

Rights First

Working Together to
End Poverty and Patriarchy

Country Strategy Paper III
(2005–2010)

August 2005

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ActionAid International-India

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A total of **824** women and **915** men (partner organisations, activists/social movements and AAI staff) have been involved at various processes of CSP III consultation and preparation.

Vision

A world without poverty and injustice, one in which every woman, man and girl and boy enjoys the right to life with dignity.

Mission

To work with poor and excluded women, men and girls and boys to eradicate poverty, discrimination and injustice.

Values

- ▶ *Solidarity with the poor, the powerless and the excluded* will be at the core of our struggle against poverty and injustice
- ▶ *Courage of conviction*, requiring us to be creative and progressive, bold and innovative – without fear of failure – in order to make both the greatest possible impact on the causes of poverty, exclusion and injustice
- ▶ *Equality and justice*, requiring us to work to ensure equal opportunity to every person, irrespective of caste, class, race, age, gender, sexual orientation, colour, class, ethnicity, disability, location, and religion
- ▶ *Humility and modesty* in our conduct and behaviour, recognising that we are part of a wider alliance against poverty and exclusion
- ▶ *Mutual respect*, requiring us to recognise the innate worth of every individual and community and the value of diversity
- ▶ *Honesty and transparency*, demanding that we are accountable at all levels in order to be more effective in our actions and open in our judgements and interaction with others
- ▶ *Independence and neutrality* from any religious or party-political affiliation.

Guiding Principles

- ▶ Non-hierarchical in our own working and in our interface with all stakeholders by creating and upholding decentralised systems of work for efficient functioning
- ▶ Ensuring participation by enabling poor and excluded people to get fully involved in decision-making through the conscious inclusion of all poor and excluded groups
- ▶ Respecting people's knowledge, wisdom and skills by acknowledging the innate worth and capacity of all humans, by listening to people's voices, empathising with people's daily struggles and appreciating poor people's ingenuity and resilience.
- ▶ Challenging patriarchy manifested through unequal power relations between women and men, both within and outside the organisation, by supporting the daily struggles and assertions of women and girls
- ▶ Respecting social diversity and leveraging the creative potential of all peoples and communities for social change and transformation.
- ▶ Ensuring downward accountability and transparency to the poor and excluded communities through the consistent application of good practices and effective communication.
- ▶ Deepening the quality of our engagement with the poor and excluded people and opposing all forms of violence
- ▶ Enabling collective leadership to emerge within excluded communities so that every member owns and shares responsibility and accountability for her/his actions
- ▶ Preventing conflict of interest while carrying out our responsibilities as civil society actors.

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Foreword

We, the staff of ActionAid India (AAI), supported by our partner organisations, have from 1972 been making modest efforts to partner poor and excluded communities in India to collectively address poverty, inequity and injustice. Our shared mission is to enable an India, and indeed a world, to emerge free from poverty, discrimination and injustice, where every person – irrespective of gender, caste, class, age, disability and ethnicity – fully enjoys human rights with dignity.

In order to maximise our limited human and financial resources, we have collectively evolved three strategy documents: *Country Strategy Paper I* (1993), *Country Strategy Paper II* (1998) and Updated Country Strategy Paper: *Taking Sides* (2000). Further, to assist us in our work on the rights approach, we have adopted *Alps* – ActionAid International's Accountability, Learning and Planning System. We are guided in our actions by *Rights to End Poverty*, the ActionAid International's strategy document 2005–2010.

The Country Strategy Paper III (hereinafter referred to as *Rights First*) is yet another framework to strategically organise the organisation and programmes, during 2005 to 2010, in line with our vision and mission statements.

Partners in Rights Action

Today, more than three decades since we started our journey, we have the privilege of engaging in rights and development action with more than 300 civil society organisations and nearly 5 million poor and excluded people – namely the *dalit* and tribal people, other sections of the rural and urban poor, women, children, and minorities. And, within them, those in vulnerable situations such as people living with chronic hunger, ill health, migrant and bonded workers, children out of education, urban homeless people, trafficked persons, persons with disability, displaced people and refugees, and people affected by natural and human-made disasters.

Also, we have formed partnerships with people who are socially stigmatised, namely sex workers, persons living with HIV and AIDS, manual scavengers, mentally ill people, people in custodial institutions and de-notified tribals. Excluded and invisibilised, such people find it difficult to enjoy their human rights and emerge out of poverty. Our resolve has been to strengthen the voices and agency of these communities to assert for their human rights and dignity.

During the last decade there has been a continuous striving on our part to come closer to the poor and excluded women and men, girls and boys. In 2000, we shifted our Country office from Bangalore to Delhi, bringing us nearer to the regions with the largest number of poor and excluded people. Also, it enabled us to critically, yet constructively, engage with policy makers at the national level. In this context, we established 14 Regional Offices (RO) and 10 Field Offices (FO) to reach the poor and excluded people in 22 States of India.

