

Our approach to working
with youth: fighting poverty
and social injustices...



“See us, hear us,
and collaborate
with us”



ActionAid's strategy 2012-2017 (People's Action to End Poverty) commits us to working with young people. In doing so, we will:

- Mobilise youth to take **sustained action** ;
- Work with poor, marginalised and excluded groups of young people – in all their **diversity** ;
- Collaborate with a **global youth movement** of school and university students, acting in solidarity;
- Look closely at **livelihoods** options among out-of-school youth, and people making the transition from school to work;
- Open up spaces for youth in **decision-making structures** – including our own.

Why have we made this commitment?

Young people are excluded

ActionAid believes that the root cause of poverty is an unjust distribution of economic, political or social power resulting in oppressive structures at local, national and international levels.

To overcome unjust power structures, communities need alliances, support and **solidarity** of broader citizens' groups.

This is no different for young people. Youth development solutions should not follow a separate logic or lower standards, nor pay any less attention to human rights. In fact, today's young people usually face additional challenges to claiming their rights including: exclusion from jobs; lack of appropriate education; denial of access to decision - making platforms; prejudice about their needs and capacities; low status in the community and in public policy; and lack of control over their own bodies – in particular for young women.

In short, **transitions to adulthood are being prolonged or blocked.** Especially in times of mass unemployment, and where marriage or home-ownership is out of reach, youth is experienced as a kind of "wait-hood". This causes loss of skills and social hope, and greater risk of conflict. But inclusion is not just a means of stability – it is above all a social goal for individuals and communities.

"Youth" therefore is a short word for a heterogeneous (diverse) category. Our definition of youth focuses first on the **socio-political identity** of young people who are seeking the rights and independence that adulthood should bring. The term 'youth' is therefore contested by its very nature, and definitions vary across the world. We use 15-30 as a guide only.

Youth rights are human rights

In theory, **people in their twenties are entitled to the same human rights** as any other adults. Those in their teens may lack the right to vote (civil and political rights) – but are entitled, at least, to additional social protections. Many young people may have the responsibilities of adulthood but not necessarily the associated economic, social or political rights.

In practice, young women and men may be some of the most invisible and excluded groups - not only within their own families and communities, but also within national and international development. The **concerns of older adolescents and young adults – particularly around health, education and jobs** – have not received sufficient global attention.

Young people's practices in surviving (self-employment, entrepreneurship, campaigning, etc.) receive praise – but rarely the policy support and resources they need to succeed. Political decision-makers often praise young people – but view it as unnecessary or risky to empower them.

Working with young partners in development means that we are creating the opportunities, developing the capacities and supporting young women and men **to be able to fight for their own rights, but also the rights of others** in their villages, towns, and cities.

COVER IMAGE:

World Food Day 2009 activity in Kenya.

PHOTO: RICCARDO GANGALE/ACTIONAID

COVER IMAGE:

ActionAid activists from across Europe carry out a stunt at the entrance of EU Foreign Affairs Council meeting in Luxembourg.

PHOTO: CHRISTOPHE HEBTING/ACTIONAID

ActionAid's approach

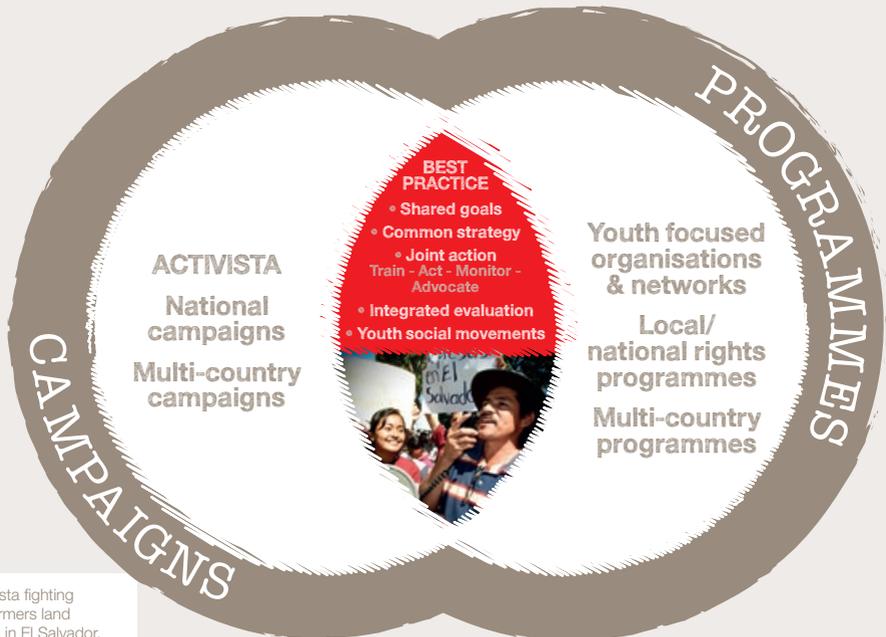
As with all our work, ActionAid's partnership with youth will follow a human rights-based approach (HRBA):

