

The logo for ActionAid, featuring the word "actionaid" in a bold, lowercase, red sans-serif font. The background of the entire page is a photograph of a young girl in a red shirt and patterned skirt running through a shallow stream, with her reflection visible in the water. The image has a subtle grid pattern overlaid on it.

actionaid

# ActionAid's approach to youth programming

A fundamental force for development



ACTIONAID FELLOW THAN THAN TIN (27) HOLDS A MEETING WITH WOMEN FROM A SELF-HELP GROUP IN MYANMAR

## Summary

ActionAid's experience of strengthening youth participation across the programme cycle in seven countries, using a specialised Youth Programming Toolkit, draws upon the organisation's long-standing expertise in developing pioneering participatory methodologies. The Toolkit provides valuable lessons and guidance for civil society actors, donors, development practitioners and other key stakeholders with an active interest in ensuring youth are given the space and tools to be a fundamental force for development.

It shows that engaging youth as equal partners, or supporting their ability to lead, can bring multiple long-term dividends within a short space of time. It can support good governance, an enhanced focus upon accountability as well as transparency, and cultivates increased ownership over development processes – not just by young people, but crucially by wider constituencies that young people are

particularly effective at engaging. ActionAid has found that championing youth participation<sup>1</sup> has helped to address issues of equity – young people have been **instrumental and effective in reaching out to marginalised groups** and supporting them to analyse and challenge the structural causes of their isolation.

This report describes ActionAid's commitment to promoting the rights of young people, as well as the background to the development of a specialist Youth Programming Toolkit. It highlights how in 2014, ActionAid Bangladesh, Malawi, Zambia, Myanmar, Liberia, Uganda and South Africa<sup>2</sup> have applied methodologies and approaches from the Toolkit to various stages of the programme cycle, and describes the impact upon youth themselves, organisational process and practices, as well as upon ActionAid's development programmes.

## Empowerment, Solidarity and Campaigning



**Empowerment:** The process through which we enable people living in poverty to become rights activists. We do this by making them more aware and more critical of power relations and by strengthening their own power.



**Campaigning:** Harnessing people's power through organisation, mobilisation and communication around a simple and powerful demand, to achieve a measurable political or social change. May include or lead to other ways of influencing decision-makers e.g. putting credible alternatives/solutions before them ("advocacy")



**Solidarity:** The process of uniting allies in a politically supportive relationship that may cross geographies or "areas" of struggle to support and strengthen a movement for change.

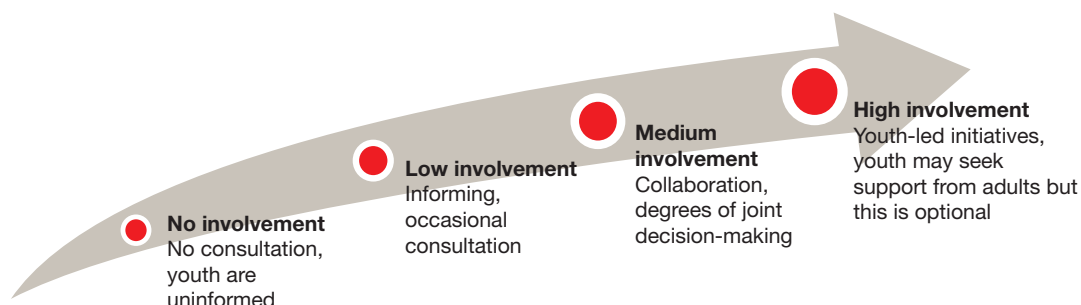
1. ActionAid essentially uses the terms youth participation and youth engagement interchangeably. However, ActionAid also thinks of youth engagement in the following ways: civic engagement is about young people's individual and collective actions to identify and address issues of public concern; and to get involved in non-partisan decision-making. Political engagement is about discussion and action that is aware and explicit about the power dimension – be that in voting or other party political activity, lobbying, or demonstrations against abuses.

2. Each country started to pilot the Toolkit at different times. This report focuses upon those countries that are more advanced in their piloting processes.

# What does youth participation mean to ActionAid?

Youth participation is the ‘active, informed and voluntary’ involvement of young people in their communities and in all decision-making that impacts them locally, nationally and internationally. It means that young people are actively involved in, or are leading programmes and work that impact them, as opposed to others working on their behalf. ActionAid subscribes to the position that youth participation is a right.

The Youth Programming Toolkit provides guidance to support ActionAid staff and local partners to transform the way they currently engage with young people – with the ultimate aim of championing higher levels of youth participation throughout their work (see Diagram 1). It also promotes a shift away from working with young people as beneficiaries, to engaging youth as partners, and supporting them to lead processes at each stage of the programme cycle (see Diagram 2). There is an acknowledgement that sometimes a variety of approaches will be used, depending upon the context and what is appropriate, safe and most effective.



