

**act:onaid**

# ACTION FOR GLOBAL JUSTICE IN PRACTICE

ActionAid's Human Rights Based Approach

**2020**



# Acknowledgements

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# Acronyms

<b>ALPS</b>	accountability learning and planning system (of ActionAid) - see <a href="#">ActionAid's Accountability Learning and Planning System</a>
<b>CBO</b>	community-based organisation
<b>FGM</b>	female genital mutilation
<b>GDP</b>	gross domestic product
<b>GRPS</b>	gender-responsive public services
<b>HIV</b>	human immunodeficiency virus
<b>HRBA</b>	human rights based approach
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>INGO</b>	international non-governmental organisation
<b>LGBTIQ+</b>	lesbian, gay, bi, trans, intersex, queer, etc.
<b>MEL</b>	monitoring, evaluation and learning
<b>MOU</b>	memorandum of understanding
<b>NGO</b>	non-governmental organisation
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goal
<b>SHEA</b>	sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse
<b>SMC</b>	school management committee
<b>UN</b>	United Nations

# Preface

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## Who is this resource book for?

This resource book is designed to be relevant for all ActionAid staff and partners. It aims to help staff and partners design, implement and monitor local, national and international rights programmes that are aligned with our collectively agreed strategy. It aims to be relevant to programme specialists and policy analysts, to campaigners and communications staff, to managers and trustees, to frontline workers and fundraisers, to administrators and activists. It cannot exhaustively refer to all possible contexts where we are working and so will need creative adaptation and interpretation by you, informed by your context.

We hope that this resource book will also be a useful reference point for people in other organisations who might find inspiration and practical guidance in ActionAid's human rights based approach (HRBA).

## How to use this resource book

You may use this resource book to:

- help you develop a new country strategy paper or design a local rights programme
- feed into a local rights or country programme review process
- develop or review your programme framework
- inform your work in a pre-appraisal or appraisal of a new programme.
- design capacity development workshops for staff or partners
- develop your own capacity and understanding
- inform your annual planning process to ensure programmes are working with a HRBA
- contribute to a participatory review of and reflection on a programme
- evaluate a local, national or international programme against our agreed HRBA
- help you develop a sound funding planning approach in-country
- assist in producing well designed fundraising proposals
- help you deepen connections between your work and work in other countries
- make your work more coherent on different issues
- become familiar with the wider world of ActionAid as part of your induction process
- prepare presentations about ActionAid's work.

You may find it useful to read the book as a whole and then return to sections of it as a reference point at different times.

For ActionAid's HRBA to be effective you need to regard this resource book as part of a dialogue, interacting with your experience and your ongoing practice. It should feed into your own process of reflection and action – your own process of transformation.

# ActionAid – An introduction

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## Who we are

*ActionAid is a global federation working in 45 countries to achieve social justice, gender equality and poverty eradication.*

ActionAid works to strengthen the capacity and agency of people living in poverty and exclusion, especially women, to assert their rights. We work with communities, people's organisations, women's and youth movements, groups and networks, social movements and other allies to overcome the structural causes and consequences of poverty and injustice. We connect the work we do at community level with broader efforts and struggles for justice at every level to make the greatest contribution towards a just, equitable and sustainable world.

Guided by feminist and human rights-based principles and approaches, we seek to shift and transform power, through empowerment, solidarity, campaigning and the generation of alternatives to ensure that every person can enjoy a life of dignity and freedom from all forms of oppression. We prioritise the leadership of women and young people, especially those living in poverty and exclusion, in our efforts to achieve social justice, gender equality and poverty eradication. We create platforms for collective action and solidarity by enabling people around the world to unite and contribute to social justice struggles as citizens, supporters, staff and volunteers.

Around the world, we are rooted in the communities where we operate and proudly uphold our primary accountability to the people most affected by unequal power relations.

## 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, social movements and supporters.

## 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** - 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 the greatest possible impact on the causes of poverty, injustice, and gender inequality.
- **Independence** - free from any religious or party-political affiliation.
- **Humility** - recognising that we are part of a wider alliance against poverty and injustice.

The ActionAid Federation is committed to applying a feminist lens and values in our work, which will guide us in interpreting and advancing our mission and these values.



# A short history of ActionAid's approach to development

*“History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived, and if faced with courage, need not be lived again.”*

Maya Angelou

Different approaches to development have evolved among development agencies over the past decades. Popular approaches since the 1970s have included the charity, anti-poverty, basic-needs and empowerment approaches. HRBA approaches gained popularity in the late 1990s and 2000s. Each approach has its own underlying understanding of development, poverty, inequality, change needed, how change should happen and who should drive change. These approaches translate into different ways of designing, planning and implementing development programmes and projects. Recognising that earlier approaches were not bringing about desired changes led many development agencies, including ActionAid, to make a gradual shift to a HRBA. ActionAid's HRBA evolved earlier than most, and has deepened and become more politicised over time. Alongside work on strengthening legal rights and public institutions, our HRBA now includes a strong focus on social dynamics, power and organising for justice.

## The 1970s – charity and welfare

The 1970s were mainly a time of charity and welfare, where we did not challenge the overarching system of injustice and inequality. We provided school uniforms and equipment to sponsored children and direct assistance to their families. But we became increasingly aware that our focus on individual children was random and unjust. We helped children lucky enough to be sponsored. Those who were not, despite their greater need in some cases, received no support. The sponsored children were going to school but receiving little education. Little was really changing in the lives of the children we worked with.

## The 1980s – basic-needs / service-driven approach

Learning from our work in the 1970s, we moved beyond individual children and schools as the main focus of our work. We included the families and communities that children are part of. We focused on meeting the basic needs of communities – supplying essentials such as seeds, farming equipment, construction materials, pumps, wells and taps for drinking water. For 15 years we built good quality schools, often using locally-sourced materials, and ensuring people from the local community took part in construction. We also provided money, materials and training so people could set themselves up to make money in areas such as tailoring, weaving and beekeeping. While this improved the “quality” of life of those we reached to some extent, our efforts were a drop in the ocean. Many of our initiatives were unsustainable. This approach didn't tackle the unequal power that results in unequal distribution of resources in the first place. While we met women's specific needs for water, education for their children and to make an income, we failed to challenge the gender-specific roles women were confined to, with their work undervalued and underpaid.

## The 1990s – supporting the empowerment of communities

Our focus during the 1990s was on empowerment. Our thinking was that since the state could not meet the needs of people, we would support communities to help themselves. We helped set up local farmers' cooperatives, community schools and non-formal education centres. We also continued to give people the resources they needed to make a living. We strengthened our capacity for participatory analysis and, inspired by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, we developed the *Reflect* approach to adult learning and social change. We helped people living in poverty make their voices heard through advocacy work. We researched and developed alternative policies and lobbied local and national governments. We had some success and the changes benefited others beyond the communities we worked in, expanding the impact of our work.

However, we realised that helping communities run their own services is not a sustainable long-term solution to poverty and injustice. We also realised that without strong grassroots organisations and movements putting pressure on the state, we could not achieve and sustain the systems changes we wanted – such as strong education systems and health services for all. Finally, we learned that we were inadvertently trapping women in marginalised positions when we organised them to address the needs of others – their husbands, children, the disabled, the sick and even “the community”. We must work with women directly to identify and overcome the root causes of their oppression, namely patriarchy. During this period, we consciously shifted towards addressing the causes of poverty, setting up ActionAid policy units in a number of countries. We started to work on trade justice and food rights globally, realising that all our community development efforts, and even national level advocacy, would be undermined if we did not also work to change the rules of the World Trade Organisation.

## The late-1990s and 2000s – working for human rights

ActionAid first made a commitment to moving to a human rights based approach to development in 1998, through its *Fighting Poverty Together* strategy. This approach was reinforced in its *Rights to End Poverty* (2005) and *People's Action to End Poverty* (2012) strategies, which focused on protecting and fulfilling the human rights of people living in poverty as the best way to eradicate poverty and injustice. By building local organisations of “rights holders”, and linking these organisations into networks, alliances and movements at national and international levels, we could help build a broad and powerful movement for change. In some places we still ran programmes directly and addressed basic needs. But we worked in partnership with local people as rights activists, allowing them to shape our priorities, strategy, plans and budgets. Done within a HRBA, work on basic needs had the potential to deliver much more, becoming a vehicle for organising people, building their analysis and piloting alternatives.

The main impetus for changing our approach was recognising that poverty is a violation of human rights, arising principally because human rights have been denied. To end poverty, it's necessary to protect, respect and fulfil the human rights of people living in poverty. We see people living in poverty and exclusion as the leading agents in their development process and in challenging unequal power and injustice. Our main strategies are to empower people to become rights activists, able to claim their rights and to hold the people and institutions meant to deliver on these rights accountable. Alongside people living in poverty and exclusion, we also campaign for structural change, working to mobilise others in civil society to act in solidarity and align to the rights struggles of people living in poverty and exclusion. We also explicitly focus on women's rights. We understand that the structure of society marginalises women, so they have unequal power. We must work with women and girls to build their power so they can achieve their rights. From this point on we mainstreamed women's rights work in everything we do, also making it a stand-alone priority.

## 2018–2028 action for global justice

*Strategy 2028: Action for Global Justice* represents the next step in our evolution, rooting us more deeply in the places where we work, and with the people whose rights and visions we work to achieve. The strategy calls on us to unite with allies in collective actions to contribute to deeper and wider structural change, leading to a more just, equitable and sustainable world.

Under this ten-year strategy, ActionAid is taking action to become closer to the people we work with by strengthening their participation in our governance. We are also deepening our engagement with social movements that share our values and vision to address inequalities worldwide. Building on our existing programming that supports the agency of people living in poverty and exclusion to claim their rights, we are connecting the people, partners and communities with whom we work with broader people's organisations and social movements engaged in struggles for justice. This recognises the interconnected nature of many of the issues we work on and the need for greater collaboration and solidarity within and among countries to influence structural change.

Women living in poverty and exclusion are central in our work and we apply an intersectional feminist lens to drive a deeper analysis of power and its many manifestations, enabling us to better work towards more equitable redistribution of power and resources, as well as enhancing women's ability to claim and enjoy their rights and to come together to challenge exploitation, discrimination and exclusion. We are also increasing our engagement with young people as drivers of change and as the majority of the population in many of the countries where we work. When crises occur, we ensure that we are well prepared to seize the opportunities that arise to drive just alternatives, working with communities and broader alliances to transform societies.

## Beyond HRBA

Our understanding of a rights-based approach will continue to evolve, based on a critical analysis of our practice and of the changing context of our work. We recognise that the normative strengths of human rights frameworks, indeed some of the foundations on which human rights frameworks depend are presently challenged, with democratic institutions under threat, the capacity of states as duty-bearers diminished and inter-governmental bodies increasingly captured by elite interests. Moreover, we need to advance justice and equality beyond those areas where rights are presently codified. Ideally, new understandings of rights and new dimensions of rights should emerge from bottom-up processes, from the demands of those who are most excluded (for example from indigenous peoples, disability movements and undocumented migrants). There is exciting work pushing the boundaries beyond individual rights to community, customary and collective rights of groups of people which our HRBA practice must expand to include.

We also need to look beyond the 'human' in human rights, working with movements calling for the rights of the wider natural world and the reality of inter-species dependencies. In the face of the climate crisis we need to support developments in the understanding of rights that connect humans to the web of life, to planet earth and its fragile biosphere – where rights go beyond the human but human responsibilities are fundamental. We remain alert to these developments and supportive of a continuing critical engagement.

## Learning from experience

ActionAid continues to reflect critically on its practice of HRBA – creating space for ongoing analysis of our experience. This approach to critical reflection is captured well in this 2017 article in the [Journal of Human Rights Practice](#).

In conclusion, it's important to note that while our approach to development has changed over time, we have drawn upon elements of prior approaches in each "new era". For example,

empowerment of people living in poverty and exclusion is still a central feature of our HRBA. But now it is part of a larger more politicised agenda of enabling people to be human rights activists, demanding accountability from powerful actors and working together to achieve a more just, equal and free society. Today we are committed to building the capacities and capabilities of women and young people to claim their rights. This work is grounded as much as ever in work with local communities and organisations but also builds connections to national and international social movements. As well as supporting people to fight inequality and injustice, we are also working to propose credible alternatives that can transform the lives of people living in poverty and exclusion. We fully expect our approach to continue to evolve, recognising that in a changing world we will always need to change.

Contrasting needs- and rights-based work in education		
How to spend:	Needs-based approach What we used to do	HRBA Our strategic work now
£20	Buying a school uniform to enable one child to go to school in Kenya.	Supporting travel costs for two children to speak to the national parliament in Kenya, as part of the Global Action Week - leading to the Minister writing to 17,800 primary schools saying lack of a uniform should not prevent access.
£200	Buying some textbooks and teaching materials for one school in Northern Nigeria.	Sharing a report that documented the impact of community-based school management committees in 40 schools in Northern Nigeria on school performance – that led to a change in government policy (mandating the formation of SMCs in all Nigerian schools).
£2,000	Building an extra classroom in Tanzania benefiting about 100 children.	Supporting Maarifa, a national NGO in Tanzania, to do research on why children were unable to go to school. It showed that user fees were the problem. A campaign to abolish user fees led to an extra 1 million children enrolling.
£20,000	Opening a non-formal education centre for two years in Bangladesh reaching 100 children.	Training community audit groups in dozens of districts across Bangladesh to monitor whether the education budget arrives in practice at school level and is used appropriately. This improved the flow of funds to government schools helping millions of children.
£200,000	Re-building a primary school in Pakistan following the earthquake.	Building a broad national alliance, The Pakistan Coalition for Education, to help make education a top national priority. This helped secure a commitment to increase the government budget to education from 2% to 4% of GDP

# A human rights based approach

*“ActionAid has really pioneered the way on rights-based working in terms of larger INGOs.”*

John Gaventa, Director of Research, Institute of Development Studies

## ActionAid’s HRBA – a summary

Poverty is a violation of human rights and arises because of the marginalisation and discrimination associated with human rights violations. ActionAid has a distinctive human rights based approach to development that centres on active agency: supporting people living in poverty (particularly women and young people) to become conscious of their rights, to organise and claim their rights and to hold duty bearers to account. Our HRBA flows from our values, our feminist principles and our strategy. It builds on international human rights law but goes beyond a legal or technical approach to rights. We support people to analyse and confront power imbalances and we take sides with people living in poverty and exclusion. This sets our HRBA apart from the approach many other agencies take; using rights-based language but failing to challenge abuses of power at local, national or international level.

By using a HRBA, we support people living in poverty and exclusion to understand that many of their most fundamental needs are actually enshrined in specific human rights frameworks. Indeed, the deprivation of needs often arises from the denial or violation of specific rights. The state normally has the ultimate responsibility to respect, protect and fulfil these rights. We should help people identify and target the specific duty bearer, or bearers, accountable for ensuring rights are realised. Some rights are subject to “progressive realisation”, where civil society actors have an important role in ensuring that states are indeed progressing in the right direction, dedicating increasing budgets to delivering on rights and social justice.

We place people living in poverty and exclusion, particularly women and young people, at the centre of our HRBA. We believe that people can only claim and protect their rights when they organise themselves and mobilise as a constituency, aware of their rights, and conscious of why their rights are being violated. They need the tools, knowledge and capacities to advance their case. But raising awareness and mobilisation are not enough on their own. We need a wider movement to challenge the structural causes of poverty and injustice, and shift power – and this creates a vital role for solidarity action between citizens at all levels.

In our HRBA, we think and act globally and locally. The roots of a human rights violation at the local level may lie elsewhere in a complicated and inter-connected global system. For example, people living in poverty in Kenya might be thrown off their land to make way for a biofuels crop grown by a European company as part of their efforts to promote a green economy. In building our programmes and campaigns we need to be aware of how the local links with the national and global. And we need to reform institutions at every level, working collectively as a federation.

## An intersectional feminist approach

ActionAid is an organisation guided by feminist values and a feminist vision. We recognise that the dominant system favours men and limits women’s access to economic, political and social opportunities simply because they are women. Women’s work is often overlooked, unpaid and undervalued. They work in unsafe conditions and have precarious jobs. Women across the world are also at risk of violence. ActionAid works with women to call for greater corporate



accountability to uphold their rights and for governments to do more to serve the needs of poor and excluded women, and to protect and advance their rights. Women pay the highest price of unjust policies and patriarchal societies, and must play a key role in challenging injustice and bringing about social change.

ActionAid recognises that many factors influence how someone is treated in society. Racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, xenophobia and classism are interconnected and cannot be examined separately from one another. We therefore draw on an intersectional feminist approach, taking into account the different factors that maintain and perpetuate inequality, and challenging the unequal power relations that underpin violations of women's rights. This also means supporting people to see that their struggles are aligned. Many people are potentially united in how they suffer from the patriarchal system, whether they are workers, women, LGBTIQ+ or migrants, for example. Recognising this and coming together is an important basis for building a mass movement for change.

We focus not only on addressing the visible power of government and other duty bearers but also on addressing hidden power (for example, of corporations and international institutions) and invisible power (for example, power arising from patriarchal values and traditional cultural beliefs). This means looking at power relations in private and personal spaces as well as in the public sphere. It is often in the personal space of the home that the most deeply rooted and internalised oppression operates. We therefore need to change not just policies but practices also. Securing rights on paper will never be enough if we do not also change the attitudes and behaviours of people that perpetuate rights violations. Anti-domestic violence laws, for example, exist around the world. But until women and men, girls and boys change their attitudes and behaviours to no longer tolerate or perpetuate violence, a life free of violence will not be possible.

## Our 8 HRBA principles

Eight core HRBA principles are the foundation of our practice. They guide how we plan and implement interventions and distinguish ActionAid's HRBA approach.

### Box 1. ActionAid's 8 HRBA principles

1. We put people living in poverty first and enable their active agency as rights activists. We analyse and confront unjust and unequal power
2. We advance women's rights, taking a feminist approach
3. We work in partnership
4. We are accountable and transparent
5. We rigorously monitor and evaluate to evidence our impact and we critically reflect and learn to improve our work
6. We ensure links across levels to address the structural causes of poverty and injustice
7. We are innovative, solutions-oriented and promote credible feminist alternatives
8. We promote credible, sustainable and feminist alternatives.

## Principle 1: We put people living in poverty first and enable their active agency as rights activists

*“The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed.”*

Stephen Biko

### Why?

We believe that the meaningful agency of people living in poverty and exclusion is essential to challenge unequal and unjust power. We support excluded groups to analyse their situation, strategize for change and develop their power as rights activists. While we may support people to develop “tactical” alliances with more privileged groups to achieve a specific change, for example working with middle class women to campaign for a law preventing violence against women, we do this in ways that put the interests of the women living in poverty and exclusion first. Putting people’s agency first does not mean that ActionAid puts aside other parts of its mission and values. We are committed to building an honest, open relationship with people living in poverty and exclusion, based on dialogue and mutual challenge.

### How?

- **By identifying those living in poverty and exclusion.** We prioritise long-term engagement with women and others living in poverty and exclusion and the organisations that represent them. Depending on the location, we may work with smallholder farmers, people with disabilities, sexual minorities, migrants, slum dwellers or other marginalised groups. In every programme, we map these groups using an intersectional feminist approach so that we are conscious of the overlapping dimensions of power and exclusion.
- **By supporting rights awareness and conscientisation.** We use a participatory *Reflection-Action* approach to support communities to become more aware and more critical of existing power relations and to empower them to act to challenge injustice and bring about social and political change. See our [Reflection-Action](#) website for more on this approach.
- **By supporting organisation and mobilisation.** We support women and young people to organise as rights activists, linking organisations across geographies and building and strengthening people’s organisations and social movements. This is an integral part of our empowerment process that centres on building people’s active agency and supporting and building leadership.
- **By sensitising duty bearers about rights.** We work with duty bearers in local, district and national governments, so they understand their responsibilities and are more likely to be responsive to demands. How we work with governments will vary according to the context – in some cases we may establish a positive relationship, in others we may need to take a more challenging standpoint. But in all cases, we need to work to strengthen their responsibility and accountability for rights.
- **By grounding our national and international campaigning in the lives of real people.** Sometimes campaigning for structural change involves influencing policies or institutions in rich countries, far away from the people living in poverty and exclusion who we work with. Wherever possible, we campaign with people’s organisations and movements, ensuring that our campaigns are rooted in the voices and actions of people living in poverty and exclusion, and we track the long-term impact of our campaigns on these people.
- **By involving people living in poverty and exclusion in our own processes of decision-making** during appraisals, strategy development, programme design, annual planning, participatory reviews and evaluations. By engaging people in every stage of our processes we can shift norms and model different ways of working, building people’s capacity to hold other agencies, especially governments, to account.

## Principle 2: We analyse and confront unjust and unequal power

*‘Washing one’s hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral.’*

Paulo Freire

### Why?

We believe that ending poverty depends on changing unequal and patriarchal power relations from the household to the global level. At every level, decisions are usually made by a small powerful elite. Elites sometimes wield power in **visible** ways (through formal laws, structures and procedures controlled by elites), sometimes in **hidden** ways (where elites set the agenda behind the scenes) and sometimes in **invisible** ways (where beliefs, habits and unwritten rules favour the elite). We need to be aware of all the ways power is wielded in order to confront it effectively and secure change.

### How?

Through empowerment, we build the awareness, organisation and power of people living in poverty and exclusion. Through solidarity work, we build alliances to strengthen their power. And through campaigning, we work with allies to raise voices, engage people and apply pressure for changes in policy, practice and behaviour. The following are key building blocks for supporting people living in poverty and exclusion to analyse and confront unequal power using a *Reflection-Action* process:

- **By creating and facilitating democratic spaces.** In any group there will be stratification based on factors such as gender, race, class, age, sexuality and education. We are aware of this and facilitate reflection and action on power within the group as part of the process.
- **By respecting people’s existing knowledge.** We start with respect for people’s existing knowledge and bring in existing information and analysis as and when it will advance or challenge (rather than supplant or undermine) people’s own analysis.
- **By using participatory tools to help people advance their analysis.** It can be difficult to talk about power. We use participatory tools to stimulate ideas, give the group critical distance and help them to structure and deepen their discussion.
- **By asking ‘good’ questions.** Any participatory tool can be undermined with bad questions (for example, ones that are ‘leading’ or inappropriate). Good questions stimulate critical thinking and dialogue. We dig deeper, asking why and why again to find the root causes of a problem. And we ask difficult questions about who has power, why, and how that power might be challenged and shifted.
- **By building a reflection-action process.** Endless theoretical analysis of power becomes frustrating and action isolated from reflection rapidly loses direction. We work with groups to build a cycle of reflection and then action and then reflection. Ultimately, we need action to achieve change – but that action needs to be consistently informed by reflection.
- **By ensuring the process is intensive and extensive.** A deep analysis of power will not emerge overnight, in a week or in very occasional meetings. We create a regular and sustained space for people to engage fully, build trust and address sensitive issues.
- **By recognising that power analysis is a political process.** Power analysis is not a neutral process. We support people to analyse power relations, challenge injustice and bring about real change.
- **By building people’s communication skills.** We build people’s capacity to communicate. That might involve improving literacy or language skills, building confidence to speak in public, to challenge powerful voices, to understand how to reach their target audience or to access influential media and communication platforms.

- **By being aware of our own power.** We have the confidence and capacity to understand, discuss and confront our own power as individuals and as an organisation.
- **By celebrating wins.** To sustain momentum, we need to celebrate when we make a gain, recognising the progress that is made, even if it triggers a backlash.

## Principle 3: We advance women's rights

*"Feminism is the radical notion that women are human beings."*

Cheris Kramarae

### Why?

ActionAid recognises that most people living in poverty and exclusion in the world are female. We will not succeed in tackling poverty if we do not support women to fight for their rights. Our aim is to witness women worldwide growing in confidence, skills and knowledge so they can decide their own destiny, live without fear of violence, and engage fully in the decisions that affect their lives and livelihoods at all levels.

### How?

- **By applying an intersectional feminist lens to our analysis of power.** In our power analysis, we look systematically at the inequalities between women and men as a critical factor in situations of poverty and injustice. We consider how factors such as race, sexuality, age and ethnicity intersect with gender to compound injustice, and we create space for women, men, girls and boys to analyse the gendered distribution of power and resources and the gendered division of labour and to build strategies to challenge injustice and inequality.
- **By strengthening women's leadership.** Women pay the highest price of unjust policies and patriarchal societies, and must play a key role in shifting unequal gender relations. We support women to challenge inequalities and injustice, and to engage in people's organisations and movements, as well as in national, regional and global policy spheres.
- **By working with women's movements and feminist organisations.** We work alongside women's organisations and movements strengthening their capacity to participate in decision making and governance processes, to address the structural causes of poverty and exclusion, and to challenge the patriarchal norms and institutions that systematically deny women their rights.
- **By creating independent and safe spaces for women and girls.** It's important for women and girls to have the space to define and discuss issues for themselves, as they will not raise some sensitive issues in front of men (for example, related to maternal mortality, domestic violence or FGM). In our work with young people we promote the balanced involvement and leadership of young women.
- **By working with boys and men.** We work with boys and men (especially traditional and religious leaders) to change their attitudes and behaviours, and advance women's rights. However, we are mindful that the majority of our resources are spent on women and girls.
- **By ensuring that women and girls who we work with are protected from harm.** We ensure that women and girls who come into contact with ActionAid are protected from deliberate or unintended actions that place them at risk of abuse, sexual exploitation, injury, discrimination or any other harm.
- **By recognising that that women's rights cut across all our work.** We promote and advance women's rights, which are at the centre of all our programmes, whether we are working on economic empowerment, resilient livelihoods, climate justice or emergency preparedness, response and prevention.

- **By advancing women's power in our own organisation.** We make sure that ActionAid and partners have the skills and political commitment to support women's rights within our own organisations. We cannot facilitate the transformation of others without transforming our own practices. We "walk our talk" on women's rights by encouraging women to take on leadership roles within ActionAid and changing our organisational culture and practices to respect and protect women's rights.

## Principle 4: We work in partnership

*"Don't walk in front of me; I may not follow. Don't walk behind me; I may not lead. Just walk beside me and be my friend."*

Albert Camus

### Why?

Sustainable structural change can only happen if we work together, building partnerships and connecting our work locally, nationally and internationally. Often, we will need to be led by social movements and other constituencies, supporting their struggles. Partnerships with local organisations can strengthen civil society and root our work at the local level. Partnerships with social movements and people's organisations can build greater legitimacy and pressure for change. Working in coalitions and alliances can help us to campaign more effectively. And partnerships with academic and research institutions can help deepen the evidence base for our work.

