

Saving lives, protecting rights:

An introduction to ActionAid's work in emergencies and conflict





Members of the ActionAid-supported Je nan Je coalition march through downtown Port-au-Prince to deliver a charter of demands to the Haitian Parliament two years on from the devastating earthquake of January 2010 Photo: ActionAid

ActionAid's approach to emergencies and conflict: Saving lives, protecting rights

ActionAid believes that disasters are not inevitable. Hazards such as floods and droughts only become disasters if people lack the capacity, skills, institutions, infrastructure and resources to prepare for, mitigate or cope with their impacts. Disasters are therefore a context in which people live their everyday lives, as opposed to chance events or distinct episodes. Poverty, exclusion and marginalisation – along with poor governance and under-investment in areas such as education, agriculture and development – increase people's vulnerability to various types of hazards and risks.

ActionAid believes that basic needs are basic rights, so in humanitarian contexts – as in our longer term development work – we operate a human rights-based approach. When disasters strike we work to ensure people's immediate needs – such as for food, water and shelter – are met. At the same time, our response builds people's capacity and facilitates their empowerment, laying the foundations for long term interventions aimed at addressing underlying inequalities. It is this combination of programme work and policy-advocacy initiatives which defines our human rights based approach in emergencies.

Promoting alternatives

National and international humanitarian systems tend to focus exclusively on saving lives, ignoring the need to support people to assert their rights. A lack of transparency and accountability, inadequate funding and limited coordination in humanitarian response also means that the root causes of people's vulnerability to disasters (a direct result of their poverty and exclusion) are rarely addressed. ActionAid promotes alternatives which aim to address gaps in the system through a focus on six core components:

- Women's leadership in disaster preparedness and response
- Accountability to disaster-affected communities
- Local partnerships in emergency preparedness and response
- Combining scientific information with community experience and traditional knowledge
- Adequate funding and aid effectiveness
- Linking emergency response to longer term change processes.

Members of the Zvido Zvenanhu (People's Questions) Arts Ensemble demonstrate how hand-washing can help to stop the spread of cholera in Harare, Zimbabwe Photo: ActionAid

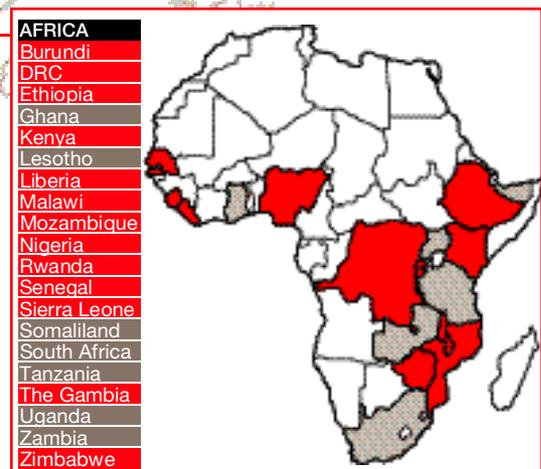
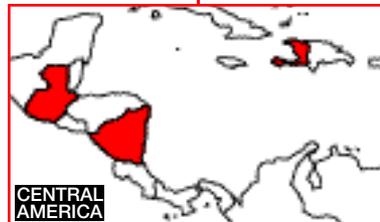
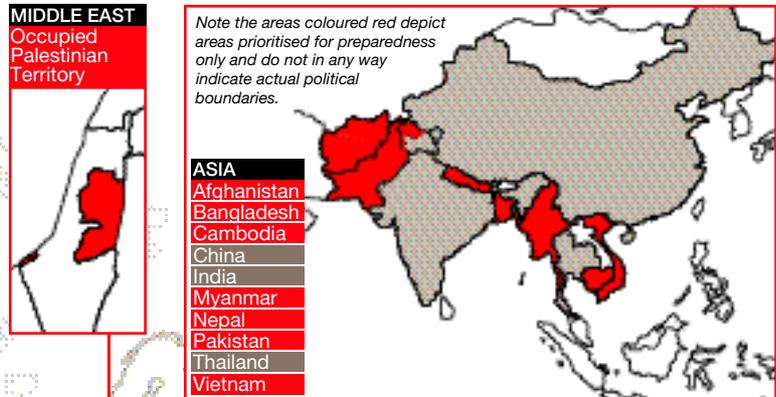


Where we respond to emergencies

- KEY**
- Country prioritised to develop preparedness plans between 2012-2017
 - Country where ActionAid has an established presence

ActionAid generally responds to emergencies only in areas where we have long-term development programmes in countries where we have an established presence. This means we already have local staff on the ground who know the context of the communities we work with, and who can respond whilst respecting local customs and culture.