**DIAGRAM 1:** ADAPTED FROM: SAVE THE CHILDREN (2010) PUTTING CHILDREN AT THE CENTRE: A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO CHILDREN’S PARTICIPATION



**DIAGRAM 2:** ADAPTED FROM: HUXLEY, S IN THE DFID-CSO (2010) YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN DEVELOPMENT GUIDE

## ActionAid and youth

In ActionAid's 2012-2017 strategy, People's Action In Practice, ActionAid makes the following commitment:

“ By 2017, we will have mobilised over 5 million young men and women to take sustained action towards building a poverty-free planet ”

Youth, as rights holders, are central to ActionAid's Theory of Change (see Annex 1), which states: 'we believe that an end to poverty and injustice can be achieved through purposeful individual and collective action, led by the active agency of people living in poverty and supported by solidarity, credible rights-based alternatives and campaigns that address the structural causes and consequences of poverty.' This Theory of Change emphasises that only by working on Empowerment, Campaigning and Solidarity – i.e. the three central pillars that make up ActionAid's unique Human Rights Based Approach – will we secure change. The strategy, meanwhile, stresses that the promotion of young people's participation in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of local rights programmes (LRPs)<sup>3</sup> is central to the realisation of rights. People's Action in Practice describes how ActionAid has also committed to integrate youth<sup>4</sup> concerns within each of its Strategic Objectives – namely, Resilient Livelihoods, Democratic Governance, Education, Emergencies & Building Resilience, and Women's Rights. An internal scoping exercise of ActionAid's global youth work identified the need to ensure the organisation had a coherent approach to meaningfully engage diverse young men and women in all areas of its work. To respond to this, ActionAid consulted with young activists, local partner organisations and staff members to develop a Youth Programming Toolkit that would provide clear guidance, methodologies and tools for promoting quality youth participation at every stage of the programme cycle.

## What we did...

Seven ActionAid countries have been piloting the new youth programming approaches and tools outlined in ActionAid's Youth Programming Toolkit. Here is a snapshot of their exciting work:

[ActionAid Malawi](#) kicked off their piloting process by conducting a 'youth audit' to assess how youth were being engaged across the programme cycle in Ntchisi LRP. Local partner organisations,

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3. LRPs are where ActionAid's long-term programmes take place in particular communities.

4. ActionAid acknowledges that 'youth' is a contested term that varies considerably according to context. For the purposes of this report, it refers to older children, adolescents and young people aged between 15 and 30 years.

young people and ActionAid staff were involved in this process, which identified that youth were mainly involved in programme implementation, but had fewer opportunities to get involved in situation assessment or strategic planning stages. To respond to this:

- 20 young people from marginalised groups, including disabled and out-of-school youths, conducted a youth rights analysis and developed a youth empowerment strategy, which has been fully integrated into the ActionAid strategic plan for Ntchisi local rights programme
- Groups of youth were trained as Reflection-Action Circle facilitators, and led Reflection-Action processes both with young people and with adults

“ As youth groups we knew the challenges that youth encounter in the communities. We used to blame ourselves for the challenges that we met. Through these circles we have been able to see problems as inter-linked and requiring collective action from both youth and adults to deal with them. We now have a long and priority list of issues to take action on in this community. ”

YOUNG CHAIRPERSON FOR CHALUMBE REFLECTION-ACTION CIRCLE, MALAWI

## Reflection-Action



Reflection-Action is an innovative approach to learning and social change. It provides an on-going democratic space for people to discuss issues that are important to them. Underpinning the approach is a range of complementary participatory methods – for example, Power Analysis and Vulnerability Analysis (see Annex 2). In Reflection-Action groups, the development of literacy and other communication skills are closely linked to the engagement of people in wider processes of development and social change.

ActionAid Bangladesh: After conducting a similar ‘youth audit’ as in Malawi, ActionAid Bangladesh identified a need to scale up youth participation in strategic planning and review and reflection (i.e. monitoring and evaluation).

### As a result:

- 46 young people (including 22 young women) have been involved in strategic planning processes in three LRPs. Through this process they have gained exposure to a wide variety of analysis and planning tools.
- 45 young people have led power and women’s rights analyses in their LRPs and are developing their own actions to address these findings.

“ Without proper planning we often get frustrated whenever we face unforeseen challenges. Now we can work more systematically ”

ROMANA AKTER, YOUTH GROUP MEMBER, BANGLADESH

ActionAid Zambia has institutionalised youth representation in project management structures at the LRP level and national levels. There is now systematic close programme planning and monitoring between young representatives from Zambia's Activista network and ActionAid staff and partners. Young people in Zambia are also working in partnership to conduct the 2014 annual evaluation of ActionAid's work in Zambia, and will take a lead in aspects of the evaluation relating to youth programming and youth campaigning.

ActionAid Myanmar: Youth have been the cornerstone of ActionAid Myanmar's entire country programme since 2006, when its Fellowship scheme was introduced and promoted the development of youth as 'community change-makers'. This year, the Myanmar team has utilised the Toolkit to scale up/strengthen youth participation in the following areas:

- 15 young people conducted a situation assessment for a new LRP in a community where



YOUNG PEOPLE IN MYANMAR HAVE BEEN TRAINED TO LEAD PARTICIPATORY REVIEW AND REFLECTION PROCESSES



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USING FACEBOOK AS A PLATFORM TO SHOWCASE PROGRESS AND SUCCESS HAS INCREASED YOUTH OWNERSHIP OF WORK IN TARGET COMMUNITIES

political tensions meant it had not previously been receptive to the presence of international NGOs; 30 youth have also led the largest annual evaluation of ActionAid Myanmar's work at community levels – and have reached out to 120 communities across the country.

