Arab Peoples’ Action to End Injustice and Poverty

Arab Regional Initiative Strategy Paper 2013-2017
Message from the Director of the Arab Regional Initiative

The Arab Region is overridden by poverty, injustice, marginalization, corruption and oppression at various levels: a fact that has eventually blown a non-stop wind of change across the region. In recent years, we have witnessed Arab populations defy embedded systems of social injustice and inequality, challenging their autocratic leaders with often bloody, destabilizing and violent results.

Young people, a staggering 60 percent of the Arab region’s population and among the most disenfranchised, have been the vanguard of this change. If anything this period of time has been a lesson for the future, that to avoid explosive, unpredictable social change springing out of decades of discontent the Arab region must begin harnessing the energy of its youth and channeling it to positive social change.

As an advocate for positive social change, I have spent a lot of my career and energy working to inspire innovative and alternative approaches for the mobilization of young people. This work has engendered serious attempts at mobilizing civil society organizations to address injustice and rights violation. In order to strengthen the civil society movement in Arab Region, a long term CSO development programme has been planned. In fact, youths should be mobilized through these CSOs and move forward toward a positive change through these CSOs. In this case CSOs capacity needs to be built up effectively.

Besides lessons, the shifting context and dynamic winds of change in the Arab region provide enormous potential and a window of opportunity to shape democratic and sustainable alternatives to an outdated status quo. And there is ample space to do so together with marginalized communities, youth activists, women and the organisations that represent them.

By now, ActionAid has established a respected reputation in the region. With this strategy and the long-term commitment of the ActionAid Federation, this reputation will be reinforced and further strengthened.

The Arab Regional Initiative (ARI) stands a great chance of contributing to the change processes initiated in the region and to building them in a progressive way, tilting the power balance towards the marginalized and the poor.

Bringing about change in the region requires courage, alternatives, innovation and a long-term commitment and that is what this strategy represents. It is an ambitious strategy but we do not intend doing it alone – we will develop partnerships at the local, national and international level; we will work alongside local communities, activists and social movements; and we will look forward to the support of the whole ActionAid Federation.

Lastly, we have also devoted part of the strategy to organizational development to make sure that we have the resources and capacities to deliver the promises we made.

Ahmed Al Damrawy
Director Arab Regional Initiative
Content

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

1. INTRODUCTION
2. CONTEXT ANALYSIS
3. OUR VISION, MISSION AND VALUES IN THE ARAB REGION
4. WHO WE ARE: Our identity
5. OUR POSITION ON CHANGE: How change can happen
6. OUR APPROACH TO BRINGING ABOUT CHANGE
   6.1. Who we work with
   6.2. Where we work
   6.3. How we work
7. OUR STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES
8. OUR ORGANIZATIONAL OBJECTIVES
9. CONCLUSION
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAI</td>
<td>ActionAid International</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAP</td>
<td>ActionAid Palestine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALPS</td>
<td>Accountability, Learning and Planning Systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARI</td>
<td>Arab Regional Initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSO</td>
<td>Civil Society Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS</td>
<td>Mellemfolkeligt Samvirke / ActionAid Denmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GMF</td>
<td>Global Monitoring Framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HRBA</td>
<td>Human Rights Based Approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INGO</td>
<td>International Non-Governmental Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organisation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Arab Peoples’ Action to End Injustice and Poverty is the Arab Regional Initiative’s first strategy paper, articulating our vision, mission, approach, objectives and accountabilities for 2013-2017. The strategy has been developed with the participation of communities, youth groups, partners, academics, and ActionAid team members. It builds on the lessons learnt from ActionAid’s earlier interventions in the region.

The Arab Region is overridden by poverty, injustice, marginalization, corruption and oppression at various levels: a fact that has eventually blown a non-stop wind of change across the region. Recent events in the region may be the beginning of a profound, comprehensive and long-lasting transformation of Arab societies, a transformation engendered by civil society rising up against statist regimes. However, the long term consequences of the events of the Arab Spring still remain to be seen. One thing is certain, the desire for self-determination that sparked the Arab Spring is the same desire for self-determination that drives youth, women and civil society to demand their rights and a say in the future of their country and their region.

ActionAid has a vision of strong and vibrant civil societies and representative states that respect, protect and fulfill human rights across the Arab region. We believe that an end to marginalisation and injustice can be achieved through individual and collective action; collective action initiated by the active agency of the people themselves; supported by comprehensive, credible rights-based alternatives and campaigns that address the structural causes and consequences of injustice and poverty.

In order to achieve this, three strategic objectives have been developed for the period of this strategy:

- Harness the leadership of youth as agents of change and for the future of the civil state to demand accountability from duty bearers on youth-specific issues and equality, access, equity and gender responsiveness in public services;
- Build the active agency of women and girls to address all forms of discrimination and injustice, and
- Promote rights-based responses to conflict and occupation in the region.

To deliver on the strategy and strengthen our organisation, three organisational objectives have also been defined:

- Diversify funding and double annual income to 3.4 million GBP to ensure a sustainable economy by 2017
- Strengthen the programming, monitoring and evaluation framework of the Arab Regional Initiative and align systems and policies to those of ActionAid International
- Promote and contribute to mutual learning, knowledge sharing, establishing linkages and creating awareness between the Arab Regional Initiative and the wider ActionAid Federation.

The status as a Regional Initiative is one of a kind in ActionAid. The Regional Initiative adopts a two-pronged approach:

- On the one hand we are carrying out programmatic interventions in a number of countries (Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Egypt and Syria) tied to the common set of objectives set out in this strategy
- On the other hand the nature of the Regional Initiative allows us to act as a change agent, engaging more widely regionally through shared learning, building solidarity, strengthening alliances, and participating in regional and global advocacy and campaign efforts. As a Regional Initiative we have a dual identity being both a civil society actor in the Arab region and a part of the global federation of ActionAid.
ActionAid International (AAI) is an anti-poverty human rights based organization, currently working in 45 countries across Asia, Africa, Americas, Europe and Asia Pacific with headquarters in Johannesburg, South Africa.

AA Denmark (formerly MS Denmark), one of the new Members in ActionAid International’s Federation, has been working in the Arab Region since the mid-1990s. Another of the new members of the International Federation, ActionAid Australia (the former AustCare), has also been working in the region with a primary focus on increasing the access to basic services for isolated communities in Palestine. AA Denmark has been working in Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Palestine, and Syria with specific communities through a multi-layered approach, targeting and covering: (i) Decision and policy makers (in municipalities and local councils) introducing them to more participatory governance and preparing them to accept young people’s ideas and advocacy for rights realisation, (ii) Civil society organisations – introducing them to a human rights based approach, in order to develop their capacity in advocating for community and youth issues, (iii) Young people – empowering them through conscientisation processes and capacity development to develop their citizenship skills and engage them in expressing their opinions and concerns, and (iv) Youth groups - supporting their mobilisation in order to work on social change initiatives that address root causes of rights violations and achieve positive changes in their spheres of life.

