Global Education Review

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David Archer

Julie Adu-Gyamfi

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## abbreviations glossary

<table>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Access</strong></th>
<th>An approach developed by ActionAid to mainstream non-formal education centres into the formal school system, literally an acronym for “appropriate cost-effective centres for education within the schooling system”</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ANCEFA</strong></td>
<td>African Network Campaign on Education for All</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ayuda</strong></td>
<td>Ayuda en Acción – ActionAid’s sister organisation in Spain, part of the ActionAid Alliance</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>CBO</strong></td>
<td>community based organisation</td>
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<td><strong>CEF</strong></td>
<td>Commonwealth Education Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>CSO</strong></td>
<td>civil society organisations</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>DEO</strong></td>
<td>district education officer</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>DFID</strong></td>
<td>Department for International Development (UK)</td>
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<td><strong>EFA</strong></td>
<td>Education for All</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Elimu</strong></td>
<td>Swahili word meaning education – used as the name for ActionAid’s campaigning work on education up until 2002</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ELSE</strong></td>
<td>empowering life-long skills education</td>
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<td><strong>GCE</strong></td>
<td>Global Campaign for Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HIV/AIDS</strong></td>
<td>Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome</td>
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<td><strong>IEU</strong></td>
<td>International Education Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INGO</strong></td>
<td>international non-governmental organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Madrasas</strong></td>
<td>Islamic schools, focusing on teaching the Koran</td>
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<td><strong>NEPAD</strong></td>
<td>New Partnership for Africa’s Development</td>
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<td><strong>NFE</strong></td>
<td>non-formal education</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>NGO</strong></td>
<td>non-governmental organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>PRA</strong></td>
<td>participatory rural appraisal</td>
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<td><strong>PRSP</strong></td>
<td>poverty reduction strategy papers</td>
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<td><strong>PTA</strong></td>
<td>Parents Teacher Association</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Reflect</strong></td>
<td>A participatory approach to adult learning and social change developed by ActionAid, literally an acronym for &quot;regenerated Freirean literacy through empowering community techniques&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sangham</strong></td>
<td>Community based organisation/self-help group</td>
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<td><strong>SMC</strong></td>
<td>school management committees</td>
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<td><strong>UNESCO</strong></td>
<td>United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>UNICEF</strong></td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>USAID</strong></td>
<td>United States Aid (government programme)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>VDC</strong></td>
<td>village development committee</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>VEC</strong></td>
<td>village education committees</td>
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ActionAid’s Global Education Survey was conducted to help build a clear profile of ActionAid’s grassroots education work over the last 30 years up to 2002. The main base of data for this review comes from a detailed survey designed in a collaborative way with grassroots practitioners, which was sent to thirty countries. The response rate of almost 70% (125 responses from 20 countries) was extremely encouraging. Six countries also undertook more in-depth reviews of their education work (Nepal, Nigeria, Uganda, Ghana, Ethiopia and Guatemala). A separate review of our campaigning work on education (the Elimu Review) was also undertaken. The outcomes from all of these processes were discussed in a series of international meetings in London, Bangladesh and Nairobi so that the conclusions and recommendations were drawn out by a broad cross-section of staff.

Education has always been one of the central threads of ActionAid’s work and the extent to which it has changed provides a good indicator of wider processes of change in the organisation. ActionAid’s strategic framework since 1999, “Fighting Poverty Together”, commits the organisation to a rights-based approach – a significant shift for an organisation that for years used a needs-based framework. This review offered a means to determine how this transition has been understood and implemented at the different levels in the organisation. A central concern was also to determine the level of coherence between our programme practice and our advocacy and campaigning work on education.

The state of education where ActionAid works
In the areas where ActionAid works the survey revealed:

- Average gross enrolment in class 1 for boys across all regions of Asia, Africa and Latin America was a mere 60%; for girls it was 55%.
- At 39%, the average completion rate of primary school for both boys and girls in all regions of Asia, Africa and LAC is about 20% less than the enrolment rate.
- Average enrolment rate in secondary school across all regions for boys and girls is only 23%.
- There is a significant gender disparity in all regions. This can be attributed to a range of social and cultural factors but most prominent is the underlying belief that educating girls is not an investment for a poor family and so when resources are limited boys receive preferential treatment.
- There are clear categories of children who tend to be excluded from the formal schooling system – children from the poorest families, the landless, working children, children of minority groups (tribals, Dalits, low castes or untouchables), children of migrant or pastoralist families, orphans, children affected by HIV/AIDS, those with physical or mental disabilities. ActionAid’s mission requires us to position ourselves clearly on the side of these children.
- In most countries, especially across Africa, children have to pay to go to school. The direct and indirect costs of schooling are one of the most significant factors in excluding all the above categories of children. For poor families, particularly ones with little cash income, sending
all their children to primary school can be prohibitively expensive and sending even one to secondary school is often impossible.

- The quality of schooling is very low in most cases, with inadequate infrastructure, large class sizes, demoralised and under-trained teachers, uninspiring methods and overburdened curricula. A key determinant of demand for primary education is not so much the absence of schools but the fact that those which do exist don’t function properly. In some cases schools have become the worst violators of children’s rights, containing, suppressing, intimidating and silencing children.

- The education system in most areas of the countries where ActionAid works is in a terrible state of crisis – much more acute than is generally realised. Looked at from the perspective of a poor family, investment in education is an expensive and often unrewarding gamble.

- Education is a right but in too many contexts, schooling is still seen as a privilege or a luxury, as something bestowed on people by a benevolent external agency. It is a hugely significant step if people who are presently excluded, or who are receiving “schooling” but not “education”, come to recognise that education is their right. Once people start to demand change and mobilise for change, when they begin to organise and hold the State accountable for providing good quality, relevant education, then the reform of education moves from being a doomed bureaucratic project into being a real possibility. It moves from being a closed private concern to being an open public responsibility. This is our central challenge.

The work of ActionAid

- The survey shows that ActionAid has a huge range of experience in the field of education around the world – working from early childhood through to adult education. In the past most of our education interventions were clearly located within a needs-based or service-delivery framework. This has shifted in the past three years so that much of our education work (though with some exceptions) is now consistent with taking a rights-based approach. Some country programmes have moved more quickly than others, so that some are just at the stage of developing a conceptual understanding of rights, whilst others are applying this understanding to their work. In many cases, there are activities that ActionAid has been engaged in for a number of years (such as Reflect or support to PTAs, village education committees etc) which are now found to be more coherent and effective when placed in a rights-based framework. Some projects are laying out a clear path for the future, showing how local level action-research can feed into national policy work and how local level mobilisation can be the foundation for building wider public pressure on politicians and public officials.

- But there are still a number of countries that are struggling to shift the focus of their work to a better balance between meeting immediate needs (services) and addressing people’s rights. There is a continuum – and adopting a rights-based approach does not mean that we should have no engagement in services – but the review indicates that there are still places where we are creating unsustainable structures for delivering education that run parallel to and may even compete with State delivery systems. Some ActionAid projects or partners run non-formal education programmes for children without any serious attempts to integrate with or influence government. This sort of work leads to a serious contradiction, where communities are more likely to demand or expect services to be delivered by ActionAid than they are to demand or expect them from government. This is inconsistent with a rights-based approach.

- Over the past years our understanding and positioning on education has sharpened. We now have a much clearer analysis of the international dynamics affecting education policy and practice. We are engaged at a national level with governments and with civil society alliances. Our local work is increasingly focused on people’s rights. However, there is much more that ActionAid can do to deepen the links between its education work at different levels – to ensure that future campaigning work is rooted in local mobilisation and practical programme experience. Our local level presence in so many poor areas in poor countries is a major strength that must be harnessed more effectively for our campaigning work. In turn, our campaigning work at national and international levels creates opportunities that can enrich our local engagement and can generate wider change. We must seek coherence and connections between our education work at all levels, from local through to international.

Ways forward/recommendation

1 Our starting point must be the assertion of education as a fundamental right in itself and as an enabling right, a catalyst for human development in the fullest sense. We need to ensure that all staff and partners internalise a rights-based perspective in education work at all levels. To achieve this we need to:

- be very clear about asserting the role of the State, moving away from the traditional role of NGOs in directly running schools or
NFE centres;
- clearly position ourselves alongside those people whose right to education has been denied, enabling them to mobilise to assert their rights, building pressure from below;
- facilitate poor people to become active agents in negotiating for their rights, enabling them to define for themselves what “free quality basic education” means;
- ensure that this assertion of education rights is rooted in wider human rights, values and principles – of equity, fairness, non-discrimination and accountability.

2 We must continue to support the building of national alliances and coalitions on basic education in each country. To achieve this we need to:
- support the struggle to secure free quality basic education as a constitutional right where this is not already the case;
- promote the analysis and tracking of education budgets and revenues, particularly tracking the costs passed on to parents and relating this to local participatory monitoring of education quality;
- promote a more campaigning mode in the work of national coalitions, ensuring that there are stronger links between national and local work, and developing comprehensive communication strategies to reach out to and involve the wider public.

3 We need to continue and deepen our support to the Global Campaign for Education. To achieve this we need to:
- end the separate “branding” of the Elimu campaign which might otherwise compete for space, time and recognition;
- ensure that the GCE becomes increasingly responsive to the work of national and regional coalitions;
- maintain pressure through GCE on the international community to live up to the promises made in Dakar.

4 In order to get education to the top of the political agenda – to make it a domestic and international priority that demands attention – we need to create controversy. We need to provoke people, generate anger and outrage at the state of education, at the injustice and inequity in education systems. We need to build up a passionate movement to demand change. ActionAid is in a good position to take up this challenge. We should develop a common identity for our education work at all levels, which captures our positioning with poor people (rather than for them) and generates passionate engagement. The artificial consensus on education needs to be challenged and we need to provoke controversy and generate passion if we are to achieve change. This common identity should unite us across ActionAid whilst allowing for engagement on different education issues, policies and struggles in different contexts.

5 At a local level ActionAid projects and partners should:
- Collect information and build their perspective: ActionAid’s engagement in education work locally must be based on a clear understanding of the situation and how it is changing, so we must start with and sustain data collection and research because information really is power.
- Position ActionAid and mobilise demand: Focus on working with those people who are excluded from present provision or are victims of it, such as parents of children who are forced to drop out early.
- Avoid service delivery: If, having mobilised demand for education, we respond by simply delivering the services ourselves, this defeats the purpose, reduces government responsibility and acts to demobilise people. In those cases where we are already engaged in service delivery without a clear rights-based framework and without clear means for achieving wider change or impact, projects may need to be phased out or closed down.
- Promote innovation by, and channel resources through, government: Where there are insufficient resources in government to respond to demand and deliver basic education to all children in the areas where we work, rather than take this on ourselves, if we have the means we should seek as an interim measure to channel resources through government and work with government to achieve local education reform.
- Strengthen local governance and accountability: We need to strengthen the capacity of local people to hold schools accountable – whether through statutory or non-statutory bodies (school management committees, parent teacher associations, village education committees, etc).
- Support the full Education for All agenda: There may be a particular need to directly support those areas of basic education that are not presently within the viable reach of government, for example early childhood education and adult literacy (particularly for women).
- Look at our own accountability: Relationships are a 2-way process. We can’t ask our partners to be accountable and transparent when we are not transparent and accountable ourselves.
At national and international levels ActionAid should:

- Draw on our rich base of programme experience on education and share this systematically with other NGOs, governments and other stakeholders (as well as being open to learning from them) in order to develop common positions for wider educational reform.
- Root all our work in our clear positioning, and passionate engagement in support of excluded groups. Our passion and our politics need to be up-front and we need to build from our grassroots engagement upwards.
- ActionAid needs to continue to facilitate the strengthening of networks and alliances at all level, to strengthen civil society voices and use all means to influence national and international policies, particularly looking at education within PRSP processes and constitutional/legal reform affecting education.
- We should use budget analysis and budget tracking as a glue between our local and national work – but the analysis of budgets must include the analysis of revenues (from taxation/donors etc) and especially the costs that parents have to pay to send their children to school.
- We need to develop a national consensus around what “free education” means in each country – and we should campaign to remove all user fees or other costs which violate the agreed definition of free education – seeking for it to be made a constitutional right where it is not already.
- Keep a strong focus on quality. In the quest to achieve Education for All, we must never forget what education is for. National and international campaigning while needing focus, must not be reductive, assuming that getting children into school is an end in itself. There isn’t enough debate on the role of education in society, on the appropriateness or relevance of education, on the status and skills of teachers, on the curriculum etc. We need to ensure that we keep a strong focus on quality – particularly from a vantage point of equity.
- We urgently need to do more work collating information on the impact of HIV/AIDS on education and the roles education can play to help address HIV/AIDS.
- We should not ignore secondary schooling. Investments in education must include balanced investment in secondary education to avoid future bottlenecks which will undermine demand. Investment in primary education should not happen at the cost of secondary education.
- We need to invest in alliance building at all levels! We must recognise that International/Regional coalitions on education can only be strengthened if national and local level networks are strengthened equally.
- We need to maintain pressure on Northern governments and donors to deliver on promises that they have made. The commitment made in Dakar that no country that has a viable plan for educating its citizens will be allowed to fail for lack of resources should be taken absolutely seriously. This should be done within the framework of a rights-based approach – that there is a right for people to demand substantial, effective and coordinated support from the international community for achieving Education for All.
- We must recognise that there are risks in moving towards an approach in which we are clearly positioned with excluded groups and are promoting mobilisation. In this work we have more responsibility to the communities with whom we work than ever before – to stay with them and support their struggle rather than to seed something and then leave.
- Greater financial resources are needed to share innovations and rights based work on education across ActionAid. Cross-national exchanges particularly if they involve varied groups of people from lower down the organisation are important in allowing discussion, reflection and learning.
The objectives of this education review were:

- to improve the quality and impact of ActionAid’s education work;
- to increase coherence between local and national engagements by provoking reflection on education programme and policy work in the light of the rights-based approach;
- to build capacity for the design of strategic future initiatives in education;
- to identify information and experiences that we can draw from our programmes to help frame the future directions of our campaigning on education.

Methodology

The main base of data for this review comes from a detailed survey designed in a collaborative way with grassroots practitioners, which was sent to thirty countries. The response rate of almost 70% (125 responses from 20 countries) was extremely encouraging. Our local staff and partners completed the surveys providing an impressionistic assessment within the context they are working.

The strength of the review lies in the fact that it is based on primary research and not on a literature review or a secondary piece of work. It offers a perspective from the people doing grassroots work in a wide range of contexts and countries, enabling us to chart similarities in people’s thinking and activities and helping us to bring together ideas in a coherent way. The extensive survey format asked many overlapping and inter-related questions which enabled us, in some cases, to do cross-verification.

The willingness of staff and partners to respond to this survey means that we should use this approach in other ways in future to get more specific, focused information. There is potential for each horizontal or thematic team in ActionAid to conduct a review of this kind, drawing on the collective experiences of our grassroots work to generate new insights.

Collaboration at all stages has been central to this education review process – and it is this that has contributed to the high response rate and the quality of the resulting materials.
Limitations
This is the first time that a review of this magnitude has been initiated in ActionAid and it has generated an immense amount of information. Although there are some valuable outcomes, it is important to emphasise the limitations of the review:

- The survey represents the perceptions of ActionAid staff and partners: the basis of all data is informed impression, not scientific fact.
- Outside the four lead countries the survey was not completed in a participatory way.
- Given that one person filled in the survey in some cases, it limits our ability to make broad generalisations about that particular project.
- Survey results are intended to complement country strategy papers, Annual Reports, evaluations and other materials emerging from time to time.
- There were many issues on which we would have preferred to dig more deeply or to dis-aggregate data further, but there is only so much that one can do and ask in a survey without making it too cumbersome.
- Results from some countries represent a broad national picture, while results from others show some local activities, which may make comparisons difficult.
- It is impossible to tell how far the respondents’ understanding or misunderstanding of questions distorted their answers.
- There are many issues on which, in retrospect, we should have included questions – but this is perhaps inevitable. Although the focus was local project work we should have asked more about national level engagement in order to get a wider picture (for this we depended on other sources).

We wish to emphasise that this report is not comprehensive: aggregating quantitative and qualitative data across such a large organisation has been a huge challenge. Some relevant issues deserve closer examination than we are able to give in a document of this length. Nevertheless, we hope this report does justice to our education work.
1 The status of school education in the areas that ActionAid works

1.1 Government school enrolment and completion rates

Chart 1: State of school education in the areas where ActionAid works
(Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean)

Chart 2: State of school education in the areas where ActionAid works (Africa)
The figures presented in this section come from the survey filled by the ActionAid staff/project managers or partners, who provided an impressionistic assessment within the context they are working. Hence the data is illustrative rather than definitive. These figures represent the situation of the people we work with. These are not national averages or statistics, but refer only to the poor population in the areas where ActionAid works. In some sense we have managed to exclude the urban elite population, who often bias national or official figures, as we do not work in such areas.

We should mention that this section makes no use of official data on school enrolment and related statistics. Government official figures are sometimes grossly inflated and often conceal major education inequalities. This survey is thus a portrait of the education system as experienced by people living in the poorer sections of the societies in Africa, Asia and Latin America. From their viewpoint the state of education is significantly more alarming than it seems from the official statistics. Education is expensive. It is very poor quality. Often it is simply not available. For most children the completion of primary education is the most that can be hoped for – but the benefits from completion may well not justify the huge investment made. To get a child educated requires massive sacrifices and for a girl the chances of her family making such sacrifices are very slim indeed.

Enrolment in primary school education in ActionAid project areas

- Average gross enrolment in class 1 for boys across all regions of Asia, Africa and Latin America was a mere 60%; for girls it was 55% (1999–2000).
- Average enrolment for boys in Asian country programmes is 59%, ranging from 30% in Pakistan to 70% in Nepal; for girls it is almost 10% less at 49%, with enrolment rates in Pakistan as low as 15%.
- Average enrolment for boys in African country programmes is 59%; for girls it is 54%. Malawi shows the lowest enrolment rates at 37% for both boys and girls.
- Only in Latin America & the Caribbean is the average enrolment rate of girls greater than that of boys, although this trend appears individually in some areas of Nepal, Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania and Rwanda. The reasons for this phenomenon may be:
  - male preference: many parents send their boys to good or private schools in nearby areas, but enrol their girls in the local village school;
  - areas that have big plantations and cultivations (tea, coffee, rice etc) or are tourist attractions have a high incidence of male labour – boys are directly involved in these jobs, while girls are enrolled in the local school;
  - many NGOs rigorously work towards the enrolment of girls in rural communities, ignoring boys – they also frequently miss the larger picture related to the completion of primary education of girls.

Completion of primary school education
As soon as we shift our focus from enrolment rates to completion rates, the situation gets worse. At 39%, the average completion rate of primary school for both boys and girls in all regions of Asia, Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean is about 20% less than the enrolment rate. This trend shows an endemic problem of dropping out of primary school, thus reducing the benefits of high enrolment rates.

- Average completion rate for boys in Asia is 42%, ranging from 17% in Pakistan to 53% in Vietnam; for girls, it is as low as 7% in Pakistan with an overall Asia average of 33%.
- Average completion rate for boys in Africa is 40%, ranging from 20% in Ethiopia to 75% in Nigeria; for girls, it is 27%, ranging from 10.5% in Liberia to 48% in The Gambia.
- Even though enrolment rates in Latin America and the Caribbean are higher for girls than boys, completion rates are not; indicating that dropout rates are higher for girls.

Enrolment in secondary school education
- Average enrolment rate in secondary school across all regions for boys and girls is only 23%.
- Enrolment rates for girls are less than 10% in Pakistan, Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania, Ghana, Malawi and Guatemala.
- Enrolment rates are particularly low in Africa, compared to Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean.
Global summary
In all regions, there are enormous inequalities in educational achievements between girls and boys. This seems to be based on various factors that differ greatly from country to country and different areas within countries. Cultural and economic factors are heavily intertwined.

As well as lower enrolment rates, there is a much higher dropout rate among girls compared to boys and therefore the gap between girls’ and boys’ education widens as you move higher up the education system.

Comparing with national figures (Table 1) on primary school enrolment reconfirms that we work in the poorest regions (measured in terms of educational deprivation) of each country.

It is interesting to note that in Burundi and Ethiopia enrolment rates are higher in the areas where we work than the national averages. This may be because in these two countries the national education system is in such a crisis that it depends on the presence of NGOs to make basic provision function.

Table 1: A comparison of local and national primary school enrolment rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Boys</th>
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- Estimates of our local staff and partners
** UNESCO, World Education Report 2000
- Data not available

1.2 Reasons for gender differences in school enrolment and completion rates

For the vast majority of respondents, cultural norms and traditions are the over-riding reason for gender disparity in school enrolment and completion. These norms and their strength vary from country to country and very often within different regions of the same country. For boys the main reason for non-attendance is often financial, and therefore a much simpler issue to address. There doesn’t seem to be one factor that prevents girls’ access to schooling, but rather a combination of interrelated factors.

Many respondents attribute the obstacles to cultural factors – but this seems problematic. Cultural implies ‘local culture’, whereas gender disparity seems to be universal and therefore is not that simplistic. There is a need to unpack the word ‘culture’. Where do these cultural norms come from? As we explore more deeply we see from respondents that under the umbrella of culture there is a mesh of economic, political and religious factors. Chart 3 is an attempt to lay out these multiple factors, though in reality many of the categories are not mutually exclusive. Economic and cultural factors overlap and therefore cannot be addressed in isolation.

The belief that educating girls is not an investment becomes apparent from most of the cases. Where resources are limited boys tend to receive preferential treatment. Because girls generally move to their husband’s house after marriage, they are exposed to only a few years of schooling as parents feel that educated girls benefit the families they marry instead of their own families. They are therefore not worth investing in, as they end up building “somebody else’s home”.

In Nepal, “girls are treated as second class citizens as they go to their husband’s house.” (Krishna Hari Paneru Sindhuli, Nepal)

Girls’ education is also often seen to be incompatible with the traditional values of the communities.

“An educated girl will search for a higher educated boy. So, it is very difficult to find a suitable candidate for her.” (Sudersan Biswal, Orissa, India)

In Ethiopia, respondents highlighted traditional factors such as early marriage for girls, parents’ preference for boys’ education and heavy household work demands on girls. In India, this...
issue of needing to accommodate household work and sibling care appeared as the main reason for gender disparity.

“Poverty means using maximum number of hands for work. Girls have to take care of siblings, manage home and even sometimes work to earn.”
(Nazrul Islam, West Bengal, India)

In Burundi girls are also expected to help with family work and domestic responsibilities. “The reasons for differences are essentially tied to the parents’ mentality, the local culture means that girls are the main ‘human resource’ for family work.” (Nshimirimana Mamert, Monitoring and Evaluation Programme Coordinator, Burundi)

However, it should be borne in mind that boys as well as girls drop out of school to help with necessary work. While for girls this is often in the household, for boys it is for farming. In the central province of Kenya where coffee is grown, girls’ enrolment is higher than boys’ – suggesting that where economic opportunities for boys are higher, their attendance in school reduces.

In Nigeria, the main reason for non-attendance of school for both boys and girls is engagement in income-generating activities or domestic work during school hours and the inability of parents to meet the expense of schooling. However, early marriage and pregnancy adds an extra burden on girls.

Less priority is given to girls’ education in Pakistan, and this is reflected in the absence of girls’ schools and women teachers. Education is also linked to the notion of employment, and as it is not believed that women should have jobs, it is believed that they do not require schooling. Girls are expected to stay at home to help with household work.

There are a great number of genocide widows and genocide and HIV/AIDS orphans in Rwanda. Once again, the education of girls is particularly affected by this, as girls are needed at home to help their mothers and look after their siblings. They are also needed to earn an income to help support their families financially.

Other factors such as the fear of abduction and distance from school were highlighted in Kenya and India. Non-flexible timings of schools, which prevent girls from performing their domestic responsibilities and fitting schooling around these, was deemed a significant reason for gender disparity in both enrolment and completion of primary school across many countries.

