

ActionAid's Discussion Paper on Resilience

May 2013



Summary

ActionAid seeks to further develop its thinking on its comprehensive, holistic approach to Resilience and for this reason has developed a Discussion Paper, which presents **ActionAid's Human Rights Based Approach to Resilience**. We'd like to invite comments and further discussion both internally and externally to further refine our thinking.

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A. Background

Context:

Disasters, climate change impacts and conflicts affect millions of people every year. They unleash considerable misery by destroying livelihoods and causing huge and often irreversible damage to the economic, social and cultural fabric of communities and nations. Human and economic losses are set to increase in the near future as climate change impacts such as global warming, climate variability (including changes in precipitation), sea-level rise and intensification of droughts and floods, for example, become more pronounced (IPCC, 2012), heaping further misery on already fragile societies.

Over the last 30 years the number of deaths due to disasters has reduced, although the numbers of disasters and people affected have increased. According to CRED's Annual Disasters statistical review 2011, natural disasters killed a total of 30,773 people and caused 244.7 million victims worldwide. Economic damages from natural disasters were the highest ever registered, with an estimated US\$ 366.1 billion. Recent food crises in Niger, the Sahel and the Horn of Africa as well as the world food price and fuel crisis of 2007-08 have set development gains back decades. Added to this the recent economic crises due to the adverse impact of macroeconomic policies has created an even greater need for social protection programmes and policies. Violent conflicts arise and reinforce social and economic inequalities, leaving poor and excluded communities more vulnerable than before.





Resilience and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs):

Many of the losses caused by crises can be avoided through properly planned and coordinated effort. With increasingly frequent and intense natural disasters, climate change impacts and heightened security and conflict risks wreaking havoc in developing countries, it is imperative that efforts aimed at disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation and conflict mitigation/resolution are better integrated and equipped. Development gains in health, education and across the MDGs are being undercut unless they are safeguarded with an integrated approach that tackles the underlying risk factors that cause vulnerability. Building resilience is a way to prevent human suffering, reduce the cost of emergency response and reduce development failures. There is a need to integrate post-2015 resilience-building strategies and thinking into the successor to the existing MDG framework, which is currently being discussed at a policy level.

Resilience under the Hyogo Framework for Action and Cancun Adaptation Framework:

Since world nations have adopted the Hyogo Framework for Action (2005) and the Cancun Adaptation Framework (2010) there has been increased attention by the international community to resilience-building initiatives. These have helped enable communities and countries to be prepared when shocks and stresses (both natural and climate change- induced) strike and to emerge out of such crises with minimum human, economic and social costs. However, such resilience-building strategies become comprehensive only when efforts to tackle conflict-related risks and extensive risks¹ and to achieve long term adaptation are also integrated into the framework.² At the community level, the dominant risk profile is from the under-reported and uncompensated small-scale recurrent disasters, which are increasing rapidly in developing countries – these are the 'everyday disasters' that need to be addressed. Global factors such as financial crisis, concentration of land, degradation of natural resources, coupled with poor governance and policy environment, further exacerbate the vulnerabilities of poor and excluded people. Additionally, both the UN-ISDR's Global Assessment Report and the Global Network for Disaster Reduction's 'Views from the Frontline' report have identified that the least progress countries have made is in achieving the Hyogo Framework's fourth priority for action in tackling the underlying causes of risk.

Resilience and Conflict:

According to the global trend in armed conflict in 1992, nearly thirty percent of the countries in the world experienced some form of major political violence. This percentage dropped to just over 13% in 2010. Increasing violence in the Middle East has led to an increase to about 16% in 2011.³

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¹UNISDR (2009) defines extensive risk as "The widespread risk associated with the exposure of dispersed populations to repeated or persistent hazard conditions of low or moderate intensity, often of a highly localized nature, which can lead to debilitating cumulative disaster impacts." "Extensive risk is mainly a characteristic of rural areas and urban margins where communities are exposed to, and vulnerable to, recurring localised floods, landslides storms or drought. Extensive risk is often associated with poverty, urbanization and environmental degradation".

