

## INTRODUCTION

**We believe that change is possible and we will answer the call for action. Our greatest resource in our struggle is young people themselves!**

ActionAid's new strategy, Action for Global Justice, prioritises the leadership of women and young people, especially those living in poverty and exclusion, in its efforts to achieve social justice, gender equality and poverty eradication. We work for enabling young people to unite and contribute to social justice by creating platforms. Our partnerships will be with young people's organisations and movements with whom we share a common vision and values.

With half the world's population now under 25 years of age<sup>1</sup> and 89%<sup>2</sup> residing in developing countries, young people play a vital role in transforming and shaping more just, equitable and sustainable societies. Young people's potential for spontaneous action in the face of injustice offers opportunities to counter high youth unemployment in many countries where we work, alongside the privatisation of public services, violations of young women's sexual and reproductive rights and devaluation of their contribution across all levels. Increased civic engagement of young women and men can create an enabling environment for inclusion, voice and influence in public participation.

ActionAid's views its role as a connector, and it connects local struggles of people with progressive social movements, young people themselves and their movements. We consider young people as our partners and LEADERS in the fight for global justice. We focus on young people unleashing their desire and demands for change as a force for transforming the wider society. In this process ActionAid positions itself as an ally, co-creator and co-convenor to make these changes happen by working with young people on their local and international struggles.

## WHY WE WORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

Young people have been part of societal change for centuries and in the modern era played a pivotal role in independence movements particularly since the 1960s<sup>3</sup>. Over the past decade young people have re-emerged as a powerful catalyst for social movements and agents of change in leading several radical and transformative social struggles in more than 25 countries<sup>4</sup>.

In contrast to their parents, young people today are more likely to be educated, they are more connected to the world than any generation before them and are in turn more ambitious, which also makes them prone to getting fed up with what their 'elders' have to offer<sup>5</sup>. Many are not in a position to obtain decent work in their communities and millions move from rural to urban areas and increasingly from urban to foreign countries where they are increasingly unwelcome<sup>6</sup>. While there is a risk that the unmet expectations of young people could fuel widespread violence there is no concrete link between joblessness and terrorism, unemployment can contribute to a broader sense of marginalisation and grievance that can drive young people to commit acts of violence, whether they live in Nairobi, Baghdad, or the Brussels neighbourhood of Molenbeek<sup>7</sup>. Young people do possess the

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.un.org/youthenvoy/2015/04/10-things-didnt-know-worlds-population/>;  
<http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/ageing/WorldPopulationAgeing2013.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> The Power of 1.8 Billion: Adolescents, Youth and the Transformation of the Future – State of World Population, UNFPA (2014)

<sup>3</sup> American civil rights movements, African colonial independence movements, etc.

<sup>4</sup> Brazil, Bangladesh, Egypt, Myanmar, South Africa, The Gambia, Tunisia and USA are a few to name.

<sup>5</sup>[https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/06/sunday-review/the-world-has-a-problem-too-many-young-people.html?\\_r=1](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/06/sunday-review/the-world-has-a-problem-too-many-young-people.html?_r=1)

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

power to drive political and social norms, influence what modes of governance will be adopted nationally, and embrace or discredit extremist ideologies.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted in 2015 supports “accountability to its citizens” through an open, inclusive, participatory and transparent review framework. With young people being referenced in one third of the SDGs and 20 youth specific targets across six key goals, their empowerment, participation and wellbeing is central to its achievement<sup>8</sup>. Youth organisations and movements are fighting for justice and equality in the shrinking political spaces. They are organising to take collective action and expand their influence in society.

## WHO ARE THE YOUNG PEOPLE

Young people are a diverse group<sup>9</sup>, and at ActionAid we refer to “the many faces of youth”. Our definition of youth focuses first on the socio-political identity of young people who are seeking the rights and independence that adulthood should bring. It is by its very nature, therefore, contested; and hence age definitions vary across the world. ActionAid uses 15-30 as a guide only. We will be working with the most vulnerable young people and prioritise young women and girls across all interventions.