Drawing on wider evidence it seems clear that the policy actions taken by governments and NGOs have an enormous influence over the size of the gender gap in education. This is shown by the fact that different states in India (which face broadly similar economic, cultural and social conditions) have achieved such different outcomes on girls’ education (with total gender parity in states like Kerala and a 50% gap in states like Uttar Pradesh). It is also suggested by the fact that Bangladesh, though poorer than Pakistan and India, has surpassed both countries in girls’ education since introducing a nationwide programme of targeted subsidies to girls attending secondary school. Hence, we must not use tradition as an excuse for gender inequality in education, as positive experiences in poor countries indicate that change is possible. Most of the cultural resistance to girls’ education evaporates where schooling is genuinely accessible, of a reasonable quality, and gender-sensitive. At the very least, there is an interplay between culture and education policy that needs to be examined more closely.

Possible solutions to end gender disparity

There is no simple step that will increase gender equity across such diverse countries – and strategies need to be developed that are appropriate to each context, but there are some strong common threads. In countries where the problem is more to do with keeping girls in school than getting them there, the focus must be on measures to reduce dropouts and repetition of school years among both boys and girls, and improve learning outcomes among the most vulnerable students, including girls. All of the following measures are mentioned by respondents as possible ways forward. Most are simple to implement, yet have significant benefit to girls:

- mainstreaming flexible, innovative approaches;
- providing a safe learning environment;
- improving school infrastructure, especially boundary walls and toilet facilities;
- ending corporal punishment; stamping out physical and sexual abuse;
- increasing investment in learning materials;
- improving teacher training; ensuring that women teachers have equal pay and opportunities;
- using child-centred (and gender-sensitive) approaches to teaching and learning;
- nationwide learning assessment mechanisms;
- specific time-bound gender-disaggregated targets for improving learning achievement, particularly among disadvantaged communities and groups;
- education programmes for women to give a second chance to girls who do not receive schooling;
- rooting out budgetary discrimination against women’s education (eg subsidies to boys-only private schools; spending on science labs but not on toilet facilities; excessive spending on universities when most university students are male).

These ideas are explored in more detail in Part 5 of this report.
The patriarchal society does not understand the importance of sending girls to school. Girls are to do domestic work, to be married off and bear children.

Nazrul Islam, West Bengal, India

Investing in girls’ education is seen like tilling somebody else’s land because girls will be married and taken away to another family. Thus it is better to invest in boys since they will never leave their family.

Amina H Ibrahim, National Picture Kenya

Girls are the marginalised within the marginalised group.

Rekha Roy, partner, West Bengal, India

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**Chart 3: Reasons for gender differences**

- Education is linked to employment. Since the prevailing norm is that the girls are not supposed to work outside, there appears to be no need to educate girls.
- Girls do not get lucrative jobs in the economy.
- When a family has limited resources, parents prefer to educate boys.
- Domestic chores.
- Taking care of siblings.
- User fees and exam fees.

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- View that girls are to get married, bear children, and work in the home.
- Early marriage.
- Pregnancy/puberty.
- Girls go to their husband’s house. There is no return for their family, therefore no investment.
- Illiteracy of parents.
- Lack of role models.

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Patriarchal society: girls’ education may be in conflict with traditional values, norms and customs, lower self-esteem.
The son becomes the main provider of economic support in old age, he stays with the family so his productivity is a family asset. Girls leave and hence her productivity does not contribute to the family.

Mangaraj Pande, Project Director, Orissa, India

The reasons for differences are essentially tied to the parents’ mentality, the local culture means that girls are the main ‘human resource’ for family work.

Nshimirimana Mamert Monitoring and Evaluation Programme Coordinator, Bürundi

One of the principle blockages to learning especially in rural Ethiopia, is the inflexible school calendars that do not give a chance to parents to seek the support of their children during peak working seasons on farms and looking after livestock.

Berhanu Berke, Ethiopia
1.3 Characteristics of excluded children

Chart 4: Characteristics of excluded children in Asian country programmes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
<th>Working</th>
<th>Tribal</th>
<th>Disabled</th>
<th>Parental</th>
<th>Orphaned/Single Parent</th>
<th>Delinquent and Traumatised</th>
<th>Migrant</th>
<th>Remotely Located</th>
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Chart 5: Characteristics of excluded children in African country programmes

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<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
<th>Orphaned/Single Parent</th>
<th>Working</th>
<th>Tribal</th>
<th>Disabled</th>
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Chart 6: Characteristics of excluded children in Latin American and Caribbean country programmes

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
<th>Working</th>
<th>Delinquent and Traumatised</th>
<th>Parental</th>
<th>Orphaned/Single Parent</th>
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While many children excluded from the formal schooling system are poor, landless or economically disadvantaged, our respondents identified many other characteristics among these boys and girls, including:

- having to work – includes both paid and unpaid work at home (such as domestic work, taking care of siblings) or outside (in farms, markets, small cottage industries, etc);
- belonging to a minority – includes tribals, Dalits (so-called untouchables), or low castes;
- having a physical or mental disability;
- being part of a migrant family;
- living in a remote or insecure community or area (cited as the highest barrier in Ethiopia);
- alienation through language, when a child’s mother tongue is not the medium of instruction in government schools. By assimilating across regions, the language problem may seem low in our charts despite being the biggest factor in one country or area;
- unsupportive parents, who are often uneducated themselves or do not believe in the benefits of education;
- being “delinquent” and traumatised – includes children who are distressed, drug users, malnourished or have many siblings;
- being an orphan, living with a single parent or relatives (cited as a major reason by the majority of respondents from Africa) – the reasons for losing one or both parents differs across the regions, and includes HIV/AIDS and conflict;
- reaching puberty (for girls), and becoming a child mother.

Bullying and humiliation

Quiet, gentle and softly-spoken, Shapna clearly distinguishes herself from the other inmates of one of the largest brothels in southern Bangladesh. She is a misfit among the weird hairstyles, thick make-up, glittering clothes and alluring smiles. Uneasy and shy, Shapna is a former student of Jagrata Jubo Shangha School, run by a local NGO of the same name (JJS). She studied there for two years before moving on to Amlapara Primary School. But here things took a serious downturn.

In the classroom she was treated as an alien. Nobody wanted to talk to her or mix with her. The boys would always tease her and make derogatory comments like “Your mother is a prostitute, so are you”. Her teachers were indifferent and did not stop the boys. She used to go to school with her head down and complain every day to her mother, insisting that she could not bear another day of humiliation.

When she was nine, she finally realised that she was too frail to stand up to the bullying. Despite the fact that she loved to learn and dreamt of getting educated and established in life, she gave up. Now every day Shapna wakes up early in the morning, prepares and serves the usual breakfast with rice before doing all her daily chores in the brothel.

Shapna still misses school a lot, and longs to be there again! Her younger brother Rana has already decided not to go to school. Shapna tried to persuade him to go, but he would not listen.

"The girls who attain puberty are restricted to continue their studies due to the blind belief in superstitions."

Jagannath Raju, Orissa, India

It is important to bear in mind that the categories identified have different meanings or implications in each region. We must also remember that identities are complex and characteristics are often interrelated. If three or four of these characteristics overlap, then exclusion of the child from school becomes almost certain.
1.4 Reasons for not going to primary school

The previous section looked at certain categories of children who are likely to be excluded from school. We will now consider other elements which cut across different groups of children – factors that act as a pressure on almost all children in the poor areas where ActionAid works. Although respondents identified a number of reasons for children being unable to go to school, the most significant related to costs.

The analysis below starts with a review of information from the survey about the direct costs of schooling – revealing what a central obstacle this is for so many children. It goes on to explore other factors such as opportunity costs, quality of schooling and lack of perceived economic returns. It is often the conjunction of all these elements that leads to children dropping out or never going to school in the first place.

a) Direct costs to parents of schooling

In most countries across Africa children have to pay to go to school. These direct costs are often referred to as “user fees”. On top of these there are many other costs, for example for books, stationery and uniforms. These costs add up, to become significant obstacles to children from poor families across Africa, Asia and Latin America – who are less likely to enrol and complete primary school because of the associated costs. Respondents to the survey identified the following examples of costs that parents have to pay:

- books
- stationery and basic equipment
- uniforms
- admission fees
- registration and exam fees
- contribution towards building and maintenance fund
- construction fees
- transportation
- mid-day meals
- PTA fees
- sports fees
- library fees
- extra tuition fees.

Even where primary education is free, parents are still making major financial contributions, some of which are effectively compulsory while others are supposedly voluntary, but are requested with considerable social pressure. Non-payment of even apparently voluntary costs can lead to victimisation, stigmatisation or even exclusion.

The total cost to parents of all these elements pose a substantial burden on poor families particularly (but not only) in Africa. For a family with several children of school-going age, the direct costs of sending all of them to school can easily be unaffordable. This means that choices have to be made, and the choice is often to withdraw children from school. Often this leads to parents denying schooling to girls while enrolling the boys, thereby contributing directly to maintaining the inferior status of women.

Though government provides free education to the children, in practice ancillary costs have become very substantial including fees under a variety of heads like sports fees, library fees, exam fees etc.

Nazrul Islam, West Bengal, India

When the Ghanaian government, together with the World Bank, launched a Basic Education Project, they initially called it FCUBE – Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education – using a capital F in their document to represent Free. However, parents soon realised that they still had to bear some significant costs in spite of zero tuition fees, and that basic education was not fully free. As a result, the ministry switched to using a small f in all its documents (fCUBE) to signify that basic education as provided by the government is free in some respects but not in all, thereby accepting the wide range of schooling costs to parents.
Two sides of the same coin – the question of uniforms

Using uniforms in school can be very positive as they can reduce discrimination in the classroom between the have-haves and have-nots and inculcate a sense of identity and an atmosphere of discipline and safety. However, this argument has failed to hold in poor regions, where too much insistence on the use of uniforms has led to discrimination against poor people. The cost of uniforms has risen enormously in poor regions and often costs more than other clothing. This could perhaps be due to the monopoly of uniform suppliers, as parents often have the choice of buying them from just one or two suppliers who exert disproportionate power. Reducing the specifications of school uniform can significantly reduce costs and prevent this monopoly (e.g. accepting any green shirt and not insisting on school badges). However, it is important to have some regulations to prevent new forms of discrimination emerging (e.g. banning logos and brand names, which if permitted can easily create a new visible gulf between the have-haves and have-nots).

Chart 7: Education costs as a percentage of annual household income of poor families in Asian country programmes

Chart 8: Education costs as a percentage of annual household income of poor families in Latin American and Caribbean country programmes

Chart 9: Education costs as a percentage of annual household income of poor families in African country programmes

Key
- Blue: Proportion of annual household income spent on primary education per child per year
- Orange: Proportion of annual household income spent on secondary education per child per year
- Dot line: Proportion of annual household income which would need to be spent on primary education to educate all the children in an average sized family (if all were school-going age at the same time)
Charts 7, 8 and 9 show that direct costs are a major reason for low levels of primary and secondary school education, especially among large rural families – as a significant proportion of household income needs to be spent to send children to school. It is important to read these with a clear understanding that this is the picture for very poor households (not all households) – particularly those in rural areas who may have very little disposable cash income. Moreover, it is important to acknowledge that the calculation of costs that is used represents all the costs that parents are expected to pay – and in practice it is sometimes possible for parents to avoid incurring the full costs (e.g. by sending children to school without full uniforms or equipment that may be expected).

Though not scientifically accurate, the tables indicate an alarmingly high percentage of family income in poor households spent on schooling. Covering the cost of sending even one child to secondary school is an impossible dream for many families.

The charts show that the problem of direct costs is a particularly important issue in poor communities in Africa, where the proportion of household income needed to educate a child is much greater than in Asia or Latin America and the Caribbean. These findings are reinforced by the recent experiences of Uganda, Tanzania and Malawi, where remarkable exponential increases in enrolment have followed the abolition of user fees in primary education (even though some other costs remain in place).

There can be little doubt remaining that the single biggest obstacle to schooling for most children is the cost. Abolishing user fees is one step towards addressing this – but cost will remain an issue unless many other costs are also removed.

b) Opportunity costs

On top of the direct cash costs there is, in most areas where ActionAid works, an opportunity cost for parents sending children to school – as children’s time can be of economic importance to the family, whether they are directly engaged in income generating activities or in supporting the functioning of the household. This opportunity cost may lead to a child attending school irregularly or dropping out completely because he/she is required to work. These opportunity costs apply particularly to girls, who are almost invariably engaged in household chores, particularly in minding younger children. Boys are more affected in those areas where there are specific income-generating opportunities for children, and this is often seasonal rather than permanent.

We must also bear in mind the seasonal nature of poverty in many poor, tropical countries, where rains coincide with sickness, low food stocks, low cash income and high labour demands (often leading to distress sales of income-earning assets). This is a period when children are likely to be withdrawn from school. In most African countries, the school year takes little account of these seasonal factors. Locally adjusted changes in the school calendar and timetable can significantly reduce opportunity costs.

c) Illness and hunger

Many respondents highlight the problems caused by illness and malnutrition. This may be illness of the children themselves or illness of someone in the family requiring additional help in the home (once again girls are disproportionately affected). Young children are particularly vulnerable to common infectious diseases. Whilst some illnesses may cause temporary absences or irregular attendance, the accumulation of these may lead to children falling behind or giving up on school altogether. Resuming studies after a prolonged absence can be difficult.

d) Limited economic benefits

For families struggling to survive day by day, year by year, sending a child to school has to make economic sense – particularly where there are direct cash costs and indirect costs. Seeing other local children who have completed primary schooling, but have not benefited economically, can have a disillusionsing effect. Why bother to make the investment if there are no returns? In part this becomes more acute when so many governments and agencies judge the value of schooling by the economic benefits rather than by social, cultural, political or personal human benefits. If schooling is judged as a simple economic transaction then in many countries, with high rates
of graduate unemployment, it is often a bad transaction and parents may feel cheated. Even a handful of stories of local children who have been educated but failed to reap the benefit can change the attitudes and expectations of parents and lead to a drop in the demand for schooling.

e) Low quality of schooling
School quality depends on a variety of factors, including:
- physical infrastructure – quality of building, classrooms, presence of teaching aids, reading and writing materials, drinking water, functioning toilet facilities, electric supply, etc;
- size, competence and motivation of the teaching staff – class sizes, teachers’ qualifications, pupil/teacher ratios, teaching quality;
- organisational and managerial factors that determine the effectiveness with which resources are utilised;
- content of the curriculum and nature of teaching methods;
- relationship of the school and teachers with the wider community.

It should be borne in mind that even when school facilities are available at a convenient distance, they are often inadequate. It is of little use living within one kilometre of a primary school if the school is already overcrowded, has a single teacher, or is deprived of basic facilities such as a blackboard.

The quality of supply of schooling services is a powerful factor in inducing demand – and where quality is low there is little incentive for parents to invest. The survey results have indicated that although the direct costs of education play a major role in discouraging poor families from sending children to school, this is especially acute when the quality of schooling is low. A key determinant of demand for primary education is not so much the absence of schools but the presence of schools that don’t function properly.

The survey finds that teaching activity and methods in government schools are far from engaging. Pupil achievements are abysmally low, with, for instance, many children unable to read and write even after several years of schooling. In light of these survey findings, it is not surprising that parents often lose patience with government schools even when they have a genuine interest in education.

This applies not only to parents but also to children. If the school environment is lively and supportive, children enjoy going to school and learn with enthusiasm. Quite often, the stifling nature of the school environment saps this initial enthusiasm. It is not uncommon, for instance, for children to drop out of school as the alienating curricula, inactive classrooms and indifferent teachers gradually put them off.

Studies have pointed out that the widespread problem of teacher inertia has various inter-related roots. A teacher trapped in a ramshackle school with low wages, surrounded by disgruntled parents, irregular pupils and corrupt inspectors can hardly be expected to work with enthusiasm. The working conditions in village schools are such that most teachers would find them tough, and even the most committed teacher would find their enthusiasm waning.

The most common complaint cited in field investigations is that schools are under-equipped, under-funded, understaffed and overcrowded. Three specific points are highlighted in these investigations:
- Well-meaning teachers are discouraged by the failure of many parents to participate in schooling endeavours. Teachers are often frustrated by the indifference of parents towards their children’s education. They complain that parents do not send their children to school regularly, or withdraw them for flimsy reasons. As teachers perceive it, their own efforts to keep the children at school are not reciprocated by the parents.
- Many teachers are anxious to avoid being posted in remote or backward villages. Unwanted postings and arbitrary transfers are seen as a constant threat. Teachers spend a great deal of time and energy trying to avoid undesirable transfers, lobbying for preferred postings and building up influential connections to play the transfer game. This syndrome becomes a major diversion in the teaching profession.
- A paralysing or unrealistic curriculum, too many administrative chores and unsupportive management all contribute to this demotivating environment.

Thus, what is often observed is a vicious circle of neglect, whereby different flaws feed on each other. School facilities are minimal, classrooms are overcrowded, school buildings are falling apart and teaching aids are rare. Teachers feel trapped in a hopeless work environment, lack respect for the local community and yearn for better postings. Parents feel alienated from school, feel they don’t have a right to comment, criticise or engage. Hence, nothing improves. Lacking faith in the system, parents are half-hearted in their efforts to send their children to school. This further demotivates the teachers. Everyone’s hopelessness feeds on everyone else’s. The children are the victims.

A successful schooling system depends a great deal on cooperative public action, including cooperation between parents and teachers (eg in ensuring school attendance) and cooperation between teachers and management (eg in implementing pupil incentive schemes). There is an urgent need to improve the accessibility, affordability and quality of schooling.
1.5 Reasons for not going to secondary school

Rough estimates of local ActionAid staff and partners have indicated very low secondary school enrolment rates in the areas where we work. For most of the children who successfully complete primary education, secondary education remains a distant dream. This is because of the swelling of direct costs to parents for secondary school (see charts 7, 8 and 9).

Annual secondary school costs per child are such a high proportion of the annual household income of poor families in Africa that it is impossible for most parents to send even one child. These high costs of secondary education have reduced the transition rate from primary to secondary education, reflected in the low enrolment rates in secondary school discussed in section 1.1.

The high costs of secondary education could partly explain low primary school completion rates, with parents giving up on their children's education early if they know there is no chance of following it through. There is increasing evidence that the real economic benefits of education come beyond the primary stage, especially where primary schooling is of low quality, so if secondary school is effectively sealed off from people they can rapidly lose interest in primary schooling as well.

We were also particularly interested in knowing the distance to a nearest functioning secondary school, though one could argue that the distance that a child travels depends entirely on the child's preference and parent's options. Our main concern is that even though many countries have conscious policies of building a primary school in every village (e.g., the Indian government's policy is to construct a primary school every kilometre), no such policy exists for secondary schools. As a result, children travel vast distances, as seen in charts 10 and 11.

The situation varies between districts and between rural and urban areas. The most obvious aspect of this problem is the absence of any secondary school in some areas. “There is no government secondary school in this area but there are four private schools, which are very expensive. A child has to travel 10 km to go to a government school and half a km to go to a private school” (Nazrana Hira, Bangladesh). Most of the children have to bear significant travel costs to access the nearest secondary school, which is typically found in urban areas.

Children from one village may be reluctant or unable to go to school in another village, due to caste and ethnic tensions, adverse terrain or non-availability of roads. For most poor parents wishing to send their children to secondary school the only option is boarding school, for which they need sponsorship to be able to meet the inconceivably
high costs. Many respondents indicated that children go to boarding school or stay with relatives in different towns. Such a trend breaks up community living and means children often emerge alienated from their home environment. “There is one secondary school in the whole district. Children from distant places hire rooms in the nearby village or town, which are not cheap.” (Theodore Mwalongo, Programme Coordinator, ActionAid Tanzania).

Once again, girls seem to suffer disproportionately from schools not being available at a reasonable distance. While all children may be reluctant to travel long distances to school, girls, particularly adolescents, are rarely allowed to travel alone outside their own village – making it impossible for them to attend school in such circumstances. For those who do have permission, a very real fear of harassment and abduction dissuades them from attempting to make the journey.
2 Understanding our theoretical and strategic framework

ActionAid’s key strategic document at an international level, *fighting poverty together*, frames our work from 1999 through to 2003. Before this document was produced ActionAid’s work was predominantly rooted in a needs-based framework, often responding to people’s needs through direct service delivery. The shift was from focusing on people’s condition to focusing on their position. Using a rights framework we can work to change people’s position in society – something that will enable them to secure their needs in a more enduring way than could ever be achieved if we were simply responding to their immediate conditions.

Radically changing an institution is never easy, particularly where there are long-term programmes which have been conceived and designed within one framework, with staff employed to deliver on that framework. We were therefore interested to see the extent to which staff in ActionAid programmes have shifted their understanding. What does the rights-based approach mean in the context of education and what factors facilitate or block the transition towards such an approach?

2.1 Local understandings of the rights-based approach in education

What does the rights-based approach in education entail? We were interested in looking at people’s perceptions and investigating whether there is a conceptual clarity and coherence on the rights-based approach across and within ActionAid programmes. Respondents’ statements can be read in Appendix 1: these do not necessarily represent the views of each country programme, but provide a sense of how ActionAid’s theoretical framework is understood at the grassroots.

Some key concepts that constitute the rights-based approach in education

It is clear that there is a wide range of understandings of the rights-based approach amongst grassroots workers. While they are not mutually exclusive, it is clear that few people are able to give a comprehensive view. In a short survey it is perhaps wrong to expect people to draw out full definitions of the rights-based approach. Below we have tried to pull together core strands of thinking from the testimonies of respondents to come up with a few key reflections on the rights-based approach in education:

1 Moving from needs to rights: asserting the role of the State

Rights have a close connection with needs but the difference is in who responds to the needs and how.

A rights-based approach and service delivery are not mutually exclusive nor at opposite ends of a scale. Rather they represent a difference in approach, the former being more concerned with changing power relations in order for people to access their rights. Service delivery may be an ‘entry point’ in some contexts, or may be a follow-up to an assertion of rights. What will differ is the way in which services are delivered using a rights-based approach. The focus now is on ensuring State responsibility in the longer term, and avoiding dependency on NGOs as service-deliverers – moving away from the traditional role of NGOs in directly running schools or NFE centres. This is like drawing a line in the sand against the tide of privatisation to assert that if there is one thing that governments should do it is provide basic education to all children.

"Rights-based approach is making education and all the other basic needs a citizen’s entitlement and a fundamental right, which he/she can demand, from the state. Kenyan children who are not accessing basic education would be able to sue the government for violation of their basic right to free and compulsory education, which is enshrined in the recently passed children’s bill."

Amina Ibrahim, Education Adviser, Kenya
We need to move from the abstract concept of rights to mobilisation on specific rights of specific people

There is a long way to go from an abstract concept of rights to mobilisation to secure rights. That mobilisation should be rooted in the action of people whose rights to education have been denied – for example the categories of people in specific areas who have been excluded from education (as discussed in Part 1). It is important to start with a clear sense of the identity of the people who are asserting their rights. This gives us a stronger basis to building a rights-based intervention – much more powerful than starting from an abstract notion of rights. It is this basis on people and their identities, which will provide energy, passion, outrage and effective mobilisation. This may mean focusing on Dalits, indigenous people, disabled children, street children or other categories of people whose right to education is presently violated.

Rights involve a process of negotiation and awareness-raising

Often it is not enough simply to assert a right or demand rights – in many cases it is important to start with a process of negotiation and awareness-building so that people come to conceive something as a right. Education is often seen as a privilege. Establishing a consensus that it is a basic right requires some important groundwork (e.g. relating indirect taxation to the responsibility of government to deliver on the right to education).

Poor people need to be active participants in the process of negotiation. If we wish to work on people’s right to free education then we need to build with them an understanding of what “free” means. This is a process of negotiation that needs to be undertaken in each context.