Steps in our Journey

In 1972, when we started our work in India, we were convinced that 'Education for All' was the key to fighting poverty. Hence, for the next two decades, we used our resources mainly to support children from poor and excluded families to access school education. Later, in the late 1980s, we revisited our intervention strategy to broaden its focus to community development through a multi-sectoral approach.

Our organisational growth and the rapidly changing external context during the early 1990s compelled us to engage in strategic programming. Consequently, we formulated our first five-year strategy paper (CSP I: 1993–97). It provided us the mandate to support grass-roots action for people's empowerment. Also, it identified priority issues and regions, and emphasised the need for policy influencing through civil society alliances.

After a critical review of CSP–I, we drew up the next strategy paper (CSP–II: 1998–2002), which for the first time recognised the need to work through the rights approach. It acknowledged that the fight against poverty could be sustained only by strengthening the agency of poor and excluded people. We are also duty bound to facilitate processes that enable poor and excluded people to fully access and enjoy their human rights and entitlements.

Later, we revisited CSP–II in the light of the conclusions from *Taking Stock–I*, a global review of 25 years of our work, and *Fighting Poverty Together* (ActionAid's global strategy paper), which provided a comprehensive framework for poverty eradication through the rights mode of development. Subsequently, the Updated CSP–II document entitled *Taking Sides* was adopted.

Also, the *Taking Sides* document incorporated the outputs from an AAI staff reflection, in May 1999 at Kodaikanal and again at Hyderabad in March 2000. There was an affirmation of mainstreaming the rights based approach and the need for strengthening gender equity and leveraging in-country resources.

Struggle for Right to Basic Needs

In India, while public awareness of human rights is growing, the struggle for full access and enjoyment of poor people's rights is a long one. The problem gets compounded because, in many instances, human rights standards have not been fully developed, and hence often not agreed upon by the state. The collective struggle for the right to food and livelihood of poor people is a case in point. Here our primary effort has been to set standards and monitor state accountability for violations. We are part of a civil society alliance that has approached the Supreme Court of India to claim food as an entitlement of poor people. Already the court has declared that all children in state-run schools must be provided a cooked midday meal. This has assured nutrition to nearly 30 million children from poor families. At another level, we have succeeded in motivating governments and local bodies in Delhi, Hyderabad, Lucknow, and Chennai to open schools and public buildings as night shelters for homeless people. Already, some 30 street children use our office space in Delhi as a night shelter. Further, we have supported children in vulnerable situations – street children, disabled children and children of sex workers – to access school education. Nearly 3,000 such children are attending schools through our intervention. Also, we are part of several civil society campaigns, such as those against caste discrimination and demeaning practices like manual scavenging, which affect the lives of nearly one million *dalit* people. More recently, we have partnered survivors of communal conflict for justice to promote peace and harmony between communities. These small but significant steps have brought us closer to the goal of an India free from poverty, discrimination and injustice.

Country Strategy Paper III: *Rights First*

Our Country Strategy Paper III, entitled *Rights First*, is an enabling dynamic instrument that derives from various streams of thought and practice. It identifies strategic ways to carry forward our mission, against the backdrop of our shared vision, our organisational values and our learnings from rights based action.

It is born out of lengthy internal and external consultations with our partners. It incorporates the conclusions from the review of the CSP II and from several staff meets at Goa, Bhopal and Jaipur during 2004–05, where we analysed the emerging global and Indian realities and our role in the larger civil society efforts to fight poverty, exclusion and injustice.

Also incorporated are the discussions from public consultations on diverse themes – globalisation, human rights, women's rights, tribal rights, dalit rights, food rights and livelihood, disability rights, rights of people living with HIV and AIDS, child rights and education, anti-trafficking, peace and justice, health rights and rights of urban poor people – in which nearly 600 staff, social activists and action researchers participated.

Further, it derives from the conclusions of *Taking Stock II (2004): A Review of Fighting Poverty Together*, which indicated that, while globally our programmes are having a lasting impact, there is scope for improvement. This is especially true in our work on women's rights, where we have achieved far less than we had hoped to under our previous strategy period.

It has been our experience that poverty is a complex multi-faceted phenomenon with many overlapping social, economic, and political dimensions. Also, patriarchy – defined as unequal and unjust power relations between women and men – is one of the root causes of poverty. Despite the Indian Constitution, the stubborn persistence of poverty suggests the need for much larger efforts on many fronts. *Rights First* mandates that we must continue to collectively work to address the root causes of poverty and exclusion, and not just its various manifestations.

Further, the primary responsibility for ensuring rights and justice rests with the state, from which it should not be permitted to retreat, and for which it must be held accountable. Therefore, the need for civil society to collectively engage with the state at the local, national and global levels to transform governance through changes in laws, policies and institutions that work against the interests of the poor and excluded.

