclear in relation to ALPS: the Board and the Regional level.

Board members are not a new phenomenon in ActionAid. But they will be an increasingly critical one as a result of internationalization, as each country will be governed by its own Board. The current Governance Manual does not include ALPS related issues in the selection criteria for Board members, although reference is made to the need for them to embody AA's values. More explicit mention of ALPS in the selection criteria could ensure high level champions for its implementation. The Governance Manual highlights accountability but does not discuss what is expected of how and about what the Board is expected to 'learn' nor of the quality of planning that the Board itself needs to undertake. Board members need to approve a wide range of strategic documents but get no guidance through the Governance Manual on this, such as clear quality criteria for what each core requirement document needs. There is a risk of ALPS being diluted if National Board members are not consciously monitoring their national AA offices on this. So their tasks should/could include a specific one related to ensuring the upholding of ALPS, regularly monitoring innovations and the implementation of ALPS goals, etc. Another question that will need clarification is how the Board itself will be

accountable? What does 'downward accountability' mean for the National and International Boards?

Besides ensuring capable champions for ALPS via the Board, a second critical Board-related governance issue is how the National and International processes and mandates will be integrated with respect to ALPS. Should a National and International Board disagree on how ALPS is to be carried forward, perhaps with a National Board opting for more dilution than the International Board deems appropriate (or vice versa), what mechanism exists to resolve this?

The current *ambiguity over the role of the regional level* has been discussed in section 4.1. What exactly is expected of them generally in AA requires clarity, before progress can be made in clarifying how they can best fulfil core requirements and contribute to ALPS. It is likely that there will be no standard answer for this, as the regions vary enormously in size.

6.3   Gaps in Functions

Functions are explicitly addressed in the core requirements. Yet only some countries appear to consider some of the functions as 'ALPS-worthy'. The perspectives of three functions are particularly critical to integrate into ALPS, and these functions should get full support to embed ALPS in their own procedures and style.

Marketing and fundraising (child and other forms of sponsorship) are the lifeblood of AA. They make it all possible. Child sponsorship, in particular, places heavy reporting demands on CPs. These reporting demands have not been incorporated in the ALPS logic, yet they are integral to being accountable. Not always is this carried out in a mutually respectful way. Some fundraisers accuse some CPs of taking them for granted, while some CPs accuse some fundraisers of being unconsultative and autocratic. There appear to be considerable variation among the European CPs in terms of how they relate to the Southern CPs. Currently, the UK Fundraising division plans its communication agenda in close discussion with the CPs. Capacity-building writing workshops are held. They are engaged in their own PRRPs and do interesting quality tracking of how well CPs perform with respect to the child sponsorship information needs. But not all Fundraising divisions have this style of operation. Particularly important is the need for coherence between the demands that different European CPs place on the Southern CPs. I do not imply that sponsorship related reporting should be reduced in any way, as I have not focused on this in the review and this would require a closer look. However, if sponsorship-related reporting requirements are 'counted' as accountability requirements, this may facilitate a more streamlined information collection process at the DA/DI level, the staff of which bear the information collection burden. Or where marginalised groups undertake the information collection (such as in parts of Brazil), it is local people who pay with their time.

Human resource development is critical to the success of ALPS. It shapes the quality of induction processes, performance appraisals and personal development plans, incentives to stimulate learning within and across programmes, the space to learn from mistakes, etc. While I have come across many examples of good HR practice that help ALPS and a growing number of ALPS processes being taken up by the HR divisions, I did not see comprehensive ALPS audits of HR policies and structures. The Finance division is increasingly looking at its work from an ALPS logic - and is the only function doing so, is my impression. It would be interesting to see what HR improvements might emerge from a similar, more comprehensive

ALPS perspective. Performance appraisal processes, for example, could be strongly shaped by the principles, attitudes and behaviours articulated in ALPS.

The *Communication* staff themselves identified their function as a gap in the global review. Now that Communication is going to become a 'function', it will sit more comfortably in the logic of ALPS. The Communication function can learn much from how other functions have taken up the ALPS challenge. Nevertheless, two specific considerations are needed:

- Undertaking an *ALPS 'audit' for all communications issues*, not just media work but internal communication and inter-programme communications. Currently, for example, marketing people use images of marginalised people to sell 'products' without consulting with those people in the images on how they are portrayed. Attitudes from fundraisers like that heard in one case "They should trust us to do our job!" sit uncomfortably with the value of "Behaving in a way that is not domineering or patronising but that genuinely shares power with others rather than keeps it for oneself" (ActionAid 2000, p 4).

- ALPS does not include any mention of communication! To learn from others requires communication. This may constitute an *inadequately articulated missing principle or value* in ALPS. Much more is needed to support the flow of information on mistakes and achievements, so that learning can genuinely take place.

6.4 The Quality Gap

As the review shows, 'A', 'L', and 'P' are happening. However, the *minimum quality criteria for the different ALPS processes are not clearly defined or tracked*. For financial accountability, there is increasing clarity about what minimum quality standards should be met. For planning processes, the Guidelines provide some help with stipulating the type of information required, while the principles and attitudes and behaviours should embody the standards followed. These latter aspects are, however, fairly generally worded and leave much to the imagination in terms of implementation.

