

**A REVIEW OF ACTIONAID'S EDUCATION
WORK 2005-2009**

SYNTHESIS REPORT

YUSUF SAYED & KATE NEWMAN

AUGUST 2009

Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMAMRY.....	3
PART ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND	6
1.1 This document.....	6
1.2 ActionAid International	6
1.3 ActionAid’s International Education Team.....	7
The International Education Strategy: a rights-based approach	7
1.4 This review: methodology.....	8
PART TWO: THE CURRENT PICTURE	11
2.1 The range of ActionAid’s work on education:.....	11
Education work at the grassroots:	11
Education work at national level:	13
International policy work and multi-country projects:.....	15
Cross-thematic work:.....	15
2.2 Strategies and approaches to education:.....	16
2.3 Who ActionAid works with on education:	19
Local linkages:.....	19
National linkages:	20
International linkages:	20
2.4 The perceived impact of ActionAid’s education work	21
Campaigning and policy work:.....	21
The impact of grassroots work:	24
PART THREE: DEVELOPING A STRONG COHERENT PROGRAMME	25
3.1 Setting national education priorities:.....	25
3.2 Future directions for education work:	26
3.4 Developing a coherent and complementary body of education work:	27
PART FOUR: STRATEGIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	28
4.1 WELL-DEFINED AND COMPLEMENTARY ROLES WITHIN AA	29
The skills mix of the international education team:	29
Staff capacity in country programmes:.....	30
Working together on education	31
4.2 CLEAR, SUPPORTED AND SHARED APPROACHES	32
Delivering education rights - strengthening government services:	32
Power and gender analysis:.....	32
Integrated campaigning:.....	33
Participatory approaches:.....	34
Promoting stronger linkages:.....	34
4.3 MUTUALLY SUPPORTIVE PARTNERSHIPS AND COALITIONS	36
4.4 SYSTEMATIC MONITORING, REPORTING AND SHARING OF LEARNING	38
Reporting, sharing learning and strengthening peer support:	38
Monitoring a rights-based approach:	39
4.5 SUSTAINABLE AND FLEXIBLE FUNDING	40
Education spending in ActionAid:	40
Strategic fundraising.....	40
Education and Child Sponsorship	41
PART 5: CONCLUDING REMARKS	42

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Education Review took place between December 2008 and June 2009 and employed a range of quantitative and qualitative methodologies to explore the views of ActionAid staff, partners and other education actors on the impact of the International Education Strategy and gather information on the range of education work taking place across the organisation. The review team was pleased to find such consistent support for education work, but it was also clear from the review that there are various gaps, missed opportunities and challenges as the International Education Strategy is translated into practice.

Taking a principled and process-based approach to working on education rights is not straightforward. There are tensions and compromises to be made by everyone involved, whether this relates to managing diverse expectations, making partnerships work, or balancing fast paced international advocacy and long-term grassroots capacity building. It takes time to build skills and confidence to undertake such work and choices need to be made along the way. The diversity of education work within and between countries is great; both in terms of who ActionAid is working with and the types of work the organisation is involved in. On the one hand the breadth of experience in education is impressive and suggests that programmes respond well to local need. However, the review also found that the decentralised nature of ActionAid, and the complex ways in which strategies and priorities are made and linked, has resulted in a dilution of the education strategy and lack of coherence across the theme. Many localised programmes have little relationship to national and international strategic goals, thereby reducing the scope of impact and possibilities for shared learning.

The recommendations listed here are aimed to enable the education theme to build from their current context and create a more coherent approach to education across the organisation, deepening the understanding and practice of a rights-based approach to education. This involves greater clarity of the roles of, and relationships between, education staff at international and country programme levels. It also requires well-crafted systems to enable mutual accountability, increased attention to monitoring and learning, and a dynamic exchange of ideas, learning, successes and challenges among the education community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

FUTURE FOCUS OF WORK:

The review was not a consensus building process. However, there was broad agreement around four areas of work which should be prioritised in future:

- Adult literacy, including focus on Reflect
- Education financing, including how countries can confront aid dependency
- Quality education, taking on a broader framework of child rights
- Early childhood care and education

THE EDUCATION STRATEGY:

The education strategy should be revised to be more focused, more target driven and a more effective framework for developing and monitoring strategic education programmes. This strategy should be a key reference point for country programmes when developing their wider country strategies to ensure the two are consistent and linked.

- The new strategy should clarify the role of the IET in relation to country programmes and the role of lead advisors in each country.

- It should include an operational plan with fundraising and capacity building programmes.

ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS:

People working on education have relevant skills and experience for their areas of work, but these are in pockets. Roles need to complement each other, to combine different skills and build good communication and accountability within the theme.

- The IET should be staffed appropriately (with more core funding) to continue to provide leadership on education and coordinate a strong and well linked cadre of staff working at different levels.
- Country programmes engaging on education should have at least one full-time member of staff devoted to education at national level, based on a common profile. IET should support induction and professional development of this cadre.
- Invest in strong systems to ensure that the IET responds to country programme priorities.

APPROACHES:

Partners find transparency and collaboration very important in assessing the value of partnership with ActionAid and would like them to be more rooted in national civil society and work more on women's rights. The review found diverse interpretations of what a rights-based approach means in practice; specifically in relation to the role of service delivery.

- Facilitate a collective reflection process to agree how service delivery works within an RBA to education, specifically in relation to government schools and systems. Implementation of RBA should be part of any PRRP.
- The IET should provide guidance on how to integrate gender and power analysis into the planning, implementation and monitoring of education work.
- Different approaches to campaigning (as an extensive process) should be considered.
- The IET should strengthen and invest in Reflect.

PARTNERSHIPS AND COALITIONS:

The education theme is highly regarded for its work in coalitions, and strengthening the links between civil society and teachers unions, at all levels. Yet these relationships are complicated, especially when one partner has more power and resources. Challenges were voiced by education leads, including skewed power relations and the related issue of partners' capacity gaps, and dealing with multiple accountability lines.

- AA needs to acknowledge the tension between the role of partner and support provider and reflect on how to make partnerships more equal; including specific reflection on the transformation of power, and how to adapt the Paris 21 declaration principles.
- The IET should lead in defining types of partnerships and strategic alliances to strengthen education work, including actors beyond education, and other INGOs

MONITORING, REPORTING AND SHARING LEARNING:

The review found that voices of national and local education staff and partners need to be stronger in education planning and campaigning. Systematic monitoring, reporting and sharing of learning are central to this.

- The IET should develop systems to ensure that information about education work is available centrally. This will involve building staff capacity to identify and document relevant issues. Knowledge relevant to AA's wider aims should also systematically be identified and shared.
- IET should develop a monitoring framework with common indicators for tracking aspects of an RBA to education.

SUSTAINABLE AND FLEXIBLE FUNDING:

In many countries there is little connection between funding planning and education programme planning; which is further complicated by the fact that most education lead staff sit within policy teams, separate from education programmes.

- Education leads should be involved in the national budget process for local education programmes.
- Education staff should develop funding plans as part of their annual plan, including areas seeking external funding; and international funding should build from national plans.
- Programmes receiving funds from child sponsorship should review and report how this contributes to children accessing their right to education.

PART ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

“Education is the thing ActionAid is best at. It should be the heart of ActionAid, it is ActionAid’s USP. Education underpins all the other issues - like sustainability, population growth, women’s rights – all these can be tackled ethically through education. To make long term, sustained changes, education is key.”

AA UK Staff Member

1.1 This document

This document is a synthesis of the Education Review, based on the report written by Yusuf Sayed, the external review coordinator, and Kate Newman, the internal review coordinator, with the support of three interns from Sussex University: Charlie Gordon, Ruth Tate, and Joanna Wettern; and the learning drawn from the three critical stories of change developed as part of the review. This synthesis includes some of the key findings and analysis, to give a picture of ActionAid’s current work in education and the impact reported, as well as recommendations to strengthen future work. More detailed information and analysis can be found in the initial report, available from the International Education team.

1.2 ActionAid International

ActionAid (AA) is an international NGO with a federal structure, with an international secretariat led from Johannesburg. It has a presence in 50 countries including Northern affiliates and Southern country programmes. Over time all 50 programmes will become independent national organisations, directly accountable to nationally recruited boards of governors, as affiliates of ActionAid international. The organisation is largely decentralised with priority setting and programme design occurring at the national and local levels, united by its strategy ‘Rights to End Poverty: 2005-2010’ (R2EP).

This structure has been designed to root AA in the South, ensuring that it is led by southern voices and able to align itself with national and global civil society activists and social movements. As part of this aim the organisation has embraced a rights-based approach (RBA), which puts the process, in particular working with specific groups of rights-holders, equal to the aims and the outcome. R2EP identifies six thematic areas for AA’s work. Education is one these, alongside Women’s Rights, Food and Hunger, HIV and AIDS, Human Security in Conflict and Emergencies and Governance. The themes are led by small international teams, located as part of the international secretariat, and linked to different staff at national level for programme implementation and policy-making. Of the 43 country programmes,¹ 34 are working on education.

There is broad agreement among staff that AA is a very person-centred organisation, which has an impact on communication flows, decision-making and accountability. AA’s Accountability, Learning and Planning System (Alps) was developed in 2000 and is the framework for AA’s accountability in all its work, including education. It *‘aims to reflect the organisation’s goal of empowering the communities it works with, and puts analysis of power relations and a commitment to addressing rights – particularly women’s rights – at the heart of all [its] processes’*. (ActionAid 2006, p5).

1.3 ActionAid’s International Education Team.

Education work across ActionAid is led, and supported, by the International Education Team (IET). The IET came into being at the beginning of the current strategy period in 2005, although there has always been a central unit to support education work in the organisation. In the words of one team member:

¹ This does not include 6 Northern Affiliates bringing the figure to 49

“The IET has three roles: externally, in its relationships with partners, its policy and advocacy work – it is very good at this; internally, as a team of high skilled expertise which can be called on and support fundraising, M&E, documentation of good practice, campaign strategies, research; and working with the organisation, which the IET is not so good at.”

The IET fluctuated in size during the review period and currently has 4.8 core staff, with 2.8 members based in the International secretariat in London, one member in Senegal, another in India. The team links to education leads in those countries which have prioritised the education theme in their country strategy. Education leads are mainly recruited at the national level and there is no systematic involvement of the IET in this, or in the induction process. Likewise job descriptions, performance indicators, professional development and career progression are all determined nationally.

The questionnaires and the country visits found staff to be very appreciative of the responsive and supportive relationship they have with the IET, as one education lead shared:

“I have a very good working relationship with IET. I have been supported with my induction and whenever I have problems in a particular area I’m always assisted timely. When I require materials they have been sent to me on time and I have also been supported in campaign strategy development. They have also been supportive in profiling the work we are doing; for example in education financing and the HIV and AIDS behavioural change project for teachers.”
(Malawi report, p19)

This reflects the responses from other education leads, which showed that the most valued functions of the IET is the production of resources and training programmes and facilitating the sharing of lessons and experiences.

The International Education Strategy: a rights-based approach to education

ActionAid’s current strategy, Rights to End Poverty, states:

“The focus of all our work is to ensure that the rights of poor and excluded people are respected, promoted, protected and fulfilled and they are our primary stakeholders. We also direct unrelenting attention on the responsibility, both of the state and of other powerful institutions and individuals, in respecting, promoting, protecting and fulfilling the rights of poor and excluded people.”