Priority 7 of ActionAid International’s (AAI’s) global strategy, People’s Action focuses on “expanding strategically into new countries to advance AAI’s mission, based on clear criteria and transparent process”. Subject to this, an appraisal was undertaken in March 2012. The purpose of this appraisal was to determine whether and how AAI should continue and/or expand its engagement in the Arab region, exploring opportunities for wider cooperation with civil society organisations in the region and prospects for deepened engagement with poverty and injustice issues. Key recommendations of the appraisal team were presented to the AAI General Assembly in June 2012 and the latter approved the establishment of a regional initiative in the Arab Region in order to build AAI’s presence in the region. The Arab Regional Initiative will be an ActionAid first, being the only multi-country regional initiative that will put in place strategies that remain responsive to the changing context in the region.

Arab Peoples’ Action to End Injustice and Poverty is the Regional Initiative’s first strategy paper, articulating our vision, mission, approach, objectives and accountabilities for the next five years (2013-2017). This has been developed with the participation and cooperation of different stakeholders, including communities, youth groups, partners, academics, and ActionAid team
aims to develop solutions and alternatives that foster participation and accountability, open space for ActionAid to work with women and youth, and start developing its collective of supporters and volunteers, who will want to contribute their part in the eradication of injustice and poverty.

This strategy has built its foundations on the historical events that have taken place in the Arab region over the last two years and the work of local, national and regional civil society and movements seeking more accountable, transparent and just governance. This document is our aspiration, shared vision and commitment for change to a sustainable, just and equal society in the Arab region.

In the strategy period 2012-2017 the AAI Board has delegated the management responsibility of the Arab Regional Initiative to ActionAid Denmark.
Today, more than ever, Arab countries too are highly influenced by what happens ‘next door’. Moreover, we have seen the potential for change when social media is harnessed to support the mobilisation of people seeking accountability, justice and democracy.

The Arab region is located on the cross-roads between Asia, Europe and Africa and accounts for close to sixty percent of the world’s oil reserves and twenty-five percent of the world’s reserves of natural gas. The region is also birthplace of three of the world religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The vast majority of the people (almost 90%) are Muslim and a significant number – about 7% - Christian.

The Arab Region plays an increasingly important geopolitical role vis-à-vis world peace and stability. The region is affected by protracted conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Yemen, Sudan, Somalia and, most obviously, the occupied Palestinian territories. These conflicts profoundly affect global peace and security and are at the epicentre of hostilities between extremists of Christian, Muslim and Jewish faiths. The political involvement of regional and international actors including Iran, USA, Britain, Russia, China, Indonesia, France and other nations makes the region extremely important and highly influential in international politics.

The Arab region comprises 22 countries and some 358 million people. During this strategy period, the Arab Regional Initiative (ARI) will be focusing the attention on five of those countries: Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Syria (where work is at present suspended but will resume when feasible) and Palestine, building on our historical presence in these countries and working to consolidate and deepen our programming. The initiative will include such work as capacity development and solidarity building with people from other countries, including Morocco, Tunisia and Yemen. In addition ARI will be closely linked to the separate AA Palestine program strategy. We will use this strategy period to explore the possibility of obtaining the funds necessary to formally expand to other countries in the future, depending on need and demand and an assessment of ActionAid’s added value, to ensure that we remain responsive to the fluid changes in the region.

Although each country in the Arab Region is unique, there are a range of commonalities in political, social, economic and cultural challenges and opportunities. United by an Arab identity, underpinned by common histories, language and culture, the Regional Initiative presents a unique opportunity for a united fight for justice and an end to poverty and marginalization.
In terms of the political context, the historical presence of authoritarian regimes and poor quality of democratic governance is a major overall obstacle to development and realization of rights in the region. Democratic governance is essential to improve basic service delivery, economic growth, generation of employment, urban and rural development and redistribution of wealth and power and participation for the most vulnerable in society, particularly youth and women who are often excluded from such processes. Gender discrimination is widespread in the political arena, but is similarly present at the familial and community levels and defines culture and social relations. Therefore, more accountable and transparent governance is required for the fulfillment of rights as well as the promotion of gender equality and the ability of women and youth to participate in, and contribute to social, political, economic and cultural growth.

Despite the recent positive developments and the potential of the Arab Spring as a game changer, free and fair elections, inclusive constitutional processes, protection of civil liberties, freedom of the press, transparency, accountability and access to and enjoyment of all rights and freedoms are all still at stake. Governments elected as a result of the Arab Spring and others that feel threatened by the uprising have been rolling back the freedoms that once existed and reneging on promises made. Arrests and political trials have found their way back into the daily life of citizens. Political and economic corruption are still prevalent and a source of frustration. It is closely linked to the power and networks held by small elites ruling the public and private spheres.

We must also recognize the very uneven nature of the uprisings and transitions in the region. The Arab countries themselves could be divided into three categories, those with: 1) transitional regimes i.e. Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain and potentially Syria; 2) regimes trying to reform to sustain their existence i.e. Morocco, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Jordan; and 3) Countries where the situation largely remains unchanged i.e. Algeria, Lebanon and Palestine.

Conflict and violent unrest are a major concern in all countries although the levels, patterns and implications of conflict differ across the countries. Accordingly, conflict and sensitivity about sectarian, tribal, ethnic and class issues are vital elements not to be overlooked in any intervention in the region. Arguably the root of regional conflicts and most severe rights violations occur in Palestine as a result of the unresolved occupation. The various conflicts that have existed throughout the region have had significant impacts on the enjoyment of human rights and development. Violence, lack of security, unresolved injustices and denial of human rights have created an enabling environment for religious extremism and political alienation. Largely as a result, the sum of refugees in the region continues to rise, creating additional layers of discrimination and marginalization. A large number of Palestinian and Iraqi refugees are still displaced and the number of Syrian refugees has been increasing by the day since the civil war broke out.
Traditionally, civil society organisations (CSOs) have stood in the background of government-affiliated organisations and therefore not been able to flourish and exert influence on the political decision-making processes. CSOs across the region have traditionally – with Palestine and Lebanon as exceptions - been operating in a disabling environment with political restrictions. For example, in Syria hardly any independent organisations exist, whereas Egypt is home to a huge number of CSOs though with a fairly limited room for maneuvering. Organisations have traditionally focused on mainly providing services to the community.

Therefore, the impact of the civil society on government and society has been of limited significance. However, the picture of a relatively passive civil society dramatically changed following the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt. A feeling of political efficacy had evolved among the youth in the sense that they now had a stronger belief that they could influence political affairs. “Street politics” continue to shape developments in virtually all Arab countries – both in countries that experience major changes (Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen and Bahrain) and other countries where unprecedented political actions that occur on the street or on the internet do not reach the level of calling for regime change (Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco and Saudi Arabia). Particularly Islamic groups have been able to reach out to the community and are experiencing increasing mobilization. With the changes in the societies across the region there is an increasing need for capacity development of civil society organisations to take on a new role in the change processes and bridge the gap between people in the forefront of the protests and the community at large.

