



A march in El Salvador raising awareness of Climate Justice ahead of the CoP.
PHOTO: ACTIONAID

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1. INTRODUCTION

Working with progressive social movements is a core part of [ActionAid's](#) change strategy since the transformative power of working together on shared concerns will contribute to systems change.

This guidance document aims to support ActionAid staff and partners and those outside ActionAid interested in how international non-governmental organisations (INGOs)¹ work with social movements. It is a set of ideas for working with movements which is rooted in ActionAid's principles and mission. This document has been created to support people working in programmes and campaigns to ensure their engagement with social movements is guided by a feminist perspective. It aims to develop a deeper understanding of social movements and guide good working practices to avoid Sexual Harassment, Exploitation and Abuse (SHEA) and minimise risks to the movements, people and organisations engaged.

This guidance document was put together following work in 2021 to map ActionAid's engagement with social movements. It draws on extensive conversations across the federation, as well as with movement allies and it builds on existing guidance and learning documents.² It has been further developed to respond to questions, issues and challenges arising from ActionAid and partners, particularly following conversations at our annual Global People Power Forums, where movements gather to network and collectively discuss current issues.

This document is for guidance only, and every collaboration is different. With a view to being concise, the document does not outline practical examples, but rather links to effective engagements. For further practical tips on working with social movements, see *Building a Movement Mindset; a guide for civil society organisations*.

Not everything in the document will be relevant for your work, and it doesn't claim to cover every scenario – this is a learning process for ActionAid too. We recommend the reader to dip into relevant sections, seeking out further reading from annexes where necessary.

Some links in the document are for ActionAid staff and are not accessible for anyone outside the organisation. If you have any questions on the content, or would like to access the documents, please contact Amish.Shrestha@actionaid.org.

1. This document shall also be useful for NGOs too.
2. The documents referred to are listed in Annex 3.



Pride parade held in Warsaw on Saturday, 25 June 2022. As a consequence of the Russian invasion, many Ukrainian LGBTQI+ organisations and community have celebrated the pride day outside the Ukraine. Members of Insight, (ActionAid's partner in Ukraine) came to the parade to raise awareness of the importance of protection of the most vulnerable people in times of conflict, including the LGBTQI+ communities. This march is a showcase of resilience, trans-border solidarity, tolerance and acceptance. PHOTO: ALEKSANDER MAJDANSKI / ACTIONAID

2. BACKGROUND

ActionAid is a global justice federation working to achieve social justice, gender equality and poverty eradication. ActionAid works to strengthen the capacity and agency of people living in poverty and exclusion, with a focus on women, youth and marginalised people, people with disabilities, women and LGBTQI+ people. ActionAid works with communities, people's organisations, women's movements, groups and networks, social movements and other allies to overcome the structural causes and consequences of poverty and injustice. The aim is to connect work at community level with broader efforts and struggles for justice at every level to make the greatest contribution towards a just, equitable and sustainable world.³

ActionAid has a long tradition of working with people's organisations, building on work with grassroots organisers and with participatory local governance actions at its core. Through conversations and collaborative work with progressive organisations and social movements, and building on the mapping of 2021, we seek to understand how an INGO can better work with social movements to achieve change.

Social change requires all forms of societal transformation. A social movement is a collective effort to bring about social change and is one of the primary mechanisms by which social change can occur.

ActionAid's work revolves around bringing about the societal transformation through addressing the structural and proximate causes of poverty and injustice. This involves harnessing the power of organising, collective actions, and mobilising change agents, especially women and young people and their movements. Based on learning and conversations with movement leaders, this guiding document outlines processes, systems, methodologies, and approaches for supporting movements with their work.

3. For more read '[Action for Global Justice in Practice – ActionAid HRBA 2020](#)'

i. What is a social movement?

Following discussions with social movement leaders, a common request was for INGOs to better understand how social movements work. This section offers some basic definitions and processes to support INGO staff in more effective and compassionate engagement.

Whilst there are different definitions, ActionAid defines a social movement as a coming together of people who are organised and mobilised to fight injustice, sharing a common cause rooted in a shared social, political, and cultural identity and an interest in justice. This definition is inherently flexible and can be applied to a wide range of collective efforts to bring about social change. The boundaries of what constitutes a social movement is open to interpretation; some movements may have named leaders and organisational structures, while others may be more decentralised. Movements may arise around a specific issue or set of issues or may have a more general focus on broader social change.

Social movements often arise in response to perceived social injustices or inequalities and seek to bring about change by challenging existing power structures, influencing public opinion, and mobilising collective action. Social movements closely interact with political institutions and can be local, national, or global in scope, and can involve a wide range of actors, from individual activists to formal organisations and online communities.

The defining features of social movements include:

- A shared political agenda or ‘common cause’
- A constituency base that is mobilised and collectivised in either formal or informal institutions
- Collective strategies and actions in pursuit of a shared agenda
- Some continuity over time
- Committed and passionate members

ii. What is a people’s organisation?

INGOs typically work with, and may be more familiar with, what we broadly call a ‘people’s organisation’. A people’s organisation is formed by people based on a shared identity, reality and common goals of their members. They primarily operate at a local level but have different structures, ranging from very informal groups based on voluntary participation (such as community-based groups emerging from ReflectionAction circles),⁴ to more formal institutions, with legal recognition (such as people’s committees, national NGOs, networks, etc.). People’s organisations can also represent organisations/networks of movements.

People’s organisations include groups connected by tribal or ethnic identity, castes, disability, livelihood, LGBTQI+ groups and people of minority religious or cultural identities. They can also be connected by location or common aims for resource management. Typically, INGOs are on familiar ground working with people’s organisations which have a more clearly defined roles and responsibilities organisationally than social movements.

4. See here for more: <https://www.reflectionaction.org/pages/about-reflection-action/>

Examples of people's organisations

1. SWOFON (Small Scale Women Farmers' Organisation) in Nigeria – a national umbrella organisation of smallholder women farmers with over 500 cooperatives and 200,000 members across 29 states.
2. The Rainbow Activist Alliance in South Africa – an organisation of lesbian, bisexual and transgender women who are challenging a culture of violence against their communities in townships across South Africa.
3. MVF (Mamidipudi Venkatarangaiya Foundation) in India – an organisation mobilising youth to campaign against child labour and for education.
4. The Women Watch Groups in Ethiopia – community groups empowering, organising, and mobilising women to fight for their rights and eliminate gender-based violence.
5. Babassu Nut Breakers in Brazil – helping women to know their rights and resist ranchers and deforestation.
6. MLup Promvihearthor Centre in Cambodia – an organisation mobilising local fishing communities to protect their fishing areas from a land grab by a major company.
7. Anjuman Falah-e-Moshra in Pakistan, a non-profit organisation – supporting the rights of mineworkers who are not allowed to unionise.
8. The Jungle Flower community in Guatemala – working in coordination with the Council of Displaced Guatemalans on resisting pollution caused by a palm oil company.
9. MAM (Mahila Adhikar Manch) in Nepal – a network of rural women advocating for women's rights to good governance, food security, environmental protection and progressive laws and policies.

iii. Organising and mobilising⁵

At the heart of organising is people power. We often refer to the foundation of a movement as a constituency of people with shared political interests and social change goals. Organising is not only about solving problems, but also about **building people power**,⁶ the 'Power With', enabling the people facing injustice to develop long-term strategies and resources so they can claim back power, whether political, social or economic.