This rights-based approach underpins the International Education Strategy (IES), which serves to articulate the goals, vision and mission of education work in ActionAid. The IES interprets the rights-based approach as follows:

“Education is a fundamental human right, the responsibility of the state and a core element of a development policy committed to social justice. Our vision for education is that all children will have free access to quality education within an equitable system. We want to see schools where children’s rights, especially those of girls, are respected, injustices are challenged and children’s lives can be transformed Education is part of the DNA of ActionAid. We are widely recognised as one of the leading international NGOs in the field of education and often regarded as the leading international NGO”

The IET provided practical guidance on adapting the rights-based approach to education work, working with the Global Campaign for Education to produce *Education Rights: a resource pack for practitioners and activists*. This uses the 4A framework developed by Katarina Tomasevski – that education rights should be **available, accessible, adaptable** and **acceptable** - and looks at how this applies to work with different actors:

- *poor and marginalised communities* - strengthening their capacity to define and secure their rights;
- *government and the international community* - ensuring that they uphold their obligations;
- *NGOs and other civil society actors* - to ensure that they use their power to strengthen the relationship between people and their government.

The pack is a key reference for ActionAid's education theme in terms of understanding and implementing a rights-based approach to education. As the pack was published with the GCE this has meant that many other education activists also use it, enabling AA to share its interpretation of an RBA to education and enhancing the influence of their approach.

1.4 This review:

The review took place between December 2008 and June 2009 and was coordinated by Yusuf Sayed (External Lead Consultant) and Kate Newman (Internal Lead Consultant). It was designed to critically examine AA's education work to date and draw out learning and recommendations for the way forward. The review itself was an organisational requirement, but the timing was chosen to ensure that ActionAid could integrate learnings in the last year of its strategy period and begin the process of revising and strengthening its work in education.

The review objectives:

The specific objectives of the review were:

- To evaluate the impact of the IES on education work in ActionAid*
- To explore the impact and quality of our work at local, national and international levels*
- To gather learning on how AA has been working in education*
- To review and deepen our accountability*
- To evaluate how effectively financial resources have been secured and used to achieve the strategic objectives of our education work.*

Key elements of the IES:

The strategy lists six strategic goals:

1. secure constitutional rights to basic education and ensure they are enforceable in practice
2. work with excluded groups to secure free access to quality education as a basic right
3. secure adequate resources from governments and donors to ensure effective delivery of education for all
4. secure sustained and meaningful citizen participation at local and national levels, and increase the transparency, accountability and responsiveness of education systems
5. secure schools that respect all children's rights and provide education that is empowering, relevant and of good quality
6. challenge the reduction of the EFA agenda to primary schooling and ensure balanced investment in early childhood education, adult learning and secondary education

And three operational goals:

1. strengthen internal organisation and capacity
2. strengthen policy, research, campaigning and coalition-building work on education at all levels.
3. build strong linkages to the other five priority themes of ActionAid

Methodology:

The review was formative rather than summative: it sought to understand ActionAid's education work; identify areas for improvement; and challenges that need to be addressed. In addition to an analysis of ActionAid documentation, the review sought to bring in diverse perspectives through a range of activities:

Questionnaires: To explore education work at country level, four questionnaires were distributed to all countries where AA runs education programmes. These gathered perspectives from education leads in country, national and local education partners, and other education actors at national level. There were also a series of community facilitation exercises developed. The country education leads identified relevant respondents and administered the questionnaires. Data requested was both quantitative and qualitative, and designed to provide insights into:

- key areas of education work;
- external relationships;
- how work in education, including rights-based approaches, is understood; and
- perspectives on ActionAid's International Education Strategy (IES), which included comments on the coherence between local-national and international work.

The return rate for the lead education questionnaire was good (from 28 of 34 countries), though feedback from local partners via questionnaires (17 received from 11 countries) and facilitated reflection exercises (carried out in only 2 countries) was very low. No information at all was obtained from Afghanistan, Cameroon, Haiti, Lesotho, South Africa or Zimbabwe.

In-depth country and project reviews: To further explore some of the issues and dynamics, get a clearer picture of different types of education work and bring in some external perspectives, various sub-reviews were commissioned. These were:

- Three '**critical stories of change**' to illustrate different dimensions of AA's work in education. External consultants visited projects, facilitated reflections among key actors and wrote stories highlighting the impact, as well as the complexity and challenges, of the work. The stories selected were:
 - Advocacy on the role of the IMF in education financing in *Sierra Leone*, to explore how an international research programme was interpreted and implemented at national level;
 - The national education coalition in *Brazil*, to look at how a national coalition can be well rooted and successful; and
 - The Reflect work with Dalit groups in *Nepal*, to understand how identity-based movements can emerge and be sustained.
- In-depth **country reviews** were carried out by external consultants on the education programmes in *Nigeria*, *Bangladesh* and *Malawi*, to complement and add depth to the information obtained through the other means. The reviews aimed to reflect on how AA understands and implements its rights-based approach to education, understand the relationships and dynamics behind ActionAid's education work in the countries and explore the impact and effectiveness of the work.
- In addition the review benefited from 2 **visits** by AA UK trustees, one to *Uganda* to trial the survey tools, and one to *Ghana*.

Interviews: As well as the interviews that took place as part of the different in-depth reviews, the review team interviewed international education staff and some of their peers and colleagues from within and outside the organisation. These included:

- 16 ActionAid staff from outside of the education team, to get a picture of the way education relates to and communicates with the wider organisation
- 18 people from other NGOs, donors, research and policy institutes to see what they think of AA's education work and its impact.
- Staff from, or directly linked to, the International Education Team, to review and explore understandings of their work and that of AA education more generally.

Limitations:

The review team faced various limitations in the review process.

- To some extent these were due to the lack of central data systems or shared knowledge across the organisation concerning what education programmes were actually being implemented at national or local level.
- There were also several limitations in relation to the data collection processes for the review. Much of the information collected is self-reported, and most of the external respondents selected by AA education staff. The level of involvement, and potential influence, of education leads in selecting and supporting their partners and peers to respond to the surveys has an impact on the data collected.
- Furthermore, there is a wide discrepancy in the depth of information provided by different countries and different levels, potentially skewing the data further. In particular, the low level of return for local level questionnaires and reflections is significant to the findings and analysis.
- There are also issues concerning different interpretations of the questionnaire, which mean that at times the data gives rise to more questions than answers.

It is important to note however, that it was felt that the process of administering the questionnaires would enable education leads to understand more about the education work happening within their country and encourage greater reflection on the strategy and its implementation. Furthermore, the results from the in-depth country reviews could be used to triangulate and compare information received.

PART TWO: THE CURRENT PICTURE

2.1 The range of ActionAid's work on education:

Given the decentralized nature of ActionAid, education priorities are set at the local level. Thus, while there is central guidance for education, such as the IES, there are also individual country and regional education commitments. This section highlights some of the education work as shared through the review mechanisms². It shows great diversity both within and between countries. On the one hand the breadth of experience in education is impressive and suggests that programmes respond well to locally specific need. However it is also problematic that many localised programmes have little relationship to national and international strategic goals, thereby reducing coherence, impact and shared learning.

Division of labour in education:

The majority of education leads spend more time on national work than local level work, although the picture is varied. Many Asian programmes spend more time on local work, for example. Overall, less time is spent on international work, with the exception of India and Senegal.

Education work at the grassroots:

ActionAid's education work at the grassroots is a mixture of work on rights awareness and campaigning, and provision of, or support to, local education services. Local work to secure education rights includes campaigning, mobilising and awareness raising, capacity building for participation in education governance and budget tracking work with community groups and media. They also promote a rights-based approach to education, publishing materials and influencing the work and approach of other actors. This example from *Cambodia* shows how a focus on rights and governance can have tangible and sustainable results:

Community Organising is a social process to translate a rights based approach into local people's language and practice. AA Cambodia works in remote and excluded areas where people are unaware that education services are the state's obligation. The process has been strengthening local people's understanding of the government's role and responsibilities so as to demand accountability, teachers and schools from the government. Success has led to space for a hundred children to go to school. The number of children benefiting from the programme is small, but it makes a huge contribution to cultivating hope and encouraging other communities in the process of demanding state accountability and responsiveness.

In this example from *Nepal*, the use of Reflect for empowerment and participation in governance is directly linked to children accessing their right to education:

Reflect has sensitised communities to education and encouraged them to send children to school. In many cases, discussion about government provision of scholarships to girls and Dalit children has led to these communities claiming their rights and increasing access to scholarship entitlements. Reflect participants have stood for school management committee (SMC) election and influenced decisions in favour of rights-deprived groups, for example ending user fees. The enrolment of children from marginalised communities has increased as a result.

From *The Gambia* comes an example of a campaign to ensure that the education system meets local needs:

In partnership with The Gambia Teachers' Union and Parents Teacher Associations (PTAs), a campaign was run to enable rural schools to decide on when to open and close school in the year. It

² The questionnaire asked education leads to describe their best education programme/ work – the answers are the source of these examples.

was a cry from the parents that they did not need long Xmas and Easter breaks but preferred to have long summer/ rainy season holidays for their children.

Providing services: At the same time, in many places ActionAid is involved in delivering local education services. For example, 14 countries are involved in supporting school construction and 18 in providing equipment. This quote from *Somaliland* gives an example of the type of services ActionAid provides to strengthen local education:

AA Somaliland train teachers in both public and non-formal primary schools. Training is given to trainers working in regional education offices, covering: pedagogical skills (lesson planning), use of local materials as teaching aids, participatory child-friendly techniques etc. AA Somaliland has built the teaching capacity of more than 200 teachers in the past 3 years.

This example from Sierra Leone shows how service delivery is not necessarily at odds with a rights-based understanding of education as the responsibility of government:

Poor communities with very limited knowledge of their rights have been empowered to be vibrant and take the lead in agitating for facilities such as schools, health centres, and water and toilet facilities. The stride to ensure that these schools are recognised by government and that teachers are put on government's payroll is a strength we want to build upon to ensure that all schools meet the required standard and that quality is ensured at all times.

Links with other themes: The link between education and women's rights is strong, especially in Africa. This includes work on violence against girls, building alliances for girls' education and supporting girls' clubs, and in the case of 13 countries who responded, conducting research into issues in girls' education. Many of the education leads also report being involved in HIV and AIDS work as part of their education programme, although examples were not given. This example from *Malawi* shows the range of work bringing a women's rights perspective to their education work, and how this has influenced others:

AA Malawi conducted research and raised awareness on the issue of violence against girls in school, which led to other organisations taking up the issue, mobilising civil society organisations to take up the issue at local level. A readmission policy was developed to get teen mothers back to school and AA has been very active in raising awareness on this policy and monitoring its implementation. AA has also supported the formation of Mothers' Groups to support and advise girls and their parents, handle cases of violence against girls, link needy girls to the Social Welfare office for bursaries and raise funds to support poor girls' basic needs. AA helped to make schools girl-friendly through the provision of adequate girls' toilets and desks and the School Management Committees have used these examples to advocate for better environments in other schools.

This example from *Uganda* shows how ActionAid's education work adapts to different contexts, in this case ensuring children's right to education is upheld even in conflict:

ActionAid was deeply engaged in advocating for the education rights of children displaced by war in Northern Uganda. Efforts started in 2003 by mobilising the district education actors in war affected districts and creating a loose network of advocates. Through the initiative, a strong platform for education in conflict called the Northern Region Education forum was formed of district civil servants and other actors. The forum is now a fully registered NGO. The strength of the forum was the concrete data which was collected and used for advocacy. This resulted in a unified and integrated approach to education delivery from ministries such as defence, education, health and gender as well as donor agencies. Examinations were for the first time flown to the actual exam centres and the policy on educationally disadvantaged children was strengthened to include children in conflict.

