

fighting poverty together

ActionAid's strategy 1999-2005

a short guide



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This strategy renews our commitment to fight the outrage of poverty

Glossary



Jenny Matthews/Network/AA
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What we mean by certain key terms used in this strategy

Advocacy The process of influencing key decision-makers and opinion-formers (both individuals and organisations) for changes to policies and practices that will work in poor people's favour.

Basic needs and basic rights

The essentials that everyone has a right to, including: food; water; education; healthcare; livelihood; security; information; participation. ActionAid believes that by taking advantage of these rights people will be free from a life of poverty. In this strategy the use of the word 'rights' recognises poor people's entitlement to their rights in a way that the word 'needs' does not.

Equity The principle of justice which states that resources should be distributed fairly (and not necessarily evenly), taking into account people's different needs. It is not the same as equality, which insists on identical treatment for all.

Gender The roles which society assigns both men and women which define, among other things, who does what work, and who has what level of status and access to power.

Grassroots Activity at the local or community level.

Marginalisation/marginalised

(people, communities) The process or status of exclusion from mainstream society, and/or exclusion from the (decision-making processes and institutions which can secure) resources and power needed by people to exercise their rights.

North Refers to 'economically developed countries' rather than the northern hemisphere of the planet.

South Refers to 'economically developing countries' rather than the southern hemisphere of the planet.



Steve Morgan/AA

Since 1972 ActionAid has made real improvements to the daily lives of millions of poor people in more than 30 countries across Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. We have grown in size, deepened our understanding of the complex causes of poverty, and become a more diverse organisation in order to tackle this complexity.

During this time, however, the number of people living in poverty around the world has increased, and inequalities have widened – despite huge successes

in some areas, such as extending life expectancy and providing more people with access to safe water.

fighting poverty together outlines our response to these changes, and illustrates our approach to tackling poverty between the years 1999 to 2005.

Originally set for five years (1999 - 2003), **fighting poverty together** has been extended by two years and now runs until **December 2005**.

ActionAid's vision is a world without poverty in which every person can exercise their right to a life of dignity



Liba Taylor/AA

ActionAid's mission is to work with poor and marginalised people to eradicate poverty by overcoming the injustice and inequity that cause it

ActionAid lives by the following values:

Mutual respect recognising the innate dignity and worth of all people and the value of diversity.

Equity and justice requiring us to work to ensure that everyone irrespective of sex, age, race, colour, class and religion has equal opportunity for expressing and utilising their potential.

Honesty and transparency requiring us to be accountable for the effectiveness of our actions and open in our judgements and communications with others.

Solidarity with poor and marginalised people so that our only bias will be a commitment to the interests of the poor and powerless.

Courage of conviction requiring us to be creative and radical without fear of failure in pursuit of the highest possible impact on the causes of poverty.

Humility recognising that we are a part of a bigger alliance against poverty and requiring our presentation and behaviour to be modest.

Achieving our vision



Gideon Mendel/Network/AA, Liba Taylor/AA

Eradicating poverty is not a distant dream, but one we can realistically achieve

ActionAid believes that poverty's continuing existence is a result of choices made over time about how to organise societies, and that by working together we can choose differently – individually and collectively – if we wish. Proof of this lies in the fact that since the 1960s in developing countries:

- infant mortality has halved.
- life expectancy has increased by 17 years.
- twice as many people have access to safe water.

These advances bear witness to the power of concerted action against poverty, and encourage us to achieve more.

Underlying ActionAid's work between 1999 and 2005 is the conviction that:

- everyone has a right to life's essentials – including food, water, healthcare, and education – and that poverty prevents people from exercising their rights to these things.
- the variety of goods, services, knowledge and abilities that people can draw upon to exercise their rights are inequitably distributed within and between societies, and that the causes of poverty are rooted in this inequitable distribution.
- national governments are primarily accountable for enabling poor people to exercise their rights, with support from other sections of society.

To realise the dream of eradicating poverty we will build upon this conviction by concentrating our efforts on four specific and achievable goals, set out in the following pages.

Four goals to achieve our vision



GOAL 1

Helping poor people exercise their basic rights

By working directly with poor people at the grassroots, ActionAid will help them take advantage of their right to life's essentials, including food, water, healthcare, and education.

We will do this firstly by equipping poor people with the variety of goods, services, knowledge and abilities they need to draw upon to achieve practical, concrete benefits in their lives. To sustain these benefits over time, ActionAid will work with people to build their skills, confidence and organisational support – a process which will also lead them to take on bigger issues and win bigger victories.

ActionAid will work constructively and critically with national governments by encouraging them to be responsive and accountable to poor people, and to provide reliable social services and further access to public resources. We will also work to increase poor people's participation in – and influence on – their governments.

ActionAid will work with poor people in preparing for and coping with emergency situations, whether natural or social in origin. Our emphasis will be on measures which lead to sustainable recovery.