The Hyogo Framework for Action does not include tackling conflict-related risks as part of disaster risk reduction and resiliencebuilding, necessitating the need to press towards a comprehensive resilience strategy at the global level.

http://www.systemicpeace.org/conflict.htm



Violent conflict can be the product of deep grievances, political and economic competition, mismanagement of natural resources, unjust political leadership, weak and unaccountable institutions, as well as global and regional forces. There are strong causal linkages between conflict, poverty, natural resources and governance. Violent conflict disrupts society, displaces people, destroys infrastructure and means of production, as well as terrorises and dehumanises individuals, particularly the poor and excluded. This in turn leads to fear and insecurity and ultimately, greater poverty. People caught up in conflict suffer immediate and acute powerlessness, as homes and livelihoods are threatened and the normal rules of peaceful civilian life are suspended. With the impact of armed conflict around the world rising, people in many countries face an insecure, fearful future. The majority of conflict casualties are innocent civilians, particularly the poor and excluded, women and children. Every conflict situation requires thorough analysis to gain a sound understanding of the causal factors, and the interaction between the situation, the community's intervention and potential consequences of such interventions. In this way any interventions should take a conflict-sensitive approach to reduce the vulnerability of people.

Definition of Resilience

The understanding of resilience as a concept is still in an evolutionary phase as more and more organisations begin to adopt resilience-building interventions in providing development and humanitarian assistance. Several working definitions of resilience have been developed by different organizations. Most of these definitions, however, are built on the meaning of resilience as defined by UNISDR (United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction):

Resilience is generally defined as, "the capacity of a system, community or society potentially exposed to hazards to adapt, by resisting or changing in order to reach and maintain an acceptable level of functioning and structure. This is determined by the degree to which the social system is capable of organising itself to increase this capacity for learning from past disasters for better future protection and to improve risk reduction measures."

Definition of Risk

The UN-ISDR defines risk as 'the combination of the probability of an event and its negative consequences.'5

Disasters and their negative impacts happen when the population exposed suffers from multiple vulnerabilities.

⁴ http://www.unisdr.org/files/7817_UNISDRTerminologyEnglish.pdf pg. 4

⁵ http://www.unisdr.org/files/7817_UNISDRTerminologyEnglish.pdf pg. 25



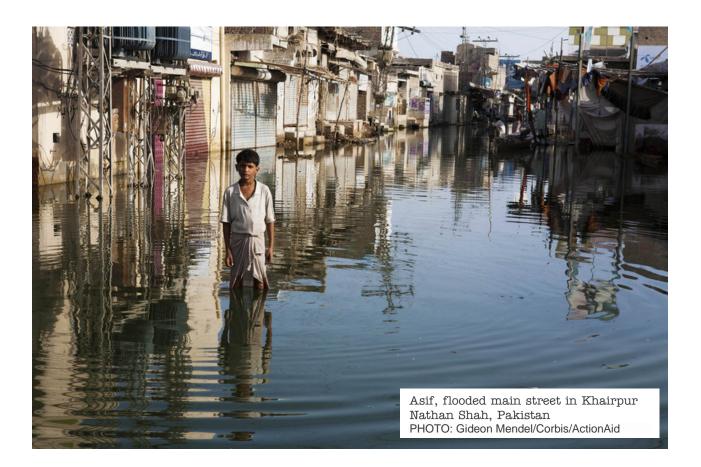
Definition of Vulnerability

The UN-ISDR definition for vulnerability (to disaster) is:

The characteristics and circumstances of a community, system or asset that make it susceptible to the damaging effects of a hazard.⁶

ActionAid firmly believes that our Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) towards enhancing resilience provides sustainable long term solutions for people and communities who are the most vulnerable to disaster and whose lives and livelihoods are under the constant threat of destruction.

