



Power in People

**act:onaid**

**ActionAid Netherlands**

# **Strategy 2017-2028**

Change the rules for a just and sustainable world



# 1 | INTRODUCTION

ActionAid believes in the power of people. Over the years we have taken sides with some of the poorest communities around the world, defending their right to food and access to basic services, and demanding government and corporate accountability. By working together, we are convinced we can make a lasting difference.

We know that the goal of eradicating poverty and injustice is a massive undertaking. That's one reason why we joined up with ActionAid in 2012, becoming the Dutch member of a worldwide federation with a presence in 48 countries across the globe. ActionAid is well known for its **rights-based approach and deep roots in even the remotest communities** in the global South. We have quickly become part of the fabric of the federation, strengthening and amplifying the voices of the excluded in our own political arenas – in the Netherlands and Europe – while gaining access to key international spaces to ensure that our voices are heard at every level

of society. We have also established our position in some important Dutch networks such as the Fair Green and Global Alliance, Tax Justice Netherlands, MVO (Corporate Social Responsibility) platform and WO=MEN (the Dutch gender platform).

Looking back on our previous strategy and objectives<sup>1</sup>, we see many successes and changes that we can be proud of. We supported 22,000 women farmers from Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe to claim their rights to land and agricultural inputs and to put the issue firmly on the agenda of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Our work with the International Alliance of Natural Resources in Africa (IANRA), a network we have supported from day one, has led to the world's first draft model mining law based on community input. The model law has the power to

1 Our previous strategy, Action for equity in Africa: natural resources for a just and sustainable future covered the period 2012-2017. We have chosen to align our new strategy period with that of ActionAid International, which covers the period 2017-2028. This new strategy thus prematurely replaces the previous strategy by one year.



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Schoolgirls Shalon (centre left) and Eliza (centre right) at school in Malawi's capital, Lilongwe, hold placards calling for tax compliance by big companies, so their government has the revenue it desperately needs to provide basic services such as education.

protect communities from rights violations by mining companies, a key problem we've worked long and hard to expose and address. Another achievement was the decision by the Dutch government and the European Council to limit the use of biofuels from food crops. Broad-based, coordinated campaigning in the global South, Europe and the Netherlands inspired these important policy changes, which are helping relieve pressure on land and food. Similarly, we were one of the first organisations in the Netherlands to reveal the effect of corporate tax avoidance on the delivery of public services in lower income countries. We captured the attention of the public and policymakers by drawing the links between tax avoidance and, for example, lack of girls' access to education. We were honoured to receive the 2016 Partos Innovation Award for our #Tax Power Campaign.

### Shifts going forward

ActionAid has contributed to tangible improvements in the lives of people and to policy changes that address structural causes of poverty and injustice. Yet inequality and injustice persist – maintained by vested interests through strongly cemented power structures. We need to unravel these complex issues, expose the drivers of poverty and injustice, and hold those in power to account. This new strategy represents a refinement rather than a departure from our past strategy. Going forward, we aim to be **bolder and more outspoken**. We will engage in more collective efforts through mutual capacity building, solidarity and campaigning that amplifies our voice and sparks long-term change. We aim to increase the volume and reach of our voice by better integrating our fundraising, campaigning and external communication. We intend to focus on a more **limited number of issues**, being conscious of our size and the extent of our resources, and avoid spreading ourselves too thin.

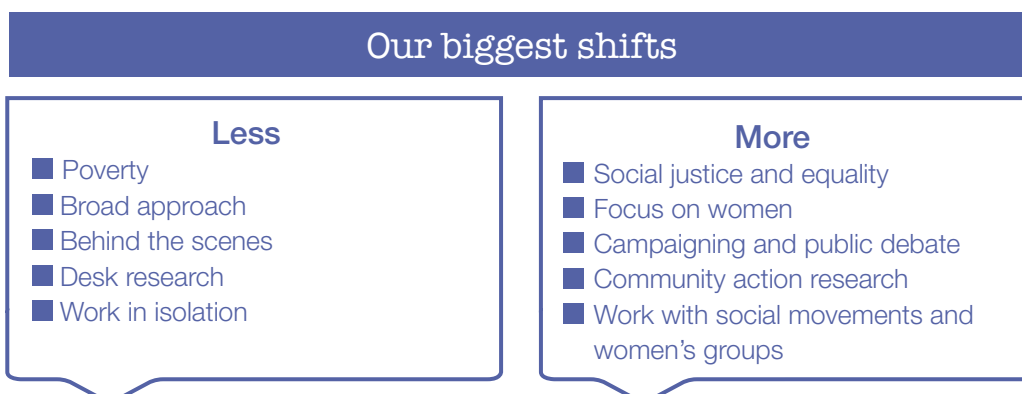
ActionAid will strive to ensure the right balance between being a critical campaign organisation and an **expert**