## VISION

We envision a just, sustainable and equitable world where every young woman and man have their rights respected, resources equitably redistributed and are able to lead resilient lives.

## HOW CHANGE HAPPENS

ActionAid believes that young people have the capabilities to play a significant role in creating transformative change. That is why our theory of change is built on the ability of young people to harness their collective power and their ability to affect change together. We work on developing effective, creative and innovative programmes<sup>10</sup> that challenges the prevailing status quo in society. This includes the invisible power embedded in our sociocultural and religious norms; the visible power of the state; and the hidden power of elites and corporates. ActionAid believes the collective efforts of young people are more impactful when connected through solidarity, advocacy and a common vision to drive structural change. Our partnerships will be with young people’s organisations and movements with whom we share a common vision and shared values.

## PROGRAMME FRAMEWORK

This is a long term integrated programming agenda focused on claiming RIGHTS, fighting for REDISTRIBUTION and building RESILIENCE where the three pillars are interconnected and mutually reinforcing to support the achievement of the overall ActionAid goal.

*To achieve social justice, gender equality, and poverty eradication by shifting and redistributing power and resources; strengthening the resilience of communities and movements and fulfilling the rights of people living in poverty and exclusion<sup>11</sup>.*

## Rights

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<sup>8</sup> [www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/DemocraticGovernance/Youth/FastFact\\_Youth\\_&\\_SDGs\\_2017-January.pdf?download](http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/DemocraticGovernance/Youth/FastFact_Youth_&_SDGs_2017-January.pdf?download)

<sup>9</sup> Refer to the International Youth Engagement Plan, ActionAid (2013)

<sup>10</sup> By Programme we mean the whole continuum of ActionAid’s mission - from direct work with communities, to advocacy, policy influencing to campaigning.

<sup>11</sup> Strategy 2028: Action for Global Justice, ActionAid, pg. 10 (2016)

Realisation of young people's rights<sup>12</sup> requires investments in young people themselves; their conscientisation in realising the power within to co-create an alternative narrative; and strengthening strategic alliances and partnerships. Young people's access to and inclusion in spaces at local and national levels provides a platform for their demands to be articulated and heard, so as to ensure accountability from duty bearers.

### **Redistribution**

All young people, especially young women, must have access to and control of productive resources (natural, human and capital) with benefits being equitably redistributed to reduce sociocultural and economic inequalities. The State, by recognising the diversity<sup>13</sup> and increasing numbers of young people must provide greater and targeted gender responsive public services which create opportunities for decent work and ensure fair labour rights<sup>14</sup>.

### **Resilience**

Conflict, disaster and climate change has escalated the vulnerability of the millions of young people<sup>15</sup> residing in conflict and/or climate induced countries. This is an urgent call to action for decision makers, governments and civil society to safeguard food sovereignty and achieve ecological and climate justice. There is a need for a shift in power that enables young people and their organisations who are the first responders at the frontlines of emergencies to have greater investment from local actors and increased accountability by national stakeholders. With 60% of young international migrants living in developing countries<sup>16</sup> and one in eight migrants moving in search of better livelihoods<sup>17</sup>, strengthening resilience in rural, urban and external contexts is a priority.

## **PROGRAMMATIC PRIORITIES**

Five programme priorities guide the youth engagement across the Federation over the next three years. With over 75 million young people unemployed<sup>18</sup> across the world, decent work has been adopted as a separate priority under the Youth Engagement Plan. The young people and youth champions<sup>19</sup> across the Federation call for its adoption in the International Strategy.

### **Priority 1: Address the structural causes of violence against women and girls, and secure women's economic justice**

Taking a life cycle approach, ActionAid will support girls and young women to make safe, healthy and informed choices as they transition through life to mobilise their peers and communities to take advantage of opportunities to fulfil their potential. We will specifically address the issues of economic empowerment<sup>20</sup>, sexual and reproductive rights unpaid care work and bodily integrity. Through this,

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<sup>12</sup> Youth Engagement Plan (2013) for detailed definitions (pages 14 -16) and rights analysis (page 45)

<sup>13</sup> Gender, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, geographical location, etc.

