

ActionAid International
Taking Stock II
Rights Based Approach
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by
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ACTIONAID INTERNATIONAL REPORT: RIGHTS BASED APPROACH

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What follows is my report based on five country visits, numerous conversations with Actionaid International constituents, Board Members, staff members at all levels and the reading of numerous Actionaid International internal, program and historical documents and meetings of team members in London, Ethiopia and India and earlier with International Directors in London before the travel began. The countries I visited were: Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, India, Vietnam and Guatemala in that order. My observations have also been informed by the ongoing conversations with my fellow teammates who have provided numerous observations and insights. I have drawn from my own reading over the years, the influences of fellow practitioners and others who have provided constructive thought and reflection. My report is oriented to try and suggest what steps Actionaid International, as an international organization, should take in the next five years to further advance in major ways the Rights Based Approach, in the framework of fighting poverty.

Two matters deserve mention at the beginning.

The Actionaid International staff uniformly is a committed group of people, often working under trying and adverse circumstances. They bring professionalism and dedication to their work. That work often takes place in politically risky situations in which different kinds of threats and political harassment occur. The courage and efforts made by the staff and constituents of Actionaid International cannot be over stated. It is neither self-serving nor bragging to find appropriate organizational ways to recognize that courage and commitment.

The willingness of Actionaid International to undergo this review reflects its openness as an organization. It reflects its determination to be a learning organization. I found that that attitude and practice courses through the organization. That means there is also a responsibility to find effective ways of taking hold of this learning that takes it past the learning from anecdotes and the cross fertilization that occurs at the many Actionaid International meetings.

Two additional reminders: anecdotes are to be appreciated as they tell stories that people can remember and internalize; cross fertilization has to have its own ways of dissemination through oral means and by way of modern approaches that use videos, cd-roms and other practical efforts.

I. The Actionaid International Rights Based Approach

The historical evolution of Actionaid International from a relief and a service based organization to a development one and to one that has a Rights Based Approach (RBA) as a normative policy is well established. This major organizational change over time positions Actionaid International to play an active and important role as part of a sustained effort that challenges the growing poverty and inequality in the world.

In a lecture at the India International Centre in June, Ramesh Singh, Actionaid's International Executive Director, added an important framing aspect to Actionaid's International evolution from a relief organization at its start to one that now places a rights based approach front and center. He stated clearly that effective development, human rights and social movement organizations are at an important coming together that leads to a synergy for initiating actions that establish public agendas in an international setting. This critical frame points the way to understanding the political changes that regularly occur. These changes have the potential to create synergies and added political strength between and among the worlds of development and human rights organizations working with social movements and at times along side of them. Actionaid International has the potential to play an important role as part of its effort to end poverty and the world's growing inequality in economic, political and social matters.

In this effort Actionaid International is not a sole actor, or even most of the time the most well known initiator. It is a reliable organization that has special and ongoing contributions to offer. These contributions have the potential to be recognized by the people and movements it serves. Actionaid International's contributions build and strengthen a community of practitioners who draw their political strength and legitimacy from their development, human rights and social mobilization work. Such work is rooted in communities and crosses international boundaries.

In this setting my observations lead me to believe that Actionaid International as of now brings with it clear advantages. These illustrative examples include:

1. An institutional awareness by Actionaid International senior staff members that reflects well on the investment made in advancing the RBA approach since before Fighting Poverty Together (FPT) began.
2. It has led to effective community engagement that in turn has resulted in examples of communities increasing their power.
3. It has led to communities engaging with decision makers and power and policy systems at different levels of governance. The Kenya sugar campaign and the efforts of Dalits to establish dignity in villages in Andhra Pradesh illustrates these advances.
4. In some locales RBA has affected difficult institutions and has improved people's lives in unexpected and unanticipated ways. One example that comes to mind is the change in police practices and behavior in relation to street children in Ethiopia.
5. RBA has provided a political entry point for vulnerable populations.

These winning illustrative outcomes create a sense of possibility that influence changes for the better in people's lives. That should not be de-emphasized. The work Actionaid International has done has created a rich experience in which ways have to be found to value that experience. At the same time these encouraging advances increase responsibilities for Actionaid International at all levels including Actionaid International at the international level.

II. Rights Based Approach and the International Setting

Before those responsibilities are delved into it is critical to look at the international context for a Rights Based Approach. Governments, international donors, multi-national corporations, religious fundamentalists and ethnic chauvinists find different ways to express opposition to make RBA operational. These actors know full well what is at stake. That explains their hostility whether they express it directly, seek to coopt it or blunt it, achieve it by inaction or starve programs that should be funded adequately..

Those who influence traditional power holders sing the song of neo-liberalism. They leave women out as a priority for change and action, place trade liberalization high without meaningful offsets to the immediate harm caused in people's lives by such liberalization and do not choose education as a priority for policy intervention even where it is most needed in educating girls.

This is not about conspiracies by neo-liberals but recognizing that substantial change is resisted by that world even when it positions itself to be constructive and advocate modest non-systemic changes. Currently you will find such matters played out in the Copenhagen Consensus, argued in the pages of *The Economist* and *Financial Times*. This group of practitioners has a political and policy agenda. It currently is not matched on an ongoing scale by any sustained set of alternative approaches that penetrate political and policy systems.

Even when critical matters may be dealt with—curtailing the spread of HIV-AIDS disease, tackling malnutrition by overcoming anemia with food supplements, stopping the spread of malaria—the framing is one of costs and benefits and it does not touch systemic change.

A Rights Based Approach requires a political set of strategies and with it the tools to compete effectively by engaging in the world of ideas not through think tanks but by connecting the work of development, with human rights work and social movement building and strengthening. It challenges the framework of the neo-liberals who influence decision makers. Some of that takes place in a series of UN activities. These have value as they legitimize further and increase the rights based approach in usage that becomes familiar and hopefully in time customary.

The groundwork is familiar to Actionaid International leadership people. The United Nation's Secretary-General has stated as part of UN declarative policy that the UN system is expected to integrate human rights in all its work. Integration is another way of saying that it is expected to "mainstream" such work. Kofi Annan's efforts have been listened to in part. The major UN development and humanitarian agencies have responded in typical institutional ways. They have studied what others have done, and through experiment and refinement have tried a rights based approach to their programming. UNDP, for example, has published a useful work of why human rights are integral to all of its development work. Other examples abound from the work of WHO, UNICEF, UNIFEM, UNHCR, and other UN agencies. In addition, these agencies have

met, most recently in May, 2003, to exchange experiences, and identify what they consider to be best practices on a rights based approach.

Bi-lateral donors have also weighed in with declarative policies that advance a rights based approach. CIDA, DANIDA, DFID, SIDA, NORAD come to mind.

Actionaid International is not alone among international NGOs that have adopted a rights based approach. OXFAM, CARE, the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, NOVIB, INTERACTION in the United States and other organizations have contributed to an understanding of RBA along lines familiar and supportive of the Actionaid International understanding.

Missing from this list are the International Financial Institutions and the driving engines of governments even if within a few governments individual voices and agencies are sympathetic to and supportive of an RBA. It goes without saying that non-state actors, generally associated with markets, corporations and multi-nationals, do not embrace an RBA even to the extent of defending traditional political and civil rights and civil liberties—concepts that are often declaratively embraced by northern and western governments. The economically powerful follow a pattern of either staying silent or undermining RBA that improves peoples lives and their sense of individual dignity and worth.

Although dominant forces within the international governance community, and the think tanks and study centers that serve them, do not embrace a rights based approach the idea is far more advanced than it was a decade ago or even five years ago. The force of the various UN conferences in Beijing, Cairo, Istanbul, Copenhagen, Hamburg and other places should not be discounted. In this effort Actionaid International has played an important role in advancing the idea among its key personnel and its programmatic partners.