- 140 young Fellows have been trained to use Facebook as a tool for review and reflection, and have set up Facebook pages for the communities they work in. In 2014, youth have been using the social media site to document the baseline situation of target communities, and to use pictures and stories of change to highlight how social changes are taking place. Using Facebook as a platform to showcase progress and success has stimulated young people's interest in monitoring and evaluation and has increased their ownership of work in target communities.

[ActionAid Uganda](#) is using the Toolkit to support young people to develop an evidence-based national youth advocacy strategy, which will be launched before 2014. A diversity of young people – for example, out-of-school youth, farmers and university graduates - have been trained in Action-Research methodologies, and will play a lead role in identifying the key priorities for youth in their localities. They will then work in partnership with ActionAid Uganda to develop and implement the national advocacy strategy.

[ActionAid South Africa](#) is supporting young people to mainstream safety across the programme cycle. Youth will lead the development of their own safety strategies and local partner organisations will be supported to strengthen meaningful youth participation across their work.

[ActionAid Liberia](#) is in the process of conducting youth audits in all of its LRPs and will be engaging youth to lead strategic planning processes based upon audit findings. Youth are also a key contributor to partnership assessment and partnership review processes.

## Activista!



Activista is ActionAid's global youth campaigning network. It currently operates in over 25 countries and comprises of ActionAid country members, local and national youth organisations and partners. Activista focuses on youth campaigning through mobilization and engagement of youth at local, national and international levels. This is just one way that ActionAid works with young people – some countries engage with grassroots youth groups and the organisation also works with youth social movements.



## A focus on results

Although the piloting period has only been just over half a year long, rich findings are already emerging.

### Youth catalyse wider community ownership and action

Youth from Activista Zambia have started to lead a wide variety of programme activities in 2014. For example, they have organised radio programmes and community sensitisations on early marriage. ActionAid Zambia have noted that since young people started to take more of a lead, they have been instrumental in:

“catalysing community ownership and wider community action on many issues. For example, youth have been very successful in working with the wider community to say, ‘These issues you are facing are not ActionAid’s problems. These are our problems – and it’s time to do something about it’. The community is sitting up and taking notice.”

MWILA MUSONDA, ACTIVISTA CO-ORDINATOR, ACTIONAID ZAMBIA

Likewise, case studies from ActionAid Bangladesh (see ‘Tackling the loan sharks’, p.9) and ActionAid Zambia (see ‘Quality healthcare for all’, p.10) highlight how young people have spearheaded collective community action and civic engagement.

### Changing adult mindsets and practices

All countries that have participated in the pilot initiative report that ActionAid staff and local partners increasingly understand the positive contribution young people can make at every stage of the programme cycle. For example, in the pilot area, ActionAid Malawi staff no longer hold any programme planning meetings without male and female youth representation. Young people’s presence in these meetings has led to an increase in their participation in all LRP activities – for example, Reflection-Action activities were previously held on days when young people could not attend. Timings have since changed to ensure young people can take part. LRPs across Malawi are starting to disaggregate data on youth engagement across all their activities for the first time and assess the impact of all their work on young people as a distinct group of rights holders. Meanwhile, ActionAid Bangladesh and ActionAid Zambia report that staff and local partners no longer view young people as merely effective community mobilisers – there is a growing recognition that young people have the capability to plan, organise and evaluate the impact of large-scale events or campaigns.

## Tackling the loan sharks



YOUTH IN BANGLADESH SUPPORT COMMUNITY MEMBERS TO CHALLENGE A FRAUDULENT LOAN SCHEME

In Chilahati Upazila, Bangladesh, a female local community group member raised concerns about a fraudulent loan scheme that was intended to support acutely poor households, but was being targeted at households that had not applied to the scheme. Those exploiting the system were receiving the bulk of the loan, meaning that poor households were only receiving 3% of the full loan amount, yet were saddled with 100% loan repayments. When local youth group members heard about this, they mobilised to seek additional information.

Thanks to the approaches they had learned from ActionAid's youth programming team, such as project planning and stakeholder analysis, they were able support local community groups to conduct information research, documentation and link up with government and media organisations. They managed to bring the fraudulent scheme to the attention of the national media.

Shadi, representing the youth group stated: "We get very disappointed whenever we get to know any incidents of injustice in our community. We have a moral responsibility to not take these incidents for granted and to work together to bring such cases to light. With regards to the recent case, we wanted to be able to support the victims who otherwise would have been struggling to pay back large amounts of money". A victim of the loan scheme said, "We got the courage to fight against the injustice we faced because we had the youth group members who supported us and stood beside us during this entire process."

## Quality healthcare for all



ActionAid Zambia has trained young members of its Activista network in strategic planning. Using tools and approaches from the ActionAid Youth Programming Toolkit, including how to develop critical pathways and conduct stakeholder analyses, young people developed action plans to address the poor quality of public services in their areas. For example, in Nkonde LRP, there are inadequate health clinics to serve the local population – many people travel long distances to receive health care. When the local government opened a new clinic, it was received with much fanfare and media attention. However, government equipped the new clinic with equipment from the already existing clinic in the District, which meant that people living close to the older clinic were unable to get the treatment they needed, and instead had to travel 10-12 Km to get to the new clinic, paying high fees for transportation.