Based on an analysis of their vulnerability to disasters and conflict, and an assessment of ActionAid's in-country capacity, we have identified 24 priority countries for developing emergency preparedness plans and increasing capacity to respond quickly and effectively to disasters by 2017.



The designations employed on these maps do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of ActionAid concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

Key achievements in emergencies and conflict

- Our response to the 2004 **Asian tsunami** reached more than 750,000 people across seven countries. ActionAid was commended for its “complete and strategic approach to accountability” by the DEC independent tsunami evaluation team in January 2006.
- In 2007 ActionAid was awarded a Certificate of Distinction in the UN Sasakawa Award, with the jury praising ActionAid’s “pioneering role in incorporating disaster risk reduction into its national, sub-national, sectoral and community initiatives”.
- When Cyclone Nargis hit **Myanmar** in 2008, ActionAid worked with trained community workers, local authorities and government officials to integrate Disaster Risk Reduction in the response. Recognition of our expertise in this area led to ActionAid Myanmar being appointed co-chair of the national level working group on DRR.
- ActionAid’s response to the **Haiti** earthquake in 2010 combined programme and policy interventions aimed at meeting the immediate and longer-term needs of more than 200,000 of the most vulnerable people affected. Our grassroots campaign “Je nan Je” (meaning “Eye to Eye”) mobilised thousands of Haitians to demand adequate land for housing and transparency in the recovery process.
- When floods affected up to 20 million people in **Pakistan** in 2010, ActionAid supported 234,000 people to survive and recover from the disaster. Advocacy work supported thousands of rural women to secure government compensation for their losses where this had previously been denied.
- Our response to the 2011 drought and food crisis in the **Horn of Africa** incorporated resilience-building into an ActionAid emergency response framework for the first time – an approach praised for its innovation in an independent evaluation.
- In 2012 ActionAid was awarded the Innovation Award in the Technology4Good Awards for a project which uses mobile phones to establish two-way communications with drought-affected communities in **Kenya**.
- Since 2008 we have trained more than 450 ActionAid staff on emergency preparedness and response, helping increase the speed, quality and efficiency of our humanitarian work.
- Over the past five years, we have built a rapid response roster of more than 100 staff and deployed surge capacity to support emergencies across 17 countries.



Benazir (left) and Shamim practice their embroidery and learn new vocational skills at a women and child-friendly space set up in the aftermath of floods in Sindh, Pakistan

Photo: Umar Farooq/ActionAid

“ ActionAid are amongst the honourable exceptions of agencies which are able to demonstrate a more objective and evidence-based analysis of community needs ”

Kenya Real Time Evaluation of the DEC response to the 2011 drought and food crisis in the Horn of Africa, January 2012



Food supplies are offloaded in advance of distribution to community members in Nguni Town, Eastern Kenya

Photo: Danielle Peck/ActionAid

Delivering with speed and quality

ActionAid's experience in preparing for and responding to emergencies has grown considerably over the last 15 years, during which we have responded to numerous large scale humanitarian crises – from the 1999 supercyclone in Orissa, India, to the 2004 Asian tsunami, to Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar (2008), to the 2010 Haiti earthquake and the Pakistan floods of 2010 and 2011. Beyond these, we have supported thousands of communities affected by smaller scale disasters which slip under the radar of mainstream media and public attention.

Our commitment to supporting people during crises is captured in our organisational strategy “People’s Action to End Poverty”, which recognises emergency response, risk reduction and resilience building within the context of disasters as one of our five core areas of work. This comprises policy work to address the root causes of disasters and conflict; pre-disaster preparedness work to enhance the resilience of vulnerable communities; and post-emergency relief and recovery programmes.

Within ActionAid, the International Emergencies and Crises Team (IECT) supports emergency preparedness and response work led by our country offices. Based across Europe, Asia and Africa, IECT has expertise in policy analysis, advocacy, accountability, information management, communications and fundraising in emergencies. The team builds the capacity of country offices before disasters, deploys surge capacity in the event of a major disaster, and is responsible for developing approaches to keep ActionAid at the cutting edge of humanitarian work. This involves engaging with external networks and bodies (including the global UN Clusters), influencing stakeholders on rights-based humanitarian policies and ensuring learning from ActionAid’s experience – as well as guidance from the wider sector – is factored into future responses.