### How?

- **By selecting the right partners** (see [ActionAid's partnership framework](#)). We take time to get to know each other before we enter into a long-term partnership. This is a two-way process of building mutual understanding and identifying shared values and principles. It is better to start slowly, collaborating for a year or more on a specific initiative, before entering into a long-term partnership.
- **By building or supporting the establishment of new people's organisations and movements.** Where appropriate, ActionAid will also help to support the creation of new civil society organisations and to build new people's movements, supporting people to come together to fight injustice and bring about social change.
- **By developing clear partnership agreements.** Through an initial appraisal our partners are able to assess ActionAid and vice versa. This informs the development of a memorandum of understanding (MoU). For example, if the appraisal shows weaknesses on women's rights or financial management, there should be a clear plan to address these. Likewise, if the partner's appraisal of ActionAid shows potential problems in ways of working, these should be addressed. The MoU should also spell out clear mechanisms for exiting the partnership.
- **By modelling and monitoring our values in our relationship with partners.** We regularly monitor how well our MoU and partnership principles are being respected and how the partnership can be improved. We live up to our organisational values in our relationship with partners. This means being critically aware of our own power in the relationship, based on the size and reputation of our organisation and on the financial and human resources available to us. It also means ensuring that all partners have strong gender awareness and supporting them in building feminist leadership.
- **By supporting the capacity development of our partners.** Over time, we want to make our partners stronger, more independent and more sustainable so that when our relationship ends, they are able to stand without us. In order to achieve this, we support the capacity development of our partners across all areas. We agree capacity development parameters in the partnership agreement and review them regularly.



- **By connecting partners.** Our capacity to make links between partners and help build movements is one of the areas where we can add most value. We have partners in different geographical areas and at different levels, often working on similar issues or with similar groups. We ensure that we link them, that there are forums for them to come together, and that we facilitate communication between them and with wider movements for change.
- **By regularly reviewing our partnerships and being conscious of how ActionAid uses its power in partnership.** At least once a year, as part of our participatory review and reflection process, partners give ActionAid feedback on its work and the relationship, and vice versa. Partners are also made aware of and encouraged to use [ActionAid's complaints policy](#). If a partnership is not working for any reason, it can be ended by either partner as outlined in the MoU. ActionAid needs to consistently reflect on power dynamics in our partnerships, recognising power and privilege at both individual and institutional levels and working to transform these positively.

## Principle 5: We are accountable and transparent

*"It is not only what we do, but also what we do not do, for which we are accountable."*

Molière

### Why?

ActionAid is committed to increasing external accountability towards people, movements and the environment and to strengthening internal accountability in terms of compliance towards internal policies, geographic footprint and ways of working. Being accountable is a value we put into practice in all our relationships. By being accountable, we build trust, increase our legitimacy, raise awareness of rights and strengthen people's capacity to hold their own governments to account. Accountability also makes us more effective, enabling us to get better feedback on what we are doing, to know what is working and what is not and to respond accordingly.

### How?

#### **By recognising that our primary accountability is to the people we work with, ensuring that:**

- People living in poverty and exclusion, particularly women and young people, take part in local rights programme appraisal, analysis, planning, implementation, monitoring and review.
- We respect and critically engage with their analysis, and their priorities inform our decisions.
- We listen to children and measure the impact of our work on children living in poverty and exclusion.
- We are transparent in our relationships, sharing information freely and proactively.
- We apply budget analysis and economic literacy tools to ourselves (including [social audits](#) and [transparency boards](#)) and demonstrate value for money in our programmes.

#### **By recognising that we also have other accountabilities:**

- **To the environment.** As part of our external accountability, we work to reduce our carbon footprint, ensuring our organisational lifestyle is consistent with our values and mission, and minimises environmental impact.
- **To our partners.** We are accountable to our partners and to our peers in social movements, CBOs, NGOs, coalitions, and all those with whom we share a common agenda.

- **To the state.** We respect the constitution and laws of countries where we work. We may challenge policies that limit our capacity to work or which contribute to rights violations, but we do so within the law. We adjust our strategies according to the context, remembering always that our primary accountability is to people living in poverty and exclusion.
- **To donors.** We deliver on the contracts we sign with donors, taking this accountability seriously. We enter into contracts fully aware of associated conditions, reporting and accounting requirements. We may seek to influence donor policies and procedure, but in the meantime, our compliance is essential to maintain our credibility and reputation.
- **To supporters.** We are accountable to our sponsors and other supporters. We ensure high standards in our communications with all supporters, so they can understand the change process. By communicating well and being more accountable to supporters, there is greater potential to mobilise them in solidarity to advance local struggles.
- **To each other.** We are internally accountable within ActionAid for delivering on our work and upholding our values. We recognise the power we have and work to transform how we use it inside and outside the organisation. We aim to practice feminist behaviours and [feminist leadership principles](#).

## Principle 6: We monitor, evaluate, reflect and learn

*“He who learns, teaches.”*

African proverb

### Why?

To know if we are making a difference, we must show the impact of our work on people living in poverty and exclusion. This requires us to **rigorously** monitor, evaluate and document our work, and to reflect and learn so that we can be more effective in the future. We need to constantly test our theory of change. By analysing and reflecting on an ongoing basis we can learn more about challenging power, and how change happens. This can lead to new insights and we can adapt our work to support new, stronger actions for change. Rigorous evaluation is also important for deepening our accountability to donors, for testing innovations and for building the evidence base for alternatives. Good monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) should inform our future actions, so we are following the same cycle of *reflection-action-reflection* that we promote in communities.

### How?

- **By privileging the voices, perspectives and analysis of the people we work with.** Building on ActionAid’s accountability, learning and planning system (see ALPS) our MEL privileges the voices, perspectives and analysis of people living in poverty and exclusion, particularly women. Their knowledge is used throughout the programme cycle, strengthening our own learning and knowledge generation.
- **By applying a feminist lens to MEL.** We apply a feminist analysis in our MEL. This involves looking at the different changes for women and men, disaggregating data by sex and age, exploring intended and unintended project outcomes for women, making sure a significant number of women are involved in the MEL process (as leaders and as respondents), creating separate focus groups for women and men where appropriate, ensuring that timings are convenient, and respecting women’s safety, privacy and confidentiality at all times.
- **By analysing how social change happens.** We need to track our contribution to change and communicate our impact in line with our theory of change, focusing in particular on measuring the structural changes, including shifts in gender and other unequal power

relations. This will help us and our partners to adapt our strategies and manage or resist any backlash as we increase collective actions to advance rights, redistribution and resilience.

- **By taking a value-for-money approach.** This involves analysing the value for money of a programme on an ongoing basis by examining the outcomes achieved and asking whether we could have achieved the same change in a different and more cost-effective way. [ActionAid's approach to value for money](#) takes a long-term view, recognising that the sustained change that comes from HRBA is of more value than the short-term one-off change that comes from traditional service delivery.
- **By linking evidence generation with decision making.** In this way our collective knowledge and resources can make a lasting impact on the lives of people living in poverty and exclusion and contribute to the work of social justice movements.
- **By being transparent about our contribution to change and our learnings.** We should be careful not to **over-claim** credit where we work with partners or where other forces have contributed to change. Instead we should recognise and celebrate the power of people coming together to challenge inequality and injustice as the drivers of change.
- **By investing in people, capacities and systems to deliver quality MEL at all levels.** We need to ensure a critical mass of people across different teams with the skills to deliver on our MEL approach. We also need to strengthen the systems and methods to track, assess, document and communicate the impact of our work on people's lives for informed decision making. To do this, we must embrace technology and innovation, hold each other accountable to [ActionAid's global MEL framework](#) and partner with academic institutions to expand learning on key areas.

## Principle 7: We ensure links across levels

*"Philanthropy is commendable, but it must not cause the philanthropist to overlook the circumstances of economic injustice which make philanthropy necessary."*

Martin Luther King

### Why?

The structural causes of poverty, gender inequality and injustice are located from the household to the global level. Local work is fundamental as the experiences, analysis and perspectives of people living in poverty and exclusion should shape our agenda for change. People's action locally can often secure significant changes. However, some change requires action at district or national level, holding governments or corporates to account, changing policies, practices, attitudes and behaviours that cause or maintain unequal power relations. Local organisations may need to link with wider movements to secure such change. And the roots of some problems lie in other countries or at international level with the policies and practices of big corporations, other governments, or institutions such as the IMF or World Bank. As an international agency, one of our added values is that we can link local people to movements, information and strategies for change at other levels. We can support people living in poverty to enter national and international spaces of power to campaign for their rights and for social justice.

### How?

- **By building alliances.** We help build collective power through broad alliances between communities, people's organisations, social movements and others, working together across geographic boundaries to achieve social justice and eradicate poverty. We work with women's movements as a priority in our efforts to advance gender equality.

- **By sharing information and knowledge.** We ensure a smooth flow of information and knowledge between local, national and international levels, travelling in both directions. People working at international and national levels produce resources that help to deepen local analysis of people's rights. And local analysis from diverse contexts enriches the understanding and effectiveness of people at national and international level.
- **By linking local rights violations to the human rights framework and to national constitutions and laws.** In this way, we ensure that people are able to see that legal frameworks apply as much to their community and lives as to any others.
- **By harnessing people's voices and opening up spaces.** Testimonies of people living in poverty and exclusion are a powerful way to shift the position of a policymaker or journalist. Too often, the same people occupy the spaces where decisions are taken. ActionAid supports people living in poverty and exclusion to enter these national and international spaces, bringing new perspectives to debates.
- **By exposing and challenging hidden power.** Alongside communities and partners, we challenge and transform the hidden power of elites, financial institutions and corporations that are increasingly influencing and controlling decision making processes at all levels. We aim to expose their power and role so that people can hold them accountable and ensure that decisions are made by those institutions mandated to do so.
- **By campaigning together.** As a federation we concentrate support on the collective priorities identified in our strategy. Our joint advocacy and campaigning focus on the larger structural causes and consequences of poverty, gender inequality and injustice, taking on one major international campaign at a time, to maximise impact and resources.
- **By building an internationalist perspective across all members.** ActionAid is a global federation and we work to ensure that every member of governance bodies, management and staff feels a sense of dual identity: national and international. The more we are able to build this sense of identity, the more we will maximise the added value of being a democratic global federation.

## **Principle 8:** We promote credible, sustainable and feminist alternatives

*"Daylight follows a dark night."*

Masai proverb

Why?

Too often, struggles against poverty, gender inequality and injustice focus on confronting existing conditions without providing credible and sustainable solutions. ActionAid needs to find alternatives to the current system of economic and social relations, where institutions (such as international financial bodies, the state and the family) abuse power, violate rights and perpetuate inequality and injustice. We also need to respond to a changing world which creates new challenges and new opportunities. We therefore commit ourselves to engaging proactively with others to uncover, explore, document, share and activate alternatives to the current dominant paradigms.

**Box 2. When does a pilot or innovation become an alternative?**

- When it is breaking new ground and not just reinventing / relocating the wheel
- When there is rigorous MEL, with good baseline data, so we can demonstrate change
- When the costs are tracked so that it is something that others can credibly take to scale
- When we are not working alone but engaging a range of actors in developing the alternative
- When those we want to influence are involved from the start, so they take ownership
- When we are connecting grassroots practice with blue sky thinking by progressive thinkers
- When we are able to make new links across issues, for example bringing together priorities for women's rights and tax justice, and by making these links we forge new ground.

## How?

- **By naming, critiquing and challenging the dominant paradigms to which we are presenting an alternative.**
- **By building research into all our programming** so we have an evidence base to inform future programme design, shape policy or campaigning work and influence alternatives.
- **By ensuring an intersectional feminist analysis** informs and enriches all our work on alternatives.
- **By being open to learning from others.** Communities, young people, social movements, research institutes and activist academics may already be doing or have ideas about something that is highly innovative. We are open to drawing out learning, championing and popularising innovations by others.
- **By bringing our own angle to existing positive practice.** ActionAid can bring in a new angle which makes an idea innovative. For example, cooperatives are not new, but our work with cooperatives is innovative as it integrates a women's rights and resilience perspective.
- **By mainstreaming progressive ideas and practices.** We help to champion progressive solutions that have the potential to operate on a larger scale. We can take something from one location and share it in others, spreading horizontally. We aspire to achieve a real scale, not just to proliferate small projects that depend on our own resources.
- **By linking our alternatives work at different levels and areas of work.** As with all our work, our alternatives links with other levels and other areas of work for greatest impact.
- **By ensuring that our alternatives contribute to sustainable development.** Our solutions promote a partnership between people and the environment. To be credible, we need to premise any alternatives we propose on an understanding of their environmental impact. We must make explicit any trade-offs between social, economic and environmental impact.
- **By embracing failure and failing faster.** We are self-critical, recognising where we have failed and being willing to share learning from our failures as well as from our successes. An open culture that acknowledges failure will help us take calculated risks with innovative work and fail faster, so we can move on.
- **By challenging ourselves to work in different ways** to bring out alternative and non-linear approaches, for example, using creative arts techniques.
- **By finding the space and time to dream.** We take the time to imagine and build visions of a better world, which can inspire us and help shape action now.



## Minimum standards for HRBA programming

The checklist below will help you assess whether a programme (local, national or international) is consistent with ActionAid's HRBA. While you may not meet all these standards at the start of a programme, you must be able to show that you are working towards these in a credible way.

### Box 3. A checklist of minimum standards for HRBA programmes

PRINCIPLES	MINIMUM STANDARDS
<b>We put people living in poverty first and enable their active agency as rights activists</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ People living in poverty and exclusion and their organisations have been actively involved in the drawing up of all our local rights programmes. Our national and international programmes are based on analysis and learning done with people living in poverty and exclusion.</li> <li>■ Programme activities or strategies enable people living in poverty and exclusion to reflect on the conditions and causes of poverty and inequality, linking this with rights and the violation of rights.</li> <li>■ We have supported the active, free and meaningful participation of people living in poverty and exclusion, so they are aware of their rights and of key duty bearers and are able to hold them to account.</li> <li>■ We have addressed and understood vulnerabilities, strengthened people's resilience and helped respond to basic needs in ways that are sustainable, strengthen rights and generate alternatives.</li> <li>■ People living in poverty and exclusion have organised themselves and mobilised as rights activists. We have supported them to build their skills and leadership to articulate their agenda, and to take actions to claim and enjoy their rights.</li> <li>■ Our fundraising and communications work represent people living in poverty and exclusion as active agents, not victims.</li> <li>■ In our campaigning and fundraising work, we are actively engaging and promoting the leadership of people living in poverty and exclusion, respecting them as rights holders and activists.</li> </ul>
<b>We analyse and confront unjust and unequal power</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ We have analysed and understood the impact of unequal power relations within groups of people living in poverty and exclusion and between them and other actors/duty bearers.</li> <li>■ We have challenged all forms of discrimination and prioritise working with those who are most excluded.</li> <li>■ We have specifically analysed and understood power relations between women and men and worked on strategies to address them.</li> <li>■ We have analysed the impact of our own power in partnerships and alliances.</li> <li>■ We have a clear critical pathway, laying out how change will happen, based on a thorough analysis of power and rights.</li> <li>■ Comprehensive power analysis informs our campaigns, which seek to confront and shift power.</li> <li>■ Our fundraising narrative recognises the role of unequal power relations in causing poverty and the importance of addressing this.</li> </ul>

<b>We advance women's rights</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ We have ensured that women have the confidence to identify and challenge different forms of subordination and exploitation – whether sexual, cultural, political or economic.</li> <li>■ We have supported the capacity development of women living in poverty and exclusion and their organisations.</li> <li>■ We have confronted unequal power relations between men and women, including within our own organisation.</li> <li>■ We have done feminist analysis / budget analysis to concretise this commitment.</li> <li>■ We have connected women living in poverty and exclusion and their organisations with others to build solidarity and strengthen the movement for change.</li> <li>■ Our fundraising and communications work are gender-aware and challenge stereotypes.</li> </ul>
<b>We work in partnership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ We have identified strategic partners who can help us achieve our goals. These include organisations that are constituted by, genuinely represent or strongly connect with people living in poverty and exclusion.</li> <li>■ We have built credible partnerships based on our principles, building trust and mutual understanding and developing clear agreements.</li> <li>■ We have identified partners with the capacity or the potential to implement high quality and high impact programmes.</li> <li>■ We have helped to strengthen our partners, building movements or supporting organisational and institutional capacity development, as appropriate.</li> <li>■ We are linking our partners (local-local, local-national, national-local, national-international, etc), facilitating connections with social movements and engagement in international advocacy and campaigns.</li> </ul>
<b>We are accountable and transparent</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ We can show evidence of our primary accountability being to people living in poverty and exclusion.</li> <li>■ We are satisfying all relevant secondary accountabilities.</li> <li>■ We can show the impact of all our work on children.</li> <li>■ We have fulfilled the requirements of our open information policy, by making information about our programmes and budgets available to all stakeholders in accessible formats.</li> <li>■ We are using our own accountability as a foundation for strengthening people's ability to hold their governments to account on their rights obligations.</li> </ul>

<b>We monitor, evaluate, reflect and learn</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ We are tracking relevant indicators and have credible baseline data so we can measure change, showing the outcomes and impact of our work – whether we are working in a local rights programme, in a multi-country campaign or in fundraising.</li> <li>■ We are cost- and carbon-conscious in all our work, being careful how we use both ActionAid’s resources and natural resources.</li> <li>■ We are monitoring and reflecting on change processes in a participatory way on an ongoing basis.</li> <li>■ Our future plans are informed by what we are learning and by evidence of what is effective.</li> </ul>
<b>We ensure links across levels</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ We are working towards lasting gains at the local level and beyond by tackling the structural causes of poverty and rights violations (for example, changes in law, policy, procedure or budget allocation in favour of people living in poverty and exclusion).</li> <li>■ We are connecting local rights violations to national and international factors and to recognised human rights legal frameworks.</li> <li>■ We are connecting local struggles with national and international movements, and connecting local issues to national civil society change processes.</li> <li>■ We are connecting work on different objectives and connecting grassroots programme, campaigning and fundraising work.</li> <li>■ We are facilitating communication and information flows between local, national and international levels.</li> </ul>
<b>We promote alternatives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ We are putting forward credible feminist alternatives to challenge dominant models and paradigms that undermine people’s rights.</li> <li>■ The alternatives we propose are sustainable, being cost- and carbon-conscious.</li> <li>■ We have developed these alternatives with people living in poverty and exclusion, our partners and allies.</li> <li>■ We encourage innovation and experimentation and are not afraid of failure but are quick to learn.</li> <li>■ We are connecting our work on alternatives in different areas.</li> <li>■ We have created some space for dreaming and visioning the future.</li> </ul>

# ActionAid's theory of change

## ActionAid's theory of change

*We believe that social justice, gender equality and poverty eradication can be achieved through purposeful individual and collective action. Change will be led by the active agency of people living in poverty and exclusion, linked in solidarity with people's organisations, social movements and other allies, and campaigning for credible, rights-based alternatives.*

## ActionAid's theory of change unpacked

Social justice, gender equality and poverty eradication are achieved through purposeful individual and collective action to shift unequal and unjust power, whether it is hidden, visible or invisible, from the household level to local, national and international levels. The empowerment of people living in poverty and exclusion is crucial. Active and organised people develop and drive change, which will transform power when led primarily by those who are directly affected, and by individuals committed to deepening democracy and achieving social justice.

Collective efforts and struggles are more impactful when linked through solidarity, campaigning and common cause between communities, people's organisations, social movements, citizen's groups and other allies to strengthen the power of people to drive structural change. This includes advocacy, campaigning and policy influencing to engage with power structures from local to global.

Change is not linear, and opportunities to drive social change, advance alternatives and resist injustice open up at different moments. Different contexts will require different strategies. ActionAid is both a catalyst and a contributor to social change processes. We will be prepared to seize key moments for social transformation when they arise, and to resist backlash, guided by our long-term rootedness in communities and working closely with people's organisations, social movements and other allies. ActionAid will also support citizens' actions to hold duty bearers to account.

## ActionAid's programme framework

ActionAid's programme framework for the period to 2028 will work towards the following overarching goal: **To achieve social justice, gender equality and poverty eradication by shifting and redistributing power and resources, strengthening the resilience of communities and movements, and fulfilling the rights of people living in poverty and exclusion.**

We will contribute to change by:

- building power from below through empowerment, campaigning, solidarity and alternatives
- influencing and shifting power (visible, invisible and hidden)
- increasing rights, redistribution and resilience.

The following sections outline in detail how this will be achieved.





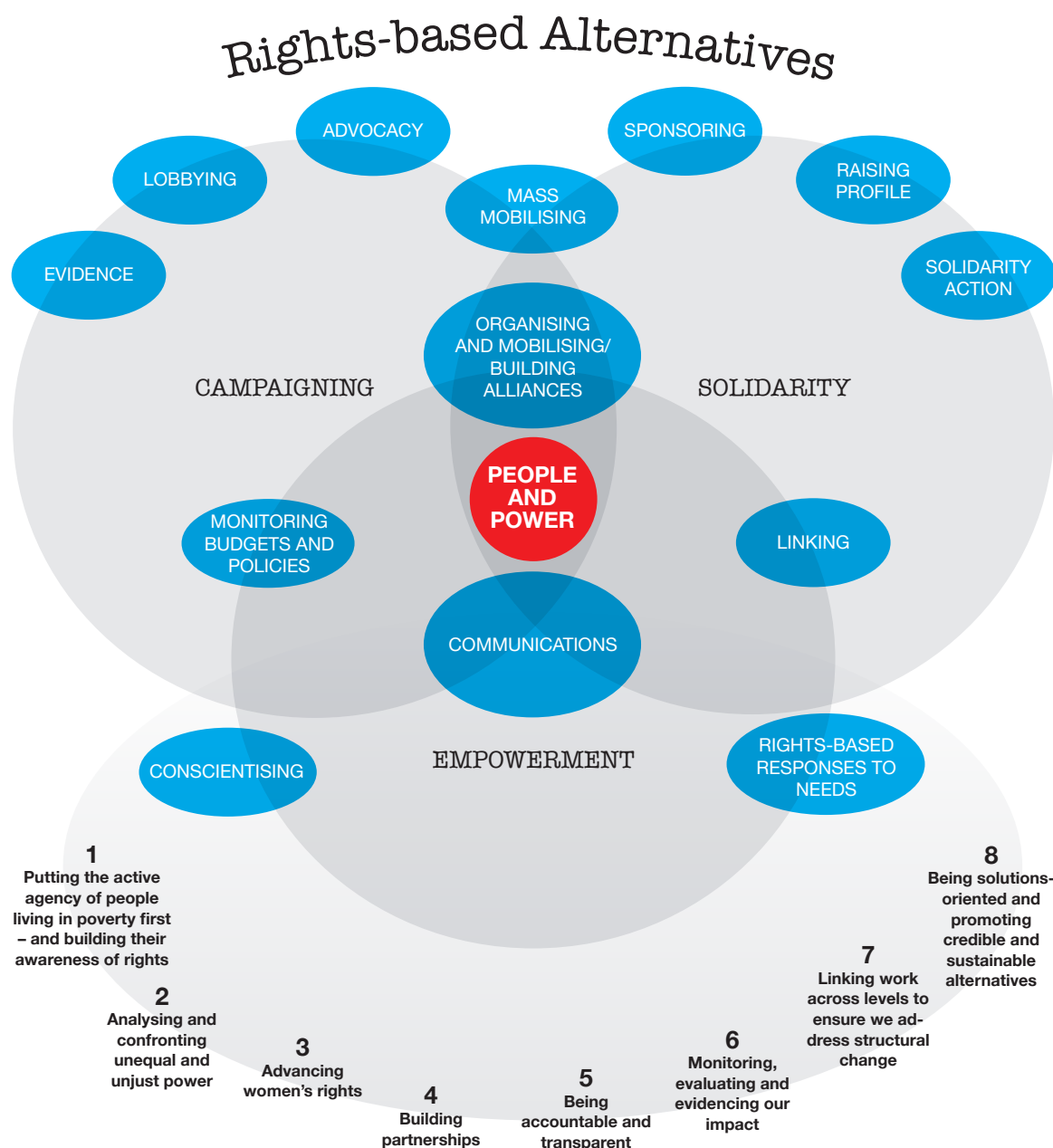
# Part 2: Building the power of people living in poverty and exclusion

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ActionAid works with people living in poverty and exclusion, particularly women and young people, to strengthen individual and collective consciousness of their rights, agency and capacity to lead lives with dignity. We support communities to understand the causes of poverty and injustice, such as unjust laws or policies, which are often generated in decision making spaces far from their localities. We connect these communities and their organisations with other organisations and alliances. When new laws or policies are put in place, we work to support communities in claiming and enjoying those rights. We campaign with and support people's abilities to shift and transform power at all levels, challenging patriarchy and other intersecting forms of oppression, and developing just, sustainable and equitable alternatives. This approach advances transformational and redistributive change by analysing and shifting power and holding leaders to account.

Our programming is based on the four HRBA pillars, all of which interconnect and overlap:

- **Empowerment:** This involves building the knowledge, skills and agency of people living in poverty and exclusion, including consciousness of their rights, and supporting them to come together to claim their rights.
- **Solidarity:** This involves developing the solidarity of other groups who come together to challenge power but are not necessarily living in poverty or exclusion themselves. We will work with these allies to deepen democracy and will facilitate links to the people we work with and to broader social movements, supporting their efforts to transform their realities and act in solidarity with others.
- **Campaigning:** This involves building the capacities of people and movements to mobilise key individuals and critical masses around an issue, making powerful demands to influence policies and practices and realise the rights of people living in poverty and exclusion.
- **Alternatives:** This involves the creation of shared visions that challenge existing narratives and perceived wisdoms, offering a new way forward.



## Who we work with

We believe that people living in poverty and exclusion, particularly women and young people, must be central in driving social change towards a more just and equal world. Women, who pay the highest price of unjust policies and patriarchal societies, must play a key role in order to shift unequal gender relations. Young people are important drivers of change throughout the world and will inherit a planet that faces irreversible climate change and environmental destruction as a result of the actions of previous generations. They also represent the majority of the population in many lower income countries, and often experience high levels of unemployment and marginalisation. Young women living in poverty, in particular, often experience violence, discrimination and sexual and reproductive rights violations that undermine their rights and dignity.

