

Transformative Participatory Approaches

for ActionAid's System Change Agenda

APRIL 2026





The Youth Climate Reparations Camp outside New Orleans, USA, brings youth activists together for collective discussion and decision-making to co-create strategies and take collective action for climate justice. CREDIT: BRANDON WU/ACTIONAID

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COVER PHOTO: People from Belém participated in a Social Cartography workshop, mapping their territories. By transforming memories and experiences into data, the participants collectively mapped the impact of public infrastructure and urban projects connected to COP 30 on rivers and communities. CREDIT: TAMARA MESQUITA/ MANDÍ

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WENet, ActionAid's partner in the Philippines, conducts training to ensure that women play a leading role in disaster preparedness and response.

CREDIT: Pambansang Koalisyon ng Kababaihan sa Kanayunan (PKKK)

Introduction / Rationale

ActionAid's Strategic Implementation Framework for 2025-2028 (SIF3) includes an expected outcome (1.3) that by 2028: *ActionAid has regained its capacity and reputation for using participatory and transformative approaches to support conscientisation and organising work with movements and allies from local to national and international levels.*

ActionAid recognises that reflection-action processes using participatory methods are a key means for achieving transformative system change. These approaches remain the bread and butter of how we engage as ActionAid with communities, creating space and time for people to analyse their own condition and position with an intersectional analysis of power, and then supporting people to organise and act on their own terms, building or joining movements of change. This is the foundation for building the active agency of people living in poverty or facing exclusion.

We recognise the need to be consistent and coherent in the processes we follow to critically analyse power and organise at different levels, locally, nationally and internationally – whether working purely internally within the organisation or working with coalitions and movements. Connecting these participatory, transformative approaches from local to global levels is crucial if we are to become a rooted campaigning organisation, working with allies and movements on system change.

In the past few years, ActionAid has become complacent around these core participatory and transformative approaches, failing to invest in capacity development for our own staff and partners. But there is a renewed commitment to re-energise spaces for learning and sharing about the core politics and practical tools involved in transformative participatory approaches. This has included re-activating the Reflection Action website and updating / popularising our induction and training resources. Even more explicitly ActionAid's strategy includes this commitment:

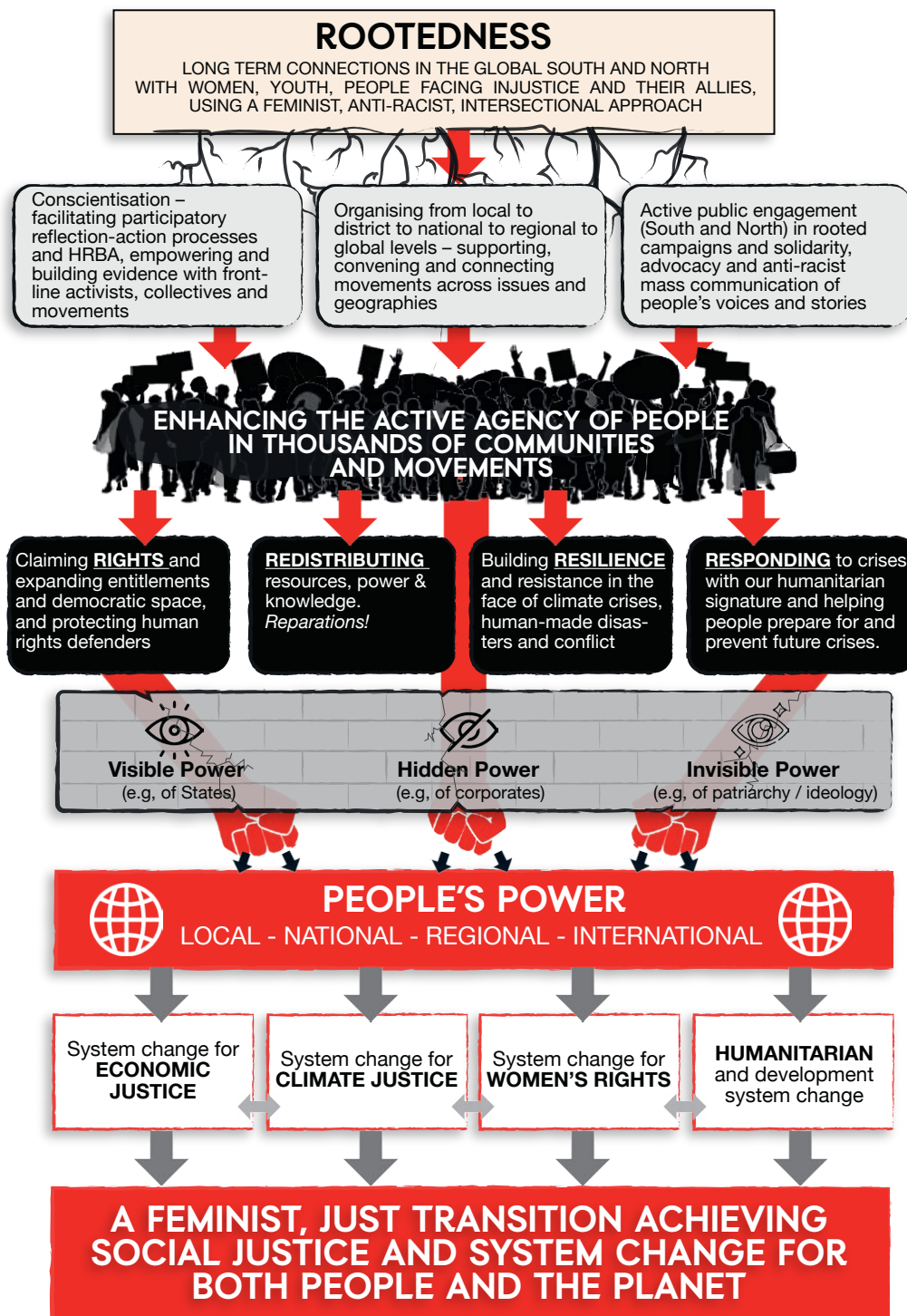
We will develop a practical toolkit (drawing on much that we already have) collaboratively across our 4 system change priorities - to help build critical analysis, evidence and organising from local level upwards – offering guidance on building rooted campaigning and transformative programming with key constituencies and movements. People do not live sectoral lives. Everything is connected and we can help people understand the connections and build their own analysis.

This is a first attempt to draft such a toolkit. **This resource has three core sections:**

- A. Some principles, concepts and key elements of a participatory reflection-action process
- B. A selection of specific tools relevant for ActionAid’s SIF3 system change agenda
- C. A selection of different participatory toolkits / existing resources on key issues.

All of these tools and resources are intended to help colleagues across ActionAid to advance work in line with our **programme signature** as visualised below:

actionaid’s PROGRAMME SIGNATURE





The People's Tribunal for a Just Transition, organised by ActionAid Brazil with territorial movements and civil society partners, is a symbolic public trial held during the People's Summit at COP30.

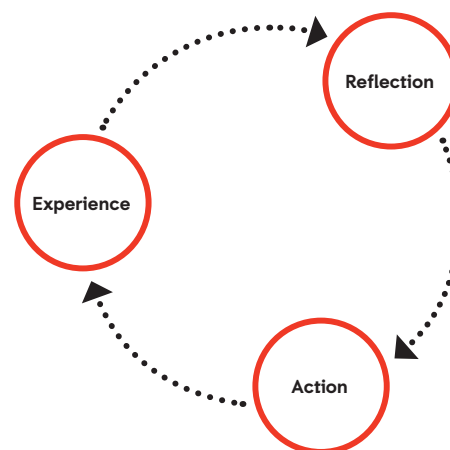
Inspired by the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal, it exposes cases of environmental racism and rights violations affecting quilombola communities, fisherfolk, babassu coconut breakers, family farmers and urban residents.

CREDIT: ACTIONAID

A. Some principles, concepts and key elements of a participatory reflection-action process

Below we identify some of the key principles and concepts that should guide ActionAid's support for reflection-action processes linked to our system change agenda and support for social movements and people's struggles.

Using a reflection-action cycle – the essence of a transformative participatory approach is to enable people to critically reflect on their situation and position in order to take action to improve / change that reality – and to then reflect on the experience of the action that has been taken, to learn from what did and did not work with the action and identify new more strategic actions – which will stimulate more reflection and learning. This is a never-ending cycle. In other contexts, this cycle is talked about as praxis.



Understanding conscientization - *Conscientisation is the process of developing a critical aware-ness of one's social reality through reflection and action.* The term conscientisation, coined by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, involves enabling people to perceive the social, political and economic contradictions of their lives and to take action against them. It is a process involving reflection and action that enables people to understand the reality of oppression, not as a place from which there is no exit, but as a situation which they can transform. The key is enabling people to explore **why** they are in such a situation and to begin to understand **how** to change their situation. Conscientisation requires careful work to first bring to the surface and then challenge deeply held prejudicial ideas related to power relations, for example around gender, race, class and sexual orientation. These ideas are generally not visible to the

person and prevent change. Examples include the idea that poverty is unchangeable, determined by divine law or cause by individual failure. Through conscientisation, we challenge the internalised oppression and lack of self-worth that most oppressed groups suffer, drawing out the political issues that have everything to do with power and require change.

Working with a human rights based approach – see [Action for Global Justice in Practice](#) – We understand poverty as a violation of human rights that arises because of the marginalisation and discrimination associated with human rights violations. ActionAid has a distinctive human rights-based approach to development that centres on active agency: supporting people living in poverty (particularly women and young people) to become conscious of their rights, to organise and claim their rights and to hold duty bearers to account. Our HRBA flows from our values, our feminist principles and our strategy. It 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 and exclusion.

Prioritising and building the active agency of the most excluded – putting the last first as [Robert Chambers](#) would say. ActionAid aims to empower people living in poverty and exclusion to become rights activists. It supports them to seek their rights and entitlements by building critical awareness (conscientisation); supporting and strengthening people’s organisations and social movements - from grassroots to scale; enabling people to monitor public policy and budgets and organise to hold governments to account; harnessing the power of communications to raise people’s voice and responding to urgent needs through rights-based service delivery.

Analysing and confronting power in its multiple forms - We focus not only on addressing the visible power of government and other duty bearers but also on addressing hidden power (for example, of corporations and international institutions) and invisible power (for example, power arising from patriarchal values and traditional cultural beliefs). This means looking at power relations in private and personal spaces as well as in the public sphere. It is often in the personal space of the home that the most deeply rooted and internalised oppression operates. We therefore need to change not just policies but practices also. Securing rights on paper will never be enough if we do not also change the attitudes and behaviours of people that perpetuate rights violations.

Using a feminist intersectional approach - ActionAid is an organisation guided by feminist values and a feminist vision. We recognise that the dominant system favours men and limits women’s access to economic, political and social opportunities simply because they are women. Women’s work is often overlooked, unpaid, underpaid and undervalued. We recognise that many factors influence how someone is treated in society. Racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, xenophobia and classism are interconnected and cannot be examined separately from one another. We therefore take an intersectional feminist approach, taking into account the different factors that maintain and perpetuate inequality, and challenging the unequal power relations that underpin violations of women’s rights. This also means supporting people to see that their struggles are aligned.

Creating and sustaining a democratic space – which is counter-cultural in most contexts. How you set up and facilitate space is crucial. There are power dynamics within any group of people and so creating a level playing field where everyone has an equal voice needs active and ongoing work. It is better to sit in a circle than in rows (which create a hierarchy and can foster passivity). Talking about different forms of power and giving people tools to monitor power dynamics can shift the dominant norms. It is important for everyone to listen actively and to ensure that those who are more hesitant or nervous to speak have the chance to do so. Working together to construct ‘visualisations’ can change the dynamic, breaking down more formal dynamics and allowing more informal interaction that is sometimes less stratified.