The democratic spaces in the region are still limited due to certain limitation to fundamental political and civil rights. Major issues include the need to improve inclusiveness, representation of people as well as accountability and transparency by the states. The right to freedom of expression is often also violated by governments; and civil society organisations and human rights defenders experience harassment and obstruction of their work, as it is seen these days in Egypt. Some countries have expanded the scope of laws traditionally used against writers and journalists in order to criminalise bloggers and users of other internet-based tools. The Freedom in the World 2012 report4 on political rights and civil liberties shows that slightly more countries in the Arab region registered declines over the course of 2011. However, Egypt and Tunisia have seen an increase in freedom of expression, media and access to information during the Arab Spring. Currently, Tunisia, Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt score highest among Arab countries with more open systems, where Lebanon maintains a lead position. Although the Arab spring has resulted in an opening up in media, 2012 also witnessed stricter access to internet and a number of political, sexual, and religious oriented websites were censored in Jordan. Some countries have restrictions to freedom of speech, as in Jordan where one cannot criticize the King. Freedom to form associations and freedom of assembly are likewise limited by national laws. CSOs in the region have a weak culture of investing in ICT and social media; they are limited to traditional methods of communication, online research and information sharing. This fact is more aggravated by relatively low access to ICT and the Internet, and by the limited availability of online materials in Arabic.
inequality in the labour market is also manifested in other significant ways, including wage gaps and occupational segregation. Women continue to dominate the informal labour market. Where women contribute to household income, they continue to face challenges within the home in relation to negotiating decision-making space and control over income. At the same time women continue to be responsible for the bulk of childcare and domestic work and the value of this work to maintaining society goes unrecognized.

From a socio-economic perspective, inadequate social policies including deterioration in housing conditions, inadequacy of health services and social protection systems pose a serious social challenge and impediment to development and attainment of rights in the region. Unemployment is rampant, with youth unemployment reaching an average of 23.4 per cent across the region in 2010, according to ILO, and 31.5 per cent for young women in particular. The long term consequences of unemployment at such an early age are grave, impacting self-esteem, long-term career prospects for these youth, economic growth and the ability of working-age populations to care for the elderly in the future.

Women in general face lower participation in the labour markets which stands, on average, at around 25% across the region and is as low as 13% in Syria and 15% in Jordan among women over the age of 15 for the period 2008 to 2012. Not only are women more prone to unemployment than men, but gender
On the social front, young people are the fastest growing segment of the population in the Arab region. Some 60% of the population is under 25 years of age, with youth between 15 – 24 years constituting one third of the population, making it one of the most youthful regions of the world. vi Youth are the driving force of many change processes. Nevertheless, many vital challenges are confronting this segment of society in a way that might jeopardize the future realization of the youth’s potential in Arab countries. A main gate keeper for the status quo is the family where children and youth are not given the space to develop and grow and where they are governed by a patriarchal system growing up without the sense of having a legitimate voice to express their views on various issues. Both young women and men frequently experience a cultural norm where it is expected that young people will leave it to the adults to engage in societal affairs and make decisions about their own lives. This is further engraved and reinforced on a daily basis, by top-down information loaded, non-participatory teaching-based educational system.

One important reason for these limits to youth participation is to be found in the political systems of the given countries. The way in which governments give room for civil society to thrive and participate in decision-making is of utmost importance as regards to the opportunities of young men and women in any society.

The year 2011 seems to have marked a turning point in the political development of the region, where youth played a significant role in the Arab Spring. The long term consequences of the events of the Arab Spring at the systemic level still remains to be seen, but one thing is certain; this movement influenced the self-perception of youth and civil society who are now demanding their rights to a much larger extent and have a belief in their leverage over determining the future for their countries. In this self-perception, youth see themselves as active political agents that have an inalienable right to contribute to shaping society. The extent to which young people will become productive members of their societies depends on how well governments and civil societies invest in social, economic, and political development that meet their needs and address their rights. However, youth are increasingly being marginalized, and their post-revolutionary role already seems to have been undermined. Therefore, they deserve all the needed support and coaching for them to succeed in influencing the long term change process.
Inequalities are a significant issue in the region and are a serious threat to human development. The inequality of wealth and opportunities where a small elite controls the economy is a predominant problem across countries in the region. Disparities between urban and rural areas are significant. Nevertheless, while rural poverty is pervasive urban poverty is now rapidly increasing. Inequitable gender relations are also integral to the problem of equitable development in the region. The most cursory examination of the Middle East and North Africa, demonstrates that men and boys are frequently accorded rights which are not accorded to women. When rights are also accorded to women, they are not as robust. While the rights of men and boys are most likely to be violated by government or the state, the rights of women and girls are violated by the state and also often by men and boys in general and by family members, and sometimes other women as well.

No-where in the region do women, half of the population, enjoy the same opportunities as men, due to discriminatory laws and social practices. Such challenges along with many others are limiting youth and women from exerting agency in political processes and participating in both formal and informal decision-making processes. Women’s rights to physical security and freedom from violence are violated across the region. Not only are laws inadequate to protect women’s freedoms, but patriarchal values and cultural, religious and traditional norms act to justify and normalise such rights violations. It is not only laws, and governmental policies and institutions that need to recognize and provide the means of realizing and protecting rights, but also local communities and families. This is further reinforced by the refugee status, by conflict and by occupation.

A great deal is at stake for the region and beyond if the problems of poor governance, gender inequality and youth unemployment and civic disengagement, particularly of those most marginalized whose voices may not yet have been heard in recent uprisings, are not adequately addressed. Arguably the focal problem of the region has shifted from the Israel-Palestine conflict to the ineffably destructive and violent Syria conflict. The Syria conflict epitomizes much of what this strategy seeks to address. Nevertheless, the continued occupation by Israel of Palestinian land through
settlement building and the dispossession of Arab land, livelihoods and human rights remains a symbolic issue.

Although the regional context is complex and the multiple socio-economic, political and cultural challenges appear insurmountable there is need to take action. Building on ActionAid’s learning and achievements over the past 40 years and our enriched practice of a human-rights based approach to development, we are well positioned to contribute to change in the region and obliged to address the root causes of poverty and conflict in the Arab region. We are also capable of building on our global network to facilitate empowerment, solidarity and campaigning on Arab regional issues.

As an organisation, we also have much to learn from the amassing activism and demands for greater accountability that have been witnessed across the region over the last two years. Accordingly, a rights-based approach through empowerment, solidarity and campaigning as well as promotion of alternative solutions, shared learning and knowledge generation are some of the main pillars upon which the ActionAid Arab Regional Initiative is based.
Our vision, mission and values in the Arab region

Our VISION is:
Strong and vibrant civil societies and representative states across the Arab region based on the respect, protection and fulfillment of human rights

Our MISSION is:
To work with people living in exclusion and poverty, particularly youth and women, and progressive movements across the region, to seek an end to poverty, injustice and marginalization.