Renewed Commitment to Justice

Rights First demands that we further sharpen our focus and reaffirm our faith in the agency of the poor to secure their rights with dignity. It renews our commitment to fight unequal and unjust social relations. It mandates strategic action with *dalit* and tribal people, most backward communities within the other backward classes (OBC), minorities, women, persons living with HIV and AIDS, sex workers, trafficked people and persons affected by natural and human-made disasters, to enable their alliances and networks at local, national and global levels. Further, it mandates special focus on rights of women, children and persons with disability in all our work.

Rights First strives to deepen our partnerships and solidarity with social movements of women, persons with disability, HIV and AIDS, manual scavengers, the urban homeless, agricultural workers, organisations of the poor, youth groups, students and trade unions – both nationally and internationally. Also, it mandates critical engagement with the state and its institutions, as well as international bodies.

Along with the right to be heard and to live in dignity, poor people need access to entitlements of food, water, health, employment, education, housing, and human security, in order to be able to participate as full citizens in the political, economic and social processes. Therefore, the imperative to give the poor and excluded full access to the human rights guaranteed by the Indian Constitution and International instruments.

Put together, *Rights First* seeks to enable the poor and excluded in India to achieve the following goals:

- ▶ An alliance of marginalised people that will engage with institutions of state and civil society to ensure the realisation of basic rights – food and livelihood, education, health, shelter and human security.
- ▶ Ensure that women, children, persons with disability and people living with HIV and AIDS will exercise power and assert their rights and entitlements.
- ▶ Address the immediate distress needs of the vulnerable through processes that reinforce their dignity through local, national and international support.
- ▶ Build solidarity between the marginalised communities and larger civil society so that they will merge to fight discrimination, inequity and exclusion.

The programme mandate of *Rights First* has several implications for the organisation. It would need to continue its endeavour to develop inclusive, gender sensitive, and non-bureaucratic procedures. It would need to be completely transparent. Our policies, practices and systems must ensure active accountability to poor and excluded communities.

Finally, *Rights First* delineates the role that we would like to play in the much larger efforts of development actors for a more equitable, gender just and humane world. Through this document, we give ourselves a new set of strategies to overcome our weaknesses, consolidate our strengths, and convert our past failures into opportunities. It informs us about what we are, what we stand for and what we have mandated to do, severally and collectively, over the next 5 years. Also, the exercise of drawing up the *Rights First* document brings the time frame in synchronisation with *Rights to End Poverty*, the ActionAid International Strategy document, i.e., up till 2010.

Summary

Rights First, unambiguously expresses our commitment to enable an alliance of the marginalised people of India that will empower the poor and excluded peoples to claim their human rights as Indian and global citizens. It builds on our earlier strategy entitled, *Taking Sides*, the emerging demands of the external environment and in solidarity with the internationalisation process of ActionAid. It reflects our identity – what we stand for and what we pledge to do – over the next six years, e.g., 2005–2010.

Rights First declares that our core constituencies for rights action would be the dalit people, tribal people, most backward groups within the other backward classes (OBC), minorities, urban poor people, informal sector labour, women, persons living with HIV and AIDS, sex workers, trafficked people and persons affected by natural and human made disasters. Further, within each social group, the focus will be on the rights of women, persons with disability and children.

Deepening our Actions

Right First seeks to deepen our ongoing work and partnerships with poor and excluded people by:

- ▶ Enriching our work on the rights mode with new insights from the human rights discourse and praxis
- ▶ Enabling poor people to assert themselves for human rights that are instrumental in satisfying their basic needs
- ▶ Unambiguously expressing our commitment and action on the rights of women and girls to social equality
- ▶ Ensuring that our thematic work is seamlessly linked with partnering social groups – our core constituencies
- ▶ Enabling an alliance of the marginalised people – by facilitating the poor and excluded to form their agency and collectively engage in social change and transformation.

Continuities from CSP II

Rights First seeks to continue with the following processes initiated during the earlier strategy period:

- ▶ Taking sides with the poor and marginalised and strengthening their agency for rights action
- ▶ Rights of women, persons with disability and child rights permeate all our work and programmes as cross cutting themes

- ▶ Addressing distress needs of people in vulnerable situations within the constitutional framework of the right to life and right to subsistence
- ▶ Presenting a pluralist identity of ActionAid International-India to all our stakeholders. For instance, donor agencies or activist organisations will be treated as equal partners for social change and transformation.

Goals of Rights First

Rights First seeks to achieve the following four goals in partnership with our core constituencies:

- ▶ Form an alliance of the marginalised to engage with institutions of the state and ensure the realisation of rights to food and livelihood, education, health, shelter and human security
- ▶ Women, children, persons with disability and people living with HIV and AIDS are empowered to exercise power and assert their rights and entitlements
- ▶ Immediate distress needs of the vulnerable people are fully addressed through processes that reinforce their dignity with local, national and international support
- ▶ Solidarity between the marginalised communities and larger civil society will emerge to resist and fight discrimination, inequity and exclusion.