The obstacles to continued advances are strong but the walls are not impregnable. Those advances can be gained and consolidated. They require far more than what has been done so far nor can they be sustained with a list of activities. They do require a set of political strategies that are political and not partisan. I deliberately place the strategies in the plural because there are too many institutional, cultural, regional and country specific variances to focus on one strategy. Here a caution is in order: any successful set of strategies has to welcome “boundary crossing” of institutions and borders by its participants and recognize that organizational competencies have to match the unfolding and maturation of issues on matters that address the eradication of poverty and the advance of human rights.

III. What Is a Rights Based Approach

The world does not lack for definitions of the Rights Based Approach. Because of Actionaid Internationals value of fighting poverty with the poor, and not just for the poor, it behooves us to use definitions that reflect the views of the poor. These voices emerge

in many of the reports Actionaid International does. They are scattered everywhere and can be found on videos, websites, CD-roms and other modern modes of communication. To make sure that we are all operating from what a colleague calls “the same song sheet” a brief definition advanced by practitioners in a workshop on human rights and development may prove helpful.

A rights based approach is founded on the conviction that each and every human being, by virtue of being human, is a holder of rights. A right entails an obligation on the part of government to respect, promote, protect and fulfill it. The legal and normative character of rights and the associated government obligations are based on international human rights treaties and other standards, as well as on national constitutional human rights provisions. Thus a rights based approach involves not charity or simple economic development, but a process of enabling and empowering those not enjoying their economic, social and cultural rights to claim their rights.

In operational terms, as we all know, it means understanding the difference between a right and a need. A right is something a person is entitled to solely because that person is a person. It enables the person naming and claiming the right to live a life of dignity. A right, as Mary Robinson has asserted in her address to the World Summit in Durban, “provides a normative framework of obligations that has legal power to render governments accountable.” To carry out the operational aspects further if a right can be enforced before the government the government then in turn has an obligation to protect and/or fulfill that right.

Needs are also legitimate but they are aspirations. Without diminishing their importance, aspirations and obligations by the government do not go together in a mutually enforceable manner. As a savvy practitioner put it “satisfaction of a need cannot be enforced.” So rights are associated with dignity and being and needs are associated with possessing and having.

The astute insights of Mr. Minh, a development worker directly associated with Actionaid International Vietnam (AAV) in Dien Bien Phu connects a rights based approach in that socialist country with the right of association and the right to have and use information by those affected by development policies and government actions. In Kenya similar insights have been gained from direct work in the field about the centrality of the right to information and making that information accessible and usable to people on the front lines.

Participants in Vietnam and Kenya have put into operational terms what Amartya Sen sees as the development of the expansion of freedoms. The public freedoms, as practiced by Mr. Minh and the anonymous practitioner who distinguished between rights and needs, come full circle with Sen’s articulated freedoms. They are each embodied in political and civil rights through participation and association in public life and the economic, social and cultural rights such as access to the equalizing institutions: health, education, shelter and livelihood.

There is a context and foundation for a Rights Based Approach that on the whole does not seem to emerge in Actionaid International work. That is said descriptively and not critically. Taking advantage of the context and foundation for RBA is meant to position Actionaid International as an initiating actor in the advancing of RBA.

Central to the effort is having a full understanding and appreciation of the international human rights law framework. That framework is established in various treaties. Many countries where Actionaid International is present have signed one or more of these treaties. These treaties provide the framework for what can be considered an International Bill of Human Rights. These include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the international Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Over 160 countries have ratified one or more of these treaties and covenants. Furthermore, these are not the only treaties critical to development practitioners, human rights advocates and social movement people who mobilize others. Other treaties include the Convention on the rights of the Child, the Convention Eliminating All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention against Racial Discrimination. Most states have ratified these treaties.

Strategically these treaties provide a real advantage to activists trying to advance an RBA. It is easy for eyes to glaze over at the provisions that are routinely hailed and routinely ignored. What we do know is that no treaty self-executes itself. Implementation of established norms and declarative policy is a long winding road and treaty, covenant or convention approval is but an early step in making the norm and the policy real.

Ratifying these treaties is an affirming act in advancing an RBA. In no way is it an empty or symbolic act. Understanding the treaties brings people directly into contact with principles of equality, non-discrimination, transparency and accountability into national and local law. Treaties require states to ensure that their laws are fully consistent with the treaties. We are all experienced enough to know that states will invariably do the minimum. Treaties are about establishing floors for states. For those working on RBA they are about lifting the floor and raising the ceiling. Lifting the floor and raising the ceiling is about advocacy and therefore it is about politics. That is not a burden but a challenge.

What these treaties, covenants and conventions do is create political space to raise human rights issues on social, economic, political and cultural matters. They move the discussion from law to a political and policy arena. It affects people's lives on what matters to them. It moves them to action.

One of the refrains we heard constantly was "rice and rights." Rights are an abstraction without rice or the necessities of life. The growing vortex of development, human rights and social mobilization work has linked in the Mr Minh of Vietnam's framework of economic, social and cultural rights with political and civil rights. The Mary Robinson mantra of "all rights for all" connects these rights in a way that neither rice nor political rights take a back seat. This is critical in the scheme of holding country officials responsible for implementing international agreements that have been agreed to.

Rights holders have a basis on which to base their claims. Such rights holders make claims on State and non-state actors (often economic powers) who have obligations as well. The state and the non-state actors are duty bearers. What we have is a relationship between the rights-holders and the duty-bearers.

A central aspect in this relationship is for the rights holder to have the capacity to name and claim the rights held by the individual, group and community. The duty bearer also must have the capacity to fulfill the right. Not being able to fulfill the right by the duty bearer is not acceptable and ways must be found to make sure that the right is fulfilled whether it is a question of administrative capacity or resource allocation.

What has happened is that the international legal system sets a context for a right's based approach that expresses "all the rights for all." Rights holders have the right to demand from duty-bearers—the states or private entities such as corporations, public-private partnerships, even a family or legal arrangements created by states to fulfill the treaties—to respect, protect and fulfill people's rights.

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) expects its signatories to fulfill the rights by taking on its state responsibilities, and to call on and use economic and technical international assistance to make the rights real. That is no small order. The legal framework provides the pivot energy for an Actionaid International to be an initiating actor as part of an international effort to advance social and economic development in a human rights framework that stands with social movements.

IV. Positioning Actionaid International for a Sustained Rights Based Approach

Actionaid International brings lots to the table in advancing a Rights Based Approach. Its main contribution is that it is rich in experience and has had an important effect on improving people's lives. Whether it is in micro-credit in Ethiopia, or beginning to secure Dalit dignity in Andhra Pradesh, or finding ways to hold diamond mine owners accountable in Sierra Leone, or observing the work in communes in Vietnam or seeing the impact of adult education in Guatemala lives of people have been improved. In each of these examples people have found their voices, have tangled with those who are more powerful and brought about changes in relationships that otherwise would not have happened without Actionaid International's presence.

In each of these settings certain commonalities stand out. Governing authorities were unhelpful and sometimes were hostile. Even when the situation called for the implementation of government policy, as is mostly the case in Vietnam, political space has to be negotiated and won. Even with operational and institutional success fragility and slipperiness is more the order of the day than solidity and firm footing. To secure rights there are no easy victories and indeed they can only be secured with struggle and uncertainty.

It would be easy to continue as Actionaid International has performed admirably well since it began its efforts on Fighting Poverty Together (FPT). No question about it: it would continue to have an impact on improving people's lives. But the harsh fact remains that doing good, and correcting wrongs, does not by itself lead to an ongoing attack of systemic problems that directly affect questions of distribution of resources.