Activista members mobilised and developed a lobbying plan. They worked in collaboration with local community members to organise a public forum, which was attended by Ministry of Health representatives. The forum was broadcast by local community radio stations. In response, government has agreed to return the equipment to its original clinic and buy new equipment for the new facility. Community members have reported that levels of congestion at the clinics have been much reduced as a result, and that patients are receiving a higher quality of care.

### **Increased relevance of local rights programming**

ActionAid Malawi supported young people to critically assess the existing strategic plan for Ntchisi LRP. Young people reported that the plan was, to a large extent, 'youth-blind'. For example, there was no holistic approach to tackle problems of high drug and alcohol abuse among young men, or the lack of targeted youth employment or livelihoods strategies for young women. There was also a need to explore how harmful traditional practices such as early marriage were preventing young women from taking up leadership roles in the community. Young people also analysed the budgets and targets for the existing plan, and made suggestions for how many young people should be included within the existing targets, and how budgets and programme activities could be adjusted. Their recommendations have been taken on board by Ntchisi LRP, and as a result, the existing strategic plan, budget and targets have been revised and youth concerns have been mainstreamed into the LRP's existing work on Education, Governance and Livelihoods.

## Youth amplify voices of the marginalised

“ Young people often understand better than older generations that we can and must transcend our religious and cultural differences in order to reach our shared goals. ”

UN SECRETARY GENERAL BAN KI MOON, 2011, UNGA

Anecdotal evidence from ActionAid Zambia, Bangladesh, Malawi and Myanmar suggests that when young people lead specific processes, such as situation assessments or Reflection-Action groups, they are highly successful in both mobilising and ensuring the meaningful participation of marginalised members of the community. For example, the young people who led ActionAid Myanmar's appraisal of a new local rights programme were:

“ Understanding of those in the community who had been marginalised as a result of their ethnicity, religion, economic status, gender or age. The young researchers were excellent at facilitation, and at making sure that those marginalised groups were able to voice their concerns. They did not display entrenched prejudices in the slightest. Their approach bodes well for inter-ethnic, inter-religious understanding and community cohesion. ”

JULIA RAAVAD, YOUTH MONITORING AND EVALUATION ADVISOR, ACTIONAID MYANMAR



YOUTH IN JOYPURHAT, BANGLADESH, CAMPAIGNING FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLE'S RIGHT TO LAND

Meanwhile youth in BITA LRP, Bangladesh, have been working tirelessly with local indigenous communities to arrange a conference advocating for the constitutional rights of indigenous groups, who have been seeking a separate land commission, as well as increased recognition in official publications issued by the Ministry of Culture. During the conference, 500 youth organised two human chains to show solidarity with indigenous communities. Since the conference, which received widespread media coverage, there has been recognition of a variety of indigenous groups in an amended government gazette, and the youth groups have been supported by ActionAid teams working on land rights to link up with the Association for Land Reforms and Development – a national advocacy platform that works on land-grabbing issues. This will give the young people and the indigenous communities they support a louder voice at national level.

## Generating multiplier impact at a national level

A focus upon promoting youth participation across the programme cycle, as well as investing in youth-adult partnerships, can generate impact at multiple levels, as this example from ActionAid Bangladesh highlights:

“ The district of Kurigram has one of the highest rates of child marriage in the country. We formed our graduated sponsored children's group made up of formerly ActionAid-sponsored children in 2011, and since then have prioritised child marriage as one of the key issues that we will work on. Initially we had limited knowledge on how to go about this. Once we were introduced to the Youth Programming Toolkit we had a much clearer way of doing our work. We have been able to organise awareness-raising initiatives such as essay, debate and art competitions in schools. Exposure to capacity development focusing on leadership, communication, and youth programming have allowed us to approach and lobby with local duty bearers on child marriage.

I have also been recently selected as a member of the UN Youth Advisory Panel in Bangladesh. This gives me a unique opportunity to network with young people from across the country and plan activities that will influence how various UN agencies work with youth in Bangladesh. My recent experience and the support from ActionAid have helped me perform better within the UNYAP and contribute in a more meaningful manner.

MOMINUL ISLAM, PRESIDENT OF YOUTH ACTION FOR SOCIAL CHANGE (YASC), KURIGRAM

## A more holistic, youth-centred focus on risk

Young people from Ntchisi LRP in Malawi used approaches from the Youth Programming Toolkit to analyse how increased youth engagement across the programme cycle could expose them to risk. They generated findings that were unidentified in prior risk assessments led by ActionAid and local partner staff. Young people feared that increased activism and visibility might lead to de-registration of youth groups by government officials; discrimination of youth from benefiting from public works schemes that pay small stipends; and even witchcraft from Secret Societies that might disapprove of young people campaigning on issues relating to access to education and early marriage. As a result of youth-led risk assessments, youth have developed their own safety strategies and Ntchisi LRP is specifically investing in training young people in effective communication and safe, creative campaigning methods, to minimise the risk incurred as young people claim their rights. Simultaneously, there has been increased time invested in bringing key duty bearers on board – which has strengthened local relationships with key stakeholders such as the District Youth Officer.