Our VALUES:
- **Mutual respect**, requiring us to recognize the innate worth of all people and the value of diversity.
- **Equity and justice**, requiring us to work to ensure equal opportunity to everyone, irrespective of race, age, gender, sexual orientation, HIV status, colour, class, ethnicity, disability, location and religion.
- **Honesty and transparency**, being accountable at all levels for the effectiveness of our actions and open to our judgments and communications with others.
- **Solidarity with the poor**, powerless and excluded will be the only bias in our commitment to the fight against poverty.
- **Courage of conviction**, requiring us to be creative and radical, bold and innovative – without fear of failure – in pursuit of making the greatest possible impact on the causes of poverty.
- **Independence** from any religious or party-political affiliation.
- **Humility** in our presentation and behavior, recognizing that we are part of a wider alliance against poverty.
As a Regional Initiative we have a dual identity being both a civil society actor in the Arab region and as a part of the global federation of ActionAid. We focus our resources and time on building long-term mutual partnerships and strengthening engagement with the most excluded and the poorest groups and the organisations that represent them. We are committed to finding sustainable alternative solutions to end injustices and poverty from the household to the global level.

The status as a Regional Initiative is one of a kind in ActionAid. One of the key characteristics of the Regional Initiative, as opposed to a regional program is the application of a two-pronged approach which is managed and coordinated from the regional office in Jordan: On the one hand we are carrying out programmatic interventions in the respective countries. These are tied to the common set of objectives set out in this strategy although not all promises will be implemented in each country. On the other hand the nature of the Regional Initiative allows us to act as a change agent that engages more widely regionally through, for example, shared learning, building solidarity, strengthening alliances, engagement with knowledge networks and hubs, participation in regional and global advocacy and campaign efforts. This engagement will be based on the concerted efforts and learnings from the work being done in the countries. Another trait of the Regional Initiative is the potential to invite women and youth from other countries in the region to be included in capacity development activities such as training programmes organised by Training4Change, twinning arrangements and deployment of ‘Inspirators’ ‘Advisors’ and Global Citizen Volunteers through People4Change.

The Regional Initiative is also characterized by having the possibility of responding to immediate needs and emerging opportunities and putting in place strategies for an ever-changing and complex context and dynamic. Under this strategy period, the five key countries - Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Palestine and Syria remain at the core of the initiative. The Arab Spring and the rapidly changing dynamic in the region is an example of how the Regional Initiative’s ability to remain flexible to ‘fluidly’ respond to changes in neighbouring countries, such as Tunisia and Yemen is appropriate. By strategically altering the depth of our engagement in response to regional changes, the initiative will remain relevant to the region. If the security and political situation in one country, for example, does not allow ARI to continue its partnerships and interventions, there is the possibility to scale up in other countries. This is important in a high-risk situation like the present in the Arab region.

A particular regional partnership structure equally defines the Arab Initiative. A group of key strategic partners that are not necessarily programme partners from the countries in the region will make up an ARI Partnership Forum. The Partnership Forum will serve as a strategic advisory group for the Regional Initiative and help to ensure that we remain engaged and relevant to the region. At the same time such a forum strengthens the local ownership and credibility of the Initiative within the region. The Partnership Forum can also help to ensure engagement of ARI in various AAI organisational structures and processes.
We believe that the indignity of injustice and poverty is a violation of human rights that arises from unequal power relations, from the household to the global level. We have seen how the State, the market, local communities and families often perpetuate inequality and injustice—though authoritarianism, corruption and lack of transparency and accountability, through patriarchy and other forms of discrimination.

The events of the last 2 years in the Arab region in particular demonstrate people’s power and the capacity of movements to demand and bring about change. The so-called Arab Spring was a radically transformative process in several countries in the region. While the change brought about has not necessarily been what people set out to achieve nor advanced the freedoms and enjoyment of the rights of the people, the process itself has been a reflection of how change can be brought about. The uprising brought youth, including young men and women, to the forefront and gave them more of a voice and confidence as individuals and as family members to promote democratization, to challenge traditional patriarchal culture and values. Education, mass media and social media in particular were proven to be critical tools for shifting attitudes and mobilising people and movements.

In other words, through individual and collective action of progressive groups and movements, and by supporting people suffering from injustice to discover their own power, get organized and connect, we publicly demand respect, protection and fulfillment of their rights from local institutions and authorities, national governments, corporations, donors and the international community.
6.1. Who we work with

While ActionAid works with many groups, our priority is to work with people living in exclusion and poverty and their organisations. Youth have proven to be powerful agents of change. Within the region, youth presently appear to be somewhat frustrated by those that have come to power in countries managed by transitional governments. In other countries where no such transitions have been witnessed, youth and youth groups continue with caution and frustration, awaiting change. This strategy comes at an opportune time where support can be given to mobilize and build solidarity among a wide representation of youth who have been actively involved in instigating change and those youths who did not take part in the uprisings so far. ActionAid will invest in the capacity of Arab young men and women to take stock of successes and challenges thus far and mobilize, campaign and advocate for their human rights. Globally, ActionAid focuses in our work on women’s rights and this will also be a priority of the Arab Regional Initiative, alongside working with youth aged 15 to 30.

We will also prioritise working with other marginalized groups. This may include refugees, displaced persons, survivors of conflict, migrant workers, female informal workers, Arab and foreign alike and also ethnic and religious minorities. These are all marginalized, discriminated against and more vulnerable to poverty and infringements of their social, economic, political and civil rights.

The Arab region is birthplace to three of the world religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Religion plays a major role in the society, in conflicts and in politics across the region e.g. in Lebanon the highest political offices are proportionately reserved for representatives from certain religious communities and in several countries the main political parties are based on Islam.

AA will not take side in any religious conflict. We will work in partnership with civil society organisations and alliances that share our vision and values no matter their religious beliefs. A majority of the partners are secular organisations without any religious mission. However, in order to reach out to all people living in injustice and poverty, it will also be relevant to form alliances with faith-based organisations, religious leaders and Imams.
6.2. Where we work

The Arab Regional Initiative will have a primary programme relationship with Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine and Egypt. ActionAid Palestine is a Country Programme but will strongly be linked to this strategy implementation, any programmatic interventions and relations between the two will happen in close coordination. The programme interventions in Syria will be resumed when the security and political situation again allow us to operate in the country. However in the meantime, we keep the communication channels open with previous partners and implement activities with Syrians in Jordan and Lebanon.

In all countries, programmes will be built that include both working with partners and people living in exclusion and poverty at the community level as well as engagement with national partners and national processes. These processes shall further feed into the regional discourses. The work in these countries will serve as mutual learning opportunities within ActionAid and it will be an aim to build experience and ‘centres of excellence’ that may be used for wider inspiration and learning within the region.

The locations of community partners are at the moment mainly focused around Beqaa in Lebanon, Zarqa in Jordan, Hebron in Palestine and El-Fayoum in Egypt. These areas were identified on the basis of low human development indicators, persistent human insecurity, lack of access to political decision-making for young people and women, political movements for change as well as limited presence of international organisations and foreign funding. We wish to deepen our engagement in these areas before widening our partner portfolio and geographical scope in order to ensure strong and sustainable impact in these localities.