1. We put rights holders first and ensure participation of rights holders... youth participation
2. We analyse and confront unequal power... between generations
3. We work in partnership... with credible organisations, **youth NGOs and networks**, and donors
4. We are accountable and transparent... with youth stakeholders
5. We advance women's rights... 50% of the "youth" we work with are **young women**
6. We critically reflect and learn... from lived experience and expertise, regardless of age
7. We ensure links across levels – local, national, regional, international... policy developments, and activist **social movements**

Young people's capabilities and opportunities (assets), and their needs (practical and strategic), call for unbiased enquiry and respectful dialogue. On the one hand this will take place in schools, communities, clubs and places of work; on the other – in campaigning or protest actions, advocacy, and voting for publicly accountable bodies.

Our **youth engagement** is both civic and political in nature. For us:

- **Civic engagement** is about young people's individual and collective actions to identify and address issues of public concern; and to get involved in non-partisan decision-making
- **Political engagement** is about discussion and action that is aware and explicit about the power dimension. This is where young people's relationships to government and the state are "out in the open" – be that in voting, campaigning, lobbying or demonstrations against abuses.



Activista fighting for farmers land rights in El Salvador.

PHOTO: SEBASTIAN CHATHAM/ ACTIONAID

Asking the right questions

The success of informal education, youth livelihoods work, and campaigns depends on a sound understanding of the local situation. Where power lies, who benefits and who doesn't, and how to build enough people power to achieve change. For example:

- What age barriers face young people who want to access community banking; housing; voting; attendance/ membership of community decision-making bodies? Which make sense, and which are unfair or out of date?
- Are any of them discriminatory in their purpose, or their effects? How do they affect young women, as compared to young men?
- What is the culture and history behind this – is it changing? In what direction – and why?

We can then understand what problems and solutions are relevant to the **many faces** of young people and at **different stages of the life-cycle**. We work with youth from diverse backgrounds including: slum dwellers, pastoralists, and out-of-school youth.

Developing this understanding doesn't begin and end with ActionAid alone – we develop it in partnership with youth and wider social movements. Part of being accountable and transparent means asking similar questions of ourselves:

- Are we recognising and rewarding young people's work – paid and unpaid?
- Do our assumptions, values and behaviour let young people in – or hold them out?
- Are we creating informal and/or formal spaces where young people can take the lead?

"Becoming question-makers" has been important in women's empowerment and other struggles over the decades. It has always been the foundation of ActionAid's human rights based approach. With the help of ActionAid supporters, many graduated ('age-out') sponsored children have enjoyed a holistic education – and are now taking their self-development and that of their communities to the next level.



Activista members who participated in a blogger swarm
PHOTO: ACTIVISTA

Linking people and places: Activista

“Activista” is ActionAid’s youth network, and it is one of the main youth networks that we work with – this also includes local and national youth organisations, movements and wider partners. Activista focuses on mobilising young people – including at an international level.

“When Activistas in Senegal are running campaigns against land grabbing, they do it as a coalition of youth from directly affected rural communities and youth living in urban areas, recognising that they too are suffering from this practice. (...) The grabbed land is being used for producing biofuels for European consumers and industries. In turn Activistas in the UK, Denmark and Greece are campaigning against these practices by raising awareness, and lobbying national and EU parliamentarians.”