Strategic Priorities: 2005–2010

In order to achieve the above goals, our actions will aim at realising the following objectives at both the programmatic and organisational levels. The thematic framework composed of realisation of six basic rights themes together with the rights aspirations of our core constituencies will guide this work.

Rights themes that inform our strategic actions:

- ▶ Right to food through sustainable livelihoods and food entitlements – particularly of persons living with HIV and AIDS (PLWHA), access and control over natural resources for women, targeting and enforcement of food entitlements and reversal of unfair trade rules and policies
- ▶ Right to education to ensure all children have free and equal access to quality education with full respect for children's rights, especially of girls, children with disability and children affected and infected by HIV and AIDS
- ▶ Right to health for all through a free, effective and efficient primary healthcare delivery system, and assured comprehensive care and treatment to PLWHA, especially for women and children
- ▶ Right to housing for all comprises legal security of homestead tenure, protection of livelihoods, availability of services and infrastructure and provision of 24-hour shelter for the urban homeless
- ▶ Right to human security involves extending the protection of the state to people, especially women living in violent situations, and improving human security through participatory relief and rehabilitation measures during emergencies in a manner that protects people's dignity.

Programme Strategies

Building Alliance of the Marginalised

Core focus is two-fold:

- ▶ Support empowerment of poor and excluded people by enabling them to understand the root causes of their poverty and exclusion
- ▶ Assist in the formation of an alliance of the excluded people that will enable them to collectively challenge existing social, economic and political processes, as well as, institutions, laws and policies that perpetuate inequity and injustice. This will result in:
 - Poor and excluded people effectively challenging the unequal power relationships in society and asserting their human rights in both public and private spheres
 - Fostering solidarity within the poor people for collective and sustained actions for social change and transformation.

Facilitating Just and Democratic Governance

The primary thrust is to ensure social justice by supporting processes that amplify the voices, power and influence of the poor and excluded people in institutions and decision making with particular focus to women, children, people with disability and people living with HIV and AIDS. Also, build capacity of civil society to monitor the state and its institutions to ensure just, transparent and accountable governance. Key outcomes are:

- ▶ Deepening democracy by supporting the poor and excluded, women in particular, to actively participate in governance processes
- ▶ Enhanced accountability and transparency of the State towards pro-poor and gender; access to human rights, public resources and state services.

Enforcing Rights of Women and Girls

Primary focus:

- ▶ Gender analysis to understand the oppressive patriarchal power structures both in domestic and public spheres
- ▶ Challenge and change social processes, institutions, laws and policies at local, national and global levels which are manifestly anti-women and anti-girl.

Key outcomes:

- ▶ Empowered women's groups that will create a social space for themselves and help assert their rights in the private and public spheres, along with gaining greater access and control over common property resources.
- ▶ Change in attitude among men and boys from gender based stereotyping to supporting the cause of gender equality and equity.

Addressing Immediate Poverty Needs

Primary focus:

- ▶ Create community-based system that copes with emergencies and combats anti-women and girls' coping strategies
- ▶ Establish accountability of state and civil society for timely relief and reconstruction.

Key outcomes:

- ▶ Capacities and resources of communities are enhanced to cope with emergencies.
- ▶ Linkages with the state established for greater access of their services with dignity.

Diversifying Resource Base

Primary focus is on diversifying our financial and human resource base by mobilising ethical funding and volunteers from the larger civil society and from institutional donors and corporates for rights and justice work. This would result in increased participation and a sense of ownership by the non-poor sections of the civil society of the programmes and initiatives to address the issues and concerns of the poor and excluded people.

Organisational Objectives

The programme mandate that we set out to carry forward has several implications for the internal working of our organisation. It would require continuing efforts to develop and strengthen policies, systems and procedures that reflect our core principles of inclusion, transparency and accountability with the process of internationalisation. We will create a National Governing Board and foster gender sensitive governance and accountability to deepen our commitment and achieve our mission with the values of democracy and social justice. A set of five objectives guides the organisation effectiveness:

Deepening Accountability and Transparency

Expanding credibility of the organisation and programmes with multiple accountability and transparent processes focused on our core constituencies. Our monitoring and evaluation methodology to be strengthened, ensuring multiple accountability, participation and rigorous social and power analysis.

Decentralisation and Horizontal Working

Empowerment of all frontline staff and promoting horizontal working would become an integral part of our work culture, achieved through effective decentralisation, democracy and participation guided by strategic coherence and transparency. Accountability to be institutionalised at all levels delineating clear roles.

Enforcing Gender and Social Equity

Making gender and social equality and equity central to ActionAid's being and doing. We will institutionalise gender analysis and integrate power framework towards creating an enabling environment through addressing exclusion at the work place and challenging the attitude to gender stereotyping.