Respecting and building on people’s existing knowledge – we should start with respect for people’s existing knowledge and bring in external information and analysis only as and when it will advance or positively challenge (rather than supplant or undermine) people’s own analysis. If we bring in solutions from outside before people have analysed an issue for themselves, we risk manipulating the process and creating a dependency on outsiders for solutions. This creates passivity rather than the activism and ownership that is key to people’s struggle.

Building and strengthening movements / people’s struggles – when people take action to improve their lives or engage in a local struggle, it will almost always be more powerful and effective if they are linked to organisations or movements that can elevate their struggle. It is not enough if critical analysis in a local group leads to purely local action – as we know that the structural causes of problems often lie at national or international level. So, it is important to encourage wider connectivity, where possible linking local groups to existing movements or struggles so they can organise and mobilise at a higher level. By working intensively with local groups, we can strengthen the base and grassroots activism of such movements. In other cases, groups across multiple communities might come together to form new platforms or movements. Reflection-action processes have helped to build or strengthen a huge range of movements, whether of Dalits, women smallholder farmers, landless labourers, indigenous groups, marginalised youth, bonded labourers, land rights movements, fisherfolk unions, informal settlement-dwellers, etc. Working with wider movements can be a key means to move beyond pure localism to link local to district, national and international struggles – a necessity is we are to truly contribute to system change.

Identifying and addressing structural causes – when analysing any problem using participatory processes we should dig deeper – beyond instant or superficial conclusions or actions, to identify the structural causes behind an issue, the experience or symptoms of which might seem purely local but where root causes lie at other levels. Working with organisations and movements can help with this structural analysis. Often this requires deep power analysis and a constant cycle of asking, why? Why? Why? Or a cycle of ‘What or who is behind this?’

Connecting threads of analysis into bigger system change – whilst some struggles can achieve breakthroughs by focused action on one issue, to resolve a specific challenge, often there are related structural issues that warrant building an analysis and action that convenes and connects different movements.

Being accountable and transparent – we need to monitor and evaluate with people and learn together – through an ongoing process of critical reflection. The reflection-action cycle used by people themselves is in itself an effective way to monitor and evaluate progress. As an organisation helping to support such a process we need to be as transparent and accountable ourselves as possible – so that people become accustomed to expecting transparency and accountability from others. This is a key part of living our principles.



WARNING: A NOTE ON THE LIMITATIONS OF TOOLS

Tools are a means to promote dialogue and advance the process – not ends in themselves. They are designed to stimulate structured reflection and analysis, but we must avoid elevating tools above the purpose they serve to advance a reflection-action and organising process. They do not in themselves contain any magical powers. It all depends on the context in which they are used and the process of facilitation and analysis.



B. Some specific tools relevant for ActionAid's SIF3 system change agenda

Below are a series of short descriptions about specific applications of specific tools that can be helpful for advancing ActionAid's strategic agenda. In most cases links are given to fuller descriptions of these tools and to wider resources. **These are not presented in any particular order, and it is not expected that anyone will follow all of these** – but they provide a quick snapshot of the range of tools that can be drawn on to advance transformative change. They are a refresher / reminder of the many ways in which we can use participatory tools to engage people in critical analysis and system change – whether at community level, nationally or internationally. Most of the tools outlined relate to a specific application which is relevant for system change for climate justice, economic justice or women's rights – but many tools can of course be adapted for many different uses. Indeed, there are many other tools that are not included here and many tools that have yet to be invented! **The key is to be creative in adapting tools** to the particular context in which you are working – and inventing tools for yourself if needed.

The following tools are outlined below, most with illustrations, notes on adaptation and links to more detailed descriptions.

1. Visualising visible, invisible and hidden power
2. Power and discrimination lines
3. Time Diaries / Gendered analysis of time use
4. Gender analysis of access and control over resources
5. Climate Calendars
6. Climate Risk and Resource Maps
7. Matrices on industrial agriculture and agroecology
8. Income and Expenditure Trees / analysing debt
9. Decent Work Matrix
10. Tax justice role play
11. Public services - participatory surveys and analysis
12. Timelines of Critical Change (History of struggles / movements?)
13. Let's talk about Our Colonial Histories
14. Movement Flow Charts
15. Rivers of life / struggle / movements – building narratives
16. Stories of self and building compelling stories of justice now
17. Prioritising actions
18. Future scenarios for strategic planning
19. Analysing political trends / systemic shifts that affect our context
20. Linking from Local to Global – e.g. through Participatory Vulnerability Assessment
21. Shaping a vision of Feminist Economic Alternatives / a Feminist Just Transition

These examples deliberately introduce a wide range of specific participatory tools / approaches and apply these to a range of key issues that are crucial to ActionAid's system change agenda for 2025-2028. Most of the basic tools can be adapted in creative ways to address different issues and the guidelines below include some suggestions on ways to adapt the tools. For wider participatory resources / toolkits on different issues see section C.

1. Visualising visible, invisible and hidden power

Purpose: to visualise and analyse different forms of power, including visible power (for example of states, laws), hidden power (e.g. of corporate actors) and invisible power (e.g. of patriarchal attitudes or ideology). If we are to work for system change, we need to understand that power goes beyond the visible forms that we sometimes focus on.

Start by introducing and discussing the concepts of **visible power, invisible power and hidden power** (see for example [forms of power](#) to see these spelt out) and then to ask people to identify who has which type of power in their context. Each name / institution / actor / ideology or concept) can be written on a card with the colour of the card denoting whether they have visible, invisible or hidden power and the size of the card the quantity of their power. The cards can then be clustered to show how different entities are related – or can be connected by string / lines.

It is then interesting to identify **which forms of power are growing or reducing** (indicating this with plus, double plus or minus, double minus signs) compared to the past (agreeing a date of reference with the group).

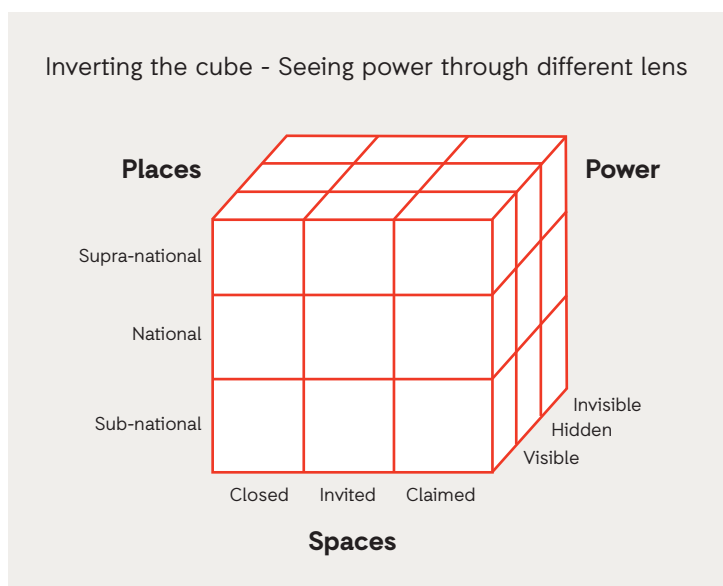
Then come the really important questions of **how we would like to see power dynamics change** in the future. Which powers do we really need to challenge?

Finally, we come to the analysis of **what power we have to bring about change**. This can lead a linked visualisation of what power we have as individuals and a group – and what power we can build with others to bring about the change we want to see. We can in the process discuss concepts of power within, power with, power together etc.

There are very many variations of this tool. You can explore power in very broad / sweeping terms or power in relation to a specific issue (who has power over specific economic or social policy). You can look at the large scale (international / national / district) or the very local (a community / neighbourhood or even an organisation) or even just take the group of people in the room as a starting point. In every group there will be power dynamics based whether on age, gender, social status, class or caste, income, institutional position, sexuality, education, ability, experience – and encouraging people to reflect upon their own power and power dynamics with a group can help to provide the foundation for deeper analysis of wider contexts.

There are similar tools for **monitoring power in practice**, observing for example, who speaks within a group, for how long and how people react. The more lenses of power that we are sensitive to the more prepared we can be to transform our own practice of power as a foundation for challenging power more broadly.

See also [the various tools on analysing power at powercube.net of IDS](#) (from which the illustration is taken) and [naming power in critical webs of power](#) (e.g. page 18 /20) and also [this Theme 2: Multiple Forms and Arenas of Power – Just Power](#)



2. Power and discrimination lines

Purpose: to help everyone involved in a process to reflect on their own power and privilege – as the personal is political!

There are several ways to analyse power by asking people to line up and move according to the power or privilege they have or based on the discrimination and disadvantage they have faced. A common starting point is to line up and then the facilitator asks people to take a step forward or step back based on different experiences:

- Are you a man or a woman?
- Do you come from a minority group?
- Is the language used in this exercise your first language / mother tongue?
- Do you have a disability?
- What is the highest level of education you have reached?
- What was the class / level of income of your parents?
- Did you go to private or public school?
- Are you a manager?
- Have you ever faced discrimination or violence based on X, Y or Z?
- Do you do the majority of washing / cleaning in your household?

The precise questions will depend on the group and the analysis that you want to encourage. This can be done in silence or with the facilitator asking people who want to speak to do so at different moments.

Another variation on this is to ask people simply to line themselves up based on who has most power in the group and who has least power. People can discuss what power means in different lenses and can then negotiate / try to move each other. This can be done in relation to specific contexts (e.g. power within an institution) or purposes. Another variation is to ask people to identify spaces / contexts where they feel powerful or powerless and then to discuss these and the reasons for their sense of power or lack of it.



Juliet (in yellow) lives in Imvepi refugee settlement in Uganda and is the chair of the Community Transformation Agenda (COTA). Here, she is surrounded by the women and girls she supports with sustainable livelihoods through the project.
CREDIT: ESTHER MBABAZI / ACTIONAID

3. Time Diaries / Gendered analysis of time use

Purpose: to build people's own analysis of the time used in unpaid care and domestic work, to reflect on the injustices in how this is distributed and to analyse how this relates to paid and underpaid work in the wider economy.

These can be very powerful for analysing the gendered division of paid, underpaid and unpaid work. If working in a mixed group, one option is to separate men and women and to ask the men and women separately to do diary of a typical day – showing roughly from when they wake to when they sleep, what time they spend on different tasks at different times. It can be helpful to brainstorm the different things that should be included: paid and unpaid work, travel, domestic chores, child-care, care of the sick or elderly, collecting fuel or water, cooking, cleaning, study, watching TV or scrolling on phone, talking with friends, drinking etc – and agree how to represent something when people are multi-tasking. It can be helpful to do one for a typical working day and one for a weekend. Once completed, participants can post theirs on a wall, providing some explanation if they wish, and then all participants can try to identify trends / cluster them – are there similarities based on age or gender or other criteria?

Discussion can be encouraged on questions like

- What is unpaid care work or domestic work?
- How is unpaid care different to leisure time?
- Is it fair that women / young women / others take on a greater share of unpaid care and domestic work?
- Why is certain work seen to be the responsibility of men / women?
- What would help to reduce the time spent on unpaid care / domestic work or to redistribute that work?
- What can other members of the household do to help? What can the State do to help through public services?
- If you could spend less time on X what would you spend more time on?