This approach lays emphasis on active participation of the poor and marginalised, whilst emphasising the responsibilities of the state and society towards them.

Lamin Sise, Education Officer, The Gambia

We need to root education rights in wider human rights, values and principles.

We need to link the right to education with a wide range of other human rights and key related principles and values that can enrich what we are seeking from the right to education. The right to education needs to be considered in relation to the rights of children more generally as well as the rights of people employed within the education system. Moreover, in pursuing work demanding education as a right we need to be guided by wider principles and values such as:

- equality and equity
- fairness
- non-discrimination
- accountability
- participation.

The right to education will mean very little if these other values and principles are violated in the process. All too often schooling becomes a form of containment or imprisonment in which children’s rights are systematically violated. We need also to be conscious of the wider context of rights in terms of a country’s constitutional, political and legal frameworks – and how these can be used to assert or reinforce different rights. This also needs to be grasped at a local level by all people involved.

Parents, teachers and all community members where the child is staying should be aware of the fact that the child has a right to good quality education and teachers have their own rights as well.

Olive Muhara, Team Leader Malawi

It seems that there is a growing understanding amongst staff of the rights-based approach to education – but there is still a long way to go for people to be able to gain a full perspective. As far as we are aware there are very few examples of workshops or training sessions which explicitly seek to give staff the space to develop their understanding of the rights-based approach. This may be an area worth investment if we are to build a more comprehensive and coherent vision.
2.2 Common obstacles to a rights based approach

The view held by people is that we talk more and do little under this approach.

Babulal BK, Team Leader, Kanchanpur, Nepal

There are a number of factors that can limit the move towards a rights-based framework to our education work in ActionAid. We have gathered here some of the obstacles highlighted by respondents to the survey. They refer to education work specifically, but many of the insights are relevant for the whole process of change within ActionAid. Some staff are concerned that the rights-based approach is one that involves a lot of talk and little action – a perspective which needs to be overcome if we are to move forward.

I Widespread poverty
- People are grappling with daily bread, giving them little time and opportunity to demonstrate and push for their rights.
- When communities are poor, their orientation is towards service delivery.
- A rights-based approach does not provide for the immediate needs of children’s learning i.e. scholastic materials, quality teaching and inspection and a good learning environment.

II Lack of information and knowledge

Among communities
- “(The) community’s understanding of rights or about national constitution is very low. People in villages (are) not aware that education is a right, rather feel that it is a favour of the government to provide education.”
  (Ken MateKenya, Programme Manager, Malawi)
- Poor people tend to keep quiet and not demand their rights, while people who are relatively wealthy are more demanding of their rights.
- Poor people tend to cling to their oppressed state and depend on fate.
- Poor communities are often unable to see the broader picture and gains of the rights-based approach as against service delivery.

Among ActionAid staff
- Staff have limited knowledge of, training in and exposure to rights-based work in education (especially in Gambia, Malawi, Nepal and some regions of India).
- There is a lack of qualified staff who can launch advocacy programmes.

Among other organisations
- Few organisations, civil society organisations and other partners are doing rights-based work in education, leading to a lack of knowledge in how to handle rights-based work.
  “The rights-based approach is proving difficult to be understood by both implementers, partners and recipients of development initiatives. The service delivery approach has always been preferred by people at all levels as tangible results can be produced through this approach. Most of the important stakeholders at the community and district levels have preferred the service delivery approach because it is difficult to sustain community motivation for such a time consuming effort like the rights-based approach.”
  (Shiva Raj Lohani, Consultant, Nepal)
- There is a low level of coalitions and network building among NGOs in all regions.
  “The non-existence of civil society structures in my country did to some extent hinder rights-based approach in my education work”
  (Lamin Sise, The Gambia)

III Limited resources
- There is a lack of proper funding to campaign, lobby, advocate and build networks at various levels.
- Donors and sponsors lean towards visible, concrete and tangible activities and outputs.

IV Government issues
- Government staff have little understanding of the rights-based approach.
- Local level government officers show little interest in the rights-based approach.
  “What hampers the rights-based approach is that enlightening people about their rights is sometimes misconstrued as politicking by government officials and most unfortunately by the local people themselves. One may be seen as partisan.”
  (Abbdoulie Jawo, Pernership Funding, The Gambia).
- Governments still expects NGOs to work on service delivery with no scope for rights-based approach.
- Government bureaucrats still have a traditional attitude of seeing education as a privilege – so lack political will and commitment.
  “The bureaucratic and stern approach of government primary school blocks in taking rights-based approach in our education work”
  (Haider Ali, Kolkata, India).
- Poor governance and widespread fear of the State and its machinery prevent people from demonstrating for their rights. Public demonstrations are met by heavily armed state security who often fire live bullets, while arrest without trial, rape and torture in cells and
harassment of slum dwellers is commonplace.
- When people demand education services, government officials develop resistance.
- Widespread corruption and low economic growth means that State funds are lost through corruption, where those who are at the top of power loot state funds. This, together with low economic growth and centralised management of government ministries makes finances for providing free basic education more a dream than a reality.
- Lack of effective implementation of government education policy creates a gap between legal provision and actual practice. This can be seen in cases of Dalits, dominance by higher caste people, etc.
- Government education budget is limited and not transparent.

V The absence of government
Much of the current shift towards a rights-based approach has involved country programmes developing a clearer focus on the state apparatus. The rights-based approach tends to depend on the presence of a State that can respond or has, at least, a basic structure and presence. However, we are working in many countries which are emerging out of conflict or where the state is weak or non-existent (eg Somaliland), which presents particular challenges to taking a rights-based approach.

2.3 Facilitating factors in taking a rights-based approach
An understanding of these obstacles indirectly sheds light on the factors that will facilitate country programmes in taking a rights-based approach in education. In addition, some other elements mentioned by respondents that improve ActionAid’s capacity to take a rights-based approach forward include:
- close co-ordination with local government, development committees, local associations or clubs, women’s groups etc;
- clear government policies and commitment to provide Education for All;
- the presence of a clear constitutional commitment regarding people’s right to free education;
- a democratic environment and a fair, independent legal system;
- decentralisation of government, creating greater space for local demand mobilisation;
- the presence of a free, independent, private media (radio, print, TV);
- increasing number of local institutions and growing community participation;
- strengthening of non-statutory groups and village education committees, which create spaces where people can assert their right to have a say;
- communities’ confidence in ActionAid’s work “our good rapport with the community and their faith towards the organization has helped in inculcating the rights-based approach in communities” (G. John, Project Director, Andhra Pradesh, India);
- government confidence in ActionAid’s work;
- ActionAid’s track record in education development, which gives a credible base for engaging in more controversial education issues;
- the Reflect approach, which is framed strongly within a rights focus, giving people space and time to develop their own analysis and make coherent or strategic demands;
- experience of working with participatory approaches which give people the opportunity to develop their own analysis of rights;
- increasing spread of gender sensitivity within the organisation and growing areas of work around gender (both internally and externally), which help us to become more sensitive to basic rights;
- the influence of key educators such a Paulo Freire whose ideas are familiar to staff in many countries and whose wider theoretical framework gives a powerful basis for a more political interpretation of rights – moving us beyond the “banking approach” which might be likened to the old approach of needs-based service delivery.

Even in a country like Nepal, where a strong rights-based approach has been taken, there are growing concerns about the feasibility of making demands on government in rural areas where the Maoist guerrillas are increasingly dominant.
Table 2: ActionAid's education interventions in each country and the relative strength

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<tr>
<th>Key</th>
<th>Asia</th>
<th>Nepal</th>
<th>Pakistan</th>
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Specific Interventions

- girls and women’s education
- HIV/AIDS
- helping parents to demand their rights
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The local work of ActionAid in education

The programmes that participated in the survey described a range of creative approaches and interventions in education with poor and marginalised communities. In this section we discuss the basic approaches or activities identified. Table 2 shows the range of work in each country and the relative strength of each area of work, including three cross-cutting areas:

- girls education (see Part 5.8)
- HIV/AIDS (see Part 5.9)
- helping parents assert their rights.

Table 2 (see page 28) also documents emerging areas of work around cost and budget tracking.

3.1 Support to parent teacher associations and school management committees

Many ActionAid staff and partners highlighted work that has focused on supporting community management of education, particularly strengthening the capacity of statutory bodies such as parent teacher associations (PTAs) and school management committees to give them a greater say in matters related to the education of their children. In general this work is focused on improving the quality of schools through improving their accountability to local parents. However, different projects emphasise different activities with parent teacher associations and school management committees, which include:

- setting up committees where they do not exist or strengthening them where they are not functioning properly;
- organising workshops and meetings with parents and teachers about different issues, such as girl's education or inclusive education;
- helping committees to identify problems in the village school and working to try and find appropriate solutions;
- advocating for fair representation of women (at least 50%) and poorer parents in school committees and parent teacher associations;
- training members on their right to education and book-keeping, administration and the day-to-day management of school affairs;
- training leaders to perform their roles and responsibilities fully and effectively;
- encouraging the monitoring of teacher attendance and quality;
- helping parents and teachers to increase support for the school, through local fundraising activities or mobilising local people to carry out repair or building work;
- helping to run the school library as an open-access community resource;
- developing skills in budget monitoring and analysis.

One of the greatest concerns is that all too often the head teacher has a dominant voice and uses the committee for his/her own ends, usually to try to raise more funds from local parents. Those parents who are active are often the relatively better off ones. This can lead to negative outcomes as even apparently voluntary contributions can place huge burdens on poor parents, which can lead to poor children being stigmatised or withdrawn from school. It is thus important to ensure that parent teacher associations and school management
committees involve a cross-section of parents who are able to play, and even extend, their full statutory role.

"The campaign includes participation of parents and friends of the school organisations – these people are trained on rights and together we visit education authorities and devise proposals to present to these authorities to resolve the concrete education problems found in diverse communities."

Antonio Pol Emil, Executive Director, Dominican Republic

Parental involvement in their children’s education is perhaps the most critical factor in ensuring the success of individual children – and the same is true for schools as a whole. Where local parents are disengaged, schools struggle to make a difference and negative practices can easily spread. In The Gambia, support for parent teachers associations and school management committees has been very effective in increasing the accountability of schools and improving achievement. At the moment these are not legal bodies, but where such groups have been formed by CSOs and their capacity has been strengthened, the gulf between schools and local parents has been bridged, and schooling has been made more relevant to the local economy and culture. The success of projects supporting such associations and committees has aroused the interest of the government and there is now active talk of legitimising them through acts of parliament. A key part of this process has been the creation of a national PTA platform, which can ensure that parents’ voices at a local level are heard in national level debates.

3.2 Reflect

Table 2 shows that most ActionAid projects or partners work with the Reflect approach to adult education. The Reflect approach, now used by over 350 organisations in 60 countries, was developed by ActionAid between 1993 and 1995 through field practice in Uganda, Bangladesh and El Salvador. There is no compulsion on projects to use Reflect and many country programmes only started Reflect as a result of interest from their partners or other NGOs. As one would expect, the way in which the Reflect approach is adapted in different ActionAid projects is highly diverse. Three broad tendencies emerge:

Reflect as an effective approach to teaching adult literacy, or sectoral intervention
Participants develop different maps, matrices, calendars and diagrams to analyse their local environment, and discuss issues arising from these. The dominant focus is on using the visual materials that are generated to teach people to read and write.

Reflect as a fusion of literacy and empowerment
The focus is on raising the awareness of participants and enabling them to access information or demand services more effectively. Many work particularly with women and focus on challenging gender roles and relations. Much emphasis is placed on strengthening people’s dignity and self-confidence as well as having an impact on improving resource management, health practices, children’s education, local community organisation, civic life etc.

Reflect as an entry point or “operating system” for ActionAid or partner organisations
In these cases, Reflect is seen in a more fundamental way – as an ‘operating system’ for projects, rather than a ‘piece of software’. The analysis developed by participants in the circles forms the foundation for all other work locally, with Reflect circles often seen as the foundation for building or strengthening local organisations and social movements. The focus of Reflect is on strengthening people’s capacity to communicate, ensuring that they demand, act and advocate with their own voices and for themselves. In these cases there is usually still a dimension of literacy or language work – but the focus is on people’s practical use of literacy, language or other forms of communication to challenge unequal power relationships.

In general those projects that use Reflect as an operating system have found it more effective than those where Reflect is used as a sectoral intervention. It is clear that Reflect as an approach was in tension with ActionAid’s past focus on needs-based service delivery. Indeed, the Reflect approach was often distorted in those more conventional multi-sectoral projects where ActionAid had substantial resources for service
delivery. Reflect circles would do their own analysis of local issues and find their own solutions – only to be ignored by ActionAid’s own fieldworkers who regarded the circles as a self-contained literacy intervention.

The Reflect approach is clearly much more coherent with a rights-based approach and works better where there is a lower intensity of financial or human resource input at project level. These factors have helped the continuing spread of the approach within the organisation and beyond.

There is often a strong link between Reflect circles and other education interventions. The education of women has been seen to have a major impact on the education of girls – increasing their enrolment and sustained attendance at school and playing a more supportive role with homework, etc. Parents who have been involved in a Reflect circle tend to be more involved in their local school, whether in PTAs, school management committees or in non-statutory organisations demanding better quality, increased accountability, etc. Reflect is sometimes used directly with PTAs or SMCs. In a number of contexts Reflect circles have led to the setting up of linked early childhood education initiatives.

There is a growing area of work around budget analysis and economic literacy within Reflect programmes and this provides a potential basis for budget tracking work in education, which is explained in detail in section 3.14.

Three experiences of Reflect in ActionAid

A. Reflect and micro-planning in India

Balangir is one of the poorest districts of Orissa in India, with 90% of the population living under the poverty line. ActionAid started work there in 1997 in response to a drought, providing emergency help before undertaking a detailed poverty profile. From this broad information base communities were facilitated to develop micro-level plans over several months using PRA tools such as social maps, resource maps and wealth ranking. These plans were then approved by the local community assembly as the official local development plans.

In many cases the poorest sections of each community had little voice in these initial plans. So Reflect circles were formed only with the people who were identified as poorest. These circles met twice a week, discussing in greater depth the issues identified in the plans, translating them into action, and improving or correcting the plans to reflect their own points of view. By being constantly reviewed and acted upon, the plans avoided the risk of becoming static documents. The local elite found it impossible to reject changes to the plans where the Reflect circles prepared their case well.

The Reflect circles in Balangir are unlike many other Reflect circles in that there is no explicit teaching of literacy. They are, however, using literacy in the active pursuit of change, and the number of uses of literacy in this process is quite staggering. The effect has been to enable people to overcome their fear of and alienation from situations where literacy is involved.

On every issue the circle starts its analysis from the experience of participants themselves and the facilitator then introduces information which will help them to assert their rights or access their entitlements. Acting to assert these rights often involves using different communication skills (whether the spoken word, written word, numbers or images) and these skills are reinforced through that practical engagement and action.

Some of the prominent outcomes in just two villages (Bubel and Sunarijore) included:

- mobilising to obtain government ration cards;
- securing housing and legal land rights from the local land office;
- campaigning against alcohol abuse and getting a local stall-holder’s licence revoked;
- exposing corruption in the public distribution system;
- securing access to drinking water and building proper drainage channels;
- establishing a plantation for reforestation with help from government departments;
- planning, designing and building a micro-irrigation system;
- documenting crop and vegetable varieties;
- mapping out and securing electrification of houses.

For those interested in further materials on Reflect please see the website facilitated by ActionAid www.reflect-action.org or see the recent publications compiled for the International Reflect Circle (including a global survey or Reflect and a review of 13 evaluations).

The box (see right) gives a flavour of Reflect in three very different contexts within ActionAid: Jangyabata Suna, Bubel village
B. Reflect and social movements in Nepal

In 1997 ActionAid Nepal and its local partner, Saraswati Community Development Forum (SCDF), started using Reflect with 15 women’s groups in Saptari District, Eastern Nepal. The Dalits (so-called “untouchables”) in this area have endured centuries of brutal intimidation, abuse and discrimination at the hands of the upper castes. In the Reflect circles women began conducting an analysis of the caste system and the situation of women. Groups discussed the importance of creating an action plan to counter discrimination and identified the need to develop an organisation to create group strength. In response, eight “Dalit Sanghams” were set up – so that Dalits could have their voice heard. These sanghams were also progressively linked together so that before long there was a powerful voice for Dalits at a district level.

The turning point in the development of the Dalit movement in this area was the Dalit’s decision to abandon their traditional jobs as dictated by the caste system. They chose one of the most sensitive issues in order to highlight their case, refusing to dispose of the dead carcass of animals. This was taken as a conscious stand against caste-based exploitation and their refusal to do the work was publicised. There was an immediate backlash from the local high caste community whose first action was to refuse to serve any Dalits in local shops. This caused huge problems for local Dalits and could have led to them giving up. But the Dalit Sanghams discussed each new development and planned a careful united response – using both the law and the media creatively to get their way.

Early success with this campaign helped to propel the Dalit movement forward, generating faith in and commitment to the movement. New members were attracted as the word spread and before long a national level Dalit movement had emerged. The strength of the base of this movement – rooted as it is in the Sanghams and Reflect circles, means that once one victory is secured on one issue, new campaigns could arise and the momentum of change could be sustained. Now the Dalit movement in Nepal is continuing to put pressure on issues as varied as education, land reform and citizenship.

C. Reflect and peace in Burundi

ActionAid Burundi have been adapting Reflect to peace and reconciliation work in the Ruyigi province since 1997. Working in 84 centres with about 3000 Hutu and Tutsi participants, Reflect has played an important role in rebuilding trust and social relationships through creating space for communication and joint learning. All circles have two facilitators, one Hutu and one Tutsi and all have participants from both communities, creating ongoing opportunities for interaction and dialogue.

The circles have become places for both young and old, Hutu and Tutsi, to meet, reconcile and forgive. This has made it possible to build trust as the key foundation of a sustainable peace locally, even where violence and instability continue elsewhere. It has particularly helped reduce people’s vulnerability to “rumour” which was identified as a powerful agent of the spread of violence in the past. Now, when there are rumours of rebel attacks, Hutus and Tutsis meet together to review the dangers, analysis the reliability of the information sources and whether they decide to stay or to flee temporarily, they do so together.

Although the focus of the Reflect programme in Ruyigi has been on peace and reconciliation, literacy has been an essential part of the programme. Literacy skills learned or strengthened in the circles enable participants to counteract rumour, misinformation and propaganda through mediums such as Ejo, a community peace-building newsletter. Participants in Reflect circles write articles for Ejo giving their personal accounts of their efforts to rebuild life after conflict, and the challenges they are now facing. It has built up a large readership as it is the only publication in Burundi that routinely captures these grassroots voices. It now has a circulation of 40,000 in Ruyigi and neighbouring provinces and is read by everyone from politicians to the general public. There have also been a series of “peace posters” produced to spread the message of reconciliation beyond the circles.
3.3 Access or non-formal education programmes

A third very common area of work for ActionAid programmes concerns non-formal education (NFE) for children or Access. These are conceptually very different but tend to get blurred in practice.

In Part 1 we discussed how many, if not most, children in poor areas have little chance of going to school. With government systems over-burdened and slow to change, many ActionAid programmes have turned to developing NFE centres in the poorest communities. These centres promote the active involvement of poor parents in management, and develop flexible timetables and calendars to accommodate working children. The curriculum usually focuses on a core set of skills, taught usually in the mother tongue with locally relevant materials and child-centred methodologies. These NFE centres may be targeted at all children in a remote area, or seek to respond to the needs of particular groups, such as indigenous people, language minorities, the children of migrant workers, child labourers or street children. ActionAid’s involvement may be in helping develop basic infrastructure, training local people or para-professional teachers, providing materials, adapting curricula or developing local teaching and learning materials.

A review of our NFE work in the mid-1990s raised some fundamental concerns and contradictions. Unintentionally we were absolving governments of responsibility and becoming agents of the privatisation of education for poor children. Governments suffering from structural adjustment were reluctant to take on the centres when ActionAid left an area. In some contexts a two or three-tier system was evolving with no coherent planning and no quality control. Most worryingly some children who completed an NFE course were then unable to access government schools either because their learning was not recognised or they were not competent in one of the subjects taught in formal schools (usually the ex-colonial language). Locally, there was often rivalry with government teachers looking down on NFE teachers as amateurs, whilst NFE teachers regarded formal school teachers as lazy and bureaucratic. Moreover, however many centres we ran, it was clear that we would only ever be a drop in the ocean. The real challenge lay in reforming the government system.

This led ActionAid to develop a strategy called Access, which focuses on mainstreaming the best practice of NFE into the formal system. It is an approach that seeks to non-formalise formal education and formalise non-formal education centres – in the process aiming to overcome the whole unhelpful language of formal and non-formal! In practice this means either:

- seeking to get recognition from government for existing NFE centres – converting them into recognised satellite or feeder schools, or
- collaborating with government in experimental and innovative work based on this model so that there is a single unitary education system that is flexible, responsive to local needs and that integrates best practice from NFE experiences.

Many countries are still developing these experiences with some notable successes such as Ethiopia where many district and regional governments have recognised Access. The strong linkage with the formal school system has helped children to make the crossover from non-formal to formal education more easily. Shepherd schools in Ghana are also based on this Access model operating close to children’s homes in remote areas and reducing the distance travelled everyday. The curriculum is based on the government-run schools. After completing three years in the shepherd schools, the children are then integrated into government schools.

However, this government recognition has not always been easy to achieve and many projects are running centres that claim to be in the mould of Access, whilst in practice they are just a continuation of more traditional NFE work. The key determinant is whether government actively owns and manages the approach. Where ActionAid or its partners are still in the driving seat, managing projects and running centres, it is difficult to argue that there is any real shift from NFE, whatever we wish to call the centres.

Other significant innovations found in several programmes included:

- selecting and supporting local or ethnic minority teachers in rural poor or ethnic minority areas;
- using child-to-child education methodologies and setting up children’s organisations to promote participation;
- teaching in local or tribal (mother tongue) languages.

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**Adisata’s story**

*Adisata Ibrahim attends a village shepherd school in Bawku West, Ghana:*

“I come from a big family of 18 children. I used not to go to school. It was very far from our village and also, because I was the oldest female child, I stayed at home to assist my mother as well as caring for the younger ones in her absence. However with the establishment of the shepherd school and its flexibility a lot of children got attracted to school. Because there was no payment of fees and I was always available when my mother needed me, my parents allowed me to attend. I love to be a pupil and hope to continue to the junior secondary school and beyond!”
3.4 Support to government primary schools

a) Supporting construction
Respondents referred to several interventions that are focused on the development of school infrastructure. Most obviously this involves building schools blocks or new classrooms, though this is less common now than in the past. It is now more common for the construction to focus on things such as boarding facilities, toilets and bathrooms (especially separate facilities for girls), kitchens (for school meals), sports-fields, school gardens, safe water wells or water tanks. It is assumed that such interventions can have a significant impact on attendance (especially of girls), the health of children (a pre-requisite for learning) and children’s levels of motivation.

However, it is important to recall the outcomes from an evaluation in Kenya in 1996, which looked back at 16 years of school-building work by ActionAid Kenya. ActionAid had an excellent reputation for relatively low-cost construction, drawing on local materials and with active participation of local people. We had influenced the policy of the World Bank and the European Union with regard to school building in East Africa. However, this evaluation found that we had no notable impact on school enrolment and none on achievement. There was even evidence that poor children were more systematically excluded than before. This occurred because the relatively better off parents on school management committees chose to increase school fees once they had a good building – in line with the government policy on cost-sharing (actively supported at the time by the World Bank). We thought that there was nothing more tangible, more concrete or enduring than building something with bricks and mortar – but we were proved wrong. We must always ask ourselves about (and monitor for) unintended negative consequences.

b) Providing equipment and materials
A second major area of work for ActionAid in supporting government schools involves the provision of basic equipment. Notably respondents to the survey highlighted the provision of:
- desks, chairs and other furniture;
- textbooks, teaching aids, children’s story books;
- stationery;
- toys and sports equipment;
- medical chests;
- bicycles and motorbikes for teachers.