**on issues of land rights for women, tax justice and natural resources.** These issues have given us and our partners valuable access to key negotiating arenas, such as conferences and roundtables, where we can jointly express concerns and gain support for our evidence-based analyses and solutions. We aim to establish ourselves as an accelerator for positive change and enabler of inclusive decision-making by bringing southern voices and particularly women to the fore. We will continue to engage in research and dialogue – not only to criticise but also to propose and promote alternative solutions and practices that advance human rights and contribute to a just and sustainable world. We also intend to be honest, admit our mistakes, share and learn from them.

The political landscape inside and outside the Netherlands can change at a moment's notice, sometimes radically. In this rapidly changing context, we need to be **agile in our decision-making**. At the same time, we know that achieving social justice, gender equality, and poverty eradication requires a long-term horizon. Like ActionAid International, we have thus chosen for an overarching strategy that covers a twelve-year period, 2017-2028. The strategy will be accompanied by more concrete three-year operational plans that clearly spell out our thematic choices and specific objectives<sup>2</sup>. In this way, we will ensure we remain adaptive to major external shifts.

This strategy has been informed by extensive consultation with internal and external stakeholders (partners, supporters, progressive government officials, private sector, media) from the Netherlands and beyond to ensure the widest possible **feedback and learning**. We are proud to have been praised for our effectiveness, rootedness in communities, our passionate and capable staff, and for achieving a lot with limited budget and

<sup>2</sup> The first of these three-year plans will be finalised in the fall of 2017. The gap is a consequence of our shift to the ActionAid International timeframe, indicated above.







Over 5,000 rural women from across Africa took part in the community-led Kilimanjaro Challenge to stand up for their right to land. Hundreds came together at Africa's largest mountain to proclaim a charter of demands to world leaders, after which they were invited at the African Union and the United Nations.

capacity. Stakeholders repeatedly emphasised our strength in catalysing change – often by **putting key issues on the agenda** of other larger civil society organisations. We have learned that we can improve our visibility, transparency, stakeholder engagement and integrated campaigning.

Our new strategy builds on these learnings and strengths. It articulates our future ambitions and approaches, while reflecting our long history of combating inequality. As we embark on this journey, we invite our supporters and allies to join us, to advise along the way, to engage in dialogue, and to co-create and support our work.

Together, we aspire to innovate, take risks and transform the challenges faced in the world into opportunities for change.

**Outline of this strategy**

We begin with a description of who we are and our unique role and contribution within the ActionAid Federation and as ActionAid in the Netherlands. The second section is an analysis of the context we are currently working in. This is followed by our theory of change and our intervention strategies. Next, we describe our programme priorities and, finally, our organisational ambitions.

**ActionAid Strategy 2017-2028 \***



Details of each of the three year plans, including targets and milestones will be shared on the website.

\*ActionAid Netherlands is following the same timetable as ActionAid International

## 2 | WHO WE ARE

### Our roots in the anti-apartheid movement

ActionAid has its roots in the Netherlands as a strong, activist-oriented anti-apartheid movement. After apartheid was abolished, three streams of this movement merged to form NiZA, the Netherlands Institute for Southern Africa. In our first decade of existence, NiZA focused particularly on freedom of expression, democracy building and economic justice in Southern Africa. For several years, we enjoyed intensive and fruitful cooperation with the ActionAid Federation. In 2012 we formally affiliated in order to increase our impact for communities on the ground, grow the organisation and further strengthen our work.

It was the right decision. Under our new ActionAid banner, we significantly expanded our support-base. We maintained the commitment of our NiZA constituents, who recognised the consistency between Mandela's and ActionAid's vision and values, and we engaged over 15,000 new ActionAid supporters. All of our supporters share the **conviction that everyone deserves equal opportunities** in life, and that those most affected by inequality – women and girls – should be our top priority.

Each member of the federation has its own added value and expertise and is encouraged to contribute to the common ActionAid mission by drawing and building on these. Our previous strategy (2012-2017) was consistent with this principle, emphasising a commitment to the struggle of people in Southern Africa for fair and sustainable governance of natural resources. We have a strong track record on the issues of land rights for women, natural resources, tax justice, corporate accountability and good governance. **Membership of the ActionAid Federation** has enabled us to approach these issues more holistically, linking our work to related fields of education, violence against women and emergency response.