Developed and refined over a number of years, the following tools facilitate effective preparedness and response:

- ▶ **The Alert System:** a colour coded system for categorising the scale and severity of emergencies, which triggers standardised fundraising, communications and operational response actions across the organisation.
- ▶ **Situation Report:** an information-sharing tool used during the first critical hours and days of an emergency to communicate details of the situation, impact on areas where ActionAid works, response by other actors, likely ActionAid response and funding needs, from country level to the wider ActionAid federation, and to inform discussions with external contacts including donors.
- ▶ **Disaster Preparedness and Response Fund:** an internal fund which disburses funds to support three areas of work: development of preparedness capacity at country and international levels; immediate response to humanitarian crises; and strategic policy work.
- ▶ **Emergency Fast Action Support Team (E-FAST):** a pool of more than 100 experienced staff from across the ActionAid federation who can be quickly deployed to support emergency response across 16 different skillsets, including project management, needs assessment, women’s rights, livelihoods, finance and fundraising.
- ▶ **Country and community level preparedness plans:** enhancing our organisational preparedness by proactively analysing the capacity, resources and linkages necessary to undertake immediate and effective response to disasters, and supporting country teams to build such capacity.

“ ActionAid has developed an extensive breadth of knowledge about the situation of women and violence in humanitarian settings ”

Independent End of Project Evaluation: Reducing Violence against Women and Enhancing Access to Justice for Women, August 2012



Above: **Women demonstrate at an internally displaced person's camp in Goma, DRC. The placard says: "We don't want to be raped anymore. Stop the violence."** Photo: Jenny Matthews/ActionAid

Right: **ActionAid Field Officer Luija Lesuuda coordinates food distributions in Isiolo, Kenya, using a mobile phone provided as part of an innovative project set up by ActionAid in collaboration with the consortium infoasaid** Photo: Søren Bjerregaard/ActionAid

What ActionAid offers

- A **rights-based approach** that puts poor and excluded people at the centre of emergency response and analyses the dynamics of power, inequality and discrimination.
- A **commitment to taking sides with the poorest and most excluded**, precisely because they are hit hardest by disasters and consistently marginalised in relief, peace-building and recovery efforts.
- **Promotion and facilitation of women's leadership** in disaster preparedness and response as a standard part of our programming. Our experience shows that women are worst affected by disasters but also the first responders. Our responses aim to harness the potential women have to make a unique and meaningful contribution to the development of their communities, changing traditional power dynamics in the process.
- **Conflict-sensitive programming** that ensures that our work does not exacerbate or create violent conflict.
- Specialised experience in providing **community-based psychosocial, disaster risk reduction and livelihood recovery programmes**, with a focus on reducing vulnerability.
- International expertise and **policy analysis**, drawing experience from the communities we work with and bringing community voices to debates aimed at influencing policy and practice locally, nationally and internationally. Key areas include disaster risk reduction and adaptation to climate change, conflict and peace-building, and the UN Humanitarian Reform and Transformative Agenda processes.
- Programmes designed to **reinforce the local capacities and resilience** of the communities we work with. This is combined with programming aimed at increasing the capacity of people and institutions responsible for emergency preparedness and response.
- **Rigorous and effective participatory methodologies** to ensure that all our responses are appropriate, community-led and transparent.
- **Quality programming** in line with International Humanitarian Law and internationally agreed standards.
- **Innovative mechanisms for delivering accountability** to disaster-affected people by involving communities and partner organisations closely in the planning, budgeting, monitoring and reviewing of programmes.

“ActionAid's work shows that two-way communication [with disaster-affected communities] is much more powerful than more traditional top-down information solutions”

Judging Panel, Technology4Good Awards 2012



About ActionAid

Fast facts

- Our vision is a world without poverty and injustice in which every person is able to fulfil their right to a life of dignity.
- Formed in 1972 in the UK, we now work in 45 countries across Africa, the Americas, Asia and Europe.
- In 2003, we established our head office in South Africa and began the process of making all our country offices equal partners in our governance.
- 84% of ActionAid staff and the vast majority of our senior managers come from developing countries.
- ActionAid's 2011 income was € 224m, of which € 27m was spent on our emergencies work worldwide.

ActionAid is a global federation committed to finding sustainable solutions to end poverty and injustice. We believe that the indignity of poverty is a violation of human rights, arising from unequal power relations from the household to the global level. Our Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) puts people living in poverty and exclusion at the centre of our work and prioritises their empowerment and active participation in the design and implementation of our programmes.

We work in partnership with thousands of communities, local non-governmental organisations and peoples' movements, providing assistance based on people's needs and capacity, regardless of their identity, gender or beliefs. We mobilise people to come together, to speak up about the issues that are important to them. We advocate for states, governments and other powerful institutions to recognise and fulfil their responsibilities to protect and empower all of their citizens, whoever and wherever they are.



