

Strategic objective 4

Build the resilience of people living in poverty to conflicts and disasters and respond to disasters with people-centred, rights-based alternatives

ActionAid takes a **human rights based approach to emergencies and building resilience**. People living in poverty are vulnerable to a constant series of shocks and risks, and they have a right to retain a minimum quality of life and level of human security with dignity, defined by the UN as, “freedom from fear, freedom from want and freedom to take action on one’s own behalf.” These rights are most compromised during disasters. A rights-based response treats basic needs as basic rights, and strives to achieve respect for, protection of and fulfilment of these rights.

ActionAid takes sides with people living in poverty and exclusion who are hit hardest by emergencies. For example, disasters exacerbate women’s everyday experiences of discrimination and multiple denials of rights. Unless there is affirmative action and commitment to take sides with women, they are likely to be excluded from emergency preparedness and response, and their issues will go unaddressed. This affirmative action includes addressing basic needs/rights and building awareness as part of empowerment initiatives, followed by building solidarity and campaigning for assertion of women’s rights. ActionAid’s HRBA to emergencies and resilience-building also seeks to respect and uphold the dignity and agency of rights holders at all times, ensuring that we build on local capacities, and put the concerns and priorities of vulnerable communities at the centre of our work.

Vision

By 2017, people living in 5,000 communities where ActionAid works are resilient and have the capacity to absorb shocks and uncertainties, recover after disasters and adapt to climate change. Furthermore, five million people experiencing conflict or disaster receive assistance in a way which respects their rights, supports their livelihoods, and empowers women.

To achieve this, we will facilitate communities where we work to identify the multiple vulnerabilities and risks (social, political, environmental, policy and economic) they face and draw up action plans to address these at local level, while linking them to influence national and international policies and practices. We will ensure that women are empowered to be leaders in this process, resulting in increased protection, promotion of rights, access to justice and reduction of risks and vulnerabilities. We will work with allies to promote community-centric and rights-based humanitarian approaches, changing national and global policies and practices around risk reduction, disaster prevention, climate adaptation and coordinated and accountable emergency responses.

We will work to ensure:

- **Vulnerability analyses and comprehensive resilience frameworks are in place.** Vulnerability analysis will be an integral part of our comprehensive analysis of power and rights using the *Reflect!on-Action* process. Recent developments in the disaster risk reduction and climate change sector have led to strong interest in the concept of resilience. ActionAid already takes a comprehensive approach to resilience in much of our work. For example, we use *Participatory vulnerability analysis* methodology; build a culture of safety through our disaster risk reduction and disaster preparedness work; engage with local government; link up to national and global level policies on climate change adaptation; do community-led conflict risk reduction work; and build institutional capacity to reduce risk.

- **Our focus is building communities' comprehensive resilience against multiple threats and hazards,** including climate change-induced "new" slow-onset disasters such as sea level rises, glaciers melting and increasing water salinity. ActionAid links rapid assessment after disasters to vulnerability analysis (integrated with wider participatory processes of reflection-action) and longer-term change processes as part of its comprehensive resilience frameworks developed in the aftermath of emergencies. We have already taken steps to engage with others in the sector to explore the development of a common comprehensive resilience framework. This is an evolving concept and conversation.
- **Disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation are integrated.** Practitioners and policy-makers are recognising more and more the importance of bringing together disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation and the value of mainstreaming climate change adaptation into disaster risk reduction and development activities to reduce vulnerability and increase resilience. ActionAid has collaborated with the Institute of Development Studies to develop an innovative approach to mainstreaming climate change adaptation into disaster risk reduction programmes and policies. Risk and vulnerability analysis needs to be included in ActionAid's regular assessment and programming frameworks to mainstream resilience within the organisation. We can share our practical learning on how to do this to influence policies and other agencies.
- **Women are leaders in disaster risk reduction, climate adaptation, preparedness and emergency response.** Facilitating women's leadership in these areas builds a sense of self-confidence and empowerment which can help to transform power relationships in societies where women have traditionally been excluded from decision-making. Empowering women to take leadership roles is a key part of our work on emergencies, climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction. We have championed the importance of facilitating women's leadership at key humanitarian forums, including the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction 2011 and UN climate conferences. In the new strategy, we will build on this work, ensuring there is sustained investment in women's leadership and representation at all levels.
- **States and the international community uphold rights to community-based protection.** ActionAid's protection approach involves building protection strategies as part of empowerment initiatives. These enable people living in poverty and exclusion, especially women, to achieve their rights in safety and dignity. Disasters and violent conflicts increase violence against women, create new vulnerabilities and threaten their safety and security. For example, increased violence, including sexual abuse, increases the risk of HIV transmission. There is a major gap in preventing and responding to violence against women during conflicts and disasters. Our approach involves campaigning at the national and international level to influence governments and the humanitarian sector (including the UN, INGOs and local partners) to amplify their efforts to prevent and respond to violence against women during conflicts and disasters.
- **Conflict-sensitive approaches are mainstreamed.** Conflict sensitivity recognises that any initiative in a post-conflict or conflict-affected area will interact with that conflict. That interaction could have positive or negative effects on the conflict. It is also essential to recognise that a HRBA will inevitably create tension in any context. Conflict sensitivity involves being mindful of these interactions, and designing/altering interventions accordingly. It emphasises the importance of in-depth analysis of the context. ActionAid's experience in the UK, Kenya and Sierra Leone on the consortium project *Conflict sensitivity - from concept to impact* (implemented between 2008-2012) provides relevant learning in this area. We recognise that working with women and promoting their leadership is critical in a conflict context.
- **Women are able to advocate for and gain access to justice.** Disasters and conflicts increase violence against women. ActionAid's work on access to justice for women addresses formal and informal justice systems and the demand and supply side of justice. On the supply side, we aim to increase justice for women by bringing about pro-women government policies, judicial system reform and changes in cultural practices at national, local and community levels. This includes capacity-building activities to improve the legal infrastructure for dealing with violence against women. On the demand side, we aim to enhance the