This example from *Bangladesh* shows how the education theme have been able to connect in a practical way with the food security campaign issues:

AA has launched an integrated development campaign in Bangladesh to combat the Monga (seasonal famine). As part of Hunger Free Campaign the education theme has launched a Mid Day School Meal pilot project in two selected schools of Monga prone area.

Adult literacy: Literacy is an important area of work, with a growing number of countries involved in promoting women's literacy, and 13 countries involved in collecting evidence on the state of adult literacy. This example is from *Brazil*:

The Landless Workers' Movement (MST) in Maranhão established a partnership with the state government to teach young people and adults in agrarian reform camp areas to read and write based on a successful methodology from Cuba, influenced by Paulo Freire's work.

However, Reflect is still the best-known and most widely-used approach to adult literacy in ActionAid. In Mozambique, Reflect facilitators are subsidised by the Ministry of education, and this example from *Vietnam* shows how Reflect is integrated with other formal and non-formal approaches to adult literacy:

ActionAid Vietnam has been running its adult literacy and community development programme using the Reflect approach since 2000. So far, the programme has reached more than 12,000 people, mostly ethnic minority women, and 97 Village Community Development Clubs have been formed from Reflect circles. 6 women Reflect participants have become members of commune people's council and many others have become active members of local organizations such as women unions, youth unions etc. Reflect has been adopted by 11 donors and INGOs and a training pack on Reflect was authorised by the Ministry of Education and Training.

Education work at national level:

At national level, education work revolves around campaigning and policy influence, including work with education campaign coalitions and research and campaigning on specific issues such as financing and women's rights. 15 out of 24 countries are engaged in advocating for greater resources for education at national level, with 8 involved in user fees and several involved in the IMF research. The following examples illustrate a variety of campaign issues:

Pakistan: girls' education

Fiery speeches denouncing female education have led to a major catastrophe in the female education sector. This campaign mobilizes the local community and civil society organisations to ensure government takes immediate measures to resume and rehabilitate girls' schools in conflict situations.

West Africa: financing adult education

A campaign organised in three countries (Senegal, Guinea, Mali) to influence their governments to increase the budget allocated to adult education from 1% or less to 3% of the total education budget. The campaign took advantage of the arrival of the international meeting on literacy which brought the global adult education community in Bamako.

India: promoting access to education

ActionAid have been campaigning in Madhya Pradesh to end hidden user fees in government schools, supported by work with the state media to raise awareness of the Right to Education Bill and child rights.

Coalition building: ActionAid's has been committed to building education coalitions following the run up to the Dakar World Education Forum in 2000 and has consistently supported coalition work. This was extended through the Commonwealth Education Fund, and there is currently a strong focus on working with and facilitating campaign coalitions, building the capacity of coalitions and their CSO members, providing funding and technical support and influencing the agenda. This example from Ghana shows how support to coalitions can lead to stronger capacity, collaboration and linkages at all levels:

In 2000 the Ghana National Education Campaign Coalition was established, and ActionAid provided technical and financial support to get the network registered and buttressed at regional and district level. In 2003, with the support of CEF, the GNECC recruited staff for the secretariat and established teams to engage on district level advocacy and ensure that adequate resources were allocated at that level to support primary education. At national level, the coalition served on committees of the Ministry of Education. The activities of the GNECC highlighted the plight of rural school children, gaps in quality education were discussed in the media and political parties had to defend their manifestos for ensuring quality education for the ordinary Ghanaian child. Through collaborative efforts we have succeeded over the past eight years in ensuring quality education remains high on the agenda of the government, and contributed to the introduction of the Capitation Grant which provides fee free education.

Budget advocacy: Local level budget tracking is widespread in order for SMCs and other community groups to monitor spending and hold education service providers to account. Work on the national budget aims to ensure that policy commitments are reflected in spending priorities, as well as conducting research to support budget tracking and accountability at both local and national levels. The work typically includes capacity building, engaging with parliament and media, lobbying the Ministry of Finance and undertaking research. This example from *Pakistan* shows the linkages between budget tracking, research and advocacy at local and national levels:

To prepare for a campaign to ensure appropriate levels of education funding in Pakistan, ActionAid and the Institute of Social and Policy Studies launched district education budget tracking research to provide strong evidence for budget advocacy and increased investment in education. The research aimed to address budgetary processes, underinvestment, and absence of policy levers for the required resource allocation, missing budget lines, delays in fiscal transfers, poor spending capacities and transparency issues at the district level. Data collection is complete and the campaign will be launched during 2009. Following that local partners will be given capacity building on budget tracking in their districts.

Another example comes from a national education partner in Nigeria:

ActionAid carried out a budget tracking training programme and this has helped us to acquire skills that has enabled us track the education budget both at the national and state levels. We have also had roundtable discussions / policy dialogues on key education issues and carried out step down training for our members.

International policy work and multi-country projects:

Education work at international level is coordinated by the International Education Team and includes international policy advocacy work, which may or may not relate to work happening at national level projects, as well as multi-country projects where the IET have raised specific funding to pursue and learn from innovative work implemented at national level across several countries. Policy Advocacy work includes work on education financing and the role of the IMF and influencing the adult literacy agenda. Members of the IET are also active in a number of international fora including the Global Campaign for Education, HLG and the EFA Working Group. Multi-country projects include:

Commonwealth Education Fund (CEF) was launched in March 2002, with support from DFID, to promote free primary education and facilitate local level advocacy and lobbying and operated in 16 poor Commonwealth countries in Africa and Asia (Bangladesh, Cameroon, the Gambia, Ghana, India, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia). The CEF aimed to create a social and political environment in which education becomes the number one national priority for developing nations. It was jointly managed by Save the Children, Oxfam and ActionAid from 2002-2008 with a Secretariat in the UK (now being phased out).

Transforming Education for Girls in Nigeria and Tanzania (TEGINT) is a special grant of about £4m from Comic Relief for promoting girls' education in Nigeria and Tanzania.

Improving Learning Outcomes in Primary Schools (ILOPS) was a one year grant supported by the Hewlett Foundation and the Gates Foundation for work in Burundi, Malawi, Senegal, and Uganda. It aimed at contributing to improved learning outcomes in selected primary schools through the active participation of parents, teachers, and other key actors. This project has contributed to capacity building of ActionAid staff and partners who participated in the widely-shared research which set a baseline for future projects.

The Stop Violence against Girls in School project was launched in July 2008 in Ghana, Kenya and Mozambique with Big Lottery funding. By 2013, the project aims to achieve: a legal and policy framework that specifically addresses VAGS in the project countries, a statistically verifiable reduction in violence against girls, increase in girls' enrolment and retention in project areas and an increase in girls reporting the confidence to challenge the culture of VAGS.

Cross-thematic work:

Cross-thematic work has a different nature at different levels. The Sierra Leone story commissioned for this review found that connections between different issues and themes are very clear and easy to make at personal, or local level, but become more complex as the issues are abstracted and bureaucracies further complicate collaboration – towards national and international policy levels. 11 of the 25 national education leads who completed the questionnaire admitted that cross-thematic linkages have been weak. Overall, the strongest linkages are with Women's Rights (23 out of 25 countries), followed by HIV/AIDS and Governance.

In particular there is strong gender focus in education work in the Africa region. This could be because three multi-country projects (EGBENN, TEGINT and ILOPS) have a strong gender focus or be due to good working relationships and compatibility of strategies between the themes. One ActionAid staff member interviewed noted this relationship:

"There has been a healthy, robust relationship [with women's rights], maybe because of the overlap of the work. They've been supportive, and they've shared common interests. "

However, the interviewee also recognised the difficulty in maintaining strong linkages, considering the multiple pulls and dimensions of planning and prioritisation, including local partnerships and availability of funding and resources:

Women's rights in education work:

Education leads were asked how a women's rights perspective affects their education work. Responses included:

- Reducing violence against girls, from campaigns to providing girls' toilets;
- Vocational training and information for girls.
- Women's literacy and empowerment, including Reflect and teacher training programmes
- Increasing women's confidence and capacity to participate in governance of education, including mothers groups and school management committees.
- Advocacy and information on women's rights, girls' education or violence against women.
- Including a gender lens in the planning, implementation and monitoring of all education work, and prioritising funding relationships.

“However, it is not always easy to sell a complex feminist understanding of women’s rights; this is where AA comes unstuck with partners – who may not share the same beliefs or values.”

It is clear that external funding can be used to inspire cross-thematic work, but that deliberate effort needs to be made to enable these connections to happen.

2.2 Strategies and approaches to education:

“We have always emphasised a critical approach to our own practice, being willing to reflect and learn so that our work is continually evolving and improving.” Review TORs

The review showed that most country leads feel they are meeting the operational goals of the international education strategy to some extent, with strongest overall progress on goal 3: strengthening policy, research, campaigning and coalition building. However, over a third of them feel that they have made limited or no progress on the three goals, suggesting perhaps a lack of investment in organisational development. One of the main objectives of the review was to understand how ActionAid’s rights-based approach is being interpreted and translated into practice at national and local levels.

The review found a high level of commitment to, and knowledge of, the rights based approach among staff and partners, as these quotes from local partners demonstrate:

“RBA makes the state accountable and only this approach will provide space to organise and empower poor people.” (Local partner – India)

“[Without an RBA] we will fail to do essential actions, will not be efficient, not relevant.” (Local partner – Ghana)

Education leads demonstrated knowledge of the relevant national and international legislation to support rights-based work on education, although admitted gaps in knowledge and use of regional instruments. However, on closer scrutiny, the shared understanding of a rights-based approach begins to show up some contradictions. For example, the near total agreement on the inalienability of rights was contradicted by the fact that over 44% of education leads and local partners agreed that rights could be limited under certain contexts. Agreement with the strategy of affirmative action and positive discrimination to favour girls or ethnic minorities was also higher at national than local level. The following extracts from the in-depth review in *Malawi* show how complicated the transition to a rights-based approach can be:

The review showed a number of programmes focused on a rights-based approach at local, national and international levels, including awareness-raising, women’s rights in education and strengthening government accountability and citizens’ participation. Malawians were long exposed to a system of not questioning authorities but this is changing, and after capacity building people are questioning their authorities and demanding social services.

However, community expectations of AA Malawi have meant that change is slow, and the shift from a service delivery to a RBA initially caused conflict due to high levels of poverty and different views on child sponsorship. The communities had got used to service delivery from ActionAid and it was not easy for them to adapt to the change in approach. During focus group discussions with mothers groups, CBOs and SMCs, it was learnt that people felt they were being neglected by ActionAid due to change of their approach, although they later got used to the new way of working.

The above quote illustrates the most important apparent contradiction emerging from the data: between the acceptance of a rights-based approach underpinning all education work, and the continuing provision of direct services at local level. Five local education partners (23%) stated that the majority of their funding is for service delivery work and nine (41%) consider service delivery as a crucial element of a rights-based approach. 68% of education leads agreed that ActionAid should provide (in the last instance) education rights and services to groups who have none, as the lead from India explained:

"Perhaps more service delivery for specific vulnerable groups like migrant children or bridge courses for mainstreaming out of school children where the government provision is slow to deliver."