In working with, and for poor people, including the poorest of the poor, the next stage calls for a concerted attack on systemic problems. RBA provides a workable path in ways that confront a growing pattern of inequality of people within countries and regions and between regions as well.

Analytic skills and capacities are central to making an RBA work for the people struggling to realize their rights. Such capacities have to be centered within Actionaid International or it has to develop partnership relationships with in country partners. Those capacities have to also be anchored to the International headquarters by being organized in ways that support country and regional work while leaving room to initiate agendas for rights fulfillment within countries and across boundaries.

By assessing the level that rights are fulfilled, or not fulfilled, a greater understanding is realized at all levels what is lacking in addressing the causes of poverty. The human rights law framework leads to certain consequences that have the potential to transform societies as rights follow a path of what practitioners call "progressive realization" of human rights.

1. This leads to situations that cut across all levels of a society and works to make the expertise informed by people's experiences and moves decision-making away from the sole province of experts.
2. It brings into public discussion what are the maximum available resources to address the problem. Germany may be wealthier than Ghana but Ghana cannot use its lack of wealth to not address a specific problem in health, education, or issues pertaining to livelihood attainment.
3. Those who are duty bearers (which can be a private entity such as a corporation or multi-national) are held accountable for their performance. That is part of the give and take of politics. It is harder to attribute the failure to fulfill responsibilities by the duty bearer as largely the work of the political opposition.
4. Relationships between rights holders and duty bearer's change as a result of the implementation of a rights based agenda. In a very real sense the rights holders have agency to fulfill their rights that in turn are exercised in relationship to the duty bearer. They are no longer passive inhabitants of a state but are active doers in attaining their just due. That relationship means that the rights holder brings authority, legitimacy and credibility to the effort to fulfill the rights.

Operationally what this means is that capacity building and ongoing strengthening is a necessity in fulfilling the attainment of all rights. People have to know how to recognize and how to claim their rights. The duty-bearer must know that the claimants are a

knowledgeable force precisely because they know their rights and have sufficient knowledge of whatever the system is that they are living under to claim the rights or apply the pressures that will begin to fulfill those rights.

This situation has great applicability to the work that Actionaid International has undertaken. It is clearly important to strengthen the capacity of local NGOs, and other Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), to understand and know their rights, to use a rights language and to analyze issues through a rights perspective and framework.

That is but a beginning. It requires a technical capacity to respond to claims by rights holders and that same capacity to answer the denials or obfuscations of decision-makers. Rights claimers must gain the experience of using advocacy and communications strategies so that their voice is fully articulated and heard in these situations.

Capacity building extends beyond using the traditional tools of advocacy. Skills must be developed to monitor the implementation of the progressive realizing of human rights. Monitoring is not a passive activity. It is about understanding information and creating it. The monitoring activity leads to situations in which decision-makers may be called to account. It can also lead to vastly strengthened relationships with decision-makers. Not every situation is a call to the barricades. Indeed few should be. Most situations require organizations to have the ability to be an independent and authoritative analyzer and purveyor of information.

We are all familiar with the limitations of state action in a world driven by positive and harmful aspects of globalization. What the consequences of attaining these capacities bring is the ability to take matters that involve national governments, multilateral institutions, bi-lateral ones and non-state actors and be able to deal on sub-regional levels, regional ones and international ones.

The Actionaid International approach to programmatic partnering that I observed in different countries—particularly in Andhra Pradesh in India, in Dien Bien Phu in Vietnam and in Guatemala—are particularly useful in advancing a Rights Based Agenda. These all express in different ways strengthening those who will organize, build the constituencies, foster the confidence of people who have long been denied rights the confidence, skills, knowledge and attitude to tangle with powerful institutions who resist or drag their feet on fulfilling the progressive realization of rights. It is Actionaid International as an enabler and catalyst. Those qualities, are an important resource for Actionaid International, suggests a preferred organizing strategy.

V. Overall Organizational Strategies for Actionaid International and a Rights Based Approach

A secure footing creates responsibilities for Actionaid International at the international and country levels. Those responsibilities spring forth from a complex history and sets of relationships.

1. Actionaid International is part of something larger than itself as an organization. Its roots are as a development organization that now advances human rights and connects to social movements. Its identity should now embrace its extended environment
2. It brings to its larger world incredibly diverse and rich experiences work—experiences that are largely not captured in any organized way for purposes of advancing an agenda based on attaining human rights..
3. Its values, and even passions, are about creating lives of equality for all and therefore it know it must tackle hard problems that deal with power in political, economic, social and cultural settings.
4. A hunger exists among staff members to advance their understanding, knowledge and skills to do policy work with those that they serve and relate to.

Internationalization

A possible way for Actionaid International to proceed in the context of the organization's internationalization as it advances the Rights Based Approach is to ask what organizational capacities and competencies should be in place five years from now. Actionaid International's work flows from its values and the various organizational divisions of Actionaid International (fund raising and communications) should serve those values drawn from the organization's work internationally and in the countries it serves. Part of the task is to decide how Actionaid International should be organizationally structured to serve the ongoing work it is doing in the field and in the international setting that it is operating in. The structural decisions are determined by internationalization stands as a given and the work in individual countries will reflect the rights based approach.

One of the strengths of internationalization is that Actionaid International at the Johannesburg level can be in a position to serve as a hub. In its pivot role it will provide key information to countries about matters that can be helpful to their work. These can be questions and suggestions drawn from different countries experiences in dealing with organizational or substantive questions. It can also encourage the linking of horizontal work on a variety of issues and/or find ways to make connections that otherwise would only be done through chance.

In this respect Actionaid International at the country and international levels has to have the organizational capacity to understand and convey:

1. The systemic and structural causes of inequality with action plans that address them. Actionaid International also has to sharpen its understanding and communications in advancing equality. In practical terms it has to recognize that gender equity is about equality and it needs to say so. It also means start naming what is involved in gender equality. It is about women. It involves grappling with social systems, such as patriarchy, that buttress the existing inequalities.
2. It means tackling the distortions of power that extend beyond analysis. Analysis, as we all know, is important but none of us wants to face "the paralysis of

analysis” that Martin Luther King used to warn social justice fighters about. It therefore means addressing questions about identifying, naming and understanding people’s own sources of power. The voices of those participating with Actionaid International, including its programmatic partners, should come forth loud and clear.

3. Actionaid International in Johannesburg should be equipped to deal with critical common issues. These include budget analysis, expenditures and revenues, gender quality, transparency including right to information, NGO-government relations, Institutionally embedded corruption, and the other cross cutting issues such as HIV/AIDS and food security.
4. Actionaid International has to help provide sharper understanding for its country programs the workings and systems of international donor agencies. This point came up consistently in my conversations
5. Tools of power analysis and mapping should be part of each country’s program. None of this should be static. It uses conventional ways of understanding power. It needs to deal with social institutions outside of government. That includes family social systems and dissecting patriarchy. Obstacles to an effective realization of RBA stems from social systems. It is necessary to provide tools that help overcome the obstacles. The tools of power analysis should be part of each countries kit as it unravels race, class, gender, caste and ethnicity and their influence on creating cultures of submissiveness and silence or high risk for challenging the powerful.
6. A non-static analysis of power will also help people recognize their own sources of power including the tools of solidarity drawn from culture and historic memory. For example, the use of story by community groups in Addis Ababa and song by Dalits in Andre Pradesh go far deeper than ritualistic telling of inspirational narratives.