<sup>14</sup> Writing Our Rights: A Call for Improved Access and Provision of Appropriate Youth Public Services (2015), provided insights of young women and men's priorities in accessing quality public services across

<sup>15</sup> 1 Billion young people reside in countries affected by climate change (United Nations Joint Framework Initiative on Children, Youth and Climate Change, 2010); more than 600 million young people reside in fragile and conflict states (UNDP Youth Strategy, 2014 – 2017)

<sup>16</sup> UNDP, Guidance Note - A Development Approach to Migration and Displacement, (p.5)

<sup>17</sup> ILO, International Labour Conference, 2016 (p.5)

<sup>18</sup> United Nations, The Millennium Development Goals Report 2015, (p.17)

<sup>19</sup> All participants at the Youth Forum in Tanzania in January 2017

<sup>20</sup> ActionAid advocate for access and quality education for all. It becomes necessary that the conversations on school to work transitions commence at an early stage at educational institutions so that young people – adolescents – are equipped with the knowledge, information and skills.

ActionAid expects to significantly reduce the risk of violence and promote young women and girls as key advocates and lobbyists for shaping the course of their future.<sup>21</sup>

**Priority 2: Ensure increased civic participation and state accountability for the redistribution of resources and delivery of quality, gender-responsive public services<sup>22</sup>**

ActionAid will promote active and meaningful civic engagement of young people in decision making and governance processes. Particularly in this regard, they will shape the access and provision of public services where the redistribution of resources and power will enable increased public investment and accountability in service delivery. We will facilitate young people's participation in spaces within the ActionAid Federation (beyond where possible) where they are able to influence and hold duty bearers to account for redistribution, delivery of services and state accountability to its citizens.

**Priority 3: Strengthen resilient livelihoods and secure climate justice**

Young people are at the forefront of taking action on climate change, advocating for fairer redistribution of productive resources and holding emitting economies accountable for the impacts of their emissions. ActionAid will support and partner with young people to design and implement innovative sustainable programmes to achieve resilient livelihoods in urban and rural environments.

**Priority 4: Drive transformative women-led emergency preparedness, response and prevention**

ActionAid will promote young women-led preparedness and response in times of emergencies, occupations and conflicts to transform the humanitarian system to be more locally led and accountable to the affected communities. Together with the humanitarian actors, we will collectively address the protection of young women and girls from sexual and gender based violence, exploitation and abuse in times of crises. ActionAid will build the resilience of rural and urban communities to climate change, disasters and conflicts with actions at all levels led by young women.

**\*\*PRIORITY 5: Address the causes of youth unemployment and secure decent work<sup>23</sup>**

ActionAid will support young people to make informed choices and access services. We will specifically address issues on access and availability of quality and relevant education, skills development and financial services to address the demands of the labour market from state and non-state actors. ActionAid will partner with young people to advocate for safety, security and the rights of workers in the formal and informal sectors, ensure that international commitments on solutions to decent work are upheld taking into cognisance the relevance to young people and their needs. We will test and widely share approaches to youth economic alternatives.<sup>24</sup> Through this, ActionAid seeks to contribute to the dismantling of barriers that cause youth unemployment and facilitate decent work.

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<sup>21</sup> Writing Our Rights: A Call to Improve Access & Provision of Appropriate Youth Public Services: ActionAid Discussion Paper (November 2015)

<sup>22</sup> IBID

<sup>23</sup>Decent work as defined by the ILO means: the aspirations of people in their working lives which involves opportunities for work that is productive, and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organise and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men. 400 million young people currently suffer from a deficit of decent work opportunities. (ILO, 2015)

<sup>24</sup> The research on Youth Social Entrepreneurship (2014) and subsequent way forward as well as outcomes of Putting ideas of Work (2015) should be used as background to moving this work forward. Several Global Platforms in partnership with country stakeholders currently provide capacity development on social entrepreneurship.