capacity of affected women to access justice. ActionAid's *Access to Justice for Women* project, funded by the UK Department for International Development and Danida, developed methods and strategies for this work.

- **The humanitarian system is transparent, accountable and effective.** The link between poverty and the impact of disasters is clearly established. When disaster strikes, the humanitarian system is expected to help affected people, the majority of whom are living in poverty and exclusion. To bring sustainable changes in the lives of these people, the humanitarian system has to be transparent, accountable and effective. ActionAid's approach to humanitarian reform emphasises the importance of putting affected communities at the centre of humanitarian response, accountability to affected communities, and a bottom-up approach which listens to the perceptions and experiences of those disasters affect. We have engaged with humanitarian reform mechanisms at country and global levels. We are an active member of the *NGOs and humanitarian reform* project, which aims to strengthen the effective engagement of local, national and INGOs in reforming humanitarian financing, accountability and coordination mechanisms at global and country levels.

ActionAid will develop policies, practices, skills and resources to address the causes of vulnerabilities, and prepare for and respond to disasters with speed and quality. We already have a "rights holders security policy" in place. We plan to operationalise this across the organisation and develop related policies and practices. We have also mobilised an emergency fast action team from across the ActionAid federation.

Key change promise seven

By 2017 we will have built effective risk reduction and resilience systems and capacities in over 5,000 communities.

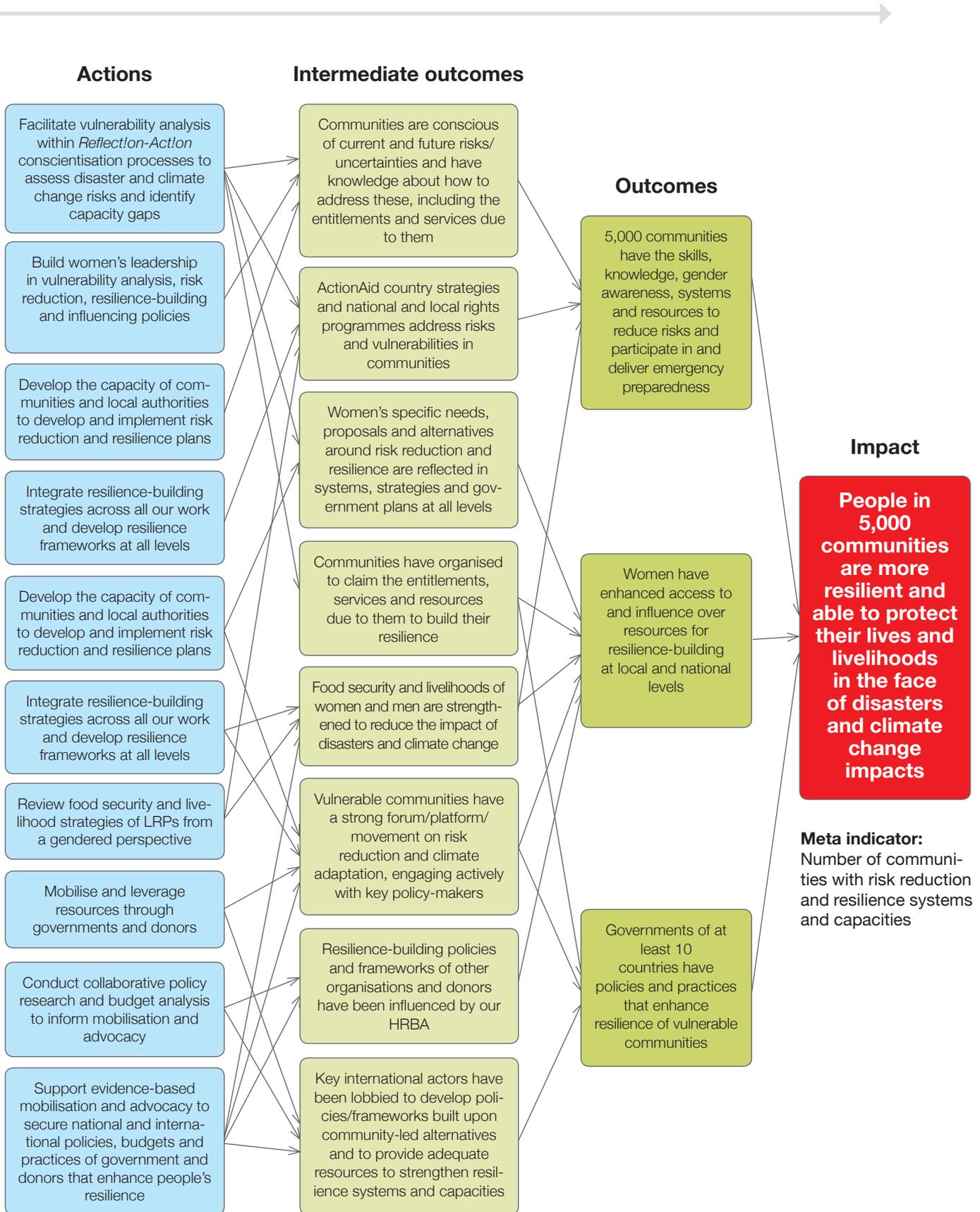
Change promise seven aims to ensure that by 2017 people in 5,000 local rights programme communities are resilient to disasters and climate change impacts. To build the resilience of these communities, it is important that they and their institutions have the capacity and resources to reduce risks and recover from disasters and climate change impacts. We will empower communities, particularly women and their organisations, to assess their vulnerabilities from existing and future risks. We will mobilise and support them to participate in and influence decision-making processes and forums at national and international level. We will help them build long-term resilience so disasters and climate change impacts do not threaten their food security and livelihoods.