The provision of such materials can be a relatively low-cost way to improve the functioning of a school and can be an important way for ActionAid or partners to build a good relationship with local schools. However, there are dangers in going too far and being perceived as the provider who can be called on for donations so easily that there is little incentive or motivation for parents or teachers to demand resources from government. This can leave a school very vulnerable and weak when ActionAid or its partners move on.
c) Improving the quality of teaching and learning

There are many ways in which ActionAid gets involved directly in improving the quality of the teaching-learning process in government schools, including:

- developing locally appropriate learning and teaching materials, which often have a specific focus (sexual health; gender sensitivity; non-violence) – projects might work to adapt the national curriculum in appropriate ways for rural schools or focus on the learning process (eg introducing participatory processes; visualisation);
- providing inputs to pre-service teacher training;
- running special in-service training for existing teachers;
- running short courses to train local parents as teacher assistants or para-professionals;
- promoting special days or weeks on curriculum areas (eg sessions on peace education in primary schools);
- running quizzes, essay competitions or sports events;
- providing focused support to particular children within the school (eg those with learning difficulties, disabled children); mentor or buddy schemes;
- training for head teachers;
- selecting and supporting local or ethnic minority teachers in rural poor or ethnic minority areas;
- using child-to-child education methodologies and setting up children’s organisations to promote participation;
- promoting teaching in local or mother tongue languages.

In the 1990s ActionAid Uganda set up the Mubende Integrated Teacher Education Project. This responded to local research by ActionAid which showed that over 80% of primary school teachers were untrained. These teachers could not afford to go to a two-year residential teacher training course. In response, ActionAid set up an in-service teacher training programme using distance education – developing a wide range of training resource materials which teachers could work through in their own time in the evenings. This was supplemented by face-to-face tuition in the school holidays and occasional weekends.

The ‘rural education volunteer scheme’ in Ghana trains unemployed secondary school leavers in rural areas to teach in short-staffed schools, with an emphasis on recruiting female teachers to improve girls’ involvement in schooling. ActionAid Ghana has trained 900 such volunteers to help improve the education of over 45,000 children.
3.5 Mobilising demand/organising village education committees

In some contexts, the existing PTA or school management committee is seen as having too narrow a focus – or is seen as being too weak to activate directly. Where a large percentage of local children are not in school, reforming or strengthening statutory bodies in existing schools may not be the most effective strategy. In this case ActionAid often works to promote non-statutory bodies such as village education committees or local education groups. These are usually organised outside of the existing system of provision and have a mandate to look at the education needs of the local community in a more holistic way – including adult literacy, early childhood education and non-formal provision as well as formal. In some cases these have emerged through discussions in Reflect circles or through other forms of local mobilisation.

Such bodies come in many forms. Some are relatively passive and focus on trying to sensitisise parents about the importance of sending their children to school. Others may play a more vigorous and challenging role than statutory bodies, such as:

- exposing the inadequacy of existing provision with original local research, data collection or statistics;
- demanding new resources from local government or district education offices and mobilising parents to help secure them – resources may include new teachers; female teachers; additional classrooms; new schools or an upgrade of existing schools;
- starting up non-formal provision to cover some urgent gaps, usually demanding recognition and support from the State;
- engaging in specific campaigns, such as demanding free education; opposing school fees or the passing on of other costs to parents; education for girls;
- using different media such as radio, street theatre and cultural programmes to raise issues and provoke reflection and action;
- developing broad-based education plans for the local community, linked to wider local development plans;
- monitoring government provision and tracking government budgets;
- translating campaign documents such as the Dakar Framework for Action into local languages for people’s understanding of the wider context;
- making links beyond the local level to other networks and alliances (we look in more detail at how such local mobilisation is linked to national and international campaigning on education in Part 5).

This independent space to organise can sometimes be an effective foundation for securing more fundamental reforms in PTAs and school management committees than would be achievable working only within existing bodies.

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“Teacher absenteeism has been a serious issue in our area. We organised parents and community members to raise voice against it in the District Education Office. As per our pressure, the District Education Office took action against absent teachers. Last year, parents complained to the District Education Office that one primary teacher could not even write a letter and the District Education Office took action against him. This story was published in different newspapers. We also supported the creation of an institution for the establishment of scholarship fund at village development committee level. This institution has supported poor students.”

Shiva Raj Pokhrel, Area Coordinator, Nepal

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**Buwekula project radio programme, Mubende, Uganda**

In response to the increasing number of rape cases, early marriages and pregnancies that were impacting on girls’ education, ActionAid and other stakeholders in education started a radio programme in June 2000 to stimulate discussion on girls’ education. Parents, children, officials from the judiciary, the police, education and community services departments were given space to discuss the issues that inhibit girls’ education and recommend practical remedies based on their experiences. The discussions were aired in the local language on local radio, and members of the public could phone in to ask questions. These discussions were also intended to create community awareness on the right to basic education and sexual reproductive health and rights.

**Apac Theatre for Development, Uganda**

Apac used theatre for development to create awareness on issues inhibiting education for girls. Oyeyeng theatre group composed drama and songs based on local experiences with support from ActionAid. Many government personnel and local leaders also attended. As a result of the impact of the play, UNICEF has committed to support the theatre group with 50 million Ugandan shillings to make a recording of the play to be used in other areas.
3.6 Vocational education and training

Many ActionAid projects or partners have a range of other development activities within which education components are included. These are often vocational education or training programmes which may not have been included by some respondents as they are not seen purely as education interventions. These include training in:

- income generation for disabled people;
- life-skills, especially for young people;
- tailoring, embroidery, dress-making, mat-weaving and greeting card and handicraft-making;
- veterinary care, dairy management, ceramics, bakery, mechanics, hand-pump repairing, gem cutting for young people;
- pottery, batik-making, carpentry;
- typing and computing courses;
- goat rearing for children;
- vegetable growing for local farmers.

The training is sometimes linked to savings and credit programmes, which give members access to affordable loans to buy the tools they need to earn a living, such as a sewing machine. These vocational education and training courses are sometimes clustered together in a training centre or an entrepreneurial development centre. The primary target is usually young people.

3.7 Youth education

Some education programmes were highlighted by respondents that are specifically targeted at young people, but go beyond vocational education or training. These might, for example, include support for cultural activities such as drama, sports, films, and debating. It may include organising youth fairs or competitions run by young people for local children or educational tours for boys and girls to nearby towns and new places.

In some cases there are links to extra-curricular activities in secondary schools (eg debating groups), but many are aimed at a wider group of young people in order to give them a greater sense of purpose and a constructive or positive environment which emphasises democratic norms and tolerance. For example, in Pakistan there is a youth programme called “Playing by the Rules” which focuses on using different sports and games and reflecting on these in order to promote positive behaviour in other spheres of life. In some cases this youth education work takes place at special youth camps in rural areas whose young people can come together for a few days or weeks to find space and time to change their lives. For example, specific retreats for street children are run in India.

3.8 Secondary education

Relatively few programmes provide support for secondary schools. This appears to be mainly because the poorest children have no access to secondary schools (see Part 1), so it is not a poverty-focused intervention. However, it is increasingly acknowledged that the appalling quality of most primary schools means that the real benefits of education will not be achieved unless a child accesses secondary education – and this remains something open to the elite only. Whilst ActionAid, other NGOs, governments and international donors all focus on investing in primary education there is a real danger of this bottleneck to secondary schooling getting more severe.

The only strategy that seems to be used at present is to give scholarships either to children from poor families or specifically to girls, so that they can join the elite who currently has access to secondary schooling. This is clearly a problematic area. Scholarships to primary school were one of ActionAid’s earliest interventions in the 1970s and have long been abandoned because they are neither cost-effective nor equitable. Running a truly open and fair system can become costly and bureaucratic – and it is common for abuse or corruption to become endemic. It would be more appropriate to put pressure on the government to expand secondary provision as a whole than to support a few children from poor backgrounds. There is a real danger that governments, under pressure to invest in primary schools, will either privatisate or shift resources away from secondary education – further reducing the chances of poor children to access it. Some ActionAid programmes are now supporting the tracking of national education budgets and policies to ensure that this does not occur and that investment in primary schools is balanced with investment in secondary schools.

3.9 Early childhood and the pre-school years

Early childhood education is less widespread than we might have anticipated in ActionAid programmes, though this may be because support for non-formal community-based childcare is not always seen as an explicit education intervention. Those respondents who reported positively here were following one of two basic models:

- supporting government provision (eg with teacher training or providing toys or other equipment);
- running non-formal early childhood centres for pre-school children (often targeting particular groups such as children where mother tongue is not taught in the primary school system – and who thus need a headstart).

The school starting age varies from 4 to 7 years old –
and where it is nearer seven some earlier provision seems important. Some early childhood education programmes are closely linked to women’s education (eg Reflect processes) and these can become mutually reinforcing. Child-care is often needed for women to participate in a learning process themselves. In some cases participants in Reflect circles take it in turns to look after the children in a separate space during the Reflect sessions. Over time, developing skills to create a stimulating environment for the children becomes an issue for discussion in the circles – leading to two inter-linked learning processes, one for young children and one for women.

3.10 Rural libraries and information centres

A number of countries support rural information centres or libraries. These usually provide books and other reading materials for children and adults. They might include information about people’s rights or leaflets about different government schemes. Sometimes there are facilities to produce or reproduce materials, such as silk screen printing. One innovation in Kenya has been to open community book banks that transfer books from urban areas to rural communities, thereby saving parents from purchasing textbooks.

In some places, where electricity is available, these information centres may have access to computers and even the internet. A new initiative in India, Burundi and Uganda is looking particularly at how Reflect participants and facilitators can have control over the development of relevant information and communication technology locally.

3.11 Health education

Because health education is usually led by people in the health sector, it has probably been under-reported in this survey. In some cases, however, there are close connections with other education programmes.

There are some tensions between the pedagogy used in health education, which is often concerned with communicating specific messages (eg about safe drinking water, basic sanitation or safe sex) and the pedagogy encouraged by those working in other areas of adult education such as Reflect.

Work relating to HIV and education is separately reported in section 5.9.

3.12 Other adult education

Although the Reflect approach is used most widely for adult education there are many other adult education projects run by ActionAid and partners, including:

- starting women’s home schools in Pakistan;
- functional literacy classes (there is no requirement on ActionAid programmes to use the Reflect approach);
- workers or labourers schools;
- programmes supporting cultural identity and spirituality groups (eg Mayan identity in Guatemala);
- education programmes for disabled adults;
- workshops for parents of children with disabilities;
- socio-legal education, enabling people to analyse social and governance issues that block the advancement of children’s education (eg in Masindi, Uganda);
- exposure and motivation through study trips for women and children to nearby towns, new places etc;
- savings and credit groups with links to children’s education.

“The mothers are mostly illiterate, therefore no one listens to them at home. But through Reflect, adult literacy and home schools we are equipping mothers to be more confident and influence the fathers of the girl child for sending the latter to school.”

Ghulam Nabi Rutamani, Reflect Coordinator, Pakistan

“We are networking with poor women through thrift and credit co-operatives to build their capacities to have a say in education decision-making. We organise women from landless families to a society and support them to undertake income-generating activities so that they can meet the education needs of the children.”

G. John, Project Director, Andhra Pradesh, India
3.13 Inclusive education for people with disabilities

Few programmes identified specific projects dealing with education for disabled people. The exception was India, where there is a significant base of work on inclusive education.

In Tamil Nadu, for example, the SEVAI project has introduced a concept called ‘mentor education’ into their school. Disabled learners live with their teachers on school premises, follow the same curriculum and evaluation as other students, and have all the facilities to learn in and after school hours. The live-in teachers, known as akkas, are each responsible for a minimum of 5 to 10 disabled students. The akkas facilitate self-learning for the disabled children, as well as habit-formation exercises, painting, music and games.

ActionAid India is now undertaking a large scale initiative in Tamil Nadu to mainstream inclusive education across the whole State. This will involve building a model of inclusive education and engaging in State-level policy influencing work. It is hoped that this model can then be spread across other States through a range of civil society coalitions on basic education.

3.14 Budget analysis and tracking

Budget analysis and tracking is a relatively new area of work for ActionAid in education. The first steps often involve national-level work – for example, producing a simplified guide to how the government’s education budget is supposed to work. Budgets are then tracked in different projects across the country, to ascertain what happens to the budget in practice.

We determine whether there is equity across different areas, by analysing, for example:
- who makes decisions about the budget at each level;
- whether there is transparency;
- whether the money is reaching the levels it should;
- the net amount arriving in each school worked out per-capita.

This budget analysis differs across countries and regions, for example:
- Bangladesh – strong focus at the school level;
- Brazil – focus more on the overall allocation to education in local government budgets
- Kenya – linking national work to district-level work.

It can be important to match the tracking of government budgets with the tracking of all other resources coming into the system (e.g., from donors or parents). In Kenya a national coalition of organisations concerned with education, the Elimu Yetu coalition, was alarmed to find parental contributions to their local school often got sucked out of the school to prop up district education offices and support services. Specifically tracking costs charged to parents can be another important project intervention linked to mobilisation or campaigning on education.

Budget monitoring work will be spread to a further 17 countries over the coming years with support from the Commonwealth Education Fund.
4 National and international work on education

The education survey did not focus much on the national or international dimensions of ActionAid’s work on education, as the intention was to understand the perspective from the grassroots and to look for connections from the local level upwards. However, in order to contextualise the material in Part 5, which looks at links between local, national and international work, it is important to provide some basic information and overview of our wider work on education, which has grown substantially in recent years. Much of the material for this section comes from the recent review of the Elimu Campaign (May 2002). Some, however, was collated from information on file and also from discussions at the international workshops in London (April 2002), Bangladesh (May 2002) and Nairobi (July 2002).

4.1 Origins of the Elimu campaign

In 1998 education was chosen as one of two issues for long-term agency-wide campaigns in ActionAid. Whilst the other campaign, food rights, started from a global analysis, looking at high-level influencing of the World Trade Organisation, education was seen as more immediately connected to our accumulation of programme experience around the world. We already had a good reputation for education work and strong links with major players like the World Bank, UNESCO and UNICEF. The challenge was to take this much further – through a campaigning approach.

The campaign was officially named Elimu (Swahili for “education”) at an international ActionAid meeting in Harare in January 1999. Here the core strategy was agreed – to galvanise action towards the realisation of Education for All goals using the World Education Forum in Dakar in April 2000 as an initial hook. The campaign focused specifically on power relationships in education policy-making at all levels – demanding a greater say for:

- poor parents in decision-making in local schools and in the implementation of education policy;
- civil society organisations working with poor people in national government policy-making on education;
- national governments and their citizens in the South – in global debates on education reform and Education for All.

Towards these ends, ActionAid, under the Elimu banner, proceeded to invest in building and supporting the emergence of strong civil society coalitions and networks, particularly at a national level in about 15 countries across Africa, Asia and Latin America. These often bring together diverse international and national NGOs, trade unions (especially teachers’ unions), parents associations, women’s movements, child labour or debt campaigners, social movements etc. At a regional level in Africa ActionAid has helped facilitate the emergence of the first ever alliance on basic education, the African Network Campaign on Education for All (ANCEFA). We have also been instrumental in co-founding the Global Campaign for Education (with Oxfam, the international federation of teachers unions, and child labour campaigners). In all cases the “means” of this campaign (building alliances) was seen as intertwined with the “ends” (changing the balance of power in education policy making).
4.2 Alliance building through *Elimu*

Working in alliances on education reform is a radical step given that, over the past 20 years or more NGOs have been busy delivering services in a bid to patch up the gaps in education provision. As the *Elimu* review notes:

“In the past NGOs working in the education sector by and large failed to offer systematic critiques of the policy and spending choices of governments and donors. Some NGOs working in the field, particularly in Latin America and parts of South Asia, are motivated by radical ideals of justice and equality, but their vision, if any, has too often narrowed down to the creation of islands of progressive methodology in a few carefully nurtured “alternative” literacy projects or schools. In many countries, the debilitating legacy of years of government attempts to control and suppress civil society activism inhibited cooperation among NGOs even at the level of experience-sharing, and had discouraged them from any attempt to speak out – collectively or separately – on the devastating and avoidable crisis in education facing their countries. Even at the local level, “NGO and civil society involvement in the management and implementation of education policies is just on paper but not in practice.”

(Ghana)

“Writing in early 2000, Mozambique admitted that despite their “...passion and commitment to education [and] direct contact with education realities on the ground”, CSOs lack awareness about national education strategies, lack cohesion, research, in depth analysis and creativity. CSOs are therefore unable to contribute to sophisticated debates with government, World Bank and donor experts, and hence are not being taken seriously by current policy makers.”

The *Elimu* review documents the rapid way in which ActionAid was able to facilitate the emergence of strong national coalitions. These coalitions are very different from the neutral NGO networks or talking shops of the past.

“[The coalitions] have gained the recognition and growing respect of other civil society organisations, governments and donors as the legitimate, collective NGO voice on education and as credible, well-informed interlocutors in the policy arena.”

To a great extent, ActionAid’s strategy of working with partners and alliances worked well in the *Elimu* campaign in Nigeria. Civil society groups that were hitherto alienated from the policy process in the education sector, have come to gain confidence in themselves as equal stakeholders and are demanding greater democratization of the policy process and accountability from government.

“Nigeria

ActionAid Malawi has managed to bring all key stakeholders in basic education together through the formation of an NGO-government alliance for basic education in Malawi. This body has created a platform from where all issues affecting basic education are discussed. Our ability to mobilise all stakeholders to form an education network for both NGOs and government... is definitely our strength.

“Malawi

We are also changing the way that we think and other NGOs think. Before this campaign began, NGOs just wanted to ensure funding and profile for their own projects. No one was interested in having a common voice on education as civil society.

“Uganda
The alliances that have emerged have received support from a growing number of INGOs, local NGOs and CBOs who have been “converted” to the idea of working together in order to influence policy and practice. Thus, the Tanzania Education Network, TEN-MET, now has over 200 member organisations, the QTI network in Pakistan has a similar number of members, Elimu Yetu in Kenya had over 40 member organisations and the civil society alliance, CASCEFA in Nigeria has 60.

The Elimu review quotes a senior manager from a large ActionAid country programme:
“When it was said that ActionAid would have a campaign on education, we expected that we would have massive drives to provide scholarships and build classrooms and launch Reflect programmes across the country – the same things as we have always done, but in a bigger way… But as the thing unfolded we realised that the more fundamental issue was not what ActionAid could do but what government should do and wasn’t doing. This was a very different approach for us and for our partners. If we had been told from the start that we must go and demand the rights of the poor for education, we would have rejected the whole thing. Instead the Elimu approach is to let people develop this analysis for themselves, but all the time raising new questions, new perspectives for us through activities like the report cards and budget tracking.”

4.3 Activities of national alliances

Each national alliance or coalition has developed in different directions, with ActionAid playing a low key facilitating role. Below is a small selection of activities undertaken by alliances and coalitions to give a flavour of the work involved:

- influencing government policy or discourse on key issues such as: the role of PTAs (The Gambia); partial or comprehensive removal of education charges (Tanzania, Nepal); inclusive education (Bangladesh, Uganda); adult literacy (Uganda); non-formal education (Ethiopia);
- organising rallies, petitions, marches, concerts, special events in order to mobilise the wider public, such as the “big walk” for the right to education, which attracted more than 1000 participants in Malawi;
- campaigning and lobbying to end gender discrimination in education, especially in Bangladesh, Pakistan, The Gambia, Uganda, Kenya, and Ethiopia;
- working with the media to influence public opinion (Ghana, Bangladesh); training for journalists (The Gambia); imaginative events with film and football celebrities (Brazil);
- engaging in cross-country research studies, on subjects such as the impact of cost-recovery or user fees;
- targeting the national budget process by producing simplified versions of the education budget and tracking or monitoring expenditure in practice (Brazil, Kenya, Bangladesh);
- influencing the development of national EFA action plans, other education policies or the education sector within Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers;
- participatory research on education costs (undertaken by one of the Tanzanian NGOs involved in TEN-MET, and since replicated by others);
- preparing an annual “Education Watch” report (as compiled by the Campaign for Popular Education, CAMPE, in Bangladesh, which in 2000 and 2001 produced evidence that only 25% of primary school students achieve meaningful literacy);
- specific studies on sensitive issues, such as political manipulation of adult literacy statistics in Brazil, or the financing of education in Pakistan, which investigated the reasons for the rise of private schools catering to low income households;
- documenting and evaluating field practice and innovation, such as of the Access approach in Ethiopia;
- lobbying key donors and UN agencies, such as local missions of the World Bank, UNICEF, European Commission, USAID, etc (though this was not strong).

4.4 International impact of Elimu

There is also no doubt that the Elimu campaign has had a significant impact internationally, as can be appreciated by the following examples:

- Effective work was undertaken with the ActionAid Alliance influencing European Union policy on aid to education.
- ActionAid has played a key role in facilitating the emergence of the African Network Campaign on Education for All (ANCEFA).
- Significant progress was made together with the Global Campaign for Education, notably at the World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000 where the final outcome reflected about 60% of our collective demands. Notably, Dakar represented a major shift in the perceived role of NGOs – away from being agents of service delivery and towards being partners in the development of education policy.
- Subsequent work on influencing the UNESCO High Level Committee, the World Bank and G8, has kept the pressure on the international community to live up to one of the key promises they made in Dakar, namely that “no country with a viable plan for achieving Education for All will be allowed to fail for lack of resources.”
- The World Bank changed its policy on user fees in primary education after pressure from ActionAid and other agencies campaigning against user fees in primary education.
4.5 Outcomes of the Elimu review

There is a lot more material in the Elimu review which explores the wider international impact of this education campaigning work. However, for this document it is probably sufficient to report the executive summary of the findings from the review:

1. Elimu is perceived as an unusual and innovative campaign because of its efforts and successes in involving Southern CSOs as equal allies rather than as dependent ‘partners’.

2. There is evidence of significant change in the political landscape shaping education policy in countries taking part in the campaign. In many Elimu countries, NGOs and CSOs are pressing for accountable, pro-poor policies for the first time and in an organised and sustained manner. Governments are beginning to feel the need to sit up and take notice.

3. Building national campaign coalitions first, then gradually defining a common policy change agenda based on emerging concerns of the national campaigns, has allowed the flexibility necessary for genuine local ownership of the international effort.

4. The secretariat management structure has proved successful in ensuring that there has been no concentration of management responsibility and political decision-making in the hands of a single campaign head.

5. National coalitions have won access to policy forums and have the basic foundations in place for exploiting this new space effectively.

6. Should Elimu decide to rise to this challenge, some of the structural weaknesses of the international campaign will need to be addressed, such as continuing dependence on and control by ActionAid, and the lack of a clear membership structure. Alternatively, it was suggested by some that Elimu may decide to reposition itself as a capacity-building and experience-sharing network for education activists, continuing to support national coalitions in these areas while ceasing to be a campaign that pursues specific policy change goals of its own.

7. The review also raises major issues about the overloading of ActionAid staff involved in the campaign. Country programme staff were typically told to add the campaign to an already unmanageable list of responsibilities, with the result that few ActionAid staff had more than two to three days per month available for campaign work at all levels.

8. Finally, it was evident that monitoring and evaluation had been very weak during the first two years of the campaign. However, the self-assessment process seemed to enthuse most who took part and there is a clear commitment to improve the monitoring of such work in future.

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**Marion is in school because...**

This year Tanzania abolished primary school fees. Abolition came as a direct result of sustained campaigning by a Tanzanian network of over 200 organisations called the Tanzanian Education Network (TenMet).