Learning is particularly poorly defined. When I asked ActionAiders if they thought there was any learning happening in AA, they said 'oh yes, there is never-ending change'. It appears that learning is defined as 'change'. Yet so much change happens through non-learning routes, but by accident, crisis, imposition, etc. What then, is the common understanding of learning in ActionAid? Do all in AA have clarity about learning as a mix of internal focused deliberations based on collected evidence on own experiences, external reflections and learning from the experiences of others (vicarious learning)? And how does AA know when 'good quality' learning is happening, so not stopping at involving another colleague in reflecting on the last week's work, but going out and collecting information and debating that with supporters and critics alike? Quality checklists could be developed to help AA staff and partners scrutinise with greater care, for example, 'Is learning distributed equally between partners, AA and beneficiaries?' or 'How does a gender perspective or the quality of RBA work undertaken inform the focus of the partner meetings or of the performance appraisals or the fundraising efforts?'

7   ALPS in an Emergent ActionAid International

7.1   Internationalisation and ALPS

As AA staff members know all too well, they work in a dynamic organisation. Internationalisation is the most recent and far-reaching of changes that need to be accommodated. As AA moves towards into its international identity of autonomous but affiliated AA programmes, it needs to consider how this shift might affect the good that ALPS has triggered. Five key implications are highlighted here.

- *Centralised M&E is likely to decrease with internationalization*, thus potentially exacerbating the existing problem of ensuring that coherent information reaches the global level to inform international campaigns and global reporting.

- *Lines of accountability will shift* away from the international level and towards National Boards. This has implications for the quality of the Board, for the rigidity of core requirements, and for which levels above the national level can be expected to demand and receive what kinds of information.

- *Diversity of ALPS* is likely to increase as Country programmes gain greater autonomy. Nepal has already, for example, let go of DA/DI strategies and is, instead, producing thematic position papers per DI.

- *New affiliates will join AA*. As diversity is likely to increase, ways should be identified to maintain minimum quality criteria at entry into the AA system. ALPS may usefully inform the criteria for selection of CPs to become Affiliates.

- Many affiliated programmes will start to raise funds nationally. This means that CPs may need to master the child sponsorship challenges, as Brazil is currently experiencing, but particularly that CPs will be subject to the M&E requirements of diverse donors. This presents a serious risk for ALPS, as *the constraints of conventional, data and upward accountability-focused processes that were rejected when APRS was abolished may well return to AA via other funding agencies*.

- Working through partnerships is only likely to increase with internationalization. This will require *solid clarity about the partnership-ALPS issues* raised in Section 5 above.

7.2   Summarising ALPS in ActionAid

ALPS represents an organisational paradigm shift that should be nurtured. For Country Programmes not yet thinking along RBA or advocacy lines, the advent of ALPS gave a necessary push in the new direction. But for those CPs and Directors passionate about these issues, ALPS served to reaffirm this position and gave the space they needed to work.

The *shift to ALPS and the adoption of FTP have been mutually reinforcing*. This is worthy of congratulations. Many other development organisations have adopted FTP- or RBA-like policies, yet remain firmly wedded to a count-and-control accountability and planning structure in which there is no room for learning, and no mention of principles, behaviours or attitudes. Table 12 highlights the main achievements and challenges of ALPS.

Table 12. Progress and challenges of ALPS2000-2004 (based on the 7-S Model[7])

Organisational Aspect	Key achievements	Core challenges
1. *Strategy*	• Clear articulation of a vision for A, L, and P that is consistent with RBA and gender equity priorities • Differentiating between procedures and principles – and stressing their interdependence	• Filling the gaps, particularly with certain functions, Northern CPs, themes, • Articulating strategy for focused support needed to avoid that ALPS is left up to chance
2. *Structure*	• Recognising problems associated with centralised control and related focus on downward accountability • Shift from counting exercise of the APRS to stories and narratives of change via the PRRP • Critical reflection and learning is stipulated in reports.	• Clarifying the new lines of accountability with internationalization • Locating the regional level • More comprehensive 'translation' of ALPS for the Northern CPs and functions (HR, fundraising, communications)
3. *Systems*	• Flexible timeframe for reporting has been an advantage of ALPS • Starting attempts to link finance and HR with programmatic side of work • Much room for innovation with new systems and procedures	• Quality expected of A, L, P processes needs to be specified • Better balance needed between diversity(CP and below) and centralised information needs (above CP level) • Weak MIS • Ensuring that impact information *and* lessons are institutionalised outputs of any review process • Ensuring coherence between HR/OD, finance, governance, right to information policy *and* ALPS
4. *Style*	• Greater understanding of the real value and inherent problems of ActionAid's work. • Great openness by staff to frank feedback from peers, donors, partners and marginalised citizens	• No clarity on expected or clear tracking of attitudes and behaviours • Dilemma between funding-related profiling AA (i.e. standing apart in the crowd) and being part of coalitions (i.e. disappearing in the crowd) • ALPS success depends strongly on management 'savvy' senior management
5. *Skills*	• Some competency building with facilitation, participatory approaches, RBA, gender equity for staff and partners • Staff starting to engage with the value of a 'learning' perspective • Considerable progress with financial accountability innovations	• The need for more on RBA, power and gender analysis, and facilitation cannot be stressed enough • Care with asking too much too quickly from staff • More balanced invested needed to avoid excessive focus on financial accountability skills
6. *Staff*	• Increasing investment in HR policies compatible with FPT	• Ensuring that programme and fundraising staff are informed about ALPS, included in a wide range of

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[7] The 7-S model provides a structure for summarising how an organisation performs when it implements a change, such as ALPS. http://www.1000ventures.com/business_guide/mgmt_inex_7s.html.