Our strategy needs **a different way of thinking and planning**, where **women lead vulnerability analysis** (integrating disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation and climate resilient sustainable agriculture in *Reflect!on-Act!on* processes) to assess disaster and climate change risks and identify capacity gaps. Our HRBA will enhance the capacity of communities and local authorities to develop plans for risk reduction and build resilience systems. We will mobilise and leverage resources from governments and donors to implement these plans. We will review local rights programmes' food security and livelihood strategies and **integrate resilience-building strategies**, developing resilience frameworks and capacity-building programmes. We will **test these resilience-building plans** on the ground.

We will create and promote alternatives within and outside the organisation. These will involve awareness-generation, conscientisation and political mobilisation around disasters and climate change. We will mobilise and empower communities, particularly women and their leaders, civil society organisations and networks, to review and **advocate for government, international agency and donor policies, budgets and practices** to enhance their resilience.

The **critical pathway** below shows this in a systematic format:

Objective 4 - Key change promise 7



Monitoring change promise seven

This change promise is at the level of outcome, with 5,000 communities developing systems and capacities for greater resilience and reduced risk to emergencies. The meta indicator we will collectively monitor across the federation is the **number of communities with risk reduction and resilience systems and capacities**.

Possible **outcome indicators** include:

- number of communities and their governing institutions with resilience-building plans built on traditional knowledge, scientific practices and earmarked budget
- number of communities and their governing institutions with increased knowledge and skills to reduce risks and respond to disasters and climate change impacts
- number of communities claiming state and non-state resources to deal with disasters and climate change
- existence of community and civil society platforms campaigning to government for policy changes to increase their resilience
- increased budget allocations at national and international level for resource redistribution/distribution/ allocation which enhances the resilience of poor communities
- government policies and practices on resilience have increased focus on the most vulnerable, particularly women.

Possible **process indicators** to track the progress of your activities include:

- number of women and men in local rights programmes that have contributed to community level vulnerability analysis
- number of women and men at local rights programme level informed about their rights and entitlements
- number of local rights programmes that have integrated risk reduction strategies and allocated budgets to address capacity gaps
- number of policy level interventions taken up by ActionAid country programmes on resilience-building
- level of budget allocated/leveraged/raised for resilience-building work in local rights programmes
- increased access of women and men to early warning and weather forecast systems
- number of families with disaster-resistant housing
- evidence of farmers having improved climate resilient farming practices
- number of women and men having two to three meals in post-disaster situations
- increased engagement of women and community members in policy research and budget analysis to inform policy positions and advocacy strategies
- approaches of other organisations and governments reflect some of the core features of ActionAid's HRBA to resilience
- media coverage of ActionAid's research reports and policy papers on strengthening resilience.

Linking change promise seven to impact on children

Children are one of the most vulnerable groups to climate change and disaster impacts. Children from families struggling with poverty are likely to bear the brunt of environmental disasters linked to climate change. They have a right to participate in decisions which affect them now and in the future. Interventions that analyse risk and vulnerabilities and develop strategies to reduce them in households, the community and schools help to reduce risk and build resilience. Promoting disaster risk reduction and the tracking of climate change locally within the school curricula can help empower children as active agents for reducing risks and adapting to a changing world.