We are informed by an intersectional approach and will work to address intersecting inequalities in gender, income, location, disability, age, race, caste, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation and gender identity that exacerbate poverty and exclusion. We will work with both urban and rural poor, specifically women and young people. We will support the voice and agency of those who are most excluded wherever we work, strengthening their leadership and engagement in people's organisations and movements, as well as in national, regional and global policy spaces.

# Empowerment

*“The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don’t have any.”*

Alice Walker

## What is empowerment?

*Empowerment = the process through which we enable people living in poverty to become rights activists through a critical awareness of power relations and a strengthening of their own individual and collective power.*

The first pillar of ActionAid’s HRBA is empowerment. It’s a key element of our theory of change, which highlights the importance of “purposeful individual and collective action led by the active agency of people living in poverty and exclusion”.

ActionAid’s HRBA empowers people living in poverty and exclusion to become rights activists. It supports them to seek their rights and entitlements by:

- building critical awareness (conscientisation)
- supporting and strengthening people’s organisations and social movements - from grassroots to scale
- monitoring public policy and budgets and organising to hold governments to account
- harnessing the power of communications to raise people’s voices
- responding to urgent needs through rights-based service delivery.

## Building critical awareness: conscientisation

Often people living in poverty and exclusion are unaware that they have rights. Or they may lack the information, skills and knowledge to claim them. Awareness-raising and information sharing processes can help in these situations. But often people also internalise their oppression, seeing their condition as natural and unchangeable. Consciousness-raising processes can shift people’s fatalistic beliefs and help them begin to see themselves as agents capable of bringing about change.

ActionAid has a long history of using participatory methodologies for raising critical consciousness and analysing power. Using our [Reflection-Action methodology](#), we are able to facilitate a process in which people carry out a detailed analysis of their context, focusing on areas such as [rights](#), [power relations](#), [gender](#), [vulnerabilities](#), [actors and institutions](#), [communications skills](#) and [risks](#) [EP19]. They discuss the problems they face and look at the causes and possible solutions. The process always starts from people’s analysis of their own context and builds in a cumulative way, looking at the connections between local, national and international levels. *Reflection-Action* becomes the bedrock for building people’s agency, starting with their own conscientisation.

#### Box 4. What is conscientisation?

*Conscientisation is the process of developing a critical awareness of one's social reality through reflection and action. Through joint reflection people are able to gain a better understanding of their reality. Action is fundamental because it is the process of changing that reality.*

The term conscientisation, coined by the Brazilian educator [Paulo Freire](#), involves enabling people to perceive the social, political and economic contradictions of their lives and to take action against them. It is a process involving reflection and action that enables people to understand the reality of oppression, not as a place from which there is no exit, but as a situation which they can transform (Freire, 1970). The key is enabling people to explore **why** they are in such a situation and to begin to understand **how** to change their situation.

Conscientisation requires careful work to first bring to the surface and then challenge deeply held prejudicial ideas related to power relations, for example around gender, race, class and sexual orientation. These ideas are generally not visible to the person and prevent change. Examples include the idea that poverty is unchangeable, determined by divine law or caused by individual failure. Through conscientisation, we challenge the internalised oppression and lack of self-worth that most oppressed groups suffer. We also uncover the issues that go untouched because they are personal and private, such as sex, or relations between a husband and wife in marriage. Thorough conscientisation we bring them out as political issues that have everything to do with power and require change.

Conscientisation is deeply tied to action. Because people living in poverty often have a low sense of self-worth and personal (or collective) power, the experience of acting to change their situation gives them another experience of themselves – as agents capable of bringing about transformation. This positive experience of a more powerful self and community builds confidence and supports deeper struggles for change.

Conscientisation is particularly challenging in countries where states are repressive and space for civil society action is constrained. In such cases, awareness combined with critical consciousness can empower people to initiate struggles within the parameters of what is possible in their context. For this reason, it's essential to start with people's own context.

A large variety of *Reflection-Action* tools and processes can be used to support awareness raising and conscientisation at community level. Detailed descriptions of processes, tools and practitioner stories can be found on our [Reflection-Action](#) website.

#### Box 5. Five tips for using *Reflection-Action* for conscientisation

##### 1. Work with the poorest and most excluded.

- **Form *Reflection-Action* circles with the most excluded people or work with existing groups.** How you do this will depend on the size of the community and the nature of the groups. Linking groups within and across communities (for example, farmers' organisations or women's groups) will help to build analysis and connect to people's organisations and social movements.
- **Create women-only spaces.** Women may feel more confident to talk openly in a separate space and we should ensure that this is an option. Of course, connections need to be maintained so that at critical moments the women can share their analysis and actions with wider groups. Moreover, gender analysis of power needs to be prioritised in all groups.
- **Create spaces for young people.** Young people are key drivers of change and represent the majority in many of the areas where we are working. We should reach out to existing youth organisations or create new spaces where we can support conscientisation processes with young people and enable them to address their own critical issues, as well as supporting them to engage in wider community and national development processes.

- **Create spaces for children.** In most contexts, we will engage with children through schools. We can help build children's awareness of rights by working with teachers to reform the curriculum, bringing in new teaching methods or learning materials, or supporting girls' clubs, for example. [ActionAid's Promoting Rights in Schools Charter](#) of 10 core rights offers a framework for this.
- **Invest in community facilitators.** No one is more important to the success of a *Reflection-Action* process than the facilitator. We need to invest in the capacity development of grassroots cadres. These may be people from the same communities or people from outside the area (such as the "fellows" in Myanmar) who are given intensive training and located with communities for a year or more to facilitate change processes. Either way, we need to value the training and development of these people, recognising the importance of their own empowerment in the process.

## 2. Explore issues of power and women's rights.

- **Draw on the full basket of participatory tools to promote comprehensive analysis.** We have extensive experience of using participatory tools, such as maps, calendars, trees and rivers, to support critical analysis of power, rights and gender, for example. Visit the [Reflection-Action](#) website for more information.
- **Ensure there is a strong women's rights focus to the analysis.** Whatever the issue being discussed, it is likely to impact on men and women in different ways. It's essential to support groups to understand how issues impact differently on women and men and to ensure that proposed solutions empower women rather than reinforcing traditional gender roles and increasing women's unpaid workload.
- **Support focused work on particular issues with particular groups.** Different groups may need separate spaces to pursue their analysis and action. The challenge is to support each of these groups using the same *Reflection-Action* process. Each group may link to different organisations but within the community there need to be connections, so we don't end up with fragmented processes. Tensions should be explored in wider assemblies rather than being ignored.

## 3. Ensure accountability.

- **Use participatory review and reflection processes (see ALPS) to ensure that ActionAid does not escape scrutiny.** When we carry out institutional appraisals, strategic planning, reviews and evaluations we take a participatory approach which enables the people we are working with to engage in the process in a meaningful and empowering way. The same is true when we support people to apply our budget analysis tools to our own budgets.

## 4. Facilitate links across levels.

- **Promote shared learning visits and accompaniment.** There is a particular value to shared learning visits, such as exchanges between women's or farmers' groups, where people learn from peers who have overcome challenges. Having someone from a different yet similar context accompany your process of empowerment or organisation can bring a new perspective, open doors, spread new practices and build solidarity.
- **Connect community conscientisation processes with mobilisation at other levels.** Isolated local actions will not resolve many issues, so connecting people to organisations and supporting their mobilisation is essential. We can use *Reflection-Action* processes in our work with social movements and partners, strengthening their analysis, democratising their practice and grounding them in the voices of people living in poverty and exclusion.
- **Create a national and international *Reflection-Action* community.** Periodically bringing facilitators and trainers together at regional, national and international levels will enable them to learn from each other and develop their capacities. The [Reflection-Action](#) website provides an online space for *Reflection-Action* practitioners to share their experiences of working with the approach.



## 5. Promote credible alternatives.

- **Use learning and evidence from the grassroots level to support our advocacy work and the promotion of alternatives.** Action research processes carried out by *Reflection-Action* groups at the local level can provide new ideas and valuable evidence to support our advocacy work at national and international level.

### Case study 1. The quiet are speaking out in Pakistan

At a gathering in Lahore of grassroots women activists from different parts of rural and small-town Pakistan, women discuss what they have been doing to challenge the worst inequalities and hold the powerful to account in their communities. To learn from each other they take it in turns to share their stories.

*"I am a school teacher, and my school didn't have a boundary wall, or a toilet. So, I met with the local government official and said that it needed to be fixed. He said there were no funds. I said that I would find that out using the Right to Information Act. He organised for the wall and the toilet."*

*"When a man murdered some young girls, the police did nothing to arrest him. So, I went to see the police to complain. The murderer's family went to visit my brother to put pressure on me to stop pushing. But my brother supported me. I stood firm. Then six days later the police arrested the killer."*

*"I organised for the women in my village to get ID cards — we could not get them because our marriages were not being recognised as Hindus. It can be difficult to be a Hindu, even harder to be a low-caste Hindu. We are called untouchable. But I don't care what they say. I am not afraid."*

*"In my village there is a piece of land on which some very poor families have been farming for many years. But the government wanted to sell the land from under them. We organised a protest and the local media came. The families were weeping. I went inside to meet the official and urged him to stop the land sale. He told me that even if he wanted to stop the sale he could not. But I knew the rules and I told him he could postpone the sale and write to the higher ups recommending that the families be allowed to stay. We went outside together, and he announced to the media that the sale had been postponed. The families still live on that land."*

From [The Price of Privilege: Extreme Wealth, Unaccountable Power, and the Fight for Equality](#), ActionAid, 2016.

## Organising and mobilising

*"In union there is strength".*

Aesop, Greece, 560BC

People living in poverty and exclusion can take on and challenge more powerful interests that deny them their rights by coming together in groups, organisations and social movements. Processes of awareness raising and conscientisation are a foundation but, on their own, are insufficient to guarantee structural change. We need to support people to organise to lead their own struggles, and to link with other organisations and movements that can advance their rights.

A core goal of community organising is to build the power of excluded groups by bringing them together to build a collective organisation that will allow them to influence key decision-makers on a range of issues over time. As outlined in the previous section, conscientisation processes involve mobilisation and action on local issues. It is important to build on this organic mobilisation to facilitate the emergence of new community organisations or to strengthen and democratise existing organisations. We also need to support grassroots organisations to connect

with each other at district and national level, creating new social movements or strengthening those that already exist.

In any particular context, a range of community organisations may emerge from or be strengthened by the conscientisation processes. These could include women's groups, organisations of smallholder farmers, cooperatives, youth activist groups, organisations of people living with HIV, school management committees, adolescent girls' clubs, public service user groups, identity-based groups (e.g. Dalits, migrant labourers or landless people) or issue-based groups (e.g. on land rights).

ActionAid focuses in particular on supporting women's organising, working with women's organisations and movements to advance gender equality. Change for women living in poverty starts with their actions to claim their rights at a family and community level. When women organise with others, their ability to shift power is stronger, as organising has the intrinsic benefit of increasing their motivation and self-esteem, and working together gives women a stronger, unified voice, greater visibility, and greater power to affect change. People power is required to hold governments and others in structural positions of power to account and to begin to shift cultural norms and behaviours. Transformative change will come when grassroots campaigns led by women come together and form a critical mass, particularly when they are also able to work with progressive social movements and women's rights organisations at a national level.

### What is a people's organisation?

People's organisations tend to operate primarily at local level and are formed by people based on a shared identity or reality and the common goals of their members. People's organisations range from informal groups based on voluntary participation (e.g. community-based groups emerging from *Reflection-Action* circles) to formal institutions with legal recognition (such as people's committees). It is our ambition to support local people's organisations to come together with like-minded groups in other communities and at district, national and international level, uniting in a common struggle to fight injustice.

People may be connected based on:

- gender or sexual identity (e.g. women's organisations or LGBTIQ+ groups)
- indigenous, tribal or ethnic identity
- caste (such as local Dalit organisations)
- disability (led by people with disabilities, as opposed to organisations led by others who have no disabilities themselves)
- livelihood (women smallholder farmers, producers' associations, informal traders, seed banks)
- economic purpose (cooperatives and collectives)
- location (e.g. neighbourhood action groups, associations of slum dwellers, civic committees)
- resource management (water control committees, communal forest groups)
- minority, religious, or cultural identity, etc.

Examples of people's organisations include:

- The **Women Watch groups in Ethiopia** which empower, mobilise and organise women to take a central role in challenging gender-based violence and promoting women's rights.
- The **Small-Scale Women Farmers' Organisation in Nigeria** (SWOFON), a national umbrella organisation of smallholder women farmers which ActionAid Nigeria helped to start in 2012 and continues to support (with over 500 cooperatives and 200,000 members across 29 states).
- The **Babassu Nut Breakers in Brazil** that organises women to know their rights and resist ranchers and deforestation.

- The **Mlup Promvihearthor Centre in Cambodia** which mobilised local fishing communities to protect their fishing areas from a land grab by a major company.
- **Anjuman Falah-e-Moshra in Pakistan**, a people's organisation that mobilises to support the rights of mineworkers (who are not allowed to unionise).
- **Mahila Adhikar Manch in Nepal**, a network of rural women advocating for women's rights to good governance, food security, environmental protection and progressive laws and policies.

### **Box 6. Five tips for working with people's organisations**

1. **Support women's organising.** Work with community organisations to ensure that women's contributions are valued, that they are treated as equals, and are able to take on leadership roles. This may involve building capacity and changing attitudes. Specifically build the capacity of women's organisations and link local women's groups with national women's movements for greater impact. Recognise the risk that women face in organising and support their acts of resistance, ensuring that we support women on the frontline as human rights defenders (see <https://actonaid.org/stories/2019/celebrating-power-human-rights-defenders> ).
2. **Provide capacity development support** in areas such as financing, training, strategic advice, communications and connections. Continue to build capacity for reflection and action, seeing conscientisation and rights awareness as an ongoing process. Promote democratic and transparent practices within organisations and encourage their openness to new members, especially from the most excluded groups.
3. **Facilitate links across organisations** within the same community, with like-minded community organisations in neighbouring communities and at district level, with like-minded national organisations, and with organisations and alliances from other social groups (including from the urban middle class) that may be allies acting in solidarity. Link up women's local organising with national women's movements who share political ideals and goals, for greater impact in change processes.
4. **Be strategic in the selection of national organisations.** There are many apex organisations, networks, coalitions, federations, alliances and movements that claim to have legitimacy and roots, but which are little more than "fronts" set up by governments, corporate interests or powerful elites to advance their own interests. It's important to understand their origins, membership, agendas, credibility and affiliations. Sometimes a national coalition or platform that starts off with a credible reputation can lose legitimacy, becoming dominated by individuals or detached from its members. Our national vantage point puts us in a good position to help community organisations make their own informed decisions about which national organisations best represent their interests and add value to their struggles.
5. **Be conscious of our own power** and ensure that our agenda does not undermine the space for people's own analysis and action. We should avoid a situation where we or our partners are directly running or dominating organisations. While some organisations may initially depend on our support, we need to foster their independence if they are to be sustainable.

### What is a social movement?

A social movement is a coming together of people with a common interest to fight injustice. It connects different organisations and individuals in a collective struggle around a particular issue or agenda and tends to operate on a large scale, at district, national or international level. The defining features of social movements include:

- A common political agenda or 'common cause'
- A constituency base that is mobilised and collectivised in either formal or informal organisations
- Collective actions and strategies in pursuit of the shared agenda
- Some continuity over time
- Clear internal or external targets.

There are different organisational models for social movements, but most depend on voluntary engagement and there is a strong tendency to avoid hierarchy and promote horizontality in decision making, deepening people's sense of ownership and collective identity.

Examples of social movements include:

- The **Citizens' Initiative to Address Domestic Violence in Bangladesh**, a movement of 65 national NGOs and thousands of CBOs.
- The national **Dalit movement in Nepal** and **Bonded Labour movement in India**, which ActionAid helped to form and build.
- **La Via Campesina**, a global movement that links millions of peasants, landless people, agricultural labourers, small and medium size farmers
- The **Safe Cities Campaign in Liberia**, which includes women's forums in universities, the Liberia Women's Empowerment Network, the Women Legislative Caucus, the FGM Working Group, the Liberia Feminist Forum and others.
- The **Africa Network Campaign on Education for All** (ANCEFA) a movement linked to broad-based national coalitions in 32 countries involving teachers' unions, citizens' groups and rights-based NGOs.

When is a social movement feminist?

Women's rights movements have a political agenda to defend and promote women's human rights. However not all women's rights movements will identify as feminist. Along with the basic characteristics of social movements described above, feminist movements have the additional following attributes:

- Alignment with feminism as a political ideology
- An agenda that is built from a gendered analysis of the problem or situation
- Women form a critical mass of the movement's membership or constituency
- Women's leadership is systematically built, women's participation is not merely instrumental
- Political goals are gendered and seek a transformation in both gendered and social power relations
- Strategies and methods build on women's own mobilising and negotiating capacities, and involve women at every stage of the process
- As organisations, they seek to have transparent systems and structures, to consciously address the distribution of power and responsibility, have strong systems for learning and accountability, and actively experiment with change within their own structures.

Considerations of power and intersectionality in social movements

Social movements, including women's rights and feminist movements, are highly politicised spaces that can be skewed by unequal power relations between different movement actors. These power imbalances are based on issues of identity and power, such as gender, class, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation, which in turn shape and reflect movement actors' differing levels of access to political, social and financial capital and resources. This raises important questions around who sets the agendas and priorities of movements, and who speaks on behalf of whom.

For instance, many social movements operate in ways that are gender neutral or gender blind, while leadership and decision-making are dominated by men. Meanwhile, in countries in South Asia such as Nepal, national level ‘mainstream’ women’s movements may be dominated by heterosexual, high caste and upper-class women; or in the case of Europe, heterosexual white middle class women. This means the particular concerns and priorities of Dalit, tribal or LGBTIQ+ women in Nepal, or ethnic minority and LGBTIQ+ women in Europe, remain marginalised.

### **Box 7. Five tips for working with social movements**

- 1. Build women’s power.** Prioritise working with movements that have a track record of empowering women and mobilising on women’s rights issues. Put women’s rights and feminist analysis at the centre of our work with any social movement. This means ensuring women are in leadership, that violence within movements is discussed and that specific issues which may concern only women are part of the agenda.
- 2. Understand your context and be agile:** It’s important to understand the context and the types of social movements that are functioning. Actors, spaces, agendas, objectives and interests are constantly changing. Social movements evolve and may have legitimacy at one moment and lose it the next, as leaders lose track, are co-opted or the context changes. We may need to reposition ourselves to make quick links to emerging movements or to contribute to change at different moments.
- 3. Provide appropriate funding or tangible support.** It’s important to be flexible and to think about what kind of support is most helpful. Rather than big grants with huge accountability requirements, it may be better to give small amounts of money or tangible resources, such as t-shirts for a street march or access to a meeting space. Practical support with finance and administration, or to document experiences and learning, may also be valuable. We may need to redesign some of our systems and processes to be agile in supporting movements. Sometimes our NGO ways of working and our onerous expectations may kill movements.
- 4. Facilitate links across sectors and countries.** One area where we can add real value as a global federation is in facilitating links between people’s organisations and social movements, across issues within the same country (where there are common concerns such as tax justice and the right to education, for example) and across countries. We can use our engagement in international forums to open up space for the representation of these movements.
- 5. Be aware of our own power:** As an INGO we need to be constantly conscious of our power and privilege. We need to monitor and manage this power and to be humble in how we engage with movements, aiming to build equal partnerships. We must come from a place of trust, recognising that these movements will work differently from us. We should step back, supporting social movement representatives to take the lead in our joint campaigns and to take centre stage in national and international spaces.

### What we gain from work with people’s organisations and social movements

- A strong connectedness to organised groups of people living in poverty and facing exclusion, which helps to deepen our rootedness.
- Partners who are genuinely “of” the people we want to work with, not just working “for” them.
- Partners who will work with us to sustain demands of accountability from duty bearers.
- Credibility and legitimacy from working directly with people rather than through intermediaries.
- Insights into alternative ways of organising.



- Partners who are more likely to have a rights-based rather than needs-based world view and who are more likely to share ActionAid's HRBA and theory of change.
- Greater potential to connect our work from local to district to national and international levels, and to mobilise our collective power as a Federation.
- New knowledge on issues based on the vantage point of those most affected, deepening both our theoretical and practical understanding, for example from feminist movements. Often, we ourselves learn a lot and have our capacities strengthened by working with them.

## Case study 2. Mobilising women farmers in Brazil

The Mirandiba Women's Forum works with impoverished rural women from the semi-arid north eastern part of Brazil. The Forum partners with NGOs and national feminist organisations who apply feminist analysis to social inequality. It provides education on women's rights, promotes women's participation in social movements and grassroots organisations, combats violence and discrimination against women in their private and public life and supports income and food security projects for women in rural areas.

The Forum has become one of the leading spaces for women's empowerment and achieving women's rights, leading to changes in the lives of rural women. For example, self-organisation has enabled rural women to strengthen their role as political players. This has enabled women to better access their rights and ensure better food security, income and self-esteem. Mazé Silva, woman farmer and coordinator of the Forum, says, *"In the past we did not have a large number of women in the meetings, even because their husbands would not let them leave the house. Today, women make the decision and come."*

From [Shifting Power: Learning from women's experiences and approaches to reducing inequality, ActionAid, 2017.](#)

## Case study 3. Support mechanisms for *Reflection-Action* circles in the occupied Palestinian territories

Around five million people live in the occupied Palestinian territories. As part of keeping alive their humanity and identity in the face of systematic human rights violations that range from forced displacement to torture and extrajudicial killings, Palestinians under occupation live their daily lives by steadfastness and resistance. ActionAid Palestine applies a **human rights based approach** to its work in this challenging context, supporting Palestinians to examine the multi-layered system of duty-bearers that excludes and exploits them, as the first step in identifying opportunities to advocate and lobby for their rights.

ActionAid established *Reflection-Action* circles in five communities in Area C of the occupied Palestinian territories to address women's rights issues; increase women's engagement in decision making processes, improve their access to and control of productive resources, and promote bodily integrity. It also focused on strengthening networking, building the capacity of women councillors to represent women's issues and building direct engagement between women, government and private sector actors. The circles have worked successfully on issues such as credit, water and health.

*Reflection-Action* was adapted to the Palestinian context through the establishment of a Supportive Committee for each circle. These committees were established at the beginning of the process, following a stakeholder analysis, and their members included village councillors, community-based organisations and social activists. They provided a direct link between the circles and duty bearers, as well as a means of local support that they could access if they experienced challenges in implementing their action plans.

## Monitoring policy and budgets

*“If you don’t monitor you don’t see.”*

[ActionAid Participatory Methodologies Forum](#), Bangladesh, 2001

The monitoring of public policy and budgets is an essential part of empowering people to hold the state to account for implementing gender responsive laws and policies. By monitoring public policy and budgets, people can build their own evidence base, strengthen their understanding of the role of the state, enhance their capacity for effective rights-based action and lay the basis for campaigning to bring about positive change. This is closely linked with the conscientisation and organising processes outlined above. First, people are supported to understand their own context and the laws and policies (or lack of them) that impact their lives. And coming together in people’s organisations gives women and other excluded groups increased power to challenge unjust policies and laws, and to claim their rights where good legislation exists but is not properly implemented or fully budgeted for.

There are many *Reflection-Action* tools and approaches that ActionAid and our partners can use to support this process. These include budget monitoring, [social audits](#), [community scorecards](#), public policy monitoring and engaging in budget formulation and approval processes. Detailed descriptions of many of these tools and approaches, as well as practitioner stories, can be found on our [Reflection-Action](#) website.

The following are some key areas for group reflection and action:

- **Lack of implementation of existing policies and programmes.** Often government policies and programmes promise people specific entitlements, but these are undermined in practice because of low awareness, poor targeting, inadequate budget allocation or misappropriation of resources. This is where the work of local groups can be particularly effective. If groups understand their entitlements and are able to monitor the implementation of programmes and the use of funds at local level, they are in a better position to hold duty bearers to account.
- **Lack of good laws and policies.** Power imbalances are perpetuated in society because there is a lack of willingness to create and implement policies that address discrimination and exclusion. In cases where there is a lack of positive legislation, community groups might come together with others and link with national-level movements to campaign for the introduction of a specific law or policy.
- **Gender-blind policies** – Traditional systems of power exclude women, resulting in the creation of gender-blind policies that do not recognise or respond to women’s contexts and needs. Women therefore face inequality in accessing public services and economic resources, such as land and credit. They are also more likely to be engaged in unpaid care work, and to be confined to underpaid and insecure jobs if they do work outside the home. Local groups might campaign for greater involvement of women in decision making processes at local and district level to ensure that their voices are heard and that they are able to influence local budget decisions, for example. They might also come together with women’s movements at national level to call for the introduction of new policies or laws or for increased funding for existing policies.
- **Policy inconsistency** - Inconsistencies between human rights commitments enshrined in international and national laws and government economic policies can act as a barrier to reducing inequalities. For example, even in countries where the right to free public education and health care are enshrined in the national constitution, they may be undermined by a policy which results in the commercialisation of these previously public institutions. Whilst women who are dealing with inequalities are often excluded from policy discussions, they have clear ideas about what policies will make a difference in their lives and reduce inequality. Analysis carried out by local groups can provide important evidence to feed into advocacy and campaigning at national and international levels.

### Box 8. Five tips for monitoring policy and budgets

1. Use a *Reflection-Action* process to build an understanding of the context. What are the issues faced by people at local level? What policies, programmes and budgets relate to these? Are these effectively implemented? Are budgets adequate and does the money arrive where it is promised?
2. Apply a gender lens to your analysis. Work with women to look at how they are impacted by existing policies and programmes (or the lack of them) and to what extent they are able to influence decision-making processes at different levels.
3. Develop links between levels. Local evidence showing the impact of a lack of effective policies on people's lives (or a failure to fund or implement existing policies) can be powerful for advocacy and campaigning at the national and international levels. And by coming together with each other and with movements at national level, local groups will have a greater chance of making their voices heard and influencing key policy and budget decisions.
4. Adapt your approach to the context. The approaches you use will depend on your context. For example, is there an effective legal framework and a right to information in place or is any attempt to scrutinise government spending regarded as a subversive political act? Even in difficult contexts, there is usually some way of monitoring government policies and budgets, increasing accountability.
5. Open ActionAid and partner budgets for scrutiny. How ActionAid and partners manage our own finances becomes particularly important when we are tracking government budgets and holding others accountable. We should model good practice, strengthening our accountability to the people we work with, increasing their participation in our governance, and opening our budgets to scrutiny.