Power

A well regarded way of understanding power comes from Lisa Veneklasen’s and Valerie Miller’s *Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation*. The book discusses four uses of power:

1. *Power over brings with it negative associations*. These are regularly associated with repression, force, coercion, discrimination and abuse.
2. *Power with* connects with finding common ground among different interests. It rests on mutual support, solidarity and collaboration. When done well it has a multiplier effect.
3. *Power to* often is associated with the power of a person to shape her or his life choices. It can also be thought of organizationally, and among social movements, as a way of creating collaborations that challenge dominant institutions that lead to their bending towards the rights of the poor.

4. *Power within* is essential to achieve the other forms of power. It is what people internalize for their belief system and their perspective that shapes their outlook on connecting their values to the world they are trying to influence and shape.

The challenge for change agent groups is to be able to use all four forms of power including the use of power over. Power abhors a vacuum. Social change power wielders can be unaccountable as well. Yet as voices for social justice we should not deny the importance of power over when a mobilization occurs and decision makers back down, or sometime institutional arrangements change for the better.

One challenge in the work that Actionaid International performs so valiantly, and often well, is to make all four forms of the power understandable. In that way it can work against the resisters of change or diminish the power of those who do not embrace or respect rights based approaches. In operational terms it means people need to feel and recognize their own sources of power. By recognizing their own sources of power, and being realistically tough minded about them, they recognize that not all power resides with whoever the others are. Those others are largely the adversaries of Actionaid International organizations.

Constant attention and energy must be focused on those parts of the society that are less powerful and invariably more marginalized. That is why the creation of political and public space is so critical. That space provides a gathering place for an exchange of ideas and practices that will add to the understanding of ways of challenging substantially unequal power relationships, opportunities to influence public policies and their implementation and undertaking social audits to examine what has improved, stayed the same or worsened for poor people. The last can lead to the asking of a set of key questions:

- What does change mean to your organization?
- How should it be done?
- How should it be modified?

Should the efforts always focus on the poorest of the poor, those most marginalized and least powerful? Or is it important to engage with parts of civil society and other interest groups who may not necessarily have the poor as their top priority but are in a position to influence and affect social change, who have the power to direct that change and sustain it? Actionaid International India raised this issue most sharply.

The question then is asked, how should Actionaid International's public work be conducted with itself and those with whom it partners?

1. Draw on its sources of power to create change. Understanding history and culture is essential to Actionaid International staff members and programmatic partners.

2. Face the threats and risks directly by working with staff members and partners to overcome them. Be upfront and strategic and therefore know whether the risks should be undertaken or not.
3. Always make the organization and partnership people centered. That deals with policies and participation. For example, PRSPs may have value as a participatory experience even if the paradigm does not reflect an Actionaid International or Partner analysis.
4. Build public support by conducting public discussion and public argument.
5. Create public and political spaces for people to discuss, sort, mull, debate. Actionaid International has a rich history in Vietnam, Guatemala, Sierra Leone, Liberia, India, Ethiopia of creating different kinds of public spaces to improve the lives of the poor and at times advance a Rights Based Agenda.
6. In building public support, and creating public and political space, is Actionaid International able to engage policy making systems at all levels of governance. Has it identified the attitudes, knowledge and skills needed to engage the policy system?
7. Has it gained the experience necessary to know when to push on the system harder, when to consolidate gains, when to recognize a compromise as an early step to move forward rather than hold out?

Political and Public Space

My sense of Actionaid International is that it is uneven in moving to a sharply generically political stance - one that is non-partisan and political. It is rarely described that way although it was clearly so described and understood that way by the Dalits in Andhra Pradesh. Its observation is influenced by the Dalits who are engaged in struggle actions in which they tangle with power and drive a wedge into the caste system.

In Ethiopia a culture of submissiveness - so described by Ethiopians working in social change matters including people in Actionaid International - dominates as a prevailing story over the creation of space to improve people's lives, particularly women and children, that stems from micro-enterprise initiatives.

Innovative ideas that have been made workable are lost to other countries. Here is one example. The Ethiopian micro-enterprise activity developed the use of the burial society to build financial support for health insurance. It used a culturally powerful institution to help people while they are living. Actionaid International is not organized to capture this story and as a result the chance to trumpet a bold innovation is unintentionally neglected.

It is useful to examine the space created in Vietnam to implement policies that fit RBA and government policies. Vietnam provides a rich example of negotiating and securing public and political space to create change that advanced a Rights Based Approaches. It is based on matters that the government's declarative policy fit the Actionaid International Vietnam agenda and the overall Actionaid International agenda. That success needs to be understood because its success did not come with the same ease as

rolling off of a log. That too needs to be captured by Actionaid International International.

The whole matter of public and political space raises answerable questions that are useful in working through strategies to advance RBA.

Why is space such a scarce resource in Ethiopia where criticism of a specific policy is associated with politically opposing the standing government? Its effect is debilitating. At times it silences voices or leads to a withdrawal from the processes of engaging policy systems at the level of allocating resources.

Why has space begun to be created in Guatemala and Sierra Leone after a conflict situation has ended even as the conflict remains deep in the public consciousness? The question is even more urgent organizationally as the leadership in these countries expressed strong views that Actionaid International at the international level was not sufficiently tuned into the specific situations these countries had to overcome.

Clearly an additional question is that in Gujerat state in India outstanding rights work was done in a horrid conflict. Actionaid International, as the only international NGO stepped in and provided valued and necessary leadership. Courageous, effective and outstanding work could be done in that emergency situation.

Progressive Realization of Human Rights

The concept of “progressive realization” of human rights would be a useful idea for countries emerging from conflict situations or getting rid of the shackles imposed by repressive governments. Progressive realization of human rights is a way of establishing benchmarks within a country. It addresses the question of why countries even in conflict situations, or those that are just emerging from them, should move forward on an RBA no matter how difficult the circumstances.

What can we learn from these varied experiences? That is a task for Actionaid International to organize by recognizing the experience is worth capturing and learning from.

These suggestions are made to sharpen the strategic thinking to advance RBA. RBA should frame issues in ways that demystify its concepts. It is a way of thinking that deals with matters holistically and systemically and is applied at the different levels of governance - from local to international.

In advancing RBA choices, Actionaid International will have to face whether it can continue to undertake service activities. A different choice is to pursue programmatic partners who undertake the organizing with advice and technical assistance from Actionaid International. Such an approach can in turn create organizers and technical assisters who can enlarge the field for organizing. The question that needs to be faced is whether it is possible to do service work directly or does the service work itself blunt

Actionaid International's own contribution to sharpening RBA. However it is initiated—whether through democratic conflict as in India, negotiations in Vietnam or by strengthening fragile institutions faced by countries coming out of conflict such as Sierra Leone, Burundi, Liberia and Guatemala—the question that has to be faced is can Actionaid International do service work and keep a cutting edge approach on RBA. The experience may not be fully in but to this observer it points away from doing service work directly but providing service people active help in clarifying RBA. Such service providers are in a position to be great sources of information—perhaps the best sources of information to advance an RBA

The organizing strategy has to succeed at the CBO level. That is where the voices of the poor are amplified. That is why an emphasis on critical matters such as public budgets, transparency and good governance is paramount. Such emphasis deals with serious aspects of institutionally embedded corruption. That is what affects people where they live and at the same time Actionaid International in country and internationally wants to show that it is a vital part of, and connected to, initiatives that are taking place beyond the community level. The voices of the poor must be amplified. Equally important the poor must establish their priorities. In establishing their priorities the poor must not stand by themselves.