	and ALPS • Capacity to attract highly motivated and talented staff	required competency-building efforts and ALPS innovation, and that their problems with ALPS are heard and responded to
7. *Shared values*	• Very clear set of values at international and country level that are widely shared	• Greater understanding needed of RBA and gender – and how to work with the analysis of power and gender • More focused attempts to deal with the attitudes and behaviours that are considered conditions for success of ALPS • Elevating the status of principles/ A&B so that ALPS is more than just PRRP and an Annual Report

Indications are that *many of the good practices visible in the AA system are not due to the existence of a set of documented guidelines* but rather due to good HR procedures, politically imbued and management savvy Country Directors, or good quality RBA in which some of the more participatory aspects of the work are automatically included. Many people I spoke with were not familiar to any degree with the ALPS guidelines – several were quickly scanning the Guidelines as I walked into their offices. Yet their daily practice with partners and communities often strongly reflected the principles. This is not a problem. But if my impressions are correct, then it simply indicates that the direction of investment for further improvement of ALPS does not necessarily lie in perfecting the Guidelines.

Improvements can be facilitated by *clarity about challenges*. Many have been mentioned in the review thus far. I would like to highlight those that I feel are particularly significant.

1. *The time-consuming nature of ALPS* means that shortcuts are made in applying principles "nor is there a continuous process of ALPS in the work that country programmes do" (Kantelberg 2004). The lack of time thus far to develop a full suite of ALPS processes means that gaps occur, for example "using ALPS to assess impact of policy/advocacy and putting lessons into action" (Kantelberg 2004).

2. *Slow lead time for ALPS-related changes to become visible.* As much as ALPS tries to inspire change in attitudes, behaviour, and culture, there are still challenges associated with such changes, in particular, the time it takes before organisational cultural shifts are visible and the adoption of ALPS where local cultures are very different.

3. The *lack of staff capacity* is stifling the further uptake of ALPS. Competency gaps exist in analytical writing, facilitation, gender and power analysis, as well as limited understanding of the need for ALPS (Kantelberg 2004) and in particular of how to operationalise the principles.

4. *Poor coherence with parallel processes* that challenge working with ALPS principles. This includes internal management and fundraising processes, as well as donor conditionalities for non-sponsorship funded work. Second, Northern CPs have not engaged fully with ALPS processes.

5. *ALPS in relation to partners* requires more clarity, as partners are accountable to their communities and extending country programme work. Bridging the multiple interpretations of ALPS among staff and partners needs addressing. The consequences

of internationalisation on ALPS have not yet been looked at systematically (see Simon Matsvai's report and section 7.1 of this report).

6. *Attribution.* AA needs, to some extent, to assert its own identity and its own success, as much for accountability reasons as for marketing and fundraising reasons. This sits uneasily with its role as one of many voices in local, national and international advocacy efforts. A challenge recognised by AA Ireland in the Communication self-assessment was: "*Getting recognition for the ActionAid brand while working in coalitions (which we have done for strategic reasons related to establishing our legitimacy)* (Communication Europe report, pg 6). On the ground it is difficult to identify the impact of ALPS when the actions may not be immediate within the community or even in the mid-term.

7. *Learning with respect to the global goals and objectives.* The purpose of learning and processes for ensuring learning with respect to the global strategy is not clear. Countries use their CSPs to structure their reflections. At the moment, global reflections appear to occur mainly through annual PRRPs with the International Directors and the writing of the Global Progress Report. But are key lessons truly being learned with respect to goals 1, 2, 3 and 4? (and their interaction)? Is this also the case for strategic objectives 1 to 6? How was this learned? Whose lessons are these? It comes back to my point of how well and how 'learning' is defined in AA. Does the organization specifically try to collate 'lessons learned' with respect to its overarching goals and strategic objectives? And then IF this is happening, then it is important that there is clarity on whose lessons these are - are they yours just because you happened to collate the material for the Global Progress Report, the IDs, the IDS as checked with the National Directors, those from the National directors and collated upwards, etc. It is very easy to say 'we learned...' but the 'we' needs to be unpacked at the global level as the information that shapes the lessons passes through so many layers that it may well be distorted by the time it reaches the global level.

8. *Lack of clarity between ALPS and M&E.* Much confusion exists between how ALPS and M&E relate to each other. Evaluations are being fairly well dealt with through PRRPs, and thematic and CSP reviews. However, with the advent of ALPS, quantitative monitoring processes in particular seem to have all but disappeared in some cases. The use of quantitative comparative data to deepen the understanding of what does and does not work and why is not a common practice at all. This extends to the comparative tracking of changes in power relations and gender equity concerns.

8   Core Recommendations and Questions for ActionAid

8.1   Clarifying ALPS in ActionAid

ALPS is relatively new so some confusion, fuzzy areas and gaps are understandable, particularly given that AA's identity and structures have changed considerably in recent years.

1. *Promote ALPS as a stool with three equally important legs:* 'core requirements' as the minimum procedures, 'principles' as minimum quality standards, and 'attitudes and behaviours' as core success factors. Articulate explicit strategies for all three aspects, particularly that of attitudes and behaviours that has been left entirely up to everyone's

own discretion. Redesign the figure that is used to explain what ALPS is to reflect this more comprehensive definition of ALPS. The identity of ALPS must move beyond that of a regular PRRP and annual report.