Achieving Learning Organisation

Institutionalise action reflection process to capture best practices and encourage innovation. Strengthen staff capacity in knowledge, skills, attitudes and values required to deliver our mission. Shared learning to be institutionalised across the organisation.

Aligning Structure to Values and Principles

Facilitate and nurture an organisational structure that synergises thematic work with work across horizontal and geographical boundaries. Here, we will be guided by highest and best standards

of accountability for the outputs, outcomes and impacts of our actions. We will strive to create an empowering and motivating environment through organisational processes that facilitate internalisation of our core values and principles.

The Way Forward

While our response to addressing structural causes of poverty of the most vulnerable people continues, in the strategy period (2005–09), we will engage with specific categories of excluded poor people and their movements, to enable formation of an alliance that challenges unequal and unjust power relations through a process of empowerment and assertion of their human rights. To be effective, we would require to nurture and support organisations or poor and excluded people and assist social movements guided by ‘platform politics’, without assuming leadership positions. We will progressively work in networks and alliances striving to create synergy and solidarity to take our work forward.

Both rights issues that are most significant to fighting poverty and patriarchy, and our core constituencies – the social groups – will guide us in forming thematic teams. We link with the ActionAid international campaigns on women’s rights, food and hunger, education, HIV and AIDS, and governance. To proclaim our commitment to strengthening our work on women’s rights and gender justice, our human resources to be augmented and enhanced with relevant competencies. Staff capacities to be built on to ensure greater downward accountability and transparency through adherence to Alps principles and processes and to create systems that facilitate critical reflection, innovation, and learning.

Acronyms

AAI	ActionAid International
AAI-I	ActionAid International-India
Alps	Accountability, Learning and Planning System
ARV	Anti-Retro Viral
CBO	Community Based Organisation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HDR	Human Development Report
HR/OD	Human Resources/Organisation Development
INGO	International Non-Government Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MBCs	Most Backward Communities
NACO	National AIDS Control Organisation
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
OBCs	Other Backward Classes
PLWHA	Persons living with HIV and AIDS
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
PPA	Participatory Poverty Assessment
PVA	Participatory Vulnerability Analysis
PWD	Persons with Disability
SC/ST	Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribes
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
WTO	World Trade Organization
WB	World Bank

Inequalities, Poverty and Deprivation

On the ruins of its colonial past, India, in the last five decades has built a strong agriculture, self-reliant human power, and a sophisticated industrial and scientific superstructure. This has, among other things, led to India making strides towards self-sufficiency in food production, health care, power generation and progress in many other sectors. The economy has also been growing at an average rate of 6 per cent since 1992, prompting the World Wealth Report 2005 to claim that 70,000 Indians own financial assets worth more than \$1 million.

Reproducing Inequality

However, statistics on poverty reveal that the benefits of economic growth are not reaching large sections of the population. According to the UN Human Development Report (HDR) 2004, the richest 20 per cent of Indians enjoy 41.6 per cent of the national income, while the poorest

20 per cent receive only 8.9 per cent. Similarly, the daily average consumption expenditure at 1993–94 prices, computed on basis of the National Accounts Statistics data, was a meagre Rs23.27 (less than half dollar) in 2002–03. Consequently, 21 per cent of India is undernourished, 16 per cent have no access to safe drinking water, and 30 per cent of children are underweight at the time of birth.

HDR 2004 reports that India ranks 127th on its human development index, with nearly 34.7 per cent (e.g., estimated 350 million) of the population living on income of less than a dollar a day. Using a different poverty assessment methodology, the Government of India claims that 28.6 per cent Indians presently live below the poverty line. Whatever method one adopts for estimating poverty, the fact remains that it is disproportionately high among historically excluded

groups, namely the *dalit* people, tribal people, minorities, most backward communities (MBC), women, and persons with disability.

Insofar as access to public services – education, health care, drinking water, sanitation, transport, judicial services, banking services, policing and so on – is concerned, significant inequalities continue to persist. Nearly 17 per cent of the children are yet to enroll in schools. Out of 100 million children enrolled in primary schools, only 35 million complete secondary school. In 2001, the expenditure on education was 4.1 per cent of GDP and on health care was 0.9 per cent of GDP. In a democracy, it is the State, which has the ultimate responsibility for providing these services. Its denial makes the poor people a different class of citizens from those in the upper and middle classes who take all these services for granted.

Social Costs of Economic Reforms

The economic reforms process in India had been initiated in 1991 when the economy's external and internal imbalances had reached crisis proportions. The initial reforms – involving reducing fiscal deficit, restrictions on imports, and currency devaluation – sought to stabilise the economy. Later, the planners argued for changing the development strategy through structural adjustment. The subsequent reforms included delicensing of industries, divestment of public sector units, privatisation of public services, elimination of non-tariff restrictions on imports, removal of restrictions on imports, and liberalisation of financial markets.