That raised an interesting question in our discussion with the team that performed the India country review. They squarely faced the question as to whether or not the group should focus its direct actions on working with the poor. There is little doubt that in India valuable work is being done with those who are homeless. Again I want to emphasize in India, as in Ethiopia, and indeed in all the countries I visited Actionaid International is taking steps to improve people's lives. That should be understood and valued.

But gnawing away is the question are these the wisest strategic choices? In creating and effectuating social change can an organization only work with the poor? If it chooses not too for strategic political reasons what steps does it take to assure that the voices of the poor, and their political and programmatic priorities, stay front and center. (Efforts will be made to grapple with these matters later in this report.)

As an open and learning organization, and one that has accomplished important changes, its charge has to advance the RBA so that it affects systemic change.

VI. Matters to be Intentional About

When significant changes are planned within an organization questions of what matters become critical and they should be treated cautiously. What should happen more slowly? What are the benchmarks of organizational success, using the concept referred to in RBA as “progressive realization” of rights?

In observing the organizational culture of Actionaid International I get the sense that substantive learning takes place by osmosis. Anecdotes help people have understanding. There are lots of meetings and they take place outside of given geographical venues. That

leads to a healthy cross-fertilization. Meetings strengthen relationships (the great bulk of the time) in ways that telephone calls and e-mail or websites, absent such meetings cannot. An organization as geographically spread as Actionaid International is has to pay attention to cross cultural communication. In that respect the meeting culture is a strong dimension of Actionaid International's work.

I heard lots of concerns that go beyond the usual complaints. The people are sending signals that merit attention. We are all experienced enough in our own work to know that there is as much artistry, if not more, in implementation than in setting public policies or organizational ones What my suggestions are drawn from is what I heard people discussing in my discussions and interviews. Some of it stems from the fact that not all understandings are substantially clear within the different parts of the organization. Here are suggested items to be intentional about based on my observations.

1. Actionaid International staff accepts internationalization as a given but a great gap of knowledge exists about what it means as an idea and operationally. What would be useful is to have a common script. One approach is to collect the frequently asked questions about internationalization and answer them. One simple way to correct the gap in understanding is to have each Actionaid International ask the five questions it urgently wants answered. Surely some of the questions will be similar. The process enables the organization to put its best foot forward as it establishes a common effort to understand internationalization.
2. The advancing of RBA should be a reminder that each country has to be understood in its own context. Political and cultural institutions differ. Context is very specific. Paying attention to context does not mean a country gets a pass. For example, just as we contrasted, Ghana and Germany so can Country Directors be asked to indicate what strategies they will undertake to advance RBA by indicating what systemic problems within the country are to be addressed.
3. By working to build over the next 5 years a community of Rights Based Practitioners ways will be found to develop active learning about ongoing actions by:
 - (a) using meetings to reflect on attaining internal organizational challenges to strengthen capacity;
 - (b) creating campaigns that address systemic questions;
 - (c) providing examples of international aspects of local issues and campaigns;
 - (d) identifying innovative ideas and practices whether they are organizational or based on policy initiatives.

Cultural Constraints

Being intentional requires addressing cultural constraints. Those who spoke about it as a major problem included partners who are battling the harsh treatment of dying HIV/AIDS people, those who are working at the village level to stop FGM, facing the culture of silence and submissiveness specifically addressed by Ethiopia staff members and partners and the huge gap in sharing various forms of household work by men in African, Asian and Latin cultures. A simple exercise was tried with groups of Actionaid International

staff members. An upside down triangle was used with policy formulation on the upper right and implementation on the upper left. The bottom dealt with cultural influences that invariably meant cultural constraints and obstacles.

The staff members' response revealed a moment of revealing insight. The insight was not that they had not thought about cultural opposition to the achievement of rights. They had. The positioning of cultural restraints, in spite of often reasonable policies and even adequate efforts at implementation., suggested why open discussion of cultural influences are important. Just as failure to attain a "progressive realization" of human rights is not acceptable, so is letting cultural constraints go by without their being addressed is equally harmful to advancing RBA. Being intentional requires finding appropriate ways to discuss these hard matters and not just dismiss them by saying it's in the culture.

Language

The use of language as a social change factor requires attention. In an organization such as Actionaid International, with its rich history and culture, there is a danger that short hand, acronyms and alphabet soup substitute for what Actionaid International wants to convey. A Rights Based Approach requires language filled with active verbs such as initiate, innovate, invent. It requires using words and concepts that convey agency and not dependency. Beneficiary, is a classic word that conveys dependence. Regrettably it is used all the time in Actionaid International circles.

Actionaid International may want to consider developing a glossary of RBA words and concepts and ask those on the front lines to contribute words that they want to see become part of the Actionaid International vocabulary. Such a glossary can be built from words and phrases that build energy and do not sap energy. Often such words will emerge out of actions undertaken by the organization and also from workshops and informal conversations.

Caution should be exercised around the use of the word empowerment. Not only in Actionaid International, but in other organizations as well, empowerment is used in the form of empowering others. This flies in the face of power coming from organizing, of people creating their own agency and recognizing that power stems from relationships.

Language is important in other matters as well. I found confusion is created by the multiple uses of partnerships. Is it financial, does it flow because Actionaid International in country either contributes or receives funds? In discussing partnerships it became useful early on to categorize the partner: programmatic, funded, or being funded by. What about International NGOs that compete for resources and public recognition but meet with World Bank officials or British Ambassadors to discuss common issues? Confusion abounds around the notion of who a donor is? Can an organization be a donee and a donor at the same time? Is a donor only an international financial institution or does it include DFID and USAID? The language issue has to be clarified in further delineating the concepts of partnership and who a donor/grantor and donee/grantee is.

A strong case can be made that to further sharpen RBA partnership should be used with programmatic partners not financial ones.

The question has to also be asked as to whether the use of marketing language, and marketing thinking, unintentionally steps on Actionaid International's larger message reflected in its mission, values, objectives and the whole thrust of a rights based approach and women's equality. The question is neither an idle one nor an academic one. It is raised because from time in the field I come away with a concern that market driven matters submerge the telling of Actionaid International's powerful story.

International Organizing: Capacity Strengthening, Horizontal, Sub-Regional

The Internationalization of Actionaid International provides a special opportunity to think in ways of organizing for a global organization. I will also suggest an approach that is meant only to stimulate further discussion. The framework is meant to cover capacity strengthening, horizontal work and sub-regional actions. In doing so I want to recognize much work that is already occurring and being actively explored. It is precisely because of such work I find there may be potential to advance systematic efforts at dealing with and addressing the inequalities that are so deeply felt and understood within the organization.

I divide International Organizing into three parts. They are neither equal nor roughly equitable in their power distribution.

The first part is International Advocacy and these are state actors, UN institutions, IFIs and the think tanks that serve them and rationalize their actions. These are largely government or international official institutions who do not present powerful support for an RBA.

The second part is what is often referred to as global civil society. These include the International NGOs (INGOs). They include many southern participants who have gained an expertise in certain subject areas such as international trade. These groups are active players on the international scene. The connection of the INGOs to local groups is sporadic but powerful when matches are made as they began to in the Beijing conference on women's issues. There are often north-south relationships that in turn create tension flash points with southern social movement efforts.

The third part is what I refer to as trans-national RBA advancement. It is where there are commonalities found in ways that advance RBA. Illustratively these include horizontal working groups in women's rights, livelihood issues, and health issues including HIV-AIDS work. If it had been organized more fully it's what could have come out of the follow-up to some of the UN conferences.

Transnational efforts provide great potential for capacity strengthening in linking local and national governance and policy-making systems to international ones or regional

ones. It combines horizontal situations with efforts to strengthen capacity strengthening by providing entry points or wedges into policy-making and political systems. It provides the basis for initiating campaigns to change policies and may provide the key to innovative and policies, policies that create inventions for social change.