TenMet – an alliance of national and international organisations concerned about education in Tanzania – has played a crucial role in persuading the Tanzanian Government to abolish school fees. This has led to an additional 1.6 million children enrolling in primary schools.

When TenMet began its campaign the Tanzanian Government did not think that school fees were a major problem. But there had been no national census in Tanzania since 1988, they actually had no idea how many children were not enrolled in school. Primary education was compulsory, so those who couldn’t afford the fees lied about their children’s ages, or moved, so as to avoid getting in trouble.

TenMet undertook a survey to demonstrate just how many poor children were not attending school. The findings shocked the Government which committed itself to abolishing primary school fees within two years. At the World Education Forum in Dakar Tanzanian Government used the TenMet research to stress the importance of abolishing school fees and it called on the international community for help to end fees for primary-aged children across the developing world.

But TenMet’s work has not ended. The increased enrolment has put pressure on school resources and every shilling put into education needs to be spent wisely. TenMet is campaigning to try and make sure that none of this money gets diverted either into other areas of spending or into someone’s pocket. Most villages now have noticeboards that display how much each school should be receiving. And TenMet is working with school management committees to help them understand the budget-making process.

Nationally, the Tanzanian Government now consults with TenMet on a regular basis and TenMet is working to ensure that an even higher percentage of Government funds go into education in the future.

TenMet is making a real difference. The Commonwealth Education Fund can both sustain it in its current work and help it move into new areas.

**Life story**

**Marion, Tanzania**

“My family is very poor. I have two brothers and two sisters but my parents could only afford to send my older brother, Kaseem, to school. He was often sent home because my father couldn’t afford to give him the money to pay his fees. But now that school is free he’s been able to finish his education and now I go to school every day. No one sends me home. My younger brother and sisters are now looking forward to going to school as soon as they are old enough.”

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Extract from the CEF Brochure: Investing in the Next Generation, November 2002
5.1 The risks

One of the classic problems for NGOs developing policy and advocacy work in recent years is the divorce that exists between their grassroots programme work and the policy work undertaken in capital cities. In ActionAid this almost caused a split between the international headquarters in London and the countries where we worked: with enthusiasm for policy work being seen as London-led, and national offices across Africa, Asia and Latin America being more focused on the real practical work at the grassroots. This remains a problem for some international NGOs but in ActionAid, as the previous section shows, there is now a strong base of policy work in most country programmes, particularly around education.

Nevertheless, concerns remain that much of our policy engagement takes place in capital cities and is undertaken by a different cadre of staff than those engaged at the local level. It is for this reason that the survey sought to understand the connections between local education work and national and international work. This was done through various means:
- asking respondents what they thought about ActionAid’s involvement in wider campaigning on education, particularly what they thought about, and whether they agreed with, campaigning for free, compulsory education;
- analysing local work which respondents identified as being directly linked to campaign on education (and relating this to the constitutional framework in each country);
- exploring examples of how local innovative programme work in education has influenced government policy or wider national practice;
- asking about structural links between local projects and other education stakeholders – district and national alliances, national ministries, government offices, social movements, unions etc;
- analysing key thematic programmes of work that might provide a link between local and national/international work – around girl’s education and HIV/AIDS.

The following sections deal with each of these points in turn.

5.2 Local understanding of campaigning for free compulsory education

When directly asked what they understood by, and whether they agreed with, ActionAid’s international campaigning on free compulsory basic education, most but not all respondents were positive.

“We understand the campaign locally to be saying that education is a basic right based on social contract between the government and its citizens and the government having signed off to international declarations has a responsibility to ensure that the right to education for women, men, boys, and girls is protected and respected. Citizens on their part have a right to demand this from government.”

Chike Anyanwu, Nigeria

“An education where every one regardless of tribe, sex, age get an opportunity to access functional education which is relevant to his/her environment. Yes.

Deo Luicomwa, Uganda

“Campaign to raise awareness. I agree with it.

Ander Acero Saavedra, Peru
Some respondents expressed some doubts as to whether we were going to follow through some of the work that we have started, while others actively disagreed. Either they felt that children should pay at the point of entry in order to “own” education or they felt that there were problems with the concept of compulsory education.

“Education is right to everybody and it should be given free. I don’t agree; if we really want people to value education they should contribute in money and kind.”

Theodore Mwanga, Programme Coordinator, Tanzania

Forcing every child to be in school. This can be applicable where facilities are of good quality and communities earn reasonable income because even if education is made free there are some necessities which are needed for someone to go to school such as good clean clothes, food and moral support which poor families cannot afford. So, to some extent ActionAid Malawi does not agree with this campaign.

“himwemwe Mangeni, Programme Manager, Malawi

Debate between compulsory schooling and the right to education

The notions of ‘compulsory schooling’ and ‘right to education’ are often confused.

The right to basic education is best seen as a right of the child vis-à-vis society. The responsibility for enforcing this right need not rest with a single person or institution. It is a shared responsibility. It is the responsibility of the state to provide the facilities, parents to send their children to school, teachers to impart learning and employers not to employ children in a way that conflicts with their education. Thus the overall responsibility of guaranteeing the right to education is shared between different persons and institutions. In this framework if a child is deprived of education, it is possible to take concrete action. If school facilities are not available at reasonable distance, they can be demanded. If a teacher is chronically absent, he or she can be replaced, etc. These steps are more likely to be taken if education is recognised as a fundamental right of the child.

Compulsory education, on the other hand, is one of the means that can be used to make the child’s right a reality. It sends a clear message to parents that they don’t have a choice and that they have to send their children to school. This can add weight and momentum to a campaign but can also have negative consequences, especially if the quality of education available is poor or local officials see a money-raising opportunity in fining parents. Compulsory education makes sense when the compulsion on parents is made conditional on government ensuring that education is accessible (facilities available at a convenient distance), affordable (free) and of minimum quality. Assertion of a right to education does not depend on making education compulsory.

5.3 Local work linked to wider campaigning on free education

Table 3 shows some of the examples given by respondents concerning how they presently feel involved in the campaigning work on education. This is a consolidation of views from the field level and shows the ways in which staff and partners see direct links between their present local work and national or international campaigning. It also shows the future directions of their work and how they feel that they might be linked to such work in future. For each country we have also indicated the present constitutional status of education.

It is important to note that this does not represent an official or necessarily correct version of the level of national work in each country. Rather it is a view from the grassroots about their national work.
### Table 3: Campaigning on free education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Constitutional guarantee</th>
<th>ActionAid or partner’s current involvement locally</th>
<th>Future activities as mentioned by field staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>No constitutional guarantee of free and compulsory education for children.</td>
<td>Campaigning locally for free compulsory education so that government bears the expenses. Trying to establish the rights to education through SMC meetings. Creating awareness in community that education should be free and compulsory.</td>
<td>Pressurising government to declare education free and compulsory, together with other partner organisations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Organising parents and SMC members to discourage the practice of charging fees. Conducting talk programmes; organising seminars and workshops; mobilising district level demonstrations. Lobbying of District Education Officer by students with support from local networks and Dalit organisations, to demand removal of illegal enrolment fees. Awareness campaign on free education launched at the local level.</td>
<td>Intensification of present activities Using Reflect as an operating system – to build social movements demanding rights. Create a revolving scholarship fund at the VDC level for access to further education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>Not in 1973 constitution. The government recently made primary education compulsory but not free. It has already been put in place in the capital but not in other areas.</td>
<td>Efforts directed towards a national policy change, including the legislature, executive and judiciary. Believe that all institutions must support ‘free’ primary education. Actively involved in the Global Campaign for Education and use the Global Week of Action for Education each year to influence the policy makers. Previously launched a campaign on a small scale – now we are widening it, through strengthening the community to demand basic free primary education from the government.</td>
<td>Opening girls’ education centres. Training of teachers. Awareness-raising about education through seminars, workshops, government dialogue etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not engaged yet.</td>
<td>Intend to call a workshop and organise field trip for local authorities and communities to talk about free compulsory education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>Education was made a fundamental right in 2001 for children aged 6–14 years.</td>
<td>Educating communities about children’s rights through awareness camps, cultural programme. Being in contact with lobbying groups such as NAFRE. Pressurising government bodies for establishing education centres.</td>
<td>We have achieved the broad objective of making education a fundamental right. However, questions of special needs of left out children are not addressed. Focus now with other agencies on seeking policy on inclusive education. Influencing media persons to highlight the issue. Organising area, district and state-level campaigns to demand increase in GDP spent on education from 3% to 6%.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Campaigning for education as a constitutional right in India

The National Alliance for the Fundamental Right to Education (NAFRE) has made dramatic progress in making education a constitutional right. NAFRE is a grassroots-led national coalition of over 2,400 NGOs spread across 15 States. After rigorous and widespread campaigning, the broad objective of making education a fundamental right for children aged 6–14 years was achieved in 2001.

On 28 November Parliament passed the 93rd Constitution Amendment Bill, which makes education a fundamental right for children in the six to 14 age group. Although this is a step forward, questions of special needs of left out children and the right to free education of children in the zero to six age group are not addressed.

Moreover the full impact of the constitutional amendment will depend in part on how legislators interpret and apply it in each of India’s many states. Coalitions in India are keeping pressure on government bodies to deliver on this new amendment as well as to move forward with an inclusive education policy to enable disabled children to participate fully.

Africa

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Burundi</td>
<td>No constitutional guarantee of free and compulsory education for all children.</td>
<td>Campaigning not only for Education for All, but free access to education, especially in primary school. This might take a long time because of the war.</td>
<td>Depends on wider political changes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanzania</td>
<td>No constitutional guarantee.</td>
<td>Campaigning through Global Week of Action every April.</td>
<td>Intensify the campaign and publicise it through different media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>No constitutional guarantee.</td>
<td>Members of the National CSO coalition of Education for All – CSACEFA. Play a pivotal role in the evolution of CSOs’ participation in the EFA processes and Elimu. Campaigning in the West African sub region and the Africa region as a whole. Links with Global Campaign for Education.</td>
<td>Deepen our coalition activities and effectiveness at the state and local council levels. Increase the number of CSOs who are members of the national coalition. Strengthen our links with sub-regional networks and the international campaign on education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malawi</td>
<td>Yes – free but not compulsory.</td>
<td>Some coalition – building work at national level.</td>
<td>Broadening of the national coalition to include teachers’ unions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberia</td>
<td>New education bill just passed by houses of the legislature, Senate and representatives.</td>
<td>Campaigning for the publishing of this law into handbills.</td>
<td>To pursue the process with the relevant authorities and form a network in this direction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Engaged in education campaigning at international, national and regional levels. When people are informed and demand their rights social change can come through informed voters electing and tasking members of parliament.</td>
<td>Actively lobbying for an end to levies and user fees in primary education, in partnership with wider civil society. Mobilising and educating parents on the importance of education (rural children enrol) despite the fact that it does not lead to white collar jobs any more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Constitutional guarantee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gambia</td>
<td>Free but not compulsory – only tuition is really free.</td>
<td>Campaigning to make parents understand that their children’s education has been constitutionally guaranteed and as such they should go to school. Involving communities in education decision-making. Lobbying and discussing with policy implementers to adhere to the constitutional provisions for free Education for All Gambian children.</td>
<td>Enhancing the existence of a national movement that can make demands on the State at all levels on people’s right to education. Enhancing the legitimisation of PTAs in the national education system to serve as permanent institutions for community representation during educational debates and policy formulation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>Yes – Article 34(2) of the constitution states a child is entitled to basic education which shall be the responsibility of the State and the parent. However, the provisions don’t spell out the compulsory and free access to education which could be implied.</td>
<td>Mobilising communities to understand and play their roles in educating their children in line with government’s Universal Primary Education policy. Mobilising local groups to campaign against negative culture practices that hinder children from getting an education. Supporting adult education through Reflect to enhance analytical, numeracy and writing skills. Sharing good practices with other players. Helping to build national civil society coalition, FENU.</td>
<td>Advocating for more opportunities for the disadvantaged at no cost – an education system where everyone regardless of gender, tribe and age gets an opportunity to access functional education, which is relevant to his or her environment. Continuing to build stronger networks and alliances (pulling more partners on board the campaign). Disseminating government and donor policy for people’s critique and own planning or demanding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>Constitutionally guaranteed – free and compulsory.</td>
<td>Campaigning runs through all local activities. Strengthening the capacity of citizens to demand their rights through Reflect.</td>
<td>Mobilising people to join in the campaign for massive enrolment. Spreading the use of Reflect. Strengthening existing education networks like the Ghana National Education Campaign Coalition to move the campaign forward.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>Constitution states that education is a basic right.</td>
<td>Conducting advocacy and basic education promotion workshops at various levels. Organising and participating in consultative forums. Influencing government education policy in the light of the constitutional right is not easy as it cannot realistically be delivered at this time in such a poor country.</td>
<td>Initiating more community involvement in education. Supporting and strengthening pressure groups. Carrying out practical actions and research and disseminating best practices. Networking and coalition building.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Latin America and the Caribbean

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>Yes – education is secular, free, and compulsory for pre-primary, primary and secondary levels.</td>
<td>Working through our partner PRODESSA regarding education reform, creating awareness among parents, local and municipal authorities, to promote children’s rights. Promoting methodological changes in the teaching-learning process to increase respect for child rights.</td>
<td>Promoting education reform to increase awareness of rights. Influencing municipal authorities to assume their responsibilities to children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>Yes – free and compulsory.</td>
<td>Campaigning for a free, quality education with the same opportunities for all children. Giving talks to teachers, designing learning unit which includes activities for children and youth rights.</td>
<td>Planning to engage people in achieving better distribution of national budget on education. Organising training and capacity building around education, addressing topics on the development of free and compulsory education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>Free and compulsory basic Education for All is constitutionally guaranteed.</td>
<td>Involved in a campaign, which focuses on the human rights of the Dominicans of Haitian origin, campaigning on article 8 of our constitution to establish free primary education.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haiti</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Fighting to make the State responsible; focusing on no to violence; end to child labour; equality of opportunities for boys and girls; promoting a code of conduct concerning children.</td>
<td>Engaging with communities to encourage them to adapt new ways of behaving towards children in difficult situations. Lists of demands to be presented to the relevant State institutions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.4 Local work that has impacted on wider policy

There are many ways of linking local to national work or programme to policy work. For many years ActionAid’s perception of influencing policy in education was that it was best achieved through programme experience – by doing something innovative, documenting or evaluating the impact and persuading others, especially government or major donors, to learn lessons or adopt the new approaches. Many staff and partners are still working to this model – convinced that it is an effective means to influence not only policy but also practice. The survey therefore asked people for examples of how their local programme work had influenced wider policy or practice.

There were some frustrations in reading the responses to this question as some respondents described local level activities without detailing their specific impact on government, and some described the policies which ActionAid and their partners have influenced, without specifying in detail how this was achieved. There was also a range of ways of interpreting the question. Some examples were given of how NGOs are bringing in new levels of competence around policy issues to benefit the capacity of middle and low-level government officials – who often receive more useful information and support from NGOs than they do from the higher levels of the government. Other responses focused on how programmes have strengthened community institutions’ ability to influence local government, resulting in improvements to education services. It is clear, however, that many national governments have drawn on learning from the practical field experiences of ActionAid or partners in their policy making. Co-operation and links with government education institutions appear strong in many countries, perhaps particularly so in Africa.

Influencing activities have included:

- supporting advocacy for increased access and funding for education at national, regional and district levels, often involving organising CSOs to press for change;
- building and strengthening civil society networks to advocate for Education for All through training workshops and national forums, to campaign and influence government;
- advising government on policy and good practice, for example getting Access and Reflect taken on board by government at district or even national levels;
- mobilising awareness and support among government agencies for girls’ education;
- persuading local government to hand over management of schools to community organisations and respond to local priorities;
- achieving local budget increases to support disadvantaged children’s education.

A selection of specific examples of these forms of influencing government follows.

Ethiopia

Two government initiatives have acknowledged the value of innovations associated with the Access approach: a Ministry of Education study on alternative routes to basic education and a joint pilot project undertaken between ActionAid Ethiopia and the regional government in North Showa.

Ghana

ActionAid Ghana has spearheaded the innovation of an alternative, flexible approach to basic education, Shepherd schools, which have gained recognition from the Ministry of Education and UNICEF. UNICEF plans to replicate it in some deprived areas.

Another intervention which has generated a lot of interest from government is the Rural Education Volunteer scheme which recruits secondary school leavers as volunteers and trains them to be able to support schools in remote areas.

ActionAid Ghana organised a national camp for girls from very remote areas, emphasising the importance of girls’ education. This gained the support of both the public and the Ministry of Education, and the event has become an annual affair.

India

(ActionAid partner) IADWE has developed a training of trainers’ module on adolescent health which has helped ActionAid India with the integration of health issues in the NFE system of our Adolescent Development Centres. The knowledge basis on adolescent health, growth and development, sexual maturity, HIV/AIDS etc has impacted NFE and at the same has been recommended to be included in the modules for street children being prepared by National Council for Education Research and Training.

Madhu Shrama, Programme Manager, Delhi
Kenya
The Community Education Initiative is a primary education programme run by ActionAid Kenya with the government and local CBOs, which is currently developing a national education programme in:
- participatory school management structures to create spaces for participatory decision-making in schools;
- flexible non-formal education programmes that enhance access to basic education for nomadic communities.

ActionAid Kenya also played a lead role in a national consultation on Kenya’s primary school curriculum. By running workshops and linking with local and national government, NGOs, newspapers and radio programmes, a number of clear positions emerged, based on our experience of dealing with primary education in rural areas. For example, we made a clear call for a reduction (from 14 to 5) in the number of compulsory annually examined subjects in primary school.

Liberia
The Reflect approach has generated huge interest from the government, including a front page article in the government-run national newspaper, and is to be adopted into the government’s national mass literacy work.

Peru
Ayuda en Acción’s new methodology for rural schools is being implemented in seven areas on the coast and in the highlands of Peru. It is also being promoted and applied in government primary schools.

Uganda
ActionAid’s approach to non-formal education has been adopted into national policy work. In Masindi, government policy has been influenced to support the funding of special facilities for girls and children with disabilities at school.

Government extension workers are also integrating Reflect into their work to promote the maximum participation of the poor.

5.5 ActionAid innovations that have impacted internationally

It is important to note that ActionAid’s innovations have sometimes had an impact far beyond the national level. For example, the Reflect approach, pioneered by ActionAid, has now been adapted by more than 350 organisations in 60 countries, including government programmes in more than ten countries. Almost every major donor organisation has funded a Reflect programme somewhere in the world and Reflect is widely referred to as the most significant innovation in the field of adult learning over the past decade.

On a smaller scale, Access is now widely referred to as a major innovation, providing a shift in the terms of the debate beyond the unhelpful formal/non-formal divide. It has been influential on government and donor programmes in several countries and an Access workshop in November 2000 in Ethiopia attracted people from 20 countries. It has particularly influenced UNESCO.

Another important innovation that has had a cross-national impact is the approach to distance education for in-service teacher training developed by ActionAid in Uganda in the 1990s, which is still widely quoted and the evaluation of which is still in demand.

To some extent the Elimu approach can also be regarded as a major innovation, emphasising the building of broad-based national alliances, coalitions and campaigns on education in the South, linked both to local and international level work. This approach has influenced many other international NGOs who are now supportive of such a strategy. The recently established Commonwealth Education Fund (managed by ActionAid, Save the Children and Oxfam), which provides at least £10 million for such work over 17 countries, could not have been envisaged had it not been for Elimu (See box on page 82).
5.6 Structural links between local staff and other agencies

The chart below shows the range of structural relationships that local projects and partners have with different types of organisations. In each case we asked respondents to indicate whether the relationship was strong or weak, and the nature of the relationship (funding or non-funding, service provision, etc). The chart shows the percentage of respondents in all ActionAid country programmes that claimed they have strong relationships with the following types of institutions:

- CSOs, NGOs, CBOs and local groups involved in delivering education services;
- CSOs and NGOs involved in advocacy or public awareness work on education, child rights and related issues;
- local government;
- regional education offices;
- National Ministry of Education;
- social movements (women, indigenous people, disabled people, etc);
- public sector unions, including teachers’ unions;
- district or regional coalitions and alliances on education;
- national alliances and coalitions on education;
- global or international campaigns, coalitions and alliances on education.

The result is revealing. The most common relationship is with smaller NGOs or community based organisations involved in service delivery. This is still a dominant focus. However, there are strong relationships with district and regional education offices or local government, showing a much greater connection than may have been the case a few years ago. About 40% of respondents said that they had strong relationships with NGOs involved in advocacy work.

Relationships with national level organisations are strong in about a third of cases, and links with national alliances or coalitions are now more common than direct links with the Ministry of Education. This level of national connectedness is significant and is explored a little further below. The fact that fewer people feel linked to district or regional coalitions probably reflects the fact that many national coalitions are only now building decentralised committees or alliances at this mid-level. It is remarkable that a significant number of projects feel they have a strong link to global campaigns (either Elimu or GCE).

Just under a third of respondents identified strong links to social movements – and a regional breakdown shows that this is particularly strong in

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Chart 12: Strength of ActionAid’s relationship with local, regional and national stakeholders
Asia and Latin America.

Perhaps the most worrying result is the very low level of relationship with unions. Many of the national alliances on education now include teachers’ unions, but it seems that relations with unions at a local level remain rare.

The fact that ActionAid programmes and partners appear to have been active in making links with local, national and in some cases regional and global, campaigns or alliances on education is perhaps unsurprising given the key role that ActionAid has played in supporting the emergence of many national campaigns or alliances (see Part 4). However, we should never take for granted that strong links will develop as it is quite possible for policy staff in the national office to be doing one thing and programme staff locally to do another. On the whole, the level of engagement felt by local staff suggests that coherence is developing and that the old programme/policy divide might be breaking down (at least in education). Local staff see policy engagement as part of their own work and national staff see links to local work as essential to the success of national policy engagement. These are connections that should be strengthened as they are essential to developing coherence across the organisation. For this reason, we have included here some examples of how local staff perceive these relationships. There are clearly still wide differences and much learning that can take place in this area.

**Kenya**

There are strong links between local and national work, for example in the PRSP process. In all project areas where PRSP consultations took place, our local partner CBOs got the opportunity to present their views. This was facilitated by the engagement of ActionAid and the *Elimu Yetu* coalition in the national level processes.

**Ghana**

ActionAid Ghana has strong links with the Ministry of Education at district, regional and national levels. There is now a major effort to decentralise the national education campaign coalition, setting up district level committees which local partners can relate to directly.

**Nepal**

Our partner HICODEF in Nawalparasi does not have a direct link with central level agencies or people and depends mostly on ActionAid to link to national level work, but they do get involved actively in generating support at the district and local level on national issues.

“Our link and partnership with ActionAid Nepal helps us to launch campaigns.”

*(Shiva Raj Pokhrel, Area Coordinator, HICODEF)*

**Uganda**

ActionAid Uganda has links with government at both local and national levels. Programme staff in Masindi have been linking with MPs, working on district and national level Education for All task forces. There are links with a range of different networks and alliances, including FENU, the national network on education and the literacy alliance LITNET, and women’s organisations. Policy staff, who attend national level meetings, provide feedback from reports and proceedings to local staff. This means that local staff feel they are an active part of a national movement.

**India**

Several of the Indian respondents’ organisations are members of multiple networks at and above the national level, such as the South Asia Coalition on Child Survival (SACCS). Many partner organisations, particularly in Rajasthan, are developing links with the National Alliance for the Fundamental Right to Education (NAFRE). Several are also involved with Child Relief and You (CRY). Coalitions appear to be mainly campaigning and research bodies, focusing on child education and girls’ education, with several also campaigning against child labour and trafficking.
5.7 Cross-country links and sharing

One way to link work at different levels is to enable country programmes to share experience and knowledge. ActionAid has had a number of international conferences bringing together staff and partners, particularly since 1995 – with some form of major international meeting on education occurring every year. This has been crucial to the evolution of ActionAid’s thinking around education and has helped programme staff to understand wider policy issues. Once people see that the issues in their local programme are similar to those in other programmes, they spontaneously look for common causes and become engaged in policy debates. However, it is usually a relatively small number of people who can participate in such meetings and there are concerns that this cross-national sharing may not benefit everyone.