## Case study 4. Holding government to account in Senegal

ActionAid is supporting women's groups in Niodior, an island off the coast of Senegal, to come together to take action against unequal access to basic services.

Article 8 of Senegal's constitution guarantees health, yet only 5% of people in Niodior are able to access health insurance, compared to 20% nationally. There are only three health centres on the island, with no specialist doctor for women or the elderly, many of whom have high blood pressure and heart problems because sea salt seeps into drinking water and produce. Meanwhile, the new city of Diamniadio, 50km from Dakar, is due to receive US\$100 million from the African Development Bank.

ActionAid is able to bring information from the national level to the women's groups on Niodior, where women can use their local knowledge to plan how to challenge government policy. This has enabled women's groups to demand better services, asking why they don't receive adequate support despite constitutional commitments. As a result of community organising, the health insurance plan implemented by the Ministry of Health and Prevention has now started to target children and elderly people in the area. The government has started to identify places to drill for fresh drinking water on Niodior.

From [Not ready, still waiting: Governments have a long way to go in preparing to address gender inequality and the SDGs](#), ActionAid, 2016.

## Strengthening communications skills

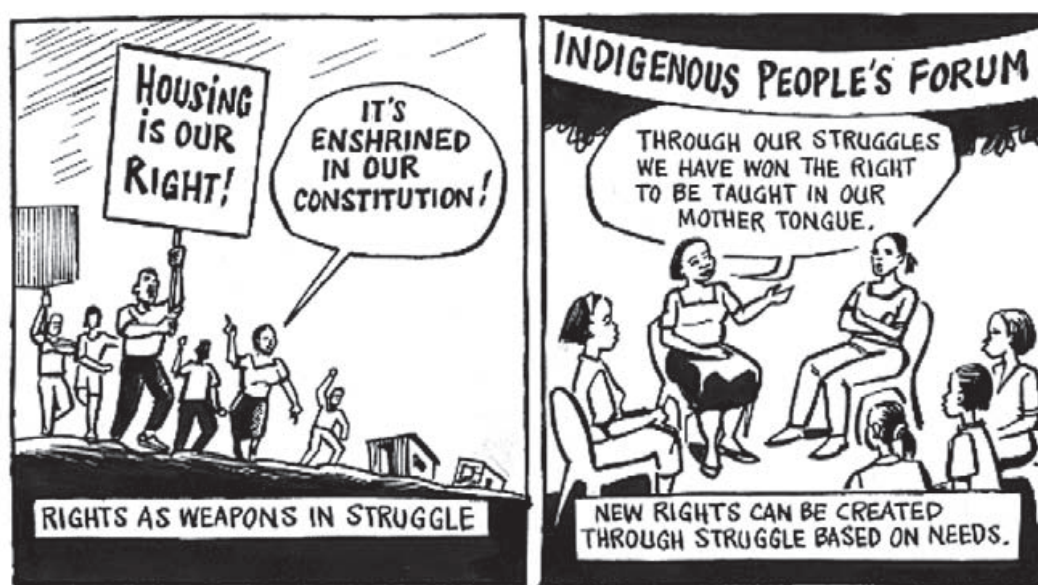
Strengthening people's capacity to communicate – to elevate their voices from the grassroots to those in power – is a defining part of empowerment. In many cases this will involve the strengthening of basic literacy and language skills, often denied to people because of lack of education or opportunity. Lack of these skills prevents people living in poverty accessing power. However, increasingly, we need to move beyond basic communication skills to improve people's access to different means of communication and to build their capacity to understand and engage the audiences they want to reach. This might involve using social media, text messaging, posters, community radio stations or participatory video to support local and national struggles for rights.

Corporate media have immense power over the news agenda but with the spread of new media, people from all walks of life are increasingly involved in compiling, sharing, filtering, discussing and distributing news. The internet and the rise of citizen journalism is making news more participatory, social, diverse and partisan, reviving the discursive ethos of the era before mass media. Indeed, there is a marked decline in people's trust of formal institutions as sources of information. This is matched by the rise in person-to-person communication through text messages, mobile-to-radio, community radio, user-generated content, citizen journalism, blogging, recommendations, crowdsourcing, transparency and anti-corruption initiatives and social-media-as-news. Online and offline, communities are increasingly using mass communication tools and platforms to tell their own stories, mobilise support, reach decision-makers and advance social change.

ActionAid and our partners can harness these new opportunities to great effect, enabling people in our local rights programmes to develop their literacy and communication capacities, generate and share engaging content, and create and occupy media space in ways that motivate decision-makers to act. We can combine innovation in popularising accountability and transparency initiatives (such as [www.ipaidabribe.com](http://www.ipaidabribe.com) in India) with our experience of budget tracking and social audits to help spread and advance alternatives in this area. We can innovate with multimedia tools as part of our participatory processes, connecting people to relevant communication technologies, media and platforms – helping to sustain, spread and deepen progress made locally.



In any media, traditional or new, a powerful story that responds to real events and key moments, from a person behind-the-scenes, at the grassroots, who has lived through the issues at hand, is worth its weight in gold. ActionAid is well placed to draw out these voices and stories, and to tailor them to the audiences we want to reach, motivating people to act. But the challenge is to ensure that this is genuinely part of an empowering process for the people involved, that we are not disempowering or exploiting people in the process, or indeed, exposing them to a [risk of backlash](#). We need to develop a culture of excellence in giving people space and means to communicate as an integral part of the empowerment process, rather than just using their voices for our own ends.



### Box 9. Reflection-Action for literacy

Literacy is a right. It also has multiple benefits. Literacy can improve self-esteem and individual empowerment, influence increased political participation, transform attitudes, improve livelihood options and reduce poverty. A lack of basic literacy and language skills prevents people living in poverty accessing power. Adult literacy rates are slowly increasing. In 2017, the global rate was 86%. However, an estimated 750 million adults struggle with literacy and literacy rates in sub-Saharan Africa are still only around 65%. For low income countries, the average female rate (53%) trails the male rate (68%) by some 15 percentage points.

In a *Reflection-Action* literacy process, participants come together regularly (2-3 times per week) over a prolonged period of time. They use participatory visual tools such as trees, rivers and matrices, often created on the ground with local materials such as pebbles and sticks, to discuss and analyse and plan action on issues that are important to the group. Literacy and numeracy work arise directly out of the graphics, as participants learn to write the words that are most relevant to them, translating the graphics onto paper and copying them in their notebooks. They continue to develop their literacy and communications skills in ways that are meaningful to the group, for example reading leaflets from the local health centre, writing letters and petitions, or using numeracy skills to analyse the budget of the local school. Use of the media (television, radio and newspapers) to develop literacy skills and stimulate dialogue, analysis and action is very common. In this way, the literacy acquisition process is linked with individual and community empowerment; strengthening people's capacity to secure their basic rights.

For more ideas on using *Reflection-Action* for literacy see the [Reflection-Action](#) website.



### Box 10. Five tips for strengthening communications skills

1. Understand the communications context. It's essential that we support people to understand their communications context, thinking about how they currently access information, the media that they use and are comfortable with, and the skills that they might need to effectively communicate with the wider public and with people in power. A variety of [Reflection-Action tools](#) can be used to support people to do this.
2. Build women's communications skills. It's important to work with women living in poverty and exclusion, whose stories so often go unheard or unrepresented in the dominant media. In poor communities, women are more likely than men to have been excluded from education, to struggle with literacy and lack the confidence to speak out. By building their literacy and other communications skills, we can help them to share their stories and make their voices heard in spaces of power.
3. **Raise the voices of children and young people.** Our commitment to show the impact of our work on children's lives means we should be able to tell every story through a children's lens. Our sponsorship communications can be used to share stories from children, empowering them in the process of communicating with supporters. Children and young people are particularly agile when it comes to engaging with new media and using these skills to claim their rights. We should also explore opportunities to bring their voices into local, national and international spaces when issues that directly concern them are being discussed.
4. **Create a group of frontline witnesses.** We can use a range of media to help people living in poverty to act as frontline witnesses, documenting and reporting rights violations, corruption and absenteeism. Creating a group of women, girls, men or boys who can act as grassroots spokespeople, ambassadors, multimedia reporters or amateur journalists, can make a big difference. They should be trained and supported to get their stories into the media.
5. **Build the communications capacity of staff and partners.** To do this work effectively, we need to invest in our own staff and partners. We need to boost their capacity to understand the different opportunities and the power of different media, messages and actions. When our own colleagues are using these media for themselves, they will understand their power as part of the empowerment process. In a world of multiple and diversifying literacies we are all illiterate in some way, and we need to invest in our own learning!

### Case study 5. Learning new ways of communicating in Kenya

As part of a pilot project on unpaid care work, ActionAid Kenya gave cameras to the members of a *Reflection-Action* circle. Once the women became familiar with the simple-to-use cameras they recognised what a powerful tool they could be. They started by taking photos that showed the problems they were confronting. This meant they could bring evidence ("ushahidi" in Swahili) to share with the rest of the community, decision makers and media. Previously, they felt they could be easily dismissed and their concerns not taken seriously. They also used the cameras in imaginative ways, to visualise a different reality. They took pictures showing men and boys fetching water or firewood and cooking: making the changes they wanted to see visible.

From [Reflection-Action](#) website.

### Strategic service delivery

In line with our HRBA, ActionAid does not generally engage in delivering basic services or in any way seek to act as a substitute for the government. Where we respond to basic needs, we do so in a way that contributes to a sustainable process of change, strengthening the connections between people as rights holders and their governments as duty bearers. We may occasionally

provide services on a temporary basis in a humanitarian context when governments are unable or unwilling to do so, or when people are in situations outside normal citizenship as a result of dislocation, status, etc.

### Box 11. An example of strategic service delivery

Consider a situation where ActionAid is working in an area where the majority of girls are not in school because the nearest one is five kilometres away. The community have prioritised education but have no link with the Ministry of Education. We may facilitate their analysis of the situation, raising their awareness that education is a human right and sharing details of the constitution or relevant laws. We may support them to organise a school action group to make the case for a local school, collecting details of the number of children out of school and the difficulty of travel. Children may provide testimonies to illustrate the case for a school. We may then help a delegation from the community (including women and girls) to go to the district education office to present the case. But the response may be negative, with government officials saying they have no resources to build another school. We may then support further reflection and analysis by the community, working out the cost of building a school and where they could secure resources to help. We may also help the community negotiate with the government, for example, asking, “If we can get a school built, will the government guarantee to provide three trained teachers?”

The details will vary enormously from one location to the next. But in the above example there may be a strong case for ActionAid or a local partner to support people to build classrooms, if the district education office will agree to supply trained teachers and maintain the school. Supporting the school construction may be an opportunity to challenge discrimination or raise awareness of rights. For example, we could challenge gender division of labour or ensure stigmatised local people are employed. We may help set up and build the capacity of a school management committee, with equal representation of women, raising awareness of other education rights beyond just access to school (using our [Promoting Rights in Schools charter of 10 core rights](#)).

In our HRBA we are clear that basic needs, like food, water, sanitation, education, welfare, health care and shelter, are basic rights. Adequate provision of these to all people is a fundamental responsibility of governments. In extreme circumstances, such as disasters or conflicts, the responsibility may lie with a “replacement duty bearer” such as the UN or a humanitarian agency. In practice, many governments fall short. And while these rights continue to be violated it can be difficult for people living in poverty to find the time and space for processes of conscientisation, mobilisation and organisation.

Sometimes governments may agree that citizens have certain rights but may lack the resources to realise these rights in practice. In other contexts, the government may have the resources to meet basic needs but lack the capacity to follow through on delivery. Or the government may deny that people living in poverty have rights at all and may actively oppose their struggle to realise rights. Empowering and organising people remains our fundamental concern in all these contexts, but we may also need to take action to respond to people’s basic needs. In doing so we always work in ways that reinforce people’s awareness of rights, build critical consciousness, strengthen grassroots organisations and increase the accountability of government agencies.

Often, we work in contexts where key responsibilities for governance and delivery of services has been decentralised to local government. This can create opportunities for us to work strategically with local government agencies to model new ways of delivering services, always ensuring our approaches are cost effective and replicable and that they reach the most excluded people. The work we do in one district may act as a model for others and may serve as a foundation for our advocacy and campaigning work. Our rights-based approach reinforces the role of local government and strengthens the relationships between people (as citizens) and their government.

We can support service delivery work in the short term, but in the long term reinforce people's awareness of rights, secure long-term commitments from the government to deliver on fundamental rights, help people to organise, and facilitate a direct connection between citizens and governments as the duty bearer.

### Box 12. Five tips for strategic service delivery

1. **Build people's understanding of human rights.** Even where ActionAid provides some support for service delivery, it is essential that the rights holder / duty bearer relationship between the community and government is strengthened. It's important to facilitate a process of reflection and action, supporting people to understand their rights and the role of duty bearers, and strengthening their confidence to take rights-based action.
2. **Support grassroots organisations.** The process of organising to demand and shape the new service should help to strengthen the existing people's organisations and may lead to the creation of new groups and alliances.
3. **Strengthen people's communications and negotiation skills.** By involving them from the beginning in discussions about the kind of service they want and how it should be delivered, we can help to build the communications and negotiation skills of community leaders and others. This will enable them to ensure that the service provided continues to reflect community needs and will equip them to claim their rights in future.
4. **Empower women and challenge the gendered division of labour.** Where ActionAid is involved in service delivery, such as the construction of a school or health centre, this can be used as an opportunity to challenge discrimination and the gendered division of labour, modelling a service which enhances the rights of women and girls.
5. **Give people a positive experience of mobilisation on a basic right.** Modelling a positive experience of mobilising on a basic right (even if in the short term it is supported by ActionAid rather than the government) can help to inspire action on other rights.

### Case study 6. A rights-based approach to service delivery in Myanmar

Even in a post-emergency context we can promote rights-based approaches to service delivery. In Myanmar, after a terrible flood, agricultural production was impossible because of damage to a small dam responsible for irrigating more than 2,000 acres of land owned by five villages. We helped people get the irrigation department to agree to support engineering design and provide heavy machinery to rebuild the dam. But they needed US\$40,000 to buy materials.

ActionAid Myanmar worked with communities to agree a clear strategy for how landless people would benefit directly from the project. Villagers came up with the idea that landowners would get irrigation water from the dam, but landless people would have the right to cultivate fish in the lake behind the dam. Landless people would get 70% of the income from the fish while 30% would be used to maintain the dam. Villagers also decided that half of the dam construction project committee members would be women and a women's self-help group would be supported to create a "women-only space" for their economic empowerment. On the basis of this agreement, ActionAid agreed to provide materials for the dam.

From [People's Action in Practice](#), ActionAid, 2011.

## Monitoring empowerment

**ActionAid's Monitoring Evaluation and Learning Framework** identifies the following empowerment changes for monitoring purposes:

Definition	Examples of change
<b>Skills, capacities, leadership and voices of people living in poverty and exclusion, particularly women, so that they are able to set the agenda and lead</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Increased number of the most marginalised and excluded groups, particularly women, with greater knowledge and consciousness of their rights</li> <li>■ Increased number of people who are able to take action to defend those rights by employing appropriate advocacy and influencing techniques</li> <li>■ Increased self-confidence to lead and participate in decision making to influence decisions that affect their lives before, during and after disasters (women &amp; young people)</li> <li>■ Increased number of people mobilised about their rights</li> <li>■ Increased number of people advocating for shifts in power when their rights are not respected by local and national governments.</li> </ul>

In relation to organising and mobilising, or the “harnessing of collective power”, the MEL Framework identifies the following changes for monitoring purposes:

Definition	Examples of change
<b>Growth of people's organisations and movement strengthening efforts so that people can assert their rights and defend any gains made over the long term</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Broad-based social movements and human rights champions, in particular women &amp; young people, are free to organise themselves and enjoy freedom of expression and association</li> <li>■ Increased number of people participating in reflection action circles, local women's groups, farmers' groups, girls' clubs, etc</li> <li>■ Social movements, human rights champions and women leaders challenge social, religious, and cultural norms and practices that infringe upon rights</li> <li>■ Extent to which social movements and CSOs are satisfied with their partnership with ActionAid</li> <li>■ Stronger levels of interactions and cross-movement dialogues or organising</li> <li>■ Number of new partnerships established with organisations that share similar agendas</li> <li>■ Increased number of interactions between different organisations</li> <li>■ Increased collective action to challenge powerful actors and institutions.</li> </ul>

# Campaigning

*“First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win”.*

Mahatma Gandhi

## What is campaigning?

*Campaigning = harnessing people’s power through organisation, mobilisation and communication around a simple and powerful demand, to achieve a measurable political or social change.*

Campaigning is core to ActionAid’s theory of change and is one of the pillars of our HRBA. Our campaigns seek to address the structural causes and consequences of poverty, gender inequality and injustice to bring about long-term systemic change at local, national and international levels.

For ActionAid to build distinctive and successful campaigns that respond to our theory of change we need to integrate elements of empowerment and solidarity. This might involve empowering people living in poverty and exclusion to gather evidence and advocate for their own rights as part of a campaign, as well as monitoring policies and budgets. It might also mean building relationships between different campaigners, such as women farmers, farmers’ unions, women’s movements and ActionAid supporters. In this way, campaigning, empowerment and solidarity are mutually reinforcing. We can have more campaigning influence by improving people’s power, organisation and capacity, whether they are our supporters, people living in poverty or other allies. Ultimately, our aim is to support people living in poverty and exclusion to carry out and lead their own campaigns, not just to campaign on their behalf.

### Some characteristics of campaigns

- Campaigns seek to achieve **specific, time-bound objectives**. They involve focused, sustained pressure on particular targets to bring about political change. A campaign incorporates a range of tactics to achieve its agreed objectives, such as research, advocacy and public engagement.
- Campaigns seek to **shift and mobilise public opinion**. They aim to reach the people who can make a difference and motivate them to support the campaign goal and take action. Sometimes we need the support of a cross-section of citizens to gain traction with decision-makers. At other times a particular constituency or interest group may be able to help us achieve our objective.
- Campaigns have **varying timeframes**. Campaigns that seek to get new issues on the political agenda or shift views in a new direction may need to focus on building up a supporter base, which can take years. In other cases, there may be a relatively short window of opportunity, linked to a specific external opportunity.
- Campaigns are designed to **respond quickly to the changing environment** and political reality. They should be able to change direction or tactics at short notice and stay reactive to external events.

### Campaigning in ActionAid

ActionAid’s campaigning focuses on strengthening the leadership and voices of people living in poverty and exclusion, particularly women and young people, so that they are able to set the agenda and lead change. We campaign with and support communities’ abilities to shift and



transform power at all levels, challenging patriarchy and other intersecting forms of oppression, and developing just, sustainable and equitable alternatives. Working with women's movements, including feminist organisations and other women's rights actors is a priority in our efforts to advance gender equality.

In line with our theory of change, our campaigning focuses on building links between levels. The structural causes of poverty, gender inequality and injustice are located from the household level to the global level. This means that solutions can only be found through collective and connected efforts at community, national and global levels. We will help build collective power through broad alliances between communities, people's organisations, social movements and other allies, working together across geographic boundaries, to achieve social justice and eradicate poverty.

## Designing a campaign

As outlined above, campaigns aim to get wins on specific, time-bound objectives. It's important to set clear short-term objectives, outlining how changes will happen one step at a time, where one successful step leads to another. This is sometimes called a "critical path" in campaigning. We should not set out to address a holistic set of issues in all of their complexity all at once, as we may try to do in our programme work or policy analysis. Ultimately, campaigns win by taking successful steps along the way towards an eventual win.

Campaign tools and tactics could involve any mix of:

- research to build evidence
- advocating for rights and lobbying for change
- public engagement, mobilisation and action
- using communication for change
- building alliances and coalitions.

### Box 13. How to design a campaign

- **Put together your design team.** The design team should ideally include and be led by people and their movements who are directly affected by the problem. ActionAid's role is as facilitator.
- **Identify the issue.** Do an initial scoping of the problem you are trying to solve. What is the issue? Who is behind it? What are its causes? Who is affected?
- **Define your position on the issue.** Do you disagree with or oppose the issue? What are your alternatives? One position can be translated into different options for your demands and calls.
- **Carry out a power analysis.** It's essential to know where power lies, who benefits, who does not and how can you build enough people power to achieve change.
- **Assess your capabilities.** What do you have? What are your strengths and weaknesses? Think about your allies and partners, your constituency, your resources, your credibility and political stature, etc.
- **Define your goal and objectives.** What can you do about the problem in the short, medium and long term? An effective objective will be precise and realistic. Say what you want to change, who will make the change, and how much change you want to achieve by when. Objectives must be SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound).
- **Develop a critical pathway.** Describe the critical path for the campaign – the series of steps in which achieving one is necessary to move on to the next (best planned backwards from the objective). Completing each step is essential to achieve the end objective and is a milestone along the way to campaign success.

- **Decide whether a campaign is necessary.** Having carried out some analysis you may decide that a public-facing campaign is not necessary. Perhaps you can achieve your objectives through other means, such as advocacy or networking.
- **Identify your target audiences, build your narrative and key messages.** Produce a stakeholder analysis and describe who your target audiences for the campaign are. Whose actions do you want to change and who are your allies? What are the key messages for each target audience? What will convince your primary targets, and those in the influencing chain?
- **Create a campaign plan.** Describe your strategy for influencing each target audience in a clear action plan. This should include details of each phase of the campaign detailing how you propose to achieve your campaign objectives. Use your critical pathway to identify the phases and to write down your influencing strategy for each moment.
- **Develop a MEL framework.** Explain how you will judge the success of the campaign. What are your indicators of success, for your intermediate changes and for the overall change? How will you track and monitor your campaign? Monitoring and evaluation should be incorporated from the start of your campaign development process.
- **Describe ActionAid's added value.** Describe how ActionAid's efforts contribute to the work of others, and what specific contribution ActionAid will make.
- **Outline your assumptions, risks and constraints.** Describe your assumptions, and the main risks and constraints your campaign may face, whether internal or external.

## Research

Research is one of our strongest tools for advocacy with governments, international institutions and duty bearers, external engagement, tracking impact and learning from our programmes. Research products are key to bringing about shifts in power that will ensure that women and young people living in poverty and exclusion secure their rights. The research process in and of itself can be a transformative process, since collaboratively reflecting on power is itself an activist pedagogy.

### Feminist approach to research

Currently, in most global and national policy fora, what is deemed 'evidence' is typically produced and funded by white, elite, heteronormative, patriarchal, and neoliberal actors, who are more often than not men. These individuals and institutions are often located in or connected to the global north and are often unwilling to recognise their power and privileges. Rather than being active agents in their narrative, this research consequently tends to silence research 'subjects', often people of colour – and particularly women and girls – who are framed as lacking in agency. This perpetuates unhealthy power dynamics and impacts the analysis, and consequently the policy and practice decisions that are informed by their research.

ActionAid is committed to challenging and diversifying whose knowledge counts, starting with people's role in shaping the priorities and evidence itself and strengthening these alternative narratives which go some way to challenging how people see and understand the world. In this sense, the research itself can be the activism as it is where - through *reflection-action* cycles - the change starts to happen.

Just as we believe that a human rights based approach to development generally achieves the most effective, just and sustainable change, we believe that a feminist, human rights based approach to research is the most effective approach. It can empower men and women, build solidarity between different groups by bringing different actors together, and can provide us with the evidence we need to shift power. This enables us to address the structural causes of poverty, change power relations and challenge dominant narratives and false solutions by offering evidence-based alternatives.

Drawing on an intersectional feminist framing for our work, we acknowledge gender does not operate alone as a basis for structural inequality. Power and privilege are experienced in different ways by different groups of women at different points in their history and in varying contexts.

**Intersectional feminism** strengthens our power analysis. It allows us to understand how different inequalities are constructed and sustained. ActionAid's research should bring to the centre the experiences and rights of those who are most marginalised and together interrogate why inequalities occur and then support programming and practice that breaks down systems and structures that sustain them.

Historically ActionAid has done strong policy research that has shifted power at a global level but has not had huge impact at a national level and doesn't fully connect to our local programme work. On the other hand, we have done wonderful participatory research which creates change at personal and local level but struggles to shift power at national and global levels. We aim to do both for increased impact and change. Our long-term engagement in communities means we can track issues over time, building evidence and bringing it to national and international attention. We are able both to provide evidence of the impact of a particular problem on people's lives and to propose solutions which are rooted in the analysis and aspirations of the people we are working with.

This type of research process, rooted in ActionAid's programmes, building participants' sense of power, increasing solidarity between people and generating evidence of alternatives leading to collective action which influences power and change broadly, is ActionAid's added value and we call it our '**Research Signature**'. When practicing ActionAid Research Signature work, we draw on our own history and that of our allies and we ensure our processes pay constant attention to ethics and ensure the safety and care of all participants.

**Informed consent:** There are huge risks to research participants as they take part in research processes, both as they meet with research teams and as joint analysis is published. This is exacerbated when negative power dynamics between researchers and the research community result in people's perspectives, words and photos going into the public domain without joint analysis. 'Informed' suggests that the relevant people receive all relevant information in advance. 'Consent' means participants have clearly expressed their agreement. ActionAid will make every reasonable effort to prevent and mitigate risk caused by our own activities, in line with our approach to Sexual Harassment, Exploitation and Abuse (SHEA) and Safeguarding. Informed consent is one example of this. It means that all participants, including children, will be given clear information about the project, to be able to choose not to participate, and to withdraw at any time.

**Disclosure and safety of participants:** ActionAid should also acknowledge, recognise and take steps to mitigate the deep dangers to partners, beneficiaries and rights holders of doing research in risky environments, for example, where there is shrinking political space. Confidentiality and anonymity are key aspects of Informed Consent and should be maintained throughout the research, including during analysis and reporting in line with ActionAid's SHEA and Safeguarding approach. In addition, a thorough risk analysis is key, as is recourse to legal support.