One area that deserves far greater attention is how to begin to create an experience of working on sub-regional efforts. The Mano River project—Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea—provide one important possibility. Another comes from work done in Central America with Guatemala as a possible hub. Work that has already started, particularly on women's issue in South Asia, provides an ongoing and a likely rich experience for learning and adapting for use elsewhere.

VII. Matters that Merit Active Consideration

These items that will be raised are all discussed from the vantage point of advancing and initiating an active Rights Based Approach that deals with matters of achieving equality and distributive justice and thereby transforming power relationships in the worlds in which Actionaid International operates.

In writing on this next section I want to pay tribute to the work of my colleagues. On each of their specialty they taught me much in understanding the complexity and texture of Actionaid International in ways that I got only from spending time with them, listening to them and reading them. My few comments on these matters have been influenced by their contributions. I will discuss financial and marketing matters, followed by questions on management systems.

Financial and Marketing Systems and Culture

A powerful message flows from a zero tolerance for organizational corruption. It goes beyond exhortation and has systems in place to prevent it deserves ongoing trumpet blowing. In every respect Actionaid International is an active and protective steward and trustee of the organization's funds - funds that come from hard working and committed people who express their values through their contributions. I frame it this way because at least in the materials I have seen, (and I would be the first to say I could have missed it) I did not see the organization acknowledging its achievement or valuing its contributors with that perspective. If I am wrong I cheerfully stand corrected.

The organization has clearly moved the contributors of child sponsorship to a different level of understanding. It's not a Life magazine version of finding 10 young children in Brazil, India and Kenya decades ago and talking about how as individuals they were rescued from poverty. It clearly deals with how the contributions enable Actionaid International to play an active role in benefiting the community. It would be useful to know whether the fund raising messages consistently reflect the RBA and women's equality in (a) initial recruitment of contributors and (b) the ongoing cultivation of these contributors so that they renew and increase their contributions. Generally speaking those

already recruited place greater trust in the organization and can be brought into the demanding, and even adversarial aspects, of Actionaid International's work.

Is there a gap in Actionaid International's communication about using a Rights Based Approach? If yes, how is that best addressed? If not, how can that be used to show that RBA, and women's equality, has strong "political legs" in those countries that provide financial contributions.

After all there is no great leap in recognizing that RBA fits European democracies. Furthermore, it reflects values of multiple religions. Sophisticated ways of recruiting new contributors, and keeping old ones, are well established. Having said that a successful fund raising program requires the whole organization to pull together. In a social change organization, such as Actionaid International, each department should contribute its skills and knowledge in raising funds.

Program people in any active organization have a specific responsibility to help raise funds. That speaks to why fund raising is a collective organizational responsibility. Program staff, while reflecting on Actionaid International's mission, should also think about the advantages that come from having resources to try new programs, to experiment prudently and to carry forward ongoing and effective program work. This is well illustrated in Alex Jacobs' written materials.

Therefore program people need to play a role in fund raising. That indeed is part of their responsibility to the larger organization. With the countries—Greece, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom-- (and on this I would suggest examining how to gain the financial support from Canadian and United States value based contributors) playing an active collegial role, program people should be asked to contribute reflections on their work that will be part of the organizational discussion to gain additional financial support.

Here are a series of questions that I would consider asking of the Country Directors and their team. I have no doubt that others will have far better ones:

1. What is the major message of your work?
2. What are your best stories that illustrate your message?
3. What are your best ideas that are now working well in the field?
4. What larger movements are you part of and how has that influenced your work?
5. What are Actionaid International's distinctive contributions to women's equality, eliminating poverty and advancing a Rights Based Agenda?

Program people working with fund raising people will be able to tell a powerful story that will solidify current contributors and set the stage for recruiting new ones.

Management Systems

Our team read many documents including numerous country reports and strategy papers. Lots of time is spent on these. They have a similar approach and resemble a formula. The

reports raise a question for me. The concerns senior staffers in different countries raised should direct Actionaid International to the need for taking practical steps that will create time for reflection as part of a group process. I will look briefly at REFLECT, ALPS and innovations to see how management systems can address problems that emerge or opportunities that should be seized.

The question for me is what kinds of incentive systems can be designed to lead to organized reflection. I say this recognizing earlier in the report the value of osmosis and cross-fertilization that takes place. Perhaps that is sufficient if it leads to a recognized institutional memory. So far, according to staff members talked to, Actionaid International has not established a process for capturing ongoing institutional memory that deals with what happens when the work of social change is carried out. Since so much is going on, and experiences have a rich quality, something vital is surely lost.

REFLECT

REFLECT receives high plaudits when it is used. But its use is inconsistently applied. It can be used more widely than it has been and could in all probability be well used by senior staff within countries and by the International Directors as well. REFLECT is an Actionaid International nugget that should be used far more strategically.

REFLECT is one aspect of Actionaid International's identity. It's not of course that only Actionaid International reflects. But the REFLECT process is a powerful tool for understanding and sustaining social change and it is under utilized.

ALPS

As will be developed far more fully by Irene Guijt ALPS is a source of good practice and innovation. It seems to be part of the osmosis and cross-fertilization processes. That this seems to happen without documented guidelines attests to the strength of the organization. But that virtue should not go silently into the night. Capturing learning is important and reflecting about that learning is surely useful.

The challenge is to identify smart management systems that capture it. They do not have to be perfect. They should not be complicated. They should be narrative and story oriented. Among the questions they can ask are these:

- What do you want others to know about what your colleagues and you learned?
- What would you avoid?
- What can be adapted and applied for programmatic partners?

Innovations

In each country I visited I found nuggets of innovation - policy, organizational, policy - that exist, are part of what people do and do not flow into the Actionaid International system.

In Sierra Leone it included recruiting strategies that provided time off to attract woman to have leadership roles. The time off enabled them to spend time with their families when they were away from home as the job called for being away.

In Ethiopia it connected health insurance, otherwise unaffordable, with the burial society group. It used a culturally appropriate organization (the burial society) to strengthen life by making health treatment less unaffordable.

In India it used case stories from efforts by Dalits to gain dignity. Narrative stories, albeit short, recognize the efforts made by the people to win their rights, values their work and can serve to inspire others.

In rural Vietnam communes are linked electronically so information is shared and discussion is advanced.

In Guatemala partnerships are fostered with innovative institutions of higher learning and past discrimination efforts are overcome.

These innovations merely scratch the surface. A smart management system would find ways to capture innovations, make them understandable within the organization, decide the different areas that can be covered, and recognize them within the organization so that others can apply or adapt them.

For a large organization to think in terms of innovations further reinforces its position as a learning organization. It also demonstrates that there is room for fresh ideas and organizational approaches. It is one of the best ways an organization avoids ossification and keeps away its barnacles.

The other aspect of innovations, as is true with various organizational learning methodologies and processes (REFLECT and ALPS quickly come to mind), is that that is part of Actionaid International's public story and that includes communicating with its contributors. What the story tells is critically important. That is why the language of RBA, with a constant emphasis on women's equality, and what that means for children, is essential.

VIII. Longer Range Concerns

Here I want to address a series of program related matters that in my judgment Actionaid International at the international level has to be equipped to provide direction to. It can do by consciously acting as a facilitating catalyst. It uses its hub to pivot ideas, plans and

organizational methods - thereby creating a mental model of active leadership drawn from the experience created - to help build an organization in which the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

Organizing

The connection between development, human rights and social movements is held together by ongoing attention to organizing - understanding its power, respecting the energy that has to be devoted to it and constantly learning from what is occurring. The key to the organizing is the clarity of thinking about partner relationships and working with those partners whose feet are well planted in constituency and membership. Actionaid International's significant added value is in what it bolsters through policy initiation and implementation and its horizontal work across sectors and borders. Organizing provides the key to make the right of association real and workable.