2. *Identify and clarify recurring contradictions and ambiguities.* Notable among these is resolving the tensions between the CP and global level about whether or not Annual Reports are needed for the Global level and whether or not all CPS need to deliver core information to help assess progress against global goals and objectives. Another ambiguity is how CSPs and 3-year rolling plans relate to each other. For some, CSPs remain the core reference for assessing progress and 3-year plans are an empty financial exercise, while in other CPs, the 3 year rolling plans have taken over that role. Finally, it requires some terminology clarification, notably how M&E relates to ALPS.

3. *Critically assess the core requirements.* Given that the core requirements were largely based on a CP and DA/DI logic of ActionAid and that internationalisation will herald more rather than less diversity, the currently non-negotiable core requirements need some scrutiny. For example, the need for annual reviews for all policy areas may be unnecessarily frequent in some cases, while Nepal has let go of DA/DI strategies as it pursues thematic position papers per DI. This will require identifying where and how the quality can be maintained (see 8.3 below).

4. *The original set of principles requires some reassessing.* It is not clear what the 'true' set of principles is. In the one used for this review, considerable overlap exists between the principles related to people's participation, and to accountability and transparency. New principles might be considered, such as 'AA seeks to add value to existing development processes and actors' or a principle that reflects good communication practices, two ideas that emerged in discussions. What should a revised list of principles look like, given AA's four years of experience with FPT, RBA and ALPS?

5. *Clarify the location of ALPS in the management structure* to help embed it as a cross-cutting responsibility. Currently, the champion is considered the 'Impact Assessment' person. This person might act as the quality champion but more is needed to embed ALPS in the functions. It will be critical to ensure an integrated ALPS function exists at international level that integrates the intentions of the Shared Learning initiative alongside the current A, L, and P functions.

8.2   Supporting the Ongoing Uptake of ALPS

The lack of follow-up support to embed large organisational changes, such as RBA and gender equity, was one of the key findings of the TSII team. It is no surprise that current levels of support for ALPS, too, are largely inadequate. While the spirit of ALPS calls on people's creativity, not everyone has to invent the wheel and much hesitation and rushed attempts could be avoided by more time to think before acting. Further efforts are needed to ensure a comprehensive 'roll-out' of ALPS that includes the current laggards but in particular for ongoing understanding and competency-building.

6. *Fill the gaps!* See Section 6 for details on the key gaps (issues and contextual factors, governance and functions). These are largely related to helping certain CPs, functions, and themes interpret what ALPS in practice means for them and then try it out. Consider the possibility of the progressive uptake of new ideas. For example, now that capacity-building financial accountants in Kenya have done such a great job on that

aspect of ALPS, maybe their role can be phased out and investment can shift to capacity-building gender and power auditors. Do not only fill the gaps relate to core requirements but also for the principles and attitudes and behaviours.

7. *Identify the most appropriate types of support for ongoing implementation.* Documentation of ALPS is clearly insufficient to ensure understanding and implementation. Familiarity comes from trying it out. In Kenya, induction of programme staff includes 10 days to visit any other DI areas, where ALPS can be seen in action. Such experiences may, in some cases, be a safer bet as support mechanism for that group of staff. Different types of opportunities are needed for staff to reflect on implications, dilemmas and concerns they might have. Ongoing forms of updating on skills, not just one-off induction exposures. What are the priorities for support per region, per function (national and international), and per country that can allow ALPS to thrive?

8. *Invest where your priorities lie.* Why is it that financial accountability can count on so much capacity-building support, when other competencies crucial for successful ALPS are seriously neglected? Appropriate levels of investment commensurate with what are presumed to be equally important principles are critical to strengthen the current weak areas of RBA, gender equity, facilitation skills, experiential learning and participatory M&E.

9. *Align the content and quality of capacity-building events with ALPS.* If training events are considered an important means then the content and quality of training events on related skills such as RBA, facilitation skills, MIS, etc, should align with ALPS. Where external consultants undertake such tasks, as is often the case, then this must be made explicit. If not, contradictions will arise. For example, a recent logframe workshop provided by consultants in Brussels (REF), concluded that ALPS should redirect more towards the Logframe methodology. Yet it is precisely the dogma of logframe culture that ALPS has sought to sidestep. M&E workshops in particular must be aligned with ALPS as the standard fare, often Logframe-inspired, might only sow confusion.

8.3 Improving the Quality of ALPS

Currently the core requirements do not include explicit quality criteria for accountability or learning, and describe desired content of planning processes but do not detail the quality of the processes themselves. As the ALPS documented guidelines do not appear to function as quality baseline reference, other strategies for quality-focused uptake may offer better returns.

10. *Explore the potential of ALPS health checks to guide the analysis of implementation quality and identify mechanisms for undertaking these or some other type of quality audit.* Responsibility for this function should be clearly allocated, as is that of financial accountability. Currently at the international level, Internal Auditors do a rapid assessment of country level ALPS compliance. However, this is done on the basis of slim knowledge of ALPS and focuses more on core requirements than quality of work as indicated in the ALPS principles and attitudes/behaviour.

11. *Launch focused learning efforts to address existing ALPS dilemmas.* Many AA staff members struggle with ALPS in practice. Establishing one (or more) active learning groups across the CPs that identify critical gaps in understanding, and then collect and share 'good practices' should not be difficult. AA has precedents for this type of

learning process. This used to occur through an ALPS working group and a newsletter 'IA Exchanges'. It is unclear why this organisational learning initiative was not allowed to continue. This effort could include the documentation of the many innovations that exist, in which quality issues would be embedded.