It can be very powerful for participants to go away and keep track of daily time use over a few days after the exercise, as it can be hard to reconstruct a typical day – and doing it as the day progresses can help to generate richer detail – specially if participants have had an initial discussion on the gendered dimensions of daily workloads.

This often leads to some deep discussion on gendered roles and relations without any external input being needed. Of course, recurrent questions are: Is this fair? Why is the work divided like this? Could this be changed?

It can be interesting to repeat this at different times of the year – as there are often seasonal variations – based on work that is available / needs to be done / availability of water / the impact of weather etc.

Illustration: Example of Daily Time-Use Diary from Making Care Visible - see page 14/15 of this resource for more detailed guidance on using this approach.

	Paid work	Unpaid work	Collection of fire-wood and water	House-work	Care of children	Care of adults	Learning	Social and cultural activities	Mass media use	Sleeping	Other personal care
4-5 am											
5-6 am											
6-7 am											
7-8 am											
8-9 am											
9-10 am											
10-11 am											
11-12 pm											
12-1 pm											
1-2 pm											
2-3 pm											
3-4 pm											
4-5 pm											
5-6 pm											
6-7 pm											
7-8 pm											
8-9 pm											
9-10 pm											
10-11 pm											
11-12 pm											
12-1 am											
1-2 am											
2-3 am											
3-4 am											

4. Gender Analysis of Access, Control and Ownership of Resources

Purpose: this tool deepens understanding of how gender impacts on access and decision-making over the use of key resources.

1. Ask the participants to identify the different resources used in the community / location. You may choose to focus on one resource or type of resource such as different types of land. Other resources that relate to productivity might include transport to get to market / tractors / other farming equipment / equipment for processing etc. The matrix can also be used to analyse any other resources too (electricity / water / fuel / forests).
2. Ask the participants to choose / agree a symbol for each of the resources they have identified that they want to discuss / analyse. And put these in the first column of a matrix
3. Discuss the meaning of the following terms (including in local languages as needed):
 - 'access to,'
 - 'ownership of' and
 - 'control over'.
 Ask the participants to choose a symbol for these terms and put them along the top row.
4. Ask the participants to select counters (for example, stones or beans) for scoring. If men and women are working together, they should choose separate materials as counters so that it is possible to differentiate between the two (or you can have separate columns for men and women)
5. Each participant then votes by putting a counter in the appropriate box if she/ he feels they do have access to / ownership of / control over that type of resource (perhaps scoring from 0 to 3 counters depending on the degree of access / ownership / control).
6. Review the completed matrix and identify / discuss the patterns that are emerging
 - Do women and men have equal access to resources? Why?
 - Do women and men have equal control over resources / ownership of resources? Why?
 - Is the situation the same for all women? Why?
 - What does this mean for women? How does it impact their lives?
 - Does the type of resource affect the degree of access and control that women have? Why?
 - Who takes the decisions about what access and control women have? Why?
 - What can we do to change the situation? What are women's rights in this context? How can we work together to claim these rights?

	Access		Control		Ownership	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Land	XXXXX	X	XXX		XX	
Cow	XXXXX	XXX	XXXX		XXXX	
Money	XXXXX	X	XX	X		
Tractor	XXX		X			

For further details See page 36 of [gender_sensitive_access_to_market_2_e-book_final.pdf](#)

5. Climate Calendars

Purpose: to build people own evidence base and analysis around how the climate is changing and the impacts that this is bringing.

In almost every country and community, people are noticing that the climate is changing, that weather patterns that were reliable in the past are no longer so predictable. Documenting this collectively can be very powerful to focus attention – and can help to add to the evidence base nationally and internationally. Calendars can be very effective ways to do this. Start ideally on a large scale on the ground or a large table, dividing the year by 12 months (or whatever local system is used). Ask people, ‘what are the main seasons / variations at different times of the year in a **typical / natural year?**’ If people ask, what is ‘typical / natural’ say this is what you want to explore ... ask them to consider what a normal year might have been in the past (20 years ago / 10 years ago or longer / shorter time if people prefer). Then explore a series of questions and illustrate these visually for the typical year:

- When did the rains come in a typical year? Can they indicate how heavy / persistent they were in different months?
- When were the dry periods – for how long – and with what level of heat?
- What are the key indicators people have locally for the changing seasons (blossoming / movements of animals / leaf fall / flooding / maybe snow or specific winds etc)
- What are the key activities people engage in during different seasons (planting / weeding / harvesting / seasonal migrations for work etc).

Mark each of these as clearly as possible on a calendar - with approximate start and end dates where relevant and indicators of scale if needed (e.g. intense rain vs light rain).

Once this is complete it serves as a baseline – and start work on a second or third calendar underneath it, showing the differences in recent years (or agreeing a couple of specific recent years as illustrations) – what were the variations – in terms of all the above - when rains arrived (early / late / strong / light) etc. – including on how people have had to adapt their activities. Include of course any specific moments of crisis (floods / landslides / wildfires / droughts).

The discussion can then deepen to explore:

- What will we do if another year like X happens – or if it gets even more extreme?
- What measures have proved effective to prevent disasters?
- What can we do to prepare / adapt / be more resilient?
- Who else can help us? What government agencies / schemes / organisations?
- Who is most affected by different disasters (look in an intersectional way)?

A similar process can be followed by bringing in actual data on rainfall from different years for a specific region and asking people to reflect on a similar range of issues.

Other uses of calendars: health calendars can be used to chart different illnesses in different seasons; seasonal workload calendars etc.

For much more detailed guidance on compiling climate-related calendars look at the [Handbook for Loss and Damage assessment](#).

6. Climate Risk and Resource Maps

Purpose: to build people's preparedness for and capacity to adapt to the climate crisis.

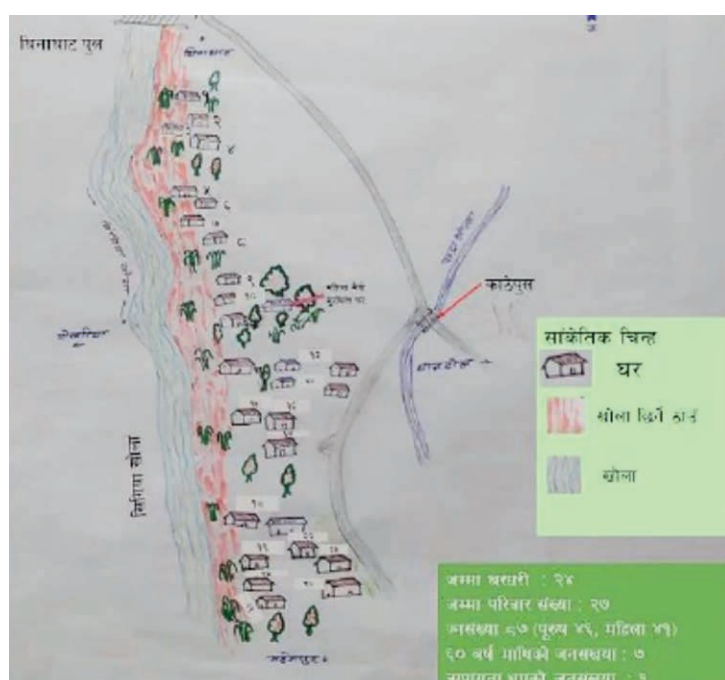
There are many ways in which maps can be used, with people constructing them initially with movable objects (whatever is available – sticks, stones, beans, paper, string etc) until the participants are happy with the layout and content – and then they can be recorded / transferred onto paper. A map may be of an immediate neighbourhood / village or a larger canvas showing a much wider area to document natural resources, land use or land ownership.

In the case of a climate map a larger landscape is helpful. Start by identifying / marking your specific location and then identify key natural features – hills / mountains / rivers / streams / forests - and key man-made features – roads / other neighbourhoods / settlements / fields / farming areas -- ensuring participants collectively agree the broad lay out. The elements to include will vary of course if you are in a rural, urban or peri-urban location. Let people add whatever key landmarks they consider significant.

Once the core base of the map is agreed, you can use this to:

- **Identify locations where there have been serious problems** with water flow: with rivers / streams / groundwater drying up owing to drought or rivers flooding / soil being washed away or landslides or wildfires occurring. Mark these and their extent and the month / year of the worst incidents. Where are the safest places in the face of different natural hazards? Who do these challenges affect most acutely (encouraging an intersectional analysis)?
- **Identify where there have been significant changes in land use** over recent years (timescale can be chosen by the group). Where was there forest / woodland X years ago? Where have human settlements been built up? Are there differences in crops that are grown compared to the past (and if so, why?)? Are there differences in water flow (owing to dams / irrigation / changing weather etc)?
- **Identify where changes could be made in the future** in respect of land use to reduce the likelihood of climate related problems /disasters. Are there areas that could be reforested or where re-wilding could be allowed? Are there different crops or uses of land in certain areas? How can we organise to make this happen? Is there a place to get support for such actions so that livelihoods could be enhanced rather than diminished?

Other uses of maps: Simple maps of households can be used to identify anything from the norms and size of families to the levels of poverty / disadvantage / health / access to or exclusion from key services or resources. Larger scale maps can be used to explore where key government offices / departments are located, or wider public services are available -or to explore accessibility to markets / prices of produce in different locations. Maps have also been used to map different locations of gender-based violence in all its forms and explore actions that can increase safety and security. Below is an example of a **social and climate hazard map from Nepal** from the [Handbook for Loss and Damage assessment](#)



7. Matrices on industrial agriculture and agroecology

Purpose: to create space for people to analyse the impact of industrial agriculture and build understanding around agroecology as an alternative.

There are increasing concerns that export-oriented industrial agriculture is contributing to accelerating the climate crisis and that support for agroecology by smallholder farmers, which still feeds most people, urgently needs to be expanded. One useful tool for analysing the two forms of agriculture is a matrix

This can be done in many forms but one would be to list the different factors that could influence people to invest in export-oriented cash crops and to encourage people to analyse each of these elements. The list might start with what drives farmers to export oriented cash crops, but then many other elements can be introduced (many of which are touched on in ActionAid's resources on climate resilient sustainable agriculture).

	Industrial agriculture	Agroecology
Yield per hectare and / total price secured in sale of crop		
Cost of seeds	(note: purchased each year)	(note: often from previous harvest / see stores)
Cost of fertiliser	(note: often chemical / purchased from specific company)	(note: often locally produced and organic)
Cost of pesticides	(note: often chemical / often more needed each year and prices rising)	(note: often natural solutions can be found)
Hours of labour at different times of year		
Likelihood of ending up in debt		
Impact on independence / dependence on others		
Impact on sustainable water management		
Impact on soil conservation		
Impact on gender equity		
Impact on agrobiodiversity preservation		
Impact on livelihood diversification		
Impact on local markets		
Impact on farmers' organisations		
Potential for local processing		
Likely longer-term yield / total price per hectare		

Participants may of course add their own criteria. The point is to encourage people to look at the big picture and not to be seduced by short term promises of big corporate actors seeking to expand export oriented industrial farming into new areas.

Image: smallholder farmers from India discuss climate resilient sustainable agriculture ([Climate Resilient Sustainable Agriculture Handbook](#))

Betty Bob, Betina Charlie, Rachel Orris and Rosetta Roussa, members of Women I Tok Tok Tugeta Malo in Vanuatu, at a training on Disaster Risk Reduction, a systematic and participatory approach to identifying, managing and reducing risk caused by disasters which impact lives, livelihoods and property.

CREDIT: CLARE DOUGLAS/ACTIONAID



8. Income and Expenditure Trees / analysing debt

Purpose: to open up a critical discussion about debt and strategies to diversify incomes.