And the Nigeria in-depth review highlighted the community's perspective on this issue:

At the local community level, members were aware of an RBA mentioning making claims on duty bearers and holding government to account. Yet it was also evident that for the local community RBA was as much about changes to their material conditions and the provision of services as about making claims. Thus, local communities cited the building of schools, the provision of electricity transformers as material goods which changed their lives.

Furthermore, some education leads, such as Zambia, felt that ActionAid has a moral imperative to provide services for communities in whose name funds have been raised.

"If children need to go to school and government is not able or unwilling, and if AA has the means (through resources raised in the name of children), they are morally and duty-bound to give children education."

The surveys and the in-depth country reviews reflect a sense that although service delivery is still a part of ActionAid's education work at local level, this is not seen to be at odds with a rights-based approach. It is service delivery employed within the context of rights, as the response from Nepal explains:

"Providing service delivery does not mean anti-rights and only advocacy might not guarantee that work is rights based. The main difference between service delivery and rights-based are on three accounts: what message we give the community; how we facilitate our discussion with the community; and what is the goal of our intervention. If services assist the community to organise and mobilise then service provision can be integrated in our work."

Meanwhile, the response from Brazil shows the other extreme of the argument:

"[Service delivery] is not the role of ActionAid. Its role is to support social organisations to pressure the government to improve living conditions and to guarantee human rights."

Examples of service delivery as a rights-based approach:

ActionAid *Zambia* implemented a school construction project with the community, with skills transfer as a central component. Seeing the community's commitment to the project, the Ministry of Education allocated an extra classroom block. This was only possible because AA and the community had done half of the work. AA *Zambia* recognise that a rights based approach requires honest dialogue and recognition of the fact that our government has limited resources for rural areas but while advocacy continues at national level, children are being denied a right to education because the Ministry of Education can't afford to build schools. Our intervention ensured that children in another area could benefit from an extra classroom block as AA have already constructed one at the project site.

ActionAid *Ethiopia* has been establishing Access centres in the poorest and most remote communities. Now local government bodies are taking increased responsibility for sustaining these programmes and Access has become an alternative basic education programme. Local government have been allocating resources and planning, implementing and monitoring Access, recognition and support which has been achieved as a result of AAE's continuous engagement in advocacy and lobbying work. The linkage in most areas with the formal school system has been encouraging and helped poor children to make the transition from Access centres to formal schools more easily.

The review found that the danger of service delivery leading to, or strengthening, dependency is still a real one, and the ideal balance may still not have been struck. An AA UK trustee, noted from his visit to partners in Ghana:

“Essentially the community seemed locked into a dependency/ service delivery model. The focus was almost entirely on what services ActionAid could/ should provide to them. There was an acknowledgment of the need to build capacity and demand their rights but there was a questioning of how effective this approach had been or could be.”

He reached the conclusion that:

“For the continued credibility of ActionAid Ghana and in order to maintain the trust, confidence and commitment of communities the RBA must be delivered alongside an element of service delivery.”

This view was echoed by many other voices in the review, calling for the organisation to review its stance on service provision in education and support different, contextualised approaches to securing education rights. At the grassroots, where material needs are so evident, staff and partners working on education need support to develop a more nuanced understanding of the link between the approaches, and support for implementation. Others working in support functions such as fundraising and communications also felt that more clarity about the link between services and rights would strengthen their work. One AA staff member pointed this out:

“It is interesting that the IET strategy is all about rights, while at the same time AA builds schools all over the place, usually with really good explanations. We are still fundraising for this, and some funders, like the Isle of Mann, will only fund this.”

2.3 Who ActionAid works with on education:

This section explores the data emerging about how relationships with peers and other actors within and outside of ActionAid support the achievement of ActionAid’s education objectives. ActionAid works through partnerships and in coalitions, the nature and strength of which vary widely. The data given on the types of groups that AA education work focuses on shows consistency with the aim of solidarity with the poor and marginalised: women and girls are highly targeted, as are excluded groups including ethnic minorities, disabled children, people living with HIV, child labourers, illiterate adults, orphans and children who are displaced by or living in conflict and emergency situations. Context is very relevant to decisions about who to work with, for example in Latin America there is a stronger focus on landless and marginalised farming communities and in Asia there is less focus on people living with HIV.

Local linkages:

At local level, most countries report having strong links with primary schools, though less with other stages of education such as teacher training colleges, and community based organisations working on education and relevant issues. The strongest relationships were reported with local organisations and groups campaigning on education and children’s’ rights, as well as women’s groups, faith-based organisations and youth groups. However, the picture was very mixed, and there was clearly a lot of scope for relationships with community based organisations of all kinds to be strengthened.

Overall, local education partners perceive ActionAid to be an effective organization, a good facilitator and easy to work with. These quotes illustrate some of the experiences of partnership with ActionAid expressed by local partners:

“Our relationship is mutual and facilitative. We have the freedom and liberty to interact and negotiate with AA with regard to deciding programme plans, modification of plans and budget appropriation.” (Local partner - India)

“The partnership has been characterised with transparency and downward accountability. It has built our organisation’s human and institutional capacities. Since the partnership, our organisation has been rated among the best in our region with good records of reporting, strengths in problem/ solutions analysis, strategic planning and we in turn are now strengthening the capacities of other NGOs.” (Local partner - Nigeria)

However, the Nigeria country review uncovered some of the intricacies of local level partnerships which, from the point of view of local partners, are not always equal:

Partner perspectives in Nigeria:

The benefits of partnership with ActionAid identified by local organisations were mainly to do with the training and capacity development support they received, including training on Reflect, and in some cases visits to other countries. They feel this empowered them as organisations to work effectively with local communities. One local partner stated that through ActionAid they *‘learnt how to talk to big people’*. They believe that such training has collateral benefit, and they use it to secure other work. ActionAid Nigeria was described as *‘focused’, ‘result orientated’* and *‘getting things done’*.

However, local partners also pointed out challenges in the relationship. The first was that they felt that they were not fully involved in the design of the project from inception, but brought in at a later stage. A community member stated that they first knew about ActionAid *‘when they came to tell us we were selected to be part of the project’*. In addition, a key issue for local partner organisations was that they felt that they did not have full financial control and say over how monies were spent. This was manifest in statements such as *‘AA specified what we can spend the money on’* and *‘AA specifies how much we can spend on staff on this project’*.

National linkages:

At national level some of the strongest links are with NGOs involved in advocacy work on education, women’s rights and children's rights. AA is perceived by its national partners as an organisation that provides space for other civil organisations and is process orientated. Links with education ministries are generally quite constructive, although relationships with national government and parliament clearly need to be strengthened further in many countries in order to achieve effective policy advocacy.

Teachers unions have become an important ally in many national coalitions campaigning for quality education for all, and the international advocacy on education for all. One ActionAid staff member noted that:

“Work with Teachers Unions has intensified over the strategy period, and this has influenced the education coalitions at national level; when trade unions join the education coalitions they have to look at issues differently and they become more political, and have a stronger platform/collective voice”

Integrating local and national partnerships

A national education partner in *Bangladesh* explained how AA work with partners at local and national levels:

“AA Bangladesh motivates local partners and other local actors to engage with the formal education system by administering various participatory advocacy tools and techniques. National level partners (not all) calibrate their policy advocacy work based on these real life engagements, evidence, voices, etc. where AA plays a lead coordination and facilitation role.”

However, despite this around half of countries responding claimed to have no relationship at all with teachers unions. What’s more, despite the extent of international focus on IMF conditionalities, there

are not generally strong links with organisations working on financing issues such as debt and the international finance institutions, or with finance ministries.

International linkages:

At international level, there are strong linkages with international campaign coalitions and INGOs working on education, both from country level and IET staff. The IET have also have a range of relationships with different funders, including trusts in the UK and US and DfID. The IET also have built strong collaborative relationships for policy advocacy with NGOs and policy research organisations working on financing issues and the IMF. One respondent aptly noted that *'if there were no AA, no GCE, we would just have cheerleaders in the international arena'*. Another saw ActionAid as a *'critical friend asking the hard questions'* and an ally in arguments with financing institutions such as the World Bank and the Fast Track Initiative (FTI).

However, questions were raised about the blurring of organisational boundaries between ActionAid and the coalitions of which it is a member. One respondent summed this up by saying that in some international fora *'it is not always clear where AA begins and GCE ends'*, for example on the FTI Board. Additionally, some respondents noted that *'AA does not take all members along in bodies'* and that it needs need to take more fully into account the agenda and needs of other NGOs.

Challenges of multiple roles and partnerships:

At both local and national level AA plays multiple roles. These include being an advocate of change, and empowering and facilitating local organisations, as well as directly funding organisations and implementing projects. One staff member noted that: *"AA basically acts as a donor to CSOs: CSOs raise money from AA in the same way as they would from any other funder."* There are challenges and tensions between these roles which have to be carefully and effectively managed and which require reflection and guidance across the NGO sector as a whole. Capacity building and campaigning partnerships are complicated in many cases by the issue of funding, as the Malawi Country Review noted:

"ActionAid needs to recognize that where its staff are implementing a project, the partners perceive it as competition and feel ActionAid is stifling the capacity of their organisations. Therefore ActionAid needs to balance being a donor and an implementer not only in rural communities but also in national activities."

The Nigeria review showed how the strength and power of ActionAid, while employed in the service of local communities and civil society groups, can also hinder their progress. This quote from a partner illustrated this:

"We participated in the National Council for Education but for the Ministry we were identified as AA. While there is equality in operational and implementation matters, the major decisions about policy direction, linkages with funders are in the hands of AA."

It is not easy to find the right balance between internal organisational imperative and collective aspirations, but acknowledgment and discussion is a step forward. The international initiative on CSO effectiveness is looking at a range of issues around NGO accountability and effectiveness including how NGOs work with countries, each other, and with other partners. Given its role as a member of CEF, AA has a rich history and experience to draw from to this end.

2.4 The perceived impact of ActionAid's education work

"ActionAid is like a goat, because a goat would not be satisfied grazing from one plant. It browses from different plants and sometimes from a plant it has never tasted. For me ActionAid is like a goat. It is ready enough to try new approaches." (National Education Actor, Ethiopia)

"ActionAid is like a dog. A dog is intelligent, defensive in the sense that it can go against the enemy when rights are denied and also announces its presence." (National Education Actor, Nigeria)

In general, at international level most organisations and individuals have a positive view of the work that ActionAid does, the calibre of its staff, its engagement in international fora and its commitment to building civil society capacity. One respondent noted that if there was no AA *'then there would be a need to invent one'*, and another said *'AA punches above its weight'*.

ActionAid and adult literacy:

ActionAid is respected for its work to ensure the education development agenda is not reduced to a narrow focus on primary education. Respondents pointed to the work done on the International Literacy Benchmarks, participation in CONFITEA and in the Literacy Working Group. Specific mention was made of ActionAid's work on Reflect.

Campaigning and policy work:

"AA is known for its position on Education rights. This has helped keep the issue of rights to education strongly on the national education agenda." (National education partner - Sierra Leone)

"AA plays a critical role by providing funding for both institutional capacity of coalitions and program activities. They also provide technical assistance to members of the coalition in programme formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation." (National education partner - Ghana)

The IET has focused its policy work over recent years on the influence of the IMF on national education spending, making this a hot topic on the international development agenda. However reports on the impact of this work are not so clear, and difficult to attribute. One respondent summarised the view of many by noting that the work has raised awareness and engendered advocacy and campaigning momentum across many CSOs. Others pointed to the lack of policy change and change in the reality on the ground, showing the difficulty of assessing the impact of policy advocacy work, especially at international level.