“ As a result of youth-led risk assessments, in Ntchisi we have supported youth to be transparent in everything that they do. Young people hold their meetings in open areas where everyone can access or attend. They proactively inform local officials of their upcoming plans. Relationships of trust between youth and local authorities have really improved.

STELLA AGARA, YOUTH ADVISOR, ACTIONAID MALAWI

## Youth Voices: “ ” ActionAid Malawi Champions Inclusion

When I was asked by young people from my community to join a Reflection-Action group, I was not sure if I would be of much use because of my illiteracy. I placed all my hope in the hands of fellow youth whom I decided to depend on for explanations. It is amazing that after going through the processes, I am able to follow and participate in the discussions. Although I cannot write my own name, I feel as important as my friends who are very competent in reading and writing skills.

MARY NTHALA, REFLECTION-ACTION GROUP  
MEMBER, MALAWI

## Youth-friendly spaces are important for sustaining young women's engagement

In many of the countries where this pilot has taken place, young women face significant barriers to meaningful involvement in decision-making and public life. Traditional patriarchal power structures mean that it is often men who dominate leadership posts; young women may lack the confidence to claim their rights to participate in the decisions that affect their lives, or have internalised their own subordinate positions. Countries including ActionAid Bangladesh and ActionAid Zambia have found that the existence of youth-friendly spaces that are run and comprised only of young people have been instrumental in attracting and sustaining the engagement of young women. For example, over the past year, ActionAid Zambia has seen a 40% increase in female representation in its Activista network. This is credited to the introduction of 'Activista corners' - which are safe places where young people have been able to discuss issues that were previously off-limits to them. ActionAid Zambia and ActionAid Bangladesh report that girls and young women have used the spaces to disclose abuse, discuss and challenge taboo issues, and to start to reflect upon gender inequalities. This has led to young women spearheading actions to address those issues they care about most. A female youth group member from Bangladesh describes how the spaces enabled her to reflect upon power dynamics in her own family:

“ Now I can urge my parents to ensure my equal access to various family resources, just the same as my brother has. ”

ZANNAT FERDOUSI, YOUTH GROUP MEMBER, BANGLADESH

## Youth-led Reflection-Action can break taboos and nurture youth leadership

Ntchisi LRP in Malawi has trained a diversity of marginalised youth – including disabled youth and young people with low levels of education – as Reflection-Action facilitators for groups comprising a wide range of community members. ActionAid staff have found that the youth-led groups are more active and motivated than those led by older community members, and that there is less need for staff to provide ongoing support to the youth-led groups. A key finding has been that the youth-led groups are more likely to discuss a range of sensitive issues openly. For example, in the target community, Secret Societies and some of their negative practices are rarely discussed, even though it is evident that young people who undergo initiation with certain Secret Societies tend to drop out of school early and are subject to a variety of harmful traditional practices. The youth-led Reflection-Action groups are the first to start to analyse this issue and develop action plans to address it. Their work will require substantial sensitivity going forward, given the powerful role the Societies play in the community.

## Youth-adult partnerships lead to increased accountability and transparency

Many ActionAid countries have taken steps to include young people in their programme management structures in local rights programmes. For example, ActionAid Zambia ensure that young representatives are involved in all programme planning on LRP Management Committees. This has strengthened accountability, as young people have access to the types of information needed to question the allocation of project budget lines, and demand that targets are set and monitored for the numbers of young people who will take part in key activities. Institutional engagement between ActionAid and youth groups at local levels provides a systematic mechanism for regular follow-up to ensure youth concerns are being integrated into all areas of work. Meanwhile, ActionAid Liberia reports that working in partnership with young men and women to conduct annual programme evaluations has been essential for encouraging diverse youth to demand accountability from ActionAid.



YOUNG MALAWIANS LEAD REFLECTION-ACTION GROUPS IN NTCHISI LOCAL RIGHTS PROGRAMME

“ Young people are asking us why certain activities are not working and questioning where we have gone wrong. They are telling us what needs to be done to strengthen our work. And we are responding by altering our plans for the coming year. We are also asking young people to assess how inclusive our local partners are – young men and women are now a key part of our partnership assessment and review processes. ”

MARVIN GARBEH DAVIS, YOUTH MANAGER, ACTIONAID LIBERIA

## Increased engagement between youth and duty bearers

The findings of this pilot initiative show that whenever young people have been involved at the beginning of the programme cycle, and taken part in or led research/situation assessments, they have been exposed to tools that enable them to pinpoint which duty bearers are responsible for respecting,



# ActionAid's Human Rights Based Approach in action

ActionAid's Theory of Change on development and programming emphasises three pillars: Empowerment, Solidarity and Campaigning. Each pillar builds upon and strengthens each other. The examples below highlight the ways in which solidarity and campaigning interacted to promote accountability during the piloting of the Youth Programming Toolkit in Malawi.