Today, the adverse effects of the reforms programme on the lives and livelihoods of the poor are increasingly evident. The pressure to contain fiscal deficit has led to drastic cuts in public investment on agriculture, to the extent that P Sainath in his article, 'Seeds of Suicide – II'

(2004) refers to zero investment in agriculture. Since 1996, the estimate is that nearly 9,000 farmers across the country have committed suicide.

The report of the 2nd National Commission on Labour (2004), while commenting on the impact of globalisation, says that between 1995–2000 coffee prices have declined by 50 per cent. Rubber prices are currently Rs14.35 below the cost of production, affecting the wages of 1 million people employed in the plantation industry – the largest private sector employer in India.

The Economic Survey 2004–05 shows that in 1998–2003 the total employment in the public and private sectors declined by 4 per cent respectively. This is in sharp contrast to the situation in 1972–82 (before the reforms programme) when the employment growth was 42 per cent in the public sector and 12 per cent in the private sector. The employment of women during the reforms period declined in the public sector from 74 per cent in 1972–82 to 5 per cent in 1998–2003, and in the private sector from 20 to 3 per cent respectively. Consequently, in 2002–03, the labour force participation rate for women in India was 21.6 per cent compared to 55.3 per cent for men, which was lower than Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

Anti-Reforms Verdict by the Poor

The reforms programme, manifested through land acquisition, corporatisation of agriculture and forest produce collection, privatisation of water bodies, trawling of coastal waters, opencast mining, divestment of public assets and the like, is pushing *dalits*, tribals, women, fish workers, traditional artisans, small and marginal farmers, and other excluded people into destitution and despair. During the last few years, thousands of farmers, retrenched labour, ruined artisans, and displaced people committed suicide and hundreds of starvation deaths were reported from different parts of the country. Social conflict fanned by fundamentalist ideologies is on the rise, as also atrocities on women, dalits and tribal.

Expectedly, the Indian electorate has not taken kindly to the regimes that have enforced the economic reforms programme. This was demonstrated in the six General Elections over a short period of 13 years: no 'reforming' regime could renew its mandate from the people. The

15 years of reforms has seen more elections at the national level than any other period of comparable length in independent India. People's resentment and anger against policies that foster inequalities and are inherently anti-poor have been sharp enough to send the so-called 'reformers' from political power to the wilderness. However, the reformers have sought to downplay people's negative verdict by attributing it to anti-incumbency sentiments.

Women are Doubly Excluded

The HDR 2001 mentions that poverty has a woman's face – of the 1.3 billion people in poverty worldwide, nearly 70 per cent are women. In India, gender inequalities reflect in the differences in sex ratio, child infanticide and foeticide, violence against women, literacy rates, health and nutrition, wage differentials and ownership of land and other assets. During 1991–2001, the girl child sex ratio has declined from 945 to 927 and nearly 50 per cent of all pregnant women are anaemic.

Patriarchy exacerbates the impact of poverty on women and girls due to unequal allocation of food, lower wage rates, lack of participation in social, economic and political institutions, and absence of inheritance and property rights. Social and economic dependence is extremely high among women. Men own nearly all the agricultural land and most of the productive assets and women suffer from illiteracy, chronic illnesses, disability and different forms of violence.

Women continue to be discriminated and excluded by the existing social and cultural practices, customary laws, and, in many instances, state laws and policies. Many women are destitute for structural reasons with their identity as women closing most options for employment. Women receive wages that are often half to two-thirds of that given to men. While women constitute nearly half the population, their representation in the national and state legislatures remains abysmal, even after five decades of democracy. Only nine per cent of the Members of Parliament (MP) are women.

Pandemic of HIV and AIDS

Officially 5.1 million Indians, i.e., 1.9 million women and 0.1 million children, are living with HIV and AIDS (NACO, March 2005), with the numbers only increasing. Nearly 89 per cent of persons living with HIV and AIDS

(PLWHA) belong to the sexually active and economically productive age group of 15–49. HIV and AIDS cases have been reported from almost all the States and Union Territories, with six states being listed under high prevalence. Given India's large population, a mere 0.1% increase in the prevalence rate would increase the number of PLWHA by over half a million people.

Studies indicate that most of the PLWHA come from poor and excluded households. Unequal distribution of wealth and power and lack of access to livelihoods create conditions for the virus to spread rapidly. The low status of women reduces their capacity to choose the circumstances of sexual liaison or to negotiate for safe sex. Their economic and social dependence on men limit their control on their lives, including on exposure to HIV and AIDS. Abuse and violence against women, and lack of access to legal and social protection, increase this vulnerability.