Our history is in the Dutch movement to end apartheid in South Africa. Our future is in making our unique contribution to the collective effort of the ActionAid federation to end poverty, inequality and injustice everywhere.

### Our vision

A just, equitable and sustainable world in which every person enjoys the right to a life of dignity, freedom from poverty and all forms of oppression.

### Our mission

To achieve social justice, gender equality, and poverty eradication by working with people living in poverty and exclusion, their communities, people's organisations, activists and social movements.



### Our values

- **Mutual respect**, requiring us to recognise the innate worth of all people and the value of diversity;
- **Equity and justice**, requiring us to ensure the realisation of our vision for everyone, irrespective of gender, sexual orientation and gender identity, race, ethnicity, caste, class, age, HIV status, disability, location and religion;
- **Integrity**, requiring us to be honest, transparent and accountable at all levels for the effectiveness of our actions and our use of resources and open in our judgements and communications with others;
- **Solidarity**, with people living in poverty and exclusion will be the only bias in our commitment to the fight against poverty, injustice and gender inequality;
- **Courage of conviction**, requiring us to be creative and radical, bold and innovative - without fear of failure - in pursuit of making the greatest possible impact on the causes of poverty, injustice and gender inequality;
- **Independence**, from any religious or political party affiliation;
- **Humility**, recognising that we are part of a wider alliance against poverty and injustice.



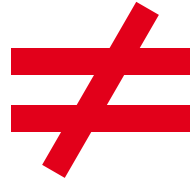
## ActionAid in three words

### Rooted



ActionAid works in over 2.000 communities worldwide, partnering with local groups and social movements.

### Inequality



We focus on the root causes of inequality. We bring evidence from the ground to campaign for long-lasting change.

### Women



Empowering women to make the largest possible impact.

ActionAid distinguishes itself from other organisations by combining its rootedness in communities, campaigning against the root causes of inequality, and a strong focus on women. In addition to our thematic expertise (described above), our role in the federation is threefold:

**1. Supporting programmes in the South** by (1) funding their work, particularly related to campaigning and advocacy and (2) mutual capacity building – exchanging skills and knowledge by linking community organizations across borders from the local to international level.

**2. Policy influencing and campaigning** through community based action research, publishing reports

and engaging in dialogue with corporate and political stakeholders in the Netherlands and Europe (and occasionally beyond) to address direct and indirect impacts of their decision-making on people's livelihoods and opportunities in the global South.

**3. Mobilizing and uniting Dutch citizens** to speak out against poverty and inequality. By linking issues faced both North and South, creating a common cause and clear calls-to-action, we will build a movement of people that uses their joint power as consumers, voters, campaigners and supporters, fighting for a just and sustainable world.

Hawa Jammeh from The Gambia, who is surrounded by soil saturated with salt in the village of Nema Kunku. This is a common result of climate change along the west coast of Africa, leading to abandonment of rice fields. ActionAid's partner Agency for the Development of Women and Children has built a dyke to flush the soil and prevent further inundation – an example of the adaptation measures ActionAid campaigned for at the COP21 climate talks in Paris.



## 3 | THE WORLD WE LIVE IN

### International achievements and commitments

In recent years, promising international commitments have been made in the areas of human rights, gender equality and climate. In 2011 the **United Nations Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights (UNGP)** were adopted as a global standard for governments and companies to address human rights risks in business operations. In 2015 the United Nations adopted the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** to guide international efforts between now and 2030 toward ending poverty, protecting the planet and ensuring prosperity for all. In many countries, national legislation has improved on these and other matters. Between 2002 and 2013, the number of people living in poverty dropped by half, from 26 to 13 per cent<sup>3</sup>. Rich countries increasingly acknowledge their role in sustainable development and their responsibility to get their own house in order, a goal reflected in the SDGs as well as the 2015 **Paris agreement on climate**. Such positive steps are evidence of people power: they are the result of sustained pressure from civil society and concerned citizens, and they come at a time when international cooperation and commitments are more crucial than ever.

### Entrenched inequality

Although absolute poverty has been on the decline, inequalities in gender, income, class, location, disability, age, race, ethnicity, caste, sexual orientation and gender identity still prevent billions of women, men, girls and boys from enjoying a life with dignity. What's more, gains made could be quickly rolled back. The United Nations estimates that by 2030 climate change will drive another 122 million people into poverty, exacerbate existing poverty, and increase conflict and displacement<sup>4</sup>.