Power is central to any change strategy; a movement must analyse the different forms of power at play, and develop strategies to shift power. Organising in movements and building alliances with others grows people power and increases people's ability to make change happen. To better understand where power lies, it is important to think about the four following questions:

5. For a brief online training session please visit: [GOLD Global Organising and Leadership Development | Home \(talentlms.com\)](#)
6. Learn more about approaches to power here: <https://www.powercube.net/analyse-power/what-is-the-powercube/>

1. What are the interests of your constituency?
2. Who holds the power and is preventing these interests from being addressed?
3. What are the interests of the individuals or organisations who hold the power?
4. What power does your constituency have that the other individuals or organisations need to address their interests?

*“It is important to realise the **power of people**. Movement building is about shared ownership of the space. We need to deepen our understanding about **collective leadership** and strategize to achieve the same. When decision making is truly decentralised then innovation flows freely, and this is the characteristic of social movements.”⁷*

Elements of successful organising

The key element of organising is to **build the power and leadership** of the people affected by a particular issue. Struggles need to be led and won by those affected, while being supported by allies.

Organising can be effective if people:

1. Organise themselves with a clear purpose and agenda to shift power.
2. Claim their rights in the process of grassroots campaigning.
3. Build networks and alliances with others outside their communities to claim rights beyond their community.
4. Campaign for specific changes within a set timeframe and goals.
5. Are supported in solidarity by allies, including INGOs, but these allies do not take the driver’s seat.

Why do we need organising?

Organising is a way for people to grow power and fight injustices. It’s a crucial part of building people power, deepening democracy, and securing political, social, and ecological justice.

In the past decade, people have organised mass movements to fight for democracy and people power, such as in the Arab Spring, Hong Kong protests, Black Lives Matter, #MeToo and climate protests. Digital connectivity has also supported activists to better organise to challenge unequal power.

As the decade wore on, governments, elites, and others in positions of formal power have delivered a systematic and global crackdown on the conditions for civil society. We have seen rising xenophobia and fascism, widening disparity between rich and poor, and Covid-19 exacerbating the gross inequalities caused by a global system of extraction and oppression. Organising is needed to bring diverse movements together.



Global Climate Strike, Washington DC, 2019 - A placard on 'Black Lives Matter' shows the disproportionate level of effects of climate induced crisis.
PHOTO: ACTIONAID

7. ActionAid - Lessons learned from social movements

What is mobilising?

Mobilising refers to a tactic that aims to involve people in something for a shorter period of time. This could be showing up at a demonstration, a town hall meeting, signing a petition, or liking a post on social media. Mobilising is part of the organising effort when movements need to engage a lot of people at the same time to put pressure on those holding in formal power by showing the volume of people who care an issue, and takes place during a longer campaign or organising strategy. Being part of a mobilisation can be a change process itself because mobilising can change the hearts and minds of the people taking part and their immediate networks and communities, as well as the target audiences. ActionAid aims to mobilise one million stakeholders around its Global Climate Justice Campaign, launched in 2023.

Organising dilemma: how big is too big?

The number and commitment of its supporters is a major determinant of the success of any social movement. These supporters bring money, education, skills, contacts, personal access to different institutions – in short, the primary resources of the movement. More members mean more resources.

However, a movement which consciously tries to diversify its membership base further than required often runs a risk of diluting its belief system. Movements can often be torn by conflicting demands of the movement's own social base. For a movement to opt in favour of one faction over the other often leads to the destruction of the movement. It becomes necessary to maintain a dynamic tension between the different pressures. This may be difficult to manage, but it is important for a movement to embrace the perspectives of those with intersecting marginalised identities or backgrounds.

In order to be inclusive, like any organisation, movements can consider the barriers to participation. These might include financial barriers to take part in solidarity actions, unpaid care work and language. Movements can replicate power dynamics in wider society and analysis of power is important to ensure inclusivity.

While mobilising can be very effective at strategic moments, organising efforts require longer term commitment.

Differences between organising and mobilising

Organising	Mobilising
builds leadership by developing the capacity of members to take on activism and leadership	builds membership by meeting people where they are
identifies and develops leaders who can engage others	identifies and recruits leaders from several prospects
has distributed responsibility	has centralised hierarchy
has supporters who are deeply engaged	has a greater number of supporters
is inexpensive to get people on board	costs more to get people on board
is a long-term strategy	is time-bound and short-term in nature

Interface with partisan politics – Should social movements operate within or outside the partisan-political system?

When a social movement operates solely outside the partisan political system, it is frequently not heard and even more frequently disregarded. When it operates solely inside, it risks becoming co-opted by unequal structures of power. There are instances where social movements that have collaborated with political parties have had their agenda taken over by the political party, weakening the movement or even making it redundant.

Thinning line between social and political movements

While challenging unequal power relations, especially when the state itself is the perpetrator of such unequal power relations, the movement may end up challenging the state. At times the social movement's path may collide with political movements seeking regime change. For INGOs with restrictions on engaging with political movements, such an agenda may be beyond the organisational mandate.

iv. Challenges facing social movements today

Government constraints and restrictions are making it difficult for social movements to thrive. Laws on organising in public spaces that were introduced during the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic remain in force, with some governments using these as a tool to legitimise a crackdown on protest, organising and the actions of human rights defenders.⁸ In some countries, laws of terrorism have been extended which is preventing peaceful protest.

For example, in Haiti, a 2020 decree expanded the definition of terrorism to include crowding and blocking public roads - a very common tactic for peaceful protest.

Funding for social movements is decreasing as funding to development is reduced globally, and cost of living is rising for all. Even where there is financial support, it can be challenging for this to reach movements, or comes with a risk to the organisation committed to supporting social movements. For example, in Uganda, authorities raided the ActionAid offices, taking all their equipment and even freezing their bank accounts, believing that ActionAid was assisting social movement groups in organising and training them.

This has resulted in a reduction of organisations committed to support social movements in many countries.

8. [ActionAid – The Impact of Covid-19 Measures on Civil and Political Rights in Nine Countries](#)

v. Stages of social movements⁹

All social movements evolve in different ways and should be analysed in their own context. However, it's helpful for allies to be aware of some common stages that may occur in the development of social movements. The stages broadly comprise of:

1. **Enduring crisis** – When persistent and declining conditions of injustice lead to widespread emotions of anger and frustration, a movement is born.

This is a moment for skills building, for sharing understanding of context and politics. It is the moment where movement leaders may emerge and the group start to organise to be ready for a trigger event. This is an ideal time for discussions around working together, since in the active uprising phase, movements may not have the time to engage.

2. **Uprising** – The movement is quickly growing in numbers and becoming very visible. Uprising is often galvanised by a 'trigger event' that moves many more people to join the movement. Dramatic events at this stage may cause unleashing of anger and the power of the movement depends on the potential for people to channel that anger constructively. At this stage, movement leaders often set up communication systems, recruit activists via communication platforms, develop calls to action and create face-to-face gatherings to build networks. Large numbers of people seek opportunities for action and collaboration, including with allies and partners.

Movement leaders will ensure that newcomers get the skills, knowledge and behaviour needed for them to become leaders in their own right. Leaders organise mass trainings to help the movement build infrastructure and ramp up fundraising, while individuals take part in self-organising.

3. **Peak** – The movement is at its most powerful and visible. At this stage, the movement is widely recognised, and their arguments are penetrating mainstream discourse causing movement leaders to be publicly regarded as powerful.

The movement will take advantage of the mainstream attention to make radical, transformative, and systemic demands and call for action. The movement leaders can clarify the roles and responsibilities of everyone involved and carry out continuous actions.