12. *Streamline focused reports.* Obligatory core reports vary enormously in quality and quantity. Some write long narratives, others bullet points. ActionAid knows plenty of good examples. The SUCAM Social Audit presents its findings through simple lists: key achievements, challenges, learnings (with evidence), continuing impact, value for money. For the Global Progress Report, CPs submitted their 'prouds' and 'sorries'. Much clarity would be gained by providing clearer guidance on simple reporting options, thus enhancing the likelihood of quality uptake of ALPS.

13. *Seek innovations and <u>share</u> them continually.* Continued conscious efforts are needed to identify gaps at all levels of the AA system, pursue innovations, document and share the findings. Do not seek 'best practices' – good ones will do just fine. To facilitate organisation-wide learning, AA could consider doing a 'communication flows' scan of its systems and layers, as significant information does not seem to be reaching the field level or flowing up/across the system.

14. *Validate and invest in all principles as <u>equally</u> important.* It appears that in ALPS, the principles are not all equally weighted. Much more energy has been invested in, for example, the accountability and transparency principles than in those relating to power/gender analysis and devolved decision-making.

8.4 Setting Clear ALPS Agendas

While the Impact Assessment Unit in UK has its own strategy and ALPS goals, it has only limited reach in AA. More efforts are needed to set organisation-wide ALPS targets, which could increase the likelihood of ALPS embedding itself more solidly and creatively in AA.

15. *Set A, L, and P goals.* CPs, functions and themes can review the quality of their ALPS work (see suggestion 1, section 8.3) and, where quality is lagging, set themselves annual or biannual learning, accountability and/or planning goals that focus on improving the implementation of ALPS. In setting targets, consider what aspects of ALPS the organization feels it cannot hold itself to or that appear redundant. It is important to break the pervasive tendency of setting impossibly, depressingly unrealistic standards.

16. *Improve tracking of ALPS implementation and innovations.* At the moment, it is not possible to know who has complied with which part of their core requirements and with which quality. The IA unit has tried to obtain such information but feedback at country level has been ad hoc. This information could be used to target additional support.

17. *Provide open access to strategies and reviews.* With little effort, documents related to the core requirements can be posted to the web, just as SUCAM posted all its financial information to an open access website. This would be in line with AA's 'Right to Information' Policy and could help to track recommendations. Documents related to ALPS innovations could serve as inspiration.

8.5   Specific A, L, and P Recommendations

18. *Clarify what the 'A' of accountability stands for* beyond the DA/DI realities. ALPS was designed by focusing on DA/DI impleme ntation. More clarity is needed for Northern CPs, international functions, national and international policy work, and the regional level, given that accountability to marginalized citizens is a critical feature of ALPS yet hard to envisage implementing be yond the DA/DI level.

19. *Clarify what learning means in AA.* Currently, it is used to cover any kind of reflection and change. Everywhere I went, people pointed to changes when asked about evidence of learning. But changes are not necessarily triggered by critical reflection, and not all learning has to lead to change. More conscious efforts are needed to look critically at the idea of 'lessons' and what quality/content lessons should have if they are going to help shape strategic rethinking.

20. *Consider the question 'who is doing the learning'* and assess whether reflective processes include those who could benefit most from learning. This will help indicate what communication mechanisms might be needed to ensure that exchange, dialogue and collective analysis ha ppens closest to the point where they would benefit marginalised citizens most.

21. *Invest in strategic planning.* Planning abounds in AA. The question is whether it is sufficiently strategic, i.e. based on a clear sense of priority issues and added-value by AA to existing development efforts. What (non-negotiable) quality criteria can be used to structure planning that ensures it is strategic?

Annex 1. Terms of Reference

A Review of ActionAid's Accountability, Learning and Planning System (ALPS)

Background

ActionAid's strategy, *Fighting poverty together (1999-2005)* has demanded significant organisational change. Changes which attempt to bring our internal processes and systems in line with our organisational goals and objectives – systems and processes that facilitate rather than hinder the development process.

Central to these changes was the introduction in September 2000 of ActionAid's Accountability Learning and Planning System (ALPS). ALPS is an attempt to embed the idea of rights and justice to the very heart of ActionAid's systems. The essential principles of ALPS are closely linked to ActionAid's mission and strategy: promoting greater accountability, gender equity, transparency and empowerment of the poor. As such, the system has the potential to create opportunities for poor people, particularly the most marginalised groups, not only to access resources, but also have influence and choice over the forces that affect their lives.

Nevertheless, ALPS also asks' for core requirements. These, in themselves, are not new. They include:
- **Strategies** at each level (programmes, countries, functions, regions, ActionAid) every three to five years
- **Three year rolling plans** (with annual up-dates)
- **Annual reports** for ActionAid globally, regional programmes and divisions
- **Strategic reviews** External (consultant led) reviews of work at each level after 3-5 years
- **Annual participatory review and reflections** at all levels.

In 2004, ActionAid will be going through a major change in its organisational evolution. As we move closer towards the foundation of a new ActionAid International, we need to ensure that our current Accountability Learning and Planning System (ALPS) helps support the organisation through this change process.

A key aim of internationalisation is to deepen our accountability and legitimacy in the countries where we work. A major challenge will be to ensure we are able to balance the different levels of accountability. We need to be able to capture the key lessons and issues emanating from our programmes to enable us to become more effective as an international organisation in the fight against poverty.