A Human Rights Based Approach to emergencies and enhancing resilience puts people's vulnerabilities at the centre and tackles the key underlying causes that make individuals and communities vulnerable and reinforce inequalities.



⁶ http://www.unisdr.org/files/7817_UNISDRTerminologyEnglish.pdf pg. 30



B. Vulnerability as the Challenge:

ActionAid believes that the indignity of poverty is a violation of human rights, arising from unequal and unjust power relations from the household to the global level. Poverty is not just about a lack of income or a lack of material resources. It is about a lack of power to access, acquire, use or control the resource, skills and knowledge that people need to live a life of dignity. People living in poverty, especially women, have limited resources and capacities to deal with and recover from the impacts of shocks and stresses, keeping them in a vicious cycle of poverty and making them more vulnerable.

ActionAid's work is centred on people's vulnerability to shocks and stresses as well as addressing the underlying causes that make them vulnerable. In doing so, ActionAid incorporates perspectives of people living in poverty on the causes of their vulnerability and the solutions. Shock is a broad term which encapsulates the full range of stressors faced by communities including physical, social, economic, cultural and political. Disasters, climate change impacts and conflict are also included in this concept. Examples of shocks include earthquake, cyclone, drought, flood, epidemic, sea-level rise, deforestation, loss of biodiversity, food crisis, economic crisis, political unrest, violent conflict. ActionAid works with those who are poor and excluded, thus the most vulnerable to shocks and stresses.

ActionAid's analysis shows that vulnerability is primarily caused by three factors (Diagram 1):

- 1. Social exclusion
- 2. Lack of skills, access to basic services and economic opportunities; and
- Lack of assets and secured access to natural resources.

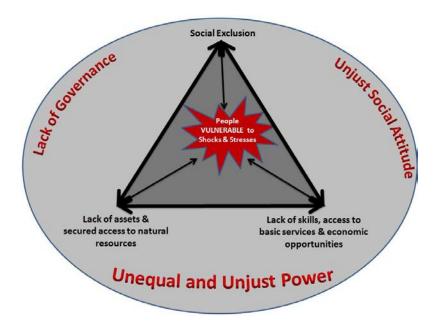


Diagram 1: The Underlying causes of Vulnerability



Social exclusion is an outcome of multiple human rights violations. In society, people face discrimination and the denial of rights due to patriarchal values, and on the basis of their gender, class, ethnicity, religion, race, caste, age or sexual orientation. Within these communities, women are particularly oppressed due to patriarchy; while children, people who are displaced, disabled, elderly or living with HIV or AIDS are further marginalised. This limits their participation and excludes them from the economic, social and political life of their communities and societies, making them more vulnerable to the impacts of shocks and stresses.

Lack of skills, access to basic services and economic opportunities: Access to basic services such as education, healthcare, information, social protection, finance, early warning and fair and stable markets, for example, has a direct correlation with the capacity to withstand shocks. Lack of appropriate skills to save life and inadequate economic opportunities to adopt sustainable and diversified livelihoods increases people's vulnerability and stop them from escaping the vicious cycle of poverty.

Lack of assets and secured access to natural resources: People require assets such as a safe house, but also other resources and capacities to prepare for and respond to disasters. People living in poverty who lack secured access to natural resources such as land, forests, water and biodiversity, have limited capacity to withstand the impact of shocks and stresses. Land use change, dispossession, the overexploitation of natural resources, unsustainable farming and food production/distribution practices are responsible for further enhancing their vulnerability.

The inter-relationship between these three underlying causes (see Diagram 2) demonstrates that just belonging to a socially excluded group alone can make a social group hugely vulnerable to shocks and stresses, but if that group also has a lack of skills, access to basic services and economic opportunities, then they become even more vulnerable. This can be compounded even further by their lack of assets and secured access to natural resources.