The image of a growing tree can help to analyse many issues, especially analysing causes and effects or analysing inputs and outputs and outcomes.

Start by talking through the elements of a tree. What type or shape of trees are there? Think about the roots of the tree, the trunk, big branches and smaller twigs, leaves and fruit, even think about the soil it is growing in (healthy or contaminated?) and the rain and sun it needs to thrive (enough / too much or insufficient?) Are there birds or other animals in the tree?

One specific application is to use the tree to illustrate income and expenditure – of individuals / households / communities / even countries.

In the simplest form,

- The various roots can represent sources of income of different types
- The big branches might represent key areas of spending

After an initial sketch we can ask, is the tree well-balanced? What can be done to build more or stronger roots (are any ways of increasing income viable)? What happens if there is an emergency expenditure (a health crisis)?

This can lead to a discussion of strategies for borrowing money and the implications of **debt**. Who can you borrow from? Are fair interest rates changed? What happens when you cannot pay back a loan? Is there a collective solution that can be found to debt?

At national level, the roots can be different forms of tax / revenue and the branches different areas of public spending. Again, this may lead to a discussion about debt – and what happens when external debt payments exceed spending on health or education (see for example the latest data in [Who Owes Who?](#))



9. Decent Work Matrix

Purpose: to have a structured reflection on what people understand to be decent work and the opportunities that are open to them

A matrix can be a powerful tool for sharing knowledge and comparing different options. In the case of a matrix on decent work the starting point is to list the range of work or jobs that people can typically secure locally. These can be put in the left-hand column of a table. It may include different forms of agricultural work, home-based work, sewing or craftwork, paid employment in the public sector or private sector.

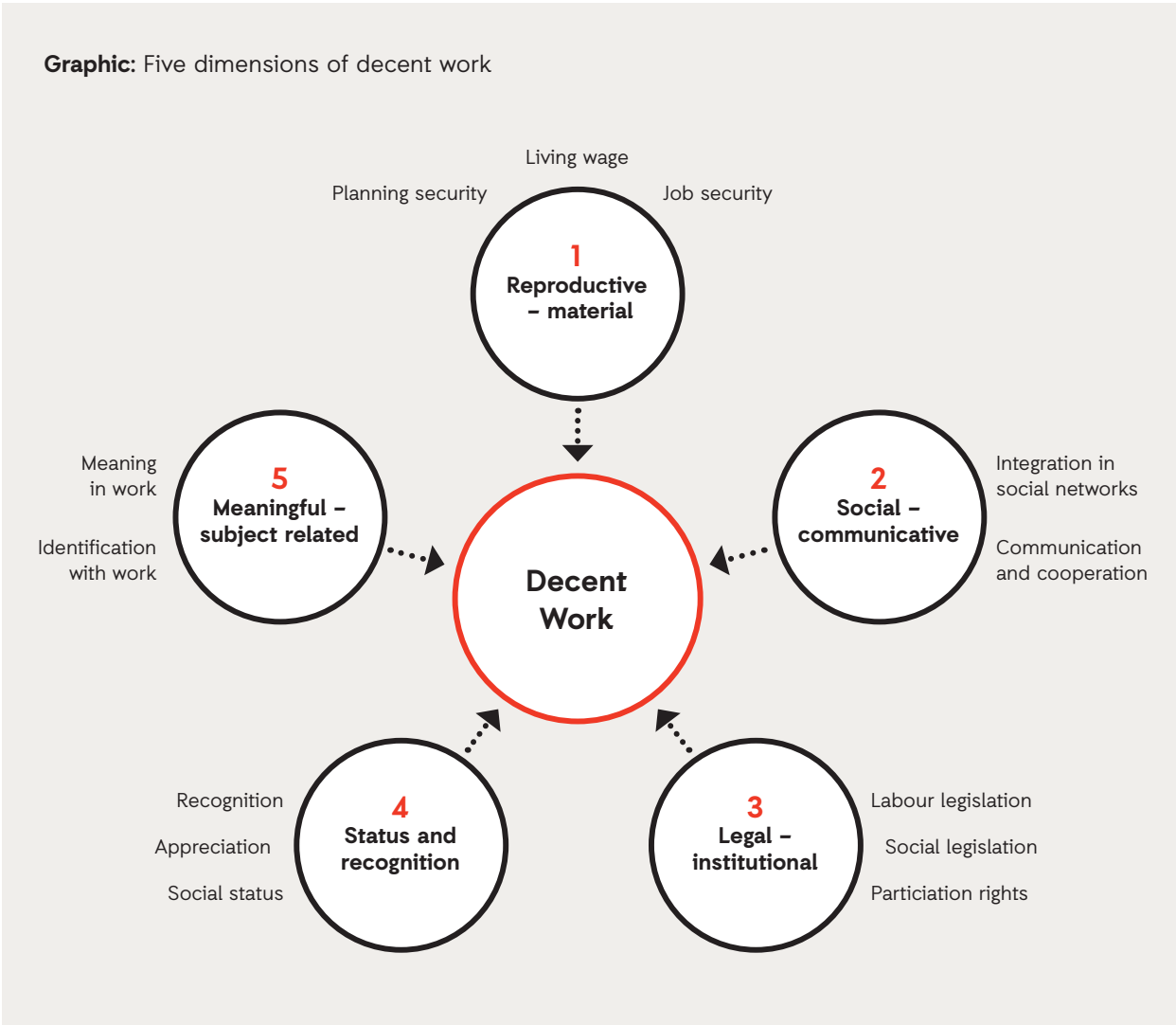
A series of columns can then be introduced that enables people to analyse these different forms of work. Criteria can be proposed by participants but might include:

	Work type X	Work type Y	Work type Z	Work type A	Work type B	Work type C	Work type D	Work type E
Is this work easily available or hard to find?								
Does this work require specific skills / experience?								
Does this work require a certain education level? (why?)								
Is this work usually done by men / women or young / old? (why?)								
Is this work paid well or badly (perhaps rough amounts for a week / month). Can this change?								
Is this work paid reliably (that is, the pay actually arrives as promised and on time)?								
Is this work secure / insecure? Are you likely to retain the work? Why?								
Is this work safe – are there risks of accident / illness / harassment / abuse / violence? How can these risks be reduced?								
Are people doing this work organised / unionised? Can this change? How?								

The point of this sort of process is not as such to rank / choose one over another but to provide a basis for a structured discussion of each of the criteria that are used. In the discussion, it can be helpful to bring in information about rights and entitlements and to prompt exploration about the scope to change things. It is interesting to explore what criteria people most value and whether there are additional criteria. Indeed, rather than start with the fixed list above it can be good to start with a list generated by people themselves, having the ideas above in reserve to prompt further discussion

Matrices can be used in many other ways for example a **Matrix of Issues and Movements**. Participants are encouraged to list the critical issues on which they wish to see change (for example food security, housing, access to land, improved health, education, climate resilience). These form the first column. Across the top of the matrix, there are then titles such as: local organisations working on this issue / duty bearers for delivering progress on this issue / national movements or people’s organisations we can link to on these issues / connections that can be made across issues.

Below is an image of **another way of visually analysing and discussing decent work**.



10. Tax justice role play

Purpose: to enable people to develop their own understanding of tax justice and the importance of using tax for redistribution of wealth.

Role plays can be very powerful ways to engage people in an issue. This tax justice role play is one of many resources on tax justice in the [Tax Power Reflection-Action toolkit](#)

The facilitator asks for volunteers to be:

- a woman farmer,
- a teacher,
- a local businessperson and
- a big company boss.

(You can use variations on these according to your context to make them resonate with people). Another volunteer is named as:

- a tax collector.

The facilitator gives the woman farmer 3 stones, the teacher 5 stones, the local businessperson 6 stones and the big company boss 10 stones. The facilitator asks the participants: who is the poorest and the richest? How much has the richest person as compared to the poorest one?

The facilitator then asks the tax collector to take 2 stones off each person. The facilitator asks participants: If some people have 10 stones and others have 3 or 5, is it fair to tax everyone 2 stones? This is what happens with a flat rate tax where everyone pays the same amount. It is called regressive tax because the poorest people end up having the biggest burden (in this case the farmer loses 65% of their income in tax whilst the company boss only loses 20%).

Finally, the facilitator asks the group to decide, if this is not fair then what would be the ideal tax distribution they would like to see? Ask the volunteer tax collector to collect the new amount the group suggests and then discuss again.

In most cases people will end up proposing a much fairer system based on progressive tax – where the richest person has to pay a larger share than the poorest. This is the foundation for calling for progressive income tax and progressive corporate tax. When you look at the impact in reality, progressive tax is seen as much more just than a flat rate regressive tax that on the surface looks fair.

The critical next step of course is to ask, how can we add our voice to campaign for progressive tax / tax justice? Who is organising on this and how can we join them? Who can we influence locally or nationally? There are many **other resources on tax justice in** [The ActionAid Tax Justice Reflection Action Toolkit](#), including creative ways of using photos: *See also another role play on tax and redistribution on page 34 (tool 2) in* [ELBAG budget tracking resources](#)



11. Public services – building evidence and accountability

Purpose: to enable people to deepen their understanding of their rights and to develop their own analysis of the state of public services in their area as a basis for action.

ActionAid has extensive experience of using participatory processes to help parents, children, communities and teachers to analyse their local school against ten core rights – using the resource book [Promoting Rights in Schools](#). This is based on ten core dimensions of the right to education that all schools should respect and then analysing the present provision against a set of indicators for each right – leading to the production of rights-based school improvement plans and results collated into district and national level citizen’s reports.

- Right to free and compulsory education
- Right to non-discrimination
- Right to adequate infrastructure
- Right to quality trained teachers
- Right to a safe, protective and non-violent environment
- Right to relevant education
- Right to know your rights
- Right to participate
- Right to transparent and accountable school
- Right to quality learning

Whilst promoting rights in schools is a systematic process, a lighter touch approach can involve using [community scorecards](#) (from page 26) to collate people’s experiences as users of different front-line services. There are many other ways to use surveys and testimonies to collate evidence on the state of different public services. ActionAid’s [Gender-Responsive Public Services Framework](#) provides a foundation for the questions we can ask to ensure that services are:

- Publicly funded (with fair share, size, sensitivity and scrutiny of budgets)
- Publicly delivered and universal
- Gender equitable and inclusive
- Of good quality in line with human rights standards

Undertaking [budget tracking](#) (from page 30) or participatory expenditure tracking, can help you generate additional evidence about whether public services are sufficiently funded and are using resources effectively and transparently. Another related approach is to conduct [social audits](#) (from page 33) where community teams systematically review the documents and finances of particular projects or initiatives.

Conducting **public opinion surveys** can be another powerful means of collecting evidence from a local level to inform national and international policy and campaigning work. In 2024, ActionAid developed a questionnaire for frontline public sector workers in rural and urban areas in 6 countries (see [The Human Cost of Public Sector Cuts in Africa](#) – and guidelines for focus group discussions with communities about their experiences of key public services. Generating this data in a participatory way from community level and including personal testimonies from people on the frontline can provide very rich material.

Whatever, specific tools and approaches are used the aim of all of these is to collate evidence and a critical next step to organise **public hearings** to share evidence generated locally (see [participatory resources on accountability](#) from page 42).