The impact of the IMF work in Sierra Leone:

The critical story undertaken on this work in Sierra Leone showed the complexity of identifying and attributing change and impact. Some policy change was noted:

"Since the research was launched the IMF have officially dropped their promotion or condition of public-sector wage bill ceilings in poor countries. ... Whether or not this policy change can be attributed to the work of ActionAid and other civil society organisations, it is an important shift. Nationally the work also contributed to policy change. In 2008 the Minister of Education made a public commitment to lower pupil-teacher ratios (PTR) to 40:1 through increased teacher training and recruitment, as a result of broad public pressure."

However the study found that the policy changes were not necessarily translated into changes on the ground – the ceilings are still in place in many countries, and the PTR target was reversed. The work also helped raise awareness of the role and influence of the IMF and the dynamics of policy making, and increased the space for civil society to engage in policy and challenge decision makers, and the visibility and influence of AA Sierra Leone.

“Policy makers (including the IMF and government) peers and partners see ActionAid as a legitimate representative of civil society voices and concerns in the policy process. Based on this, ActionAid have been able to proactively engage in public policy and finance processes, for example working with the World Bank to get the Public Finance Monitoring Grant set up, which aims to fund civil society actors to monitor government policy and implementation”

The story shows how national and international action can be complementary, and can open up the space for national civil society to link with different actors. However, there needs to be significant reflection on how to move from policy change to ensuring change in practice and lived reality, while sustaining motivation across the range of actors.

At national level, ActionAid has been one of the main initiators and drivers behind the formation of coalitions including NGOs, civil society movements and unions, which have brought an alternative voice into international education debates generally dominated by governments and donors. However, in relation to impact the development of a sustainable movement was scored very low by all groups of respondents.

National education actors stress that ActionAid has made a big impact with regards to understanding how the Right to Education can be met³, and what a rights-based approach to education means. Impact is easier to assess at this level, as clearly there has been growth in the number of national coalitions and strengthening of those that existed previously as evident in the review of the CEF.

Financing Basic Education – the impact of the Brazil education campaign

The critical story on the education campaign in Brazil shows how the Brazilian Campaign for the Right to Education was built, in part initiated by ActionAid to carry out focused campaigning with specific objectives to ensure ‘constant national pressure for local changes to be transformed into public policies’. The Campaign includes a broad range of institutions (INGOs, national NGOs, social movements, unions, councillors and municipal managers) in 18 of Brazil’s states in addition to a national coordination function. It played a crucial role in raising the profile of education funding at a time when the debate was largely about management, successfully influencing public education policies.

FUNDEB, the fund which provides the financing for basic education, was ratified by the Brazilian president in June 2007. Rather than criticising FUNDEB in its entirety the campaign analysed specific elements of the proposal and offered alternatives. Optimism and confidence characterised the identity of the movement along with the aim to contribute not to complain. The impact of the campaign is clear, with the extension of the education fund to include nursery and upper secondary education, and there were many lessons learned in relation to enabling a range of actors to work together on a specific issue. For example, it was key to sustain a permanent agenda, with time limits and well-defined objectives of each stage of the proposal; the network was sustained through circulating quality information and the contribution and role of each actor was valued. There were also a range of secondary gains resulting from the mobilisation – including expanded relationships for education actors, stronger links with women’s rights organisations and better specific knowledge in a range of areas including education funding and education for small children.

The Brazilian focus on a concrete education-related objective is in contrast to the experience in Nepal, where the Reflect approach was central in mobilizing Dalits based on their identity and centuries of oppression. Moreover Reflect was central in supporting the development of communication strategies, essential to the coordination of the movement as it grew nationally.

³ All 19 actors think that AA has increased understanding of the right to education.

Reflect and communication for sustained campaigning in Nepal:

As the Dalit rights movement evolved the local organizations, Sangams, became information centres or communication bases for the movement, where Dalits could meet to debate key issues and strengthen cooperation and collective action. Through Reflect processes Sangam members were able to minute their meetings and disseminate agreements, produce a range of communication materials, from banners and pamphlets for public information to appeals for tenancy or education access, and access and discuss newspaper articles. These communication strategies were central to facilitating coordinated action across the region and sustaining motivation of those involved in the movement. They comment that the movement has evolved and been sustained due to its roots in Reflect, the key approach in supporting local level analysis and identification of appropriate actors and strategies to extend and support a movement as it links from local to national level.

The following table shows the main impacts of ActionAid's work as ranked by ActionAid education staff, partners and peers at national level:

Table one: impacts of AA's national work on education

AA education leads:	National education partners:	National education actors:
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Stronger capacity to demand education or access education services from the government2. increased public focus on the right to education3. Gender analysis in the design and implementation of work	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Vital and tangible education benefits to marginalized groups2. Increased public focus on the right to education3. Greater understanding of a rights based approach to education by education activists	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Increased national understanding of how the right to education can be met for the poor2. Increased public focus on the right to education3. Greater understanding of a rights based approach to education by education activists

The impact of grassroots work:

ActionAid's work is perceived to have strong impact at local level, keeping issues on the education agenda, organising civil society and strengthening commitment to the marginalised. Data shows that partners appreciate ActionAid for being an organisation which creates opportunities and networks, and develops capacity building. A local partner from India stated:

"ActionAid's approach has been to strengthen communities to lead a rights-based fight, which is unique and most effective compared to other organisations working in the field of education which primarily focus on service delivery ... AA strengthens the capacities of community groups and organisations through various trainings and inputs and facilitates to lead their fight, so that it is realised by themselves."

However, the impact on the governments' ability to meet their responsibilities to provide education is less obvious to partners on the ground. The following tables show the most frequently mentioned areas of impact of AA's education work at local and national levels, as identified by AA staff and local partners.

Table two: impacts of AA's local work on education

AA education leads:	Local partners:
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Local communities are more aware of their right to education2. Local people have a greater understanding of a rights based approach to education3. Stronger capacity to demand education or access education services from the government	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. local communities are more aware of their right to education2. We use gender analysis throughout the design and implementation of our work3. Vital and tangible education benefits to marginalised groups

4. Vital and tangible education benefits to marginalised groups	4. We use a framework of legal and constitutional rights to design our work
---	---

Though positive impact is constantly noted, many respondents find it difficult to make the connection between ActionAid's work, and visible differences in the material conditions of communities. It is possible, as the review team noted in the case of Nigeria and other country visits, that people may become more aware of their rights but for this to translate into changing material conditions not only takes time but depends on other changes to happen alongside. Generally it was also of concern that at local and national level there was low perceived impact in relation to building sustainable movements which would continue to secure education rights once ActionAid turned its attention elsewhere.

PART THREE: DEVELOPING A STRONG COHERENT PROGRAMME

The review confirmed that ActionAid has huge breadth of experience in education work across the majority of its country programmes, and there is strong support and admiration for the education theme across the organisation. The work also has a strong reputation externally. No one questioned the overall focus of education work or the rights-based approach. However there is evidence that the decentralised nature of ActionAid, and the complex ways in which strategies and priorities are set and linkages made, have resulted in a dilution of the education strategy and lack of coherence across the theme. This section draws together data on future priorities for education leads, along with different perspectives on the strengths and roles of ActionAid in education rights, to set the basis for the recommendations on ways forward in section four.

3.1 Setting national education priorities:

The review showed that the focus and content of work varies from country to country, and decisions on education work are driven not only by the international education strategy, but by local strategies, priorities and partnerships. The box below shows the range of issues which come into play when staff develop plans and budgets for national and local education work, given as reasons why certain IES objectives had been dropped.

Influences on national priority setting:

The following quotes show some of the complexities, contextual issues and conflicting pressures which influence the choices and priorities of national level education staff:

Context and partners:

- *“AA Brazil has always worked on education issues aligned with the objectives of Brazilian Campaign for Right to Education.”*
- *“This was a formative stage of thematic work and strategies were evolving based on our existing work with DAs and CEF initiatives” (India)*
- *“We started our work around constitutional rights in 2005 but since late 2006 nothing could be done as there was no parliament.” (Bangladesh)*

Lack of resources and capacity:

- *“Because we don’t have enough staff to work on the Education theme we focus on primary education in the new five years strategy.” (China)*
- *“There is a lack of information and expertise available for [strategic goal 3]” (Ethiopia)*
- *“Due to limited resources, we have been largely focusing on basic education to the expense of adult learning and early childhood education.” (Tanzania)*

Competing interests:

- *“There was practically very little implementation of Education programmes on the ground ... resources from other themes were mobilised for the food and hunger campaign.” (The Gambia)*
- *“In 2005, even though one of our strategic objectives for education work in ActionAid Nigeria was making education a justiciable right, we couldn’t direct our activities to it because we were strictly implementing donor focused projects.”*

Added to the planning issues, is the lack of systematic reporting, knowledge management and sharing across the education theme, meaning that local programmes often operate in isolation. The review

found that there are a variety of concerns around the impact of this lack of coherence and linkage. These include:

- National and international initiatives are not easily designed to build on and extend local work, or to systematically learn from and improve on education programming. Neither is local programming designed to build on or support national advocacy initiatives. This creates a disjuncture between policy changes achieved at international or national level and changes in actual experiences of people living in poverty.
- While ActionAid's reputation for education work is mainly built on the advocacy and communication work of the IET, their high-level engagement on education policy has become detached from everyday programme issues, which require different operational knowledge and expertise.
- There is a lack of common understanding of ActionAid's political position and role in achieving education rights for all, specifically in relation to national governments, and how this informs advocacy efforts at every level.
- The interpretation and translation of the rights-based approach is not consistent. At local level the challenges of poverty, community expectations and the weak capacity of partners and government further complicate this, yet the communication and exchange mechanisms are not there to support people trying to adapt the approach.

While the decentralised structure of ActionAid makes the achievement of coherence and linkages more challenging, the review also noted that ActionAid's current structure and coverage give it great potential to enhance its impact at every level.

3.2 Future directions for education work:

While the International Education Strategy is a strong interpretation of the RBA in education work, the review found that it is in effect too broad and open to interpretation to enable country programmes to develop strong, strategic and well-monitored education programmes. 22% of education leads responding to the questionnaire had not read or used the strategy, and the majority do not discuss their education programme with the IET. Education staff at every level are over-stretched and expected to play many different roles, drawing on a range of skills that are unlikely to be held by one person.

ActionAid needs to decide how much to continue supporting local diversity and flexibility in education programming and how to develop coherent themes of work. Even given the preference for locally-led planning there is a need to develop a more strategic sense of which opportunities are important to pursue which fit most effectively with AA's work programme. There is clearly a need for an international education strategy which builds on, supports, connects, inspires and provides a guiding narrative for AA's education work at all levels. This should build from the future directions and priorities emerging from the review.

The future priorities, programme ideas and strategies of national ActionAid staff working on education vary immensely. They included work on specific issues such as early childhood education, adult literacy, HIV/Aids and gender and specific activities such as teacher training or research, developing resources and publishing relevant material (which many education leads stated would be core to their programming over the next three years). The leads plan to work with a variety of actors including:

- specific sections of government (national ministries, district/local education authorities);
- specific marginalised groups;
- continued engagement with, and strengthening of, education partners and coalitions.

The steer from national actors and partners was just as varied. National partners suggested an increased focus on adult literacy; work on education quality in the classroom, including teacher capacity, and a greater focus on child rights. National actors identified work on the rights of women and specific excluded groups, and work on the role of the private sector for AA to focus on in the future, and suggested stronger systems were necessary to link local and national work.