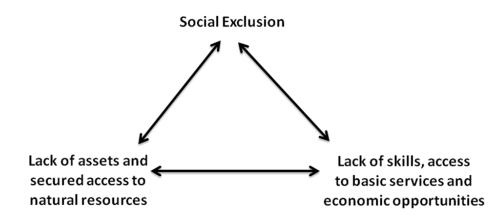


Diagram 2: the inter-relationship between underlying causes

The underlying causes of vulnerability arise primarily from **unequal and unjust power**, which leads to **lack of governance** and **unjust social attitudes**. These three mutually reinforce each



other. Individually or together, they deepen the institutional perpetuation of inequality and injustice.

Lack of governance can be through government bodies and/or institutions and one of the main drivers behind the systematic failures of development planning, design and execution. In some cases, where local government bodies and institutions don't have the resources or capacities to facilitate and execute effective planning and development, they let the powerful elite exercise their power in unjust ways.

Unjust social attitudes arise from people or groups that seek to exclude the most vulnerable people based on preference, and encompass emotional, behavioural and cognitive components like beliefs, actions through behaviour and values.

ActionAid's work integrates perspectives of people living in poverty in tackling these three dynamics that make poor and excluded people more vulnerable to shocks and stresses.

C. The Solution: People in Power

People living in poverty are denied almost all of their human rights – including rights to basic needs such as food, education, housing and healthcare. They often do not enjoy the normal benefits of citizenship such as legal justice, participation in decision-making and access to information. These human rights violations compound one another, driving people further and further into poverty and marginalisation exposing them to risks.

Adopting a Human Rights Based approach (HRBA) to Resilience:

Promotion of Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

Human rights belong to a person by virtue of being born. They are independent of a person's sex, religion, disability, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, where they live or any other status. They cannot be given or taken away. All human beings are equally entitled to rights, without discrimination. In addition, a human's right to protection from disaster is implied in various international conventions. We believe that poverty is a violation of human rights and causes vulnerability.

Our resilience work is centred on addressing the underlying causes of vulnerability of poor and excluded people to shocks and stresses. ActionAid firmly believes that the Human Rights Based Approach towards resilience provides sustainable long term solutions for people and

E.g. Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: 'Everyone has the right to life, liberty, and security of person'; Article 25: 'Everyone has... the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, or old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control' (UN 1948). In 2010, the COP16 adopted the 10/4 UN Human Rights Council Resolution recognising the adverse effects of climate change on human rights. Given disasters' dis-proportionate impact on highly vulnerable groups, inadequate DRR also infringes rights under the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and UN Convention on Protection and



communities who are the most vulnerable, and whose lives and livelihoods are under the constant threat of destruction.

ActionAid's HRBA approach centres around poor and excluded people to ensure that they have assets and a secured access to natural resources have skills, access to basic services and economic opportunities. This is achieved through strengthening active agency i.e. supporting people living in poverty to become conscious of their rights, organise and claim their rights and hold duty bearers to account. Our HRBA builds on international human rights law, but goes beyond a legal or technical approach to rights. We support people to analyse and confront power imbalances and we take sides with people living in poverty, challenging abuses of power at the local, national or international level.

To address the vulnerabilities caused by natural and human-made as well as conflict- related stressors, it is imperative that any response or intervention that seeks to resolve the problem addresses the core issue of an already existing power imbalance and inequality that gets compounded at times of crises, with disproportionate impact on women. Any such intervention has to primarily address the restoration of people's power, and women in particular, to seek solutions to their problems through a three-pronged approach that empowers them, builds solidarity and campaigns to create a global environment wherein people in distress lead specific actions to bring about a desirable change in their lives. A people centric approach to resilience that reinforces one's inherent power within is therefore a prerequisite to building a society that is resilient to future shocks and stresses.

Our HRBA framework:

Linked to this, ActionAid strategically invests in three key areas of practical courses of action, required to build resilience among vulnerable people and communities (see Diagram 3).

These areas, together, achieve equity and justice for all and thereby effectively tackle the impact of shocks and stresses.