The next phase of the movement will include backlash, so leaders should prepare for this to minimise the risk to human rights defenders.

4. **Contraction** – The movement starts to decline in power and visibility. Now it's faced by internal challenges such as burnout, and external pressure by institutions such as the police, and backlash by state, mainstream media, and reactionary elements within the public. The number of people participating will decline and there could be internal disagreement and disillusionment within the movement.

At this point, the movement should analyse its successes and failures. Allies such as INGOs may be able to support with documentation and support collective learning from these experiences. Those who remain most committed to continue the work may continue to support self-

9. [The Movement Cycle \(talentlms.com\)](https://talentlms.com)

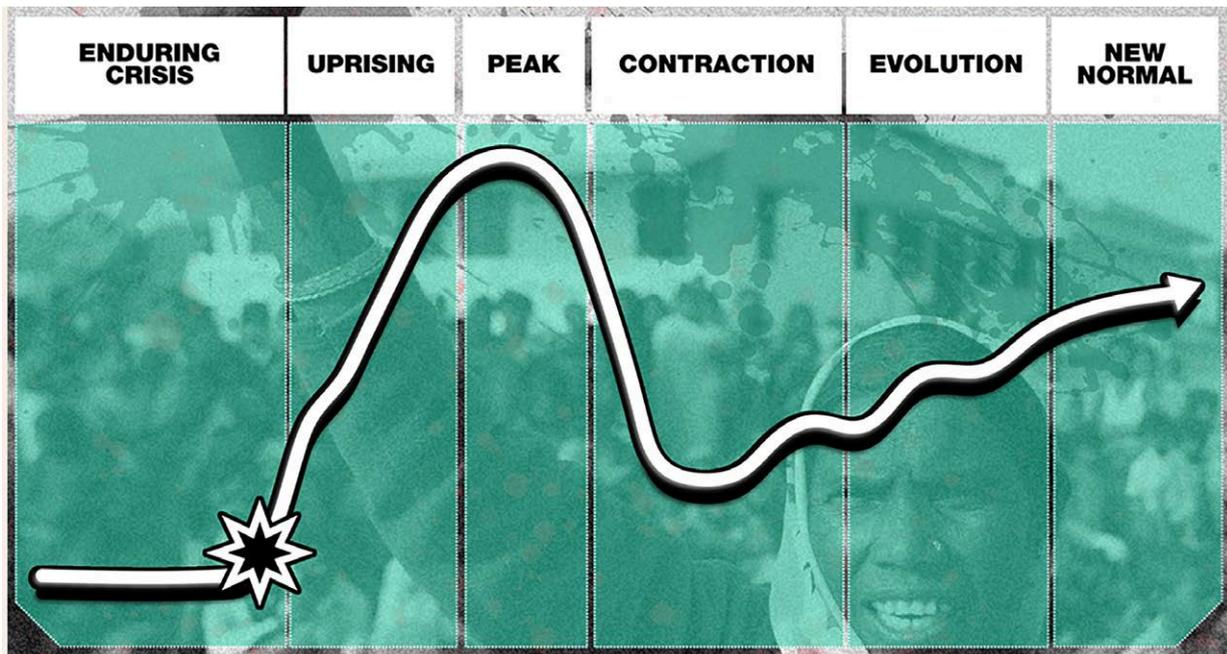
organising locally. Support to movement leaders to maintain momentum may also be valuable here since energy will be sapped, and community support is critical. In preparation for the next stage, resources should be moved to potential longer-term projects and internal conflict kept to a minimum.

- 5. Evolution** – Here the movement begins to learn from reflections and begin planning how to move forward. Longer-term projects start to take hold, and reflections allow for important lessons.

The movements should build new institutions, strengthen skills, and deepen relationships to prepare for the next peak.

- 6. New normal** – The movement is building back up, perhaps with new faces and fresh energies. It is ready to plan a new trigger event and move collectively toward a new peak. Now there is more public awareness of the cause, and new organisations and policies may be in place. The movement is better prepared for the next peak.

Stages of movement cycle





With slogan 'Feminists for Climate Justice' and 'hope grows where action blooms', ActionAid and partner organisations march at the Climate Justice March in 2023 in Amsterdam, The Netherlands.
PHOTO: LIEKE BRAADBAART / ACTIONAID

3. ENGAGING WITH SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Social movements have potential to create impact at scale and sustain change through shifting laws and policies or challenging and shifting cultural norms. Their capability in achieving change depends on the positive response of the general public versus the degree to which the opposing authority is vested in the status quo. The change is also dependant on the power held by their allies.

Recognising the potential of strong social movements to achieve positive change, many INGOs want to support movements' efforts and work collaboratively on shared change visions.

Of all partners, partnerships with social movements are the most fluid and dynamic. The partnership agreement needs to reflect this to allow flexibility for the intense nature of the relationship, where, for example, there are moments when issues are less aligned. When INGOs and social movements consider working together on strategic issues they will do so based on analysis of whether their vision is shared. Is there a shared goal? Is there alignment between constituencies of the INGO and social movement? Do partnership principles converge and is there genuine understanding of each other's structures and processes?

The different ways that INGOs can engage with social movements are outlined in more detail in section 3. ii 'Engagement strategies'.¹⁰ First, INGOs may first want to analyse and explore the context through mapping.

10. Global People Power Forum 2019 – 15 ways ActionAid can work with people's movements; and Social Movements Mapping Report 2022

i. Mapping social movements

Mapping social movements helps to identify information about social movements that can help with the decision whether to engage, and the level of that engagement. Mapping also facilitates understanding of possible allies and adversaries.

Objectives of mapping:

1. To understand the social movement landscape in a particular context.
2. To better know the stakeholders and actors involved in social movements; their needs, interests, and positions.
3. To support the development of contextualised social movement strategy including engagement with social movement stakeholders and actors to identify approach, risks, enabling factors, challenges and lessons from other social movements.

Things to consider for mapping:

- a. **Audiences of entry point mapping** – The mapping exercise serves two key audiences. First, the exercise is targeted at a group of activists with an interest in engaging on several issues through social movements. Second, INGOs that are willing to support such social movements through a strategic engagement for influencing policies and practices at the national and subnational level.
- b. **End product** – After the initial entry point mapping exercise, activists and INGOs will have an inventory of the different types of entry points at different levels of social movements. At the conclusion of all the steps, activists and INGOs will have an institutionalised platform through which they can engage on issues of social movements.

The collaborative process of identifying these entry points will strengthen partnerships between activists and INGOs that are willing to fulfil their commitments for change through social movements.

- c. **Time required** – The mapping process can take anywhere from two weeks to two months to complete, depending on how comprehensively activist groups pursue entry points. A comprehensive review of entry points and social movement landscape nationwide, however, could take at least a month and is greatly dependent upon the resources of activist groups, while subsequent negotiations to expand entry points could require an additional month. And of course, where activist groups meet significant resistance in their efforts, a more prolonged effort is required.
- d. **Skills necessary to implement the entry point mapping tool** – Initiating a mapping program requires a lead group of activists with the skills to review local and national social movements; their composition, agenda, leadership, agency, and available documents, and facilitate dialogue between grassroots organisations and social movement leaders and activists. This activist group should also have experience in conducting advocacy work at various levels of government, or work in close collaboration with an organisation or individual experienced in advocacy.

Steps to mapping:

There are six steps to a mapping, a detailed guide is in Annex 1 below.