Internationally the work on financing was well known and received strong support in the main, while there was a feeling that it would be beneficial if ActionAid reasserted itself within the adult literacy debate, specifically extending work with Reflect. Surprisingly, there was little synergy between what education leads identified as work they would be doing at national level and the work they wanted to be taken forward in the International Education Strategy.

3.4 Developing a coherent and complementary body of education work:

The review was not a consensus building process, so it is not surprising that a range of priorities and suggestions were given for ActionAid to pursue in their future education work. However, there was broad agreement around four areas of work:

- Adult literacy, including focus on Reflect
- Education financing, including focus on how countries, especially in Africa, can confront the increasing dependency on aid
- Early childhood care and education
- Quality education, taking on a broader framework of child rights

To build on this basis further, the review team suggest a set of principles to apply in developing future work programmes and strategies, as set out in the next section. If ActionAid is to capitalise on its current position in education it needs to ensure that it has a strongly articulated position on its role and function in achieving education rights for all. This position should be relevant and appropriate to the diverse contexts in which ActionAid works and should provide a strong framework in which to develop coherent, complementary and strategic education programmes. Moreover, this unified approach to education should give meaning to the right to education and clearly state how education work contributes to ActionAid's wider vision of 'Rights to End Poverty'. This will ensure that ActionAid is known for its strong, rooted, effective education programmes, as well as its presence in international fora.

Recommendations:

- The current education strategy should be revised to ensure that it is more focused, more target driven and more effective as a framework for developing and monitoring strategic education programmes. This strategy should be a key reference point for country programmes when developing their wider country strategies to ensure the two are consistent and linked.
- The new strategy should clarify the role of the IET in relation to country programmes and the role of lead advisors in each country.
- It should also include an operational plan containing fundraising and capacity building programmes.

The next section looks more specifically at how this future vision can be achieved, noting that a process of strategy development would involve mapping current capacities to ensure that the strategy is relevant, achievable and addresses the issues raised by the review.

PART FOUR: STRATEGIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthening the coherence and complementarity of education work across ActionAid requires moving beyond suggestions for specific activities, and building a programme of work which maximises the potential of AA engagement at different levels, with all the implications that has for staffing and roles. The review recommends the following set of principles as a basis for identifying and agree on (up to three) specific initiatives designed to work across levels:

Principles for developing future education work:

Managing different knowledge and perspectives:

While a new programme will need to build from the local perspective, it is important to frame the discussion with knowledge of what issues are, and what will have traction nationally and internationally. This includes being aware of the different priorities and interests of civil society, donors and policy makers. While the reality of education systems and discrimination differs widely across the areas where AA works, all programmes should be designed within the 4A (accessibility, adaptability, availability and appropriateness) framework. This should enable AA staff to balance local flexibility and responsiveness with a more coherent and linkable national and international agenda. This could be further facilitated by developing one common project or campaign across each region or sub-region.

Developing alternative solutions:

While AA has rightly criticised the direct delivery of small scale alternative schooling models, the review finds a need for constructive engagement with government school systems through offering alternative solutions; whether this is specifically about education delivery or education policy making more broadly. This involves investing in well evidenced research to produce alternative policies, and suggests a more collaborative advocacy and campaigning style (see Brazil critical story of change). An example mentioned was engaging governments in exploring creative ways of mobilising and utilising resources to achieve the right to education for all.

Thinking about sustainability and capacity:

Careful planning is required to ensure that all work processes and methods contribute directly to building sustainable movements which can continue to claim diverse rights when AA's attention turns to other projects and communities. This involves developing an integrated advocacy/ campaigning style of work at the local level, drawing on the range of participatory methodologies AA has been supporting, to campaign and build movements within a coherent rights-based framework.

Sharpening and coordinating participatory methodologies:

Underlying all participatory processes are a set of principles which involve analysing power and strengthening people's analytical and communication skills, and capacity for action. Reflect is well-recognised as one of ActionAid's strengths, and is also key in this regard in that it links these skills to literacy learning within an intensive and extensive programme. More focused investment in and use of Reflect should not only contribute to sustainability and local-national linkages (see Nepal critical story of change) but also contribute to the evidence base for engagement in international adult education fora.

Deepening gender and power analysis:

While there are many examples of education projects which focus on women and girls, there is a need to ensure that programmes are more strategically designed and implemented to tackle power relations and contribute to strengthening women's rights more generally.

The following sub-sections deal with key elements in achieving a more coherent and effective body of work in education.

4.1 WELL-DEFINED AND COMPLEMENTARY ROLES WITHIN AA

The current education strategy, and mix of approaches, encompasses a broad variety of capacity needs. The skills, contacts and knowledge required for policy analysis and influence are quite different from those required to strengthen the participation of women in school governance, for example. The review found that, while people working on education have the relevant skills and experience for their own areas of work, these are concentrated in pockets and do not draw on and complement each other as well as they should.

This section brings together some of the analysis and recommendations relating to the numbers and profiles of staff and to the building of skills and capacity both to strengthen areas of work, and to nurture the commitment and retainment of staff. It also explores how staff roles interact and complement each other, to build good communication and accountability within the theme. It is clear that some of these issues are relevant to ActionAid more generally and as such could be viewed as wider organisational recommendations.

The skills mix of the international education team:

The review recognises the critical roles played by the IET in providing coherence to the work as a whole, supporting country programmes, engaging with international actors and agencies, promoting lesson learning and information sharing and collaborating with other themes. However, there was also a sense that the team is currently strongly policy oriented at the expense of other valuable roles. What's more some felt that the policy focus itself was too constrained to education issues, too focused internationally, and not linked effectively to wider issues concerning the organisation, as expressed by the head of another theme:

“There must be more people who could talk more generally about other policy issues. There is a leadership gap when it comes to engaging with AA from an education perspective.”

Although the focus and mandate of ActionAid's international thematic teams is not entirely clear, there was a feeling from staff in and outside the education theme that the IET should offer more extensive programme support and have more in-depth programme knowledge, including technical understanding of programme implementation at local level and capacity building at national level on issues such as developing local education funding plans, or linking to donor consortia. One education lead noted:

“It would be good if the IET had a technical person who could come and work in country, building capacity, helping connect up the different things that are going on and give vibrancy to the theme. There is a lot more presence of the other themes in sub-regional meetings and this influences the planning process at national level. It is motivating for the CPs to have more support from the themes.”

Generally, it was unanimous that the current IET is too small to service its large agenda and the varied demands of it. The following quote from an AA staff member captures some of the issues:

“The team has a high level of expertise, it has depth and breadth, but it is too small, and can't do everything it wants... They have had difficulties when they want to move something on ... or influence how programmes are designed.”

Recommendations for IET structure:

- 4.1.1 The IET should continue to **provide leadership** on education across the organisation, coordinating a strong and well linked cadre of staff working at different levels.
- 4.1.2 The precise **role of the IET** should be clarified within the new or revised IES. This will include expectations in relation to international policy advocacy/representation, national capacity

building and technical support, and fundraising. The balance will depend on organisational expectations of the role of the international thematic teams.

4.1.3 The **size and skills mix** of the IET needs to be increased to reflect the needs and expectations of it. There should be clear role profiles for all team members, directly linked to aspects of the strategic plan, and based on analysis of context, gaps and work priorities, and communicated to the wider team and organisation. The review team suggest:

- All IET staff have a specific region or sub-region as part of their remit to strengthen the regional structure.
- All IET staff should be required to spend at least 25% of their time providing operational support to country programmes.
- That additional core funding is made available to increase the size of the IET

4.1.4 The IET needs pay more attention to the needs of **the wider organisation**, sharing lessons learnt and engaging in organisational debates such as how to communicate an RBA to northern funders.

Staff capacity in country programmes:

Although in there is a designated education lead person in all of the 34 countries who have prioritised education as a theme, in reality in half of all countries the education lead spends 50% or more of their time on other issues, themes or processes.⁴ While there are many reasons for this, including the decentralised structure and inter thematic working at country level, it clearly points to a lack of staff time at national level to support the complex education agenda. There is also divergence in the amount of time education leads spend on local level work. Overall, the current trend is for country education leads to spend more time on issues at national level, even though supporting good quality local work may be very time consuming. The review also found that most of the dedicated education leads in country programmes have been working for ActionAid for less than three years. This staff turnover results in loss of experience, capacity and skills, and lack of continuity in relationships with partners.

The review team noted the need for a more systematic professional development programme for education staff both to ensure continuity of relationships and capacity, but also to enhance the commitment and retainment of staff. Currently training mainly takes the form of internal workshops usually initiated by the IET in a fairly ad hoc manner. Furthermore, data suggests that more needs to be done to develop research capacity at the national level and integrate local researchers more fully into national and international work.

Recommendations for building national capacity:

4.1.5 Each country programme engaging with education should have at least one member of **staff at national level** dedicated explicitly to education. This role(s) should spend 50% of time on local education issues and supporting education programming as well as engaging with national advocacy and linking to the international team.

4.1.6 A template education **lead/team profile** should be developed for CPs to adapt and use.

4.1.7 Time should be devoted at each **global education meeting** to professional and human resource matters.

4.1.8 The IET develop a clear **professional development plan** for its cadre based on the new IES, which should:

⁴ Many of the education leads from African and Asian country programmes report that they work full-time on education issues. However, the two education leads from Latin America report spending only 25% and 30% of their time on education issues, staff from the other country programmes devote as little as 15% of their time to education.

- include a range of capacity building and training methods, including clear induction procedures, and a programme for inter-country exchange;
- link professional development to individual education staff's work needs and
- link the professional development programme to staff progression.

4.1.9 AA needs to pay attention to developing more **diversified career paths**. Strategies such as secondments into international thematic teams could contribute to this⁵.

Working together on education

While different members of the IET are increasingly recognised for their work externally, there is a very close identification of ActionAid with the education theme leader, who is widely seen as the public face of AA. The theme leader has a long history with AA, long-standing expertise in education, and intimate knowledge of Reflect, which he is credited with initiating. Such a rich history yields high dividends for AA and education work in general, including obtaining funds for projects, wide-recognition of the work and strong representation. However, some respondents felt that representation in international fora does not reflect the full range of work done at country level and some external respondents perceive AA to be a single focus organisation: *'when AA speaks in meetings, we know even before they speak that it will be about IMF'*.

In order to maintain the enormous contribution made by the theme leader while enabling diverse voices and experiences to filter up through AA, it is recommended that a more formal structure be developed which brings a broader cross section of voices to speak for the education theme. The education theme also needs to improve its communication channels with the rest of AA. As one staff member noted:

"The theme gets on with its own thing and does it well, but care needs to be taken that education isn't too independent for AA as an organisation and the other themes to benefit".

For country programme experience to be communicated (internally and externally) by appropriate staff there needs to be a dynamic system which enables discussion on key education areas, agenda setting, information gathering etc. This will also ensure that the education theme has the appropriate mechanisms to work with Alps principles thereby strengthening its accountability and impact.

Recommendations for greater representation:

4.1.10 Appoint specific education leads at sub-regional level to coordinate sharing, exchange visits and **communication between education lead staff** to strengthen links and sharing.

4.1.11 Develop a clear designated role (probably in the IET) to ensure that **country programme staff can influence the IET agenda**, and that the IET is responsive to country level needs and builds on national work. This role will involve facilitating and coordinating discussions, as well as collecting and communicating specific education experiences to external audiences and the wider organisation.