“ Youth in Ntchisi LRP, have established three Reflection-Action circles. Through the circles, youth are now capable of not only identifying and analysing their issues, but can also prioritise and link them to the appropriate government agencies for redress. For example we recently took a leading role in the Global Campaign on Education to showcase how youth living with disabilities are being discriminated against and eventually denied the right to education. We invited a cross section of duty bearers ranging from the District Commissioner, MPs and Ward Councillors. We shared the challenges through a documentary that we had compiled on the challenges faced by disabled youth in accessing education and demanded for on-the-spot commitments to open up access to quality basic education for children with disabilities. By the end of the function, we recorded over 15 commitments targeted at both individual youth and various schools. A committee was immediately set up to follow up on each of the promises and ensure that they are fulfilled. ”

RODWELL KETALA, YOUNG ACTIVIST, MALAWI



“ I am 17 years old and I live in Chalumbe Village in Ntchisi district. I have only one leg and I walk with the support of a stick. I lost my father when I was very young. This was a blow to me not just because he was our bread winner, but because he used to take me to school and back on his bike. When he died I stopped going to school. At that time my interaction with other youth was limited since I did not really feel confident around others. Earlier this year, two young people invited me to join a youth network, which they called Activista. It was at that point that I saw the value of interacting with other youth. But also important were the discussions that were relevant to me - Activista was addressing issues of rights and inclusion. As we continued, we also participated in the 2014 Global Campaign on Education, where we lobbied for support to youth with disabilities. Among the pledges made, I was fortunate to get one from the District Education Manager, who promised to pay for my school if I got selected to secondary school. As I talk to you now, I am happy to report that I have been selected to a Community Day Secondary School. I am certain that pledges that were also made to the other youth will be fulfilled. As Activista we have agreed to help all youth to secure the pledges that were made to them. ”

FANNY CHIMZINGA, YOUNG ACTIVIST, MALAWI

protecting and fulfilling their rights, and which organisations they can approach to form alliances with. Young people who have previously had little to no engagement with government officials are increasingly approaching these stakeholders and demanding action. ActionAid Bangladesh reports that following the pilot period, young people were more easily able to identify which duty bearers and allies they should be working with. For example, in BITA LRP, young people moved swiftly after leading institutional analysis processes to forge alliances with local citizens' groups to gain access to the Department for Public Health and Engineering. They demanded the Department made good on its promise to test the local areas for arsenic in drinking water and wells, and remain in close contact with government officials to ensure this testing is expedited. They are linking up their work with ActionAid teams working on governance issues and aim to hold government to account to ensure enhanced quality of public services in their area.

Where young people have been visible in leading activities across the programme cycle, the impact is even greater, as it has led to an elevation in the status of youth in the eyes of adults in the community, thereby opening up new spaces for youth engagement, as this example from ActionAid Malawi highlights:

“ Whenever I see something not going right in my community, I now speak out immediately. I am usually taken seriously especially because of the respect that I began to command since I led the establishment of Reflection-Action circles. As we continue fighting for meaningful youth participation, at this stage we already have succeeded in getting youth representatives in almost all the seven Area Development Committees of the district. Our next target is the district council; we want to lobby for a youth representative among the newly elected councillors to speak on youth issues when they meet as a council. ”

RODWELL KETALA, YOUNG REFLECTION-ACTION FACILITATOR, MALAWI

## **Youth leadership across the programme cycle generates returns in access, efficiency and scale**

ActionAid Myanmar has worked closely with young people this year to build their skills in participatory research, review and reflection methodologies. In 2014, a group of 30 young people were trained – the majority of whom had no research experience or university level education - by ActionAid to lead an annual evaluation in over 120 communities across Myanmar. This is the first time ActionAid Myanmar has been able to conduct such a thorough review of its work at community level; and this has been thanks to the expertise and commitment of young researchers. Likewise, by working with young

researchers to conduct a situation assessment for a new local rights programme, ActionAid Myanmar was able to conduct research in communities that have been traditionally hostile to the presence of international NGOs because they have been affected by land-grabbing practices of an international mining company. Young researchers were able to build relationships of trust with local communities by spending several weeks prior to the situation assessment living in the target community. As a result, the situation assessment was successfully carried out and a new local rights programme is planned for the area. Youth will continue to play a central role going forward as 'community change makers' for the new programme.

### **Youth participation leads to a strong, diverse civil society**

The experience of ActionAid Myanmar, which has been promoting youth participation and leadership across every stage of the programme cycle since 2006 and the establishment of its youth-centred Fellows programme, strongly highlights that the promotion of youth leadership can help to cultivate a stronger, more diverse civil society. For example, in 2014, 8 new community based organisations (CBOs) have been set up across Myanmar by young people who have been through ActionAid's



MYANMAR YOUTH PREPARE TO CONDUCT A SITUATION ASSESSMENT FOR A NEW LOCAL RIGHTS PROGRAMME

Fellowship programme. These CBOs are working on a diversity of issues, including livelihoods, advocacy and youth rights, and are led by young people who have strong expertise in community development and human rights. They are potential implementing partners for ActionAid and demonstrate how a focus upon youth leadership can bring long-term dividends.