If you think you're too small to have an impact try going to bed with a mosquito in the room.

- Anita Roddick

### Wealth and power are still strongly intertwined,

making structural changes in politics, policy and practice difficult and slow. We live in a time of global transition where dominant economic forces are profoundly affecting the lives of the people with whom we work. The push for deregulation, privatisation of public services, erosion of

social protection and curtailment of international cooperation is relentless, despite evidence of the adverse impacts on society. These problems are exacerbated by the fact that now more than ever people are living in urban spaces. Cities act as magnets for women and youth migrating from rural areas to escape conflict and crisis. In 2011 the world's population reached a tipping point: a majority of people now live in cities and by 2050 the figure is estimated to reach 66%<sup>5</sup>. Cities are places of opportunity, but they are also increasingly places of exploitation and violence.

Meanwhile, **rights violations resulting from private sector investment remain widespread**. Land grabs, unsustainable extraction of minerals and tax avoidance – key problems ActionAid has been working to end – continue to harm communities across the world. Women entrepreneurs in Zambia, for example, pay a higher percentage in taxes than foreign multinationals operating in the country, yet their children are not guaranteed access to education. Women in Mpumalanga, South Africa are surrounded by an abundance of natural resources, yet they are denied its rewards. Instead, they must deal with the disastrous impacts of coal mining – from toxic air to contaminated water and from the loss of land to the increased burden of unpaid household work. This is thanks to a dirty energy system that serves the interests of elites, corporations and investors, most of whom are comfortably located on another continent.

In many countries, the role of the state is diminishing and democratic institutions are being undermined, contributing to unprecedented crises and environmental degradation. **Political and civic space is shrinking**. This can be seen in direct, visible ways, such as attacks on human rights defenders; and in subtle ways, like anti-terrorism legislation that restricts fundamental freedoms, and impedes financial and political support for civil society organisations. Europe and the Netherlands are no exception to these trends: the growth of right-wing populism threatens trust in democratic institutions, increases the vulnerability of excluded people – refugees and migrants foremost among them – and makes a mockery of international cooperation and commitments.

### People power endures

Yet citizens are more vocal than ever. Concerns over these worrisome developments have created new

3 Progress Towards Social Development Goals, 3 June 2016 – United Nations Economic and Social Council

4 The State of Food and Agriculture 2016 – United Nations FAO

5 2014 Revision of World Urbanization Prospects – United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs



**energy and opportunities** for our work. There is increasing momentum across countries and involving diverse stakeholders to transform our world so that it is more equitable, and socially and environmentally sustainable. Women from across Africa are standing up to claim their land rights. This was evident in our Women2Kilimanjaro initiative, where ActionAid supported thousands of women to travel to Tanzania to raise their voice and charter their demands to high level institutions. The social economy is growing, with **new forms of social enterprise**, new and renewed models and ways of working. Examples include cooperatives to encourage the circular economy and citizen-driven energy systems, which are contributing to sustainable livelihoods in the global South, the Netherlands and Europe. Citizens are launching innovative local initiatives to help solve the climate crisis and change consumption patterns. With more space and support, they have the potential to have a far-reaching positive impact.

People worldwide are organising, defending and claiming their rights, challenging unjust power with new forms of resistance. Youth, technology and social media are key features in this new landscape. We are seeing new forms of connectivity and new types of coalitions. **Social movements** and alliances are organising to promote more inclusive and gender-sensitive policies and practices, such as those that unite the struggle for

environmental justice and gender equality. Advocacy and campaigning by global and national coalitions has proved to be effective in raising public attention to issues that once seemed too technical and obscure, like finance and tax. In response to persistent civil society pressure, some governments and companies have taken constructive steps – albeit some more ambitious than others. A growing number of companies, for example, have publicly condemned land grabbing and tax avoidance.

**People are calling for more transparency and inclusive decision-making.** A shift in power from North to South, from rich to poor, from corporations to citizens. Geopolitical changes, such as the increase in South-South cooperation, is helping to redress unequal power relations between wealthy and lower income countries. All of these trends call on us to rethink where, how and with whom we work, and the unique contribution ActionAid can make. We need to bring a fresh perspective to our strategies and analyses of power, and **consider a different way of working.** Above all, the daily struggles of people living in poverty and exclusion must be firmly integrated in everything we do in order to bring systemic change in people’s lives and to shift unequal power structures on a global scale. ActionAid has a vital role to play in generating the people power that will fuel creation of a more just, equitable and sustainable world.



