

## gender policy

### Organisation-wide strategies to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment

Why has it taken us almost three decades to develop a policy on as central an issue as gender? There are a range of answers we could choose from. Let's start from the more charitable. Because policies matter less than practice. Because we are less inclined to adopt rhetoric. Because we have more of a Southern voice in the organisation compared to many other international organisations. There is some truth in all these answers but I think there have been more fundamental reasons for this delay.

The mission of ActionAid was initially focused exclusively on children and education and then expanded to look at poverty. It has taken a long time for us to understand that the underlying causes of poverty can be found in the very unjust distribution of power and resources. And that gender inequity is a key part of this. On a day-to-day basis, the community leaders we work with, the staff of partner organisations we support, and the government officials we interact with, are often not just men but also believers in patriarchy. Within the organisation as well, resistance and discrimination are encountered at different levels and manifest themselves in various subtle as well as open ways. Although overcoming gender injustice cannot simply be reduced to recruiting women to leadership positions, organisational change does depend on developing a critical mass of support. The capacity that we have created in terms of gender posts and working groups at the local, national and regional levels has made a big difference.

The gender review within Taking Stock confirmed much of this reality. So much for looking back. It is true that a huge amount of our work is with poor women and girls. We also have many examples of our work that have strengthened the position of women, both in our directly-operational and our partnership programmes. Our staff are committed to addressing this issue in every area - at the community level, our policy advocacy work, fundraising, human resource management, finance and IT.

Fighting poverty together has challenged many of the previous assumptions and put the struggle for women's rights at the heart of our new approach. This policy statement is deliberately light in detail but clear in our resolve. It is for each one of us who make up ActionAid to show to ourselves and the world outside, particularly the poor women and girls who wage their daily battle against discrimination and injustice, that we mean every word we say. It is for people in leadership positions to demonstrate their commitment in practice - to give their own time and allocate adequate resources. This means big changes in both our behaviour and actions at all levels. It also means intolerance of any forms of behaviour that run counter to this policy statement.

Thanks to the International Gender Working Group (IGWG) for creating this yardstick as we move forward.

Salil Shetty, Chief Executive  
October, 2000

## ActionAid gender policy

ActionAid recognises that gender relations and inequalities are fundamental causes of poverty. Women and girls do not enjoy the same status, power or access to and control over resources as men and boys. This situation is unacceptable. Principles of equity and social justice require us to work to ensure that everyone has equal opportunity for expressing and using their potential, irrespective of sex, age, race, colour, class, caste, religion, ethnic background, sexual orientation, HIV status or disability. ActionAid is fully committed to channelling energy, effort and resources into processes that create a society that values women, men, girls and boys equally.

ActionAid has increasingly worked with a gender perspective over the years. This experience has led us to acknowledge that women's empowerment and the recognition of women's rights as human rights are essential for sustainable development and can be empowering for everyone. It has also taught us that working with a gender perspective means involving and engaging men and boys in order to improve the status of women and girls. These lessons - along with the need for improved learning and monitoring around gender issues and clear accountability mechanisms - have guided the development of our gender policy.

Fighting poverty together (ActionAid strategy 1999 - 2003) provides an institutional framework for placing women's rights and empowerment at the centre of all our work. This document provides guidance for operationalising the strategic objectives on gender of Fighting poverty together. However, it also stands alone as the over-riding policy document on gender for all of ActionAid. The following sections are not discrete segments and should be taken as a whole. The policy seeks to ensure greater consistency of gender principles, policies and practices across the organisation and to provide an accountability framework in relation to gender, against which all staff can be accountable and against which ActionAid will audit itself.

## principles and goals

"A rights-based approach demands that we take the analysis of poverty and marginalisation beyond communities and households to individual women, men, boys and girls as well as to the most vulnerable and marginalised groups.  
Fighting poverty together"

### principles

The achievement of gender equality requires that:

- gender equality and equity are central to ActionAid's being and doing;
- the empowerment of women and girls is recognised as fundamental to our mission;
- every individual understands and demonstrates attitudes and behaviours that promote gender equality and equity;
- adequate resources are allocated to gender work;
- all work is continuously monitored against gender indicators;
- and the cross-cutting nature of gender concerns is recognised (gender equality is both everyone's responsibility and an area that warrants specialised attention and resources).

### goals

The gender policy aims to ensure gender equality and women's empowerment are central to ActionAid's:

- programmes at all levels;
- organisational culture and behaviours;
- and public image.

The following pages lay out the specific objectives and strategies for programmes, organisational development, public image and finance and resource allocation.

## programmes

### Objective

All programmes empower women and promote women's rights as human rights.

### Strategies

Apply gender analysis at all stages of policy and programme work, including planning, implementation, impact assessment and development of measurable gender indicators.