We were therefore keen in the survey to ask whether people had much experience of sharing with other countries. Clearly different mechanisms can be used, including workshops, exchange visits, circulation of documents, websites. Some of the results were rather depressing. About 80% of the respondents said they were ‘not aware’ of ActionAid work in other countries and as a result hadn’t learnt or influenced significantly.

“We haven’t learnt from elsewhere and we would love to have more information on what is happening in other countries,” claimed a respondent from West Bengal, India.

The Access workshop in Ethiopia was an eye-opener for us in Kenya, especially in the areas of non-formal education.

Amina Ibrahim, Kenya

We haven’t got a clear picture as to how our experience in education can be disseminated to other countries. This would be important as we have had some good experiences in education.

Antonio Pol Emil, Dominican Republic

Despite the occasional international meeting, knowledge sharing between different ActionAid programmes and often within a particular country programme seemed poor. Most fieldworkers seemed keen on (and felt they needed) more opportunities to learn from each other.

Education Action magazine is one exception. This is produced twice a year and distributed in English, Spanish, French and Portuguese to about 5,000 people both within and outside the organisation. The focus tends to be on Reflect and Elimu (as it incorporates key elements from the Elimu electronic newsletter). However, the magazine clearly does not reach all projects, and beyond this there appears to be very little circulation and sharing of documents across the organisation.

Where there has been a good level of learning and sharing it seems to be mainly around Reflect, Access or Elimu. This tends to be owing to the greater financial support available for exchanges on these experiences. This is particularly the case with Reflect, where the emergence of inter-agency national forums, regional networks and the International Reflect Circle have kept a permanent flow of learning going between practitioners. Beyond an annual meeting there are also many cross-national exchanges on Reflect, involving peer evaluations and co-facilitation of training workshops.

We are encouraged by the reports from ActionAid programmes in Asia and Latin America in the sphere of strengthening people-oriented advocacy and campaigns, especially on the right to education.

Chikezie Anyanwu, Nigeria

The importance of exchange around campaigning on education is also clear:

This education review process has also acted as an important means for promoting sharing and learning across the organisation as well as within countries, with several countries organising national workshops to share the outcomes with other NGOs and governments.
5.8 Thematic links: girls’ education

One of the most effective ways of forging links between programme and policy work is through clear thematic connections between the two. As such we were keen to explore how links were being made or could be made in respect of girls’ education and HIV/AIDS (see section 5.9).

With the international development target for gender equity in primary and secondary schools set for 2005, the education of girls is high on the international agenda. UNICEF is heading up a major girls’ education initiative, with ActionAid playing a leading role on the civil society side.

The recently-established Commonwealth Education Fund (for which ActionAid is the managing agency) is framed in relation to the 2005 target, and much of ActionAid’s campaigning against user fees highlights the particular impact on the education of girls. Key questions thus arise concerning our programme work. Are there particular initiatives or innovations that might provide us with new solutions, new directions or insights for our policy work? Is there a coherence between the position we take on girls’ education internationally and our work on the ground? It is clear from the status of education that gender equity is a major issue in the areas where ActionAid works (see Part 1) – but what are we doing to address this?

There are interventions in ActionAid projects that specifically support education for women and girls. However, their direct contribution to the realisation of the right of girls and women to quality education is not easy to evaluate. In many cases respondents referred to programmes which had other objectives but might also have an impact on girls’ education as a side effect. Some of the most important interventions in female education include:

- **Reflect circles for women**: this is significant in itself in terms of its immediate impact on the education of women, but also significant due to the impact it has on attitudes to the education of girls. If women see the benefits of education for themselves and find a stronger voice through a participatory learning process, they can challenge the cultural norms held by their husbands, fathers, brothers and the wider community. This is perhaps the most widespread ActionAid intervention which impacts significantly on the education of girls – because cultural attitudes are such a major factor in excluding girls, working with adults is essential to overcome the obstacles;

- **local advocacy work and awareness campaigns** on the importance of girls’ education: this may involve training, workshops, seminars, special events, touring theatre shows, radio programmes or work with other media. A particular target is often the parents’ associations or school management committees, who can become allies in promoting the education of girls;

- **establishing Access or NFE centres** close to where the community lives and works to encourage girl’s education: the distance to school is often a key obstacle for girls;

- **involving women in village development committees and other forums**: this inclusion of women in decision-making bodies works against...
traditional biases, and can help change local public discourse, as well as fighting male prejudice about the education of girls;

- providing tutorial services or guidance and counselling services for formal schoolgirls to help them succeed;
- prioritising the recruitment of female facilitators and more female teachers, to provide role models and encourage girls’ education;
- gender-sensitive teacher training and curriculum development in primary schools;
- improving the economic status of women, who are more likely than men to use disposable income for the education of girls (income-generating projects; savings and credit groups);
- relieving girls of some of their duties or work, enabling them to go to school (provision of daycare centres, corn mills, bicycles);
- supporting the construction of toilets or separate facilities for girls in schools;
- mobilising women to lobby the District Education Officer on girls’ education;
- mini-library services to create a better learning atmosphere and facilities, particularly for girls, by enabling them to read at home;
- gender training for village development committee representatives and school children: to raise awareness on the rights of women – this can help to increase access to decision-making and control of property;
- specific interventions with the most vulnerable groups, such as working with sex workers to help prevent their daughters from entering sex work.

ActionAid and our partners have been promoting the right to sustainable, accessible and quality education for girls and women through gender awareness training for PTAs that encourages parents to send girls to school. We have also held workshops with and lobbied local government to push them to do as much as possible to make accessible and quality education available to girls and women.

“ActionAid and our partners have been promoting the right to sustainable, accessible and quality education for girls and women through gender awareness training for PTAs that encourages parents to send girls to school. We have also held workshops with and lobbied local government to push them to do as much as possible to make accessible and quality education available to girls and women.”

Ngo Due Minh, Project Manager, Vietnam

ActionAid The Gambia supports the government’s intervention in the provision of free tuition for girls in all schools. In the parts of the country where we operate, we contribute funds towards the realisation of the intervention and contribute towards the Girl Child Trust Fund account for the payment of the school fees of girls.

Lamin Sise, Education Advocacy Officer, The Gambia

“ActionAid The Gambia supports the government’s intervention in the provision of free tuition for girls in all schools. In the parts of the country where we operate, we contribute funds towards the realisation of the intervention and contribute towards the Girl Child Trust Fund account for the payment of the school fees of girls.”

This is a sensitive issue which can rouse strong opinions. Should we support covering the costs of education for one group of people when the very existence of those costs excludes many more? Should we rather take a position of opposing all user fees so that all children can access free education – rather than being complicit in running a scheme which keeps such fees a reality for most children?

Several programmes in India, particularly in Rajasthan, have introduced Balika Shivir (girls’ forum). The primary objective of the Balika Shivir is to impart literacy and numeracy skills to adolescent, out-of-school girls and to facilitate their entry (and hopefully continuation) into formal school with other children of their age group. The academic goal of the Balika Shivir is to support girls in completing their primary education within six months. At the same time, considerable emphasis is placed on structuring the Balika Shivir in a manner that immerses girls in an environment where caste and religious-based discrimination are strongly discouraged, and facilitates the development of a sense of self through educational and extra curricular activities as well as community living.

A long-term goal of the Balika Shivir is to foster a sense of personal empowerment among the girls and enhance their critical awareness of themselves and their roles (and those of women in general) in their communities. Programme coordinators also hope that the girls’ experience in the Balika Shivir motivates them to serve as change agents in their communities once they go home. Thus, the Balika Shivir is a programme where the educational experience of girls is viewed within an expanded pedagogical framework and where girls’ practical (immediate) as well as strategic (long-term social positioning) needs are given importance.
The improved documentation of these experiences and the comparative evaluation of different interventions in relation to their impact on the education of girls would be very valuable for wider policy and campaigning work. There clearly is a base of experience on which we can draw and a wide range of programmes where the education of girls is a significant concern. In general these links have not yet been made sufficiently strongly.

We have launched different projects and interventions that primarily cater for girl child education issues. What works best is the creation of conditions consistent with the cultural norms which are provided for women teachers and girl students (eg home schools and separate primary schools for girls).

"Ghulam Nabi Rustamani, Reflect Coordinator, Pakistan"

Ayuda en Acción in Peru is a member of the national network for ‘Rural Girls’ Education’ through which it has carried out a number of activities including lobbying for the approval of the ‘law for the education of rural girls’, a law which stems from the fact that in Peru opportunities for rural girls to go to school or attend classes regularly are limited. Some schools are beginning to work on gender equality for teachers and personal development. The campaign to show the importance of sending daughters to school has the slogan “If you educate a man you educate an individual but if you educate a woman the whole family learns. So send your daughter to school now.”
5.9 Thematic links: HIV/AIDS and education

There is a growing recognition that Education for All (EFA) will not be achieved unless the education community at all levels, recognises the devastating impact of the AIDS epidemic. There are many places in the world still relatively untouched by HIV/AIDS, but in southern and eastern Africa where the epidemic has hit hardest, schools and communities are struggling to live with a virus that attacks people at the prime of their lives. Educators have been slow to pick up the challenges posed by AIDS epidemic. It is only since 1999 that educators have realized the dramatic effects that the epidemic is having on formal educational structures in Sub-Saharan Africa. In 2000 ActionAid published a briefing paper on HIV and Education (see Elimu paper, compiled by Helen Elsey, March 2000) for the World Education Forum in Dakar and played a lead role on the round-table there together with UNAIDS and WHO. However, even today education planners are still reluctant to factor in the effects of the epidemic and most people in the education sector project to “carry on as usual”.

At the same time, education is seen as one of the most important weapons in the fight to address the AIDS epidemic. Yet educational responses to AIDS tend to be led by AIDS specialists more than by education specialists – leading to ineffective responses that fail to draw on the accumulated learning of what works in education. Indeed, some of the most widespread responses to AIDS directly contradict good practice in education.

The effect of HIV/AIDS on students

As HIV/AIDS destroys communities, young people are left to care for sick parents and take on the responsibilities of caring for younger siblings. As a result, education is often forfeited. Tracking what happens to the schooling of children (especially girls) affected by HIV/AIDS is almost impossible, as schools do not keep such detailed records and wider records still under-report AIDS owing to the associated stigma.

In 2002, in an attempt to find out how students have been affected by HIV/AIDS, ActionAid country programmes in Malawi, Kenya and Tanzania interviewed local students, teachers and community members. Interviews with teachers revealed that AIDS orphans were still coming to school but only sporadically: “I have seen some school pupils going to school intermittently as they take part in nursing their sick parents. As a result, at the end of a school term, their performance is negative.”
(Dickson Born, Mwanza, Malawi).

Teachers also reported that students affected by HIV/AIDS had more difficulties than other students due to psychological stress, hunger, tiredness, stigma and inability to pay school fees. Orphans reported that apart from the above problems, they often didn’t want to go to school because of their embarrassment at not having a school uniform or the necessary materials. “When they do not have exercise books my kids are told to come back home by teachers; they are ashamed of wearing slippers at school and sometimes stop going because they are made fun of by other students.”
(Rozi Mikocheni, HIV positive mother, Kenya).

The effect of HIV/AIDS on teachers

As the number of teachers living with HIV/AIDS increases, schools are being left without teachers. These problems are compounded by the lack of educational planning by governments and the lack of access to affordable AIDS drugs. In Malawi schools complained that high levels of absenteeism were causing extra work for teachers (who have to try to follow up absent children) and negatively affecting teacher morale. “The Government is not replacing sick teachers. Consequently teachers have developed low work morale due to increased workload.”
(District Education Officer, Makata, Tanzania).

Apart from the extra burden which HIV/AIDS causes to teachers, the effects on the quality of schooling must also be addressed. In some cases class sizes can double due to the temporary or permanent dearth of teachers. This limits any meaningful learning and means students and communities rapidly lose motivation to stay in the formal education system.

The role of education in stemming the epidemic

Without a known cure, education is a necessary part of any HIV/AIDS prevention strategy. Education interventions are aimed at raising awareness and promoting behaviour change. Unfortunately, many of the educational interventions are premised on top-down approaches to delivering messages – a recipe that has historically failed to change people’s attitudes and behaviour (especially in respect of sensitive issues such as sexuality).

ActionAid programmes in HIV/AIDS and Education

Table 4 (see page 64) highlights how ActionAid country programmes have observed education to have been affected by HIV/AIDS, and the specific educational interventions which ActionAid has started in response to the epidemic.
Table 4: HIV/AIDS and Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Evidence of impact of HIV on local education</th>
<th>Specific education programmes tackling HIV/AIDS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liberia</td>
<td>No evidence</td>
<td>66 peer counsellors trained from the Youth Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malawi</td>
<td>Sickness and death of qualified primary teachers, leading to high pupil-teacher ratio</td>
<td>Orientation of both primary and secondary school teachers on new HIV/AIDS school curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children drop out of school following death of parents or guardians</td>
<td>Supporting AIDS support groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family resources diverted to caring for the sick instead of education</td>
<td>Assisting schools in keeping students busy with netball and football training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Higher dropout rate for girls as they are forced to take on the role of caregiver</td>
<td>Supporting older orphans with vocational training by forming partnerships with local entrepreneurs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Paying secondary school fees for needy students through district-level existing structures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Supporting popular theatre groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>Reduced ability of parents to meet basic education costs-uniform; textbooks etc</td>
<td>Using <em>Stepping Stones</em> (a participatory approach to HIV sexual health and gender)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Demand for children’s labour at home, caring for ailing parents or siblings leading to drop out</td>
<td>Working with partner organisations involved in teacher training and non-formal approaches to AIDS education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Losing quality learning time due to sick teachers and absenteeism of both affected teachers and students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gambia</td>
<td>Flagged for further investigation</td>
<td>Organising awareness creation workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Stepping Stones</em> is being used to educate communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>Flagged for further investigation</td>
<td>Training community adult peer educators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>AIDS Action clubs working in communities and schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Using <em>Stepping Stones</em> to educate communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>No evidence</td>
<td>Involved in National Education Coalition which is now monitoring the impacts of HIV/AIDS in education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Plans to integrate HIV/AIDS into education planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>Children left in the care of grandparents who can not afford to send them to school</td>
<td>Empowering Life-Long Skills Education integrates HIV/AIDS awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expenses incurred in looking after the sick has left less money for education</td>
<td>Disseminating reproductive health materials to schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pressure on families to support orphans to go to schools</td>
<td>Re-orientation of senior teachers on their new leadership roles as AIDS educators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Life skills development project for the youth and children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanzania</td>
<td>Poor performance due to irregular attendance to school because children:</td>
<td>Community awareness-raising using <em>Stepping Stones</em> methodology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Are sick</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Have to take care of families</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Do not have necessary study materials (pens, books etc)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Are orphans</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Rwanda
- teachers are sick and too weak to work well
- orphans are traumatised, which negatively impacts on their learning
- through a local NGO, school fees and materials are provided to HIV/AIDS orphans

Ethiopia
- half a million AIDS orphans do not attend school
- professional teachers and development workers dying
- boys and girls dying in secondary schools
- establishing networks with local government to support the national HIV/AIDS campaign

Burundi
- large numbers of HIV positive students and teachers
- AIDS orphans face difficulties in accessing education
- awareness-raising of stop AIDS clubs in secondary schools
- training of trainers on HIV/AIDS issues and different ways of fighting it

Asia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Evidence of impact of HIV on local education</th>
<th>Specific education programmes tackling HIV/AIDS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| India   | - problem is new in most areas
- infected and affected children are not admitted to schools | - awareness through cultural, audio and video programmes for staff
- demonstration of the use of condoms
- campaigns and advocacy to get affected children into schools
- sex education including HIV/AIDS and condom promotion
- peer educator training among college students and adolescents |

| Nepal   | no impact known | - HIV/AIDS training for school teachers, women’s groups, police, VDC members and club members
- HIV/AIDS orientation for students
- awareness-raising through street drama programme |

| Vietnam | no evidence | - awareness-raising as part of health intervention
- some initial HIV/AIDS training |

| Pakistan | no evidence | - planning to launch a local HIV/AIDS awareness-raising campaign using brochures, seminars and hand-outs |

| Bangladesh | no evidence | - HIV/AIDS education programme by a local partner
- awareness-raising in schools through reproductive health activities, law and dowry and early marriages |

Latin America and the Caribbean

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Evidence of impact of HIV on local education</th>
<th>Specific education programmes tackling HIV/AIDS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>no evidence</td>
<td>- HIV/AIDS advocacy work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Peru             | no evidence | - no programme work |

| Haiti            | - orphans become destitute when they are HIV positive | - HIV/AIDS awareness and information is part of the wider training programme for community facilitators/leaders |

| Guatemala        | no evidence | - planning to work with young people, parents and teachers |
**Piecemeal Efforts**

This list of activities shows a wide range of support being offered to communities, but it is not clear to what extent they are part of co-ordinated and thought-out plan.

Many of the programmes mentioned talk in very general terms about “awareness raising” without being clear about how this is done systematically. In the worst scenario this may consist of spreading standardised messages about condom use, abstinence or behaviour change without really engaging people in ways that are likely to actually change their attitudes or behaviour. However, some countries do refer to *Stepping Stones* and there are some exciting innovations now starting in linking *Stepping Stones* to the *Reflect* approach to develop *Reflect Plus* (see right).

There are some examples given in the tables that illustrate potential tensions. The response to having significant numbers of AIDS orphans is sometimes to help them gain access to school by covering their school fees. This strategy seems problematic as it reinforces the existence of school fees in the first place and undermines the case for free education. At the same time it is likely to stigmatise AIDS orphans. Other responses may include non-formal education provision for orphans of affected siblings – with all the limitations associated with non-formal education (as outlined in Section 3.3).

Perhaps predictably the results of the survey showed that outside of Africa, very few of the country programmes considered HIV/AIDS to be a significant issue and few countries had developed any significant programmes.

“*With more intense problems of livelihoods and survival being faced by the community, HIV/AIDS takes a back seat in our work*” (Arun Bhandari, People’s Education Department, India).

One significant exception has been the rigorous research that has started looking at the teaching of HIV/AIDS in primary and secondary schools in India and Kenya – analysing the differing perspectives on this of teachers, parents, local leaders and children. This research will be published in early 2003.

The process of doing this education survey across ActionAid has certainly helped to place HIV/AIDS on the agenda of education staff and it seems likely that more new initiatives will be developed in future which are led by education staff – something that should be encouraged if HIV/AIDS is not to continually end up marginalized as an issue to be dealt with only by HIV/AIDS experts. There are two initiatives which hold out particular hope:

**Reflect Plus**

ActionAid in Uganda and India are working to experiment with a fusion of *Stepping Stones* and *Reflect* – recognising that participatory methodologies which address power issues are essential if we hope to achieve significant change in attitudes or behaviour.

*Stepping Stones* is a participatory approach to HIV, sexual health and gender, first developed in Uganda in 1995. It has since spread to over 100 countries and has been recognised as ‘best practice’ by UNAIDS for the way it addresses the gender equity aspects of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. *Stepping Stones* grew out of a need to address the vulnerability of women and young people in decision-making about sexual behaviour. Through a series of structured discussions, it allows people to explore the huge range of issues which affect sexual health – including gender roles, money, alcohol use, traditional practice and attitudes towards sex, death and ourselves. The programmes encourage openness, understanding and tolerance of the disease. Discussions start with young men, older men, young women and older women in four separate groups – which come together at different points.

Being open about the disease means being open about our own sexual behaviour, something which most cultures do not encourage. The many layers of fear, racism, sorcery, taboo, homophobia, sexism and morality which shroud the words HIV and AIDS must be peeled away.

However, *Stepping Stones* facilitators often find that through the process of gender analysis and empowerment, women in particular become aware of their need and right to have a voice on other issues, including through developing literacy or other communication skills – but they lack the tools to build this into their work. They may also be frustrated at having built a positive group dynamic over a short (often three month) period, which is not then linked to a longer term process.

In contrast *Reflect* circles often run for two years or more and undertake a comprehensive analysis of social, economic, political and cultural issues. This provides a powerful basis for being able to look at the impact of HIV/AIDS across the full spectrum of local life rather than seeing it as an issue in isolation. Problems relating to sexual health, such as domestic violence; sex work as a coping strategy for food insecurity; early marriage for girls; or dealing with the impact of HIV and AIDS, frequently arise. However, *Reflect* facilitators generally are not equipped with the tools and skills to help community members explore and respond effectively to these very sensitive issues and this can limit open discussion of them.

Fusing *Reflect* and *Stepping Stones* into “*Reflect Plus*” therefore offers huge potential, generating a long-term process of reflection and action through
which participants are able to address sensitive issues and place HIV in the context of all other local issues. In places where HIV/AIDS is prevalent the analysis of any issue can be enriched by considering the impact of HIV/AIDS. By strengthening the capacity of people to open up to sensitive issues the analysis of all other issues can also be deepened – as people are more readily able to make personal connections, relating their private and public experiences.

A recent training of trainers in Bangalore (bringing together practitioners from India and Uganda) was the first attempt to combine the strengths of Reflect and Stepping Stones, in an experimental community empowerment approach named by the Bangalore participants as Nayi Disha – Hindi for ‘New Direction’.

Mapping the connections:
Making HIV an education issue
It has been observed that many of the programmes developed in response to HIV/AIDS are led by those who are specialists in HIV/AIDS more than they are specialists in education. This means some of the responses fail to draw on wider learning about what is effective in the field of education. In 2003 ActionAid will be bringing together education and HIV/AIDS advisors in ten ActionAid country programmes across Asia, Latin America and Africa, to document case studies on HIV/AIDS and Education. The focus is on telling powerful stories – to give a human dimension that people can relate to – and to hook wider research/data on HIV/AIDS and education around this.

The aim will be to look at the issues around HIV/AIDS and education from the perspective of:
- AIDS infected children;
- AIDS orphans;
- affected siblings;
- teacher expected to deliver an HIV curriculum;
- HIV positive teachers;
- parents;
- religious leaders;
- district education officials;
- National Ministries of Education;
- donors.

The intention of this initiative is to engage people working on education at all levels – to prioritise HIV/AIDS as an issue that they must directly address and cannot leave to others. It aims to reach education personnel across ActionAid, within the wider NGO constituency, within governments and within donors.
6 Trends and future directions

6.1 The ongoing evolution of education in ActionAid

One of the dangers associated with doing a review of this nature is that it may give the impression that we are now fixed in what we are doing in the education sector. Nothing could be further from the truth. There has been a continual process of evolution in ActionAid’s education work and this evolution will undoubtedly continue – with new ideas, new approaches, new concepts and new practices being developed which we cannot anticipate.

In order to understand the process of ongoing change within ActionAid we asked each respondent to identify activities that they were doing three years ago which they no longer do, as well as clarifying the future directions that their education work may take. Some of these responses are compiled in section 6.2.

National level change processes are affected or informed by wider international trends, though in a decentralised agency like ActionAid this is not always clear-cut. We do not have fixed positions. There is no central control which pressurises people to pursue a particular line of work. Nevertheless, through a series of international workshops and exchanges there is a significant accumulation of learning and a narrative of change in the way we work, which has been synthesised in section 6.4.

Finally, there are some recent developments following the Elimu review and the sharing of earlier versions of this review. These help to indicate some of the likely future directions of ActionAid’s education work. There is particular interest in looking at how we can create synergy between work at local, national, regional and international levels in order to have greater impact and to overcome past tensions between programme and policy work. These recent developments are outlined in section 6.4.