4.2 CLEAR, SUPPORTED AND SHARED APPROACHES

Feedback from national partners showed they find issues of transparency and collaborative approaches very important in assessing the value of partnership with ActionAid. Furthermore, they stated that they would like ActionAid to be more rooted in national civil society and work more on women's rights. These kinds of comments are important for ActionAid to consider as they plan the approach for their future work on education.

⁵ This is outside of the remit of the IET, but relevant here.

Delivering education rights - strengthening government services:

While ActionAid clearly has a strong and serious commitment to taking a rights-based approach to poverty issues, and this has taken root in the organisation at all levels, the review found that the situation on the ground is more complex. There are clear differences in the way a rights-based approach to development is conceptualised in the international education strategy, and by staff and partners at different levels. Furthermore, on the ground service delivery is still a common element of ActionAid's education work, in parallel to a rights-based approach. Working within a rights-based approach is clearly challenging on many fronts, both in terms of implementation and communication at the community level and in terms of securing appropriate funding and communication with donors. It is important that any service delivery that ActionAid is involved in complements and strengthens government provision, rather than compensating for the lack of it. As one AA staff member noted:

"You can do service delivery in relation to the government education system, as a foundation for advocacy and campaigning, for example building girls toilets in a government school. The education rights guide laid out some of this, but doesn't really talk about how you can work with the government system."

The IET has responsibility for leadership on a rights-based approach to education. Collective reflection is required to ensure that there is a shared (not necessarily a uniform) understanding of how the RBA is operationalised and implemented at the local level, including planning and funding issues. This includes the need for critical reflection on the role of service delivery in programme work, to ensure that work at community level is radical and rights-based and that service delivery contributes to strengthening access the right to, and rights in, education.

Recommendations on integrating service delivery into a rights-based approach:

- 4.2.1 Building on the collective reflection mentioned above the education theme should develop a clear framework which shows **how service delivery works within an RBA**, and in particular with government systems, perhaps as part of the process of developing a new International Education Strategy.
- 4.2.2 Reflection on how the RBA is operationalised, what works well and how any tensions may be resolved, should be an integral part of any **annual review (PRRP)** of the theme.
- 4.2.3 These reflections should be documented and form the basis of **resource materials and capacity building** on rights based approaches to be systematically shared at every level.

Power and gender analysis:

The survey results from partners at local and national levels showed that very little emphasis is placed on power analysis at planning stage. What's more there is evidence that power analysis is not sufficiently linked to planning and programming within ActionAid either. Furthermore, while there have been funds raised for specific projects concerning girls education the general approach to work seems to lack a feminist or women's rights perspective. This runs counter to AA's stated aims and values as an organisation and more investment in developing a feminist perspective on education should be made in the future. A separate AA review noted that:

'Even where the tools help us understand and address power, we often stop there, instead of building from empowered community groups to wider organizations, networks of the poor that can claim their power from local to international levels'.

Recommendations regarding power and gender analysis:

- 4.2.4 The IET should provide guidance, based on Reflect, ALPS and the Global Monitoring Framework, on how to integrate **gender and power analysis** into the planning, implementation and monitoring of education work. This includes indicators and methodologies for tracking change in power and gender relations.
- 4.2.5 Education staff should collaborate more closely with the Women's Rights theme in developing their education programme to ensure a deeper **feminist perspective**, building on the positive experience of the Violence Against Girls in Schools collaboration.

Integrated campaigning:

Some respondents, including from other NGOs and donors, felt the current approach to international policy change was too confrontational, particularly in relation to the IMF work. On the other hand, a national education actor in Pakistan noted that the stance of strong solidarity with education actors at national level, compromised policy influence capacity:

"ActionAid is quite absent from the major groups and committees that shape the education in the country. So, their 'holistic' approach in education might be something that is different from other organisations, which some can consider a positive, but there are definitely some drawbacks of being 'jack of all trades'."

Learning from the Sierra Leone IMF work suggests that building strong, sustainable civil society capacity to secure education rights is a very slow and involved process, and that policy change impacts may be far down the line. However, the Brazil story suggests that if attention is focused on generating specific alternative policy and solutions, collaborative campaigning can bring about policy change and links and support from beyond the education sector.

Recommendations regarding integrating campaigning work at different levels:

The education theme should consider campaigning as a **long term, extensive** programme of work, coordinated across different levels and including policy engagement and key policy wins, monitoring of policy implementation and continued advocacy to ensure actual change. This includes recognising that supporting campaigning capacity among partner organisations and involvement of local groups in policy advocacy entails making a choice between responding to the quick paced externally driven campaigning and slower participatory initiatives. The education theme at all levels needs to be open and honest about where it is making such choices.

- 4.2.6 The use of identity based campaigning could be beneficial in sustaining momentum and linking education more systematically to wider rights abuses, creating a practical entry to cross-thematic work. At country programme level education staff should collaborate with other thematic staff to consider engaging with **specific excluded groups** on the basis of their identity. This will included look at how the Reflect approach can stimulate the development of such campaigning, and at whether education rights is a specific issue which could be taken up within any such campaign.
- 4.2.7 The IET should continually strengthen their **links with research institutions** at international level, and support education leads to develop similar links at national level This would further develop the theme's international and national research base and increase the credibility of its advocacy work.

Participatory approaches:

The survey found lots of evidence that ActionAid is still well known and respected for its work on adult literacy and empowerment using the Reflect approach. For example, one national education partner in Bangladesh stated that:

“The Reflect circle helped to improve the livelihood of the circle members and is also acknowledged as one of the best practices in Bangladesh. “

However, there was also concern about the sheer number of tools and approaches developed and supported by ActionAid for grassroots work. Apart from Reflect there is STAR and Stepping Stones focusing on HIV and Participatory Vulnerability Analysis with a focus on disaster-preparedness. The Nigeria country review noted that there were too many tools and evidence of ‘methodological framework fashions’, in that people are trained in different tools as new ones are developed. There is also frequently confusion between tools, methods and programmes, as the following quote from an AA staff member illustrates:

“You ask people ‘what are you doing on Women’s Rights’ they say ‘We do Reflect’ but these are methods or tools, not a programme. I want to understand why they are doing Reflect. There are some really good exceptions. For example listening to a young woman in Bangladesh describing how they had worked with Reflect I understood how they were analysing power relations between women and men and then identifying concrete issues to take forward.”

Recommendations regarding tools and approaches:

- 4.2.8 The IET should strengthen and invest in **Reflect** for adult literacy. In addition the IET should draw from its experience in Reflect to ensure that gender and power analysis are well integrated into education work; and specifically adapt Reflect tools to monitor change in gender and power relations.
- 4.2.9 There is a need for clear leadership and support in using participatory approaches - which are ultimately processes of adult education, power analysis, communication and confidence building - across ActionAid. It may be advisable for the education theme to take a lead in consolidating the different methodologies into a **coherent framework** which supports local engagement and empowerment processes and contributes to building sustainable movements.

Promoting stronger linkages:

Whatever the focus, the strong message is that there need to be seamless linkages between work at different levels and that they need to nourish and complement each other. In part, this can be achieved by strengthening the links between campaigning and grassroots work, for example building the capacity of local partners to engage in national education campaign coalitions. It was revealing to note that almost 40% of AA’s national partners are not members of national EFA coalitions. The Bangladesh review found evidence of this lack of coherence:

“In Bangladesh, the support for early childhood education has clearly been a local success story. The children enrolled in ECCE have all made the transition to primary school. However, enrolment in primary school is still followed by dropout at a later stage. Documentation in an evidence-based advocacy format is now required to influence politicians and bureaucrats in the development of the national policy on education.”

The current IES suggests that education leads dedicate 25% of their time to international work, although there are no systems to ensure that this happens. There was also a view that more attention should be paid to the regional level, with support for regional sharing and exchange, as well as use of regional rights instruments, and participation in regional events. The review noted that opportunities to engage with regional organisations such as SADEC, AU or ASEAN were not well used, reflecting a perception that the theme is too centralised and its advocacy too focused on the North. Finally, the review found that staff and partners value opportunities for exchange visits more than workshops for exchanging learning and ideas.

Recommendations for stronger linkages:

Some of the issues described above have been dealt with in other recommendations, such as regional focus of IET staff (4.1.3); clear role profiling at country level (4.1.5); improved communication (4.1.10) and involvement in budgeting (4.5.2). In addition:

4.2.10 Opportunities should be created for **exchange** between IET and national staff, including secondments to the IET and IET staff spending time as education advisors in country.

4.2.11 The IET should be systematically involved in **recruitment and induction** of education lead staff, and induction should include a visit to a neighbouring country programme.

4.3 MUTUALLY SUPPORTIVE PARTNERSHIPS AND COALITIONS

ActionAid carries out much of its education work in conjunction with other actors, for example partnering with local education actors to support grassroots education work, or working with national and international coalitions to develop joint campaigns and advocacy initiatives. The education theme is highly regarded for its work in coalitions, at national and international level, such as its work with the Global Campaign for Education, or developing and strengthening national coalitions. In particular, ActionAid is credited with strengthening the links between civil society and teachers unions at all levels, which has led to bringing a more political analysis of education priorities to the table.

This way of working means that the quality of ActionAid's partnerships is closely linked to the quality and impact of its work. Yet partnerships are complicated, especially when one partner (nearly always ActionAid) or coalition member has more power, capacity and resources. Some of these challenges were voiced by country education leads, with issues of common concern including the skewed power relations and the related issue of partners' capacity gaps, and dealing with multiple accountability lines. Other common issues relate to the difficulty of combining different agendas, approaches and values and competition for limited space. One staff member noted some of these challenges in relation to the management of multi-country projects:

"In the multi-country projects it was clear that there were research gaps at national level, people didn't have the skills in evaluation or M&E, there were no quantitative skills at country level, and partners were delivering very weak materials ... and it is also important to recognise that they have many other valuable skills, focusing on process, campaigning etc. and can't be expected to do everything."

Although ActionAid works to build the capacity and influence of partners, partnerships usually reflect the existing power structure, with ActionAid expecting to give technical or financial support, whereas there was little evidence of partnerships as spaces of mutual benefit and learning. In some contexts, coalitions supported by ActionAid were seen as vehicles for furthering AA's own position, rather than being equal spaces for learning, support and the pursuit of mutual or complementary goals. Some people said they were unsure where ActionAid ended and a coalition began. Some partners' noted difficulties in adopting a rights-based approach and there was a feeling that ActionAid did not always consult its partners. This makes accountability relationships problematic, and limits the possibility of partners influencing ActionAid's work. One NGO noted that they would work more closely with AA if they felt that there was a stronger commitment to mutual partnership.

It was also evident that the range of different relationships, formal and informal, long and short term, single-issue or complex working relationships, was incredibly broad. A national partner in Bangladesh noted how this happens and the impact on the quality and impact of policy work:

“AAB does not have longer term partnership modalities for policy work like their 10 year partnerships with local NGOs. This leads to an inclination to short-term profile building and discrete work like a roundtable, a media dialogue, a convention, one newsletter rather than long-term engagements for concrete changes.”

Recommendations for more effective and equal partnerships:

Partnerships will benefit from stronger capacity for analysing and tracking power relations, as noted recommendation 4.2.4 above.