In 2012, 20,000 people in Dakatcha, Kenya were about to be evicted from their land by an Italian owned company, to make way for a Jatropha plantation (used for biofuels). ActionAid united residents and local interest groups to legally and peacefully fight this landgrab. We informed the community about their rights, supported spokespersons on radio and TV appearances (in Kenya and Europe), gave legal support and started an international campaign. Together, we successfully convinced the Kenyan Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources to withdraw the permit. The entire region has now been declared protected woodland.



## 4 | HOW CHANGE HAPPENS

### Our theory of change

Social justice, gender equality and poverty eradication are achieved through purposeful individual and collective action to shift unequal and unjust power – including visible, hidden, and invisible power – from the household level to local, national and international levels. Empowerment of people living in poverty and exclusion is crucial. **Active and organised people develop and drive change.** When change is led primarily by those who are directly affected, it will transform power. Collective efforts and struggles have more impact when they link – through solidarity, campaigning and a common cause – communities, people’s organisations, social movements, citizens’ groups and other allies. This includes advocacy, campaigning and policy influence that engages with power structures from the local to the global and that strengthens the power of people to drive structural change.

Change is not always linear. Opportunities to advance alternatives and resist injustice open up at unexpected moments. Different contexts require different strategies. Recognising this, ActionAid develops a specific theory of change with every programme and campaign it develops.

### How we will work for change

ActionAid uses a **Human Rights Based Approach** which is developed from the understanding that poverty and inequality arise because of the marginalization and discrimination associated with human rights violations. It requires a people-centred approach that supports those living in poverty to become aware of their rights, organise themselves to claim these rights, and hold duty bearers to account.

**Empowerment:** Empowerment is at the heart of ActionAid’s programmes. Awareness raising is essential for people to be able to challenge unequal power relations at the local, national and global level. We support marginalized people to reflect on their own specific situation and on social, political and economic inequalities. Particularly intersecting issues (such as gender, income, location, ethnicity and class) that exacerbate poverty and exclusion. Next, we focus on community mobilization: helping people to get organized, bring their voice to the forefront and come up with their own solutions, which has shown to be much more effective and sustainable than those imposed by external actors. Local knowledge and experience is the starting point of all that we do. Our direct support to ActionAid offices in the global South ensures that our work in the Netherlands remains rooted. It will help us understand

local needs, opportunities, priorities and challenges, as well as the impact of actions here on communities there. It will keep us accountable and guarantee that our work in the Netherlands and Europe is on target.

**Solidarity:** The root causes of poverty, gender inequality and injustice are present at every level of society, from the local to the global. This means that solutions can only be found in efforts that combine and connect all these levels through international solidarity. We will help build power by forging broad alliances between communities, people’s and particularly women’s organisations, and other allies across the globe. Deepening our engagement with social movements that share a common vision will be a key priority. We will reach out to and involve the wider public and our supporters, both existing and future, in our work. We will promote both individual and collective support and action.

**Campaigning:** We will continue to collect local evidence and use it for advocacy, lobbying, dialogue and to create public pressure where needed to hold our governments (in the Netherlands and Europe) to account and to push for respect, protection and fulfilment of human rights. By participating in global campaigns, we demonstrate collective power and mobilise people to support the work of ActionAid in multiple ways, including through active and financial support.

ActionAid will campaign not only to change laws, policies and practices, but also people’s hearts, minds, and behaviours.

**Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity, it is an act of justice. It is the protection of an essential human right.**  
- Nelson Mandela

In the next years, we continue to work to give voice and respond to the needs and demands of our Southern partners and the communities with whom they work. Our campaigns will be bottom-up, involving local spokespeople (particularly women) wherever possible. Also, we continue monitoring and promoting secure democratic, political and civic space – an enabling environment – for civil society everywhere, and research and campaign against corporate abuses. Lastly, we will work with our supporters, peers and other stakeholders, including non-traditional development actors such as sustainability movements and progressive companies who look to support our mission.



Women at an ActionAid supported Reflect Circle that meets twice a week, where they talk about challenges they face, focussing on violence against women, the empowerment of women, and different ways of generating their own income.

**Learning and generating alternatives:** We take a learning approach to our work, developing knowledge from the bottom-up and collaborating with centres of learning to deepen our understanding of how change happens.