- Develop capacity of programme staff to carry out gender analysis.
- Develop gender-sensitive approaches and methods of work which are empowering, building on lessons learnt from Stepping Stones, Reflect and other participatory methodologies.
- Ensure programme staff take responsibility for promoting gender equality.
- Through the Accountability, learning and planning system (Alps), monitor and evaluate programmes for gender goals, and develop and employ good practice guidelines and indicators.
- Promote the creation of structures and opportunities for women's participation in decision-making at all levels.
- Ensure that women's and girls' voices are heard in mainstream development processes.
- Undertake capacity building (e.g. resource allocation, training, information, networking) to strengthen women's organisations and groups, and organisations working towards gender equality.
- Promote, support and participate in the women's movement to advocate for implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and other national and international instruments for women's rights.
- Include a gender equality perspective in all campaign and influencing work.
- Support women and girls to secure their economic, social, political, civil and cultural rights.
- Promote women's and girls' independent access to and control over land, employment, services and institutions, including their ability to exercise rights over their own bodies and find protection against violence.
- Develop, promote and use creative ways of engaging men and boys (and not only women and girls) as agents of change in the pursuit of gender equality.
- Support partners who are aligned to our gender principles, and work to inform and influence those who are not, with the option of breaking the alignment in cases where positive change fails to occur.

## organisation development

### Objective

Gender equality and equity are central to ActionAid's being and doing.

### Strategies

- Ensure that specialised gender functions are in place and adequately resourced.
- Recognise knowledge related to gender concerns and gender-related analysis as one of the core areas of capacity for staff and build capabilities throughout the agency.
- Build a common understanding around gender through induction and training.
- Ensure that all training across the agency is gender-sensitive.
- Make all HR systems and policies gender-sensitive and responsive, and integrate gender indicators into staff objectives, accountabilities and performance management systems.
- Prioritise gender sensitivity in all terms of reference, including TORs for external consultants.
- Determine the nature, structure and causes of gender imbalances in staff throughout the agency and set targets for recruitment, retention and promotion of staff accordingly, particularly women in senior positions.
- Develop strategies for reaching those targets, including:
  - affirmative action;
  - career development opportunities including development posts, training and internal promotion;
  - family friendly and flexible working policies to allow staff to fulfil caring responsibilities (including job-sharing, maternity, paternity and parental leave, and policies on childcare provision and/or subsidies for staff);
  - sexual harassment policies;
  - safe and secure transport and accommodation when travelling, particularly for women staff; and
  - equal pay for work of equal value.
- Use information technology to facilitate home working, flexible working hours and virtual working to strike a balance between home responsibilities and work;
- Ensure that staff access to and use of information technology is gender equitable.

## public image

### Objective

The external presentation of ActionAid should promote a balanced view of the issues surrounding gender equality and equity.

### Strategies

- Gender analysis will be central to the development of all marketing, fundraising, sponsorship and campaigns work and gender concerns will be incorporated into activities wherever possible.
- Design fundraising proposals and appeals to fulfil ActionAid's strategic goals and objectives on gender equality and equity.
- Inform donors about ActionAid's gender goals and objectives and give positive examples of ActionAid's gender work.
- As part of the recruitment of a wider anti-poverty movement, ActionAid will actively encourage the recruitment of new supporters who are gender sensitive.
- All materials and general communications will be formulated to reflect ActionAid's goals and objectives on gender equality and equity, challenging gender stereotypes and recognising diversity.
- Gender-sensitive language and images will be used in all internal and external communications.
- Whenever possible, women's and girls' voices will be heard in the first person.
- Ensure that women and men are proportionately represented during press briefings and other public relations activities.

## finance and resource allocation

### Objective

Adequate resources are allocated to gender work across the organisation.

### Strategies

- Commit a high level of support and resources to gender work and functions.
- Include a gender dimension in all finance guidelines, instructions and policies.
- Develop and refine tools and methods for assessing and reporting on gender-related investments at every level of the organisation.
- Maintain and update annually qualitative and quantitative information on gender related expenditure.

## implementation and accountability

"Relationships of inequality may be so entrenched in everyday ways of thinking and acting that they appear 'natural' and even necessary. ActionAid's contribution to the struggle against poverty is about changing how people - poor and non-poor, South and North - are able to act together.

Fighting poverty together"

This section outlines the framework for the implementation of the gender policy. It provides guidelines on the responsibility of different parts of the organisation for the achievement of gender equality. However, detailed strategies and their implementation plans will be elaborated by divisions, regions and country programmes.

- International directors will be accountable for the implementation of the policy.
- The international directors will report on the implementation process annually to the Board of Trustees, with an audit in line with the review of Fighting poverty together in 2003.
- Country directors and heads of department will demonstrate the political will to implement the required attitudinal changes implied by the policy.
- Country directors are responsible for implementation details for country programmes.
- All staff will be expected to show a gender perspective in their work.
- The national, regional and international gender working groups will monitor and review the implementation process.
- The IGWG will support the development of indicators and methodologies to monitor the gender policy (e.g. score cards).
- Three-year plans will ensure that the Fighting poverty together strategic objectives on gender receive adequate resource allocation.
- The organisational mechanisms and gender posts necessary for implementation of the gender policy will be put in place and resourced.



## Fighting poverty together

ActionAid's Strategy 1999-2003

### Goals

Poor are able to realise their potential  
The anti-poverty movement will be strengthened  
International constraints to poverty eradication will be mitigated  
Gender equity will be enhanced

### Objectives

Empowering poor and marginalised people  
Promoting basic rights  
Building alliances in civil society in the South  
Linking North and South  
Influencing donors  
Promoting responsible private investment  
Strengthening local strategies for gender empowerment  
Advocating for gender equity

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