Rural women march in front of Parliament in Islamabad to demand adequate compensation and recognition of women's issues in the response to the 2010 Pakistan floods Photo: ActionAid

Research and Publications



Selected ActionAid humanitarian memberships/partnerships

- Agenzia Italiana Risposta alle Emergenze (Italy) – member
- Australian Council for International Development – Co-chair of Protection Working Group
- Consortium of British Humanitarian Agencies – Board member
- Disasters Emergency Committee (UK) – member
- Food Security/ Livelihoods Cluster – member
- Global Early Recovery Cluster – Strategic Advisory Group member
- Global Network of Civil Society Organisations for Disaster Reduction – Board member
- Global Protection Cluster – Gender Based Violence sub-group member
- Humanitarian Accountability Partnership – Board member 2012-2015
- InterAction (US) – member
- Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) – Minimum Standards working group member
- International Council for Voluntary Agencies – member
- Voluntary Organisations for Cooperation in Emergencies – member

Above: A woman and child displaced by fighting receive mosquito nets and other essential items from ActionAid at a distribution in Goma, DRC
Photo: ActionAid

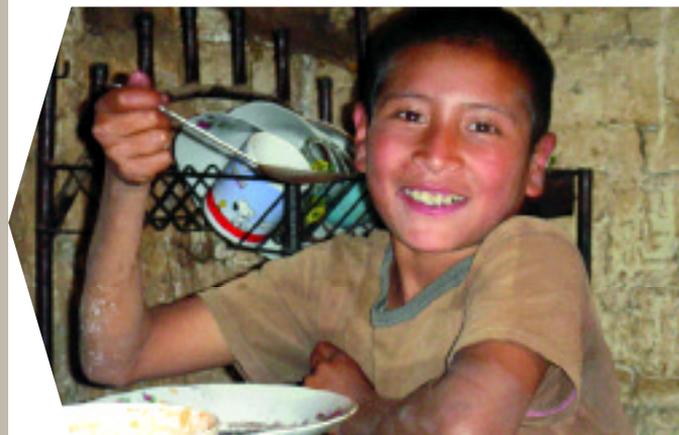


Recent publications focus on issues of women's participation in local-level peace building; reducing violence against women and women's access to justice in conflict/post-conflict contexts; mainstreaming climate change adaptation in disaster risk reduction programmes and policies; social action research on drought and climate change in the Horn of Africa; implementation of humanitarian principles in Pakistan; the UN Humanitarian Reform process; and conflict sensitivity.

Full details and downloads are available at www.actionaid.org

Recent institutional/appeal funded work

Source of funds	EUR million	Area of work
ActionAid supporter appeals	22	Emergency response Haiti earthquake (2010); Pakistan floods (2010); Horn of Africa drought and food crisis (2011)
ECHO	16.4	Emergency response Numerous responses in Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Myanmar, Pakistan and Vietnam, between 2008-2012
Disasters Emergency Committee (UK)	11.8	Emergency response DRC conflict (2008); Typhoon Ketsana, Vietnam (2009); Haiti earthquake (2010); Pakistan floods (2010); Horn of Africa drought and food crisis (2011)
AusAID	6.8	Emergency response and protection work Numerous responses, plus protection initiatives, in Cambodia, Jordan, Myanmar and Pakistan, between 2009-2012
DIPECHO	5.5	Disaster preparedness Numerous projects in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Myanmar, Nepal and Vietnam, between 2008-2012
DFID	2.5	Humanitarian Reform NGOs and Humanitarian Reform consortium project led by ActionAid 2008-2010
	1.25	Women's rights in conflict/post-conflict contexts Access to Justice for Women project (Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Somaliland, 2010-2012)
Danida	1.98	Women's rights in conflict/post-conflict contexts Reducing Violence Against Women project (Burundi, DRC, Sierra Leone, 2007-2009); Access to Justice for Women project (Burundi, DRC, Uganda, 2010-2012)
Consortium of British Humanitarian Agencies	0.52	Emergency response Pakistan floods (2010); India floods (2011); Kenya drought and food crisis (2011) Capacity building Development of Core Humanitarian Competencies Framework; development of training modules; emergency preparedness and response training for 117 ActionAid and partner staff (2010-2012)



Denilson Pérez Nájera, from San Carlos Alzate, Guatemala, eats food provided by ActionAid in response to drought and food insecurity in 2009 Photo: ActionAid

ActionAid International
PostNet Suite 248
Private Bag X31
Saxonwold 2132
Johannesburg
South Africa

Telephone
+44 (0)20 3122 0538

Email
emergencies@actionaid.org

Website
www.actionaid.org

Front cover photo:

50 year old Basaran in front of homes devastated by flood waters in Sindh Province, Pakistan Photo: ActionAid

ActionAid is a registered charity no. 27264198