6.2 Examples of evolution at a national level

Given that ActionAid’s organisational strategy, fighting poverty together, was developed in 1999, asking people to reflect on how their work was three years ago involves them looking at their work before the rights-based approach was introduced. In each case we asked respondents to say what had brought about the changes. We also asked people to give us a forward view, of how they would ideally be working in three years’ time. The responses that follow are summaries of longer statements or syntheses from various surveys from the same country.

Uganda

ActionAid used to be directly involved in the supervision of education work with communities and constructing schools. Now, ActionAid has recognised the importance of working with local government and CBOs, changing its approach from construction of buildings to construction of people. However, there is a view that working through partnerships has made ActionAid lose touch with the poor people it used to work with directly.

Our programme is changing with the world, recognising the importance of people’s involvement in demanding their rights and shifting from the provision of basic needs to strategic needs. ActionAid has started looking into other issues that stop children from attending school other than lack of classrooms and has started linking community stakeholders to district authorities. We now disseminate information about government policy and people have come to look at education as an empowering tool.

In the future, if the political situation remains stable, education will be more driven by actual community needs, accessible to at least 90% of boys and girls. It will be more community-managed and more relevant to local development:

- we will work more closely with district and government authorities to give everyone access to education;
- there will be more consideration for disadvantaged children;
- ActionAid will be advocating and influencing local and national government to adopt proven best practices that enhance education for the disadvantaged;
- we will be mobilising civil society to contribute to policy formulation and implementation processes.
ActionAid’s education work will mainly be centred around people demanding how education resources are being used. People will be demanding educational facilities from district and national government.

**Bangladesh**

In the past partner organisations supported by ActionAid had a service-based approach to education work. There was support for non formal education but the approach was passive. Now we work more on quality education with government and non-government organisations, strengthening school management committees, increasing the number of women members, etc.

In the future, our education work will focus on creating an education system which is built around local calendars and timetables. We will pressurise the Government to make commitments to free compulsory education and to ensure that education policy reflects the ideas, beliefs and demands of the people – becoming flexible and responsive to people’s needs. We will track government spending on education both nationally and locally to ensure that existing resources are used well and so that we can make a coherent case for increasing investment.

**Burundi**

ActionAid Burundi’s work has not changed dramatically over the last three years because Burundi was and still is in perpetual insecurity, characterised by the destruction of school infrastructure. Our work continues to focus on the rehabilitation of school infrastructure, reconstruction and peace education in primary schools.

It is difficult to envisage the next three years in the current context, because everything depends on how the situation in the country develops, and in particular where we work. However, the hope is that the ARUSHA agreements can support positive progress. The PRSP for Burundi which is currently under development should also improve conditions for education in Burundi, especially for school-age children.

**Pakistan**

Previously, ActionAid had a service delivery approach. Local communities were less aware of education issues and less involved in running services. They were not empowered to demand education from the government. People became dependent on service delivery. However, over the last three years we have shifted to advocacy work and strengthening people’s capacity to demand education from the government.

The Pakistan government has taken quality of education as an important theme to work on. Partners and government in almost all the areas where we work have been co-operating to influence students’ values, producing primary school materials that promote human rights, religious tolerance and non-violence. Sports and extra-curricular activities, such as music and art, have also been introduced for boys and girls in some secondary schools, to help inculcate democratic norms, tolerance and positive attitudes by providing positive alternatives. This is part of the quality education and citizenship programme and is educating students about life-skills values. It is especially positive for girls, as cultural norms do not encourage girls to participate in sports. It has also created space for parent-teacher interaction when they gather for sports or other events. Similar activities are being offered to encourage out-of-school children to interact with students.

In the coming years, the rights-based approach will be clearer and better established. Communities will demand their rights and make the government accountable. ActionAid’s work will continue but ActionAid itself will be less visible. Communities and government will be more strongly linked to one another. These changes will occur, because education is fast being seen as a right rather than a necessity. When you relate education to basic rights people start demanding it.

**Ghana**

Because of ActionAid’s new strategy, there has been a move away from service delivery to a rights-based approach to sustain the management of education delivery. We now work on strengthening people’s capacity to demand or have access to education. We respond to communities’ needs through the driving force of Reflect circles and the actions identified by participants in these circles.

In the future, we will do more advocacy work, particularly focusing on the quality of education. We will be working more with professional teachers’ unions.

**6.3 The overall evolution of ActionAid’s approaches to education – a synthesis**

ActionAid’s present strategic approach to education has evolved out of ongoing critical analysis of our field experience. This evolution has often been a result of the failure of, or contradictions in, previous interventions – we firmly believe in learning from mistakes as well as from successes. This section aims to give a synthesis of our overall evolution referring back to many of the examples given elsewhere in this review. However, this
narrative is inevitably a simplification, and suggests a uniform or even process of learning across the organisation. This is clearly not the case, and many programmes continue to work at different points of this evolution for different reasons.

In the early years (1970s) direct support was given to individual children, especially girls, from poor families, helping them to access school. This was soon found to be random and therefore inequitable as well as far from cost effective.

In the 1980s our approach shifted to supporting schools in poor areas, particularly focusing on infrastructure, with active community participation in developing low-cost school structures with local materials. However, an evaluation of 16 years of building schools in Kenya found that it had no notable impact on school enrolment and none on achievement. There was even evidence that poor children were more systematically excluded as the relatively better-off parents on school management committees chose to increase school fees as the government promoted cost-sharing.

In the 1990s baseline data in areas where ActionAid works showed that often the poorest 50% of children were unable to access school at all owing to the direct and indirect costs involved. With government systems over-burdened and slow to change, ActionAid focused on developing non-formal education centres in the poorest communities. These centres promoted the active involvement of poor parents in management and developed flexible timetables and calendars to accommodate working children. The curriculum focused on a core set of skills, usually taught in the mother tongue with locally relevant materials and child-centred methodologies.

However, in 1996 a review of our NFE education experiences showed some fundamental contradictions. Unintentionally we were absolving governments of responsibility and becoming agents of the privatisation of education for poor children, as governments suffering from structural adjustment were reluctant to take on the centres when ActionAid left an area. In some contexts a two or three-tier system was evolving with no coherent planning and no quality control. Most worryingly some children who completed an NFE course were then unable to access government schools either because their learning was not recognised or they were not competent in one of the subjects taught in formal schools (usually the ex-colonial language). Locally, there was often rivalry with government teachers looking down on NFE teachers as amateurs, whilst NFE teachers regarded formal school teachers as lazy and bureaucratic. Moreover, however many centres we ran, it was clear that we would only ever be a drop in the ocean. The real challenge lay in reforming the government system.

This led ActionAid to develop a strategy called Access, which focuses on mainstreaming the best practice of NFE into the formal system – seeking to get recognition from government for existing NFE centres as satellite or feeder schools and to collaborate with government in experimental and innovative work based on this model. Many countries are still developing these experiences, with some notable successes such as Ethiopia, where many district and regional governments have recognised Access.

By 1997 ActionAid had conceived its role as moving from providing to enabling: instead of directly providing education services our role was now to enable communities to demand quality education and governments to effectively deliver those services.

However it became clear that influencing educational reform at the micro level was only one path. Bringing that experience to bear nationally through engagement in education policy debates was equally important. An analysis of policy processes in education showed that, in most cases, Ministry of Education officials developed education policy primarily under the influence of bilateral and multi-lateral donors. With government budgets struggling to pay teacher salaries (and usually over 90% of education budgets being absorbed in this way), the only serious money for reform came from donors, but this money came with conditions. Within this policy process, national civil society rarely has a meaningful say and the parents of poor children, who most need the reform, have no voice whatsoever. This democratic deficit in education is the fundamental root of all the other problems of access, quality and equity, which we have struggled with over the years.

This led ActionAid to develop Elimu – a programme of work which involves strengthening the voices of poor people in education decision-making at all levels. At the local level this means enabling poor people to have a greater say in the running of schools. At a national level it means strengthening the voice of civil society, building alliances that will place education reform higher up the domestic political agenda. And at an international level this means challenging the dominant role of donors and arguing for more effective, better coordinated aid. In the past three years we have played a major facilitating role in building national alliances or coalitions on basic education in many countries across Africa, Asia and Latin America.

We played an important role, as active partners of the Global Campaign for Education, in influencing the framework for action that emerged from the World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000, creating more space for national civil society to engage in future education policy processes. The challenge is now to ensure that the space that has been created is effectively used.

Another challenge is ensuring that we do not
simply create a cosy club of NGOs dealing with government policy at a national level, divorced from the local level. Ensuring that the voices of poor people are directly heard at local and national level is essential. It is in this grassroots work that we can draw on the work for which ActionAid is perhaps best known in the field of education – linking adult learning to empowerment through the Reflect approach.

The Reflect approach also plays a key role in underpinning ActionAid’s move towards a rights-based approach. It is hard to access information about your rights, let alone assert your rights if you do not have access to or confidence in the dominant means of communication – which in respect of rights tends to be literacy. Indeed, in some contexts there is a clear equation between illiteracy and illegalisation – and between literacy and legalisation. There is also a clear and proven inter-dependency between adult and child literacy – and yet almost no serious investment is now made in adult literacy, which is squeezed out of government budgets and low down the agenda of major donors.

Having started life as an approach to adult literacy, Reflect is a powerful base for the rights-based approach. More so indeed as Reflect has evolved rapidly and now there are many programmes working beyond literacy – focusing more on strengthening people’s capacity to communicate through whatever media of communication are most relevant to them. It is increasingly recognised that Reflect is about the creation of a democratic space where people have the time to analyse issues for themselves. It is a basis for mobilisation, an operating system which enables us to strengthen people’s own organisations and their capacity to advocate for themselves at all levels.

Other work is now emerging that can also play a powerful role in developing a rights-based approach to education. The strengthening of statutory and non-statutory organisations at a local level can be central to improving the accountability of local schools. This may involve work with PTAs or school management committees – pushing for them to be able to fulfil their statutory role and even extend that role. Organising village education committees or other non-statutory mechanisms to mobilise local people on education can also be important. There is increasing emphasis on budget analysis and budget tracking as mechanisms to reveal the power dimensions of education systems. All these strategies share a central concern with making education more accountable – and in doing so narrowing the frighteningly large gap between governments and their citizens. This contributes to a wider objective of improving governance and deepening democratisation.

### 6.4 Recent developments and future directions

A meeting of the International Coordinating Team of the Elimu campaign in Dhaka in April 2002 analysed the Elimu campaign to date, going back to first principles, and determined that, whilst ActionAid should continue and deepen its campaigning work on education, the Elimu brand should be dissolved. This is significant as the future directions that emerged place an emphasis on the integration of all ActionAid’s education work at all levels.

It was felt that, without doubt, Elimu had achieved what it set out to do – namely to facilitate and support the emergence of dynamic national, regional and international structures to strengthen Southern perspectives and to advocate and lobby national governments in the North and South, as well as bilateral and multi-lateral development institutions (and other international development actors) to generate the right commitments in Dakar and begin to make these commitments good in a post-Dakar context. These efforts have combined to achieve:

- coherent joint action internationally to influence national EFA plans;
- stronger voice and participation of the South;
- greater space for, and acceptance of, civil society actors as important partners in policy debates at national, regional and international levels.

Evidence of this includes greater participatory approaches rooted in the experiences of the South, a strong supportive and facilitative role in the emergence of a number of key national coalitions in many Southern countries, a strong and definitive role in the emergence of the ANCEFA regional network in Africa, and a positive and proactive role in the emergence and development of the Global Campaign for Education (GCE).

Three key emerging points, though, were that:

- The Elimu brand was not used universally or centrally in national and regional advocacy and campaigning activities and it was a confusing concept for external audiences in the light of the emergence and growth (as well as ActionAid’s participation) in the GCE. Equally, internally, there has been inconsistent understanding of the concept.
- There was not enough effort to link local level work and processes with work at higher levels. Successes in national level coalition and alliance building did not exploit enough the opportunities for mobilising local effort.
- As a campaign Elimu failed to synergise and mobilise passion around a single issue, acting instead as an approach to generate national campaigns as well as doing lobbying and advocacy work at various levels. A campaign, in the orthodox sense, did not emerge.

In the light of an overall successful and positive contribution from Elimu (as well as its limitations),
and recognising the changes in the landscape since Dakar (most notably, the emergence of the GCE), the team then considered how best ActionAid could continue to provide a strong and positive input towards the achievement of Education for All through our work at local, national and international levels, contributing what constitutes ActionAid’s distinctiveness and added value.

In doing a fundamental review of the state of education, several key issues emerged including:

- at local level, prospects for quality education (for poor children and adults) remain limited;
- gender equity is still a challenge;
- at national level, genuine political and bureaucratic commitment for systemic change and resource allocation is still missing despite cosmetic changes to put the ‘paperwork’ in place;
- at international level, resource commitments from partners and institutions continue to elude us with continually shifting goalposts and new conditionalities in Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, Expenditure Reviews and the New Partnership for African Development etc – although recent developments in the 2002 Spring meetings of the World Bank and IMF are encouraging.

**ActionAid’s distinctive value addition**

The team reaffirmed that ActionAid’s analysis of the education situation points to some clear and distinctive areas where it has contributions to make. We set them out under four main categories:

**Popular mobilisation**

- use of Reflect and community based work, both directly and through partnerships;
- an ongoing proactive role in the Global Week of Action activities;
- the development of an explicit ActionAid international campaign around a single issue;
- coalitions with a broad range of partners including trade unions, popular and grassroots movements, etc.

**Governance**

- work on budget tracking and ‘cost-of-education’;
- determination to contribute to good management and better governance;
- work in pursuit of ensuring the existence of Education for All action plans and the establishment of appropriate forums for monitoring and accountability;
- continuing support for coalition and network building and strengthening.

**Legal entitlements**

- contributions, from a rights-based perspective, to the attainment of education as a basic, justifiable right in countries where we work – including legislative advocacy;
- contributions to innovative approaches to thematic issues within education which achieve Education for All.

**Resourcing**

- influencing and contributing to the achievement of a Global Initiative on financing (as well as critiquing, monitoring and keeping track of commitments) through the process in train with the Global Campaign for Education;
- use of budget-tracking and ‘cost-of-education’ work to continue to pressure for free, quality Education for All;

In addition, the group identified five crosscutting issues (the impact of conflict; health-related issues and HIV/AIDS; social and cultural exclusion including gender; disability; and opportunity cost/livelihoods of the poor) where ActionAid, in its core work, has distinctive experience and expertise to offer in the process of achieving Education for All.
Arising out of this analysis, in summary four key areas of work emerge:
- advocating and campaigning for resources – work on cost tracking and participatory public finance analysis (including budget tracking);
- focusing on the achievement of EFA goals – work on national EFA or education plans and mechanisms for ongoing civil society engagement in this process;
- working for the securing of education as a constitutional right;
- promotion of a ‘campaigning’ mode within local and national alliances and coalitions.

The three main mechanisms by which ActionAid can contribute its distinctive competencies and add value to the process of ensuring the attainment of Education for All goals are:
- working through the Global Education Campaign – ActionAid should work through the GCE in the effort to achieve broad international lobby and advocacy objectives
- continuing with a core set of activities which have hitherto been located under the banner of Elimu – stop using the name Elimu but continue with the work that Elimu has been doing
- developing a distinctive ActionAid international campaign around a single issue (an internal draft paper has now been circulated called “Stop cheating our children”).
7 Conclusions

7.1 Confronting the crisis in education

The education system in most areas of the countries where ActionAid works is in a terrible state of crisis – much more acute than is generally realised.

Looked at from the perspective of a poor family, investment in education is an expensive and often unrewarding gamble. It is never easy to send a child to school when that child could instead be playing an important social or economic role, helping the family survive. It becomes even more difficult when you have to pay for your child to go to school – and the costs keep coming, term after term, with a range of compulsory and voluntary charges often mixed up.

When your child comes home complaining that they were beaten or harassed, or that no teacher arrived today, or that they have no textbook or the written word is contained largely within the four walls of the local school, rarely spilling out into daily life.

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When your child comes home complaining that they were beaten or harassed, or that no teacher arrived today, or that they have no textbook or cannot understand the language the teacher uses, it is hard to keep faith in the value of schooling. When your child is small and cannot hear or be heard in a class of up to one hundred other children, and when, at the end of the year your child is unable to pass the exams you had to pay for, and has to start again from scratch, it is difficult to know whether to blame your child or the school. If you do manage to sustain your belief and your child completes five or six years of schooling, what then? There is virtually no prospect of sending them to secondary school (the costs would absorb a substantial part of your family income).

But with primary schooling alone, what has your child gained and lost? Perhaps they have gained a little social status locally. But they may well have lost out on some of the complex experiential and inherited knowledge that their parents’ generation gained in childhood – that is important for local livelihoods and survival. They may have gained new expectations, gleaned from images in murky textbooks but these may be at the cost of feeling socially removed, even cynical about local culture and ways of life. They may have gained some literacy skills – but these may prove of little or no value in an environment where the written word is contained largely within the four walls of the local school, rarely spilling out into daily life.

It should be of little surprise to us that, when parents are forced to pay up front to gamble on this sort of education, some refuse. Indeed opting out may well be a wiser choice where the odds are stacked so high against any real pay-back on the gamble (particularly for girls). When graduates in many countries are unemployed or working in low paid unskilled jobs it is hard to argue that education is the passport to social mobility. Disillusion rapidly spreads through the system, forcing people to question the value of taking even the first few steps on the ladder.

But education is a right. It is not something that can or should be measured only by economic returns. It should be measured also in human terms, for its role in raising awareness and understanding, in opening minds to new possibilities, in building dignity and self-respect, in creating opportunities and choices. Many schools are not places that achieve such goals or even work seriously towards them, and this represents another dimension of the crisis – that schools are not always places where the right to education is actually respected.

When we are asserting people’s right to education, getting people access is only one part of the story. Ensuring that access leads to learning, to education, is much more complex. Fundamental to achieving this is the need to assert other children’s rights – so that the school becomes an institution that values and respects rights rather than violating them.

We should not deny that in some cases schools have become the worst violators of children’s rights, containing, suppressing, intimidating and silencing children. Such are the characteristics of an unaccountable institution or private fiefdom – particularly one with scarce resources. The solution lies in demanding accountability and transparency at all levels, so that the school is genuinely in the public sphere and the government’s record in providing education is open to public scrutiny. What goes on in the name of education must be open to public debate, so that education systems become services responsive to local people, not self-contained institutions operating on people.

The most fundamental step in achieving this is for people to see education as their right. In too many contexts, schooling is still seen as a privilege or a luxury, as something bestowed on people by a benevolent external agency. It is a hugely significant step if people who are presently excluded, or who are receiving “schooling” but not “education”, come to recognise that education is their right. Once people start to demand change and mobilise for change, when they begin to organise and hold the State accountable for providing good quality, relevant education, then the reform of education moves from being a doomed bureaucratic project into being a real possibility. It moves from being a closed private concern to being an open public responsibility. This is our central challenge.

To rise to the challenge we need people to engage on education issues with passion and
urgency. But education suffers from a rather bizarre curse, which tends to limit this. That curse is consensus. Everyone agrees that education is a good thing. Everyone agrees that we should be doing more, spending more, improving quality. No-one will argue vigorously against investment in education. But because there is consensus, because there is no conflict, there is also no change. Education is always on the agenda but never quite at the top. Something else always takes over which has greater urgency or yields simpler, shorter-term results for a government or donor. In order to get education to the top of the political agenda – to make it a domestic and international priority that demands attention – we need to create controversy. We need to provoke people, generate anger and outrage at the state of education, at the injustice and inequity in education systems. We need to build up a passionate movement to demand change. ActionAid is in a good position to take up this challenge.

7.2 ActionAid: responding to the crisis in education

The survey shows that ActionAid has a huge range of experience in the field of education around the world – working from early childhood through to adult education. In the past most of our education interventions were clearly located within a needs-based or service-delivery framework. This has shifted in the past three years so that much of our education work (though with some exceptions) is now consistent with taking a rights-based approach. Some country programmes have moved more quickly than others, so that some are just at the stage of developing a conceptual understanding of rights, whilst others are applying this understanding to their work. In many cases, there are activities that ActionAid has been engaged in for a number of years (such as Reflect or support to PTAs, village education committees etc) which are now found to be more coherent and effective when placed in a rights-based framework. Some projects are laying out a clear path for the future, showing how local level action-research can feed into national policy work and how local level mobilisation can be the foundation for building wider public pressure on politicians and public officials.

But there are still a number of countries that are struggling to shift the focus of their work to a better balance between meeting immediate needs (services) and addressing people’s rights. There is a continuum – and adopting a rights-based approach does not mean that we should have no engagement in services – but the review indicates that there are still places where we are creating unsustainable structures for delivering education that run parallel to and may even compete with State delivery systems. Some ActionAid projects or partners run non-formal education programmes for children without any serious attempts to integrate with or influence government. This sort of work leads to a serious contradiction, where communities are more likely to demand or expect services to be delivered by ActionAid than they are to demand or expect them from government. This is inconsistent with a rights-based approach.

Over the past years our understanding and positioning on education has sharpened. We now have a much clearer analysis of the international dynamics affecting education policy and practice. We are engaged at a national level with governments and with civil society alliances. Our local work is increasingly focused on people’s rights. However, there is much more that ActionAid can do to deepen the links between its education work at different levels – to ensure that future campaigning work is rooted in local mobilisation and practical programme experience. Our local level presence in so many poor areas in poor countries is a major strength that must be harnessed more effectively for our campaigning work. In turn, our campaigning work at national and international levels creates opportunities that can enrich our local engagement and can generate wider change. We must seek coherence and connections between our education work at all levels, from local through to international.
8.1 Overall recommendations

1 Our starting point must be the assertion of education as a fundamental right in itself and as an enabling right, a catalyst for human development in the fullest sense. We need to ensure that all staff and partners internalise a rights-based perspective in education work at all levels. To achieve this we need to:
   - be very clear about asserting the role of the State, moving away from the traditional role of NGOs in directly running schools or NFE centres;
   - clearly position ourselves alongside those people whose right to education has been denied, enabling them to mobilise to assert their rights, building pressure from below;
   - facilitate poor people to become active agents in negotiating for their rights, enabling them to define for themselves what “free quality basic education” means;
   - ensure that this assertion of education rights is rooted in wider human rights, values and principles – of equity, fairness, non-discrimination and accountability.

2 We must continue to support the building of national alliances and coalitions on basic education in each country. To achieve this we need to:
   - support the struggle to secure free quality basic education as a constitutional right where this is not already the case;
   - promote the analysis and tracking of education budgets and revenues, particularly tracking the costs passed on to parents and relating this to local participatory monitoring of education quality;
   - promote a more campaigning mode in the work of national coalitions, ensuring that there are stronger links between national and local work, and developing comprehensive communication strategies to reach out to and involve the wider public.

3 We need to continue and deepen our support to the Global Campaign for Education. To achieve this we need to:
   - end the separate “branding” of the Elimu campaign which might otherwise compete for space, time and recognition;
   - ensure that the GCE becomes increasingly responsive to the work of national and regional coalitions in the South;
   - maintain pressure through GCE on the international community to live up to the promises made in Dakar.

4 We should develop a common identity for our education work at all levels, which captures our positioning with poor people (rather than for them) and generates passionate engagement (see box right). The artificial consensus on education needs to be challenged and we need to provoke controversy and generate passion if we are to achieve change. This common identity should unite us across ActionAid whilst allowing for engagement on different education issues, policies and struggles in different contexts.
Rationale for “Stop Cheating Our Children”!

We need a new uniting framework for our education work across the organisation – to bring together our strengths at different levels. Governments in the North and South are not keeping education at the top of their agenda – and ultimately they will not do so unless there is concerted and coordinated public pressure on them to deliver on their promises. If we are to achieve this we need to be concerted and coordinate ourselves and we need to generate passionate engagement, both from staff and from the wider public at all levels. We need a new approach to “campaigning”.