### **Improving the quality of youth participation brings ownership and sustainability**

Within the Youth Programming Toolkit, ActionAid provides guidance for how to ensure quality youth participation. One way is to ensure participation is always relevant and appropriate to young people's capacities. Since increasing their focus upon this guiding principle, ActionAid Bangladesh and ActionAid Zambia have noticed increased levels of youth ownership and self-initiated action by youth groups. For example, by supporting youth groups to use tools such as youth rights analyses, young people are identifying campaigns they are interested in leading, and are themselves initiating action. Youth in both countries are actively campaigning on child marriage, while youth in Zambia are keen to work closely with women's rights organisations on land rights issues, and young people in southern Bangladesh are actively campaigning on climate change. Because youth have self-identified the issues they are most passionate about, ActionAid staff find they have not been required to provide substantive support, and retention issues have not been a challenge. ActionAid believes that, over time, this will be a vital strategy for ensuring youth have the space and motivation to **develop alternative, innovative approaches for tackling rights violations.**

## Partner voice

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Although we have a lot of activities targeting young people, we have been facing challenges in terms of ensuring their meaningful participation in our programme cycle. The youth in our community have proven themselves to be an invaluable asset in taking forward our work over the months, and 29 of them were involved in our review and reflection activities this year. They performed their own Human Rights Based Approach analysis while we facilitated the discussions, and influenced what our local rights programme plan will look like next year.

BAPPA CHOWDHURY LRP MANAGER, BITA LRP,  
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## Key messages

Findings from the piloting process show that **youth involvement in review and reflection can have multiple benefits**, such as empowering young people to demand accountability. However, **it is important that young people are not just involved as data collectors; they need to be actively engaged in critically analysing research findings and shaping solutions to respond to those findings**. ActionAid will pay particular focus upon how young people's involvement in data analysis can be more widely institutionalised.

Platforms, spaces, practices and structures that institutionalise youth-adult partnerships across ActionAid are a springboard for building young people's capacity to lead. During the pilot period, where older adults have provided youth with guidance, resources and access to information, **we have seen increases in self-initiated action by youth and reduced dependency of young people on adults**. Moreover, where this has worked best, ActionAid has invested time in training and preparing adult staff, local partners and key community stakeholders to work with young people. **Failing to invest time in preparing adults is a false economy**; conversely, bringing adults on board will pay great dividends for all, and bodes well for the sustainability of development impact.

Examples from ActionAid Malawi highlight how **Reflection-Action**, ActionAid's unique approach to learning and social change, **is a powerful tool for promoting youth agency and leadership**. Reflection-Action builds young people's awareness of their rights, particularly women's rights, and teaches them the skills needed to understand and plan action. It is a bedrock for promoting youth agency and as such, ActionAid will continue to promote youth engagement in Reflection-Action in a wider range of countries.

Through enhanced participation at every stage of the programme cycle, young people have become more conscious of their rights, acted in solidarity with marginalised groups to confront power imbalances, and have claimed their rights from duty bearers. **Their achievements are an expression of ActionAid's Human Rights Based approach**, which has Empowerment, Solidarity and Campaigning at its core.

ActionAid, with its internal expertise on women's rights and youth, is well-placed to champion young women's leadership across the programme cycle. The pilot findings have shown that **meaningful participation of young women relies upon the provision of safe, youth-friendly spaces, as well as targeted capacity building** that nurtures young women's leadership skills. It also requires sustained effort by young people and their adult allies to transform those entrenched patriarchal attitudes and social norms in the wider community that devalue women and young people as a result of their gender and age.