GOAL 2

Strengthening the movement against poverty

ActionAid will actively link the many separate individuals and groups working to eradicate poverty in the South, both with each other and with their allies in the North. This will help each become more effective – they will benefit from the knowledge, skills and achievements of the others – and lead to a greater overall impact.

Firstly we will identify and give support to other organisations in the South by equipping them with the knowledge, skills and financial support they need to become more effective in their grassroots project and advocacy work. ActionAid will then help these groups increase their impact by encouraging them to share their knowledge and co-ordinate their actions with others.

By linking these groups to like-minded ones in the North, ActionAid will help enhance the global movement against poverty. In particular we will link the interests of people in the North with key issues in the South, primarily through educational, fundraising and campaigning activities. This will encourage the general public to build pressure for changes that support poor people.



Such activities will assist ActionAid's supporters to develop an understanding of the causes of poverty and a commitment to the global fight against these causes.



Jenny Matthews/Network/AA, Liba Taylor/AA



GOAL 3

Promoting change internationally

ActionAid will work to reform the policies and practices of organisations which undermine poor people's rights, and to optimise those which benefit poor people. Such organisations include private companies, governments in the North and international institutions such as the World Trade Organisation and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Work related to the private sector is relatively new for ActionAid. Because of this we will firstly improve our understanding of what impact corporate financial flows and investments have on poverty and on our work to eradicate it. Using this understanding we will encourage companies to be accountable and socially responsible, will support ethical investment initiatives, and will promote shareholder power to influence private companies for poor people's benefit.

Within and between OECD governments we will advocate for improvements to the range of relationships, policies and practices they have with the South which enhance or undermine work to eradicate poverty, particularly with reference to aid, trade and debt. We will promote the importance of basic rights and lobby for coherence between development and other policies (such as trade and foreign policy).

ActionAid will promote reforms to increase the accountability and responsiveness of national governments and international institutions to poor people's rights, and will encourage other groups working to eradicate poverty to press for, and take advantage of, these reforms by working in partnership with them.



Jenny Matthews/Network/AA

GOAL 4

Improving gender equity

By promoting equity among men and women, boys and girls, ActionAid will help prevent the discrimination against women and girls which makes poverty so much worse. In doing this ActionAid will address the privileges and vulnerabilities of men and boys as well as the rights and aspirations of women and girls.

ActionAid will encourage other organisations to strengthen their dedication to fight unfairness between men and women, boys and girls. We will promote examples of good gender practice, and support other organisations' ability to learn from each other and undertake advocacy work on gender issues.

In our own grassroots projects we will ensure that women and girls receive equitable benefit without having to take on additional burdens. We will also challenge cultural practices that violate women's rights.

Within our own advocacy work ActionAid will lobby for changes to unfair policies and practices – in partnership with others if relevant – and integrate gender equity into our campaigns on other issues, such as food and education.

Six steps to realise our goals



To achieve the goals laid out in this strategy, ActionAid as an organisation will take the following six steps:

Step 1 Strengthen our identity: We will establish a shared commitment to this strategy among staff, Trustees, partner organisations and other stakeholders, and vigorously promote it externally so that more people are more aware of ActionAid and its role in working with poor people.

Step 2 Achieve gender equity: We will establish and maintain the necessary responsibilities, policies and systems required to practise what we preach about fairness between men and women, boys and girls.

Step 3 Devolve decision-making: We will continue to improve the speed, flexibility, and responsiveness with which staff can make decisions by reducing bureaucracy and moving authority to the most appropriate level.

Step 4 Enhance innovation and learning: We will encourage and support staff to take responsibility for introducing new policies, behaviours and approaches, and sharing knowledge, skills and abilities so that ActionAid and others can work more effectively.

Step 5 Maximise appropriate income and ensure cost-effectiveness: We will match the quantity of money raised – and the purpose for which it is raised – to ActionAid's needs, ensure it is spent suitably, and report clearly on its spending to our donors.

Step 6 Internationalise our governance: ActionAid's Board of Trustees will be appropriately balanced in terms of men and women and of the regions where we work, and we will improve the ActionAid family of agencies' ability to work together effectively for greater influence.



Jenny Matthews/Network/AA, Jenny Matthews/Network/AA

To achieve the goals set out in this strategy we need to work with the same degree of commitment and determination that we witness in the daily efforts of poor people around the world

fighting poverty together is about change – about recognising and understanding change in the wider world, and committing ourselves to change in the way we go about eradicating poverty. Key among these changes are:

- recognising that poor people have a **right** to life's essentials, including food, water, healthcare, and education.
- working increasingly in **partnership** with others to achieve greater impact.
- promoting **change** internationally in favour of poor people – particularly in relation to private companies, governments in the North, and international institutions.
- improving **gender equity** to counteract discrimination against women and girls.

If this summary of ActionAid's direction between 1999 and 2005 has interested you, and you would like more details, please contact your nearest ActionAid office for a copy of the full text of **fighting poverty together.**

ActionAid is a unique partnership of people who are fighting for a better world – a world without poverty

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