Government programmes focus on keeping the prevalence at a stagnant rate. There is very little focus on care and support and awareness building among the vulnerable population. Almost all programmes approach HIV and AIDS from a health perspective and give little attention to stigma and discrimination. Consequently, care for PLWHA is not integrated in the primary health care system. Its implications reflect on ground. Anti-retro viral (ARV) drugs and medicines for infections are out of reach of most PLWHA. Many observers believe that the new Patents Act will further increase the cost of drugs needed by PLWHA.

Emergence of Social Consensus

The scenario is very dark indeed, but the clouds are not without silver lining. The last few years have seen an emerging consensus within the pro-poor civil society

and social movements to consolidate the spaces of freedom and democracy to counter the tendencies towards concentration and centralisation of wealth, knowledge and power. In January 2004, the Indian civil society and a cross section of the global civil society came together to share the vision that another world is possible at the World Social Forum in Mumbai.

A large section of the Indian civil society – poor people in particular – no longer want to continue to give priority to growth without specific goals and purposes, like the creation of employment, elimination of poverty, the preservation of the environment, more equitable distribution of income and other economic and social goods.

Through the panchayat raj, civil society is striving to engage critically with the state and market forces, looking out for the interest of the present generation as well as that of the future. This has brought to the fore the necessity to deepen democracy through the free and fair participation of all people in governance. Further, large sections of the poor and excluded, enabled by civil society organisations, are slowly regaining local spaces, control over local production and common property resources, as well as political organisations. Some have moved further to build global linkages of their experiences and struggles.

The need is for the vision of a society that looks for the quality of life based on the satisfaction of the basic needs of all people, access and enjoyment of every right and entitlements of the poor and excluded peoples, and a development paradigm that is sustainable. We have the resources, capacity and technology to achieve this vision and there exists a majority consensus in India in favour of such a vision. Political will can put the vision in practice.

Core Constituencies

Rights First recognises that poverty and exclusion are causally linked to the social structure. Certain social groups are more vulnerable to poverty, marginalisation and exclusion and, within them, women, children and persons with disability are doubly excluded. At another level, patriarchy reinforces inequity and legitimises the unequal and unjust power, needs and capacities of women and men. Therefore, *Rights First* mandates strengthening our rights based work and partnerships with social groups in vulnerable situations.

The framework to identify social groups to partner and work with:

- ▶ Degree and intensity of denial of human rights, dignity, justice and entitlements in education, health, food and livelihood, housing and human security, by the group as a whole
- ▶ Experiences of atrocities, discrimination and exclusion by the group and its capacity to resist and struggle
- ▶ Experiences of atrocities and discrimination which women of the group face.

In the light of our experiences and analysis, we will partner and work with the following social groups:

- ▶ Dalits
- ▶ Tribals
- ▶ Most Backward Communities (MBC) within the Other Backward Classes
- ▶ Minorities.

Besides, the two other social partners composed of diverse social groups, experiencing multiple denial of rights, discrimination and exclusion are:

- ▶ Urban Poor People
- ▶ Informal Sector Labour.

We would also continue to strengthen our partnership and work At the national level, we also partner with groups in vulnerable situations, like

- ▶ Persons living with HIV and AIDS (PLWHA)
- ▶ Sex Workers
- ▶ Trafficked people
- ▶ People affected by natural and human made disasters.

Here, we recognise that the local context has a bearing on the rights and well-being of these social categories. Therefore, it is the regional, along with the thematic strategies, which would identify the specificities within them.

Within each of the above social groups and categories, considering that women, children and persons with disability are the most vulnerable, we would adopt a twin-track approach in our initiatives – cross-cutting themes as well as focusing on each one specifically.

Women and Girls

Women and girls in India face inequities in terms of life opportunities and choices. Reinforcing this asymmetrical situation is the patriarchal institutions and ideologies in the form of inequitable entitlements in the family, caste, religion, social norms, state laws and policies and customary institutions. Consequently, the denial of rights affects women and girls differently. Also, they have differential needs, interests and experiences as compared to men. This is compounded with continued discrimination and newer forms of exclusion. Only 43 per cent of girls are enrolled in primary school, compared to 62 per cent of boys.

India is one of the few countries in the world where women and men have nearly the same life expectancy. Yet, in absolute terms, 50 million women are missing from the total Indian population. Women have little control over their sexuality, fertility and labour. They have virtually no ownership and control over agricultural property. They remain at the lowest end of the segregated labour market and continue to be concentrated in a few occupations,

holding positions of little or no authority and receiving lesser wages than men.

Every five minutes witnesses a violent crime against women and girls, which is one of the structural barriers to women and girls' rights both in private and public spheres. Powerlessness makes women and girls more vulnerable to pandemics such as HIV and AIDS, trafficking, communalism and fundamentalism, chronic hunger, disease and illiteracy.