The ARI will further include a range of other countries from the Arab region for knowledge sharing, capacity development, alliance building and solidarity purposes. These include mainly Tunisia, Morocco, and Yemen. However, as we do not intend to initiate in-depth local programming in those countries but rather engage at strategic national level under the auspices of the Regional Initiative, specific locations are not applicable in this regard.
6.3. How we work

Based on our learning from experiences, the way we think and act, our character and distinctive competencies are particularly shaped by the following set of approaches, which underpin our work, with strategic priorities and interventions determined by local contexts.

1. We believe in **taking the side of people living in poverty, marginalization and injustice** who are the primary agents of change. Poverty, marginalization and injustice can be eradicated only when the people we work with are able to take charge and act to claim and enjoy their rights. In the region, we work with diverse social constituencies, especially women and youth who suffer from violation of rights.

2. The **human rights-based approach** defines all our work. The focus of all our work is to ensure that the rights of people living in poverty, marginalization and injustice are respected, promoted, protected and fulfilled. We will deepen our experience and skills in implementing the core components of a human rights-based approach during this strategy period. We are committed to asserting the indivisibility and interconnectedness of rights, recognizing that for people to claim and enjoy their rights we need to change not only policies and practices but also attitudes and behaviours.

From an ActionAid perspective there are three axes to the human rights based approach: empowerment, solidarity and campaigning. Distinctive strengths of our **empowerment** approach include our participatory action-reflection processes with people living with poverty, marginalization and injustice at the **local level**; build critical awareness of their situation (conscientisation); organise and mobilise for individual and collective action, supporting organisations and movements that represent excluded groups and their causes; monitoring public policies and s and; develop communication skills and platforms. In the spirit of mutual partnership, the Arab Regional Initiative is open to building partnerships with those groups who share our common vision and values but may have a slightly different understanding when it comes to the human rights based approach. We will build consensus by establishing a common ground to address these issues.

We believe that connecting people and movements is necessary to build a critical mass to demand change to policies and practices. Therefore, we build and strengthen **solidarity** by connecting and organising people within countries, across borders and between diverse groups committed to a common cause.

**Campaigning and influencing** is embedded in our rights-based approach. Some of the fundamental
causes of poverty lie beyond the immediate location or borders where the effects are felt, and can be addressed by effective campaigns, mobilising people to shift national or international policies or practices, particularly by linking local issues to the national, and in this case, the regional, and international arenas. Our campaigns draw energy, legitimacy and support from citizens in the region. We are especially committed to building on our encouraging success in educating and mobilizing young people; ensuring access to information and evidence base for their action. Sometimes challenges lie not in policies but in the attitudes and behaviours of people that perpetuate poverty. In such cases, media and mass communications is a critical part of campaigning for change in the region, particularly social media.

3. **Partnerships and alliances** are important to our approach. We build long-term partnerships with local communities, their organisations and social movements, respecting their autonomy, facilitate strengthening their capacities and helping them to share learning across issues, sectors, movements and geographies to build a formidable movement for change. We increasingly support citizens’ movements that are shaping alternatives. Our work with various movements and activist groups in the region is testimony to this. We also work in alliances with many different actors and institutions, including NGOs, networks, think-tanks, unions and progressive actors. Working in this way enables us to maximise our contribution towards addressing the issues of poverty and injustice while complementing the efforts of others.

Moreover, **forging alliances with supporters** through campaigns, fundraising and communications is key to influencing and securing change. **Fundraising** is an essential part of our approach as it’s a key way to support the struggles of people living in poverty and the easiest way for many people and institutions to give their support, act on their compassion, contribute and feel connected.

4. **Critical engagement:** In order to effect change, we engage critically with governments, institutions and corporate whose policies and practices are making or keeping people marginalised. We will seek to hold them accountable through critical engagement – engaging constructively where possible but being willing to challenge where necessary. Our engagement may range from cooperation to confrontation but we will always take a non-violent approach and be based on an assessment of the impact it may have on our programme. To avoid being co-opted by powerful institutions and individuals we will endeavour to be transparent and open about all our engagements. We also commit ourselves to remain guided by the agenda of people living with poverty and injustice and their organisations and movements.

5. **Strengthening capacity:** We work with our partners to strengthen poor people’s organisations, skills and access to information and to enable joint action. A crucial part of our work involves the nurture of civil society organisations and leaders that emerge in communities of people living in exclusion and poverty. This is particularly pertinent in a region where the uprisings that occurred in many of the countries in the region in 2012 that experienced change were led by middle class groups but not necessarily those women and men and young people living in poverty and exclusion. Importantly, we believe that strengthening the capacity of civil society is not an end in and of itself. As such, by sharing skills, knowledge and resources we, and our partners, can help them become strong enough to speak and act effectively for their people. Providing training, information, exchange opportunities and feedback review and reflection processes provides the backbone for our capacity strengthening work.

6. Finally, in this strategy period we will focus on working together with people and their movements to discover and implement **alternatives** and lasting solutions. Too often struggles against poverty and injustice focus on challenging and confronting existing conditions without providing credible solutions. We will seek to ensure that our advocacy and campaigns are grounded in rigorous research, strong evidence, clear policy positions, people’s action and proposing solutions and alternatives, with an emphasis on two key ingredients to change processes - a sense of optimism and a sense of direction.

In this strategy period, the above-mentioned mutually reinforcing approaches will shape our programme design and action at local, national and regional / international levels.
Partnerships and alliances

This strategy will be implemented in close partnership with civil society.

We will work with:

- Young individuals and groups, initiatives (at the local, national and regional level), movements and progressive civil society organizations from all social and political backgrounds, with special emphasis on connecting grassroots to national level partners and focus on empowering youth.

- Marginalized and excluded women and organisations that work with these women, with the aim of encouraging them to lead and have control over their livelihoods, resources, and bodies.

- Local organizations that work with poor and marginalized youth, particularly young women, including seeking new partnerships with reformist Islamic civil society organisations at community level.

- University students and activists that are already engaged in civil action, who act as the critical mass that have the ability and motivation to help continue the momentum built thus far, mobilize and lead the society towards positive social change.

- Other marginalized groups, which may include refugees, and displaced persons.

- Key think tanks, knowledge networks and researchers from the region that would work with ActionAid to enrich the development discourse and deepen an appreciate for home-grown human rights.

- Regional and international programmes and initiatives that work to promote global solidarity in the fight for justice and equality.

The Arab Regional Initiative is committed to explore new types of partnerships and approaches and will be flexible in terms of the approach taken in different contexts.
6.4. Value-addition of AA engaging in the Arab region

By engaging in the Arab region ActionAid International can bring in its special approach, values and methods to partnerships with civil society actors and social movements. There is little competition from other INGOs to the type of partnerships that AA can offer to the region.

AAI’s special added value includes:

1. As a global federation, AA can ensure to link up the Arab region to global solidarity movements through facilitating the inclusion of progressive civil society actors in the global struggles and reflecting the issues and perspectives from the Arab region at the international level. As a global federation AA can also promote exchange, shared learning and cooperation between people in the Arab region with other parts of the world.