Step 1: Determine thematic focus of social movement mapping.

Step 2: Determine the level of mapping.

Step 3: Collect information.

Step 4: Analyse data collected.

Step 5: Substantiate collected data.

Step 6: Create report.

The mapping will have identified key potential collaborations and entry points in existing strategies and programmes. Outlined below are some of the techniques for effective engagement.

ii. Engagement strategies

1. Standing in solidarity

Organisations can stand in solidarity with social movements, including by participating in or organising direct action events. If an organisation cannot participate in an official capacity, staff can be encouraged to participate as individuals and links can be made with like-minded potential allies.¹¹

2. Strengthening capacity

Movements are embedded in communities and know their needs, so there are several opportunities for knowledge sharing between INGOs and movement leaders. For example, a skills share can be arranged (with other allies if appropriate) on organising, mobilising, collective action, direct action methods, social psychology theories, legal training, leadership skills, safeguarding, team building skills, writing and public speaking skills, strategic planning and risk analysis, maintaining non-violent discipline, planning direct actions and deploying escalation tactics, managing public relations and media. Facilitating skills shares on a range of topics relevant to mass mobilisation can support the development of a movement and the growth of new leaders.

Skills shares on social media, including digital campaigning, can also bring in new, or young activists. However, it's important to also acknowledge that some potential activists – rural women farmers for example, may not be as familiar with technology. Digitisation should not exclude people from participating.

11. See collaboration below.

Technology helps to reach new audiences when civic space is constricted

As a result of shrinking civic space, social movements are increasingly turning to social media to convey their message and gather support without access to physical public spaces. Social media platforms provide a low-cost, fast, and easy-to-use tool that effectively disseminates information and helps garner support. Online activism has amplified the voices of marginalised groups and shifted national and global conversations on important social issues.

In Uganda and India,¹² for instance, social media is being used to push the youth agenda and women's rights, respectively. Through the social movements mapping, ActionAid has learnt that the use of social media like Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp and webinars enhance a social movement's reach.



A social movement is not an NGO

Given social movements are not formal organisations, there is little need for formal structures and hierarchies. This often poses tensions for leaders in making decisions about the directions of the movement. The fewer structures a movement organisation has, the less control it has over the directions in which it develops and the political actions in which it engages. However, being a social movement also requires spontaneous action, and bureaucratic structures often become a hindrance. Maintaining the balance becomes a big challenge but any shift towards formalisation may subdue a movement's cause.

Mindful of the necessity of movements' organic and fluid structure, INGOs must not seek to impose systems which will not work in a movement context.

12. For further examples of campaigns using social media see this [article](#) and a [hashtag](#) campaign.

3. Supporting research, data collection and learning documentation

ActionAid's experiences show that social movements have little time for documentation, and INGOs can facilitate the reflection and consequent documentation of stories: both victories and failures. Building an evidence base and being learning focused allows movements and their allies to see what works and what does not work, and adapt their strategies and tactics accordingly. In addition, INGOs can provide research data on which social movements can base their campaigns and advocacy. Effective evidence gathering helps to communicate the change vision to a larger audience for advocacy and solidarity. Simply documenting asks can be effective. ActionAid India developed '[For Equality & Justice - A People's Agenda](#)' following extensive discussions in multiple states and communities - with community-based organisations, civil society organisations and social movements. It represents the concerns and needs of people from most marginalised communities and can be used for advocacy.

4. Collaboration

Social movements do not need INGOs to be formed, sustained, or succeed and, similarly, INGOs do not need to be affiliated with social movements to reach their aims. INGOs and social movements can function independent to each other, but by collaborating they can potentially achieve change.

Facilitating collaboration between social movements and other INGOs and allies - all working on different issues but towards a common goal - can result in a powerful platform. For example, ActionAid was one of the lead convenors of a gathering of anti-privatisation movements in Chile in 2022, which saw 450 activists from 100 countries defend public education, health, water, energy, transport, care and social protection. *Our Future is Public* built connections across movements working for public services. The convening found common ground on climate justice, economic justice, gender justice and democratic ownership and codeveloped the [Santiago Declaration on Public Services](#).

ActionAid acts a convener, connector and catalyst, supporting social movements to build alliance with synergistic INGOs in countries where there is a potential to increase political space, as well as providing increased access to methodologies, tools and learning opportunities.

At the same time, allies and movements need to each understand the other's **context and be agile**. Social movements evolve and may have legitimacy at one moment and lose it the next, as leaders lose track, are co-opted or the context changes. Allies may need to reposition themselves to make quick links to emerging movements or to contribute to change at different moments. Organisations can use their partnership frameworks as guiding documents to opening conversations with movements, and can ensure there is sufficient flexibility to allow for a positive ongoing relationship in a potentially informal context.

The success of a social movement depends on its autonomy

A key facilitating factor that enables social movements to achieve their goals and achieve greater success is when they are truly people-led, and not interfered with by outside agents. Leaving social movements to be autonomous gives them legitimacy and promotes ownership of the outcomes. INGOs should support from the background.

Engaging in Challenging Context – ActionAid’s experience of Dual registration

The registration status of ActionAid as both a national and international organisation has assisted some federation members in engaging with social movements. The registration as a national NGO has helped some countries to speak up for the rights of people, which may not be possible as an INGO. This has enabled ActionAid to engage with social movements deeply.

CASE STORY 1

ActionAid The Gambia’s success in developing formal relationships with movements

MUTAPOLA Voices is the campaign voice of woman living with or affected by HIV and AIDS. The movement, established in The Gambia in 2006 with support from ActionAid, is a network of women, girls and HIV and AIDS support societies. It mainly focuses on building members’ capacity, promoting their rights to access comprehensive treatment and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) services, and providing support in relation to stigma, discrimination and economic exclusion. ActionAid The Gambia has worked with the movement at local and national levels. Activities include partnering for events, providing funding, linking with international campaign actions, lobbying and advocacy and providing information and research.

When partnering with certain MUTAPOLA Voices’ members, ActionAid established a formal relationship by outlining the role and responsibilities of each partner within an MoU. This helped to create a working relationship founded on the principle of mutual respect, outlined in ActionAid’s Strategy – Action for Global Justice. As a result, ActionAid The Gambia was able to bring together members from a range of backgrounds, leading to both parties celebrating diversity.

5. Connecting movements and building alliances to build people power

From local to national – INGOs can use their engagement in international forums to open up space for the representation of movements and ensure that any wider sharing and learning spaces involve, or are co convened with, movements to facilitate further alliance building.

Across sectors – INGOs can add value by facilitating links between different people’s organisations and social movements working on intersecting issues, such as tax justice and the right to education.

Networking and strategic partnerships – Providing support through strategic networks and partnerships and creating alliances enhances an INGO's engagement with social movements, enabling social movements to upscale their voices.

In strategic collaboration with duty bearers – The fact that most social movements emerge as a result of deep-rooted injustices perpetrated by duty bearers usually leads to a confrontational approach between rights holders and duty bearers. Creating strategic partnerships with key supportive duty bearers (such as government officials, police administrations, parliamentarians, etc.) and involvement of the media are useful partnerships and collaborative arrangements that help achieve results without conflict. In Vanuatu, for example, a non-confrontational approach and working closely with the government's Women's Division on budget lobbying gained resources and recognition for the role of women in disaster preparedness and response.

In each case, the role of the INGO is to support the movement rather than to claim space itself. INGOs can use the access to National, Regional and/or Global platforms to ensure that social movement representatives get an opportunity to be heard. Note that when doing this it is important support representatives so that they do not end up getting targeted.