1. Empowerment: relates to rights awareness and capacity enhancement of people

In practice, this means that through our empowerment initiatives we help people living in poverty to become active agents of change and to lead our resilience-building programmes. We support people to collectively identify the structural causes of their vulnerabilities which stem from the violation of their rights. Our activities include making individuals, households and communities aware of how to identify current and future risks that they face and becoming empowered to deal with them. Communities are able to participate in and influence decision making for risk reduction and building resilient systems at all levels. Examples of our empowerment-related activities are:

- Collective risk and vulnerability analysis using a participatory Reflection Action⁸ methodology
- Awareness raising about the causes and impacts of shocks and stresses
- Awareness raising about rights and entitlements, and ensuring the fulfilment of basic needs as basic rights.

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⁸ Reflection Action is a participatory methodology



- Skills building around first aid, search and rescue, disaster preparedness planning etc.
- Model building and promoting good practices around livelihoods, housing etc.
- Diversification of livelihoods and asset building
- Mobilisation of communities and civil society organisations
- Blending traditional and scientific knowledge and systems
- Development of risk reduction plans
- Leadership development particularly of women
- Strengthening early warning systems
- Accessing government schemes
- Generate awareness around social protection measures (or lack of it) such as widow pensions, scholarships, compensation against disaster losses
- Promoting access to and control over natural resources such as land, water and forests.
- Strengthening community institutions and infrastructure
- Ensuring the availability of adequate resources at the local level for emergency response and enhancing resilience
- Promoting access to fair and stable markets



2. Solidarity: relates to partnership and alliance building aspects of resilience

Through our solidarity programmes, we work with citizens, partners, organisations, networks, coalitions and alliances to create a wide support base that is sympathetic to the



struggles of people who live in poverty and are vulnerable to disasters and conflicts. We thus nurture, support and sustain people's movements for their basic needs/rights and thus help in building resilient people and communities. Communities are able to work in partnership with others to exchange knowledge and raise their concerns with policymakers. We identify strategic partner organisations and networks and work with them to achieve common goals that are part of our strategy to enhance resilience. We support the institutional and capacity development of our partner organisations. Examples of our solidarity-related activities are:

- Joining with other movements such as land rights, food security and education in their advocacy work
- Working with citizens, partners, organisations, networks, coalitions and alliances to create a wide support base
- Exchange knowledge and information with networks
- Working with communities and CSOs to pressurize decision-makers through lobbying, and mobilization to develop policies and frameworks and provide adequate resources to countries and communities to strengthen resilience systems and capacities
- Strengthening local partnerships and skills across different scales and sectors
- Mobilising support from donors
- Establishing or linking with local networks and alliances to facilitate information exchange and mobilise others effectively around issues
- Working with other stakeholders to develop research and promote its dissemination
- Fostering partnership development between civil society, women, youth and academia
- Mobilising support from citizens, women, youth, children and the wider public

3. Campaigning: relates to influencing policies and practices of decision-makers from the local to the international level

By recognising vulnerable people as rights holders, our campaigning and fundraising activities represent them as active agents and give them political voice. Through our campaigning programmes we aim to create and harness people's power to achieve measureable social and political changes to the structural causes of poverty and, by extension, people's vulnerabilities. Campaigns are central to our work to enhance resilience as they help in making humanitarian actors accountable and in bringing about long term systemic change.

Our comprehensive resilience-building strategy involves campaigns that channelize people's power to demand the protection and fulfilment of their rights. Examples of our campaign related activities are:

- Research and evidence gathering
- Mobilizing women within communities to advocate government for improvements to national and international policies, budgets and practices that reduce their vulnerability.
- Working on joint position or policy papers to influence national, regional and international policy.
- Putting pressure on duty bearers, both state and non-state entities (like powerful individuals, corporations etc.), to change their practices, policies and processes to respect the rights of vulnerable people



- Developing/strengthening strong forums/platforms on resilience
- Mobilizing civil society and alliance building
- Advocating for social protection schemes
- Lobbying and advocating for appropriate policies and adequate resources.
- Demanding accountability through participatory budget tracking or improved governance mechanisms