Some researchers have used their position of power for personal gain. In our research we must be constantly vigilant to any practice which is not within **ActionAid's code of conduct** and we should be informed by ActionAid's feminist leadership approach as outlined in the core **SHEA and Safeguarding Policy**.

**Libel:** It is also very important that we review our research to check what risk it poses for ActionAid. **ActionAid's Libel Checklist** does not seek to avoid libel risk completely, because that would mean never making negative statements about companies or individuals. On the contrary, we are proud of our track record of courage in exposing human rights violations. At the same time, it's important to know and understand the law so we do not expose ourselves to unnecessary and expensive wrangles.

### **Box 14. ActionAid's Research Signature**

"...people-centred evidence gathering with women and young people at the core, collectively analysed with knowledge from in and outside the organisation, can enable multiple power shifts. This brings about changes at local, national, international levels".

#### **ActionAid's Research Signature's key elements:**

- 1. People living in poverty are empowered by our research – both process and product:**
  - a. Involves the participation of people living in poverty and exclusion and their movements directly (wherever possible) at every stage of the research process - including in identifying questions, thorough joint analysis and by bringing in new knowledge and strategies for change
  - b. Active in using the research evidence for influencing change at different levels
  - c. Womxn<sup>1</sup> and young people actively inform and transform the evidence gathering, and are well represented throughout the research outputs and attribution: voices are amplified through analysis, perspectives, quotes, pictures, and stories
  - d. Ownership of analysis and intellectual property is jointly shared with communities.
- 2. Strong analysis draws on intersectional feminism:**
  - a. Focuses on unpacking the nature of gender power relations and the social inequalities which root them
  - b. Challenges and/or allows us to better understand social and political realities, looking at the roles of various actors linked to a problem and the dimensions of power that characterise their relationship
  - c. Recognises and engages the power relations evident in traditional research practice such as the notion of researcher/researched, and seeks to subvert this practice
  - d. Historically interested in overcoming the invisibility and distortion of women's experiences by challenging dominant practice and models
  - e. Looks at the interconnectedness of structural causes of rights violations from local, national, regional and global perspectives
  - f. Understands that changes must take place in laws, policies and resources as well as in culture, beliefs and practices
  - g. Is rigorous, comprehensive, accurate, transparent and ethical and fair
  - h. Recognises creativity and non-traditional research processes as authentic tools of resistance and transformation.
- 3. Builds solidarity by linking our work across levels and adding value as a federation:**
  - a. Evidence of rights violations at any level provide the basis for changes at other levels (local, national, regional, international)
  - b. Knowledge from different levels supports us to identify pathways for change.
- 4. Builds strong research partnerships:**
  - a. Build solidarity, power, knowledge and capacity between and amongst ActionAid and different research actors, communities or organisations involved in research – in partnership.
- 5. Is innovative and engaging:**
  - a. Bold in message, audience appropriate and accessible in language, and with a clear change strategy
  - b. Useful and used in practically influencing change around ActionAid's strategic objectives & timely
  - c. Relevant and applicable at local, national and international levels, as measured by agreed indicators, build power and solidarity with contributors (subjects) of research.

For further details see ActionAid's [Research Signature](#) and [Feminist Research Guidelines](#)

1 The spelling of womxn with 'x' avoids the suffix 'men/man', and avoids binary language thus showing solidarity with and recognition of a diversity of people- LGBTIAQ+, including trans people and those who choose not to identify themselves by gender. This is a terminology that is increasingly being used in different parts of the ActionAid federation

## Case study 7. Research on unpaid care work in Nepal

In Nepal, women have been using time-use diaries to record their unpaid care work and paid work activities. The diaries were also used to assess the involvement of men in unpaid care work. The tool provided a basis for discussions between women and their husbands and children as it makes visible their disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care work. In one village, women using time-use diaries organised a campaign called “Burn your curry”. One of the participants said, *“It is very difficult to make our husbands understand how much we contribute. It’s taken for granted; we’re not appreciated. So, when cooking, we pretended we had to go and do something else and asked for help from our husband/brother/father. If they cooked nicely, it was because they had taken part in unpaid care work. If they burned it, we would say that they ruined it because they didn’t take much interest.”*

The project also led to change at national level, providing evidence for advocacy and campaigning by the women. Supported by ActionAid and partners, the women’s action contributed to the recognition of the importance of unpaid work in Nepal’s new constitution.

From [Not ready, still waiting: Governments have a long way to go in preparing to address gender inequality and the SDGs](#), ActionAid, 2016.

## Advocacy

Advocacy is the deliberate process of influencing the decisions of those who make policy. It is about engaging with and influencing power holders. Advocacy can be defined as “pleading or arguing in favour of an idea, cause or policy”. It often involves a combination of policy work, lobbying and media interventions.

ActionAid’s advocacy aims to ensure that women and others living in poverty and exclusion are able to have their voices heard on issues that are important to them, to defend and safeguard their rights and to have their voices heard when decisions are being made about their lives. A key part of our advocacy work is about supporting people to speak up for their rights, to build up an evidence base for advocacy, to identify and access the people who have the power to make decisions, to speak out confidently and to mobilise others to achieve an advocacy goal.

Our rootedness at local level and people-centred research approach means we are in a good position to work with people living in poverty to build up a strong evidence base for advocacy work and to develop compelling solutions to put before decision makers. We can also draw on a number of participatory approaches to build people’s communications skills and to support their advocacy work. These include social audits, accountability monitoring, mass lobbies. Empowering representatives of marginalised groups and social movements to speak up for their rights can also yield wider benefits, encouraging political participation.

Advocacy often involves an element of lobbying, where experts and civil society organisation leaders seek to persuade legislators and other decision-makers directly, through face-to-face meetings. Although advocacy and lobbying are sometimes used interchangeably, we define lobbying more narrowly than advocacy. It refers to face-to-face meetings, or lobby letters, and engagements at events and other direct attempts to influence policymakers, public officials and other decision-makers through personal interviews and persuasion. A key aspect to lobbying is building relationships. This might be the first step in a wider advocacy strategy. Lobbying can also happen at community level. For example, *Reflection-Action* circle participants may lobby local chiefs to oppose a biofuel deal.

Advocacy can happen at every level, from community to district, national and international. An added value of the ActionAid federation in our advocacy work is that we can potentially access key stakeholders at every level and in multiple spaces. So, as well as local and national governments we are also able to access global institutions such as the G20, European Union and African Union.



### Box 15. Carrying out a campaign power analysis

A campaign power analysis helps to inform campaign planning, giving the underpinnings and foundations on which to build a campaign strategy.

#### When do you do a power analysis?

Analysis will be ongoing throughout your programming. Initially, it will help you outline the change you want to see. Your power analysis then looks at the visible, hidden and invisible power of key actors and their positions in relation to an issue and context. Undertaking a power analysis helps you target the right actions to the right people at the right time to secure change. A power analysis enables you to develop:

- a clear understanding of the political, social and economic environment you are operating in an analysis of how you can make change happen within that context
- clarity on the key individuals you need to influence and tailor-made strategies on how to influence them.

#### What do you actually do when carrying out a power analysis?

Once you have a clear idea of the objectives of a campaign, here are some key questions to address when doing a power analysis:

- **Identify what needs to change.** What laws, policies, practices, markets or relationships need to change? What are the obstacles to change? Think about the political, financial, economic reasons or the attitudes of others which might block change.
- **Define your targets.** What is the target's current position and what might influence them to change? Who has the power (visible, hidden, invisible) to make change happen? Who and what influences them?
- **Define tools to influence your targets.** Which tools can you best adapt for a specific target? What is most likely to change their mind? Research? Lobbying key advisers? Criticism in the media?
- **Identify allies and opponents.** Who might support you or work with you towards change (allies)? Are there other powerful key players who could block change (opponents)?
- **Identify political opportunities for change.** Are there any key external events and milestones when you might seek to apply pressure? Elections? Policy reforms? Major events?
- **Carry out an asset assessment.** This will help you better understand and identify the resources and capacity to rally constituents to action.

### Case study 8. Advocating for increased education funding in Brazil

Between 2000 and 2011, Brazil's education spending rose from 3.5% to 6.1% of GDP. This change was influenced by the advocacy work of Brazil's National Campaign for the Right to Education, a network of over 200 civil society organisations and movements that works to guarantee the right to free, inclusive, quality education for all Brazilians.

The Campaign created a number of assessment tools to support its advocacy. These included the 'student-quality-cost' instrument to measure the funding required per student to deliver a high quality education. The tool helped provide legitimacy for the Campaign's demands. Other strategies included lobbying in Congress and participating in public hearings to raise awareness and engage organisations, students, educators and other activists in the debate. Public demonstrations and engagement with the media also helped to communicate the Campaign's ideas and goals.

Brazil's National Education Plan (2010–2020) was approved in 2014 and the Campaign was fully involved in its drafting. It included use of the 'student-quality-cost' instrument. As a result, increased resources were allocated to education. The Plan is expected to guarantee better school

premises and programmes as well as to improve the democratic management of the national education system. By 2020, it is hoped that 10% of GDP will be allocated to public education.

*Sadly, some of these dramatic gains are now being reversed – indicating how inter-dependent our actions on social, economic, civil and political rights are.*

## Public engagement, mobilisation and action

Campaigning seeks to shift and mobilise opinions, attitudes and behaviours, reaching out to people to persuade them to support a goal, and hopefully to contribute actively to the campaign with time or money.

The first step in this process is engagement and recruitment. In any campaign it's important to reach out to people and inspire them to become engaged and involved. This can be done partly through communications work (see below). As part of campaign design, it's important to ensure that there is clarity about which parts of the public we are seeking to engage and motivate. ActionAid has a strong commitment to working with young people to inspire them to take action and join our campaigns. Young people are therefore a central part of our engagement plans. When we are working with or supporting people's organisations or social movements in their campaigns there may already be a strong existing network of activists and supporters to reach out to.

Once the target audience is inspired and engaged, it's important to find ways for them to get involved in the campaign by mobilising in support or taking a campaign action. This needs to happen at critical moments, such as when government is deciding a new piece of policy or when parliament is discussing relevant issues, for example. "People power" can then be used to demonstrate that there is mass public support for the changes sought by the campaign.

It is important to note that while the number of people on the streets often characterises successful campaigns, a campaign should only seek to mobilise the people necessary for achieving its change. Sometimes the support of a broad cross-section of citizens is needed to gain traction with decision-makers. But at other times it may be a particular constituency or interest group that can help win a campaign.

### Box 16. Activista

Activista is ActionAid's global youth network involving more than 50 ActionAid partners and thousands of volunteers in more than 25 countries.

Every young person who ActionAid engages or works with around the world who aspires to end poverty and injustice and who want to be an active member of a movement creating social change can be an Activista. Activista links marginalised youth with other youth, youth living in rural areas with youth in urban areas, youth in poverty and youth out of poverty – recognising that unequal power structures have many faces on various levels and in various settings. Activistas are forming alliances across borders, from university campuses in Nigeria to young farmer unions in El Salvador, from university clubs in Leicester in the UK to fellows in rural communities in Myanmar.

Activistas come from all walks of life and experience very different living conditions. Among them are middle class youth from Denmark, urban slum dwellers from Kathmandu, young farmers from Kenya and former sponsored children from Bangladesh – all sharing the same vision of an end to poverty and injustice, as well as sharing the identity of being an Activista!

Activista core volunteers are community members, partners and core volunteers. They are the rights holders ActionAid works with and creates alliances with to fight for women's rights, education, healthcare, livelihoods and participation in decision making and political processes. And the supporters who actively engage in the fight to end poverty and injustice.

Currently, Activista is active in the following countries: South Africa, Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria, the Gambia, Sierra Leone, Senegal, Liberia, Zambia, Nepal, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Denmark, United Kingdom, Greece, Brazil, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Egypt and Jordan.

## Case study 9. The Women2Kilimanjaro initiative

Over four hundred women farmers from across Africa participated in the October 2016 rural women's Mass Assembly that was the pinnacle of the #Women2Kilimanjaro initiative. The event saw women farmers from 22 countries travel to Arusha, Tanzania, including two women who cycled from Kampala, Uganda. Twenty-nine of the women climbed Mount Kilimanjaro as a powerful symbol of their tenacious struggle to secure women's land rights.

In each of the 22 countries, the rural women had developed a charter of demands that they presented to their own governments. In Arusha, the women deliberated and consolidated a joint charter of demands for realisation of their land rights, focusing on land policies, land investments, and social and cultural practices that deny women their land rights. This charter was presented to the Africa Union Commission Chairperson at the Assembly.

The event gave momentum to women's land issues and advocacy continues at national level. For example, in November 2016 farmers from Liberia presented the charter to their government. The Liberia Land Rights Act was passed in 2018, extending land rights to millions of rural Liberians. In Kenya, a charter implementation framework was developed and adopted by multiple stakeholders including the Government Agency responsible for land governance. This framework, together with a data collection tool, will help women monitor progress towards women's land tenure security in the country.

[From Shifting Power: Learning from women's experiences and approaches to reducing inequality](#), ActionAid, 2017.



## Communications

Campaigns are all about communicating with people and targets and tapping emotions to motivate and mobilise them. Our campaigning must harness the power of the media and of digital platforms. We can also use communications to amplify the voices of people living in poverty and injustice and facilitate their opportunities for dialogue with each other, with other stakeholders and with ActionAid.

Communication is one of the most important facets of a campaign. If you cannot effectively communicate, people will not be motivated to act, and you will not reach your campaign objective. To be truly effective we must be clear about what audiences we are targeting, why we want to reach them, and which media are most appropriate in each case. Digital communications will be key for some audiences, but letter writing, radio or television may reach others.

Often campaigners become too close to the issue to be able to see what motivates other people, so strategic advice on communications is important. What motivates us now as committed and informed campaigners is unlikely to be what will motivate the majority into action. Do not be afraid to use emotive messaging. While it is important to offer logical, well-argued solutions, emotions motivate most people more than logic.

The media is an important tool in campaigning, from community radio stations to high profile national news. It can be used to reach out to the public to engage them with campaign communications and also to reach political targets. Conventional television, radio and newspapers remain important to decision-makers. However, digital media is increasingly powerful and has a global audience and the potential for global impact. Online activism can be particularly helpful in contexts where public demonstrations are illegal or risky.

Campaigning is a multi-functional process and needs to involve a variety of actors with different skills. It is important to involve communications specialists early on in campaign design to help ensure messages are accessible and attractive to the public and media.

### Case study 10. Documenting the impact of mining in South Africa

ActionAid South Africa worked with women from mining communities who gathered and documented stories showing the impact of mining on them and their families. The evidence was powerfully documented in text, but also in other mediums such as video stories, and photos taken by a professional photographer. The community members were able to get involved with national analysis and make recommendations based on social audits they undertook. The research and powerful visual evidence they provided were very impactful, helping to persuade duty bearers and corporates to recognise the demands of mining affected communities in South Africa.

## Building alliances

The right alliance has the potential to shift politics. By working with or supporting people's organisations and social movements in their campaigning and bringing in others to campaign with us we are much more likely to achieve momentum and bring about change than by working alone.

While giving priority to campaign alliances with people's organisations and social movements, we acknowledge that they cannot always achieve the desired social change alone. Depending on the context and the issue, it might also be useful to work in coalition with middle class citizens, the media, trade unions, legislators, celebrities, faith-based organisations, other NGOs or business groups.

An alliance needs to be big enough to build critical momentum but focused enough to share common objectives. When building an alliance or coalition, it is critical to be clear what it's for. Is it to support focused lobbying, research and analysis, or mass campaigning? The aim of the alliance will have big implications for its size, the skills and knowledge that are needed, and who are the right partners.

There are advantages and disadvantages to each of the following:

- **Running an ActionAid-branded campaign.** This gives us control to promote our own distinctive position and can be great for raising our profile and public support for ActionAid, often yielding significant fundraising benefits. But, as a lone voice, we might not have as much influence.

- **Seeking to build a wider campaign alliance or coalition.** Joining with others to build a larger critical mass can amplify the effectiveness of the campaign (many voices count for more). But it may lead us to make compromises on our positions and will mean less profile for our brand.
- **Joining or supporting an existing alliance or coalition.** This involves submerging our brand identity and adding our voice to an existing campaign because we believe it will make a difference and that our involvement can add momentum or value. For example, we may provide advice and capacity development support to a campaign led by a social movement without taking an active role in the campaigning itself.

It is best to acknowledge the competing pressures (we want to change the world, but we also need our organisation to thrive to continue making a change) and recognise that these choices are never easy. Our decision about the nature of the campaign we join, support or run should be framed fundamentally around what will ultimately have most impact for women and others living in poverty and exclusion.

### Case study 11. New law addresses violence against women in Nigeria

The Government of Nigeria passed the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act in 2015, after 12 years of advocacy from women's rights activists. ActionAid Nigeria worked in a coalition with various civil society organisations to influence the introduction of this new law, which prohibits all forms of violence, economic abuse and forced isolation, and covers previously unaddressed issues such as abandonment without sustenance, forced eviction and refusal of access.

The Act is an amalgam of nine different bills that were put before the National Assembly by different groups and individuals. Formation of the Legislative Advocacy Coalition on Violence Against Women (LACVAW) was a major step forward in harmonising the different bills into a single application. LACVAW comprises around 70 non-governmental organisations, development partners, women's rights groups, religious organisations and other stakeholders. Active participation from the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Ministry of Justice, as well as the National Bureau of Statistics, conferred a degree of legitimacy on the Coalition.

The campaign used the media to ensure all incidences of violence against women and girls were reported widely and linked to the need for a new law. Forming alliances with religious institutions also helped to break down societal barriers. UN Women commissioned research to inform the campaign. ActionAid Nigeria conducted training for police officers and contributed to the initial drafting and review of the bill, participating in public hearings and conducting media activities. Young people and national celebrities were also recruited as ambassadors for the campaign. Meanwhile, securing a former member of the House of Representatives as a consultant was an effective supporting strategy.

Although passed at federal level, the Act still requires adoption by all 36 of Nigeria's states in order to become implemented countrywide.

## Campaigning at different levels

ActionAid's reach, which goes from local to global, means we can campaign or support campaigns at lots of different levels. Our theory of change highlights the benefits of linking different levels: globalising local struggles and localising global ones.

As a global federation, with strong grassroots programmes, a global reach and good relationships with stakeholders at all levels, we have a unique ability to link constituencies to build change together. Campaigns may be purely local but because human rights are universal, participating in national or multi-country campaigns is a great way to link people, movements and issues to make a bigger impact on the causes of poverty and injustice.



Depending on our analysis and theory of change, we will prioritise our campaigning at different levels. If our analysis shows that we need to campaign against local government to achieve the changes our programming identifies, we will do that. However, if our analysis shows that we can only achieve change if we target a global policy or institution, we will also campaign there.

## Campaigning at local level

The decision to initiate a campaign at local level is based on the analysis that by doing so it's possible to bring about change on a particular issue that violates people's rights locally.

Local campaigning often focuses on improving the implementation of policies and identifies local level targets for bringing about the changes identified (for example, changing local budget allocations, stopping corruption, changing local by-laws or regulations or holding office bearers accountable for the performance of officials). Since government spending is one of the most visible ways in which government acts on the lives of people, budget monitoring is often a useful foundation for local campaigning work. There's not much point campaigning for policy change at the local level, as this typically requires national level strategies and change, and thus national level campaigning.

We may also campaign or support campaigns on issues that are relevant locally but where analysis shows that we need to link to other levels to reach our targets. In some cases, these might be out-of-country targets (see below for an example of local campaigning taking the struggle to international targets). As part of this, we may want to make connections and bring the issue to the attention of people locally, nationally or internationally. Local campaigning and organising can also link to strong national or international campaigns, where we want to ensure a strong engagement from people living in poverty and those directly affected. In this case, local campaigning will link to a broader series of campaigning activities and organising of communities around agreed national or international campaign goals.

The type of campaigning work in an ActionAid local rights programme may vary over its lifetime. In the early phases it sometimes makes sense to identify simple, easy-win campaigns that can help to build people's confidence in campaigning as an approach and strengthen local organisations. For example, this may involve campaigning for a particular service from local government. At a later stage, when there are high levels of critical awareness and organisation, the campaign may be to challenge national government to shift policy on an issue that is relevant to the local area, requiring wider alliances with people in other areas and at national level.

## National campaigning

As outlined above, often our analysis within local rights programmes identifies the need for national level changes, for our work to have a wider impact on the communities we work with. We may identify a priority problem for a community, such as national policies or laws that cannot be tackled through our local level interventions alone.

Of course, there is always a multitude of issues that communities are grappling with at any one time and we have to prioritise our engagement in national campaigning issues. This might involve identifying issues from one or more local rights programmes, where we have recognised an opportunity for a clear, winnable change to occur through national level campaigning on a specific issue (for example, the government is considering a change in policies which we think we can have a positive influence over). Alternatively, identifying a national campaign may be driven by an issue which is likely to attract large-scale public support or where there are opportunities to work with a broad set of allies to push for change. We aspire to achieve 'rooted campaigning' - so that any national campaigning is rooted in our local / direct engagement with people facing poverty and exclusion.

## Case study 12. Campaigning for women's land rights in Nepal

In Nepal, following much civil society campaigning, the government introduced the Joint Land Certificate (JLC), issued to both husband and wife. Civil society localised the policy. ActionAid Nepal and its partner organisations raised awareness about women's rights to land in communities across the country. In addition, government tax incentives (40% for people living in mountainous areas, 30% for rural people and 25% for urban dwellers) were introduced to encourage JLC take up. As a result, over 2,000 women within ActionAid's programme areas received joint or single land-ownership certificates in 2013. Across the country, in 2001, 9.7% of women had their name on land titles. By 2011 it had doubled to 19.7%.

From [Not ready, still waiting: Governments have a long way to go in preparing to address gender inequality and the SDGs](#), ActionAid, 2016.

### International campaigning

As an international federation, the more we work together and with others to harness our collective power – linking local, national and international campaigning – the more likely it is that we will secure large-scale, meaningful change in the lives of people living in poverty.

National campaigning or campaigning across two countries will not secure some changes, which instead require campaigning across many countries. Multi-country campaigns can unite constituencies in different countries around a clear global or regional goal that affects people in many places.

### Box 17. ActionAid's international campaign

Under our Strategy 2028, ActionAid countries are working together on a single federation-wide campaign, focusing on Women's Labour, Decent Work and Public Services. Women's paid and unpaid labour is the focus, while the issue of public services is addressed to ensure that women's unpaid labour is recognised, reduced and redistributed. The campaign has two discrete but complementary parts. The first is to stop gender-based violence in the world of work. The second is to lift the burden of unpaid and domestic responsibility that women face and make sure the state is providing gender responsive public services which every citizen needs such as access to safe water, education and health provisions.

See [ActionAid's campaign on decent work](#)

## Campaigning in challenging contexts

A campaign is more likely to work in certain contexts, for example where there is:

- space for civil society to act
- socially aware, politically active citizens
- space for public protest or dissent
- robust and active partners.
- vibrant, independent media

In an increasing number of countries, governments are suppressing dissenting voices by enacting a range of restrictions on core freedoms such as freedom of assembly, expression and association. At the same time human rights defenders are often harassed or demonised in the name of 'development' or the 'need protect national sovereignty'. These human rights abuses frequently involve not just governments but also corporate interests, as powerful multinationals operate beyond the control of government to suppress criticism or actions that affect their interests. Campaigning in such a context can be extremely difficult.

However, even in repressive contexts, we can support the building of civil society to help gradually open space, supporting people to make their concerns visible to decision-makers. Difficult contexts may also dictate a different mix of insider/outsider tactics, a larger or smaller role for INGOs versus social movements, or for middle-class groupings versus those directly affected.

### Case study 13. Confronting the criminalisation of human rights defenders

Abelino Chub Caal is a Mayan Q'echqi' community organiser working with community based organisation, Fundación Guillermo Torriello. He promotes rural development and protects the rights of communities whose land is under threat from large-scale commercial landowners and agribusiness. In 2016, an agribusiness company took aggressive action against indigenous communities in the Polochic Valley of north-eastern Guatemala. The company wanted to evict community members and consolidate five farms into monoculture plantations on land they claim is private property. Abelino was involved as a mediator in the dispute.

Because of his exposure of the illegal activities of agribusiness companies, Abelino found himself targeted as an adversary of big business. He experienced the murder of colleagues, physical attacks and increasing levels of threats. In February 2017, he was arrested on malicious and unsubstantiated charges and held in prison for more than two years. His trial was finally held in April 2019 and he was acquitted of all charges.

In judgment the court highlighted the way the law is used to criminalise human rights defenders. The company had from the start assumed their accusations would be accepted without question. What made the outcome different this time was the scale of organisation to confront this injustice. A broad coalition of community-based and international organisations, including ActionAid, threw a spotlight on this case, raising petitions and mobilising on social media.

Despite this important victory, the overall situation for human rights in Guatemala is difficult. Constitutional protections are being removed or flouted and attacks on human rights defenders are increasing. This needs constant monitoring and international solidarity with individuals, communities and organisations to raise awareness and support resistance in Guatemala.

See [Criminalisation confronted](#), ActionAid, 2019.

### Case Study 14. Celebrating human rights defenders

ActionAid has collected examples of best practice and innovation by human rights defenders in eight case study countries. The stories show how they have worked to promote and protect human rights in the context of shrinking civic space.

[Our story from France highlights corporate manipulation of legal processes and international agreements to prosecute activists](#) (Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation-SLAPP) in order to prevent exposure of human rights abuses by companies.

[From Guatemala our story centres on the malicious arrest of a young land campaigner called Abelino Chub Caal](#) - an arrest sanctioned by agribusiness companies. Abelino has worked for over a decade on supporting community mobilisation and social movement building to protect indigenous rights.

[From Kenya, we highlight the activism of community groups led by women.](#) Despite violence, arrests and displacement, they have been supported to demand their rights to their community land which was leased to a conservancy company.

South Africa's example highlights how black lesbian women living in townships are frequently exposed to violence, including rape and murder, due to their sexuality and their enormous bravery to make themselves visible and demand their rights.

Uganda's story is about displacement, conflict, land disputes and the violation of communities' rights in the name of conservation in Northern Uganda. It highlights the community's determination to have its land bringing the issue to global attention.

Our Zimbabwe story is about the eviction of Vhimba people from community land to clear the area for the Zimbabwe Consolidated Mining Company to prospect for minerals and how the community was supported to challenge this in court – but the battle is far from over...