Søren Warburg, Activista Coordinator

To end poverty is to achieve radical, peaceful, social change

We have a **theory of change** based on three pillars:

1. Empowerment – from individual to collective

- Youth participation can be integrated throughout a project cycle – whether that project is an event, action, or longer term (“programme”) intervention
- Involving youth representatives in *Reflection - Action* processes and accountability committees at community level
- Using social media to connect young people and play to their strengths.

“I started to feel I’m a part of the society... I started to feel that I have to participate in making decisions in the issues that belong to me as a young man”

Anas Abu Ghneem, Youth Civic Engagement Project, Jordan

power...
and
practice

2. Solidarity – a human response to a common cause

- Uniting across generations and other social groups to strengthen movements for change
- Recognising and defending shared interests – including youth rights

“I have been receiving calls from all over the world about the just concluded World Food Day Activista Caravan and everyone is amazed by what we did, we were able to reach more than 8600 farmers within three days only in Western Kenya. Long Life Activista Kenya! You made it happen!”

Godfrey, Coordinator, Activista MT Kenya

3. Campaigning – from a one day demonstration, to years of preparation

- Harnessing people’s power through organisation, mobilisation and communication around simple, clear and measurable demands
- Policy dialogue (advocacy) with government and other powerful actors – based on compelling arguments, data - and young people’s **practical alternatives**
- The three multi-country campaigns in 2013 and 2014 are Land Grabs; Tax Justice and Safe Cities.

Sustained action – what does it look like?

ActionAid has a proven track record of sustaining individual and community involvement – from child sponsorship, to *Reflection - Action* processes, to helping get economic rights into new constitutions (for example in Kenya and Nepal).

We work with youth across our four key strategic areas. These are:

- Education
- Democratic Governance
- Resilient livelihoods
- Women's rights

This means that we do not focus solely on youth rights (issues) in themselves, but rather the bigger picture of supporting young people to work alongside their communities to tackle broader development injustices.

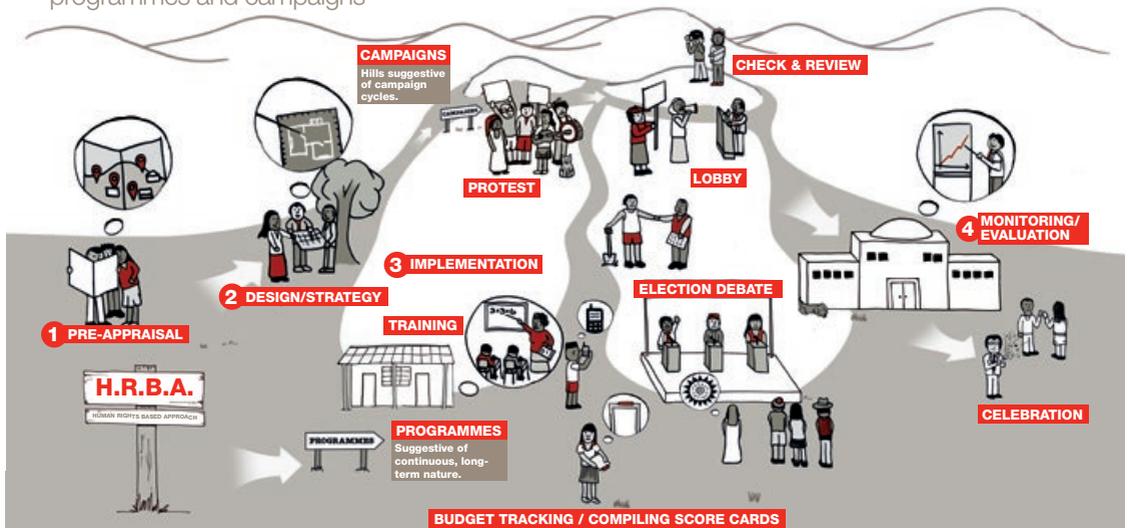
In this way, young men and women are not sidelined, and they are given the opportunity to demonstrate what they can do and offer towards development goals.

Some examples of our work in each strategic area...

