

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

World Bank recognised concerns over policies for southern nations

By Yao Graham, Godfrey Kanyenze, Mahbubul Karim, Karoly Lorant, Muriel Mafico and Hellen Wangusa

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From Members of the SAPRIN Committee.

Sir, The five-year, four-continent consultation and field investigation into the impact of structural adjustment policies, known as the Structural Adjustment Participatory Review Initiative (Sapri), was not, in fact, conducted only by non-government organisations and local academics, as you suggest ("The difficult search for global standards", Comment & Analysis February 26), but also by the World Bank and governments in the south. Together we established terms of reference, convened forums and hired teams of investigators who produced the findings that were agreed in each country.

As such, the results were no more predetermined by the opposition to structural adjustment policies on the part of our largely southern steering committee and our secretariat at The Development GAP - which has served our network and the Sapri process professionally in Washington - than by the World Bank's unwavering support and promotion of them.

Indeed, our different positions were at the root of the agreement to engage one another, and thousands of local organisations from a wide range of sectors, in Sapri. If the findings were unsurprising, as you state, it is because the on-the-ground, devastating realities of bank-promoted adjustment policies are starkly obvious to us in the south and to anyone who takes an objective look at them, as was done in this joint initiative.

You also failed to report that the legitimacy of the concerns raised in Sapri was acknowledged by James Wolfensohn, president of the World Bank, as documented in a bank transcript. That transcript, as well as public documents that established the initiative, also reflect Mr Wolfensohn's commitment to follow up with concrete changes in the field, something he has failed to do not only in Sapri but also in the cases of the World Commission on Dams and, so far, the Extractive Industries Review.

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