CASE STORY 2

ActionAid Mozambique sees the benefits of avoiding self-promotion

Since 2013, ActionAid Mozambique has been working with a movement of academics, activists, civil society organisations, collectives, community-based organisations, NGOs, feminist groups and other networks to create a platform 'to fight for... human rights in the national penal code'. An informal platform, it brings together approximately 17 national and international organisations working in Mozambique. ActionAid Mozambique's aim in working with the platform is to give 'greater attention to creating an environment free from violence and sexual abuse where women and girls can exercise their rights to security, mobility and control over their lives and bodies'. ActionAid Mozambique facilitated the start of the movement and believes it is seen as a core member. It has collaborated on a range of activities, such as providing information and research support, lobbying and advocacy, profile raising and media work, as well as providing funding and support with strategic planning.

One reason that the relationship works well is that all members have the same objective as ActionAid Mozambique. However, ensuring the equal visibility of all members during marches and planning meetings has been a challenge. ActionAid Mozambique recommends avoiding 'as much as possible to force the visibility of the organisation' during common activities, suggesting that ActionAid should avoid using own messaging and logos to prioritise the efforts and objectives of the movement first.

ActionAid Zimbabwe and the challenges of movement leadership

In 2018, while working with the Rural Women's Assembly (RWA), ActionAid Zimbabwe found that a participatory approach to engagement has helped rural women to address issues around access to land. Such participatory approaches help women share their experiences and come together and feel empowered to speak about the issues affecting them. ActionAid Zimbabwe believes this has been extremely beneficial for joint lobbying and advocacy activities and, as a result, women have been able to gain decision-making positions in community leadership structures.

However, ActionAid Zimbabwe observed that as RWA became stronger, the leaders wanted to continue beyond their terms leading to other members becoming disgruntled. ActionAid Zimbabwe proposed a standardised constitution for the movement which clarified that the movement was owned by rural women, controlled by rural women and had rural women at its centre. This facilitated a shift in power.

6. More resources, less red tape – flexible, adaptable and accommodating; how INGOs can provide appropriate funding and tangible support.

Consider what kind of support will be most helpful to a social movement. Rather than big grants with often precise accountability requirements and multiple systems to navigate with few staff, it may be better to give small amounts of money or tangible resources. Social movements are embedded in communities and know their needs, there needs to be flexibility and trust to allow movement leaders to quickly access required resources whilst maintaining appropriate measures to reduce risk. The Partnership framework and accompanying resources such as risk templates can support and facilitate this thought process.

Small stipends designed to help cover basic necessities over a two-to-four-month period allow movement leaders to keep working and gives the movement breathing space. In a typical movement cycle, two to four months is a common period for peak mobilisation, after which activity naturally tends to slow down, and the movement may begin to recollect and plan for its next cycle. Small grants, even in the form of fellowships or stipends, can help sustain the social capital and support the movement in its emergent phase. INGOs can support the provision of housing, food, childcare of activists' children, and community resources for long-term volunteer leaders and those who want to heighten their commitment if grants are not possible. For example, ActionAid India supports leaders of Ekta Parishad, a movement working for the land and livelihood rights of India's most marginalised people, by providing free lodging. Existing INGO guest houses, hostels, etc. can be used for this purpose.

Allies can also provide material assistance such as food and water, protest gear like caps and T-shirts, banners and promotion materials, transport, space for meetings, and phone access. Partners should also help social movements participate digitally by donating laptops, sharing internet access, and giving voice to causes using their own digital spaces.

Finding flexible **financing / funding** can be a significant challenge for social movements and funding can impede movements' activities when it is not sufficiently flexible. Some groups may become formalised to acquire funding, but whilst increasing available resources this may risk losing the organic nature of a social movement.

For INGOs, providing financing also means processes, compliances and documentation which are often challenging for informal structures to maintain. INGOs need to ensure that they do not create burdensome systems for movements who won't be able to fulfil the compliance demands. INGOs will need to take full responsibility to maintaining good financial management, and the Partnership Framework and accompanying guidance can support different ways that this might happen depending on the context, size of the partner and capacity.

Integrate working with social movements into your INGO strategy

The challenges social movements work on usually take a long time to resolve, and one-off support will likely not enable their resolution. It can be effective to structurally and strategically integrate working with social movements. For example, ensuring that working with movements is part the organisational strategy, that working with movements is integrated into partnership guidelines and that progress is monitored, for example, annually documenting the number of movements the organisation works with.

CASE STORY 4

Facilitating women's leadership and supporting with resources

Between 2010 and 2012, ActionAid Pakistan facilitated the start of a movement to support women's leadership and emergency response. The movement aimed to rebuild lives of marginalised communities' and prioritise women at all stages of emergency response - rescue, relief, and rehabilitation. ActionAid provided the movement of women with immediate relief and protection, enhancing their leadership capacities to claim their rights, enhancing their voices in decision-making, and improving their long-term recovery and preparedness against disasters.

ActionAid Pakistan provided support with funding, information and research, legal support, linking to international campaign actions, mass mobilisations, planning, partnering for events, lobbying and advocacy, training and capacity building, and profile raising and media work. ActionAid's involvement with the movement's training and leadership support included ensuring women were mobilised and engaged with advocacy at district level.

Although relationships between ActionAid Pakistan and other movement members were part of a strategic approach to building the movement, relationships remained informal. The

biggest strength of the relationship was that it was led by the people affected, in areas which ActionAid Pakistan worked with Local Rights Programmes (LRPs). Training women in advance of potential disasters ensured they were already engaged and mobilised. The fact that the movement was people-led helped to manage the internal power structure and support engagement opportunities.

One of the biggest challenges facing the movement is Pakistan's rigid patriarchal, male dominated power structures. These have made it difficult for ActionAid Pakistan and other movement members to mobilise and engage with the most vulnerable sections of society especially women.

ActionAid Pakistan recommends that when working with social movements it is very important to ensure downward accountability, community participation and transparency. The importance of people led movements [to] bring lasting impacts and 'above all... women's leadership must be ensured.'

7. Fundraising support

Collective fundraising - Allies can support social movements to raise funds in a range of ways, from crowdsourcing, fundraising training, identifying, engaging and cultivating donors who support movements and to providing support in applying for and managing grants. Coalitions can also be formed for joint fundraising and financial support to social movements.

Supporting emergency and rapid response mechanism – It's crucial to establish rapid response funds to help movements adapt in quickly changing situations. The creation of dedicated funds can support nonviolent direct actions, for instance, to support when human rights defenders have been abducted.

8. Facilitate risk management and supporting those at risk

- a. **Support families of activists** – Being on the frontlines of a social movement is risky and activists often face arrest and detainment. When this happens, the family of the activists can be left unsupported. INGOs can support families of activists, being mindful not to add burdens with INGO systems and structures.
- b. **Legal aid** – Legal aid can be provided at two levels; to defend human rights defenders and help social movements with litigation.
- c. **Security** – Human rights defenders encounter many forms of threats, including physical violence, due to their advocacy for society's most marginalised communities. Direct financial support plays a pivotal role in enabling these human rights defenders to swiftly access protection and continue their work in a relatively secure environment. Support can encompass providing guidance and technical assistance for the temporary relocation of individuals facing threats, facilitating legal support through third parties, and exploring other forms of assistance through trusted sources. It is important to note that social movements possess strong local connections forged through years of collective struggle, making INGOs more likely to be called upon for financial support rather than direct services. By offering

financial backing and acknowledging the unique strengths of these movements, INGOs can effectively contribute to the advancement of human rights and societal progress.