Our Spain case study focuses on the challenges, including racism and violence, that confront migrant women and their resilience. These challenges come from negative social attitudes, institutional discrimination and a legal framework that fails to protect migrant women's rights.

Finally, our story from Zambia highlights the fire trucks anti-corruption protest. This resulted in arrests and a year-long trial, showing the shrinking of space for civil society and the determination of activists to defend and maintain their constitutional rights.

See Celebrating the power of human rights defenders, ActionAid, 2019.

### Box 18. Five tips for campaigning

1. **Always be rooted.** Always plan and strategize your campaign with your allies and those who are your constituency group. This is what differentiates ActionAid from other organisations in campaigns.
2. **Don't forget your critical pathway.** This is one of the most important elements in your campaign. It will guide your actions towards your objectives in a step-by-step process.
3. **Know your targets.** It is crucial that you identify your target and understand what motivates them, what drives them to make their decisions and who influences them. This will help you in creating campaign actions that will be effective in achieving change
4. **Review, evaluate, plan.** A periodical review and assessment of your campaign can help you to identify the main learnings and improvements for your campaign. It is important that you promote a participatory process to listen to all your constituency groups. This will also stimulate a trusting and positive environment within your alliance.
5. **Tell your story.** A good narrative is essential for a campaign. It is a powerful tool that connects your audience with the issue and motivates them to take action. Build a strong narrative and identify how and what you are going to communicate to each of your target groups.

## Monitoring campaigns

Monitoring and evaluation are critical to improving our campaigning. Monitoring enables us to assess, over the life of a campaign, whether we need to shift our plans according to changes in or more information about the external environment, or in light of lessons learned from the campaign to date. This is especially important as the pace of change in campaigns can be very fast, so the process of revision must be light and nimble.

Through evaluation we must demonstrate the impact of our campaigning. This will enable us to be more accountable to stakeholders and supporters and generate more support. Change is a result of many things and it can be extremely difficult to disentangle the role of ActionAid versus other actors or external factors. This is often referred to as a problem with "attribution". It might be that we are meeting our campaign goals, but this could have very little to do with our campaigning and more to do with other factors. On the other hand, we could be doing excellent

campaigning work, but not yet be able to achieve change because the balance of power is still too strongly against us. While the changes we aim to bring about through campaigning are often very complex, presenting challenges for proving impact, there are ways to mitigate this.

Firstly, the big changes we are often trying to achieve through campaigning can take time. To overcome this, we can measure progress as we go along by being clear about what the stepping stones to progress are.

Secondly, campaigning is likely to involve a number of actors, which may make it difficult to measure ActionAid's specific contribution to change, especially when we are playing a background role as we often do in our HRBA. However, clearly articulating the change we want to see and being very clear about what ActionAid's specific contribution will be can help us disentangle our role from others. Once we are clear on our specific contribution, how to evaluate our success becomes clearer. For example, if our specific contribution is to bring a stronger women's rights analysis to a policy process, we can monitor that specific element. If our contribution is to ensure links between national alliances and people living in poverty, or to broaden an alliance to involve new stakeholders, we can get feedback on that.

Thirdly, it can be challenging to source the kind of evidence and data we need to effectively monitor and evaluate our campaigns. A few examples of data we can use are:

- **Media analysis.** Monitoring the media coverage campaign activities generate.
- **Public opinion.** Measuring web traffic to the campaign site or carrying out an opinion poll of supporters or target groups.
- **Other NGOs.** Asking fellow NGOs what they think about a campaign and its impact.
- **Decision-makers.** Asking targets if our campaigning influenced them. Access can be a problem, so it is good to identify potential contacts from the outset.

**ActionAid's Monitoring Evaluation and Learning Framework** identifies the following examples of change for monitoring campaigning:

Definition	Examples
Mobilisation and actions of key individuals and critical masses around a powerful and simple demand to influence policies and practices and improve lives of people living in poverty and exclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Increased number of people mobilising against all kinds of negative power</li> <li>■ Increased number of people demanding and pushing for shifts in power</li> <li>■ Increased number of people taking actions and having direct dialogue and engagement with decision-makers</li> <li>■ Targeted and coordinated campaigns with clear messages and demands</li> <li>■ People's access to and claim over policy/decision-making spaces</li> <li>■ Campaign is valued by the people directly affected by the issues raised in the campaign.</li> </ul>



# Solidarity

*“International solidarity is not an act of charity: it is an act of unity between allies fighting on different terrains towards the same objective. The foremost of these objectives is to assist in the development of humanity to the highest level possible.”*

Samora Machel

## What is solidarity?

*Solidarity = the process of uniting allies in a politically supportive relationship that may cross geographies or “areas” of struggle to support and strengthen a movement for change.*

The second pillar of ActionAid’s HRBA is solidarity. Solidarity is fundamental to ActionAid. It is part of the core of who we are and what we do: connecting supporters in one part of the world with people who are struggling in another.

ActionAid defines two types of solidarity:

1. where people facing different rights violations (Dalits and sex workers, for example) come together to support each other
2. where people who are not living in poverty stand side-by-side with those who are.

It’s important to note that when people facing the same rights violations ally with each other we consider this to be part of the empowerment process.

Our solidarity work is geared to supporting and sustaining a movement for change in which people living in poverty take the lead. In the section on empowerment, we highlighted the importance of organising and mobilising by people living in poverty as an integral part of the empowerment process. Solidarity involves connecting with people and organisations who are not themselves facing the same conditions, but who are sympathetic to those involved in a particular struggle against poverty. Solidarity action can help to sustain those on the frontline, reducing their sense of isolation. It can strengthen campaigns and wider movements for change to policies, practices, attitudes and behaviours.

Solidarity can include providing material, moral, and other forms of support to communities, people’s organisations and social movements as well as engaging in collective action. It may be manifested in many ways, such as:

- by sponsoring a child or making a donation
- by spreading the word, taking action online or joining a demonstration
- by using power positively to change practices and attitudes
- by building alliances
- by connecting parallel struggles.

Clearly there are strong inter-connections between solidarity, campaigning and empowerment. Rather than worry about definitions and overlaps we should celebrate the connections. When we are linking empowered people living in poverty to campaigners in other locations nationally and internationally, we are drawing on the power of solidarity. Much of our best work may connect up in this way.

## Child sponsorship and donation

ActionAid's local rights programmes are mostly funded by regular giving, including child sponsorship, which itself is a fundamental expression of solidarity. We facilitate connections between people living in poverty and those who empathise with their position. Historically, this has been premised on people in wealthier countries offering support. However, increasingly it is also about building solidarity links with the middle classes in the same country. Our work with local communities in Brazil is increasingly funded by Brazilians – with the same pattern holding true in South Africa, India, Indonesia, and Thailand. In 2017 these countries accounted for our strongest growth in supporter numbers.

Effective communication with sponsors and other supporters is essential to sustain this solidarity. Supporters want to know what difference their support is making. They want to understand the living conditions of the family and community and to know how ActionAid-supported interventions are changing the life prospects of children.

In the communities where we work, ActionAid supports *Reflection-Action* processes that help empower people, moving them from a needs-based view of the world to a rights-based view. In many respects, ActionAid is involved in a similar empowerment process with its sponsors and supporters around the world. Many people who join ActionAid or donate money start from an impulse to respond to people's basic needs. Part of our role is to engage them more deeply and communicate effectively so they move towards an understanding that basic needs are basic rights and that effective change depends on linking local, national and international work. Ultimately, this can be empowering for supporters as they recognise that through their solidarity, they too are becoming rights activists.

Any donation of money, whether from a millionaire major donor, from a trust or foundation or from a young child who has been moved to help by images of a recent disaster online or on television, should be seen as people expressing their solidarity. For many people, giving money is the most practical way to express their solidarity and to articulate their empathy with other human beings. ActionAid should celebrate the hundreds of thousands of supporters across a dozen countries who are part of this incredible web of solidarity.

We need to respect all our supporters in the same way we respect people living in poverty. Each person is helping to make a difference through the means available to them. ActionAid should take no one for granted and should seek to engage people fully, not looking at anyone just as a passive source of funding. Our engagement with people and our capacity to dignify their solidarity and communicate with them effectively is fundamental to sustaining their support. In every context we should be exploring how we can most effectively communicate the distinctiveness and effectiveness of our HRBA, both to attract new supporters and to communicate with established supporters.

### Case study 15. Bringing supporters closer to our work

ActionAid is working hard to engage our supporters everywhere as equal stakeholders in our mission. For example, ActionAid UK has received recognition for its innovative work to involve supporters directly in its strategy. ActionAid Brazil staff have begun filming mini videos during community visits to share their experiences and reflections with supporters and the public in more immediate and personal ways via social media, while ActionAid USA is experimenting with video and new technologies to narrow the gap between donors and the communities with which we work.

*From ActionAid International Annual Report 2017.*

## Moving from financial support to solidarity action

While giving financial support is a powerful form of solidarity in itself, some of our supporters are also able to help in other ways. For example, sponsors may send emails to decision-makers locally, nationally or internationally, to add weight to local action for change. They may sign petitions, join demonstrations or offer their own expertise to support change processes. They may encourage their family and friends to take action. Some supporters want to become rights activists themselves, taking solidarity action that can enhance local or national struggles. There are many ways in which our supporters may be able to offer additional help, whether this involves offering more money or using their time, contacts or expertise in ways that support our work.

### Case study 16. Working with celebrity ambassadors and supporters

ActionAid UK works with celebrity ambassadors and supporters who are dedicated to raising awareness of its work with women and girls. The ambassadors show their commitment and support to our cause in several ways. They promote our work across the world, lend their voices to call for change through ActionAid's campaigns and even run marathons and take part in events to help raise money. Many, including stage and screen star Miriam Margolyes, are also child sponsors. Action Aid is supported by actresses like Emma Thompson, Jodie Whittaker, Emilia Fox; singers Alesha Dixon and Lucy Rose; comedian Hugh Dennis; author Giles Paley-Phillips and many more celebrities.

See [Celebrity ambassadors and supporters](#), ActionAid UK website.

### Spreading the word

One of the most powerful ways of acting in solidarity with a struggle is to help spread the word. Bringing public and media attention to what is happening can really shift the balance of power. The simple act of showing that you know – of signing a petition or sending an email – can be very powerful. It can stop rights abusers in their tracks because they become aware of being watched. This can shatter the sense of absolute impunity that many people in power feel.

This operates at every level. A citizen journalist writing a story about a planned closure of a health centre can make a local health authority or local government think twice. National media picking up on the story of a single individual can dramatically shift the way in which an issue is perceived. This is the power of human interest – and it can be mobilised more simply today than ever as digital platforms make it easier for us all to share directly with a wide audience. What one person tweets can become a phenomenon within hours. What one person blogs can stimulate a debate culminating in a parliamentary discussion.

When we are seeking to act in solidarity with a struggle many miles away, we need to be acutely aware of the power of using communications strategically. Breaking the silence on an issue or breaking the isolation of people struggling in a forgotten corner of a faraway place can have a tangible impact on people's lives!

### Taking action

There have also been many examples of people taking direct solidarity action that has contributed to successful campaigning in other countries.

## Case study 17. Harnessing support for the homeless in India

In India, ActionAid used creative public engagement tactics to harness solidarity for a campaign by homeless people to increase the number of shelters for women. ActionAid worked with other voluntary organisations and with homeless people to carry out a survey into the problem of homelessness in Delhi. Networking and media work were prioritised to spread the message about the need for shelters, galvanising support from wider civil society, including students, political activists, and people from all social classes.

The campaign had a significant impact on public opinion and at the policy level to address the problem of homelessness. The results are impressive: in 2001 there were only 10 night shelters in Delhi, but by 2017 there were 269. The Delhi Masterplan for 2021 includes a commitment to have one shelter per 100,000 people. And at national level, a ruling by India's Supreme Court directed state governments to set up shelters. Today, the rights of homeless people to food and shelter are recognised in official national policy.

From [Action for Global Justice: Strategy 2028](#), ActionAid 2018 and [P2P Foundation website](#).

## Harnessing solidarity from those with power

In the countries where ActionAid is fighting poverty and injustice, securing the support of individuals can be very important, from journalists, lawyers, politicians and sportspeople to musicians and artists. We may also want to link with people in positions of visible power, such as local government, traditional leaders or religious authorities. While some of these groups may be targets for mobilisation, who we are holding to account for delivering on rights, there is sometimes scope for engaging with them in other ways, so they act in solidarity with processes of transformation.

For example, in some contexts we may want to raise the awareness of local religious and traditional leaders, changing their attitudes so they actively advocate for the education of girls. We may want to work with a progressive company to promote fair trade practices. We may link with progressive councillors in local government, so they represent the interests of people living in poverty. We may work with middle class women to challenge domestic violence. We may seek support from sympathetic people in a middle-class neighbourhood to oppose the planned clearance of local slum dwellers. We may want to get local journalists to write about certain rights violations. Or we may want to get free legal advice from sympathetic local lawyers. In each of these cases, we are not holding these people to account as such but rather we are looking to them for solidarity action.

Building connections with the middle class may play a particularly important role when we are seeking to change not just policies and practices but also attitudes and behaviours. If we want to challenge social norms that tolerate child labour, female genital mutilation or early marriage then we need to engage everyone across society. If we want to challenge genetically modified crops or entrenched gender roles, we need to change **widespread** beliefs, attitudes and behaviours. We need to work in new ways to transform how people see an issue – whether those people are urban or rural elites or people living in poverty. Getting prominent individuals at national level to stand with us can make a real difference to the take up of an issue. There are lots of ways in which we can spread the word and help people raise their voices, from online campaigns and petitions to mobile phone campaigning. In this work we want to reach out to everyone to build mass solidarity.

## Building alliances

At national level, ActionAid will often work with coalitions, alliances, networks and campaigns that can help us advance the struggles of people living in poverty. Many of these will involve people's organisations and social movements (as outlined in the section on empowerment) but they may also involve NGOs, trade unions, progressive companies and a range of other actors that do not directly or exclusively involve people living in poverty. Our engagement with these groups is part of our solidarity work, which explicitly aims to extend the constituency of people working for change. While we may want to ensure primacy of the voices of people's organisations and social movements, many other actors will play an important role in advancing rights, ending poverty and transforming society.

Working alone, people's organisations and social movements will often lack the political weight to advance people's rights. Building solidarity through wider alliances is thus an essential element if we are to secure change. Teachers' unions, for example, can play a key role in advancing the struggle for quality public education for all. ActionAid has built a strategic partnership with them in many countries. As unions, they represent the interests of teachers, who may be seriously underpaid but are not themselves the prime constituency we are working for. Rather, we know that, as frontline workers, they play a pivotal role in transforming education for people living in poverty and we have an explicit shared interest in increasing investment in education as a key means for advancing education rights. We also work with national education coalitions who seek to get the financing of quality public education higher up the domestic political agenda. Many of the organisations that are part of these coalitions are not themselves social movements or people's organisations. But they are essential allies who work in solidarity with the struggles of people living in poverty.

ActionAid may be involved with broad coalitions and alliances in many ways. At times we may play a key role in initiating or facilitating the emergence of a coalition. At other times our focus is on strengthening or democratising an alliance or platform. We may contribute in many ways, with information, analysis, training or leadership development, or with funding. In all cases there are important power issues for us to consider, but especially if we take up a prominent role or are funding or hosting a coalition. We need to ensure that we use our power positively to promote transparency and democratisation and to create space for others, particularly for people's organisations and social movements, to take leadership positions. We may prioritise the rootedness of a national coalition, making sure that it is linked to grassroots mobilisation and that the voices of people living in poverty shape the agenda and are heard clearly in national level forums. Where relevant, we should ensure that our own local rights programmes effectively engage in coalitions and that not only the urban-based middle classes occupy the space at national level.

### Case study 18. Building alliances in Brazil

In Brazil, building on extensive work to support people living in urban poverty to organise and claim their rights to education, other public services, and safety in the favelas, ActionAid connected communities such as Heliópolis and others in Cabo de Santo Agostinho with the National Forum for Urban Reform, a collective of movements and NGOs campaigning on their 'right to the city'. Together, they influenced urban planning and services reform resulting in significant improvements in the lives of people in the favelas, including the improvement of street lighting quality and coverage. Global organising resulted in the UN recognising people's right to the city in October 2016.

From [Action for Global Justice: Strategy 2028](#), ActionAid 2018.



## Connecting parallel struggles

As mentioned in the chapter on empowerment, sometimes people in different struggles may lend their support to each other:

- across identities (for example, between women's and gay rights movements)
- across issues (for example, between a trade union movement and an environmental movement)
- across countries (in the form of south-south solidarity, for example, Cuba sending doctors to Angola or Zimbabwe hosting activists from South Africa).

In some cases, the groups may have identified shared interests and want to support each other in working towards a common goal. In others, it may simply be about lending solidarity to fellow rights activists. This might involve providing practical support or sharing skills and tactics, for example.

### Case study 19. Working with education advocates and tax campaigners

Through its Promoting Quality Education through Progressive Domestic Resource Mobilisation project, ActionAid worked in six countries in Africa and Asia to ensure that children, especially girls, have improved access to public education of a high standard, financed through greater government support and increases in fair tax revenue.

At local level, the project supported communities to carry out a rights-based analysis of schools in order to develop school improvement plans and influence education. It also supported an analysis of education budgets, which in every case were either too small and/or not effectively allocated and spent. This common situation is a key obstruction to achieving the UN development goal of ensuring that “all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education”. In order to address this, ActionAid built relationships between education advocates and tax campaigners to show how progressive domestic resource mobilisation - collecting enough tax money and spending it well - is a sustainable way to finance free, quality public education for all, leaving no one behind.

The project partners lobbied for greater domestic resource mobilisation to increase access to quality education and reduce dependence on donor funds, leading to pledges of \$2.1 billion from donors and \$30 billion from developing country governments at the 2018 Global Partnership for Education replenishment meeting. And at the UN General Assembly, New York, ActionAid convened a panel that brought together, for the first time, the Global Campaign for Education and the Global Alliance for Tax Justice in a vibrant debate.

[See Promoting quality education through progressive domestic resource mobilisation 2015-2017, ActionAid 2018.](#)

## Monitoring solidarity

Solidarity is a means, not an end. It is a stepping-stone towards bringing about impact in our empowerment or campaigning work. As such, the indicators we use are process indicators related to numbers of people we mobilise and the actions they take, rather than the resulting changes in people's lives.

[ActionAid's Monitoring Evaluation and Learning Framework](#) identifies the following examples of change for monitoring solidarity:

Definition	Examples
Global mobilisation, provision of moral support and taking action on behalf of or in support of others. Taking direct or symbolic action that brings collective power and voices to bear on systemic and transnational causes of poverty and injustice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Extent to which ActionAid's messages are picked up by different media outlets at local and global levels</li> <li>■ Increased amount of donations to support ActionAid's work</li> <li>■ Increased media presence and media coverage of ActionAid's campaigns</li> <li>■ Stronger people-to-people linkages, across geographic or cultural divides, supporting one another in struggles</li> <li>■ Increased moral support for a cause across geographic boundaries, e.g. letter writing, protest actions, participation in international days of action on specific issues</li> <li>■ A change in attitudes, values and behaviours amongst our sponsors and other supporters.</li> </ul>

# Alternatives

*‘There is no alternative.’*

Margaret Thatcher

## What are alternatives?

*Alternatives = ideas or practices which stretch the scope of our existing interventions or frameworks, challenging dominant paradigms and promising something different and positive for the future.*

Working on credible rights-based alternatives involves moving beyond fighting against poverty and injustice to actively fighting for positive solutions. Indignation at injustice is often a powerful spark for movements but a sense of common purpose towards an agreed vision is also a key ingredient. In different areas of its work ActionAid advances frameworks and approaches that challenge the dominant paradigms of the development sector, building practice and evidence that there are alternatives. Examples of this include proposing a positive vision of gender responsive public services; promoting rights-based citizens’ reports; developing a model of climate-resilient sustainable agriculture; and advancing models of customary and communal land ownership that respect women’s rights.

We take a learning approach to our work, which is grounded in developing knowledge from below, and specifically from the experiences of communities and allies we work with, in collaboration with centres of learning, to deepen our understanding of how change happens. We share community-generated knowledge and alternatives with social movements, policy makers and other practitioners in order to transform policy and practice. We propose alternatives to the systems and practises we criticise and ensure that the people we work with are central in defining and building these solutions.

ActionAid works with people living in poverty and exclusion, with social movements, and other partners and allies, finding and popularising new ways of doing things, challenging dominant paradigms, promoting innovation, piloting, innovating and being solutions oriented. We invest in processes that co-generate knowledge from the experiences of communities, and their organisations to build a shared vision of social justice and equality; challenge perceived wisdom, generate alternatives, and transform policy and practice. This approach ensures that people living in poverty and exclusion are central in defining and building lasting solutions – exploring, documenting, sharing and activating alternatives.

### Box 19. Gender responsive public services

Gender-responsive public service (GRPS) policies take into account and address the practical and strategic needs and priorities of women and men. ActionAid’s experience over 45 years in 45 countries, has helped us to understand that to achieve this we need to ensure that public services are:

- Publicly funded
- Publicly delivered
- Gender equitable and inclusive
- Focused on quality in line with human rights frameworks.

Gender responsive public services are not just about ensuring that women and men have the same access to, use and control over public services. A GRPS approach asks whether the planning, delivery, access and use of public services empowers people to challenge gender inequalities and unequal power relations, while improving women's control over resources, public services, mobility, and ability to participate in local organising and decision making. So, amongst other things, a GRPS might ensure that local health care centres, women's shelters and water provision are available and accessible to women to meet their practical needs. In addition, to meet women's strategic needs, women would play an active role in decision making around implementation and there would be access to justice and legal recourse should their rights be violated.

See [Framework 2018: Gender-Responsive Public Services](#), ActionAid, 2018.

## Box 20. Agroecology

Agriculture today leans heavily towards industrial agriculture, driven by governments and transnational companies. This model is environmentally damaging with its heavy reliance on chemical inputs, industrialized seeds, and corporate supply chains. It does not value the effort of millions of smallholder women food producers, farmers, indigenous communities who produce the food and care for our environment

Together with our global partners, ActionAid supports sustainable agriculture as a way to enhance the resilience of smallholders against the impact of climate change. We see agroecology as the best response to the climate and ecological crisis. The aim is to improve food security and secure livelihoods for the neediest, particularly by addressing the inequalities that exclude women, indigenous groups, young people and others. ActionAid works with social movements to challenge industrial and corporate agriculture, and to support women's access to markets. This involves:

- Challenging industrial and corporate agriculture and the false solutions it offers, such as climate-smart agriculture, industrial agriculture and corporate-leaning seed policies
- Using evidence-driven advocacy to create support women farmers' access to national and international markets
- Advocating for public financing for women farmers and agroecology
- Promoting agroecology as a real alternative to industrial agriculture, which ensures food remains where it is most needed, and enhances farmers' resilience against climate change.

## Box 21. Five tips for working on alternatives

1. **Identify the dominant paradigm that you wish to challenge.** It's important to identify and have a good understanding of the dominant paradigm that you wish to challenge. What is your alternative an alternative to? Why is the current system dominant? What / who is supporting it? Why?
2. **Experiment with creative methodologies.** Creative methodologies, such as poetry, theatre and sculpture, can help us to vision development alternatives in a new way. [ActionAid Uganda and Bangladesh's work on creative alternatives](#) has shown that using arts methodologies can help us open our minds to new possibilities, removed from our existing narratives.
3. **Tell good stories.** How we tell stories is vital. Sometimes evidence alone is not sufficiently convincing to break dominant narratives, we must think of different creative ways of sharing our alternative vision for the future in a way that captures people's imagination.

4. **Give the positive and show how it works.** Don't just focus on the negative of the current system but explain the positive benefits that will come from the alternative you are proposing.
5. **Make sure ALL your work is about “upside-downing” the dominant narrative.** Sometimes we are so focused on one aspect of a dominant narrative that we fail to recognise how much we have internalised other aspects. It is worth exploring the flip side of every dimension of a dominant narrative.

## Monitoring alternatives

Changes in this category include the uptake of participatory action research, reviews, and evaluations from ActionAid and its partners; media coverage of ActionAid's knowledge products; influence of ActionAid's research in local and global policy processes. It also includes people living in poverty's own tracking and analysis of how they are experiencing global policy commitments such as SDGs, UN conventions, or other regional commitments.

Definition	Examples
<b>Processes to co-generate shared visions of social justice and equality and co-create knowledge from the experiences of communities, and their allies to challenge perceived wisdom, generate alternatives, and transform policy and practice.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Increased engagement of communities and most excluded groups in the production of ActionAid's publications and reports</li> <li>■ Extent to which people directly affected by problems and partner organisations participate in and are satisfied with ActionAid way of engaging communities in processes for co-production of knowledge</li> <li>■ Increased number of policy citations of ActionAid's publications</li> <li>■ Increased number of people downloading ActionAid's publications</li> <li>■ Number of tools developed with and for communities and movements to engage with policy change processes</li> <li>■ Co-creation of alternative visions, policies, and solutions to current problems, with people living in poverty and exclusion, their organisations and social movements</li> <li>■ Innovation and experimentation are encouraged without fear of failure – but to learn</li> <li>■ Creation of spaces for dreaming, theorising, and visioning the future</li> <li>■ The people we work with, their movements and organisations develop, pilot, and promote alternative narratives, change models, policies and practices</li> <li>■ Knowledge held or generated by people living in poverty and exclusion is valued, promoted and used to influence positive change.</li> </ul>





# Part 3: Influencing and shifting power

Power analysis and challenging power, particularly hidden and invisible power, are central to ActionAid's HRBA and theory of change. ActionAid seeks to shift and transform power, through empowerment, solidarity, campaigning and the generation of alternatives to ensure that every person can enjoy a life of dignity and freedom from all forms of oppression. We focus particularly on women living in poverty and exclusion. We apply a feminist lens to our analysis of power so that we can work together to achieve a more equitable redistribution of power and enhance women's ability to claim and enjoy their rights.

Unjust power relations manifest themselves at every level, from the household to the global. Power works in many different ways and can be visible, hidden or invisible. In the following pages, we look at these different types of power and at how ActionAid can work at every level, to ensure that people living in poverty and exclusion are able to shift unequal and unjust power in order to achieve social justice, gender equality and poverty eradication.