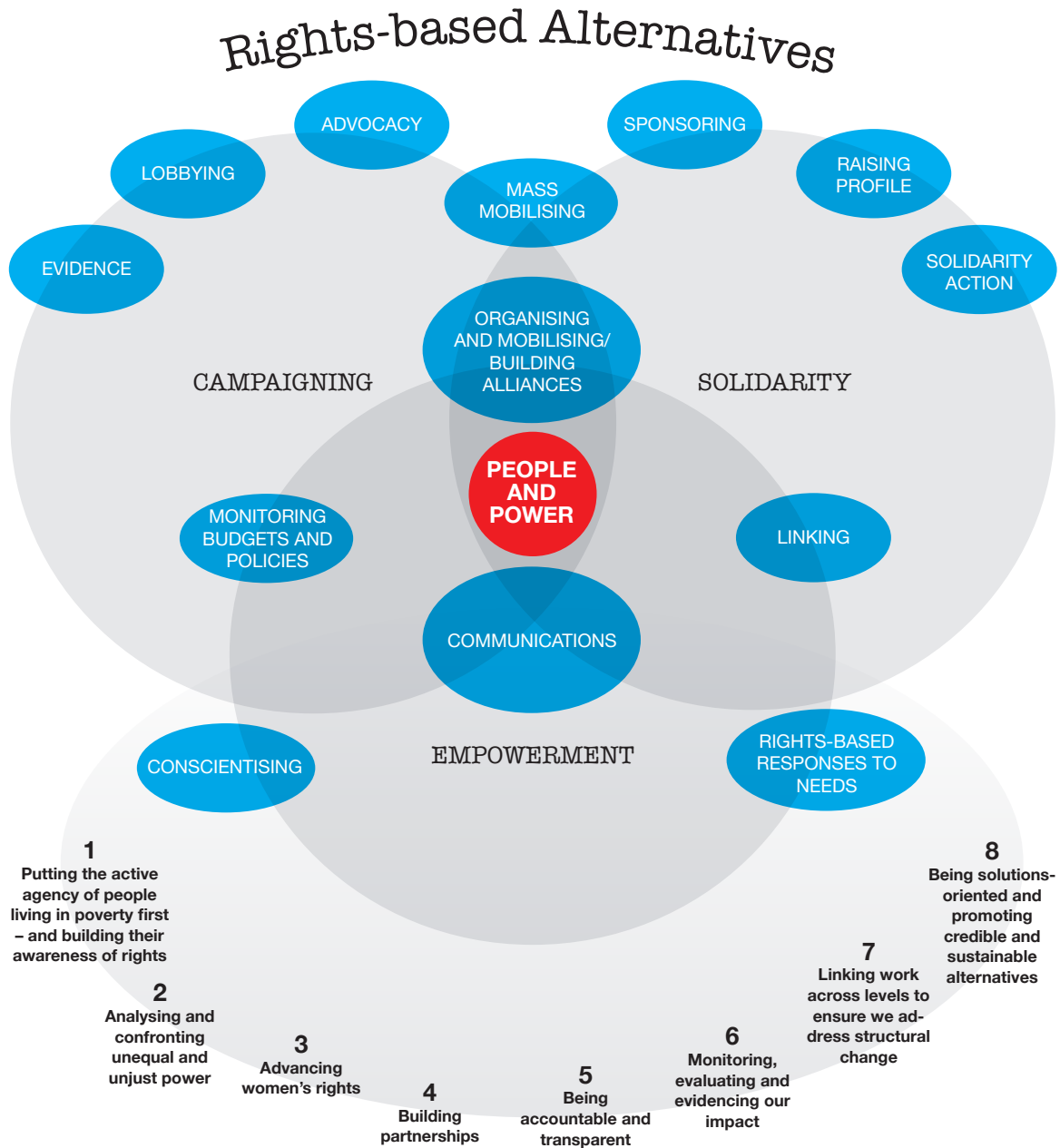
An emerging strength of ActionAid's youth work - is in its avoidance of ghettoisation within the

'youth sector'. ActionAid youth groups at the local level are not only linked up with a diverse range of national and international youth organisations, but they are allied with groups, networks and alliances in different sectors. Findings from this pilot initiative show that **when young people proactively build cross-sectoral relationships or act in solidarity with a diverse range of citizen's groups, organisations or networks, it yields results**. Continued integration of the collective action of diverse youth across all thematic areas ActionAid works on will continue to provide further opportunities for young men and women to build alliances across sectors. This is crucial if young people are to be a visible force for positive change.

## Key messages

- Youth involvement in review and reflection can have multiple benefits
- It is important that young people are not just involved as data collectors
- We have seen increases in self-initiated action by youth and reduced dependency of young people on adults
- Failing to invest time in preparing adults is a false economy
- Reflection-Action, is a powerful tool for promoting youth agency and leadership
- Youth achievements are an expression of ActionAid's Human Rights Based approach
- Meaningful participation of young women relies upon the provision of safe, youth-friendly spaces, as well as targeted capacity building
- When young people proactively build cross-sectoral relationships or act in solidarity with a diverse range of citizen's groups, organisations or networks, it yields results

# Annex 1: ActionAid's theory of change



## Annex 2: Youth Rights Analysis

A strong, effective LRP is based upon a detailed analysis of the local context. This includes analysing power, institutions, vulnerabilities and rights. It is important to ensure that analysis of youth rights is fully integrated into LRP appraisals. Your analysis of all thematic areas at appraisal stages – from livelihoods to women's rights – should be informed by a youth rights analysis. A youth rights analysis should build upon the information, views and opinions of young people themselves, as well as parents, caregivers and key stakeholders including community leaders and other duty bearers.

Programme cycle stage	Key guiding youth questions	Possible tools
<b>Appraisal (situation assessment)</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Which groups of young women and men are living in poverty and their numbers as % of the population of the LRP?</li> <li>2. Which groups of youth are excluded?</li> <li>3. What are young people's most serious rights violations?</li> <li>4. What are young people's levels of awareness of their rights?</li> <li>5. What are the key legal entitlements (laws/policies) for these groups – are they aware of them?</li> <li>6. What structures exist to implement/enforce these laws or policies?</li> <li>7. What needs to be done in order to develop or support these structures?</li> <li>8. What are young people's assets (social, economic, political)?</li> <li>9. What communication capacities do youth need to develop spaces for influence?</li> <li>10. What are the risks if young people's active engagement is to be promoted in this LRP?</li> <li>11. How do each of the areas mentioned above differ in relation to gender or other social categories such as race, ethnicity, disability status?</li> </ol>	<p><b>Useful Reflection-Action tools for 7 areas of HRBA analysis</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Rights</b> – problem tree, access and control matrix</li> <li>● <b>Power</b> – chapatti diagram</li> <li>● <b>Actors and institutions</b> – chapatti diagram</li> <li>● <b>Women's rights</b> – body map or daily activity chart</li> <li>● <b>Vulnerability</b> - map or timeline</li> <li>● <b>Communications</b> – map or problem tree</li> <li>● <b>Risks and Feasibility</b> – matrix</li> </ul>



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