- 4.3.1 AA needs to acknowledge the tension between the roles of partner and support provider. In many cases education staff are directly involved in developing partnerships, especially at local level. However, as much of the education work is delivered through partnership IET should lead/ facilitate reflection and debate on how different kinds of partnership within education, including those involving funding, can be **made more equal**. This reflection process should include analysis of the role and power of ActionAid within education coalitions.
- 4.3.2 The IET should lead in defining **different types of partnerships** and exploring the types of strategic alliance and partnership which could deepen the impact of campaigning and advocacy at all levels. This may mean linking to civil society actors beyond education. Consideration should also be given to closer working with other INGOs.
- 4.3.3 Accountability mechanisms should include reflection on **transformation of power in partnerships and coalitions** as well tracking specific indicators. This will help AA learn from partners and develop and design joint interventions collaboratively, and will provide a positive and equal partnership model for others to follow.
- 4.3.4 Many of the principles of the Paris 21 declaration apply to ActionAid in its role as a funder of partners and coalitions. The IET should look at which of these apply, and assess the need for AA and other NGOs to develop **principles for funding relationships**. This links to the international CSO effectiveness initiative launched last year.⁶

4.4 SYSTEMATIC MONITORING, REPORTING AND SHARING OF LEARNING

The need for the voices of national and local education staff and partners to be stronger in education planning and campaigning has been recognised in section 4.1. In this section we explore the systems and processes which can support that shift.

Reporting, sharing learning and strengthening peer support:

The lack of systems and processes for collecting and sharing data on AA’s education work became apparent during the review process itself. Without a central clearing house for information about AA’s education work, different countries keep information in different formats and with varying levels of detail, and access to information often depends on personal contacts. As such the IET were unable to provide an up to date list of education leads, let alone give accurate data on AA’s education spending or information on partners, types of education programming, indicators used and so on. As one AA staff member noted:

⁶ www.cso-effectiveness.org.

“The relationship with country programmes is bizarre and opaque. It is very dependent on individuals, contacting people you know to get information or get things done... there is no central place to go for updates etc.”

The need for stronger reporting and sharing of learning was evident in many different areas. Clearly staff at all levels need to know what their colleagues are doing in order to learn, and also to build complementarity and synergy into their work plans. Section 4.2 above looks at some of the ways in which linkages can be strengthened between education staff. Sharing of learning is also a key step in ensuring that the IET is more responsive to country programme priorities. The call for more complete information on education work at different levels was also echoed by staff from other functions, as this quote from one member of staff shows:

“There is so much that can be shown from a communication perspective regarding the right to education, following a specific school’s journey for example. You could show all the stages the head, teachers, community activists and children go through to get a school, a teacher, desks, latrines etc. How they build a relationship with the government to get all of this. This could be part of a supporter’s journey, making RBA concrete.”

The types of information collected need to both reflect the priorities and interests of the context, but to be most effective and support linkages they need to be comparable across different levels. It is clear from the review that more guidance and support is needed for education staff to identify and document learning, share and monitor change and impact.

Recommendations for facilitating shared learning:

The recommendations for stronger monitoring and indicators below will support this, as will the recommendation for regional support (4.1.10) and the following:

- 4.4.1 The IET should plan with the shared learning function (and knowledge initiative) to ensure that information about the reality of work at local, national and international levels is **accessible centrally**, including mechanisms and procedures for regularly updating the portfolio. This should be built into role profiles and inductions of the whole education cadre (see 4.1.6).
- 4.4.2 The theme should build capacity of staff at all levels to identify and document **relevant issues for shared learning**, and develop guidelines on the types of information that should be routinely collected when designing an education intervention.
- 4.4.3 The theme should develop and extend the **audience for information** on AA’s education work, internally and externally, and target information products appropriately. For example small knowledge products can facilitate better sharing and joint work.
- 4.4.4 The theme should systematically share knowledge relevant to **AA’s wider aims and objectives**, such as coalition building, with others in the organisation.

Monitoring a rights-based approach:

The review team noted that the difficulty in accessing information on education work at different levels is causing a problem for effective use of the Accountability Learning and Planning System (ALPS). Participatory review and reflection processes were considered the most relevant way of getting information from the local level, but there is little quality control or shared understanding of what these processes entail meaning that the quality of the information collected depends on the skills and commitment of the individuals involved. The fact that the intranet and letter writing were the least relevant means of collecting information raises a concern that an over-reliance on visits, combined with the demands on education leads’ time, may impede the regular and smooth flow of information to national level. In addition there appears to be a culture of reporting upwards, to senior staff, rather than sharing with peers, which is contradictory to ALPS.

Most education leads believe that the IES would benefit from having clear targets for education work. The review found little evidence of systematic change monitoring and indicator tracking, suggesting that the assessment of impact is subjective and ad hoc, and many opportunities for learning and identifying impact are being missed. Some indicators, such as primary school enrolment are tracked by many countries, while indicators to track the effectiveness of coalitions, or the scope of work with unions, for example, were used less regularly. This indicates a need for guidance on types of indicators which can help track different aspects of rights-based education work, linked to the areas of change identified in the Global Monitoring Framework, and to develop approaches to monitoring and sharing which strengthen the alignment and complementarity of work at different levels. This should be in line with ALPS principles and processes, meaning that diverse perspectives are needed to understand the work and its impact.

Recommendations for more effective monitoring:

4.4.5 (As part of the strategy process), the IET should develop a monitoring framework with common indicators for tracking different aspects of rights-based work to education, linked to the guidelines mentioned in 4.2.1 above. This should include reporting mechanisms and guidelines for collecting and using baseline data to strengthen and monitor programming. See also 4.2.4.

4.5 SUSTAINABLE AND FLEXIBLE FUNDING

Although education leads were specifically asked to work with their finance directors to gather education spending data, most of them were unable to supply this for the review. This suggests that in many countries education planning is not done based on financial information, and may be explained by the fact that national education thematic staff tend to sit in policy teams while programme staff implement local education work.

Education spending in ActionAid:

The figures available showed that total education spend across the organisation in 2007 at about 8% of total organisational cost. This seems low given that education is one of AA's six themes. In 2007 the IET expenditure was £785,000 out of a total education spend of £15.7m (about 5%); this is low when compared to comparable organisations. The majority of education spending is given directly to national and local partner organisations.

While differences in levels of funding to education across countries reflect the decentralised nature of the organisation, and such decisions need to be made at local level, some general guidance on the level and distribution of education spending would help to manage the expectations of the theme, and organisation more broadly, concerning capacity and involvement in education work.

Recommendation for more consistent education budgeting:

4.5.1 The IET should work with country programmes to develop realistic guidance on **education spending** and staffing costs, linked to the role profiles (4.1.6)

Strategic fundraising

The International Education Team is renowned for its success in fundraising. During the strategy period they have been able to secure various grants for a range of work in support of the strategy, including adult literacy, disaster preparedness in schools, violence against girls, coalition building. However, within the organisation concerns were raised that the education theme does not always plan or act

strategically with regards to raising funds and that it may at times adapt its work to available funding, rather interacting with donors based on a strategic plan. One education lead argues that this can lead to the IET 'cajoling' countries to participate in projects after funding has been secured on their behalf, another staff member commented:

"We need to think strategically as to why we involving and including a country in a particular process. I hate to think of us bringing in countries kicking and screaming... I know you can fundraise to stimulate things, but what I don't like is when we present a case pretending that the country has thought about it, and then we have to spend time cajoling them."

One staff member gave one example of more strategic, proactive fundraising might look like:

"They could develop a 'capital' campaign for education with a strong policy agenda which runs over 2-3 years and generates £50m. This would take 6-12 months in preparation, and work with a range of donors, maybe a third or a half would be large donors and the rest smaller."

There were also concerns raised by funders and fundraising staff as to whether AA had the technical capacity to manage large scale multi-country projects, with the failure to meet identified goals and sometimes fraught relationship with countries in the project mentioned. This is likely to be the result of AA staff being overstretched. However, if project planning built on national programmes of work this would be less of an issue

At national level there is also a tendency to funding-led planning. The review found that education leads usually plan their work based on an inflation adjusted figure from the previous year, rather than by choosing and costing education priorities and proactively seeking appropriate funds.

Recommendations for strategic fundraising

- 4.5.2 Education lead staff should be **involved in national budget processes**, for the local education programme as well as their own programme of work.
- 4.5.3 At international and national levels education themes should develop **funding plans** as part of their annual plan. This should state clearly what aspects of the work will be funded by child sponsorship and which will seek to raise additional funding.
- 4.5.4 At an **international level fundraising should support and extend planned national programmes of work**. This implies that multi-country projects should be developed from national work and funding plans.
- 4.5.5 Consideration should be given to develop a '**capital' campaign** for education.

Education and Child Sponsorship

Much of the education work at local level is funded by child sponsorship and the convergence of interests is strong. As a staff member from ActionAid India stated:

"Education is a very high priority for AA, partly because it fits in so well with child sponsorship. ... For example, at the moment children are selected from the community, and those working in child sponsorship have to explain how the whole community benefits. If a government school was sponsored then all the children would benefit."

There is a strong sense from the review that fundraising needs to be more closely integrated into the campaign and policy agenda at all levels, and child sponsorship could be a vehicle for this. However, staff noted current tension and missed opportunities, for example:

"There doesn't seem to be much linking between DA managers and the education theme, and yet if child sponsorship and education were more integrated everyone would benefit. The disconnect

is partly because the global education community are policy people, very separate from people on the ground.”

The review found support across the organisation for strengthening the links between sponsorship and education. This means that any child who is being sponsored should have the right to education secured. This will not only make funding more coherent but also provide a stronger narrative for sponsorship communications. How this is interpreted within a rights-based approach depends on the answers and guidance reached in recommendation 4.2 above - deepening understanding on how service delivery is conceived within an RBA – but will involve working to ensure that government schools function effectively and are accessible to all children. Making these links should enable greater coherence and links between local and national level work.

Recommendation on linking sponsorship to education programming:

4.5.6 Programmes receiving funds from child sponsorship should **review and report** how this contributes to children accessing their right to education.

PART 5: CONCLUDING REMARKS

ActionAid holds very strong principles relating to accountability structures and approach to work, which provided the framework by which the review team explored its work on education. The organisation has supported education work of one sort or another since its inception, partly because of its strong links with child sponsorship, and many respondents felt that education is part of ActionAid's DNA. As a team we were pleased to find such consistent support for education work, whether this was from local partners, external actors or staff members throughout the organisation. But it was also clear from the review that there are various gaps, missed opportunities and challenges as the International Education Strategy is translated into practice.

Taking a principled and process based approach to working on education rights is not straightforward. There are tensions and compromises to be made by everyone involved, whether this relates to diverse expectations, making partnerships work, or balancing fast paced international advocacy and long-term grassroots capacity building. It takes time to build skills and confidence to undertake such work and choices need to be made along the way.

The recommendations contained in section 4 are aimed to enable the education theme to build from their current context and create a more coherent approach to education across the organisation, deepening understanding and practice of a rights-based approach to education. This involves greater clarity of roles of, and relationships between, education staff at international and country programme level. It also involves well crafted systems to enable mutual accountability, increased attention to monitoring and learning, and a dynamic exchange of ideas, learning, successes and challenges among the education community.

ActionAid has a strong reputation internally and externally for its education work. The review process was long and involved many staff giving up considerable amounts of their time to reflect on their experience and practice. We hope that the process itself has strengthened reflective practice and that the insights, lessons and recommendations provided through this review process will enable education staff to continue to build ActionAid's reputation and collaborate meaningfully in achieving education rights for all.