To achieve this we need to overcome the false consensus that surrounds so much education work. People will almost invariably put education high on their agenda – whether they are poor or middle class, whether they are politicians or citizens. But because everyone agrees that education is important, there is rarely any controversy or conflict and because of this there is rarely any real change. Education never quite reaches the very top of the agenda. But if Education For All goals are to be met, it needs to be right up there. So, we need to make education controversial. We need to tap into the passion and outrage that lies under the surface of the superficial consensus.

We also need to break the myth that education is somehow too complex or that it is best left to technical experts. Everyone can contribute and has a right to contribute to education debates. It is not a subject best left to government officials, agency staff or even to trained teachers. We need people to believe that their active engagement can make a real difference to the quality of education.

It would be impossible to mobilise everyone across ActionAid around any one specific policy position on education. Partly this is because realities are diverse across continents and countries, and partly this is because it is difficult to generate passion and mobilisation around a simple policy position on education. Besides, however much we consulted, at this stage, there would inevitably be a top-down dimension to determining the policy issue to be prioritised and some people would feel left out or would disagree with the issue selected. We therefore propose that ActionAid builds a common identity on education work by agreeing a simple shared slogan

“Stop Cheating Our Children” is designed to promote controversy. The word “cheating” implies the violation of a right. It invites the question, how are our children being cheated? And by whom? This has many answers and these answers would frame different work at different levels. Children are cheated because:

- quality education is a basic right of which they are deprived
- their parents are forced to pay for something that should be free
- schools are in a scandalous state of dis-repair
- many resources supposedly targeted at education are mis-used or disappear
- large class sizes mean that schools are more like prisons or zoos, containing not educating;
- the government is not taking responsibility or living up to its promises;
- any government that is serious about providing quality Education for All citizens can now (theoretically) secure resources to do so (they should at least put the international resource commitment made in Dakar to the test);
- the international community is so far failing to live up to its resource commitment and is failing to respond in a coordinated fashion as promised;
- the international community keeps shifting the goalposts making this process a bureaucratic quagmire for governments (with little clarity over the status of EFA action plans, education sector reform plans, PRSPs, NEPAD, fast tracking and special initiatives such as that on girl’s education).

The use of the term “our” positions ActionAid clearly with those who are excluded. It is not a neutral position. We believe that this sort of slogan could make a real difference in mobilising public pressure at all levels to ensure that the commitments made in Dakar are met, and Education for All becomes a reality. Without this sort of new momentum we may well find ourselves facing the same crisis in education ten years from now. ActionAid is excellently placed to make this strategic contribution.

ActionAid projects and partners are therefore encouraged to start using the slogan in whatever way you wish. You should start by asking what “Stop Cheating Our Children” might mean in your context. Who does the “our” refer to? In what way are children being cheated? Who is doing the cheating? How might this slogan add a new dimension to your existing programme or policy work? How might you be able to make links through this between local, national and international levels? When might you use the slogan and how (in meetings, demonstrations, publicity materials, reports)? On the basis of diverse use of this slogan we will then build common threads of work across countries – bringing together people who are using the slogan in similar ways (eg linking those working with particular categories of disadvantaged groups, linking those opposing user fees or those exposing gender inequity, bringing together those whose focus is to challenge donors or those whose focus is on the lamentable quality of schooling).

But a final note of caution: This slogan should always be seen as a means to generate passionate engagement and mobilisation. It should not become an end in itself.
8.2 Recommendations for local level work

At a local level we should conceive our engagement in education as an integral part of a larger struggle for quality education at national and international levels. The following recommendations capture best practice as we have seen from the review and analysis of present work:

1 Collect information and build your perspective: ActionAid’s engagement in education work locally must be based on a clear understanding of the situation and how it is changing, so we must start with and sustain data collection and research because information really is power. The survey shows the huge potential power of generating a strong information base from which we can build our analysis. The following are areas of particular importance for helping develop a local perspective on education:
   - tracking exclusion and drop out – the categories of children affected and the causes;
   - collecting detailed breakdowns of local costs charged to parents (whether formal or informal) for access to education (and relate this to local incomes etc);
   - understanding the government budget for education, working out per-capita cost sharing and spending locally, and how this relates to the national picture (looking at equity issues); tracking the use of the budget in practice;
   - tracking completion and not just enrolment; tracking entry to secondary schools;
   - developing indicators of quality in education that can be monitored easily, independently and collaboratively;
   - looking for evidence of, and publicising the local impact of HIV/AIDS on education;
   - looking at gender equity in all areas, and ensuring we always gender dis-aggregate;
   - not relying on official statistics, but doing spot-checks to verify and expose the discrepancies of official data and collect original data;
   - collating a range of perspectives and testimonies on the state of education locally as experienced by poor people, and ensuring we do all this with affected people rather than for them –if done properly this is a powerful basis for engaging people, generating a sense of injustice and sowing the seeds for mobilisation around education as a right;
   - ensuring that all information collected is shared widely through diverse media to reach the general public; channelling it to local decision-makers and stakeholders as well as sharing it with relevant national coalitions and alliances so that a real national picture is developed over time;
   - drawing on the work of other organisations in other areas of the country to help contextualise local situations.

2 Position ActionAid and mobilise demand: Focus on working with those people who are excluded from present provision or are victims of it, such as parents of children who are forced to drop out early. This should be the clear positioning of ActionAid – our vantage point for engagement with education locally. We should work with these groups to collect information (as above), to deepen their analysis of the situation, to help them arrive at an understanding of their right to education, and to help them build effective demand. It is through popular pressure and mobilisation of demand that we will change the balance of power in the making of education policy and the delivery of education in practice. There are various strategies we can use, including:
   - using the Reflect approach, especially where it is conceived and used as an “operating system” rather than as a single intervention: enabling poor people to find the time and space to do their own analysis, define their own actions, construct their own change process and develop their own capacity for effective communication;
   - using public hearings on the state or role of education in society, and other approaches such as theatre, song and dance, to place education on the agenda for local debate, giving people space to comment and a sense that they have a right to comment;
   - forging links with, or helping to build, social movements or people’s organisations that represent excluded groups – so that mobilisation on education connects with other identity-based mobilisation;
   - generating a sense of outrage at the injustices in education – building passionate rather than technical involvement –this may lead in many different directions;
   - making links with national coalitions/alliances to help develop mobilisation at a local level that can have a larger national impact – and over time to ensure that civil society policy engagement at national level is based on priorities/issues arising from the base;
   - developing strong links with the media to multiply the impact of local mobilisation;
   - using the slogan “Stop Cheating Our Children” to add another dimension to all the above work.
3 Don't deliver the services: If, having mobilised demand for education, we respond by simply delivering the services ourselves, this defeats the purpose, reduces government responsibility and acts to demobilise people. In those cases where we are already engaged in service delivery without a clear rights-based framework and without clear means for achieving wider change or impact, projects may need to be phased out or closed down. Project Managers and Country Directors need to question the legitimacy of any education projects which focus on straightforward delivery of primary education. They should seriously question and be ready to end any ActionAid involvement in school building (which should not be our role) or the running of scholarship schemes (which should be avoided even by government unless schemes can be run in fully transparent and equitable ways, with people accessing them as a right). We should not perpetuate unsustainable service delivery for primary-school-age children where this is undermining, or running in isolation from (or parallel to), local government schools. The delivery of basic education for children is fundamentally the responsibility of government and we should not absolve them of that responsibility by taking it on ourselves.

4 Promote innovation by, and channel resources through, government: Where there are insufficient resources in government to respond to demand and deliver basic education to all children in the areas where we work, rather than take this on ourselves, if we have the means we should seek to channel resources through government and work with government to achieve local education reform. We should use our funds and engagement to leverage from government greater transparency and accountability to local citizens (rather than to us). We should strive to avoid past divisiveness and avoid using polarising terms such as “non-fomal” whilst remaining true to the practical learning from our experience. In the context of decentralisation policies it is increasingly possible to work with local government to test out innovations and to make education more flexible and responsive to local needs – or to extend access where there is clear evidence of gaps in provision. The local information base we have generated (see 8.2 (1)) becomes crucial in negotiating for change. This may involve helping government locally in developing action-research programmes that include:

- developing new teaching and learning materials;
- supporting in-service training;
- establishing satellite schools;
- adjusting the curriculum;
- promoting tolerance; education for peace;
- increasing gender equity in schools;
- responding to or addressing HIV/AIDS;
- any other initiatives to create responsive, quality Education for All.

In some contexts central government bureaucracy or power will limit the space for local innovation – and in such cases this becomes an issue to be taken up at a national level through coalitions or alliances. In other cases local government officials, or the District Education Officer, may present blocks, refusing for example to collaborate or to be transparent about the local budget. This may lead to more confrontational campaigning and mobilisation (depending on the context) – though constructive engagement should always be the starting point.

All innovative work that is undertaken with government must be developed with careful attention to per-capita costs – to ensure that all children are treated equally and that all innovations are replicable.

In some contexts, such as India, only large-scale models will have any impact on wider government policy or practice – but to be effective these must be proved to work in the context of government bureaucracy so collaboration with government is even more indispensable.

Rigorous documentation and evaluation of all such action-research programmes is essential if we are to use these to influence wider government policy and practice.

5 Strengthen local governance and accountability: We need to strengthen the capacity of local people to hold schools accountable – whether through statutory or non-statutory bodies (school management committees, parent teacher associations, village education committees, etc), running training workshops or using Reflect, helping them to deepen their analysis, strengthen their voice and expand their roles. We should look to federate such organisations at district and up to national level. These groups may also have a significant role in the mobilisation of demand.

Through these mechanisms we should also look to promote local initiatives to generate a more caring community – so that there are mutual support mechanisms particularly to help those children who are most excluded.

6 Support the full Education for All agenda: There may be a particular need to directly support those areas of basic education that are
not presently within the viable reach of government, for example early childhood education and adult basic education (particularly for women). Whilst we seek to make governments respond to the demand for quality education in primary schools, we should not lose the importance of a wider vision of Education for All. In some countries it is not realistic for us to demand that governments immediately fulfil the entire EFA agenda themselves – but these might become areas of focused demand in future. In the meantime we need to develop good practice in such areas, working closely with government where possible, documenting our work and showing the inter-dependency between, for example, the education of women and girls. We should learn from, promote and contribute to the continuing evolution of the Reflect approach and we should seek to support new innovative work with pre-school children.

7 Look at our own accountability: Relationships are a 2-way process. We can’t ask our partners to be accountable and transparent when we are not transparent in our budgets. We need to be honest about how much ActionAid gets, how much it spends on education and what on. Unless we are accountable and transparent we cannot expect the same from the government, donors and other partners. Indeed, we can actively use the process of being transparent with our own budget and expenditure to develop people’s skills and change their attitudes to the budgets of other institutions.

In summary, there is a crucial need in education provision for complementarity between accountability from above and from below. While the state bears the main responsibility for providing school facilities and appointing teachers, cooperative community action from below has much to contribute in ensuring that all parents are able to send their children to school and that teachers deliver. Community mobilisation is crucial to securing State commitment, but ongoing community involvement is then needed to ensure accountability and responsiveness of State provision.

8.3 Recommendations for national and international levels

We have a rich base of programme experience on education which we need to share systematically with other NGOs, governments and other stakeholders (as well as being open to learning from them) in order to develop common positions for wider educational reform. This wider influencing work should not be left to someone in the capital city, but should be an integral part of everyone’s job within a local programme and should be systematically woven into the design of any education intervention.

We need to work to build connections between our work at all levels – and to root all this work in our clear positioning, and passionate engagement in support of excluded groups. Our passion and our politics need to be up-front and we need to build from our grassroots engagement upwards. The following recommendations capture best practice as we have seen from the review and analysis of present work:

1 Strengthen networks and alliances: ActionAid needs to continue to facilitate the strengthening of networks and alliances at all levels, to strengthen civil society voices. We must use all means to influence national and international policies, particularly looking at education within PRSP processes and constitutional or legal reform affecting education. We need to ensure that these coalitions bring together NGOs and unions – who need to work together and resolve differences.

2 Use budget analysis and budget tracking as a glue between our local and national work: But the analysis of budgets must include the analysis of revenues (from taxation, donors, etc) and especially the costs that parents have to pay to send their children to school. Without tracking costs next to budgets we will not get the whole picture. In order to be complete this financial information also needs to be linked to wider data/statistics on education (see 8.2.1) Once we understand the national situation we can take clear positions.

3 Develop a national consensus around what “free education” means in each country and campaign to remove all user fees or other costs which violate the agreed definition of free education seeking for it to be made a constitutional right where it is not already. In many countries government’s schools are legally “free”, but nevertheless parents are still paying a huge percentage of their annual income on various costs to send their children to these public schools. What does free really mean for
us, and what does it mean to our governments? It is clear that a campaign for free education as a constitutional right might have a dramatic impact on access to education but such a campaign will be hollow without a shared vision of the term “free” in each context. In some contexts, positions may be taken that certain costs should be abolished and others subsidised for children from poorer families (so long as we can show such subsidies can be run efficiently, equitably and transparently).

4 **In the quest to achieve Education for All, we must never forget what education is for:** National and international campaigning, while needing focus, must not be reductive, assuming that getting children into school is an end in itself. There isn’t enough debate on the role of education in society, the appropriateness or relevance of education, the status and skills of teachers, the curriculum etc. We need to ensure that we keep a strong focus on quality – particularly from a vantage point of equity. The elite in most countries already receives quality education. The challenge is to spread that so quality education is available to all. The millennium development goals only focus on primary school completion and gender parity which are important issues but are not sufficient. We should be actively engaged in establishing national working groups with government to pull together learning around quality and around innovations or models developed by NGOs so that this is channelled into government policy and practice.

5 **Collate information on the impact of HIV/AIDS on education** and the roles education can play to help address HIV/AIDS. This work is urgently needed.

6 **Remember secondary schooling:** Most NGOs ignore secondary schooling and yet the Education for All vision and Dakar Framework for Action involve support to basic education up to at least lower secondary school. Investments in education must include balanced investment in secondary education to avoid future bottlenecks which will undermine demand. Investment in primary education should not happen at the cost of secondary education. We must seek to keep secondary education as a government responsibility and promote a strong government role in regulation and oversight of all schools including private schools, church schools and madrasas, which often exclude poorer children. There is a proliferation of such schools in some countries and a growing risk of such a trend leading to the breakdown of any unitary government framework. A key concern of government should be to try to ensure balanced per-capita spending across the whole system, so, for example, private schools should not be eligible for any government subsidies, tax relief or benefits where their education spending per child already exceeds the national average. Government also has a key role in ensuring minimum levels of quality are reached across the whole system. Equally important is the government role to look at the nature of education provided, to ensure that it is, for example, gender sensitive, that it promotes tolerance of others and that children’s minds are being ‘opened up’ rather than ‘closed down’. We should campaign for secondary schooling that is responsive to the needs of the society.

7 **Recognise that international or regional coalitions on education can only be strengthened if national and local level networks are strengthened equally.** We need to invest in alliance building at all levels.
8 Maintain pressure on Northern governments and donors to deliver on promises they have made: The commitment made in Dakar that no country that has a viable plan for educating its citizens will be allowed to fail for lack of resources should be taken absolutely seriously. We need to maintain pressure on Northern governments and donors to deliver on this and other promises that they have made. This should be done within the framework of a rights-based approach – that there is a right for people to demand substantial, effective and coordinated support from the international community for achieving Education for All.

9 Recognise that there are risks in moving towards an approach in which we are clearly positioned with excluded groups and are promoting mobilisation: In this work we have more responsibility to the communities with whom we work than ever before – to stay with them and support their struggle rather than to seed something and then leave.

10 Keep education as a major priority area of work: In order to develop full coherence across the organisation we need to provide more support for critical reflection and learning, promoting more cross-national exchanges and the sharing of innovations and insights. In order to ensure that international campaigning is firmly rooted and southern-led we need to ensure that staff in all countries have the time and budget available to invest in regional and international engagement on education. Horizontal communication needs to be reinforced. Policy and advocacy work on education should be seen as part of everyone’s work – not the preserve of a few specialists. More capacity building is still required on analysing the rights-based approach to education (perhaps using this report as a starting point for critical debate), particularly on approaches to mobilisation and campaigning on education.

The Commonwealth Education Fund

The Commonwealth Education Fund, a partnership between the British Government, business and non-governmental organisations, was set up earlier in 2002 by the Chancellor to provide strategic support to the UN goals of universal primary education by 2015 and gender parity in schooling by 2005. Gordon Brown, Chancellor in the UK Government committed £10 million to the CEF and made a promise to match donations from business pound for pound. Under the chairmanship of Sir Edward George, Governor of the Bank of England, a high profile Oversight Committee is working to ensure that the total fund will be close to £30 million.

This fund will be managed collaboratively by ActionAid, Oxfam and Save the Children – with ActionAid playing the role of overall Managing Agency. Three people have been recruited in ActionAid to coordinate the work. Activities will cover three broad areas (all of which respond to priorities that emerge from this review):

- Strengthening civil society participation in the design and implementation of national and local education plans and frameworks. Particular priority will be given to supporting initiatives that can accelerate progress towards gender equity in education;
- Enabling local communities to monitor government spending on education, both at the national and local levels;
- Supporting innovative ways for civil society to ensure that all children, especially girls and the most vulnerable and disadvantaged (including street children, former child soldiers and nomadic children) are able to access quality education.

The Commonwealth Education Fund will work in 17 of the poorest Commonwealth countries to help fund advocacy for education reform. The 17 countries are: Bangladesh, Camerooon, Gambia, Ghana, India, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

The CEF is based on the strong belief that achieving universal primary education is an achievable goal. It would cost only about $10 billion a year (equivalent to just one fifth of the European Union’s milk quota or half of what Americans spend on ice cream each year). If this goal is reached it will represent an historic landmark in human development. But on current trends, this goal will be missed by a wide margin, with 75 million children remaining out of school by the target date.

The key to changing this is to make education a top political priority. CEF will carefully target its relatively modest resources so that they act as a catalyst, mobilising the public pressure and political will necessary to achieve the larger goal. Put simply, by directly raising £30 million the CEF aims to play a pivotal role in mobilising $10 billion and ensuring all children receive a basic education.
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**Local understanding of the rights-based approach in education**

Below are a selection of diverse quotes/testimonies from respondents to our survey, outlining what the rights-based approach means for them. See section 2 of the main report for a synthesis of these.

**Africa**

**Kenya**
The rights-based approach makes education and all the other basic needs a citizen’s entitlement and a fundamental right, which he/she can demand, from the State. In this context, education is elevated from a basic need (where a person is at the mercy of the state) to a basic right (where a poor person can demand and even sue the state if this right is not met). Kenyan children who do not have access to basic education would be able to sue the government for violation of their basic right to free and compulsory education, which is enshrined in the recently passed children’s bill.

**Malawi**
The rights-based approach:
- enables poor people to take responsibility for their own education needs as a right by demanding access and holding others accountable to provide it;
- means that education work does not infringe on the rights of the child, the teacher and the parents – parents, teachers and all community members should be aware of the fact that every child has a right to good quality education and teachers have their own rights as well;
- tackles education work while bearing in mind that the people we are working with have the right to education, which should not to be impinged;
- should facilitate assisting people to gain their rights.
Ethiopia
The rights-based approach means:
- Enhancing and strengthening community participation to increase active involvement in development initiatives and help communities to understand their roles and responsibilities and what to expect from the government and other development actors.
- Capacity building and empowerment through support, training and advice to local grassroots community institutions and education committees, which mobilise communities to establish and maintain Access centres.
- Increasing recognition among community members of the value of education and its contribution to development, and of demanding the provision of educational services from the government.

Nigeria
ActionAid Nigeria propagates education as a basic right based on a social contract between the government and its citizens. Having signed international declarations, the government has a responsibility to ensure that the right to education for women, men, boys and girls is protected and respected. Citizens, on their part have the right to demand this from government.

Gambia
The rights-based approach means:
- working with poor and marginalised people to enhance their control over development interventions, and their ability to defend their interests;
- people know that relevant and affordable education is a basic human right, which every responsible government should provide to each and every citizen – as a result, the people should make demands on their governments to that effect.

Ghana
The rights-based approach:
- recognises that people have a right to social and economic publicly-generated goods, and that they should assert these;
- implies that the practitioner moves away from service delivery, and pushes governments to deliver as much as possible;
- is more demand-driven and people-centred, involving more capacity building and pushing government to account;
- means that Action Aid and partners provide quality Education for All in collaboration with government;
- builds the capacity of the people to demand their rights;

Liberia
The rights-based approach in education entails people demanding appropriate education services from those in authority, or pressurising government to provide education services. It also means ensuring that poor people see education as a right.
India

- Free education is our fundamental right of the citizens of India, irrespective of caste, class, gender, disability, religion and economic status. But because of lack of political will the citizens are deprived of their fundamental rights.
- We help people demand this right, through campaigns, pressure, rallies, demonstrations, letter campaigns, and advocacy. We try to ensure that this right is not violated, by constantly monitoring and pressurising the government-run schools in our project areas.
- Communities needs to be sensitised on the importance of literacy and education that will enable them to demand services and facilities for education from the government.
- We sensitise teachers in government schools to ensure that they provide quality education so that the children can continue into higher education.
- Government should provide schools in Dalit villages.
- Untouchability should not be practised in schools, where all children have equal status.
- Government schools should be accessible in every locality.
- Government schools should be managed by community and with transparency.
- If the curriculum is culturally acceptable, needs-based and area-specific then it will meet the demands of a rights-based approach in education.
- Education is an entitlement: it opens up avenues of communication that would otherwise be closed, expands personal choice and control over one’s environment, and is necessary for the acquisition of many other skills.
- A rights-based approach in education strengthens people’s self-confidence to participate in community affairs and influence political issues. It gives the disadvantaged people the tools they need to move from exclusion to full participation in their society.
- The rights-based approach means ensuring that government addresses the education needs of physically and mentally challenged persons.
- Communities should have the right to plan curriculum and strategies for their children’s education according to the community’s specific needs, aspirations, culture and language to achieve the national goals of education, and must be adequately facilitated by appropriate policies, and supported by appropriate allocation of resources in the national plans for development to implement such community plans.

Asia

Vietnam
The rights-based approach:
- strengthens people’s capacity to access suitable education services and to control its quality
- should ensure equal and adequate education opportunities for men, women, boys and girls by building the awareness of people, especially poor people, of their right to be educated, and advocating this approach at local government
- means strengthening people’s capacity to demand education or access education services from the government
- means that ActionAid and its partners are less involved in the delivery of services, pushing government to deliver as much as possible.

Pakistan
- Education is not a facility but a right of all children and adults.
- Provision of education for both girls and boys is the responsibility of the State – we have to strengthen the community to demand that particular right from the government.
- Quality education is the basic right of every child: the community should demand improvement in education standards and that it is made accessible to all, irrespective of religion and gender.

Bangladesh
- Poor and marginalised people have the right to education. Assurance of entitlement to education is not an act of charity. On the contrary, poor people have a claim on it.
- Education must reflect people’s demand. It highlights people’s problems and their solutions. Education must make people conscious, remove their silence in injustice and make them active in achieving their rights and justice.
**Latin America and the Caribbean**

**Guatemala**
- We count with the right to propose and demand substantial changes in the public policies about education, to get significant benefits that may help improve education in Guatemala.
- That education must be free and obligatory for everyone, and there must be strong investment from the State, to ensure a quality education that reaches all the farthest places of the country.

**Haiti**
Children are subject to law. The child is at the centre of learning and participates in decisions that affects its present and future.

**Dominican Republic**
The rights-based approach in education is the whole area of work that is implemented towards recognising education as a basic aspect for holistic human development of every person.

**Peru**
Education must aim at satisfying the rights of children and providing free quality education avoiding ill treatment while promoting gender equity through teamwork, ensuring:
- equal opportunities for on-going capacity building;
- opportunities for research;
- that teachers have the right to well-paid and dignified work in education, according to that established in the political constitution of Peru.