Through participatory group discussions using a Social Map, community members in Bardiya collectively identify and form an inclusive group comprising Dalit and non-Dalit households. In a context where Dalits are among the most marginalised communities in Nepal, participants jointly map and prioritise key challenges related to poverty, access to resources, and social and geographic constraints. The process strengthens shared responsibility, local ownership, and social cohesion.
CREDIT: JAYARAM THARU, RKJS / ACTIONAID

12. Timelines of Critical Change

Purpose: to draw inspiration from the past to deepen belief in change and catalyse action.

At the most basic level a timeline charts change over an extended period of time. Depending on your context and the age / memory of the people in the group you may want to produce a timeline of 25 years of 50 years or even 100 years. If the group comes up against a limit to its knowledge, they can reach out to elders who may be able to provide more information.

Starting with an open questions it is good to ask, what have been the most significant changes that have happened in this area over 25/ 50 / 100 years? For each change / development try to ask people to identify a rough date and mark this on a card on the timeline. There may be much discussion about what constitutes a significant change – and this should be encouraged – opened up rather than closed down. There are no right or wrong answers - and within reason people can put what they like on the timeline.

Additional prompts can be used as the timeline develops: When did X get built? When was the local school started? When did the nearest health post open? When were the first houses in X area? Have there been major natural disasters / events (fires / floods / earthquake / plagues)? When did people move from growing X to growing Y? Are there specific community festivals and if so when did they start? Were there significant changes associated with X change of government / the end of Y's rule?

The aim is to build as rich a timeline as possible – on the understanding that we need to know where we have come from to know where we are going!

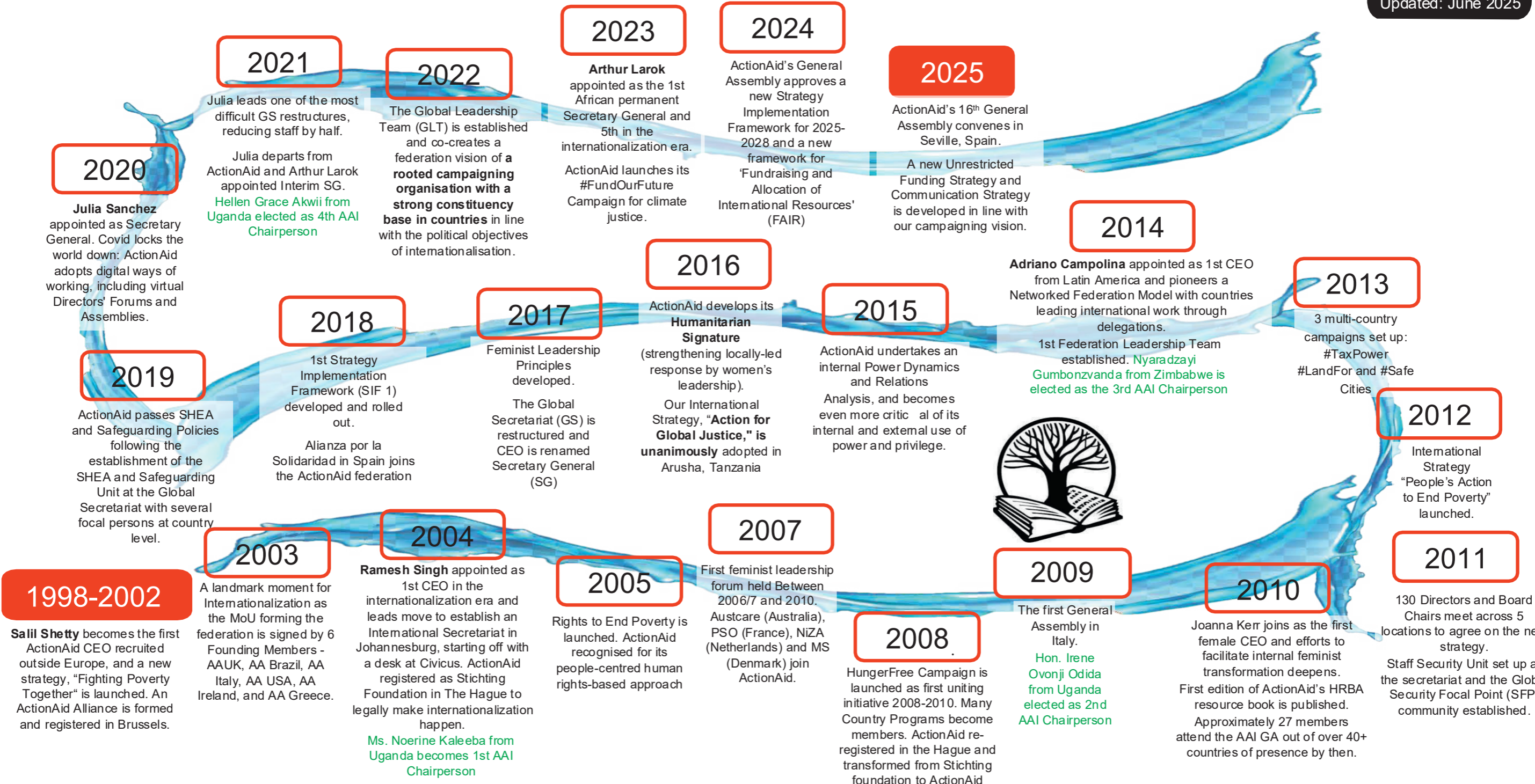
Once the timeline is reasonably complete it can be interesting to ask participants to identify – which events / changes / developments can be seen as positive ones (and mark these clearly) and which can be seen as negative? For each positive development, in turn, you can then ask – what / who made this happen? What obstacles had to be overcome? What can we learn from this, and can we do something similar? For each negative you can ask, how can we prevent X from happening again? Are we prepared for X?

Other ways to use timelines? Timelines can be used to represent key changes in an organisation (see ActionAid Internationalisation timeline) or in a movement. You can chart Health Timelines to look at the incidence of different diseases over time. You can use Price Timelines to look at the shifting prices secured for basic products grown or produced locally – discussing what informs these price changes.

See below for an illustration of a timeline tracking the process of internationalisation in ActionAid:

Updated: June 2025

ActionAid Federation River of Life, Timeline and Milestones



13. Let's talk about Our Colonial Histories

(taken from page 17 of the [Feminist Wellbeing Economy Explainer](#), Sept 2025)

Purpose: to explore the connections between colonialism, coloniality and neoliberalism by reflecting on your country's independence story, its economic journey and how colonial practices and beliefs are reproduced in our own contexts.

Step 1: Storytelling Circle. (You may also reflect on these questions individually).

- Gather in small groups or pairs.
- Share what you know about your country's colonial story, if individually, write down your responses or thoughts on a piece of paper. Here are some prompt questions for discussion:
- Do you know your colonial history, and from which period do you know, for example, pre- or post-independence?
 - Who were the key figures or movements involved?
 - What were the major events or turning points?
 - Your education system? Have you learnt about your colonial history from your school? Who wrote the history books? Whose voices are represented? Who is speaking through the history books?

Step 2: Mapping the Narrative

As a group or individually, create a timeline or a story map of your country's path to independence. Use illustrations, symbols, or key words to represent important events.

Step 3: Unpacking the Narrative

- Reflect individually or together if a group:
- Who gets celebrated in the story? Who gets left out?
- Was the story written by people from your country, or by outsiders?

Step 4: Drawing Connections

On the timeline or story map, mark points where you see connections between colonial practices (e.g., resource extraction, exploitation of labour) and neoliberal policies (e.g., debt, privatization).

Optional Creative Twist: Create a collage or mural combining visuals from your timeline/story map with magazine clippings, sketches, or other materials that symbolize coloniality and neoliberalism.

Step 5: Group Discussion or Individual reflection

Reflect on these questions:

- In what ways does neoliberalism continue the patterns of colonialism?
- Can you identify the patterns of coloniality in your context?
- What this means for the future of economic justice in your country?

14. Movement Flow Charts

Purpose: to discuss people's experience of different movements – in order to understand how movements evolve and what learning can be drawn from past or present movements to inspire new movements.

Participants are asked to identify examples of movements that they have been part of or are significantly aware of. In this first step it is important to avoid a strict definition of what a movement is, though some distinctions can slowly emerge to separate out movements from organisations.

There are different ways of capturing the following discussion – in a matrix or diagram, a timeline or flow chart – whatever feels most natural to record the insights whilst keeping the discussion flowing. For each movement where people have significant experience., the following questions may be relevant to structure a collective analysis:

- What was the original crisis / spark / issue / moment that catalysed a movement?
- What were key moments in the development of the movement?
- Was there an apex moment when the movement captured everyone's attention?
- How many people were involved at different key moments and who were the most engaged and impacted people (by gender/ age/ race / class etc)?
- What changes were achieved?
- Was there as backlash by powerful people? How? What was the effect of this and was it overcome?
- Has the movement been sustained / evolved?
- What were the biggest obstacles / challenges / moments of contraction?
- Did the movement splinter into different movements?
- Did the movement merge with other movements?
- What other movements are most aligned to this movement?
- Was the movement democratic / inclusive / involving all members or was it leader-dominated / captured at some point?
- What key lessons can be learned from the journey of this movement?

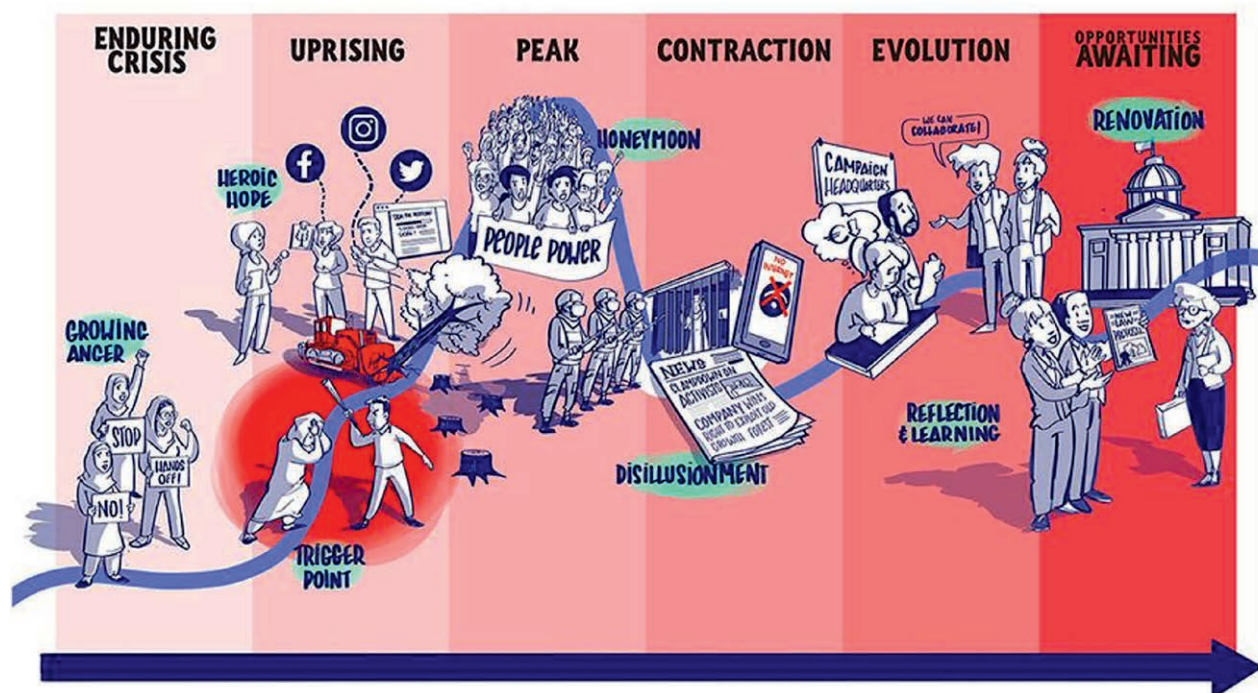


Illustration from *MOVE: Building a movement mindset* WEB 3

If this is done for different movements, it can then be interesting to look across different movement flow charts to ask:

- What are the common patterns or trends that we can see?
- Have the same challenges been faced?
- Which movements have best overcome specific challenges?
- How can movements retain a strong engagement of all their members?
- What can we learn?
- If we are starting a new movement, what do we need to put in place from the start?