It is best to lead from the best examples.

In Kenya and India work on difficult issues works usefully with programmatic partners. Investments have been made in sustaining organizations, enabling them to reach a sturdy level in their organizational life cycle so that they can act independently on their own and thereby establish the networks, alliances and coalitions that create the practical solidarity. That solidarity places these organization at the vortex discussed early in the report: development organizations, human rights organizations and social movement groups.

Establishing political and public space is at a premium in Ethiopia. The mind-set of the government authorities is very different from what I found in Vietnam. Yet within certain areas—HIV-AIDS comes to mind—there may be possibilities of creating space that otherwise does not exist in Ethiopia. How does an organization move beyond fragility and begin to secure space that enables it to address critical rural issues such as food security? In a fragile setting how does an organization avoid cooptation? How can ways be found to provide periods away from crisis to allow the leadership to engage in strategic reflection? What can be learned from the success in changing police practices and institutional behavior in advancing the life conditions of street children?

In a difficult situation, where the legacy of the conflict hangs over so much of Sierra Leone, imaginative efforts have been initiated with networks that are exploring ways to contain the rapaciousness of the diamond mining urges to sell and spend down the country's limited assets. What capacities are needed to wage this struggle effectively? What is needed in Sierra Leone, what, if anything, matters in the Mano River plans and what international institutions should be connected to prevent the depletion of the resource and the assurances it will be used to benefit the country.

In Vietnam how is solidarity maintained at the commune level, efforts made to use the power of association and right to information, to maintain a level of community cohesion

- within the villages and communes - and stay in a vital and active relationship with the government, one in which the needs of the people are articulated and respected.

In Guatemala an enriching experience flows from the respectful relationships with program related partners who consistently weave in a gender perspective. Actionaid International Guatemala models modesty in its roles and contributions. At the same time its presence is felt on the front lines of creating social change.

In all of these situations Actionaid International can initiate connections between people who work outside of a country specific context with those who work in country. This can provide reflective support that bolsters initiatives and actions taken within country.

What is apparent is that little systematic knowledge is known as to the why of what makes vibrant organizing work. A series of questions emerge.

1. What are the ingredients of relationship building?
2. What makes for the positive advances especially under adverse conditions?
3. What learning can Actionaid International distill from ongoing experiences that strengthen the relationships of development organization to those working in human rights and building social movements.
4. Where is political and public space solidified? Where do policy interventions
5. make a difference?
6. Where does it help to pursue parallel institutions?
7. Where does it help to interact with the government even where its record is spotty at best?

Right to Information

The phrase the right to information is used all the time. Sometimes it is used as the right to know. Transparency is certainly a buzz word. Rarely though is the right to information used strategically. Information can be created. Within Actionaid International at different levels I have seen effective applications of the use of information - in difficult places such as Liberia, in surprising places such as Vietnam, in its creative use in Bangladesh.

Knowledge is power but only if knowledge is created. The use of information is central to creating the necessary public and political space to organize the discussion, or if need be, the argument to advance RBA.

It is worth thinking through what the active use of information means in the Actionaid International framework. It has these elements:

- Information is facts gained through research, interview or instruction. The continuous use of information has compelling qualities since such usage and application leads to new knowledge.

- Information gatherers provide the new knowledge. They synthesize information by drawing it from data, observation, analysis and experience. They may even create the data from observation, analysis and experience.
- Information users must have the understanding to see the relationships, contradictions and patterns among different facts and data.

In its essence information, carefully and creatively organized, tells a story that otherwise would not be told. It is a way of placing critical policy matters into a frame that can then be heard and is acted on.

Actionaid International can be a broker of information. By connecting to active networks it can bring people together with others who are more distant from the CBOs and other grass roots organizations, or connect people in the same sector across borders. Perhaps the prime example would be for Actionaid International to connect with those working on budget policies which we all know is the ultimate policy document. In Ethiopia and Sierra Leone senior staff members expressed a clear interest in wanting to pursue these relationships.

The International Budget Project, familiar to some at senior levels of Actionaid International, is a natural place for Actionaid International to connect to. Its work on national budgeting encompasses understanding and demystifying public expenditures. It also gets at the key revenue questions. For example, that would have enormous application in the efforts of Sierra Leone to deal with the asset protection and revenue-raising issues related to the diamond mines.

Structured Networks

Structured networks are about organizing in the modern age of electronic communications. Structured networks are not a substitute for the necessary one-on-one organizing on building community power. Structured networks are particularly useful in horizontal connectivity and in sub-regional and trans-national efforts.

Structured networks are not formal coalitions although they might lead to their later development. The point is the work of a structured network does not have to lead to a formal coalition. They are not informal networks that serve as transmission belts or policy chat rooms. They have more structure than informal networks and therefore they create more responsibility on the participants.

The structured networks are particularly useful in the early stages of an issue or campaign where matters have not been fully formed but where there is a strong sense that something requires correcting and it takes more than a quick fix to make that correction.

Here is how it works:

1. Its prime purpose is to maintain a useful flow of information that tackles the problem faced. It does so by organizing information so that the messages are understood and transmitted.

2. It documents action strategies and tactics through quick narratives that describe action, who is being influenced and how a political and policy context is created.
3. Responsibility for documentation is important. Its quality has to be credible but it is equally important to recognize that it is an unfolding story and documenters should not be paralyzed by perfection
4. Documentation can be written, by audio-tape or video. It can appear on cd-roms to make it work best it will require somebody carrying out a journalist's function by interviewing people and gathering their stories on whatever mode of communication is used.
5. It takes an issue, or a problem, and shapes a discourse at the local, national, regional levels. In doing so it engages interested organizations and interest groups and builds strategic relationships with the media by being a credible authority on the subject at hand.

It connects organizations across geography and different constituencies. It fixes responsibility within the structure of the network. It has the capacity to initiate actions and discourse. It frames issues. It embraces rapid response. It aggregates power.

None of it is magical. Structured networks are not about short cuts. It requires being respectful in relationships. It certainly requires stamina and persistence. It moves away from the hierarchies of command and control or a top sergeant barking out orders that are often common in issue based campaigns including those involving social movements.

Structured networks, or other forms of imaginative organizing, beyond what is currently done in Actionaid International has previously recognized and respected, is not on anybody's radar screen. It should be.

Sustenance

I will leave the details of Human Resource and Organizational Development to my colleague Simon Matsvai to explore. I do want to emphasize a concern I noticed on more than one occasion and is often a problem in organizations that focus on rights and social justice.

There is a strong puritanical work ethic. In one place it was said that staff was expected to work on Saturdays and it was expected to stay late on weekdays. Variations of this were found nearly everywhere. Anecdotal stories were told of how hard work at Actionaid International is on family life, how it drove one senior person out because the work and family responsibilities, or even the joy of nurturing young children, could not be fulfilled. Given the social systems we are living under this invariably, in one way or another affects women even more harshly and none of that minimizes the hardship on all staff members and their families.

The remedy is not for Actionaid International to shun the high level of commitment uniformly exemplified by Actionaid International staff but instead to be intentional about

sustenance activities, to value them and to recognize that sustenance is an essential part of doing effective rights work. All of this applies to Partners as well and thought should be given as to how best to convey that message. There is no avoiding dealing with sustenance matters. That responsibility directly goes to Actionaid International and Country Directors.

Since it is important for Actionaid International to work to build a community of RBA and gender quality practitioners here are some suggestions drawn from practitioners around the world.