In this new strategy, we will focus on deeper analyses of power imbalances in response to shrinking political space. To do so, we will borrow elements from the feminist tradition and a youth perspective to address visible, invisible and hidden power inequalities. We find it important to propose alternatives to the systems and practices we criticise, and ensure that the people we work with are central in defining and building these solutions. Our knowledge and alternatives will be shared with peers, policymakers, the private sector and other key actors for change.

### Focus on women

ActionAid believes that people living in poverty and exclusion in the global South must be central in driving social change. In our local programming, we will prioritise work with and for women, who pay the highest price of

unjust policies and patriarchal societies. They are also the **key agents of change**, capable of shifting unequal gender power relations and securing for themselves and other women a life with dignity. At the same time, we recognise the importance to include men in the process of addressing unequal gender power relations.

We will also prioritise work with and for **youth**, who constitute the majority of the population in many lower income countries. They often experience high levels of marginalisation. This is especially true for young women living in poverty, who frequently experience violence, discrimination, and sexual and reproductive rights violations that undermine their dignity. Young people are also at risk of inheriting a planet plagued by irreversible climate change and environmental destruction. Yet they are the **innovators who can and will shape the future**. In the Netherlands, we will work with alliances, movements, supporters and key stakeholders – including the Dutch government, EU institutions, progressive private sector parties and academics – that we feel can play a part in achieving the change we want to achieve.



## 5 | PROGRAMME DIRECTIONS

We will fulfil our mission through a long-term integrated programme agenda focused on Rights, Redistribution and Resilience.

### Our long term agenda

**Rights:** It is essential that the individual and collective agency of people living in poverty and exclusion is mobilised to claim rights. Civil society must have the space to act, and human rights defenders must be protected and supported. The state, as an important guarantor of human rights, must be democratic and held accountable for its primary duty to protect rights and deliver justice. Equally important, corporations must be held accountable for their duty to respect human rights and environmental standards.

**Redistribution:** The more equitable sharing of power and resources is essential to achieving a just society. The world has sufficient financial, economic and natural resources to guarantee a life of dignity for everyone, but it will require redistribution. People living in poverty and exclusion, especially women, must have better access to and control over resources. The benefits of natural resources must be more equitably shared in order to

create opportunities for a dignified livelihood. At the centre of the redistribution agenda must be challenging of power, systems and norms that lead to excessive wealth and power and economic inequality.

**Resilience:** As disasters and conflicts increase humanitarian emergencies all over the world, people living in poverty and exclusion must have the resilience to withstand, recover from and transform systems that increase their vulnerability. Given the severe impact of climate change on rural communities and livelihoods, the energy transition must be promoted and food sovereignty must be safeguarded.

Following this long term agenda, the ActionAid federation has identified four strategic priorities that will guide our collective action in the first three years of the strategy period, after which they will be revisited. ActionAid in the Netherlands will contribute to these priorities within our Dutch and European contexts and in accordance with our expertise, strength and size. Where possible, we will seek to link our work with the Sustainable Development Goals, to connect with governments and organisations on shared objectives.



Photo: Oupa Nkosi / ActionAid

ActionAid and local partner organizations in South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe provided training to hundreds of community monitors. These are members of the local community who document the pollution of water, air, land and other damage caused by mining companies. ActionAid conducted local investigations, provided support to defenders of human rights and assisted local people and networks in expressing their views to the government. As a result, in South Africa mine workers were able to negotiate a salary increase at the 2014

platinum strike. In Zambia, community monitors in the township of Kankoya who live right next to a polluting copper mine were able to convince the municipal council in 2016 to relocate them to alternative land with good access to water, electricity, healthcare education and a road network. And in Zimbabwe, a brave group of community members filed a court case early 2017 to fight diamond mining companies in Maranga who are operating without the legally required environmental impact assessment.

## Our strategic priorities

### 1 Address the structural causes of violence against women and girls and secure women's economic justice.

Strengthening women's position will contribute to reduced risk of violence against women and girls in all its manifestations. ActionAid will focus on the issues of economic justice and rights to natural resources. Building on existing programming, we will empower women and work with movements to address the structural causes of the violations of women's rights (including cultural norms) in both rural and urban areas. A core part of this will be advocating for increased corporate and government accountability for upholding human rights standards, as well as environmental standards. By increasing women's access to and control over resources and challenging the patriarchal institutions that systematically deny these rights, we will contribute to empowerment and justice for women.

### 2 Ensure increased civic participation and state accountability for the redistribution of resources and delivery of quality, gender-responsive public services.