Change promise eight

By 2017 at least five million people experiencing disasters or conflicts will have been assisted in ways which respect and strengthen rights, support recovery of livelihoods, empower women and promote solutions for long-term change.

ActionAid will support people living in poverty who are affected by disasters not only to meet their basic needs (which we recognise as basic rights) but to overcome poverty and injustice by ensuring they can lead their own recovery. We will place women and other particularly vulnerable groups at the centre of all our activities.

We will achieve our desired impact by facilitating women's empowerment and leadership and building and strengthening their institutions at community level; strengthening preparedness at all levels; and supporting the creation of an effective humanitarian system which is accountable to disaster-affected populations.

Our focus at local level will include capacity-building and mobilisation of women and their institutions to lead emergency preparedness and response. Ensuring integration of community-based protection and access to justice for women will be a priority. This will include ensuring systems, plans and budgets are in place, and are informed by the experiences of disaster-affected people. In the process of promoting women's leadership in emergencies, we will be careful to ensure we do not increase women's unpaid care work burden.

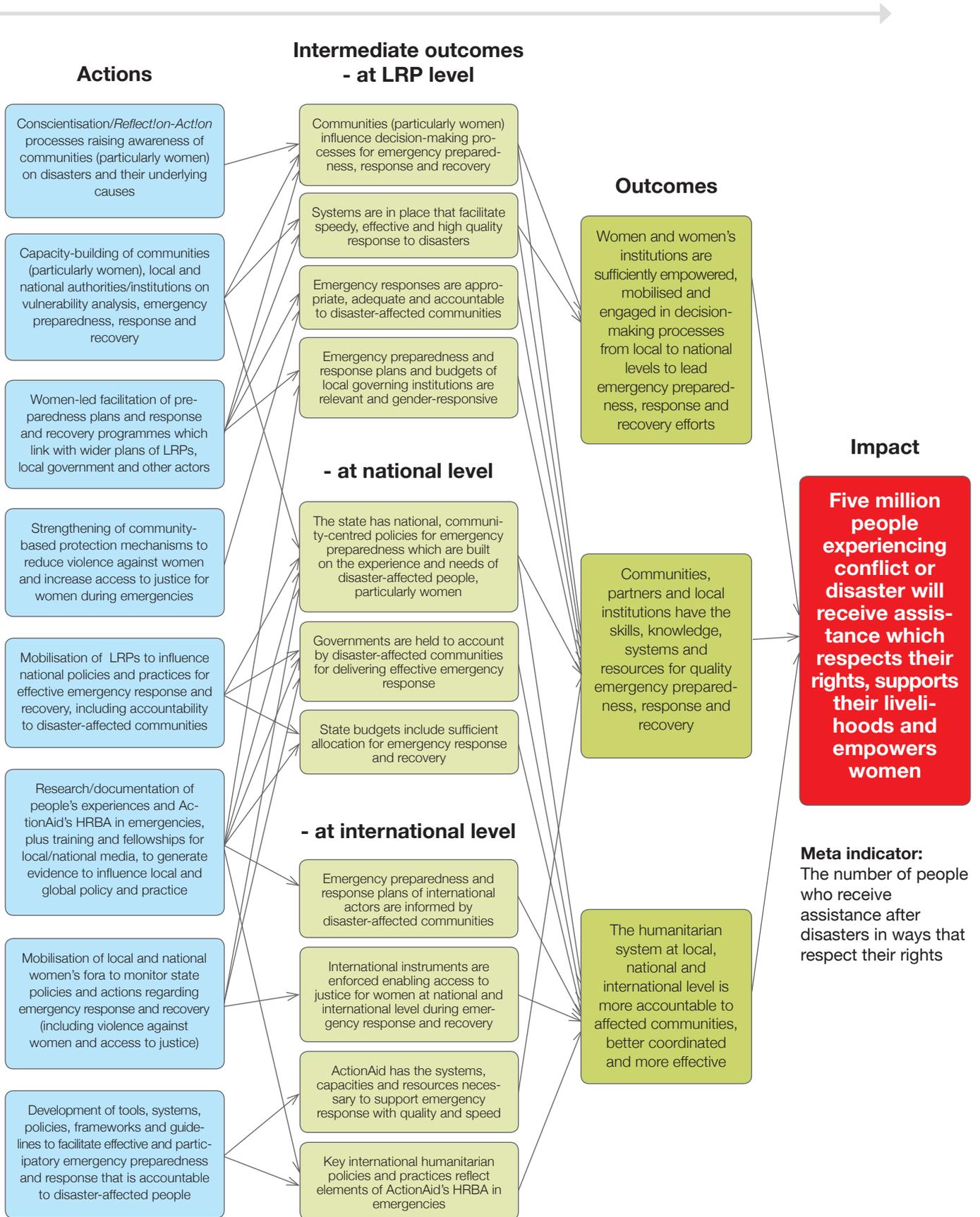
At national level, ActionAid will invest in developing and operationalising robust preparedness plans at country programme level, in collaboration with partners and communities. In partnership with communities, we will advocate for national policies, practices and budgets which enhance the speed and quality of emergency response.