## Box 22. The many faces of power

We all have and experience power in different ways. At an individual level we can distinguish between power within, power with, power to and power over.

- **Power within** refers to a person's sense of self-worth and self-knowledge. It involves fostering a sense that "I can" and "I will"
- **Power with** involves finding common ground among different interests and building collective strength
- **Power to** refers to the potential of every person to shape his or her life and world. It relates to the ability of people to learn and to take action
- **Power over** is a more insidious form of power that is easily recognisable in oppression, subordination and rights violations.

What makes "power over" more challenging to analyse is that you can't always see it. Identifying three faces of "power over" is helpful.

- **Visible power is exercised through formal rules, laws, structures and procedures such as parliaments, local governments, and councils of elders or village chiefs. It is called visible because it is based on rules and laws which you can get information about so that you know why a decision was taken.** For example, in some countries, women are unable to travel without the permission of a male relative. Those in positions of power can use such formal regulations to maintain power and control
- **Hidden power is exercised from behind the scenes by powerful people who are able to influence decisions and outcomes to their own advantage at local, national and international levels.** For example, women's rights organisations are seldom consulted by government in making laws, but representatives of big business commonly participate in those decisions. In this way, women's rights issues are devalued or even excluded
- **Invisible power shapes the way we see the world. It includes the beliefs, habits and unwritten rules that are rooted in our history, culture and traditions and influence how we see the world. Even those experiencing this power may not be aware of it.**

For example, even where there are no laws prohibiting women from moving freely, many women will feel as constrained by the social norms that prohibit them being outside the home without a male relative as they would in a country where such laws exist.

*For more information about understanding power relations visit the [Powercube website](#).*

### **Box 23. Intersectional feminist analysis**

In ActionAid we draw on an intersectional feminist framing for our work. We acknowledge gender does not operate alone as a basis for structural inequality. Power and privilege are experienced in different ways by different groups of women at different points in their history and in varying contexts. Intersectional feminism is an understanding that different forms of structural oppression overlap.

Gender is one of the bases of discrimination. Others include class, caste, race, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, work, health, HIV status, educational levels, physical abilities and so on. None of these operate independently of the other, they are interlinked. Each of these could be a source of power or disempowerment in different situations. Systems, structures, attitudes and behaviours within multiple institutions must be transformed to reflect these rights.

Unequal power relations between men and women are founded in invisible power, arising from patriarchal values and traditional cultural beliefs. It's often in the personal space of the home that the most deeply rooted and internalised oppression operates. This invisible power is also invisible to those living it and it needs to be recognised and understood in order for discriminatory attitudes and behaviours to be challenged and transformed.

## **Visible power**

Visible power includes the formal rules, authorities, institutions and procedures of decision making. Examples include elections, political parties, laws, legislatures, budgets, corporate policy, local governments, and councils of elders or village chiefs. It is called visible because it is based on rules and laws which you can get information about so that you know why a decision was taken. Usually a person is empowered by an authority mandate to exercise power based on the law or rules. For example, in meetings, the chairperson usually has the power to set the agenda for the meeting and make the members follow the formal rules for the way the meeting is conducted. In planning processes there may be a set of rules and procedures for how the planning process should be managed. Likewise, with complaints, there are often formal rules for how a complaint is registered and who deals with it.

Where power is exercised fairly and justly on the basis of laws that fulfil human rights, it is usually accepted by the majority of people. However, if the rules and laws do not fulfil international human rights standards or if the laws and rules do, but are broken or ignored by those exercising power, then visible power is being exercised illegitimately. This form of power is generally not accepted by the majority of people.

### **Case study 20. The Rainbow Activists**

The Rainbow Activist Alliance is a project of the Forum for the Empowerment of Women in South Africa. They're a black feminist lesbian organisation, formed after a series of lesbian killings in the townships. They are building links and confidence among isolated and vulnerable women. They're also challenging the authorities to stop the culture of impunity and violence. Paralegal training, monitoring of court cases and training police and court officials are all part of their approach to support these women and other minorities to secure their rights.

See [The Rainbow Activists](#), ActionAid, 2019.

## Shifting visible power

ActionAid's aim is to see power exercised legitimately in accordance with laws and rules that fulfil human rights standards. In other words, legitimate visible power. To achieve this requires reforming laws and rules which do not fulfil human rights standards and building effective institutions which can catch power holders who break the law and ignore rules. This means strengthening and reforming institutions such as the police, the courts, regulatory bodies and the media as well as enabling civil society to carry out a 'watchdog' or oversight role. For this 'watchdog' role to be effective, it is necessary to ensure the freedom of speech, the freedom to form associations and free access to information.

Together with our partners and allies, ActionAid will challenge and democratise the visible power of states and regional and international institutions. We will work to claim the role of the state as primary duty bearer at all levels, and hold states accountable for respecting, protecting and fulfilling human rights in ways that are democratic, transparent and effective. ActionAid will work with rights holders and human rights defenders to enlarge democratic space, so that all people have freedom to organise. We believe that every person has the right to participate in decision making that affects them, at every level, and we will step up efforts aimed at enhancing democracy through the participation of excluded individuals and groups in decision making. At regional and international levels, we will engage with allies in influencing institutions that impact on international rules and standards and creating space for direct engagement between the people we work with and policy makers.

### Case study 21. Engaging with “visible” power holders in Nepal

Nirmala Mahatara, central committee member of Mahila Adhikar Manch (MAM), a national network of rural women in Nepal says:

*“Being able to raise my voice in front of the government officials, asking questions to the minister, and being able to represent thirty districts, makes me feel very strong. I can make sure my voice is heard even by the [local] government or at national level.*

*“My family comes from a rural community and is marginalised. Before I joined MAM, I had no identification with the issue of women's rights... I've been involved at the community level since 2008 but in 2016, I became a national representative. MAM is a network of rural women across 30 districts. It is led only by women and campaigns on issues of rural land ownership. MAM aims to eliminate violence and discrimination against women. We've campaigned against rape, the abuse of those accused of witchcraft and the dowry system, and have lobbied for joint land ownership, recognition of unpaid care work, and women's participation in all state apparatus (3000 women slept on the road outside the constitutional assembly as part of a campaign for participation and women-friendly policies). MAM has assisted women as well as other organisations in the local community to find resources for women in the group to train other women to be entrepreneurs.”*

From [Shifting Power: Learning from women's experiences and approaches to reducing inequality](#): ActionAid, 2017.

## Hidden power

Hidden power is exercised from behind the scenes by powerful people who are able to influence decisions and outcomes to their own advantage at local, national and international levels. These dynamics exclude and devalue the concerns of other less powerful groups. So, for example, issues of concern to women or poor farmers are often not even considered relevant policy issues by decision-makers. By preventing certain voices and issues from getting a fair public hearing, decision-making can be skewed to benefit a few at the expense of the majority.

Hidden power occurs in all countries in both the North and South and often involves ignoring rules or breaking laws and established procedures. For this reason, we usually regard the exercise of hidden power as illegitimate. However, there are occasions when this would not be the case. For example, if a leader instructs an officer not to provide emergency aid to a group of people because they do not support him, and the officer provides the aid anyway using hidden influence, then we would not regard this as illegitimate. It was rather the order that was illegitimate.

In some countries the opportunities for using hidden power are much greater than others. Groups of powerful people can get together and make sure that their interests get first priority. The factory owner can talk to the local government planning officer who gives him planning permission to build a new factory on land owned by the council which was supposed to be a park. In return the planning officer gets a kickback and his brother gets a management job at the factory. Often this kind of thing happens because people can get away with it. The rules and laws in the country are weak and not enforced. Indeed, very powerful people often make sure that the rules are not enforced! Needless to say, the interests of people living in poverty and exclusion tend to get pushed to the back when this type of power becomes predominant.

### Shifting hidden power

ActionAid's aim is to expose illegitimate hidden power by peaceful and legal means and to promote the exercise of power by legitimate visible means based on transparent laws and rules.

Alongside communities and partners, we will challenge and transform the hidden power of elites, financial institutions and corporations that are increasingly influencing and controlling decision making processes at all levels. Our aim is to expose their power and role so that people can hold them accountable and ensure that decisions are made by those institutions mandated to do so. Recognising the diversity of the private sector and the contribution it can play in development, we will engage with it to promote responsible and sustainable corporate behaviour. We will continue to challenge the negative impact of corporations on human rights and ecological sustainability and advocate for safeguards and binding legislation to ensure businesses are accountable to human rights, labour and environmental standards and that they pay their fair share of taxes in all countries of operation.

### Case study 22. Shifting hidden power in Liberia

In 2015 the women of Yangayan, Liberia decided it was time to change the system of traditional rule in which traditional chiefs are the equivalent of judges, using customary laws. The women recognised that without a female representative in the town council of elders, their opinions would not be heard, nor would their claims for their rights be taken seriously. They successfully campaigned for the former chair of the Mothers' Club, Ma Zoe Taweh, to become the first female town chief, after persuading the men of the council to nominate her.

However, Ma Zoe, was initially excluded from the chiefs' meetings. They were held in "men-only" sacred spaces, where women are fined for even trying to participate. Since these meetings are where the highest form of decision making takes place, women's systemic exclusion was all but guaranteed. This was a perfect system to maintain male hidden power and to restrict women from participating in decision making. Finally, after months of campaigning, the women's groups secured an agreement to change the customs so Ma Zoe could attend.

From [Shifting Power: Learning from women's experiences and approaches to reducing inequality](#), ActionAid, 2017.



## Invisible power

Invisible power isn't really invisible. We see it all around us if we know what to look for. Invisible power shapes the way we see the world. Our history, our culture and traditions are full of beliefs, habits and unwritten rules which influence how we see the world. Processes of socialisation can perpetuate exclusion and inequality by defining what is normal, acceptable and what we feel comfortable with. Examples of invisible power are patriarchy, religious intolerance, discrimination, racism, homophobia and xenophobia.

The most widespread form of global inequality is founded in invisible power, namely unequal power relations between men and women which are justified in terms of traditions, beliefs and habits. For example, an older male politician may feel very comfortable speaking to a crowd of powerful decision makers, while other citizens may not. Women may find it hard to stand up in front of men and criticise the health care services, because there are assumptions that women should not do this. And at the household level, women may not question the fact that they are expected to carry out the bulk of unpaid care work and may blame themselves for abuse from their husbands.

Such negative values are often reinforced through our upbringing, and further entrenched by national and international laws, policies or practices, undermining the universality of human rights. Schools, the media, and religious and political leaders also shape values and norms that prevent change. In many countries, values and prejudices regarding women and racial minorities are present in stories and images that appear in school books, advertisements and in the press. This kind of power influences whose voices are heard most often and whose voice is taken most seriously and makes it difficult for the voices of the poorest and most excluded to be heard, especially for women and girls. Many powerful people and traditional leaders use this form of invisible power to justify their domination and control of society. They appeal to traditions about the rule of elders and select groups. In some cases, this can extend into the domain of the occult where beliefs about the supernatural, ghosts and witchcraft still hold sway. Religious texts are also used to show that women are inferior to men and traditions which exclude groups of the population from development are perpetuated. Invisible power often underpins hidden power.

However, we must not forget that invisible power can also be positive. It supports and instils many positive values about how we should treat each other, about how we perceive what is just, fair and decent. Invisible power is never static, although sometimes values and traditions may remain fixed over very long periods of time. Today there are many factors influencing invisible power, for example, education, mass media, mobile phones and global television and communication. These trends provide opportunities to challenge invisible power where it contravenes human rights.

### Shifting invisible power

In our work for social justice, we must assist people to appreciate their rights and obligations and understand how and why their rights are denied. Empowerment that challenges unjust invisible power is therefore a very important part of our approach to reducing poverty.

To challenge and transform such invisible power, ActionAid will work to address patriarchy, dehumanisation, discrimination, racism, homophobia and xenophobia, all emanating from negative values and stereotypes, and influencing people's hearts, minds, behaviours and practices. We will step up our public engagement to promote the values of justice, equality, solidarity and internationalism.

## Understanding invisible power in Haiti

*“We don’t have formal barriers [to women’s participation] but all these invisible elements in power are there and prevent women from having any real engagement and reinforce inequality... If I look at the legal framework there’s nothing that prevents women from owning and controlling property. However, [that] doesn’t mean that women are able to take control, because invisible and hidden power prevents them. In fact, in this country...the law doesn’t apply to the poor and so [poor] women neither benefit from the law or their rights.*

*“Women don’t even have access to wealth. According to the law, women have the right to inherit but there are so many other obstacles to gaining access and control over property that women rarely can do so. Women are thought of as belonging to a man, so when it comes to inheritance, women are obliged to sell [to their husband or his family].*

*“Women are completely isolated; they don’t have access to the formal spaces, they can’t go into banks, they don’t have identity cards. And women are fearful of entering the formal world, schools, banks and courts. Many women are illiterate, and they don’t even know where to go [for opportunities] because it’s men who have the contacts. They are completely lost beyond the local level. So though in principle women have the right to be elected and to vote, these factors, plus the violence around elections and the money required to register into politics prevents many poor women from doing so.”*

As told by Yolette Etienne, ActionAid Haiti, July 2016. From [Shifting Power: Learning from women’s experiences and approaches to reducing inequality](#), ActionAid, 2017

## How power works

In reality, all three types of power are happening at the same time: visible, hidden and invisible powers are all in motion. They exist alongside each other and understanding how they interact is important for understanding how to fight poverty and injustice. In all societies, power will sometimes be exercised legitimately and sometimes illegitimately. ActionAid’s struggle in our work for social justice is to see that power is predominantly exercised visibly and legitimately – that is to say power based on transparent laws and rules which fulfil human rights standards.

The three types of power are ‘models’ or ways of thinking about how power is exercised. These models can help us understand what type of power is predominant in our societies and how we can work to shift power and influence powerful people. Invisible power can keep people trapped in cycles of poverty and exclusion by reinforcing myths about powerful leaders and unjust and biased beliefs, for example about the place of women in society. Civil society has an important role to play in helping to empower individuals and communities to understand their rights and be aware of how invisible and hidden types of power trap them in poverty.

Reducing poverty and injustice for all people and sharing resources equitably will best be served when a society adopts decision making processes based predominantly on visible legitimate power – power based on impartial and transparent laws that fulfil human rights standards. Civil society has therefore an important role to play in promoting governance based on this type of power.

### Box 24. Institutions of power: global to local

- **International financial institutions/global economic consensus** - The wealthiest nations control decision-making at the IMF and World Bank, often promoting policies that entrench inequalities and undermine people’s rights.
- **State** - State laws and policies can be geared to the interests of the powerful, discriminate against women, and produce and reproduce social exclusion. Progressive constitutions can disguise regressive practices.

- **Market** - The market is rarely truly fair; it privileges those with existing resources – and powerful business interests often perpetuate exclusion as profits alone drive them. Indeed, people living in poverty are often made invisible by the market.
- **Community** - In most communities a small, usually male, elite has access to and control over resources, power and authority.
- **Family** - Unequal relations mean that women and girls may get less food, have less access to information, less control over resources, and exercise less authority to influence family decisions. Many women and children experience violence in the family.

*Adapted from Structural Analysis Toolkit, Just Associates, 2002.*

## Strategies for shifting power

Creating change and progress for people living in poverty and exclusion involves influencing, persuading and sometimes forcing powerful people to change their minds, their policies and their practices. It also involves working with communities to reclaim their rights and their “power to”, “power within” and “power with”. For ActionAid, this process starts with empowerment. We have an important role to play in assisting poor and marginalised people to understand the forces that keep them entrapped in poverty and exclusion. It also involves supporting poor people and their organisations to build stronger alliances and solidarity movements. The power of numbers is often crucial. A few small organisations are unlikely to be heard, whereas alliances of many organisations and movements involving large numbers of people can make a decisive impact for change. Finally, we have to consider how we will campaign for the fulfilment of people’s rights.

When we decide our objectives and strategies, we also have to seriously consider the issue of power. What and who do we have to influence in order for the change we want to actually happen? Who might try to stop us and how would they do this? Who might support us and what would we have to do to win their support? We need to consider how the issues are linked to different levels, from the local to the national and international.

There are a number of strategies we can use to support people living in poverty and exclusion to begin to shift power. These are based around our theory of change, focusing on empowerment, solidarity, campaigning and presenting alternatives, as outlined in the previous section, and include for example:

- **Building awareness of how power works** – People’s understanding and analysis of power imbalances and the context in which they occur needs to be clear so that they are able to effectively challenge power, gain decision making space and correct the gendered imbalance perpetuated by patriarchal systems. There are a number of tools that can help people to understand power. These include *Reflection-Action* tools like the chapatti diagram, onion and power line. See the [Reflection-Action](#) website for suggestions on how to use participatory tools for power analysis.
- **Collecting evidence about services and budgets** – This strategy is based on collecting objective evidence about a situation and using it to demand improvements. This might involve looking at the quality of public services and people’s satisfaction with them and whether standards are fulfilled. Another approach might be to examine budget allocations to see if money disappears at some stage in the budget process. These strategies can be effective and result in improvements in the delivery of existing services and in relationships between citizens and authorities. However, they are less likely to challenge power relations or address the structural causes of these issues.
- **Organising and mobilising** - Through mobilising, the power of grassroots organising and social movements is amplified, allowing women and others living in poverty and exclusion to shift power imbalances and to challenge the legal and social norms that exclude them

from enjoying their rights in private and public spaces. Organising starts at the local level and can build “power within” and “power with” others in solidarity. When people gain awareness and understanding of their human rights, they are motivated to pursue their rights by organising and taking collective action for change.

- **Advocacy and lobbying** - This strategy is based on influencing and persuading power holders to change policy and practice. It centres on dialogue, negotiation, lobbying and advocacy. It requires that power holders are prepared to listen. This can be because of a position of strength, for example, the backing of a national alliance of CSOs which represent large numbers of people or carefully documented evidence about corruption. It could also be because of common interests. Careful power mapping may reveal that there are power holders who are prepared to listen or provide support.
- **Communicating with a wider audience** – This strategy involves communicating with wider audiences about problematic issues in order to build support for a case and put pressure on power holders. The assumption is that greater public awareness will force power holders to react in the way we want them to. The use of the media (television, radio and newspapers) is a crucial strategy for all civil society work. Media reporting in all its forms allows our cases to be broadcast to a much wider audience and activists should consider how they can use the media in everything they do. Digital platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and text message campaigns can also be used to spread a message.
- **Peaceful action and protest** - This strategy is based on non-violent actions, protests and acts of civil disobedience where citizens draw attention to problems by using public spaces for demonstrations, sit-ins, events and happenings. There are many forms of protest and civil disobedience ranging from litigation in the courts, to hunger strikes, boycotts, refusals to comply and non-cooperation. The assumption is that drawing attention to issues in this way will make power holders react positively. However, the objective of some protests may initially be to get the issue recognised as a problem by the wider public. If we adopt protest strategies, we should carry out a careful power analysis as there are authorities in many countries that do not tolerate protests and they will often stop them violently. There may well be a risk of injury, imprisonment and torture for activists involved. In some countries peaceful demonstrations or protests are possible while in others just the act of protesting is enough to get people arrested. We need to carefully assess the risks in relation to the objectives and strategies we are pursuing and consider whether the risks can be justified.

### Case study 23. Shifting power in the community

In Kupto community, Nigeria, women farmers and traders identified the local chief as the key community power-holder as his actions hold a strong influence on cultural norms and values. The women then lobbied their chief to support their organising asks. As a result of their collective lobbying, the chief put in place a local committee that supports and oversees girls’ education. The committee’s primary responsibility was to reduce gender inequalities in education by ensuring that all households in the area send both their boys and girls to school. This has resulted in improved primary and secondary school enrolment, retention and completion for female children, which will position them well for further educational and economic opportunities in the future.

[From Shifting Power: Learning from women’s experiences and approaches to reducing inequality](#), ActionAid, 2017.

## Barriers to shifting power

The progress made by people's organisations and social movements in securing basic rights for women and other excluded groups are at risk in light of overlapping global challenges: shrinking political space, rising religious and cultural fundamentalism and extreme economic inequality. In many countries, civil society no longer has space to engage, criticise and pressure governments to put gender responsive and pro-poor laws and policies in place and to implement them.

For women in particular, rising religious and cultural fundamentalisms have eroded gains that once empowered them to have control over their bodies, sexuality, mobility and labour. Global and national economic systems continue to thrive on women's unpaid care work and labour, which largely goes unrecognised. The levels of extreme economic inequality that can be seen in the world have been built on the continued exploitation of women, especially poor women, as a cheap source of productive and reproductive labour. Seeking redistribution of power is no easy task, as women continue to face multiple obstacles in pursuing their rights.

Some of the barriers faced by women and others living in poverty and exclusion when seeking to shift power include:

- **Lack of political will to create and implement good policies.** Power imbalances are perpetuated in society because there is poor public institutional willingness to create and implement policies and mechanisms that address discrimination and exclusion.
- **Lack of implementation.** Even in regions where policies are in place, they may not be implemented, particularly where corruption is rife and goes unchecked.
- **Policy inconsistency.** Inconsistencies between human rights commitments enshrined in international and national laws and government economic policies can act as a barrier to reducing inequalities. For example, even in countries where the right to free public education and health care are enshrined in the national constitution, they may be undermined by a policy which results in the commercialisation of these previously public institutions.
- **Gender-blind policies.** Traditional systems of power exclude women, resulting in the continual creation of gender-blind policies that do not recognise or respond to women's contexts and needs. Women therefore continue to face inequality in accessing economic resources such as land, decent work, and credit across many regions throughout the world.
- **Backlash from those in power.** Power never gives up without a struggle. Serious change will trigger a backlash. It is important to be prepared, but equally important that fear of a backlash should not prevent action. Frontline workers can be harassed, threatened or arrested and this can make some staff and partners nervous about proceeding. The key is to strengthen community-based protection mechanisms, planning how to deal with the backlash as part of a continual process of risk analysis— that is, early alert, rapid reaction, solidarity and collective response schemes to protect and support staff and partners, activists and human rights defenders, and women who speak up in public and may face a backlash in private. In fact, backlash by those who hold power over others is almost inevitable and it can even be an indicator that you are doing something right— but you need to understand and prepare for backlash. In a similar spirit, if everyone is happy you should ask yourself if you have really challenged or shifted power. When you challenge power someone whose privilege is challenged will be uncomfortable or unhappy.
- **Women in particular often don't have the time to challenge power.** Women's paid and unpaid work restricts their time to challenge power. Globally, a young woman entering the job market today can expect to work for an average of four years more than her male peers over her lifetime, as she is likely to be balancing both paid and unpaid care work. This amounts to the equivalent of an extra one month's work for every woman, every year of a woman's life, and means women have little time to participate in women's groups, decision-making structures outside the house or leisure time.



- **It takes a long time to shift hidden and invisible power.** There are hidden and invisible power dynamics within families and local communities, and often it is within these micro spaces where the most deeply rooted and internalised oppression operates. These are often the most difficult forms of power to change (not least because it is hard to hold hidden and invisible power-holders to account) and to succeed depends on sustained processes of conscientisation. It is about people changing their position in society, their values and their sense of themselves—and it takes time.
- **Women may act as gatekeepers of patriarchal power.** Patriarchal power relations are often so deeply internalised and that it is women themselves who act as gatekeepers and enforcers within their communities. So, women with authority in the community might use their position to chastise women who fail to live up to traditional standards of ‘feminine’ behaviour or to perpetuate harmful practices such as FGM and child marriage.
- **Sometimes we are the problem.** It’s important to recognise that sometimes ActionAid staff and partners hold some of the very negative values and beliefs which violate others’ rights. It becomes even more challenging to engage communities in discussions or push for change when some of those facilitating the process do not believe that there should be change. As such, NGOs like ActionAid need to continually reflect on and transform their own power, including reviewing staffing and partner profiles, decision-making and resource allocation processes, and being aware of dominant ethnic, gender and other identities.

### Assessing the risks in shifting power

Challenging power is always risky, with the potential for backlash and conflict. To some extent this is unavoidable. Many issues cannot be resolved without conflict. Indeed, conflict is a necessary part of change processes. There are many strategies available for collective action. Which ones we select will depend on a number of things – among them the degree of risk. Carrying out a structured risk assessment can help in selecting strategies or thinking through how to minimise risk. Visit the [www.reflection-action.org](http://www.reflection-action.org) for suggestions of participatory tools to use for risk analysis.

### Case study 24. Backlash against campaigners in Tanzania

In Bagamoyo, Tanzania, 1,300 smallholder farmers were being pushed off their land to make way for a sugar cane and biofuels plantation run by the Swedish-based company, EcoEnergy. ActionAid Tanzania supported the farmers to campaign against the project and published a report outlining the communities’ concerns and presenting recommendations. ActionAid’s report was denounced by the government and the National NGO Registrar immediately started challenging ActionAid Tanzania’s legality and registration to operate in the country. Communities and others who consistently opposed the project received threats in the form of verbal and physical harassment. Despite this, campaigning continued in Tanzania and internationally to amplify community voices and help reduce potential risks. In solidarity, 50,000 people mobilised in a coalition across four countries to reinforce the campaigning efforts of farmers. The Tanzanian government eventually announced its decision to shelve the project. However, despite this success, the legal status of the land is still not clear, and the farmers continue to struggle for their rights.

From [Action for Global Justice: Strategy 2028](#), ActionAid 2018.

### Monitoring shifts in power

This domain of change is concerned with transforming systems and structures which restrict, deny or violate the rights of the most excluded and prevent them from stepping out of poverty and injustice. Changes encompass challenging and transforming the three faces of negative power: visible power, invisible power and hidden power.

## Visible power

Shifts in visible power include changes in formal institutions and how they make decisions, as well as tangible changes of policies, laws, and how they are made, in wider society and the state.