ActionAid will focus on ensuring increased civic participation, and state and corporate accountability aimed at securing economic justice, natural resources rights and a fair distribution of resources. We will especially advocate for the participation of women, young people and excluded groups in decision-making processes. We will contribute to ensuring an enabling environment for citizens and civil society and support and protect Human Rights Defenders. We will promote policies in Dutch, European and international policy arenas that facilitate more equitable sharing of power and resources, such as fairer tax rules. We aim for corporations and wealthy individuals to pay their fair share of taxes in order to enhance public investment and secure provision of gender and youth-sensitive public services, such as quality education, inclusive urban development and agricultural extension services for women smallholders.

### 3 Strengthen resilient livelihoods and secure climate justice.

ActionAid will support local programmes focussed on strengthening food sovereignty and advocate for a fair distribution of land and other productive resources. We particularly focus on increased access and control for women and challenge grabbing of resources. Increasingly, we will focus on pursuing climate justice by holding polluters – including Dutch and EU governments and companies – to account and ensuring those most affected, particularly women, are at the decision-making table. We will advocate for real solutions, including climate sustainable business models and energy policies that do not negatively impact human rights. We will also support communities to adapt climate change by building resilient livelihoods. We will promote increased investment in sustainable smallholder farming, support capacity-building of smallholder farmers to adapt to climate change, and promote agro-ecology – a climate resilient sustainable approach to agriculture.

### 4 Drive transformative women-led emergency preparedness, response and prevention.

When disasters strike, ActionAid will support local teams in delivering life-saving supplies to the worst hit communities in which we have a long-term presence. Our local staff will provide immediate relief based on community needs assessments and stay to rebuild and strengthen their resilience. We will train women to be emergency response leaders, overseeing the distribution of aid, to ensure fairness and transparency. Building their leadership and supporting their participation during emergencies ensures that their rights and safety are protected and prioritised. Women-led emergency response can often be a catalyst for fundamental change for women's rights in a community. Our work to build resilient livelihoods and secure climate justice will also feed into this priority.



## 6 | ORGANISATIONAL AMBITIONS

To enable us to achieve our strategic priorities, we have identified three organisational ambitions. We recognise that overcoming the structural causes of poverty and injustice requires long-term commitment and engagement, alongside the need to be adaptive in a rapidly changing context. In the course of our new strategy, we aim to become more effective, agile and accountable as we work for social justice, gender equality and eradication of poverty. In the coming twelve years our organisational ambitions are:

### **1** **Ambition 1: Increase our effectiveness through campaigning and stakeholder engagement**


In the course of our strategy we will:

- Launch several community-rooted campaigns and take part in the global ActionAid campaign;
- Create a stronger, more integrated organisation, by using a matrix structure in our campaigning, which facilitates the horizontal flow of skills and information;
- Strengthen our stakeholder engagement and align our corporate communication;

- Contribute to delivery of international ActionAid goals;
- Foster a culture of innovation and learning.

We will only be able to deliver on our goals by working in an integrated way, across functions and across countries. This requires different departments within ActionAid (both here in the Netherlands and across the federation) to cooperate effectively. We will introduce new ways of working to improve our internal coordination and build an organisational culture that is based on openness, collaboration and which fosters creativity. We will encourage joint strategising, planning and implementation of activities, and identify shared milestones to measure progress along the way.

We will improve our communication and **stakeholder engagement** so that it is more open, coherent and effective, and allows for continual reflection and learning. Specifically, we will regularly reach out to partners, policymakers, politicians, journalists and supporters to make sure our work stays relevant and responsive to new issues and important trends. And we will become more visible in the public debate, looking for different angles to tell our story and connect the issues relevant



Women work on a farm that has been established next to a Water Pan built as part of the Female Farmers Association project run by ActionAid, as part of its drought relief programme in Garba Tulla, Kenya.

to people in the global South to those faced by people in the Netherlands. We will create an easily recognisable and **distinct public profile with an 'ActionAid fingerprint'**. To this end, we will develop our storytelling skills, communicating the importance of our projects and campaigns, which often extend over multiple years but when implemented well can have a huge positive impact on society. Finally, we will strengthen our people power by building our number of supporters, reaching out to them in new and creative ways, as consumers, voters and taxpayers.

Realising ActionAid's strength lies in being more than the sum of its parts, we will contribute to the ActionAid Federation with time, skills and resources to support collective international goals and to further the impact we have on the lives of people facing poverty and injustice.