Our focus at international level will be on monitoring, reviewing and lobbying for an international humanitarian system which is adequately resourced, informed by the realities of disaster-affected people and accountable to them. Strengthening ActionAid's institutional capacity and systems around emergency preparedness and response will also be key to ensuring we respond to disasters in a timely and effective way. In addition, we will engage with and seek to influence international instruments and policies to deliver positive outcomes for disaster-affected people.

It is important to note that the above goals are closely linked to key change promise seven, on building resilience.

The **critical pathway** below shows how we will achieve our goals:

Objective 4 - Key change promise 8



Monitoring change promise eight

This change promise is at the level of impact, as it aims to ensure that our assistance to five million people experiencing disasters or conflicts respects rights, supports livelihoods, empowers women and enables long-term structural change. Our meta indicator is **the number of people who receive assistance after disasters in ways that respect their rights.**

Possible **outcome indicators** include:

- women report that emergency response efforts are more responsive to their needs and interests, providing appropriate services, supporting women's participation, and ensuring their safety, for example
- empowered women's organisations exist, are highlighting women's needs, holding duty bearers accountable and leading certain aspects of the emergency preparedness and response work
- disaster management policies have specific mechanisms for women's participation in disaster preparedness and response
- number of active community structures (for example, relief committees and volunteer groups) that have participated in and supported the coordination of disaster response efforts
- data indicates a reduction in the loss of life and assets during disasters, resulting from implementation of effective early warning systems at local, national and international levels
- strategies in place and implemented by ActionAid at national and international levels to facilitate mobilisation of funds for emergency response
- development, dissemination and operationalisation of ActionAid's standard operating procedures for emergency response in orange and red alert level emergencies
- evidence that national/international humanitarian responses incorporate community participation as standard practice
- disaster-affected communities report increased satisfaction with emergency response interventions implemented by international humanitarian actors
- number of governments which allocate sufficient contingency funding for emergency response in their national budgets
- evidence that funds mobilised by the international community match funding gaps identified.

Possible **process indicators** to track the progress of your actions include:

At local level:

- number of women leaders of community structures (relief committees, for example) leading emergency response at local level
- data indicating a reduction in the loss of life and loss of livelihoods during disasters, resulting from implementation of effective early warning systems at community level
- number of women-led local groups trained in emergency preparedness and able to coordinate rescue and relief efforts
- number of active community structures (for example, relief committees led by women) that have participated in and supported coordination of disaster response efforts
- relief supplies delivered reflect needs of the most vulnerable people, particularly women, in the disaster-affected community
- evidence of pro-active information sharing by ActionAid and partners through community meetings, transparency boards and other initiatives
- evidence of community-centred policies for emergency preparedness being developed, rolled out and implemented at local levels
- best practices, innovations and alternatives to traditional models of humanitarian response have been disseminated in partnership with communities.

At national level:

- mechanisms exist for communities, particularly women, to feed into national level planning on emergency preparedness

- evidence that sub-national and national level systems for disaster response are joined up, reducing duplication and increasing coordination between actors at different levels
- level of funding allocated in state budgets and contingency funds matches country-wide hazard analysis
- schedule in place for regular updating of ActionAid preparedness plans, and these are monitored for compliance.

At international level:

- emergency preparedness, response plans and budgets of international actors evidence a responsiveness to the needs of disaster-affected communities as gleaned from evaluations of previous response efforts
- evidence of formal and informal justice systems referencing international instruments in women's rights cases
- number of funding proposals successful in securing income for emergency response
- number of ActionAid fundraising affiliates with humanitarian strategies/plans in place to support emergency response through mobilisation of funds, profile-building and support to policy-advocacy initiatives
- key international policy documents on emergency preparedness and response reflect elements of ActionAid's HRBA.

Disaster risk reduction and climate adaptation in Bangladesh

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has identified Bangladesh as one of the worst victims of climate change, despite being one of the lowest per-capita emitters of carbon. Just some of the impacts facing the country include increasingly frequent and severe tropical cyclones, erratic rainfall, river bank erosion, melting of the Himalayan glaciers, sea level rises, increasing salinity in the coastal belt and warmer and more humid weather. These changes are causing reduction in agricultural production and a shortage of safe drinking water, resulting in food insecurity, forced internal migration and ill health among people living in poverty.

However, Bangladesh has not surrendered to the monumental crisis it faces. The country has achieved phenomenal success in reducing disaster-related deaths and developing strong disaster management mechanisms over the past two decades. It is now emerging as a leader on adaptation and building resilience to disasters and climate change. Civil society organisations have played an instrumental role in achieving this milestone. ActionAid is regarded as one of the key players.