Definition	Example
<b>The formal rules, laws, structures, authorities, institutions and procedures of decision-making.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ More favourable laws upholding the rights of people living in poverty and exclusion, and women/young women.</li> <li>■ Specific changes in laws, policies, norms, or values, as a result of people's collective demands, solidarity, or direct engagement with duty bearers.</li> <li>■ Inclusion of people's views, specific language, or budgetary allocations.</li> <li>■ Abolition of gender discriminatory laws, etc.</li> <li>■ Equal representation of women and men in all decision-making structures.</li> <li>■ Fairer elections are safeguarded by laws and regulations in an increased number of States.</li> <li>■ Unpaid work is recognised in laws and regulations, and States provide public services to relieve women's burdens.</li> <li>■ Increased number of laws safeguarding freedom of association and speech.</li> <li>■ Improved laws, policies, processes and regulations are successfully and consistently implemented and enforced, backed up by adequate provision of state resources.</li> <li>■ Government policies, laws and regulations rein in corporates and hold them to account when they violate human rights.</li> <li>■ Trade and investment rules do not violate human rights of women, workers and people living in poverty and exclusion.</li> <li>■ Tax and public spending as well as financial regulations are improved. People living in poverty and exclusion benefit from natural resources use and their rights to access and control these are promoted and protected.</li> <li>■ Increased freedom of expression and organisation (Social movements and human rights defenders).</li> <li>■ Excluded and discriminated individuals and groups are able to freely organise, mobilise and express themselves publicly; and live violence-free lives. These include; LGBTIQ+, sex workers, ethnic or religious minorities, or any other groups regarded as, 'other'.</li> <li>■ Increased participation of young people and their organisations in decision making structures and processes.</li> </ul>

## Hidden power

Shifts in hidden power include changes in unwritten rules, practices and institutions that systematically exclude certain groups from society and politics.

Definition	Example
<b>Refers to the ability of those individuals, or institutions that are not vested with formal power to make decisions. These individuals or groups tend to exercise undue influence over policies and the lives of the less privileged because they hold other forms of power and influence such as money, control over land, inherited wealth, mineral wealth, or because they have proximity to duty bearers. These individuals or institutions maintain their influence from behind the scenes by controlling who gets to the decision-making table and what gets on the public agenda.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Quality of consultation processes and the extent to which they truly include the usually excluded groups.</li> <li>■ Reduced corruption.</li> <li>■ Openness of agenda-setting processes.</li> <li>■ Increased number of regulations making corporations more transparent and accountable.</li> <li>■ Increased transparency and accountability of all levels of governance decision making processes.</li> <li>■ Increased corporate regulation.</li> <li>■ Increased fairer tax rules that curtail tax dodging by elites and corporates.</li> <li>■ Increased transparency in public resource allocation decisions to include the views of people's organisations and social movements.</li> </ul>

## Invisible power

Shifts in invisible power include changes in values and norms that devalue and discriminate against the most marginalised populations such as women, Dalits, people with disabilities, LGBTIQ+, migrants and refugees.

Definition	Example
<p><b>Processes, practices, customs and norms that influence people's values, beliefs and sense of self.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Decreased media peddling of sexist and racist messages, images and narratives.</li> <li>■ Lower acceptance of harmful traditional practices and beliefs, e.g. FGM, widow sexual cleansing, killing of women as alleged witches, etc.</li> <li>■ Lower acceptance of all forms of violence against women and girls from family to community to global levels.</li> <li>■ Increased vocal and visual challenges to social, religious, and cultural norms and practices that promote the infringement of rights.</li> <li>■ Increased recognition of the burden of unpaid care work by women and girls, and its impact on their rights.</li> <li>■ Increased recognition of gender inequality and all other underlying inequalities, as key drivers exacerbating the impact of humanitarian and climatic crises.</li> <li>■ Increased understanding and challenges to socio-cultural norms which drive the disproportionate impact of disasters on women and girls, as well as the very poor.</li> </ul>





# Part 4: Increasing rights, redistribution and resilience

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ActionAid's programme framework for its current strategy (Strategy 2028) works towards the following overarching goal: *To achieve social justice, gender equality and poverty eradication by shifting and redistributing power and resources, strengthening the resilience of communities and movements, and fulfilling the rights of people living in poverty and exclusion.*

This goal is achieved through a long-term integrated programming agenda focused on rights, redistribution and resilience. These three pillars are interconnected and mutually reinforcing in that one will only be achieved if gains are made in other areas. Rights cannot be fulfilled without redistribution of power and resources; and they will continue to be undermined without building the resilience of people living in poverty and exclusion and social movements. Indeed, whilst certain rights are codified in treaties, constitutions and laws, ActionAid has a larger vision of human dignity, freedom, equality and justice which will sometimes lead us to pursue an expansion of recognised rights. Human rights frameworks have emerged from, and will continue to emerge from, an ongoing process of human struggle for justice and equality.

## Rights

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. This will only happen if the space to influence the State is created and expanded through sustained people's struggles, bolstered by global solidarity. To realise universally accepted rights and achieve dignity, it is essential that the individual and collective agency of people living in poverty and exclusion is mobilised to claim rights and resist all forms of discrimination. Public awareness and action to reveal and confront hidden forms of power, such as corporate power, is also essential to achieving social justice. The realisation of women's rights can be transformative globally, and as a result, women's movements, civil society organisations and other self-mobilised groups should be resourced and strengthened to challenge negative social and cultural norms and practices which fuel discrimination and violation of rights.

Civil society should hold governments accountable to redistributive national plans with policies that support the accomplishment of the SDGs. Such policies would aim to: recognise, redistribute and reduce women's unpaid care work; improve opportunities for decent work and wages for women and young people; stop violence against women and girls; improve women's mobility; enhance women's capacity to organise and participate in decision making; improve women's access to education and health; and expand women's access to and control over natural and economic resources.

## Case study 25. Fighting for rights in Kenya

Kilifi County in southeast Kenya is home to 1.2 million people, over 70% of them living in poverty and hunger. Political leadership has tended to be authoritative and has not applied sufficient resources to development for the poor. Although the Kenyan Constitution emphasizes citizen participation in development initiatives, a social audit conducted in 2012 revealed massive misappropriation of public funds due to a lack of community involvement.

The Kilifi County Citizen's Forum was formed in 2013, with the support of ActionAid Kenya, and aimed to give the poor an active role in their own governance. Key initiatives include:

- Building empowerment by making people aware of the legal provisions for citizen participation and building their capacity to understand the budgetary process.
- Forming solidarity through forum structures at different levels (village, ward, sub-county and county), with representation from all sectors of society (including women and young people).
- Campaigning with the media to reject existing budgets and include community participation in formulating new ones.
- Conducting audits to ensure accountability and highlighting cases of corruption and misallocation of funds.

With the support of the media, the Forum successfully challenged the 2013/14 budget and influenced a complete change in approach in the budget preparation process for 2014/15, to include greater public participation. It also conducted social audit as a means of monitoring the implementation of activities stated in the budget. Based on community research and public meetings, the Forum has put forward alternative budget solutions that are more appropriate to the needs of the people. It is also collecting evidence on revenue generation to find out where the county is losing its revenue, since funds have fallen in recent years.

## Monitoring rights

Changes in relation to rights might include a strengthened role for the State and its ability to provide public services and protect people living in poverty and exclusion. Increased ability of the most excluded to participate freely in civil and political life. Reduced violence against the most excluded.

The State as a primary duty bearer is held accountable for respecting and protecting human rights in ways that are democratic and effective. It is expected to provide equal access to services, especially for people living in poverty and exclusion. Results in terms of rights will reflect the extent to which women, girls and marginalised groups enjoy all human rights without discrimination, including civil, political, economic, and cultural rights. ActionAid will acknowledge the States where they have made a significant effort to ensure that rights which were routinely violated are now routinely respected.

Definition	Examples
<b>Extent to which women, girls and excluded groups enjoy internationally agreed human rights without discrimination.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Increased enjoyment of internationally agreed human rights by people living in poverty and exclusion.</li> <li>■ Reduced discrimination and violence against specific groups; certain groups of women, or girls, LGBTIQ+ sex workers, lower caste, indigenous peoples' etc. This is by both ordinary people and non- state institutions as well as by States/duty bearers.</li> <li>■ Reduced violence against women and girls in both the public and private spheres.</li> <li>■ Fairer elections, increased participation of the most excluded groups in the political space.</li> <li>■ Decreased number of people arrested or detained for their political views, sexual orientation or gender identity.</li> <li>■ Increased number of people living in poverty and exclusion enjoying their socio-economic rights, including rights to public services, decent jobs and fair wages.</li> <li>■ Women, young people and other excluded groups enjoy equal rights of access and control over natural resources, and all means to decent livelihoods.</li> <li>■ Violation of all basic human rights reduced - those who violate are held to account and impunity is reduced.</li> </ul>

## Redistribution

Wealth and power are presently skewed in favour of elites and both need to be redistributed in order to achieve justice. The world has sufficient resources to guarantee a life of dignity for everyone, especially people living in poverty and exclusion, but it will require redistribution. A more equitable sharing of power and resources is essential to achieving a just society. People living in poverty, especially women, must have access to and control of productive resources while the benefits from natural resources must be more equitably shared to create opportunities, decent work, and respect for labour rights. At the centre of the redistribution agenda must be stronger corporate regulation to rein in excessive wealth and greed in order to ensure a more equitable sharing of the world's resources. A progressive tax system that ensures individuals and corporations pay their fair share of taxes is also important in advancing this agenda. States must recognise and reduce women's unpaid care work and redistribute financial resources to deliver quality gender responsive public services.

### Box 25. Unpaid care and domestic work

There is no country in the world where men and women provide an equal share of unpaid care and domestic work, such as looking after children and older relatives, cooking and cleaning. Women provide three-quarters (76%) of all unpaid care and domestic work globally, which works out to an average of 4 hours and 25 minutes a day.

Unpaid care and domestic work, often dismissed as 'women's work', contributes a huge amount to the global economy. A 2018 study by the ILO of 64 countries, which represent 67% of the world's working age population, valued unpaid and domestic care work at more than \$11trillion or 9% of global GDP.

We know the key to freeing women from the burden of unpaid care is scaled up public investment in public services, funded by progressive taxes. Children's centres in Rwanda,

supported by an ActionAid project, are giving thousands of women an extra five hours a day. The women are being supported to lobby their government to fund more centres to benefit more women, redistribute their disproportionate burden of unpaid work, and empower them to realise their rights.

Alongside local action, it is vital that international financial institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund, recognise the devastating impact of their austerity programmes on investment in public services and infrastructure, and the knock-on effect undermining women's rights and gender equality.

See [100 years fighting for decent working conditions and labour equality](#), ActionAid, 2019. *Who Cares: Financing Gender Responsive Public Services*, ActionAid, 2020.

The control of a huge percentage of the world's resources by a select few has repercussions everywhere. Decent local public services would enable women to be less tied to the home and give them more time and space to earn money and enjoy leisure time, but global tax rules allow big companies to keep the profits that could provide the revenue to pay for those public services — perpetuating inequality. Poor women and men lose the local land that is their livelihood, because corporate land takeovers for biofuels, mining or export crops are permitted and encouraged by global donors and by national governments; in many countries this worsens centuries-old inequalities of land ownership. The links are becoming starker in this time of climate change, which is essentially caused by a global refusal to change economic 'business as usual'.

Whereas high growth rates with no accompanying redistributive policies can increase inequality, studies have found that policies and economic approaches which make land, resources and capital widely available across the population, and which provide strong social safety nets that increase well-being and reduce risk, tend to reduce poverty and inequalities. Moreover, these approaches also tend to protect economies from decline and instability. In a reversal of popular opinion, a study by researchers at the IMF found that lower levels of economic inequality contribute to sustainable economic growth. However, ActionAid believe that true transformation requires more than "social bribery" where redistributive policies maintain the status quo rather than bring about real change. Alongside policy, there must be an accompanying will to challenge the historical global and national drivers of inequality and structures of power that prevent change.

Governments should develop and be held accountable to redistributive national plans with policies that support the accomplishment of the SDGs. Such policies would aim to:

- recognise, redistribute and reduce women's unpaid care work
- improve opportunities for decent work and wages for women and young people
- increase women's access to education and health
- stop violence against women and girls
- improve women's mobility, and their capacity to organise and participate in decision making
- improve women's access to education and health, and their access to and control over natural and economic resources.

### Box 26. The lies that shore up inequality

Those with the power to set and shape economic policies have established a set of convenient falsehoods to support them. To generate popular consent for the policies that perpetuate economic inequality, this set of false assumptions has been repeated so often that they are now axiomatic — widely accepted as ‘common sense’ — such that many people believe that there is no alternative. This persists despite the fact that the evidence against these falsehoods continues to mount.

These lies include:

1. Inequality is necessary to generate economic growth.
2. If people can't get as rich as they like economies will grind to a halt as wealth creators go elsewhere.
3. The profit driven private sector works better than the public sector.
4. Efficiency is an economic imperative.
5. The market price reflects the value of the work that went into it.
6. Women will achieve economic empowerment through education and training, and access to credit.
7. Climate change has nothing to do with economics.
8. Mechanised farming on large farms is a more efficient way to provide food.
9. Free trade benefits everyone.
10. Mining and petroleum production are crucial for developing economies.

### Case study 26. Fair wages for garment-makers in Bangladesh

Over the past 20 years, millions of Bangladeshis have moved from the countryside to cities. Many of them, especially women, seek employment in garment factories, where conditions are often squalid – or even dangerous – and wages are low. ActionAid has helped these workers to join together and form a movement for change. Their advocacy campaign successfully influenced the government to raise the minimum wage and reform the country's labour law.

ActionAid focused on the issue of the minimum wage to highlight the problem of urban poverty and mobilise a campaign that would address workers' rights more broadly. The first step involved conducting research. Then, ActionAid supported the mobilisation of trade unions and other stakeholders around the issue of the minimum wage. The campaign included capacity building for workers on their labour rights, including providing dedicated space for women to participate in discussions. Building relationships with garment factory owners was also important. Lobbying focused on encouraging them to be more open to change and creating awareness of the benefits of paying a fair wage.

Consultation was at the heart of the process, with a series of group discussions involving civil society, trade unions and political activists. ActionAid encouraged public engagement by sharing research findings with civil society networks, trade unions and the media. It also facilitated informal discussions and factory visits with members of parliament. While trade union leaders risked harassment and arrest, the involvement of legal actors helped to mitigate these threats.

The campaign successfully lobbied for reform of the 2006 Labour Law, which was amended in 2013. The amendments allowed the process of trade union registration to be relaxed and provided for a minimum wage board to be set up. The minimum wage was set at 5,300 Taka (US\$50) per month in 2013 with provision for frequent review. This benefitted an estimated three million garment factory workers, 85% of whom are women.

See [What a way to make a living, ActionAid, 2016](#).



## Monitoring redistribution

Redistribution of resources guarantees a dignified life for all, especially those living in poverty and exclusion. An equitable share of resources includes the benefits of both productive resources and natural resources, such as land.

Changes in relation to redistribution include decreased inequity and inequality, especially for women, and greater access to public services and resources for people living in poverty and exclusion. This means equal opportunities, access to productive resources, and equitable share of natural resources, decent work and respect for labour rights. Governments develop and enforce fairer, more progressive tax rules and allocate a greater amount of public resources to tackle inequality. They provide more and better-quality services such as education and health to the people living in poverty and exclusion.

Definition	Examples
<b>Decreased inequality and inequity and greater access and control over productive and other resources for people living in poverty and exclusion, especially women.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Global tax rules are set and enforced by a more representative inter-governmental tax body.</li> <li>■ Governments significantly increase spending on gender-responsive public services including education, water and sanitation, sexual and reproductive health services, public transport, street lighting, and services which will decrease the burden of unpaid care on women and girls.</li> <li>■ Land is redistributed, eliminating racist, sexist, caste, or ethnic based patterns of inequality.</li> <li>■ Recognition of women's unpaid care roles from household level to global policy arenas; decrease in the amount of time women and girls spend doing unpaid care work.</li> <li>■ Greater support to agroecology, Climate-resilient sustainable agriculture, instead of industrial agriculture.</li> <li>■ Greater investment and funding for climate adaptation.</li> <li>■ Increased development and enforcement of progressive tax rules both globally and nationally (States).</li> <li>■ Increased spending on key public services.</li> <li>■ Reduced privatisation of public services.</li> </ul>

## 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. Power must also be shifted to first responders, especially women's and people's organisations at the frontline of emergency response, with increased accountability to these local actors. In both rural and urban locations, people who are most impacted by crisis must be supported to tackle these underlying drivers, including gender inequalities. With growing urban migration, strengthening resilience in urban contexts is also a priority. Given the impact of climate change on rural communities and livelihoods, we must work to safeguard food sovereignty and to achieve ecological and climate justice.

Farmers, fishing communities and food systems around the world are already struggling to cope with the erratic rainfall patterns, droughts, floods, landslides, cyclones and rising sea levels brought on by climate change. In places, its impacts are so severe that it is increasingly contributing to displacement and migration, and this is likely to escalate in the years to

come. Adaptation of agricultural systems is therefore an urgent priority to safeguard farmers' livelihoods, national economies and people's ability to eat in the face of escalating climate change. Community participation and women's empowerment are the foundation of ActionAid's approach to community resilience. Potential strategies can include disaster risk reduction, adaptation, agroecology, strengthening of alternative livelihood options, empowerment and advocacy to duty bearers. Community members can use participatory processes to agree a plan that is appropriate for their context.

### Case study 27. Putting women at the centre of emergency response

Sabita, 38, was trained by ActionAid to be her village's emergency response woman leader in the Kalapara sub-district in southern Bangladesh.

When Tropical Storm Mahasen struck in 2013, she was ready to warn the community and assist them to reach the storm shelter. She worked with the other women in her group to get 500 people to safety. She loves the fact that the women worked together, and she is proud of their approach.

*"We went to people's houses and explained to them that the storm was coming. We asked, 'Will you be able to get to the shelter alone? How can we help you?' This way they felt encouraged and less scared about the storm", she said.*

See [How women first-responders saved lives during Cyclone Bulbul](#), ActionAid, 2019.

### Monitoring resilience

Communities affected by various shocks and stresses such as conflicts, protracted crises and climate change are able to safeguard their livelihoods and food sovereignty and recover better after any shocks or disasters. ActionAid works towards three levels of resilience: absorptive (the ability to cope); adaptive (the ability to prepare for, predict and adapt way of life and livelihoods to changing risk); and transformative resilience (the ability to radically change the way of life to tackle power inequalities).

The capacities, opportunities and resources of people living in poverty and exclusion to withstand, recover from and transform systems that increase their vulnerability. It also includes the ability of people to recognise, challenge and transform the unjust and unequal power relations that dictate their vulnerability to adapt positively to changing circumstances and to mitigate, prepare for and rapidly recover from shocks and stresses such that their wellbeing and enjoyment of human rights is safeguarded. Increased resilience of the poorest and most excluded is achieved through a) states and non-state actors recognising that women, young people and their local organisations are the most important groups to respond first and ensuring their participation in decision making, b) governments have clear and adequately funded programmes in place to ensure communities are prepared for disasters, stresses and shocks and women and young people are actively included in the preparations and other relevant programmes, c) governments and key humanitarian and development actors recognise gender inequality as a key driver exacerbating the impact of crises.

Definition	Examples
<b>Capacities, opportunities and resources of people living in poverty and exclusion to withstand, recover from and transform systems that underlie and increase their vulnerability.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Livelihoods of people affected by protracted crisis, climate change and disasters suffer a minimal loss, remain the same or are rebuilt within short time frames.</li> <li>■ Number of laws, policies, standards put in place in different States to achieve ecological and climate justice and challenge and reduce corporate power.</li> <li>■ Humanitarian actors across the board are consistently held accountable by women's and local people's organisations for how they prepare for and respond to emergencies.</li> <li>■ Increased accountability by decision makers on how public resources are allocated and utilised.</li> <li>■ Increased accountability of humanitarian actors to women's and local organisations.</li> <li>■ Increased institutional capacity and growth of people's own organisations and social movements to sustain social justice struggles, and withstand financial crises, state repression, and claim political space.</li> </ul>

# Glossary

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Every organisation uses or understand certain words, terminologies or concepts in different ways. Below are simple definitions of some of the key words or concepts used by ActionAid.

<b>Active agency</b>	When people living in poverty and exclusion are able to play the central role in bringing an end to poverty; their empowerment, action and organisation is fundamental.
<b>Activista</b>	ActionAid's network of youth activists around the world.
<b>Advocacy</b>	The deliberate process of influencing those who make policy.
<b>Alternatives</b>	Ideas or practices which stretch the scope of our existing interventions or frameworks, challenging dominant paradigms and promising something different and positive for the future.
<b>Appraisal</b>	An exercise undertaken to explore and understand the context, feasibility and value of a new long-term partnership or programme on the basis of financial, technical and political factors.
<b>Baselines</b>	The starting point against which we can measure change in people's lives. Baseline data and information is collected based on indicators which we want to monitor over time.
<b>Campaigning</b>	The way in which we harness people's power through organisation, mobilisation and communication around a simple and powerful demand, in order to achieve a measurable political or social change.
<b>Capacity development</b>	An ongoing process by which people and organisations enhance their abilities to achieve strategic change in a sustainable way.
<b>Climate resilient sustainable agriculture</b>	Site and community-specific adaptation strategies, including more bio-diverse and ecological methods aimed at reducing vulnerabilities and increasing the resilience of smallholder production systems to face future climate shocks.
<b>Collectives</b>	Community groups or people's organisations that are issue-based, formed with the purpose of political advocacy and knowledge sharing. In collectives, nothing is bought, sold or owned; everything is the "collective" output of its members and every member has equal decision-making power.
<b>Community based protection</b>	All activities aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and the spirit of the relevant bodies of law (i.e. human rights law, humanitarian law and refugee law).
<b>Conscientisation</b>	A process of reflect and action, enabling people to perceive the social, political and economic contradictions in their lives and to take action against them.
<b>Cooperatives</b>	Groups that come together for economic and livelihood purposes in different sectors such as agriculture. They have distinct legal structure and registration under respective national laws. They are based on membership and members are required to contribute.
<b>Critical pathway</b>	A visual representation of how we believe we will achieve impact: linking actions at different levels to outcomes and impact. A tool to help us design strong HRBA programmes.
<b>Direct impact</b>	Change in people's lives that results very clearly and directly from one of our interventions.
<b>Disaster risk reduction</b>	Techniques, tools, policies, strategies and practices that minimise vulnerabilities and disaster risks in a community in order to avoid and/or limit the adverse impacts of hazards, within the broad context of sustainable development.
<b>Duty bearers</b>	Individual or institutions with the obligation to respect, protect and fulfil a right. The state and its various organs, such as parliaments, local authorities, and the justice system are usually the primary, or ultimate, duty bearers.
<b>Empowerment</b>	The process through which we enable people living in poverty to become rights activists through a critical awareness of power relations and a strengthening of their own individual and collective power.
<b>Gender-based violence</b>	Any act that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.
<b>Harmful traditional practices</b>	Practices that inhibit women's ability to control their bodies, including female genital mutilation, child marriage, unplanned pregnancies, sex-selective abortion, honour killings, widowhood practices, dowry systems etc.

<b>HRBA</b>	Our HRBA centres on active agency: supporting people living in poverty to become conscious of their rights, organise and claim their rights and hold duty bearers to account. We build on international human rights law, but go beyond a legalistic or technical approach, supporting people to analyse and confront power imbalances and taking sides with people living in poverty.
<b>Indicators</b>	The things we choose to track in order to find out whether we are making a difference. There are meta-indicators (impact), outcome-indicators (outcomes) and process-indicators (intermediate outcomes).
<b>Indirect impact</b>	Where we bring change to people's lives but cannot show a direct link. For example, where we have changed a policy or law or helped to shift attitudes and behaviours.
<b>Intermediate outcomes</b>	The stepping stones or concrete steps towards the specific outcomes we have identified.
<b>Intersectionality</b>	Intersectionality is a concept often used to describe the ways in which different forms of structural oppression (racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, xenophobia, classism, etc.) are interconnected and cannot be examined separately from one another. For ActionAid intersectionality is a frame which provokes understanding how multiple forms of disadvantage compound a problem and are linked to, and dependent on, history and institutions of power.
<b>Lobbying</b>	Face-to-face meetings, or lobby letters, and direct attempts to influence policy makers, public officials or other decision makers through personal interviews and persuasion.
<b>Local rights programmes</b>	Our long-term engagement in particular communities.
<b>National rights programmes</b>	Where we have national partners or sustained engagement on an issue that may involve multiple local programmes and national work.
<b>Objectives</b>	Realistic steps towards a bigger vision of change; ActionAid requires that objectives be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound.
<b>Outcomes</b>	The specific changes in people's lives we have identified and work towards in a programme, project or campaign, which we believe will help us achieve an overall impact.
<b>Participation</b>	The active involvement of people in a process. There is a helpful ladder of participation that shows that there is a wide spectrum from tokenistic to full participation (and we always work towards the latter).
<b>Patriarchy</b>	Patriarchy describes societies characterised by unequal hierarchical power relations between women and men, where women and certain groups of males are systematically disadvantaged, oppressed and exploited. This takes place across almost every sphere of life but is particularly noticeable in the under-representation of women and marginalised male groups in social spaces, state institutions, decision-making positions and industry. It encourages a dominant form of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' which directly affects how men and women are expected to behave.
<b>People living in poverty</b>	We avoid talking about "poor people" which has an element of condescension. "People living in poverty" emphasises common humanity and poverty as a state that people are living in which can end.
<b>Promoting rights in schools</b>	ActionAid's framework based on ten core rights that every school should promote. It's an empowering process involving children, parents and teachers in tracking progress on education rights and producing citizens' reports.
<b>Reflection-Action</b>	ActionAid's participatory approach to supporting the rights awareness and power analysis of people living in poverty and exclusion.
<b>Resilience</b>	Capacity to absorb stress or destructive forces through resistance or adaptation; with capacity to manage or maintain certain basic functions and structures during hazardous events and capacity to recover after an event.
<b>Social audit</b>	An accountability tool to understand, measure, verify, report on and improve an organisation's programmes, finances and performance. It's often used to track a government's performance in the implementation of its policies and programmes.
<b>Social movements</b>	A coming together of people or organisations with a common interest to fight injustice.
<b>Solidarity</b>	The act of standing side by side with others who are suffering from rights violations – expressed through giving money or time or skills to support other people's struggles
<b>Theory of Change</b>	How we believe change will happen: the underpinning belief or logic of how our actions will lead to the intended change.
<b>Unpaid care work</b>	Work that is principally done by women, which is not paid, provides services that nurture other people, and which is costly in terms of time and energy.
<b>Young person</b>	ActionAid's definition of 'young person' recognises all diversity of young people (race, gender, class, caste, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity) aged 18-35. This is to avoid binary language of women and men which excludes people who don't identify as either.