## **Ambition 2: Measure change, build our knowledge and ensure the quality of our work**

In the course of this strategy we will:

- Strengthen our understanding and build our knowledge of how social change happens in line with our theory of change;
- Acquire established accreditation for the professional quality of our work;
- Build a practical monitoring and evaluation framework aligned with the Federation framework and adapted to deal with the complexities of measuring structural change;
- Ensure that we attract and retain talented and motivated people to deliver on our strategy;
- Increase our external accountability, making sure we 'walk the talk'.

We will develop and implement a common programme design and monitoring and evaluation framework which, among other things, makes use of IATI (International Aid Transparency Initiative). This will help us **assess and demonstrate the impact of our work**, and support coherent linkages between local empowerment, solidarity, campaigning, learning and generating alternatives, as well as communications and fundraising. In line with the ActionAid federation's annual participatory reflection and review process, we will provide a formal space at least once a year for community members and other key stakeholders to reflect on progress made, key learnings, challenges and opportunities, and to advise ActionAid on ongoing and future activities at all levels, from local to

national to international. This will also be a critical moment to share learning throughout the wider federation.

We aim to be an organisation of the highest quality, **meeting the requirements of recognised accreditation standards**. To that end, we will complete the process to obtain ISO 9001 certification and maintain our national fundraising certification (*Central Bureau of Fundraising*). As part of this process, we will revisit our operational models, our environmental footprint and other costs to ensure optimal use of resources toward programme-related work and investments. We will explore shared services to increase cost recovery. Strengthened policies, standards, systems and capacities will enhance our accountability to donors and supporters, whilst improving overall programme and financial management.

## **Ambition 3: Grow the income for our strategic priorities and diversify our funding**

In the course of this strategy we will:

- Build our funding strategy and develop a funding model;
- Maximise our income from existing donors and find new and innovative sources of funds to ensure long-term income growth;
- Invest in digital technology and increase our transparency;
- Increase our financial sustainability by diversifying our sources of income;
- Build new and expand existing partnerships and coalitions beyond funding.

Since the launch of our previous strategy (in 2012), we have succeeded in doubling our income. By demonstrating our effectiveness in building the lobbying and advocacy capacity of Southern civil society, we were able to obtain significant institutional funding and expand our activities to new countries. We have developed **new partnerships** with knowledgeable and well-connected foundations. We have steadily increased our support base and income from regular and high value donors. We are proud of these successes, yet we know we need to remain pro-active. It is important that we diversify our funding, as we cannot count on our current funding from the Dutch government to be renewed after 2020. Political and economic shifts are happening faster than ever so we need to be optimally responsive to the external environment. We continuously strive to lower our fundraising costs and be better equipped to meet donor's expectations and requirements.



In our new strategy, we intend to tap into new opportunities both inside and outside the Netherlands, and **become more innovative**. We will strive to maintain our current level of funding from institutional donors and regular givers. We aim to increase our absolute number of supporters and the proportion of one-off income from individual and high value donors (foundations, major donors and corporations). Now, more than ever, a strong profile and brand is needed for us to build the right partnerships for increasing and diversifying funding and to maximise our impact. ActionAid's visibility and brand awareness in the Netherlands is still limited and somewhat unclear. To change this, we will develop public campaigns that increase our visibility and motivate people to support our work in new and personal ways, taking into account the fact that support can come in a variety of forms and sizes. We will create a compelling and distinctive message with a specific focus on women's rights. We will **invest in digital** technologies and enhance our transparency to stakeholders.

We will invest in partnerships with those that share our vision and values. ActionAid believes in developing relationships that go beyond funding and include the exchange of ideas, skills and resources. We aim to **co-create new approaches to our work**, involve our supporters and offer them more opportunities to engage with us and our local partners. We will also build the capacity of ActionAid offices in the South to access funding opportunities in the Netherlands themselves. Finally, we will engage in dialogue and explore partnerships with private sector actors who are socially and environmentally responsible.

This strategy articulates our commitment, ambition and approach to deepen our impact on poverty and injustice. We will measure and hold ourselves to account against our objectives. By creating new partnerships and strengthening alliances with people committed to a common cause, we will build our movement for a just and sustainable world.



Arifa (22) has been a member of the ActionAid women's group in West Bengal since 2009. They specifically talk about topics such as the shortage of clean water, poor roads, and the lack of electricity and education in the community. Arifa now has around 200 women in her group.



Zainab Yeabu Turay, chairwomen  
of the Dim Dim Women's Group in  
Sierra Leone

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