For more information on risk analysis and management see section 6. Risk analysis.

9. Offering strategic human resources

Human resources policies are something that INGOs can control. They can be changed to support working with social movements:

- Prioritise recruiting people with a background in activism.
- Amend job descriptions to dedicate time for engaging in social causes beyond that of the INGO. Develop staff capacity through inductions, coaching, and consciousness building.
- Re-examine grading and job descriptions for field officers to better align with social movements.
- Identify human resources and admin practices that may assist collaboration with social movements.
- Consider innovative ideas such as keeping 10% of staff time flexible so employees are available when a social movement needs extra support.

Social movements and women's rights

INGOs must be constantly conscious of power, privilege, and how INGO positioning makes a difference in relationships. The aim is to build equal partnerships - respecting the autonomy of allies. Holding shared vision is important since INGOs have multiple accountabilities and organisational strategies. For example, it will be important for ActionAid to test its theory of change and be mindful of its feminist approach to engagement which seeks to consciously prioritise women and young people. This means prioritising working with movements that have a track record of empowering women; mobilising on women's rights issues and putting women's rights and feminist analysis at the centre of work with any social movement. It means investing in ensuring women are in leadership, that intersectional power dynamics within movements are open for discussion, and that specific issues which concern women are part of the agenda.

Talking about power and women's rights can be challenging but it is through critical understanding that we can build trust, which is the foundation for a positive relationship.



Examples of where ActionAid has engaged with social movements:

1. In India, ActionAid’s campaign with communities on the right to water led local administration in several districts to remove real estate encroachments on a lake in Southern Bangalore. As a result, a reported £2.14 billion worth of common property across the state of Karnataka was reclaimed by communities.
2. In Tanzania, where 1,300 people were being pushed off their land in Bagamoyo to make way for a sugar cane plantation, 50,000 people mobilised across four countries after ActionAid and partners exposed this land grab. Public pressure by local communities and advocacy by an international civil society coalition led to the plantation not being built in 2016.¹³
3. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, ActionAid linked grassroots women’s groups in Kisenso with a national women’s rights network, and 600 community members were mobilised to draft a letter of demands to the National Ministry of Gender on International Women’s Day.
4. ActionAid Nepal’s work with national network Mahila Adhikar Manch (MAM), helped mobilise 2,500 women to fight domestic violence on a local level.
5. The ‘People’s March against Xenophobia’ was called by an ‘emergency coalition’ of social movements, ActionAid and other allies, to protest against xenophobia in South Africa.

13. See here: <https://ejatlas.org/conflict/agro-ecoenergy>

6. The Kilimanjaro Initiative is a movement to create a space for rural women across Africa to participate in decision making on issues that are important to them. In 2015, ActionAid endorsed this initiative and helped to form Rural Women's Assemblies in 12 countries. In October 2016, a group of 10 women who were selected to represent their countries climbed Mount Kilimanjaro in an event which garnered global attention.
7. In 2013, ActionAid Brazil supported the launch of the National Agro-ecology Policy – a significant achievement by Brazilian social movements fighting to protect family-based agriculture against agribusiness giants. The ActionAid-supported women's movements contributed directly to the policy, and one of its key recommendations was to expand women's participation in organic and agro-ecological farming.
8. In Bangladesh, ActionAid supported nearly 200,000 female workers in garment factories around the country, helping them come together and claim their rights. ActionAid has set up Rights Cafes next to many factories, which provide a safe space for women workers to go and to learn about their legal rights under the country's labour laws. In 2013, women marched down the street in the area near the cafe, holding placards and chanting slogans calling for action and respect of the labour laws.
9. During COP21, ActionAid France helped mobilise 10,000 protesters on the streets in Paris and was involved in protest action at the conference venue. Members of the global youth network of ActionAid Activista – from Senegal, The Gambia, Brazil, Nigeria and Zimbabwe played a key role in COP21, sharing personal experiences of how they have been affected by climate change. They conducted media interviews and connected with other youth movements, ensuring that a southern voice was part of the Conference of Youth manifesto, which was shared with heads of state.



Raimunda Souza, from São Francisco da Volta Grande, Brazil, says 'I found the social movement (FASE) very important, because we knew that it was the place where we were able to fight for our rights. That is how we were living. As a mother, but always participating'.
PHOTO: BOB BARBOSA / ACTIONAID

10. In 2015, ActionAid enabled the creation of over 800 youth platforms globally and saw some innovative examples of local youth mobilisation. ActionAid mobilised over 57,500 young people to take action on issues such as tax justice, sexual and reproductive health rights, child marriage, girls' safety in schools and public spaces, and the monitoring of public service delivery and anti-corruption.
11. On the 19th of November 2019, #CampusMeToo was launched to empower students to break the silence on sexual harassment from staff. The movement is led and organised by a passionate group of students with support from university staff, ActionAid Kenya, UN Women Kenya, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Gender, and Commission for University Education Kenya among other key stakeholders, and has created major policy and practice change in Kenyan universities.
12. In Kenya, the Young Urban Women movement, Activista and Ecovista mobilised over 10,000 young people to gender-responsive public services, accountable governance and climate justice respectively. The movement reached over 100,000,000 people on social media.
13. ActionAid supported the Rural Women's Assemblies in Zimbabwe and other African countries to demand land rights at a Pan-African level.

Analysis of power

As well as INGOs needing to be aware of their power and the potential perception of them as donors, it's important to gently facilitate discussions of 'Power Within' movements. For example, are women and men treated equally? Is support given to participants' unpaid care responsibilities?

We must analyse how to build counter power to 'visible power' (i.e., state), 'invisible power' (social norms and mores) and 'hidden power' (corporates, lobbies, etc).



Demanding equal and minimum fair wage for men and women in Nepal.
 PHOTO: ACTIONAID

4. MONITORING SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND MEASURING THEIR IMPACT

INGOs are accountable to the outcomes and impacts of social movements that they engage with. That means carefully monitoring INGO engagement and its subsequent outcomes and impacts. Monitoring outcomes will help social movements leaders and their partner INGOs to understand the path the social movement is taking and assist them in making informed decisions.

Why take part in monitoring?

- To evidence impact and critically reflect and learn to improve future work.
- To ensure partnership principles are adhered to by partner INGOs.
- To track relevant indicators and develop credible baseline data to measure change.

‘If you don’t monitor, you don’t see it.’¹⁴

Before outlining how to monitor INGOs’ work with social movements and measure impact, it’s useful to understand potential outcomes. For example;

- **Shifts in social norms** - Social norms are the knowledge, attitudes, values, and behaviours that comprise the normative structure of culture and society. The PEER method could be a useful

14. [TRANSFORMING POWER - APRIL 2001.pdf \(participatorymethods.org\)](#)

tool of measuring changes.

Examples of outcomes

- Changes in awareness
- Increased agreement about the definition of a problem (e.g., common language)
- Changes in beliefs, attitudes and values
- Increased alignment of movement goal with core societal values
- Changes in public behaviour

- **Strengthened organisational capacity** - Organisational capacity is another name for the skill set, staffing and leadership, organisational structure and systems, finances, and strategic planning of organisations engaged in social movements. Development of these core capacities is critical to social movement change efforts.