## **APPROACH TO YOUTH ENGAGEMENT (WORKING WITH AND FOR YOUNG PEOPLE)<sup>25</sup>**

At its core ActionAid has a long history of working with adolescents and young people through its sponsorship programme<sup>26</sup>. In 2012, ActionAid was amongst the first civil society organisations to fully incorporate work with young people. All youth engagement work is guided by its unique human rights based approach<sup>27</sup>.

### **Youth Principles<sup>28</sup>**

The guiding principles developed in June 2015 provide ActionAid with consistency and quality in the delivery of its youth engagement strategy:

#### **1) Reaching out to strategic alliances with progressive youth movements**

In being flexible and responsive to external trends, ActionAid will invite and partner with young people, their movements and coalitions. Uprisings by nature are contentious and as such the organisation will assess its support and level(s) of participation, and incorporate risk mitigation mechanisms in its response.

#### **2) Activista will become a connector and trendspotter**

The role in connecting to external young people and their organisations and surveillance clarifies the long-term relationship between Activista and ActionAid.

#### **3) Shift in paradigm – the new youth culture of ActionAid**

The design and implementation of internal processes and mechanisms at country and Federation levels must promote young women and men's leadership and accountability across all programmatic and organisational priorities.

#### **4) Creating a space for innovation and alternative thinking**

Creating spaces (physical and digital) is essential to sharing knowledge and promoting a culture of learning. Global Platforms will create "youth activist hubs" which enable capacity development, networking and space for design, implementation and review of youth initiatives.

#### **5) Broadcast the innovation youth bring in a creative and bold way**

The use of technology and connecting with young communications specialists<sup>29</sup> encourages innovation and creativity in showcasing the work with a wider external audience where knowledge and resources can be shared.

### **PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY**

Guided by feminist and human rights based principles and approaches, we seek to shift and transform power, both visible and invisible, to ensure gender equality. This also applies to relations of power between young women and men, intergenerational and other oppressed gender identities. Young people are exposed to different layers of exclusion and oppression based on their gender, ethnicity, sexual identity, etc. and this power imbalance must be addressed across all levels. We support the transformation of all social relations of power that oppress and exploit any set of people based on gender and interrogate the relation of power in both public and private spaces.

<sup>25</sup> Representatives were equally aligned with both with and for youth people as "with young people". Without reopening the debate, a mixed approach based on context will be utilised for youth engagement across the federation.

<sup>26</sup> Established in 1972 as a youth organisation working to support young people around the world

<sup>27</sup> Refer to Annex B: HRBA Village diagramme

<sup>28</sup> Refer to Annex C for further details on Youth Principles – country examples, guidance documents and related resources.

<sup>29</sup> journalists, artists, social media and digital designers

### **Models of Youth Engagement<sup>30</sup>**

There is a myriad of approaches that provide opportunities for scaling up young people's engagement in country strategies. Listed below are models of youth engagement from country programmes<sup>31</sup>.

#### ***Transitions to adulthood<sup>32</sup>***

Programme must address the demands and needs of adolescent girls and boys<sup>33</sup> to counter prevailing socioeconomic, cultural and gender inequalities. The broad entry points from "age out" sponsorship accords the linking of sponsorship to longer term young engagement<sup>34</sup>.

#### ***Scaling up youth initiatives***

Countries where youth engagement has complemented single or multiple thematic priorities have over time invested resources (human and financial) in building organisational strategies and implementation plans and scaled up programme initiatives with untapped youth networks.

#### ***Integration of youth engagement across the country strategy***

Strong, well-integrated youth programmes that invest in young women and men's leadership has led to strong programme integration across different priorities (i.e. governance, women's rights, etc.). It has created opportunities for countries to test and learn from new ways of working with young people.

#### ***Opportunities for youth focused funds<sup>35</sup>***

Increasingly resources are being allocated by stakeholders for testing and learning from different approaches to youth engagement. ActionAid must utilise these opportunities, to build alternatives narrative and connect with young people to share learnings in the sector and the Federation.