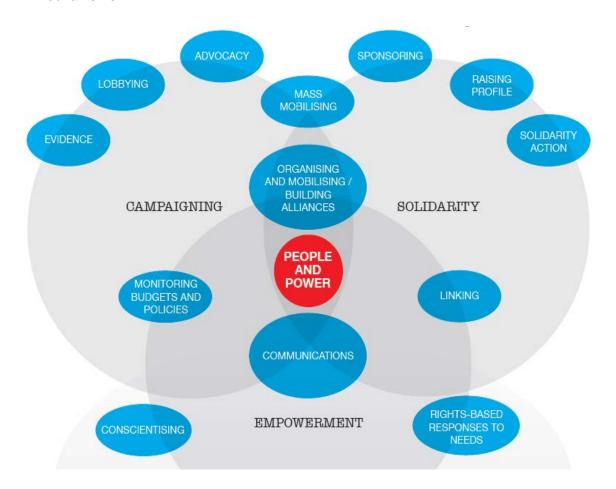


Diagram 3: ActionAid's HRBA Framework

D. Key tenets of resilience work:

Advancing the rights of women living in poverty

Women are more vulnerable when their specific needs and rights are not recognised or are deliberately undermined and ignored to further their marginalisation. One of the reasons services fail people living in poverty is because of an increase in social and cultural bias. Discrimination blocks access to basic public services, marginalising women, children and



minority groups. Patriarchy is one of the more persistent sources of social and cultural bias, and exists in all systems of governance. For example, formal accountability mechanisms are designed to prevent women from participating.

Our Human Rights Based Approach confronts unequal power relationships between women and men in vulnerable communities. Through our solidarity initiatives, we connect women we work with and their organisations with like-minded individuals and groups to accelerate and coordinate resilience-building efforts. By growing women leaders in resilience-building initiatives, we develop policies and programmes that are sensitive to their gender-specific constraints and that support the capacity development of women living in poverty and their organisations. Thus our resilience strategy benefits from the immense energy, knowledge and capacity of women without increasing their burden by being insensitive to their realities.



Promoting credible and sustainable alternatives and strive to be solution-oriented

Our resilience-building programmes generate more sustainable alternatives that take into account the local context, and the multiple challenges that communities face. This in turn leads to programmes/policies that take into account the multiple shocks and stresses that help us to tap local knowledge and practices which, when combined with modern scientific knowledge, produces lasting context-specific solutions that work. This includes the use of new, appropriate technologies. We also bring in innovations into our programme designs after considerable



research and test these innovations to collect evidence that will inform future policies, programmes and develop alternatives.

The primary requirement of seeking alternatives is to challenge the existing power structures in society that make people vulnerable. The alternative we need to seek is not in programming alone, but has to necessarily include the way we look at the model of building resilience, be it the role of governments and donors or the private sector and the community itself. Any such alternative should naturally focus on underlining the primacy of involving vulnerable people in all levels of decision making, treating them as powerful stakeholders and partners in the process, rather than the mute victims of circumstances that forces them to be vulnerable.

Promoting Social Protection

Social protection refers to a set of instruments to transfer incomes, so as to address shocks and vulnerabilities of marginalised groups - especially those in insecure livelihoods and employment. Lack of social protection makes a person, household, community or society more vulnerable to any natural or human-made hazard. With disasters on the rise and the unpredictability of risk factors that can undermine assets and livelihoods, the need for social protection and its effective mechanisms of delivery are stronger than before. ActionAid's vision with respect to social protection is that countries adopt appropriate universal transformative and redistributive social protection systems, outlined as part of their national development strategy, aiming to achieve social justice and reduce vulnerabilities to shocks and stresses and multiple inequalities such as between men and women. Systems would be based on a social minimum, which consists of two elements; social transfers and basic rights provision. Men and women would play a key part in monitoring and holding governments to account on promises.