Examples of outcomes

- Improved management of organisational capacity
- Improved strategic abilities
- Improved capacity to communicate and promote advocacy messages
- Improved stability

- **Strengthened alliances** - Alliances among movement partners vary in levels of coordination, collaboration, and mission alignment and can include relationships between unlikely allies. Alliances bring about structural changes in community and institutional relationships and are essential to presenting common messages, pursuing common goals, enforcing policy changes, and protecting policy 'wins'.

Examples of outcomes

- Increased number of partners supporting an issue
- Increased level of collaboration
- Improved alignment of partnership efforts (e.g., shared priorities, shared goals, common accountability system)
- Strategic alliances with important partners
- Increased ability of coalitions working toward policy change to identify policy change process (e.g., venue of policy change, steps of policy change based on strong understanding of the issue and barriers, jurisdiction of policy change)

- **Strengthened base of support** - INGOs draw on grassroots leadership, and institutional support in working for systemic changes. The breadth, depth, and influence of support among the general public, interest groups, and opinion leaders for particular issues are a major structural condition for supporting systemic changes. This outcome category spans many layers of culture and societal engagement including increases in civic participation and activism, allied voices among informal and formal groups, the coalescence of dissimilar interest groups, actions of opinion leader champions, and positive media attention.

Examples of outcomes

- Increased public involvement in an issue
- Increased level of actions taken by champions of an issue
- Increased voter registration
- Changes in voting behaviour
- Increased breadth of partners supporting an issue (e.g., number of unlikely allies supporting an issue)

- Increased media coverage (e.g., quantity, prioritisation, extent of coverage)
 - Increased awareness of campaign principles and messages among selected groups (e.g., policymakers, general public, opinion leaders)
 - Increased visibility of the campaign message (e.g., engagement in debate, presence of campaign message in the media)
 - Changes in public perception of the issue
- **Improved policies** - Change in the public policy arena occurs in stages – including policy development, policy proposals, demonstration of support (e.g., co-sponsorship), adoption, funding, and implementation. Advocacy and policy evaluation frequently focuses on this area as a measure of success.

Examples of outcomes

- Policy development
 - Policy adoption (e.g., ordinance, ballot measure, legislation, legally binding agreements)
 - Policy implementation (e.g., equity, adequate funding, other resources for implementing policy)
 - Policy enforcement (e.g., holding the line on bedrock legislation)
- **Changes in impact** - Changes in impact are the ultimate and long-term changes in social and physical lives and conditions (i.e., individuals, populations, and physical environments) that motivate social movements. These changes are important to monitor and evaluate when grant-makers and advocacy organisations are partners in social change. Changes in impact are influenced by policy change but typically involve far more strategies, including direct interventions, community support, and personal and family behaviours.

Examples of outcome

- Improved social and physical conditions (e.g., poverty, habitat diversity, health, equality, democracy)

Methods for monitoring

Monitoring social movements is an opportunity to measure change at scale. It's critical to involve social movements in putting together the monitoring in place so that it does not jeopardise social movements' actions and outcomes. Unlike projects, it might not be possible to measure impacts using existing organisational Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) frameworks and evaluation tools. Alternative approaches could include:

- Outline the objective/impact of the social movement
- Identify outcomes that lead to the objective/impact outlined; specific outcome indicators might be useful here
- Develop INGO engagement plan and monitor actions taken in alignment partnership and organisational principles and values
- Develop a monitoring plan

In some instances, **measuring impacts** could pose a big challenge if the issue of the social movement is a soft issue, for example behavioural and cultural changes. Nonetheless, it is important that monitoring is done to exhibit organisational commitment and accountability towards the constituency of the movement and fighting injustice. INGO accountabilities fall into two broad categories: meeting organisational principles and values and fulfilling commitments towards the constituency of the social movements they are engaging with. For ActionAid staff, [ActionAid's Global MEL Framework](#) can be a useful guide for developing a MEL plan.

5. PROTECTION FROM SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE (PSEA), SEXUAL HARASSMENT EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE (SHEA) AND SAFEGUARDING

It is important to **plan for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA), Sexual harassment, Exploitation and Abuse (SHEA) at Work, and Safeguarding of staff, rights-holders, representatives and children.**

Not planning for mitigating the risks of sexualised abuses of power can actively harm members of a social movement and others. One way that INGOs can support social movement members is by following the principle of ‘do no harm’, and making sure that their rights, dignity, and power are promoted through safe and positive ways of working. It is imperative that INGOs put in place all measures to reduce the likelihood of exploitation of social movement actors who we recognise as agents of change but who are also vulnerable to threats of abuse and exploitation by international actors.

Safeguarding minimum standards required by INGOs and concerned stakeholders must be fulfilled as much as possible, in line with their organisational obligations. Engagement with social movements could be in various forms and it is not necessary that every engagement will have formal agreements following INGO’s safeguarding and compliance policies. INGO staff will always need to adhere to all SHEA & Safeguarding policies and take appropriate actions to minimise risks of sexual harassment, abuse and exploitation to social movements and its people even though the engagement is non-formal. Anyone engaging with an INGO in any capacity, including social movement members, should be informed of their right to raise a SHEA or Safeguarding concern.¹⁵

Social movements may show a wide range of language and approaches where it comes to minimum standards of SHEA and Safeguarding. INGO representatives will need to be sensitive to this and unpack what its policies mean in a friendly way with social movements who do not have access to the same resources, systems and processes.

Staff working with social movements may wish to sensitise those they are working with to the INGO’s SHEA and Safeguarding policies and survivor centred approach.¹⁶ Remember, that any safeguarding issues arising from both formal and non-formal engagement with social movements are the INGOs’

15. For ActionAid, there is reporting information at [reporting poster.doc \(sharepoint.com\)](#) and a more in-depth guide to community reporting mechanisms at [Community Complaints Mechanisms](#).

16. For ActionAid there are a number of resources available to do this and country focal points are the first port of call for information on locally contextualised materials.

liability, hence it is important to do a proper risk analysis.¹⁷ This might also mean not engaging with movements if it does not seem feasible for INGOs to manage challenges. A disclaimer may be useful in non-formal engagements to protect INGOs from any potential risks.



In August 2023, women from countryside, forests, watersides, and urban centers across Brazil joined together for the 7th 'March of the Daisies'. This event, organised by ActionAid and its partner organisations, marked the largest gathering of women in Latin America, with approximately 120,000 participants. Their shared goal was to contribute to the "reconstruction of Brazil and the pursuit of a better life." The event's agenda included calls for government policies to safeguard their lands, eliminate hunger, address social inequalities, and combat racial and gender-based violence. Since 2000, this initiative has been held every four years, fostering extensive political engagement through advocacy, education, discussions, coordination, and community mobilization in diverse Brazilian cities.

Learn more about this movement [here](#).

PHOTO: LUIZ FERNANDES, CONTAG / ACTIONAID

17. In ActionAid the SHEA and Safeguarding Focal Points and the Global SHEA and Safeguarding Team can support with risk analysis. There is a SHEA and Safeguarding Risk Assessment Template (SHEA and Safeguarding Risk Assessment.docx) and Spot Check questionnaire (SHEA and Safeguarding Spot Check Questionnaire.docx) available to start this process.

ActionAid's SHEA and Safeguarding policies are:

1. [Sexual Harassment, Exploitation and Abuse \(SHEA\) and Safeguarding Overarching Policy](#)
2. [Sexual Harassment, Exploitation and Abuse \(SHEA\) at Work Policy](#)
3. [Child Safeguarding Policy](#)
4. [Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse \(PSEA\) Policy](#)

Key SHEA and Safeguarding Contacts: safeguarding@actionaid.org

6. RISK ANALYSIS

The primary considerations regarding risk pertain to the safety and well-being of activists and leaders within social movements.