2. AA’s strong experience working with social movements can support in strengthening the capacity of progressive human rights oriented civil society organisations. The Arab region has in the recent years experienced how social movements can have a significant political impact and these experiences could also be very relevant to bring to other social movements in other regions.

3. AAs approach to empowerment using participatory approaches is highly relevant to the current challenges and opportunities facing youth, particularly those who led and took active part in the revolution but were left unattended in the transition period.

4. Campaigning is embedded in AA’s rights based approach. By engaging in the Arab region, AA can bring in perspectives from the Arab region to multi-country campaigns to address some of the fundamental causes of poverty and injustice that lie beyond the immediate location.

5. AA’s strong democratic governance and bottom-up accountability methods can assist in promoting the critical forces in the region that challenge injustice and top down bureaucratic systems. In the Arab region, accountability and governance are newly tapped areas of work which can take development work a further step into the political arena and taking youth social development and community service initiatives a further step into working on processes of social change.

6. In the Arab region where women are faced with discriminatory laws and social practices that deny them the same rights and opportunities as men, AA can have an added value with its strong focus on and experiences with women’s rights.

7. AA can influence civil society to work more politically to strengthen poor people’s participation in decision-making and to bring the voices of the poor and marginalised into the political debates.

8. AA can introduce a new paradigm of work for NGOs in the region that is complementary, human rights based, non-donor driven and more egalitarian and participatory when it comes to youth engagement and promotion of women’s rights.

9. AA can inspire partners to promote and strengthen critical thinking among women and youth and thus support in building a new human rights based identity in the region.

10. The Arab region is presently experiencing a growing political and social indignation among youth. Therefore, there is a unique opportunity at present to create democratic and sustainable development alternatives together with the Arab youth.
OBJECTIVE 1
To harness the leadership of youth as agents of change & for the future of the civil state to demand accountability from duty bearers on youth-specific issues and equality, access, equity and gender responsiveness in public services.

Countries in the region typically exhibit a ‘youth bulge’ in their demographic profiles. Both young women and men face multiple vulnerabilities, targeted because of their status as youth and are at risk of serious human rights violations. The general discrimination faced by women, then makes it even more challenging for young women to participate in politics, engage in economic activities and assert control over their bodies.

The extent to which young people will become productive members of their societies and benefit from all that societies have to offer depends on how well governments and civil societies invest in social, economic, and political development that meets their needs and addresses their rights. At the same time, young people, if appropriately skilled, engaged and empowered provide the opportunity to be powerful drivers, bringing about positive change. Given the size of youth populations in the region, youth are both the “present” and “future” of the Arab region. AA works with youth in all their diversity. The priority is to work with the poorest and most excluded youth and hence a special focus is given to engage and mobilize young people in local communities in Zarqa, Beqaa, Hebron, El-Fayoum and Cairo. At the same time we support youth that have already been part of the movements to develop their capacities further and support them in taking an active role in change processes. We will, therefore, also be able to link up different groups of youth bridging the gap between those that have taken active part in instigating change processes and those who have not yet been involved. This strategy also commits us to harnessing the framework of ActionAid’s global youth network of the Arab Fellows, Activista and the Youth-Peers Networks, in developing a meaningful, progressive, transparent and non-violent organisational framework to further support and strengthen young people’s efforts to become a positive force in tomorrow’s power structures. Forming national networks in all strategic countries based on thorough context analysis, linking these regionally and globally would be a powerful approach in building strategic partnerships to drive youth led campaigns within the existing multi-country campaign framework.

This strategy also commits us to harnessing the framework of ActionAid’s global youth network of the Arab Fellows, Activista and the Youth-Peers Networks, in developing a meaningful, progressive, transparent and non-violent organisational framework to further support and strengthen young people’s efforts to become a positive force in tomorrow’s power structures. Forming national networks in all strategic countries based on thorough context analysis, linking these regionally and globally would be a powerful approach in building strategic partnerships to drive youth led campaigns within the existing multi-country campaign framework.

This strategy commits us to working with young people in shaping a more democratic, equitable and sustainable society in the region. In this strategy, this will be strengthening of our ongoing work with young people in terms of both consolidation and innovation. We will also commit to building solidarity between those youth groups and movements who played a significant role in Arab uprising and those most marginalized and poor youth who may have been less engaged and whose voices have not been heard.
Key Actions:

- Support process of building the critical consciousness of young women and men through Reflection-Action processes.

- Support young women and men to promote rights-based alternatives, supporting their local activism on rights and campaigns, supporting new and existing youth organizations - locally, nationally and regionally - promoting their leadership and connecting them into dynamic movements for change including the formation of Activista networks, Arab Fellow and youth-peers

- Support young women and men’s involvement in governance and decision-making processes, enabling them to participate and secure more responsive and relevant services from local and national government, including monitor services at local level.

- Support building constituency of young women and men for larger solidarity so their voices are heard in both informal and formal policy influencing spaces.

- Ensure that young women’s voices are heard within youth groups and that young women’s demands are reflected in youth movements.

- Inspired by new youth-driven and digital ways of organizing, including social media etc., support youth led online platforms and harness the potential of digital campaigning, organizing and mobilization as a central component in our efforts to promote youth participation and leadership. We will also use culturally relevant ways such as song, theatre or radio.

- Mobilize youth and civil society actors around the multi-country campaign “Progressive tax, progressively spent” through strategic partnerships including the regionally created youth networks. Provide strategic “safe” spaces for young people to express themselves, their feelings and opinions including provision of support to traumatized groups before we engage with other capacity development interventions.

- Create fundraising opportunities linked to youth activism (for example, support youth leadership, mobilization, Activista, solidarity campaign work etc.) and seek consistent resourcing for youth organising and networking.

Change Promises:

Change Promise 1: We will have built the leadership and citizenship capacity of 7,000 number of young women (50%) and men, helped mobilising and organising 3000 youth and supported 60 youth organisations and movements.

Change Promise 2: We will have supported 1,500 people (50% young women) to participate in political processes and helped bring about a substantial change in the responsiveness of governments to the demands of the people.
defend their own rights, with worrying reports of sexual harassment against demonstrators in Egypt.

This strategy comes at an opportune moment, with the Arab Spring having facilitated the mobilization of diverse women from countries across the region, with technology and social media dramatically increasing women’s access to information. The very participation of women in the Arab uprisings played a major role in challenging norms about women’s “place” in society. In Tunisia, women won 49 of the 217 Constituent Assembly seats in the 2012 election. While this does not necessarily mean women’s concerns are adequately represented in political spaces nor that these rises to power have gone unquestioned by patriarchal powers, it highlights the potential created when women’s leadership is nurtured and valued.

ActionAid International has prioritised women’s rights since its first strategy in the late 1990s which called for us “to advocate at all levels to address the causes of gender inequality”. Since our women’s rights work in the region is less developed, in the initial stages of this strategy, ActionAid will particularly invest in strengthening relationships with like-minded women’s organisations.