#### ***Synergising engagement across physical and digital spaces***

Young people are the most active users of information communication technology and social networks<sup>36</sup>. The use and access to technology has opened channels for young people to engage with policy positions and state their demands which are heard by a wider audience. Evidence has shown that in countries where internet services would be inaccessible due to cost and/or lack of infrastructure, mobile phone technology has been crucial in connecting, networking and facilitating change<sup>37</sup>.

### **RISK MITIGATION<sup>38</sup>**

Convening, supporting and facilitating strategic alliances and movements led by young people require the adoption of measures on safety and security in an increasingly hostile environment. ActionAid

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<sup>30</sup> Refer to Annex D with the case studies and country examples.

<sup>31</sup> Extensive consultations and dialogue during the design of the International Youth Engagement Plan suggested ¾ of programming to be integrated and ¼ stand alone.

<sup>32</sup> Young people are a heterogeneous (diverse) category. This is why at ActionAid we refer to "the many faces of youth". Our definition of youth focuses on first o the socio-political identify of young people who are seeking the rights and independent that adulthood should bring. It is by its very nature therefore contested, and hence age definitions vary across the world. We use 15-30 as a guide only.

<sup>33</sup> The UN defines adolescence as between the ages of 10-19

<sup>34</sup> Supporting Children and Youth Capabilities: Continuing to Empower and Work with Former Sponsored Children, ActionAid (2012)

<sup>35</sup> In example, Queens Young Leaders Programme (Bangladesh & Zambia) & Young Urban Women's Project (India, Ghana & South Africa)

<sup>36</sup> ITU 2013

<sup>37</sup> Democracy Watchdogs: Youth-driven Participatory Monitoring and Accountability in the Post-2015 Development Agenda, ActionAid (January 2015)

<sup>38</sup> Refer to Guidance on Duty of Care towards Supporters, ActionAid (2015) & Security Risk Management Guidelines for Campaigns, ActionAid (2014)

must take action on how it will manage risks related to young people's activism and leadership (as human rights defenders). The development of a risk matrix for country programmes and youth led organisations/movements will enable quick analysis of potential risks and this can encourage measures to help minimise and be resilient in the face of challenges<sup>39</sup>.

### **MEASURING THE IMPACT<sup>40</sup>**

The learnings from testing the Youth Principles regarding structural changes and shifts in gender and other unequal power relations has strengthened the understanding and knowledge of how social change happens. Increased efforts to track changes and document lessons learnt will facilitate communicating the impact and increase visibility for ActionAid. We will invest in developing mechanisms to capture youth engagement learnings across the Federation through learning and knowledge management resources. possible, monitoring and evaluation processes will be led by young people. We will invest in developing the capacity of young people and their organisations and coalitions on the use of participatory monitoring and evaluation tools including use of digital technology.

### **PARTNERSHIPS AND MOBILISING RESOURCES**

Building on the experiences<sup>41</sup> of external partnerships (i.e. Institutional donors; civil society organisations; coalitions; media; academics and; research institutions), the new strategy and landscape provides opportunities for strategic alliances and/or consortiums for youth engagement in countries and globally. ActionAid will make an effort to ensure that young people join donor consultations and actively participate in conferences (internal/external) to share their narrative/experiences. Similar to sponsorship funding, which is centred on children and their communities, ActionAid will scope the potential to support young people – the most vulnerable - in their local struggles through digital fundraising. For example, updates to ActionAid supporters, young and not young, on a specific youth struggle with an option to mobilise resources.

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<sup>39</sup> Youth Engagement Plan, pg. 51

<sup>40</sup> Refer to Annex B: Annual Report 2013 to present; Youth Principles documents (templates, facilitation note and template; International Resources; Arab Regional Initiative, Bangladesh, Denmark Liberia and Zambia received dedicated resources for piloting the youth principles in 2016

<sup>41</sup> Refer to the Youth Space on the HIVE for scoping work undertaken by the youth fundraising group to date, references to existing concept notes and projects.