Integrated programming

ActionAid takes a multi-pronged approach to addressing the underlying causes of vulnerability. Therefore, we integrate our approach and activities across all our key focus areas:

- <u>Food security and agriculture</u>: We link resilience as an important factor for sustainability of agriculture and food security and are working in several countries affected by protracted crisis. ¹⁰ We recognise resilience as a potential opportunity to transform power relations, particularly for women smallholder farmers, by building a comprehensive resilience approach.
- Natural resources: We work to analyse how the recurrence of natural and human-made disasters is linked to people's lack of access to and control over resources, and we empower them to use them productively and sustainably, to enhance their resilience. We also support women to build improved, more resilient and sustainable livelihoods that will help to reduce the impact of shocks and stresses and help them recover more quickly. Additionally, we work towards diversifying incomes to reduce people's vulnerability.

⁹ A redistributive social protection system would involve non-targeted transfers. This is because targeting can be costly and divisive. Targeting suggests that some people deserve social protection more than others, which is not conducive to a rights analysis (Mkandawire, 2005). Importantly, targeting can increase inequality (Korpi, 1998)
¹⁰ Protracted crises have been defined as "those environments in which a significant proportion of the population is acutely

Protracted crises have been defined as "those environments in which a significant proportion of the population is acutely vulnerable to death, disease and disruption of livelihoods over a prolonged period of time. The governance of these environments is usually very weak, with the state having a limited capacity to respond to, and mitigate, the threats to the population, or provide adequate levels of protection. http://www.fao.org/docrep/013/i1683e/i1683e03.pdf



- Women's rights: We mobilise women to advocate for their rights and to change power imbalance that leads to gendered roles, unpaid care, dispossession of productive resources and the violence that they face, particularly during and after disasters. We promote women's access to justice in such situations, including advocating for gender-responsive economic alternatives. We also focus on the livelihoods of the most vulnerable women in emergency responses, as they are often overlooked.
- <u>Education</u>: We support education in emergencies in rights-based ways that provide a
 foundation for long-term and quality public education, especially for girls and women.
 We also, actively look to include disaster risk reduction and climate change in the school
 curriculum, involve schools to build a culture of safety and involve parents and children
 in building plans for more resilient communities.
- Youth: This section of society is disproportionately represented in communities living in poverty. This makes them a powerful potential source of change. Youth are not only the leaders of tomorrow, but also drivers of change today, tackling increasing conflicts, disasters and climate change. In our resilience work, youth are actively mobilized and their capacity is enhanced around understanding risks and addressing their root causes. We need to do more to develop and use the channels that engage youth (social media, for example) and invest more effectively in digital activism both in the global North and South.





<u>Governance</u>: We support people and also demand state and non-state actors to fulfil their basic needs as basic rights. We regard shocks as opportunities for redistribution – mobilising demand for and bringing in new policies, systems and practices that are just and enhance resilience. We work with people, governments and wider civil society to deepen democratic values and tackle inequality and injustice.

ActionAid firmly believes that unless poor and excluded communities are empowered to deal with and demand changes that help tackle the underlying causes of their vulnerability, they will continue to be the worst affected by increasing shocks and stresses. A Human Rights Based Approach towards resilience provides sustainable long term solutions for people and communities to reduce their vulnerabilities and live a secure and dignified life.

Outstanding Questions still for discussion and inputs:

- 1) Is there a useful generic definition of stress and/or stressors we can use that relates to vulnerability?
- 2) Does the vulnerability illustration in the paper capture the underlying causes holistically, or is something fundamentally missing?
- 3) Does this paper outline a comprehensive and integrated approach to resilience?
- 4) Do you think ActionAid's work on the three pillars of our Human Rights Based Approach (empowerment, solidarity and campaigning) will have a lasting effect in enhancing resilience?
- 5) How can ActionAid's Human Rights Based Approach be effectively applied in the context of protracted crises and conflict?



For queries and comments please email:

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For further information about ActionAid's Human Rights Based Approach, please refer to: http://www.actionaid.org/publications/peoples-action-practice

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