**OBJECTIVE 2**
To build the active agency of women and girls to address all forms of discrimination and injustice.

Women in the Arab region, enabled by advances in literacy and higher education, are increasingly asserting themselves, particularly in the face of male dominance of political and decision-making spaces. In Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and Syria, women were on the front lines of the 2011 uprisings. Yet, despite toppled governments, women’s movements have been fuelled by concerns of growing conservatism and attempts to rollback hard won freedoms and protections. In the face of such patriarchal and traditional values, women and girls in the region are frequently subject to gross discrimination, denied enjoyment of the rights to sexual and reproductive health and health care and a violence-free life. The impact of these rights violations is exacerbated when the family, communities or state are violators.

New constitutions in the region can play a crucial role in protecting and expanding women’s economic, political and social freedoms and protections against violence, intimidation and harassment. Yet they may also facilitate the further oppression of women where they fail to ensure the inclusive and equal participation of women in their drafting, as was witnessed in Egypt at the end of 2012. Women’s very engagement in political processes may place such women at risk as they...
Key actions:

- We will seek the equal and valued participation in democratic spaces, helping to empower and develop the capacity of women to engage and promote an agenda that guarantees them full enjoyment of their human rights.

- We will support and help to enhance the work of organisations and movements in examining the adequacy of legal and policy frameworks in protecting rights for women, including the right to inherit and divorce.

- In solidarity with Arab women across the region, we will challenge norms at the community level that deny women the ability to make choices about their bodies and lives, including their sexual and reproductive health.

- As our capacity and legitimacy among women's organisations and movements in the region grow, we will help to ensure these local voices and demands are heard in international policy spaces.

Change promises:

**Change Promise 3:** By 2017, we will have developed the capacity of and organized 1,000 women and girls to challenge and reject gender-based violence, discrimination and injustice.

**Change Promise 4:** By 2017, we will have supported 500 women and 50 women's groups will have influenced decision-making processes essential to their rights realisation.
Crisis is a part of the complex regional make up. The situation in Syria offers a good example of such instability and the important role ActionAid has to play in supporting and empowering refugees living throughout the region, defending and claiming their rights including through meeting immediate needs. Following demonstrations against the Syrian Government in March 2011, in which protestors demanded the resignation of the current President Bashir al-Assad and end of Ba’ath Party rule, full-scale conflict emerged between loyalist forces and armed opposition groups. The International Committee of the Red Cross categorised the conflict a civil war in July 2011. Since this time, thousands of Syrians have fled their homes in an attempt to escape the violence. Many have relocated to safer areas of Syria, with over 2 million internally displaced people in Syria. Hundreds of thousands though have crossed the borders into neighbouring countries of Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon and Turkey, and Egypt to seek refuge. The day-to-day lives of Palestinians, too, are unquestionably marked by instability. With Hamas retaining control of the Gaza Strip, and the Fateh-dominated Palestinian Authority taking control of the West Bank, and both authorities operating in the context of Israeli occupation, the risk of violence erupting is high. In the face of such occupation and vulnerability to rights denials and harassment by settlers and in light of the tensions between the two ruling authorities within the Palestinian territories, Palestinians need to be supported in their resilience. At the centre of any response to crisis and volatility is supporting people to assert their rights both in the immediate crisis context and in the long term future. There are significant gaps in the current emergency response in Jordan and Lebanon and in the humanitarian needs in the chronic conflict in Palestine. People’s basic needs are not being met, and the way the response is delivered also compromises people’s identity, dignity and rights. ActionAid’s presence in the region provides an opportunity to develop solidarity in highlighting the issues of the displaced, conflict-affected and occupied people regionally and internationally. ActionAid will work with the most vulnerable groups affected by conflict, particularly among the displaced people and host communities, to ensure their immediate needs are met. At the same time we will work with these communities to address some of the traditional underlying social issues and inequalities that they faced in their society or are facing in their host community, and develop their capacity and skills to prepare them to take a leadership role during refuge and hereafter.

### OBJECTIVE 3

To promote rights-based responses to conflict and occupation in the region.
Key actions:

- ActionAid will work with people affected by conflict (including refugees, internally displaced people and host communities) to meet their immediate material and psychosocial needs in line with our human rights based approach.

- ActionAid will work with displaced people, and with wider solidarity networks, to highlight the gaps in guaranteeing enjoyment of rights and promote alternatives.

- We will develop the capacities of youth and women to realize their rights.

- We will mobilize communities of displaced people to raise issues on adequate support for their immediate needs to be met.

- We will work to strengthen accountability to people affected by conflict, both in terms of ActionAid’s programming but also the responsibilities of the wider humanitarian sector. This will include a commitment to facilitating the fulfillment of people’s right to information, including through the innovative use of information and communication technology.

- ActionAid will promote women’s empowerment and leadership in all conflict-related programming.

- We will build solidarity with communities, activists, partners and movement groups in various parts of the region and wider ActionAid Federation, to advance the causes of Syrian, Iraqi, Palestinian and other refugees in the region and Palestinians living under occupation.

Change promises:

Change Promise 5: Refugees, internally displaced and people affected by conflict are able to assert their rights to meet their immediate needs and demand accountability from governments and humanitarian agencies.

Change Promise 6: Women, youth and other conflict-affected communities are empowered and equipped with skills and knowledge to identify and demand long-term solutions to their refugee status.

Change Promise 7: Alliances and solidarity are built and strengthened to highlight the situation of refugees and occupation in Palestine and their causes, across the region and internationally.
Safe cities and urban spaces for women and girls

The safe cities campaign will be driven by the “right to the city”, which is understood globally as the right of all inhabitants, especially the poor, to equitable access to all that a city has to offer and also the right to change their cities in a way that they see fit. The campaign will particularly focus on calling for an end to the violence or fear of violence and harassment that women face in urban public spaces across the globe. Key targets are women and girls living in urban poverty. We will mobilise women to demand the changes necessary to end violence, increase their free mobility and hence enjoyment of such opportunities as accessing health services, employment, political participation and recreation and for women and girls to participate in public debates on the issue. We will target local and national governments in the north and the south to demand attention to unsafe cities and urban spaces and call on them to guarantee the necessary legal, policy and infrastructure reforms to make cities and urban spaces safer for women.

ActionAid is striving to become a more effective campaigning force by improving the quality of local and national campaigning work with movements of people living in poverty. At the same time there is a common agreement within the international federation that the more we work together and harness our collective power across the organisation – linking local, national and international campaigning – the more likely it is that we will secure large-scale, meaningful change in the lives of people living in poverty. Therefore a portfolio of 3 multi-country campaign was identified during the global strategy development process. Consequently, all countries are encouraged to participate actively in at least one of the three multi-country campaigns where the campaign will help to advance the causes and rights of people living in poverty in those countries.