In 2008 we began our *Assistance to local communities on climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction in Bangladesh* project with support from the Danish embassy. The project involves forming community research teams using the *Reflect* approach for vulnerability analysis and assessing climate change impact. It promotes alternative solutions that link local and scientific knowledge around flood-resistant housing, cyclone-resilient storage bunkers, water-efficient toilets, salinity-resistant crops, climate-resilient handlooms, solar panels and tree and bamboo plantations. The project also facilitates a reframing of relationships with decision-makers. The project, from a human-rights perspective, puts social justice and the active agency of the most vulnerable at the centre, promoting the incorporation of their adaptation demands into local level plans and budgets.

ActionAid Bangladesh has also been at the forefront of influencing policy-making at the national and international level, in collaboration with other civil society organisations. They have been actively involved with the assessment and development of national government's climate change policy and plans. They have been a leading partner on longer-term adaptation work, and they are a member of the Rio+20 National Steering Committee of Bangladesh and have been included in government delegations to climate change negotiations. The foundation of their approach has always been to empower communities and bring the voices of the most excluded groups into national and international policy spaces.

Key definitions

- **Shocks** is a broad term which encapsulates the full range of stressors faced by communities, including physical, social, economic, cultural and political. Disasters and conflict are also encapsulated within this concept. **Hazards** are dangerous phenomena, substances, human activities or conditions that may cause loss of life, injury or other health impacts, property damage, loss of livelihoods and services, social and economic disruption or environmental damage (UNISDR). **Disasters /emergencies** are serious disruptions to the functioning of a community/society with impacts exceeding the community's ability to cope (UNISDR).
- While natural **hazards** are undoubtedly an empirical phenomenon, natural **disasters** happen when hazards impact upon people living in poverty and conditions of vulnerability, overwhelming their ability to cope. Because poverty and vulnerability are caused by power imbalance and the unjust action and inaction of individuals/institutions, disasters are largely avoidable, and not simply "natural". This presents both a challenge and an opportunity: by tackling power imbalance, poverty and vulnerability using ActionAid's rights-based approach, we can reduce the impact of "natural" disasters to a large extent.
- **Conflict**, for ActionAid, refers to organised, armed, systematic/systemic, violent conflict, where at least one party uses direct violence. **Positive tension** (sometimes referred to as **non-violent conflict**) is often a precursor, and sometimes a precondition, for social change and to attain rights and justice, so is often a result of ActionAid's work. The destruction of natural resources due to climate change and other factors is exacerbating conflict. It is undeniable that conflict exacerbates poverty and vulnerability, destroying communities' resources, skills and capabilities, and eroding human security and development gains. ActionAid recognises the need to work on conflict.
- **Participatory vulnerability analysis** engages communities and other stakeholders in identifying and understanding the threats and hazards they face. It starts with the premise that human beings have a fundamental right to human security. It is a way of facilitating people living in poverty and exclusion to identify and analyse underlying causes of vulnerability at community, national and international level. It should lead to action plans to target these vulnerabilities through empowerment, solidarity and campaigning. ActionAid has used *Participatory vulnerability analysis* in 28 countries. It is a key foundation for our *Reflect!on-Act!on* process. During this process, the action plans communities develop often focus on recovering livelihoods following an emergency, as well as community-based protection initiatives. Addressing the causes of vulnerability also requires moving beyond the community/district level to the provincial, national and international level. Advocacy around the national level policy and structural causes of vulnerability forms part of the community action plans.
- **Risk reduction** refers to the techniques, tools, policies, strategies and practices that minimise vulnerabilities and disaster risks in a community to avoid and/or limit (mitigate and prepare for) the adverse impacts of hazards, within the broad context of sustainable development. ActionAid supports a participatory approach to risk reduction. We believe risk reduction should increase the resilience of communities, reduce their vulnerability to disasters and link local experiences to national and international frameworks by adopting a HRBA, with its core components of empowerment, solidarity and campaigning. ActionAid's approach to risk reduction places women's rights and empowerment at the centre. It also includes climate-induced hazards and adaptation measures, and risk reduction measures in emergency response.
- **Adaptation** means "adjustments in ecological, social or economic systems in response to actual or expected stimuli and their effects or impacts. This term refers to changes in processes, practices and structures to moderate potential damages or to benefit from opportunities associated with climate change" (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2007). Adaptation will be necessary to address impacts resulting from the already-unavoidable warming caused by past emissions.