During 2004, the ActionAid will be carrying out an organisational review of *Fighting poverty together (1999-2005),* ActionAid's global strategy. A major component of this review will be an in depth review of the current ALPS system. This will be an opportunity to assess how ALPS has been implemented, and how it has supported the changes that ActionAid envisaged in *Fighting poverty together*. The lessons and findings of the review will feed into the overall organisational review and will help us to think about the kind of accountability, learning and planning system that will be required under internationalisation and the future ActionAid International.

Purpose

To review how ALPS has been implemented across the agency and identify key lessons and recommendations for the future ActionAid International accountability, learning and planning system (or equivalent).

The key objectives will be to:

- Assess how and in what way ALPS has supported the agency in operationalising *Fighting poverty together* ie

- o Increased accountability to poor people, partners and other key stakeholders
- o Encouraged greater participation of poor people and partners in planning, budgeting, monitoring and assessing the value of interventions
- o Supported a better analysis of gender and power
- o Reduced burdensome reporting, and encourage learning, critical reflection and innovation
- o Promoted feedback loops and better management decision making processes
- o Improved our understanding of the cost of interventions and their impact
- o Fostered a culture of transparency
- Identify key achievements, lessons and gaps in the system.
- Provide a set of practicable recommendations for changes and improvement.

Process & methodology

The process and methodology will be developed with an external consultant. The consultant will work with a small reference group, which will include: regional Impact Assessment representatives (Ephraim/Pamela/LAC equivalent), a member of AA Alliance (Italy) finance, gender representative and Head of IA & IA Project Officer.

It is envisaged that the review will include:
- Organisational inventory of core requirements and how, where and when they have occurred, (appraisals, reviews, strategies, 3 year plans, Participatory review and reflection processes PRRPs) – possibly short survey type questionnaire.
- Review of a sample of outputs from ALPS processes at all levels (eg recent country/DA DI reviews, 3 year plans etc)
- Case studies:
  - o 2 or 3 country programmes
  - o 1 global donor funded programme eg SIPAA
  - o 1 international campaign (Food Rights or Education)
  - o Work in the North (eg Italy, Marketing, Dev Education)
  - o Organisational functions (eg Shared Learning/HR OD/Finance/Sponsorship)

There will be a mixture of focus group discussions, country visits, and 1:1 interviews. These will be identified with the consultant but should include: communities /partners/AA staff/donors/academic institutions etc

Approximately 30 days work in total.

Review Outputs
- A succinct report, which will highlight key achievements, lessons, challenges and outline a set of practicable recommendations for revisions to ALPS (no more that 30 pages).
- Feedback to OE Director and Head of IA
- Feedback (via teleconference) to the Taking Stock II team

Guiding Questions

1. To what extent has the introduction of ALPS contributed and supported changes in our development approach and ways of working. For example has it helped us to:

    a. Increase accountability to poor people, partners and other key stakeholders
    b. Reduce burdensome reporting
    c. Encouraged learning, critical reflection and innovation
    d. Promote feedback loops and better management decision-making processes

     e. Encourage greater participation of poor people and partners in planning, budgeting, monitoring and assessing the value of interventions

     f. Improve our analysis of gender and power

     g. Improve our understanding of the cost of interventions and their impact

     h. Foster a culture of transparency

Where has this been done and how? What are the lessons? What have been the challenges/gaps?

2. How has Alps encouraged the integration of key functions or other requirements at different levels finance, donor reporting, HR/OD, sponsorship, shared learning etc. What are the levels of coherence between these systems and ALPS? Where are we doing this well and why? What have been the challenges and why? What could we be doing differently?

3. How has ALPS contributed to our understanding of gender relations and equity issues? The impacts of HIV/AIDS? Our partnership approaches and relations? Where are we doing this well and why? Where are we finding it more difficult? What have been the challenges and why? What could we be doing differently?

4. How are we ensuring the quality of ALPS processes at different levels eg monitoring compliance of basic standards in ALPS processes, seeking external, independent consultants to give us critical feedback and insights?

5. Have our systems supported the development of staff skills and capacities to undertake ALPS processes?

6. What are the overall strengths, learning or suggestions for improvements? What suggestions for an ALPS in an internationalised structure that will involve new members, more thematic programming, complex levels of accountability etc?

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Annex 3. People and Groups Consulted

United Kingdom (27 January and 7-8 of July 2004)
Lanre Amao (Internal Audit Manager)
David Archer (coordinator Education Theme)
Jenny Chapman (Project Manager, Advocacy Research Project, IAU)
Imelda McGuigan (Fundraising)
Renee Kantelberg (Programme Assistant, Impact Assessment Unit)
Antonella Mancini (Head of Impact Assessment Unit)
Richard Miller (UK Director)
Paul Richards (Head of HR/OD)
Emma Scullion (Fundraising)
Michelle Hancock (Fundraising)
Linda Swain (Internal Audit Unit)
Koy Thomson (Director of Policy)
Peter De Vena Franks (Fundraising)