Supporting transitions to secondary school and beyond:

We are increasingly finding that a critical factor in keeping girls in school is the number of female teachers. We are therefore developing national campaigns for new cadres of young female teachers (e.g. in Ghana) to be given special support (different entry requirements, distance education etc.) to work in rural schools.

The HRBA village: programmes and campaigns



Guiding notes:

- The diagram above depicts a HRBA village – where both youth campaigning and programming are supporting a governance/livelihoods programme (based on AA Kenya).
- Can you see different elements of empowerment, campaigning and solidarity? Are there any others?
- The campaign path is at the top, and it is here that there are shorter cycles (of protest, lobbying etc.) compared with the longer term programme work along the bottom, whereby training, carrying out social audits and election forums are all depicted.
- Although this is called a 'village' - this is simply a metaphor for illustrating our holistic approach to community development. This could also be a 'town', and it could also depict connections to other social hubs (such as our northern partners).



ActionAid PowerTee Day 2009 T-shirt making workshop at Rajiv Camp in New Delhi.
PHOTO: TOM PIETRASIK/ ACTIONAID

Leadership and governance:

In Ghana we work with a **Young Female Parliament (YFP)**. This builds the leadership experience of young women, enabling them to envisage a career in politics – and it is working. In 2012, the young female parliamentarians delivered a passionate communiqué challenging the lack of representation of women in district assemblies. As a result, 40% of government allocated seats on district assemblies were reserved for women – and two young female parliamentarians felt confident enough to stand for district assembly elections.

Resilient livelihoods:

In Kenya we have been working with **'Junior Farmer Field Schools'** - this participatory methodology was developed by the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) to test new farming and agricultural technologies. The schools have several objectives, including; finding alternate sources of income through farming, increasing incomes and production, and improving marketing.

The 500+ young farmers we work with have created a cooperative, and through this platform they are empowered on land laws and agricultural policies, skills building, and lobbying for representation in devolved local land structures. They are also trying to address the impact of disaster and climate change.

Working with young women:

ActionAid Liberia's work around **Safe Cities** (a forthcoming multi-country campaign) is focused on creating safe environments for female university students. Women students come to study in the capital Monrovia and elsewhere from diverse backgrounds, including poor and rural areas. What they suffer in common is widespread sexual violence and impunity of many perpetrators.

Harassment, rape and transactional sex (including the practice of "sex for grades") are all legacies of civil war in the country.

Supported by local partner initiative Paramount Young Women, ActionAid Liberia are calling for security on campus; counselling; sexual and reproductive health services; and frank dialogue with university, local and national authorities.

We will know we have succeeded if by 2017:

- Over five million young people have been mobilised, half of them female
- Young people's voices are heard in policy debates – and formally included in the process
- In response, local and national governments deliver more and better essential services
- Young people are better prepared for the major global challenges, like Climate Change and the natural disasters that come with it.



Who to get in touch with

ActionAid and our young activists have networks at both national and international levels, allowing us to build alliances among wider networks of stakeholders. To connect locally, explore our website (Youth, and Activista pages):

www.actionaid.org

For youth development professionals there is also a “Community of Practice” set up to share knowledge and experience on youth engagement. To ask about joining, contact the Global Youth and Child Rights Coordinator:

sarah.huxley@actionaid.org

For specific queries on Activista, contact the International Activista Coordinator

soren.warburg@actionaid.org,

or visit Activista on Facebook

www.facebook.com/ActivistaInternational

Ways to get involved

- ✓ Join (or sponsor) Activista or one of the other youth networks/movements we work with
- ✓ Fund a youth programme
- ✓ Advocate/ lobby and work with national governments to raise the profile of youth in development
- ✓ Develop youth-adult partnerships in development processes

Further Resources

For more on our commitment to working with young people “Key Change Promise Six” see:

- ActionAid’s Human Rights Based Approach resource book: *‘People’s Action in Practice’*
- Programme framework on young urban women, *‘Making her own choices’*. Available from www.actionaid.org/publications/making-her-own-choices-young-women-s-rights-poor-urban-areas
- Activista blogs : www.actionaid.org/activista/blogs



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