Given the context of the region and objectives one and two of this strategy, the Arab Regional Initiative wishes to partake in two multi-country campaigns, namely:

Progressive tax, progressively spent

This campaign is about ensuring governments raise more revenue through tax, and spending it on larger provision and improved quality of public services. Tax is the major source of revenue for all countries, even those highly dependent on aid. Yet tax revenue collection mechanisms in many developing countries are weak and unfair. Powerful corporations negotiate exemptions and favourable conditions and in some cases even pay less tax than ordinary citizens. This is coupled with un-favourable international systems (tax havens, for example) that facilitate tax-cheating and undermining the economy of developing countries. Tackling tax injustice could generate millions in additional revenue for countries in the Arab region every year. The tax campaign will also help ensure that governments spend these increased resources on better public services for people living in poverty. So, the campaign will link progressive taxes and progressive spending, and will look at greater accountability and transparency on both sides of revenue collection and spending.
OBJECTIVE 1
To diversify funding and double annual income to 3.4 million GBP to ensure a sustainable economy by 2017

It is necessary for the Arab Regional Initiative to diversify its funding sources and at the same time raise the total income in order to ensure the long term sustainability and impact of the Arab Regional Initiative. At present ARI is fully dependent on one source of income and has a yearly income of approximately 1.7 million GBP. So far, there has been less focus on building strong relationships with donors in the region.

The full implementation of the strategy is dependent of sufficient financial and human resources, and will thus, among other initiatives, require the development of staff funding capacities and an increase in income in order to deliver on all objectives and change promises. At present the available funding is mainly focused on strategic objective 1 and to a lesser extent strategic objective 2 and 3.

Following the Arab spring there has been an increased focus on developments in the region and several donor countries have increased their funding. Themes like democratic governance, women’s rights, conflict and emergencies are often seen as key priority areas, which opens a window of opportunities for ARI to apply for institutional funding and to expand its activities and impact in the region. Private funds, including funds from the Gulf countries, are also increasingly open to support activities in the Arab region.

However, the regional office at present has limited human resources available for proposal writing and responding to the upcoming opportunities and there is a need to develop the capacity among staff to develop strong proposals. Donor mapping, relationship and knowledge building on funding policies, priorities and strategies needs to be strengthened. The support from the fundraising community of ActionAid is key in order to develop a funding strategy and strengthen capacities of staff and partners to develop successful proposals. So, we will endeavor to:

- Develop a funding strategy and putting in place systems and processes.
- Strengthen capacities of staff and partners to develop funding proposals.
- Strengthen our knowledge of donor policies, priorities and country/region strategies.
- Establish relations and enter into dialogues with donors.
- Prioritize and invest resources to increase fundraising initiatives.
- Develop a communication strategy that will deepen the impact of our communication work, identify key priorities, channels, audiences and messages, build on knowledge and skills, and effectively manage internal and external communication.
- Reinvigorate our communication with existing and potential donors, explore funding opportunities jointly with other members of the AAI federation and like-minded organisations to deliver this ambitious strategy promises.
OBJECTIVE 2
To strengthen the programming, monitoring and evaluation framework of the Arab Regional Initiative and align systems and policies to those of ActionAid International

We realize that there is a need to deepen and provide better evidence of the impact of our work on the lives of people living in poverty, holding ourselves collectively accountable for delivering on our key change promises, and strengthening our planning monitoring and evaluation system. At the same time we commit ourselves to elaborating and testing our theory of change, which means being very clear about what we are trying to change and how we plan to make that change happen through our strategy and programme interventions. The alignment of our PME framework, policies, and systems will be guided by ‘People’s Action in Practice which is ActionAid’s resource book for our human rights based approach as well as the ActionAid’s Accountability, Learning and Planning Systems (ALPS) and the new Global Monitoring Framework (GMF). Key actions in order to achieve this are:

- Familiarize staff and partners with ‘Peoples Action in Practice’.
- Develop a monitoring framework in line with the current strategy, drawing from the tools and resources provided from the GMF, facilitate strategic plans and monitoring framework of this initiative to better monitor and evaluate changes and develop monitoring and evaluation systems that ensures learning and mutual/multiple accountabilities.
- Take stock of organizational policies and systems, and carry out alignment process by revising those of the Arab Regional Initiative accordingly.
- Strengthen financial standards, systems and polices, ensure timely disbursements of funds, prioritize monitoring and evaluation of partners’ financial management and enhance effective utilization of resources as part of our accountability mechanisms.
- Strengthen internal audit to adopt risk based auditing.

OBJECTIVE 3
To promote and contribute to mutual learning, knowledge sharing, establishing linkages and creating awareness between the Arab Regional Initiative and the wider ActionAid Federation

Being part of an international federation like ActionAid provides many opportunities to strengthen the Arab Regional Initiative. At the same time AA can, as a newer actor in the region, gain valuable insights from the particular context and expand its wider solidarity and geographical scope for campaigns work. Thereby, ActionAid will be in an even stronger position to speak out on the some of the world’s most pervasive forms of injustices and strengthen the credibility of the organisation and its identity as part of the wider global social justice movement. Therefore, we will strive to:

- Engage with the ActionAid federation’s communities of practice that relate to our change promises to advance mutual learning and sharing of experiences
- Create an ARI site on the ActionAid intranet HIVE and make use of the learning site to share and generate new knowledge
- Take part in international meetings, facilitate exposure visits to the region and carry out study tours to other Action Aid countries
This strategy articulates our commitment, ambition and approach to deepen our impact on injustice and poverty in the Arab region. It represents a long-term commitment by ActionAid to work with people living in exclusion and poverty towards an end to poverty, injustice and marginalisation in the Arab region. To achieve this, in the period 2013-2017, we will focus on:

- harnessing the leadership of youth as agents of change and for the future of the civil state to demand accountability from duty bearers on youth-specific issues and equality, access, equity and gender responsiveness in public services,
- building the active agency of women and girls to address all forms of discrimination and injustice, and
- promoting rights-based responses to conflict and occupation in the region.

The focus will be on strengthening our programming, consolidating and grounding rights and justice, innovation, building alliances with civil society in the region and facilitating international solidarity. We recognize the importance and scale of implementing this strategy, and have therefore also committed to strengthen our organization to ensure that we are able to deliver the promises made. At present the funding is mainly available for strategic objective 1 and to a lesser extent for strategic objectives 2 and 3. We will, therefore, work towards increasing and diversifying our funding base, developing the capacities of existing staff, increasing our partnerships and leveraging resources from within the ActionAid Federation.
Endnotes

1 The Palestine programme has a slightly different relationship with the Arab Regional Initiative, ActionAid Palestine being a standalone country programme within the ActionAid Federation. There are, however, common objectives between the Arab Regional Initiative strategy and the ActionAid Palestine strategy and both will contribute to and learn from each other.

2 While we do not necessarily agree with the terminology Arab Spring and its connotation of fundamental changes in power structures and systems of governance we will use it since it has become a commonly accepted description of the uprisings in 2011.

3 Freedom House’s annual report 2011 – 2012


8 Reference to the MoU between AA DK and AAA


xi ActionAid Palestine Country Strategy Paper
End poverty. Together.

ActionAid is an international anti-poverty agency working in over 40 countries, taking sides with poor people to end poverty and injustice together.