In a proactive step towards strengthening community resilience, ActionAid Malawi (AAM) has supported the update of Disaster Preparedness Plans in Nsanje District—a region that faces recurrent natural hazards such as floods and droughts. Recognizing the urgent need for local readiness in the face of climate-induced disasters, AAM worked alongside the Department of Disaster Management Affairs (DoDMA) and the Kuchene Women Forum to equip communities with tools and knowledge essential for effective disaster response.

CREDIT: FLETCHER SIMWAKA / ACTIONAID

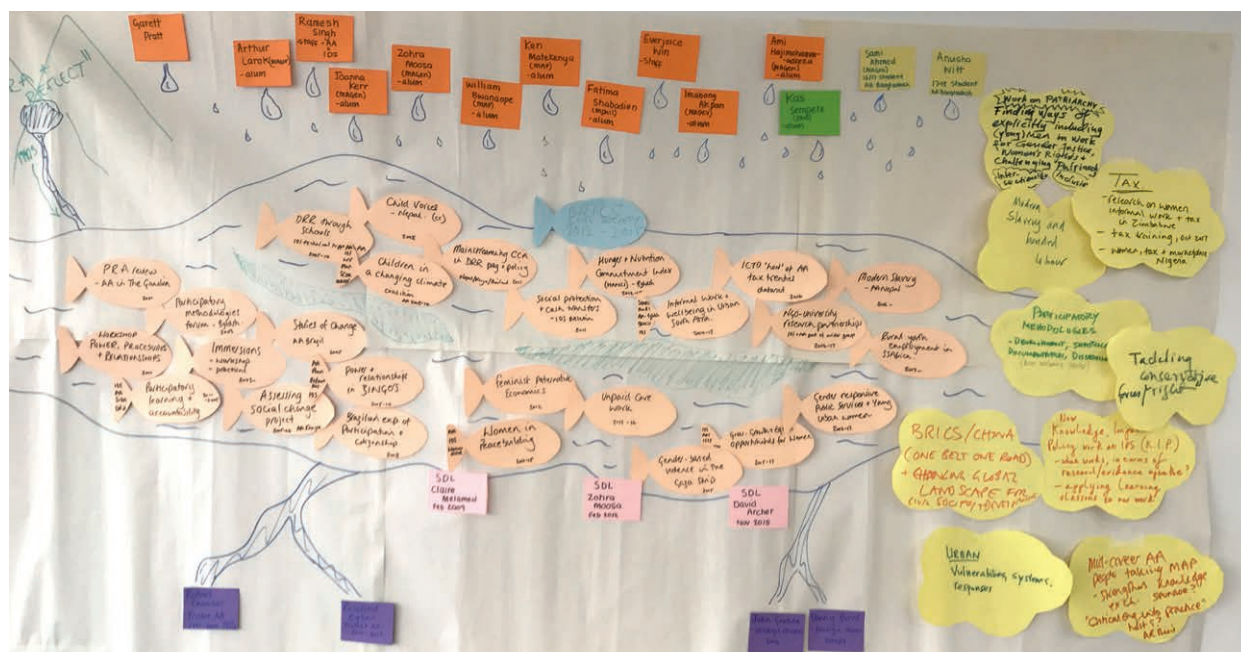
15. Rivers of life / struggle / movements – building narratives

Purpose: to enable people to share and structure the narration of their own personal stories in ways they feel comfortable with, in order to build trust and deepen solidarity and mutual understanding within a group. Or to build a visualisation of a collective struggle/movement.

Rivers are powerful ways to represent personal or organisational or movement stories without getting caught up in precise dates or times. Asking everyone to draw a river of their life using purely the visual image of a river can be powerful. A few prompts can be helpful for people to think this through. The facilitator can ask people to shut their eyes and think of a river and how their life might be represented as a river:

- Source of the river - can represent birth / origins / ancestors.
- The way the river flows – directly or meandering, with abrupt changes in direction or waterfalls or rapids that can represent key / momentous events.
- Tributaries can join – with new influences / people / allies coming in.
- Boulders or even a dam can block a river / can be obstacles in one’s life or the struggle.
- There may be crocodiles or fish or swans or pollution / contamination of the river.
- There may be shifting landscapes on the riverbanks.
- There could be floods, marshes, lakes or pools – symbolising whatever you want them to.
- As a river becomes more mature, how does it look as it forms a wider delta and as it flows out into to the sea. This may represent the future.

It may take 20 or 30 minutes for people to visualise a personal river or an hour or two for people to collectively collate the river of a struggle / movement / organisation. If done individually, once each person has visualised their life – either on a large flipchart or in some other medium of their choice - they can be asked in small groups to narrate their river to others. Often this is a powerful way to get to know each other. Each person has control over their own narrative. Importantly every individual in a group must have the time to narrate their own river! If done collectively, once a core version of the river is constructed, it can be used to interrogate what can be learnt from different moments / events – and how people want the struggle / movement to evolve.



This River Of Life charts the relationship between the Institute of Development Studies and ActionAid, and was developed in 2025 at the beginning of a workshop aimed to deepen the potential partnership. CREDIT: ACTIONAID

16. Stories of self and building compelling stories of justice now

***Purpose:** to help people share their own stories in ways that connect to the struggles that they are part of.*

Everyone has a story. We have a narrative of how we got to where we are now. But we are not always good at telling these stories. But if we can tell a clearer story about ourselves, we can also tell clearer stories about the change we want to see in the world and inspire others to join us.

Most stories have **pivotal turning points** – key moments or events that say something essential about who we are. In this first step we want people to think about their **childhood or formative teenage years** – the moment when we were faced with a challenge, or we recognised an injustice, or where someone close to us inspired us, or we first stood up to an authority figure. Every personal story will be different, but it is good to reflect on what made us who we are and to try to identify one or two specific moments that crystallise for us the moments when key values or understandings, passions or motivations emerged. A good story needs to channel emotions! You can ask people to think in silence for a few minutes and then each write something very quickly – in 3 to 5 minutes.

The next step is to **share these stories in small groups**, with each person telling their story (in just 3 minutes) and then everyone giving feedback or asking questions (max 5 minutes per person). Hearing other people's stories will often help us to sharpen our own.

The next step is to tell the **story of change now**. Building from that formative moment, what is the struggle for change that we are part of now / today that we want people to join / support? Again, give people 5 minutes to think this through and work on a narrative that starts with their story of self / formative moment and bridges to the struggle that they are part of today. What is the connection? What is the injustice and what can we do to help? Every story should end with an ask to others.

Once completed, again everyone can share their stories, and some may even be recorded on video. Each active listener should give feedback – identifying where the story could be clearer and more compelling / what details were most moving and what was missing. People can go away and strengthen their stories.

Getting better at telling our own stories and situating ourselves in a struggle, helps us to appreciate how everyone has a story to tell and that stories are often the most powerful way to move both hearts and minds – whether of the public or of policymakers and politicians. In every struggle we need to look for the most compelling stories and help people to share those that are most compelling.

For more details contact Jess Midwinter or Kate Carroll and see: [this powerpoint](#).

This is also a powerful example of a story about LGBT bullying: [Harvard LGBT Bullying Speech](#)

17. Prioritising actions

Purpose: to help people share their own stories in ways that connect to the struggles that they are part of.

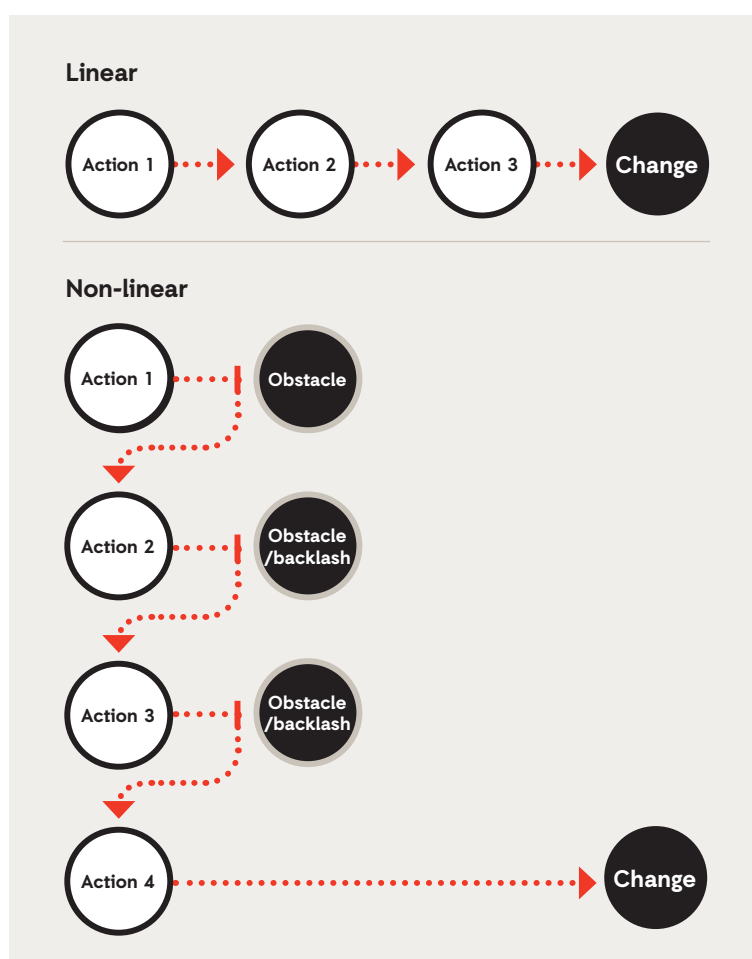
In many ways this is a generic tool that can be applied to any context or issue – for any issue that a group is discussing it can be interesting to analyse what actions can be taken to improve the situation.

This can involve multiple layers of analysis / a series of questions.

- What can be done locally to address this issue / find solutions?
- What needs to be done at district or national level?
- What requires international action / change?
- What can be done alone – individually or as a group – within our existing means?
- What requires cooperation with others? What organisations / movements can help? What needs more resources (financial or human or other)? How can these be secured?
- What can be done in the short term and what might take longer – over the medium term and long term?
- What actions are superficial / address symptoms and what actions are substantial / addressing root causes and contributing to system-change?
- What actions will likely trigger a backlash / negative reaction – and how can we anticipate and prepare for that?
- What sequence of actions makes sense over time
- How can we build in a critical reflection on our actions?
- Given consideration of all the above, what actions will we prioritise?

As always, the specific categories you choose to explore will depend on the group and the issue and the actions being explored – but this can be a powerful means to get people to think beyond the obvious and immediate.

One of the **key areas of reflection** may be whether change is linear – achieved by a clear set of predetermined actions – or whether change is non-linear – that actions will sometime trigger a backlash and that change is much less predictable. Breakthroughs to change can sometime happen quite suddenly. What examples can we think of that illustrate linear non-linear change – and what do we anticipate may be the case in the context of struggles / actions we are now pursuing?