- **Protection** encompasses all activities aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of the individual, in accordance with the letter and spirit of relevant bodies of law (such as human rights law, international humanitarian law and refugee law) (ICRC). Women's rights to live free from violence are enshrined in human rights instruments and reflected in numerous UN Security Council resolutions, such as Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. The protection of people's human rights and the prevention of/response to coercion, violence and deprivation is a critical component of ActionAid's work on conflict and disaster. **Community-based protection** strategies are critical for communities to claim their rights to safety and dignity. Both states and the international community need to take more action to uphold their obligations to fulfil these rights.
- **Social capacities** are determined by physical, social, economic and environmental factors as well as attitudes and behaviours which increase resilience and reduce an individual or community's susceptibility to the impacts of hazards, threats and risks, and enable them to respond effectively. **Organisational** capabilities refer to the ability of an organisation to organise effective emergency preparedness, response and resilience-building. We are committed to building capacity for the development and implementation of country contingency plans, the formation and strengthening of human capacity to respond, and to ensuring cross-learning and innovation.
- **Resilience systems** enable people to effectively prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters, including addressing underlying causes of vulnerability. They enable communities to cope with multiple hazards, shocks and threats, including unpredictable climate stress. We support the building of comprehensive resilience systems in the communities we work with. Comprehensive resilience stems from an analysis of all factors driving vulnerability – institutional, political, cultural, social, economic, environmental and physical – and focuses on how communities can address these. It seeks to join up the multiple layers – local, national, regional and international – which impact current and future vulnerability.
- **Resilient communities** have the capacity to absorb stress or destructive forces through resistance or adaptation. They can manage or maintain certain basic functions and structures during hazardous events and recover after an event (Twigg). We emphasise enhancing communities' capacity before and during disasters and climate change rather than just concentrating on their vulnerability to hazards and their needs in an emergency. We acknowledge the importance of wider institutional, policy and socio-economic factors in supporting community-level resilience.
- **Comprehensive resilience-building** links together all five of our objectives. We recognise that it is essential to develop comprehensive community resilience that enables people to secure rights and entitlements gained during development processes as well as in periods of disaster, conflict and shocks. The role of women, as leaders and key participants, is critical to community resilience.
- **Conflict transformation** involves the transformation of the parties involved in a conflict. It seeks to change the practices of society and governance to strengthen conflict resolution capacities for the future, not simply resolve the current conflict. It is integral to, and indeed demanded by, a rights-based approach. According to an ActionAid paper, "Conflict transformation is the inevitable goal of a rights-based approach to development. Conflict management, which tends to focus on the armed parties, is highly likely to exclude conflict-affected communities. Conflict resolution, which focuses on dealing with those issues that are related to the current violent conflict, will not necessarily address the underlying structural inequities. Conflict transformation, which requires a process approach and inclusivity, has a goal of peace with justice and is not 'peace at any price'".
- **Complex emergencies** arise for multiple reasons. They lead to disrupted livelihoods, threats to life from warfare, civil disturbance and large-scale movements of people (WHO). A complex emergency is a humanitarian crisis in a country, region or society where there is total or considerable breakdown of authority resulting from internal or external conflict which requires an international response that goes beyond the mandate or capacity of any single agency and/or the ongoing UN country programme (IASC).

Rationale

- **The number of disasters is increasing.** According to Munich Re, in 2010 a total of 950 natural disasters were recorded, nine-tenths of which were weather-related events. This total makes 2010 the year with the second-highest number of natural catastrophes since 1980, markedly exceeding the annual average for the last ten years.
- **Disasters increase people's vulnerability.** The recurrence of disasters is inextricably linked to the inability of people living in poverty and exclusion to access and control the resources that might mitigate the impact of ever-increasing hazards (both human-made and so-called "natural" events), thus leading to poverty, increased vulnerability and, finally, disasters.
- **Disasters disproportionately impact on women.** Structural inequalities, existing gender discrimination and unequal power relations mean that women are often hardest hit by disasters, take longer to recover and may not recover fully. The way women experience vulnerability is also very different to men. Lack of access to and control over resources due to their social, economic, political and cultural status, and exclusion from basic entitlements increases women's vulnerability and undermines their ability to cope with impacts of disasters. Interventions in conflict- or disaster-affected communities must not only consider the different needs and roles of women, but also take into account the power relations that affect the respective abilities and capacities of women and men to access support. This means humanitarian actors must take power relations into account when designing and implementing interventions so they meet the needs and fulfil the rights of all affected people.
- **Shocks and disasters impact on children.** Children are particularly vulnerable to disasters. They can be excluded from education; exploited; trafficked; coerced into becoming child combatants; and affected by increased migration and changes in family circumstances (taking on an adult role, caring for siblings or becoming an orphan). Disasters traumatise children and they can take a long time to recover.
- **People living in poverty lack a voice.** People living in poverty barely have a voice when it comes to decisions on how they should build resilience, prepare for and respond to shocks and in deciding the assistance they receive from emergency response. Furthermore, at the national and international level, affected people are not engaged in the development of policies and practices which impact their lives.
- **There is a lack of women's leadership.** The voice and leadership of women need to be brought to the forefront. There is a need for sustained and systematic investment in women to promote their leadership so they can reach their full potential. Our new strategy marks a commitment and an opportunity for such investment.
- **States are abdicating their responsibilities.** States are increasingly retreating from their role of delivering basic services and social protection to their citizens. This is due to the centrality and dominance of the market, or can even be the result of bad governance and corruption. It should be noted that NGOs and the private sector can contribute to this retreat by only engaging in service delivery without empowering communities to demand their rights from the government, and advocating for the state to fulfil its obligations. States can also perpetrate disasters through their policies. For example, bad governance exacerbates people's vulnerability to disasters through corruption, exclusion and poor access to information.
- **There is a deficiency in leadership, coordination and accountability.** The existing aid and humanitarian architecture does not adequately recognise, incentivise or promote accountability to communities.
- **Shocks have a dramatic impact on the lives and livelihoods of people living in poverty.** Shocks can particularly affect people living in poverty, which can undermine or distort local markets, causing increases in food prices and food insecurity. Lack of recognition of women's livelihoods means there is often little investment of resources for women in disaster response and risk, undermining their role and contribution.