The purpose of risk analysis is to address the risks faced by social movements and safeguard the physical and mental well-being of the activists and leaders by identifying:¹⁸

- Threats or hostility to social movements as a result of their activism and activities.
- External and internal vulnerabilities of social movements.
- Harm to social movements that may occur given the potential for threats exploiting vulnerabilities.
- Likelihood that harm will occur.
- In addition, there may be risks to the INGO if structures and processes are not well in place to support fluid and flexible partnerships appropriately.

Some common risks:

- **Repression and violence:** Activists and leaders often face repression, threats, harassment, and physical violence from state authorities or powerful interests opposing their cause. This can have a chilling effect on the movement's activities and members' safety.
- **Legal and regulatory challenges:** Social movements may encounter legal barriers, restrictive regulations, or laws that hinder their activities. Legal action, including arrests and prosecutions, can disrupt the movement's operations and drain their resources.
- **Stigmatisation and marginalisation:** Social movements advocating for controversial issues may face stigmatisation and marginalisation by society or mainstream media. This can undermine their credibility and limit their ability to mobilise support.
- **Infighting and fragmentation:** Internal conflicts, divisions, and power struggles can weaken social movements, leading to fragmentation and a loss of focus. Such internal challenges can hinder the movement's effectiveness and sustainability.

INGOs can take preemptive mitigation measures like strengthening capacity, support in strategic planning, garnering international solidarity, supporting advocacy and legal work, and monitoring and documentation to mitigate some of the common risks. INGOs can also stand in solidarity to support movements' struggles and challenges facing human rights defenders.

18. The following risk documents developed by ActionAid Myanmar are useful for risk management and analysis (Annex 2) and could be used at your discretion - 1. Risk Assessment, Mitigation and Contingency Tool; 2. Scenario Planning and Contingency Plan Tool; and 3. Activity-based Risk Analysis Tool



Gathering of social movements activists from across the world in 2023 in Tanzania; organised by ActionAid Denmark.
PHOTO: ACTIONAID

7. CONCLUSION

This guide aimed to give those interested in better engaging with social movements a broad overview of the different journeys social movements can take, with the aim of helping INGOs approach movements with a deeper awareness of context. The guide has outlined considerations and approaches that INGOs might factor in ahead of engaging more deeply with movements leaders for a joint change vision.

INGOs must be consistently conscious of their power and privilege, and remain humble in how they engage with movements. INGOs should be cognisant that actors, spaces, agendas, objectives, and interests are constantly changing therefore must always reposition to contribute to change at different moments and adapt ways of working to movements' needs.

As INGOs work more with movements, attention must be paid INGO structures and systems and ensure that these are still appropriate when working with social movements. In addition, INGOs must be cautious and mindful of their added value, whether that is financial contributions, amplifying social movements' stories and learning, supporting in sharing connections, facilitating spaces to organise or solidarity action.

With these aspects in mind, there is great potential for INGOs, social movements and other allies to work collectively for change.

The following set of reflective questions can act as a checklist for INGOs:¹⁹

Mapping

- Have you mapped current partners and movements, and do you understand how they are organised?
- Are you actively looking for entry points in existing strategies and programmes e.g., a global campaign – to link up with trade unions, young people, feminists, informal workers, etc.?
- Have you ensured your vision and mission matches the vision and mission of the social movement? For example, are your values on feminism aligned?
- Have you followed partnership framework and guidelines in setting up stronger working relationships?

Solidarity

- Is working with social movements structurally embedded in your approach? For example, is it written into your strategy, part of people's job descriptions and as a standing agenda item in meetings? Do you collect data on social movements as part of your evaluations of partnerships?
- Are individual staff members encouraged and given paid time off to join protest in solidarity?

Strengthening capacity

- Do you have strategies to raise awareness and build consciousness amongst all staff so that they understand how they need to work differently, including finance, fundraising and communications staff?

Research

- Have you invested in learning and documenting from your past and current experiences with social movements?
- What support can you provide to social movements in terms of documenting and sharing voices?
- Does your research with social movements take a feminist approach?

Collaboration

- Are you consciously developing links and networks with existing movements?
- Have you discussed power as part of any potential partnership, whether formal or informal?
- Are you guided by your partnership policy?

Connections

- Are you building movements across geographies and issues?
- When you connect movement leaders are you standing back?

Financial resources

- Have you reviewed existing funds and finance strategies to ensure allocation of flexible rapid response funds whilst mitigating risk? A partnership framework and accompanying guidelines can support here.

Fundraising

- Do you collect stories from work with social movements to boost new relationships with donors?
- Can you support movement leaders in their fundraising strategies and applications?

Risk

- Have you shared your risk matrices in discussion with movement leaders, and are you conscious of differing risk appetites?

Human resources

- Do you prioritise recruiting people with a background in activism?
- Have you amended job descriptions to dedicate time for engaging in social causes beyond that of the INGO?
- Can you develop staff capacity through inductions, coaching, and consciousness building?

19. [ActionAid – Senior leaders' conversation on understanding and working with social movements - 2018](#)

8. ANNEXES

Annex 1

Six steps to mapping Social Movements

Annex 2 - Risk Analysis Tools

2.1 Risk Assessment, Mitigation and Contingency Tool

2.2 Scenario Planning and Contingency Plan Tool

2.3 Activity-based Risk Analysis Tool

Annex 3 - Useful Resources

1. HRBA (Human Rights Based Approach) – Action for Global Justice in Practice 2020 – Programmes & Global Engagement Cluster - HRBA Action for Global Justice in Practice 2020 FINAL.pdf - All Documents (sharepoint.com)
2. ActionAid’s online training module on the basics of social movements – <https://gold-actionaidlearning.talentlms.com/>
3. Digital campaigning with social movement technologies Festival of Learning 2022 - Digital Campaigning with Social Movement Technologies_PPT.pdf - All Documents (sharepoint.com)
4. ActionAid Nepal’s working with land rights movement’s network and NGOs – a document on lessons learned – 2016 ActionAid Nepal - AAIN impact on social movements in Nepal (Report 2016).pdf - All Documents (sharepoint.com)
5. Examples of social movements people’s organisations - Examples Social Movements People Orgs.docx (sharepoint.com)
6. Position paper on organising 2019 - Global People Power Forum - Position-paper-on-organising-VS4_55590.pdf - All Documents (sharepoint.com)
7. A guide to measuring advocacy and policy - <https://www.aecf.org/resources/a-guide-to-measuring-advocacy-and-policy>
8. ActionAid Feminist Research Guidelines - https://actionaid.org/sites/default/files/publications/ActionAid%20Feminist%20Research%20Guidelines_2021.pdf
9. The PEER method – UK-PAP-IDPP- IDPP - OPTIONS - PEER Methodology.pdf - Standard View 1 (sharepoint.com)
10. ActionAid - Social Movements and People’s organisations Strategy Backgrounder
11. ActionAid - 10 key insights about Social Movements - GPPF 2019
12. ActionAid - 10 key implications for ActionAid
13. ActionAid - 15 ways AA can work with Social Movements
14. ActionAid - Mapping social movement engagement review report final - 2021
15. ActionAid - Lessons learned from social movements
16. ActionAid - Social Movements Learning Conversations Communique 2018

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