18. Future scenarios for strategic planning

Purpose: to enable people to build consensus on sensitive issues where there is no apparent agreement.

Sometimes it helps to look at possible future scenarios to help us make critical choices today. To detach people from the immediate battles and personalities of everyday work, fictionalised future scenarios can help to open people's minds. ActionAid has used future scenario mapping for its strategic planning in 2011 and 2017. In each case the starting point was to identify a series of critical issues where we needed to build consensus on next steps and to put each of these on a spectrum. In 2011 these included:

- Child sponsorship and children – a) phase out; b) reform in line with rights-based approaches and narrative links; c) make children active agents of change / the focus of programmes.
- Autonomy and centralization – a) excessive autonomy, fragmentation, minimum secretariat; b) excessive centralization, affiliates expelled etc; c) balance – big secretariat and significant autonomy.
- Focus – a) highly focused, one unifying issue; b) spread of four or five issues much as now, but big focus on women as 'who'; c) proliferation of many issues, our focus is purely 'how'.
- Poverty – a) focus on poorest of poor; b) focus on movements against poverty; c) address poverty and injustice everywhere.
- Politics – a) very radical; b) unconventional alliances; c) reformist.
- Growth – a) for money; b) for influence; c) to reach poorest.
- Evidence / Evaluation – a) we have strong systems / prioritize; b) we have multiple context specific approaches; c) we confront a crisis of not being able to prove impact.

Having identified knotty issues, the next step was to come up with creative formats for dramatizing these, each set ten years in the future. The options above were then mixed and matched, allocating them to different scenarios, deliberately ensuring that unexpected conjunctions were made and stereotypes avoided. We then wrote scripts for the three weird fictional scenarios about the future of the organisation and ended up with 15-minute dramatized performances - with the full script of that performance printed on a prop that was handed out to everyone present at an international workshop in Johannesburg (in this case 120 people). On each day, in small groups, after each performance, participants (Board members, country directors / senior leaders) identified what they liked and disliked in each scenario. The planning group was then able to identify where the majority view was on the sensitive issues and draft a fourth scenario with all the preferred options – which received overwhelming support and laid the foundation for writing the strategy.

Scenario planning can help address sensitive issues and build consensus. They can also help us be more prepared for future developments – so that we have some sense of what we would do next if X or Y happens.

For more details see [Developing a New Strategy for ActionAid to Advance a Human Rights-Based Approach to Development | Journal of Human Rights Practice | Oxford Academic](#)

19. Analysing political trends / systemic shifts that affect our context

This is synthesised from Just Associates - [Theme 2: Global Patterns, Systemic Shifts – Just Power](#)

Purpose: To identify and critically analyse key political trends.

Plenary: What do we mean by a 'trend'? Invite responses and discussion. Explain that trends are not only the events and changes we experience in our daily lives and work but also larger patterns – social, economic, political, technological, cultural – that reveal a correlation of forces at play. When the specific and the general are somehow connected, this is a trend. To begin, ask what new realities or recent incidents may indicate larger shifts and trends. For example:

- The denial and violent rejection of election outcomes,
- The growing dependence on digital technology for access to information,
- Increased attacks on environmental defenders and journalists
- Renewed political conversation about racial justice and colonialism, and backlash to this
- The rising political visibility of women and their rights,
- The growing numbers of people displaced by extreme weather and climate crisis
- The extreme consolidation of wealth

In pairs: Scan the news on your cell phone, magazines, or newspapers to identify and share headlines from news sources or announcements by governments or influential institutions

Plenary: Share headlines and discuss:

- Do these headlines make sense in relation to your own lives?
- Are similar events, challenges, or changes happening in other countries too?
- Consider political, economic, legal, social, cultural, demographic, climactic, and technological changes happening in your context: what's new and different?

The same trend can be both positive and negative.

Small groups: Using flip charts and markers, identify the five key trends affecting your context. Draw and label a graphic to show: the five trends your group identified / the relative influence and potency of each trend (indicated by size on your graphic) / the connections between these trends / two elements that characterise each trend in your context and globally

Plenary: Post the groups' graphics on the wall. For a few minutes, everyone views them. Then each group has a turn to explain two of the trends they identified.

Synthesis: If possible, enlist a resource person to share their insights. Alternatively, share background articles or videos related to the context or geographic region. Some critical trends:

- Authoritarianism, dictatorships, coups, and political extremism
- Xenophobia, racism, othering
- Religious nationalism and fundamentalism
- Ethno-nationalism
- Militarism
- Extractivism and resource grabs
- Climate change and extreme weather

- Backlash and misogyny, anti-feminism, anti-gender
- Corporate capture of the state
- Neoliberalism
- NGO-isation
- Racism and colonialism within organisations
- Rising economic inequity, insecurity, consolidation of wealth
- Repressions and attacks on activists, defenders, civil society, and democracy

Plenary: For each of the main trends that groups identified, invite concrete examples and experiences. Together, clarify the definition, dynamics, and impact of that trend.

- How do we understand or experience the trend in our context?
- How are the trends connected to one another? What historic roots do they share?
- Where are communities and movements resisting these trends or offering alternatives?

Ask: what do these trends mean for the ways we organise ourselves to mobilise and change power?

Anti-Racist Festival – a cultural space in Spain by Alianza-ActionAid and SoS Racismo Madrid, where racialised and migrant artists are heard, seen and valued. A young woman speaks - embodying community-building that celebrates diversity and turns dialogue into action.

CREDIT: PAOLA GÓMEZ / ACTIONAID



20. Linking from Local to Global – e.g. through Participatory Vulnerability Assessment

Purpose: to connect participatory analysis and action at different levels

One of the risks in using participatory tools is that we end up restricted only to the analysis conducted by people in the room in one space – whether at a community level or a national level or a global level. But most issues are analysed more richly by looking at the connections between levels.

This can be achieved in various ways and one of the most effective is to organising linked processes that involve some work with community groups / some district level engagement / some national and some global convening – where people in each space are grappling with the same issue and building their analysis on each other's analysis.

This was a core concept in the development of Participatory Vulnerability Analysis. This is designed to be a multi-levelled and cumulative process:

- **Community level** – meetings / discussions / training facilitators
- **District level** – stakeholders and focal group meetings / local advocacy and lobbying / documentation and liaison
- **National level** – studies on selected issues / national advocacy / exchange visits / workshops
- **International level** – Coordination and documentation / policy and advocacy work and workshops

The challenge for all our participatory work is to make these connections – but always to build from below – to start with the analysis of people living in poverty or facing exclusion – with a view to building their active agency. Connecting the local level engagement to engagement at other levels can be achieved in various ways, for example:

- By bringing evidence and data collected from local engagement into policy, advocacy and campaigning work at district, national and global levels (e.g. Promoting Rights in Schools where data is collected from multiple schools, directly informing rights-based school improvement plans but also being collated into district or national level citizens' reports).
- By working with local journalists to generate powerful stories that will be relevant to national media and helping them to make connections.
- By bringing local people into national forums / spaces to give direct testimonies.
- By connecting people locally with movements that are mobilising and engaging at other levels.
- By choosing the local areas where we engage based on selecting locations of iconic people's struggles which we can support and learn from and use as powerful examples (e.g. locations where the climate crisis is having a dramatic impact).

21. Shaping a Vision of Feminist Economic Alternatives / a Feminist Just Transition

ActionAid is committed to system change: to transform the dominant global system that is *'neoliberal, colonial, extractive and patriarchal'* and to pursue an *'intersectional feminist, inter-generational, anti-racist & decolonial approach to a just transition'*. **That is a lot of big words.** But what does that look like in practice and how can we build a collective vision of feminist economic alternatives in different contexts?

This is an opportunity for you to help shape this vision, informed by some big words and concepts but shaped by your experience and perspective.

Have a look at the three inputs below that are three different attempts at definitions

- Elements of a feminist just transition,
- Eight components of a feminist wellbeing economy and
- Four principles of a feminist economy.

The key steps to follow are:

- Read the three inputs below (and source others if you can from your context – anything which represents an attempt to articulate a collective feminist vision of the future).
- Choose what you want to produce – is it a definition of some key elements / components / a set of principles / a visualisation of different dimensions?
- Ask, what issues are the most critical that need to be included / highlighted in your context?
- Start by each person throwing out concise ideas / phrases and write these on cards.
- When you have enough cards, ask participants to cluster them – putting likeminded ideas together – if necessary, re-writing cards in the process.
- Try to get some sense of the sequencing of priorities - but this does not have to be absolute.
- Compile into a compelling format of your choice.
- Decorate with images / add artistic interpretation or decide on creative ways to present.
- Display in whatever way you see fit (physically or virtually).

Input 1:

In ActionAid's SIF3 we talk of a **feminist just transition** in the face of the climate crisis, that

- Ensures climate action does not threaten the livelihoods of workers & marginalised communities
- Advances joined-up solutions for climate justice, economic justice, women's rights and humanitarian response,
- Addresses and doesn't exacerbate inequality,
- Focuses on holistic solutions that address people and planet.
- Ensures participatory, inclusive processes, led and planned by impacted people.
- Develops frameworks that support the shift – training / reskilling / social protections – to protect people.
- Places women, in all their diversity, at the centre, addressing patriarchy
- Rebuilds the social organisation of care by recognising, reducing, rewarding, redistributing and reclaiming it- and investing in gender responsive public services.
- Considers the impact of policies on future generations and includes all generations.
- Moves beyond a focus on GDP growth - making care, wellbeing, rights and planetary boundaries visible.
- Dismantles the colonial nature of the present global architecture and racist mindsets.

Input 2:

In a recent workshop with feminist activists in Malawi, participants identified eight **key components of a Feminist Well-being economy** ([Imagining Feminist Wellbeing Economies.pdf](#))

1. An economic model that puts people before profit and ensures equity, dignity and food security
2. An economy that focuses on women's wellbeing
3. Challenging gendered social norms, recognising and valuing care
4. Readily available, high-quality rights-based State provision of public goods and services
5. Dignified work and women's economic justice
6. Freedom from GBV and access to sexual and reproductive health and rights
7. Environment protection and food security
8. Improved governance, accountability and decision making

Input 3:

In another resource **four principles of a feminist economy** have been identified:



For additional ideas, see [Feminist Wellbeing Economies Explainer](#) - including page 44 , Activity 4 on using **Vision Boards on Feminist Wellbeing Economies**, and Activity 5, see page 48 on **Imagining a Feminist Just Transition**.



Women from Lalmonirath in Bangladesh gather to discuss develop their Community Action Plan following a disaster preparedness training. Building on lessons from past floods, they are leading efforts to strengthen resilience – planning for disaster-prepared housing, climate-smart farming, and advocating for permanent embankments to protect their families and livelihoods. CREDIT: MD. MOSHIUR ROHOMAN / ACTIONAID

C. A selection of participatory toolkits / resources on key issues

Below is a selection of ActionAid’s resources and toolkits on participatory approaches relating to different themes / issues. Many of the specific tools above have been drawn from these. If you are working on a specific issue and want to go deeper these will be a valuable resource.

For each we provide a link to the resource online and a short paragraph summarising what you can find there. The resources that are relevant will depend on the nature of the group that you are working with and the issues that come up within the group.