Kenya (9 to 15 May 2004)
Makena Mwobobia (Programme Development)
Rose ?? (Partnership Development)
Wario Galma (Regional Coordinator, Northeast)
Elizabeth Muthuma (Impact Assessment, Programme Development)
Munameza M. (Finance Coordinator)
Julian Ongonge (HR/OD, then Acting Country Director)
Nyawira K. (Regional Coordinator Rift)
David Cheruyiot (PC Bomet)
Isaiah Kyengo (Policy Research Coordinator, Rift)
Titus Lotee (PC West Pokot)
Patricia Parsitau (PC Narok)
Margaret Kabue (HIV/AIDS Coordinator)
Margaret W. (PC Kieni)
Gatigwa Kimana (ex Finance Coordinator)
Meetings with partner leadership: NGOMA (CBO/Campaign), Human-Wildlife Management Network
    (CBO/Campaign), two Pillar of Hope trustees (HIV/AIDS CBO), Farming Systems Kenya, Kenya
    Land Alliance,
Group member meetings: Osiligi (Human-Wildlife CBO; 9 men, 2 women), Esarunoto Emaa
    (HIV/AIDS CBO; 24 people), Nabunu-Ntomonok (Women's empowerment CBO; 17 women),
    Nkiasin Naasipa (Education CBO; 13 men, 2 women)
Group meeting with national partners: Food Rights: Mr. Makanya - PELUM Kenya, Dr. Masake -
    CARPA, Mr. hooton - Smallholder Dairy Project, Mr. Ogola - Nairobi Friends Club International,
    Dr. Otieno – Foodlink Resources, Dr. Munyua – AU0IBAR, Mr. Aremu – Foodlink Resources;
    Gender and Governance: Barbara –ELCI, Faith Kasibi – Ifabili, Katini Ciri – Institute of
    Economic Affairs, Patrick – 4Cs, Francis – National Council of NGOs, Ann Kathumbi, Coalition
    of Violence against Women

Italy (24 and 25 of May, 2004)
Marco de Ponte - Country Director
Gaia Melloni - IA
Paola Giulani – IA, gender, programme contacts
Luca de Fraia - Policy and Advocacy
Roberta Capella – Marketing and Fundraising
Sara Bertolai – Finance and administration
Stefania Donaera - Communications coordinator
Roger Mann – Sponsorship

Nicoletta Pentico – new Board Member, ex CEO MSF-Italy
Two sponsors: Valeria (4 years of sponsorship) and Luca (6 years of sponsorship)

India (7 to 14 June 2004)
Team meeting with: Finance Manager, HR/OD Manager , Gender Coordinator , Policy Research
Manager, Sponsorship/Fundraising, Country Director, Regional Coordinators, Partnership
Development
Mohamed Asif - Impact Assessment People/Unit
Supriya (Regional Coordinator, Orissa)
Madhumita Ray (Programme manager, Orissa)
Harsh Mander (ex-Country Director)
Sharanya Nayak (Programme Officer)
Bharati Chakra (Sponsorship Coordinator)
Padmalaya Mishra (ICT Assistant Coordinator)
Prafulla Pradhan (Accountant)
Subrat Rout (ICT Project Coordinator)
Chintamani Mohapatra (ICT Assistant Coordinator)
Ashok Chand Mahaling (Driver)
Supriya Akerkar (Regional Manager)
Bratindi Jena (Prog Manager)
Madhumita Ray (Prog Manager)
Pushpashree Devi (Prog Officer)
Biren Nayak (Prog Officer)
Shashikant Mallik (Prog Officer)
Subrat Nayak (Desk Officer)
Group meetings in the following villages: Siletpada (Ganrei, Muribahal); Ganrei (Panchayat
Ganrei/Block Muribahal); Malpada (Panchayat Gandharla/Block Bangamunda); Chhatabhata
(Panchayat Parasara/Block Titilagarh)
Group meeting with CBO members of CADC: Note – only 1 woman.
Group meeting with CBO/NGO members of Disability Network:
Group meeting with NGO members of CADMB (Collective Action for Drought Mitigation in
    Balangir): NIPDIT, GMP, FARR, NYS, IRRM, ALSB, SB, Goabandhu Club, AJSA, Adhikar,
    GMP, ADHAR, RCDC, JMA. NOTE – only 1 woman

Brazil (28 May and 4 June 2004)
Jorge Romano (Director AA Brazil)
Célia Bartone (Child Sponsorship)
Glauce Arzua (Communications and Share Learning)
Rosana Heringer (Programme Coordinator
Almir Pereira Jr. (HIV/AIDS coordinator)
Ana Toni (Ford Foundation direcotr, founding director of AA Brazil)
Jean Charles Catalan (Finance and Administration Director)
Nifete – gender and local development coordinator, Women's NGO – partner
Izete – member of a Residents Association CBO
Neta – Local Housing Committee member

Others
Ephraim Dhlembeu (Africa Region Programme Coordinator)
Mozambique telephone interview – David Jorge (internal director), Manuel Luis (HR/OD), Felipe
(Food Security), Benilda (gender coordinator)
Nepal telephone interview – Sujeeta Mathema (IA Contact person)

Annex 4. ALPS Survey 2004

Q1. What is your name?

Q2. What is your job title?

Q3. In which country do you work in?

Q4. In which year (and month if known) did your country begin to implement ALPS?