1. Pursue lives outside of work—other interest whether singing, dancing, reading or any other interest.
2. Use vacation time and managers should insist that it be used.
3. Take time to keep up on the issues and problems of those you serve.
4. Take time to reflect.
5. Visit with people you partner with outside of your office venue.
6. Participate in staff development activities.
7. Create an organizational culture that recognizes and values people's contributions.
8. Let go of personal baggage.
9. Keep flexible and go with the flow.
10. Accept periods of low energy as part of the work cycle. Look to see if the low energy is work related.
11. Keep laughing.

Nothing is magical about making all this happen. It takes efforts to carry it forward. It will happen only if an organizational expectation is created that it should happen.

Leadership

A striking contrast came up in our work. In the London meetings the team reference leadership in our deliberations. This was further reinforced by the discussions with the International Directors. The contrast is that leadership as a concept, phrase, word practically never came up in our discussions. It was as if it did not exist.

In situations - and there are many - where Actionaid International is making an ongoing difference the idea of leadership was not acknowledged or recognized. No discussion on leadership occurred where risks were taken.

Why the denial, why the avoidance? Some of it may be related to thinking of leaders in hierarchical power terms. Others shun leadership because it moves away from equality. In our heads, if not in our hearts, we know that leadership is a necessary quality of social change. That suggests it needs to be understood in its different dimensions.

Arguably leadership that pursues a RBA emerges from a social construct. This is especially critical in social justice work in working on the struggle for equality and the attainment and respect for human rights. Over a period of time leadership is socially

constructed and is neither embodied in individual nor possessed by them. By the process being social rather than individual, means that is relational, and therefore belongs to a community rather than an individual.

In this understanding of leadership attention must be paid to it in the practice of Actionaid International organizations and their partners. Just as we recognize the importance of providing a power analysis leadership that transforms has to be connected to power and its connection to our earlier discussion about the power to, with, over and within. The relationship of that power relates directly to understanding leadership and its applicability to the world of attaining equality, eliminating poverty and changing power relationships.

If leadership, like power, is relational, collective and purposeful - driven by values, belief and mission - then the focus is not on the leader but on the processes of leadership, the acts of leadership and the public aspects and work of leadership. That requires understanding the social system the group, or the community, operates in.

This is not about one off trainings on leadership development. It does mean trying to identify by category what is needed in social change work and creating ways of discussing that with appropriate materials of which the most important are an organization's experience.

Recently in work in Palestine, not an area that enjoys the presence of Actionaid International, such an effort was made by people living in a conflict situation under Israeli military occupation and with a Palestinian government that has deeply embedded institutional corruption. It is fair to say space is not easily yielded and democratic processes have not advance to fragility. Yet in Palestine a vibrant civil society operates in that beleaguered land.

In a system of trying to create change around matters affecting women's rights, attaining clean water and preventing violence in schools practitioners of social change, rooted in community organizations, identified leadership that is exercised in eleven different ways. Here they are:

1. Set examples by serving as role models;
2. Serve as mentors and coaches to newer participants;
3. Strategize by thinking ahead and identifying those parts of the goals that are attainable;
4. Historians who keep memory alive by collecting and conveying narrative stories;
5. Resource mobilizers - not limited to money - who cut through institutional inertia;
6. Statespersons, people with status and standing in the society, who provide credibility and authority that those on the frontline may lack;
7. Communicators who use symbols and metaphors to help educate the various publics;
8. Organizers who raise the stakes and make the powerful squirm with discomfort;

9. Inside negotiators who know the byways and passageways of the political and policy system and use that knowledge to apply pressure to the powerful;
10. Cultural activist who pair movements with powerful cultural forces
11. Visionaries who think in the long term
12. Generalists who synthesize and relate their many years of experience.

These twelve ways when taken together are at the heart of establishing a leadership that transforms societies. It is a leadership that has to be supported and nurtured. Advancing a Rights Based Approach, with a major focus on women's equality, requires an ongoing understanding of how social change leadership does its work. It is important to learn what the mental and emotional models of leadership are.

Questions that need to be reflected on include:

1. What frameworks do those who exercise leadership bring to the table to discuss?
2. What is their perspective?
3. How do they apply emotional intelligence to their leadership?

Grass roots leaders are the first to acknowledge the need for stronger skill building. What is important the effort does not stop with skill building. It values the leadership promise by taking into the arena of where change occurs, where experience is gained and where the relationships of power are transformed.

IX. Looking Ahead

The transformation of Actionaid International from service delivery to a Right Based Approach organization, and that incorporates women's equality as an essential priority of the first rank represents a major accomplishment. Now that Actionaid International shifts towards the fulfillment of internationalization it has to be mindful of questions of identity for the organization and how power centers within the Actionaid International community (the international organization, the northern countries and the Country Directors and their Board of Directors establish policy and exercise trusteeship responsibilities).

The success in the transformation has created the space to further advance the RBA, women's equality and with it the essential matters pertaining to human resource and organizational development, financial practices and the application of ALPS. To be implemented is that ALPS should emphasize organizational learning as much as the other parts of ALPS.

Recognizing the importance of country context we ask ourselves what steps can be taken to advance the whole organization towards moving towards societal equality within countries, within regions and between the south and the north, working to eliminate

poverty worldwide and adding to the ongoing efforts to make human rights the norm in people's lives everywhere.

None of this eliminates the specific context of each country. But just as a country cannot be given a pass on achieving the "progressive realization" of human rights, so Country Directors need to have workable plans that make a realistic effort to advance RBA, women's equality, the elimination of poverty and having human rights established as a norm within country.

Actionaid International has to be organized to be helpful including policy initiation at the IFI level. Providing services with information to aid the individual countries is essential. Just as many a country strategy plan says what are the expected outcomes, so Actionaid International should decide how it wants to be organized and equipped to advance the effort.

In doing so I want to recommend a process that can position Actionaid International as it moves across the boundaries of being a development organization, with a rights based emphasis and within that placing women's equality at the highest and urgent of levels, gaining additional energy from the efforts of social movements to build power where so far it has been stifled.

This vortex of development organizations, human rights organizations and social movements that Ramesh Singh so well described in his lecture at the India International Centre in June, 2004 suggests ways of building power to transform institutions and lives for the better. In different places this linkage of three worlds into one cares about the same important matters and finds ways of functionally standing together. That enables it to build power by showing its strength in numbers, in diversity as it creates a holistic outlook on rights and the elimination of poverty. It is setting the stage for systemic changes. It will do so by thinking of such change creation as part of a social movement that brings the rich experience of a development organization to make rights based working with people especially women and children and those who want to stand with the women and children.

What are the pivotal ways that Actionaid International can be helpful and Country Directors can advance a Rights Based Approach.

1. Pick issues and campaigns big enough to matter.
2. Manage issues and campaigns that are small enough to produce substantive or process results.
3. Choose efforts that are not there for the plucking but reflect an RBA related strategy.
4. Lay the base for building future alliances through networking, structured networks, alliance building, and if it fits the strategy, future coalition organizing.
5. Facilitate grassroots experience by strengthening people's confidence and skills by their participation.
6. Energize people for future issue and campaign efforts.

7. Gain acceptance from the general public or at the minimum the public acquiesces by not opposing the changes.

What I am trying to convey is an adventure in social action that crosses borders and other boundaries. It does so by creating stories, exchanging views, being culturally aware, learning, networking, mentoring and enjoying the robustness and zest of initiating social action and challenging power. It demands reflection. It demands an open-mindedness that initiates, invents and innovates. It lives the life of social action to the fullest. It lives life to the fullest.