- Reflection-Action website** - [Reflection Action](#)
This website is being updated at the moment and is a place where you can find details of many different but connected participatory approaches (Reflect, Participatory Vulnerability Analysis, STAR, ELBAG, etc) and a large basket of practical participatory tools. Most of the resources outlined here are available also on the website.
- ActionAid’s Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA)** - [Action for Global Justice in Practice](#)
This is the core resource / reference book on ActionAid’s rights-based approach, first produced in 2011, updated in 2016 and again in 2020. It outlines eight core principles of our HRBA and AA’s theory of change. It then has substantive sections on building the power of people (through empowerment, campaigning, solidarity and alternatives). Influencing and shifting power (visible, invisible and hidden) and on increasing rights, redistribution and resilience. This journal article may also be of interest: [Reflections on ActionAid’s HRBA](#)

- **Critical webs of power and change** - [critical web \(actionaid.org\)](#)
Produced by ActionAid in collaboration with others in 2005 this includes details of critical building blocks around critical thinking, participation, facilitation, questioning and listening, democratising information and accountability.
- **Transforming Power** - [Transforming Power](#)
This report from a 'Participatory Methodologies Forum' hosted in Bangladesh involving the leadership of ActionAid, looks at critical issues of power in personal, institutional and political spaces – recognising that participatory methods in themselves are neutral and that they only truly work when accompanied with a vision of and commitment to transforming power.
- **The Reflect Approach** - [Reflect-Mother-Manual](#) and [Communication and Power resources and Evolution of Reflect](#)
Many resources are available about the Reflect approach to adult learning and social change. Reflect was developed by ActionAid in 1993 through pilot programmes in Uganda, Bangladesh and El Salvador and spread rapidly through hundreds of organisations, winning 5 UN international literacy prizes. Reflect merged the theory of Paulo Freire with practical visualisation methods developed by Participatory Rural Appraisal and related approaches. It is still widely used both for adult learning and wider social change processes.
- **Stepping Stones** - [Home - Stepping Stones](#) and [STAR](#)
The original Stepping Stones training programme is a training package on gender, HIV, communication and relationship skills. It is also sometimes described as a social norms change training package, covering many aspects of our lives, including why we behave in the ways we do, how gender, generation and other issues influence this, and ways in which we can change our behaviour, if we want to. Stepping Stones was developed between 1993 and 1995, mainly in Uganda, working with a rural community. A convergence with the Reflect approach led to the development of STAR which focused discussions and activities on six broad areas 1) communication; 2) human rights; 3) reproductive health, family and community health; 4) power relations; 5) advocacy and 6) use of peer groups.
- **Reflection Action Tax Power toolkit** - [Tax Power Campaign Reflection-Action toolkit](#)
This resource helps to build critical awareness and action on tax justice at community level. It shows how potentially complex concepts can be translated for people into meaningful and easy to understand analysis that can guide local action
- **Gender responsive public services** - [Gender-Responsive Public Services framework](#)
This framework offers practical guidance on how to engage with different public services, including education, health, transport, water and sanitation, early childcare, agricultural extension and street lighting. It is framed around four core pillars of what ActionAid believes gender-responsive public services should be:

 1. Publicly funded (focus on 4 Ss – share, size, sensitivity and scrutiny of budgets)
 2. Publicly, not privately, delivered and universal
 3. Gender equitable and inclusive
 4. Focused on quality, in line with human rights frameworks.

For each of these pillars the framework provides an analysis of key issues, clear guidance, practical examples and indicators to assess progress.
- **Rights-based work in schools** - [Promoting Rights in Schools: a participatory framework for citizen engagement in quality, inclusive public education](#)
This resource supports participatory processes by children, parents, teachers and community leaders to analyse and act on the state of their local public school. This is based on tracking the state of schools

against ten core dimensions of the right to education – and can be used to generate rights-based school improvement plans, district level citizens’ reports and national citizens’ reports on the state of education.

- **Transforming Education Financing Toolkit 2023** - [Transforming Education Financing Toolkit](#)
This resource produced by AA with key allies is available in multiple languages, and guides activists to use participatory processes to critically analyse the state of education financing – taking action to link with tax justice, debt justice and challenging austerity.
- **Influencing Budgets** - [ELBAG resource on budgets](#)
A guide for participatory budget work outlining the budget cycle, understanding revenue and taxes, ways of working with decentralisation and how to achieve local revenue justice
- **Deepening accountability in public services** - [ELBAG - accountability resource](#)
Tools and guidance for engaging with local public services, understanding rights, getting organised, gathering evidence and demanding accountability
- **Participatory Vulnerability Analysis** - [Participatory Vulnerability Analysis \(PVA\)](#)
This resource helps to ensure that marginalised community members themselves lead the process in identifying their vulnerabilities – identifying local challenges, impacts of climate and other disasters and local capacities. The process encourages community members to then be active in planning and implementing solutions that work for them.
- **Resources on resilience** - [ActionAid’s Resilience Framework](#)
*ActionAid’s Resilience Framework is a core starting point for climate justice programming, bringing three elements together: **absorptive capacity** (the ability to prevent, prepare for or mitigate the effects of negative events, through coping mechanisms), **adaptive capacity** (the ability for longer-term change e.g. to diversify livelihoods, adopt new farming techniques or adapt curriculums for health professionals) and **transformative capacity** (when the change needed goes beyond people’s absorptive and adaptive abilities and system change is required. There is a related [Resilience Handbook](#) with tools and resources to help people to think, plan and implement work in a way that supports the reduction of people’s vulnerability, and contributes to the building of their resilience to a range of hazards, shocks, stresses and threats.*
- **Participatory assessments of loss and damage** - [Handbook for loss and damage assessment](#)
This resource guides communities to do a participatory assessment of economic and non-economic losses and damages caused by the climate crisis. It includes participatory guidance on understanding climate change trends, mapping risks, using calendars to track seasonal changes, identifying vulnerable households, tracking wider impacts, calculating loss and damage and taking action to avoid or reduce future disasters and losses. It also shows how communities can provide clear information and advocate to local and national authorities to demand relief, support or compensation based on the local assessments – and how this can contribute to demands from the international community.
- **Climate resilient sustainable agriculture** - [Climate Resilient Sustainable Agriculture Handbook](#)
The handbook has been developed to serve as a guide for designing and implementing sustainable agriculture programmes on the ground. It includes details for doing a participatory appraisal of present agriculture, to identify the challenges that the community is facing, the alternatives they have been building, and potentialities. This leads to community prioritisation of actions and alternatives they want to test. It also offers guidance on processes to document local knowledge around sustainable practices / alternatives and processes to monitor and evaluate local testing of alternatives.

- Resilience frameworks for specific hazards** - [Resilience Building: A Guide to Flood, Cyclone, Earthquake, Drought and Safe Schools Programming](#)

This resource provides resilience programming frameworks for the four most common hazards: flood, cyclone, earthquake and drought. Various participatory tools help communities to: identify disaster risks through hazard mapping; understand and document the nature of their impact on the community; analyse the drivers of risk and their vulnerability; identify critical gaps in local infrastructure; and demand equitable rights. They are useful for practitioners to implement more effective and integrated resilience programmes, that cut across different fields of work like livelihoods, education, health, whilst promoting work at different levels: individuals, household, community and national.
- Gender analysis of resilience** - [Measuring resilience by gender: a toolkit for practitioners](#)

This toolkit aims to support ActionAid Country Programmes and Local Rights Programmes (LRPs) to score people's resilience, at the local level. It measures both women's and men's resilience, so that we can identify any differences that exist in terms of resilience to disaster risks. This includes guidance on doing a household survey to collect data against 36 indicators under 4 categories: Economic, Infrastructure, Social, Institutional. This is followed by interviews with key informants and separate focus group discussions with women and men. The outcomes can be used to identify areas that need to be strengthened and to support advocacy for positive change to build women's and community resilience at the local level
- Public financing of agriculture** - [Agroecology Financial Analysis toolkit](#)

Tool to assist assessments of the public financing for agriculture, with a focus on identifying the current levels of support, investment and commitment to agroecological transitions and climate resilient and gender-responsive agricultural practices which benefit smallholder farmers. Produced by the ActionAid-convened Partnership for Social Accountability the tool helps analysts and activists answer the question: to what extent is current public financing for agriculture supportive of a transition to agroecology?
- Access to markets** - [Gender Sensitive Access to Markets | ActionAid International](#)

This handbook uses a range of participatory tools to explore how women and local communities can identify the challenges to and potential of market access. We and our partners support local groups to use this methodology to improve the way they understand, access and benefit from markets, to help them become more self-sufficient and independent. Our approach to market access empowers women to undertake and act on market assessments themselves. It emphasises the importance of analysing the market from a gender perspective, examines the economic, social and environmental sustainability of initiatives, and ensures that all actors in the market can share its value equitably, creating wealth for all.
- Feminist research** - [ActionAid's feminist research guidelines](#)

This resource highlights how participatory methods and a feminist perspective are important for how we conduct research. It stresses that 'People-centred evidence gathering with womxn and young people at the core, collectively analysed with knowledge from in and outside the organisation, can enable multiple power shifts'. This is usually achieved through the consistent use of empowering feminist methodologies, approaches and processes; the application of ActionAid's brand; and an ideological feminist foundation and analysis.
- Girl-led research** - [Girl-led research: how we build power together](#)

This provides useful guidelines and methods to have research at local level actively led by girls – with some practical examples of [Building Power Together](#).

- **Participatory resources for working with girls' clubs in schools** - [TEGINT methodology toolkit: Working with Girls | ActionAid International](#)
This includes over 30 practical activities for working with girls on understanding gender, exploring roles, speaking out, getting girls into schools and moving from ideas into action
 - **Modules on unpaid care and domestic work** - [Unpaid care and domestic work \(POWER\)](#)
These modules help to build understanding on how we can build evidence and action on unpaid care and domestic work – arguing for recognition, reduction, redistribution and representation. There are many participatory tools that have been developed to track and analyse unpaid care – to 'make care visible' – including for example by using time use diaries. There are also some useful [Guiding principles and minimum standards on unpaid care and domestic work](#).
 - **Feminist economic alternatives** - [Another world is possible: Advancing feminist economic alternatives](#)
There are four volumes of resources on advancing feminist economic alternatives to secure rights, justice and autonomy for women and a fair, green, gender-equal world. These resources shines a light on some of the multitude of feminist economic alternatives that exist demonstrating their huge value and providing inspiration and practical examples.
 - **Youth activism / Global Platform training resources** - [Resources | Global Platforms](#)
A series of resources and tools available online for deepening analysis and action by young people on themes including climate justice, democratic governance, education, feminism, food and land rights, humanitarian action, LGBTQI+, and social movements.
 - **Working with social movements /rights defenders** - [Global Social Movement Centre \(MOVE\)](#)
MOVE provides an ecosystem for Human Rights Defenders and their movements to be supported in all aspects of their work through the different phases of their struggles. Currently, it entails an integrated set of capacity strengthening activities for activists in social movements, core movement support functions to social movements, including funding and action research on relevant movements trends. MOVE also focuses on building an ecosystem of actors that can and should support movements.
- See also this collective resource produced by colleagues across the ActionAid federation: [Social Movements Engagement Guidance - 2024.pdf](#)

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From outside ActionAid

- [Powercube: Understanding power for social change - IDS](#) – first developed at IDS, the powercube has grown in popularity and use among development organisations and NGOs. The powercube – and its dimensions of power, spaces and levels – has also been used effectively in combination with other concepts, tools and methods for power analysis.
- [Just Power – Simple Book Publishing](#) – a resource for activists and changemakers from Just Associates

ActionAid is a global movement of people working together to achieve greater human rights for all and defeat poverty. We believe people in poverty have the power within them to create change for themselves, their families and communities. ActionAid is a catalyst for that change.

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