Q5. In the past 3 years, what support has been given to ActionAid staff/partners in your country to <u>specifically</u> support ALPS implementation and processes? *Please tick which type of participants where given which type of support.*

Type of support	Partners	Senior Management	Programme Staff		Policy Staff		Fund-Raising	Comms /media	Finance Audit	HR/OD	Sponso rship	Admin/ general support (eg drivers)
			HQ	Field	HQ	Field						
None												
ALPS workshop												
ALPS specific induction												
New staff induction process												
Given copy of ALPS document												
Given copy of Notes to Accompany ALPS												
Training (*please specify***) For example training on:**												
• Facilitation Skills												
• Gender & power analysis												
• Monitoring & evaluation												
• Finance for non-finance staff												
• Participatory methodologies												
• Other (*please specify*)												

Q6. Has the ALPS document been adapted to your country context?   Yes   ?   No   ?
If yes, how? *(Tick as appropriate)*
   Translated   ?
   Locally rewritten manual based on ALPS document   ?
   Local guidelines on how to use the ALPS document   ?
   Incorporated into HR/OD procedures/manual   ?
   Incorporated into Finance procedures/manual   ?
   Other (***please state)***...

Q7. How many FULL-TIME staff posts are dedicated to Impact Assessment/Monitoring & Evaluation (IA/M&E) within your programme?

46

Q8. Of these FULL-TIME posts, please tell us how many roles are taken by men and women and at different management levels. Please fill in the numbers in the blank spaces in the table below.

Q9. How many PART-TIME staff posts are dedicated to IA/M&E within your programme? This should include people who have another role but devote some of their time to IA/M&E work.

Q10. Of these PART-TIME posts, please tell us how many roles are taken by men and women and at different management levels. Please fill in the numbers in the blank spaces in the table overleaf.

Q.11. ALPS asks for core requirements. These are mandatory and include:

 Appraisals (for new *DA/DI's/programmes, new countries*)

- 3-5 year strategies *(for all DA/DI's/programmes, countries, functions, divisions, international campaigns, regions, international)*
- 3 year rolling plans and budgets – (*All levels*)
- Annual reports *(International, regions, functions/divisions and affiliate countries)*
- 3-5 year strategy reviews *(for all DA/DI's/programmes, countries, functions, divisions, international campaigns, regions, international,)*
- Annual participatory review and reflection processes (*All levels*)

How many of the above core processes have been carried out since ALPS was introduced. *Please indicate how many were undertaken in each year. An empty box means none where undertaken.*

Core Requirement	Number(s) Year 2000	Number(s) Year 2001	Number(s) Year 2002	Number(s) Year 2003	Number(s) Year 2004	Comments
Appraisal						
DA/DI (programme) strategy						
Country Strategy						
Region Strategy						
Division/Function Strategy						
International Strategy						
International Campaign Strategy						
DA/DI (programme) Review						
Country Review						
Region Review						
Division/Function Review						
International Review						
International Campaign Review						
3 Year Plan & Budget						
International Annual Report						
Region Annual Report						
Function/Division Annual Report						
Affiliate Country Annual Report						
DA/DI (programme) PRRP						
Country (national office) PRRP						
Region PRRP						
Function/Division PRRP						
Affiliate Country PRRP						
International PRRP						

Q12. Central to ALPS is a set of core principles to guide ActionAid's work. These are:

- Strengthened accountability to the poor
- Greater participation of the poor in ActionAid's and its partners decision making processes
- Emphasis on learning, innovation & different forms of communication
- Financial expenditure against programme quality and change
- Increased transparency
- Commitment to gender equity

- Recognition of power & power relations

Please rate how well you think your country programme/function is doing against each statement by circling the number that most closely represents your experience of implementing ALPS in your country/function contex t.

The introduction of ALPS has:	Not at all	Only just beginning to see changes	Significant change has taken place but not widespread	Widespread and far reaching changes are taking place	Don't know
• *increased accountability to poor people, partners and other key stakeholders*	1	2	3	4	5
• *brought the concerns and aspirations of poor people into the centre of our decision making*	1	2	3	4	5
• *encouraged greater participation of poor people and partners in planning, budgeting, monitoring and assessing the value of interventions*	1	2	3	4	5
• *reduced <u>burdensome </u>reporting and created space and opportunities for critical reflection and analysis that has improved programme and advocacy actions*	1	2	3	4	5
• *ensured that decisions are taken as close to the point where their consequences are felt*	1	2	3	4	5
• *improved our analysis of power and gender*	1	2	3	4	5
• *improved our understanding of the cost of interventions and their impact*	1	2	3	4	5
• *fostered a culture of transparency and openness*	1	2	3	4	5

Q13. What do you feel have been the most exciting and effective changes in the approaches / processes and methods to plan, monitor and evaluate your work since ALPS was introduced? *Please list up to 5 only.*

Q14. Do you share the results / learnings from your monitoring and evaluations? Yes ?   No ?

Q15. How is this information shared? *Please tick ALL that apply.*

Face-to-face meetings	?	Intranet	?
Workshops	?	Other *(please specify)*	?
Newsletters / other publications	?	…………………………………………	

Q16. With whom do you share this information? *Please tick ALL that apply.*

Local communities	?	Government	?
Local partners/community based organisations	?	Current donors	?
ActionAid colleagues in this country	?	Potential donors	?
ActionAid colleagues in other countries	?		
NGOs in your country	?	Other *(please specify)*	?
NGOs in other countries	?	…………………………………………	

Q17. What (if any) have been the 3 most significant benefits and/or changes ALPS has made to your work?

Q18.What (if any) have been the 3 most significant challenges and problems you have faced in implementing ALPS?

Q19. What steps have been taken to overcome these challenges and problems?

Q20. Are there any areas of improvement and/or changes you would like to suggest for future revisions to ALPS? *If so, what are they?*