- **Resilience efforts and disaster preparedness and response are not adequately conflict-sensitive.** They often do not address issues of conflict transformation despite conflict affecting an increasing number of people. Our new strategy marks a turning point and an opportunity to build conflict analysis expertise and capacity within ActionAid.
- **Donor responses can be part of the problem.** Donors' tendency to provide short-term funding for emergency response discourages linking emergency work to longer-term development. Funding tends to be tied to specific and defined "sectors" which the humanitarian sector creates and imposes. These do not reflect the holistic experience of vulnerability in communities. This creates barriers for innovations around resilience-building, strengthening links between disaster risk reduction and climate change adaption, and the integration of conflict analysis and conflict sensitivity into development and humanitarian programmes.
- **We need more links between the development and humanitarian communities.** This would facilitate a move to a comprehensive resilience approach, and ensure long-term change. In the area of disaster risk reduction and climate change adaption, these communities of practice need to speak to one another. The scientific climate change community needs to interact with communities on the ground, drawing on local knowledge and experience. This is true both externally and internally.
- **Resourcing and integrating key areas of work is essential to a HRBA.** Even though ActionAid has made considerable efforts to build resilience, risk reduction, conflict sensitivity, preparedness and response mechanisms, this remains an under-resourced area of work in terms of systems, human resources and financing, and in that it is not sufficiently integrated into ActionAid's development programmes. Yet disasters and shocks provide an opportunity to change power relationships and consequently the lives of rights holders, to raise the organisation's profile and to recruit/mobilise supporters. ActionAid's new strategy requires closer collaboration between all development and humanitarian areas of work, moving towards a comprehensive resilience approach.

Key questions and tools for contextualisation

At local level:

- Are local rights programme communities aware of disaster risks, the causes of climate change and its impact on their life and livelihoods? How resilient are these communities currently? That is, what is their capacity to cope with shocks, respond to and reduce disaster risks and climate change impacts? What needs to be done to integrate resilience into existing programmes? Have risk assessments been integrated into local rights programme appraisals so that community resilience-building becomes an integral part of the local rights programme's strategy?
- Are people, particularly women, and their institutions aware of their right to be protected from disasters and climate change impacts? Are women living in poverty and exclusion and their institutions informed and linked to other institutions and able to demand justice?
- Have communities, particularly women and children, their institutions and local authorities been trained (including on scientific knowledge of climate change) and have skills to conduct vulnerability analysis (including around food security)? Are they able to develop disaster risk reduction and long-term resilience-building plans that are linked to local governing institutions?
- Do communities and local authorities have access to resources, for example, skills, capital and technology, to implement their plans?
- Do communities have forums/platforms to share and exchange their knowledge with other communities, civil society organisations and policy-makers?
- Are local rights programmes creating alternatives to influence policies and practices?
- Are women and their institutions involved in monitoring and reviewing the implementation of these plans?
- Are ActionAid and other agencies transparent and accountable?

At national level:

- Have ActionAid and our partners leveraged resources to build and document alternatives to be shared with civil society organisations and government to influence policy and practices?
- Have ActionAid and our partners mobilised communities and networked with like-minded civil society organisations on disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation?
- Are communities, particularly women, and their institutions informed, represented and engaging with government on and to influence policies, practices and budgets related to risk reduction and adaptation?
- Is the capacity of women leaders/representatives strengthened to engage in policy processes from local to national level?
- Do ActionAid and our partners have the capacity to support community institutions to advocate for disaster risk reduction and adaptation policies that are community-centric, rights-based, gender-sensitive and adequately resourced?

At international level:

- Are communities, particularly women, and their institutions informed, represented and engaging at the international level to influence policies, practices and budgets related to risk reduction and adaptation?
- Are countries providing evidence and alternatives on disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation to engage international actors around accountability to communities, resourcing and participation?

Additional resources

- ActionAid. *Participatory vulnerability analysis guidelines* (http://act.ai/HS_toolkits)
- ActionAid. *Resilience principles* (being developed by Programme Partnership Agreement resilience group/ BOND disaster risk reduction group)
- ActionAid. *Disaster risk reduction cornerstones*. (<http://act.ai/NUVxKt>)
- ActionAid. *Emergencies manual and toolkit*. (http://act.ai/HS_toolkits)
- ActionAid. *Safety with dignity protection manual*. (http://act.ai/HS_toolkits)
- ActionAid. *Women in emergencies manual*. (http://act.ai/HS_toolkits)
- ActionAid. *Psychosocial in emergencies manual*. (http://act.ai/HS_toolkits)
- ActionAid. *Livelihoods in emergencies manual*. (http://act.ai/HS_toolkits)