Dalit People

Dalit people constitute 16 per cent of the total population and are at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Socially and economically deprived, *dalit* people face discrimination and human rights denials at all levels. The practice of untouchability prevents *dalit* people from leading a life with dignity. Most *dalit* people are denied the right to choose an occupation and have to bear the burden of caste-based occupations – manual scavenging, carcass cleaning, and leatherwork – or agricultural labour. Often *dalit* women are denied access to common property resources, depriving them of the right to livelihood and alternative occupation.

Studies indicate that *dalit* women constitute nearly 53 per cent of the unskilled women labour force. In some *dalit* communities, women have no livelihood option, compelling them to become caste based sex workers. During the last few decades, atrocities and violence on *dalit* people, especially women, by the higher caste people has increased. The participation of *dalit* people in the political processes is minimal and they are vulnerable to manipulation by vested interests.

Tribal People

According to the Census 2001, the tribal people (also called Scheduled Tribes, *adivasis*, *girijans*, or indigenous people) constitute 8.2 per cent of the total population. They share with the *dalit* people most of the common burdens of poverty and exclusion. Some tribal communities suffer from the stigma of being labeled as criminal tribes and are stigmatised as denotified and nomadic tribes.

In India, all tribal communities are rated very low on human development indicators of food security, health, education, income, participation and like. There are several laws to protect tribal people from land alienation, money lending, bondedness, etc., but these are rarely

implemented causing their pauperisation and exploitation. At another level, most of the tribal customary laws and practices exclude women, making tribal women doubly excluded.

During the last 50 years, it is estimated that 30 million people have been displaced due to various infrastructure development projects. Of them, 40 per cent are tribals and 25 per cent are *dalits*. Their loss of control over natural resources like forests and forest produce, minerals, land and water, has affected their culture and livelihoods. Also, it has resulted in their increased bondage or migration to urban slums. Tribal women are pushed into sex work, domestic help and contract labour with exploitative wages.

Most Backward Communities (MBCs)

According to the Constitution of India the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) comprises of those social categories that are 'educationally and economically backward'. They constitute nearly 23 per cent of the population and comprise various occupational groups. Within the OBCs, there are certain groups/communities who are the poorest and socially excluded. *Rights First* prefers to term such groups as the most backward communities (MBCs), and mandates that we make efforts to partner with them for social change and transformation.

Like the *dalit* and tribal people, the MBCs too experience denial of human rights. According to our social analysis they comprise the landless wage earners (107 million), sections of the 'denotified' communities, ruined traditional artisans (14 million), such as artisanal fish workers, weavers, potters, blacksmiths, etc., and small and marginal farmers. They are primarily occupational groups, often exploited by the rich farmers and traders. Sometimes, they earn wages even below that of the *dalit* and tribal people. In emergency situations – like droughts, conflicts, etc., – they are put to double disadvantage. The complete reliance on their respective occupational skills leaves them with nothing to fall back upon when livelihood mechanisms get disrupted during emergencies.

Women from MBCs are excluded through processes such as under-valuing of their artisanal skills and contribution to the production chain. Globalisation is putting new pressures on traditional occupation and small producers. It is no longer a level playing field for the MBCs whose livelihoods are being captured by corporates. The estimate is that each powerloom

displaces 14 weaver families from their traditional occupation. Increasingly, the MBCs are being pushed from their traditional livelihoods into agricultural labour, migrant labour and child labour, and within them women are worst affected.

Minorities

The Constitution of India recognises minorities in terms of representation in the population. The sociological literature understands minorities as those social groups who are pushed into relationships of sub-ordination by the dominant majority group. In the context of poverty and exclusion, minorities form a significant social group. In India, they comprise both religious and ethnic groups – such as Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Kukis, Kashmiri Pundits, and many others.

Like the OBCs, minorities too reflect a very heterogeneous composition. *Rights First* mandates that our partnership must only be with those sections of the minorities who suffer discrimination, social exclusion and intense denial of human rights. Hence, our partnership for action will primarily be with the poor and excluded people within the religious and ethnic minority communities of India. Nearly 51 per cent of the Muslim population is landless, pushing them in to the informal labour sector, or they become petty artisans. According to the Census 2001, Muslims have the lowest work participation rate – 31.3 per cent males and 16 per cent females.

The rise of fundamentalism since 1980s brought with it increased communalisation and violence against minorities. Growing incidence of fundamentalism, communalism and conflicts put further constraints upon the freedom of women and girls to participate actively in public life. The attacks on Sikhs, Muslims, Christians, Kukis, and the like, have intensified. Discrimination and alienation are creating conditions of *ghettoisation*, not just in terms of physical neighbourhoods but also in terms of ideas and politics.

Informal Sector Labour

Almost all the labour engaged in the informal sector (also called unorganised sector) comes from four social groups – *dalits*, tribals, MBCs and minorities. It is characterised by self or wage employment – domestic workers, porters, vendors, artisans, ragpickers and construction workers (193 million) and agricultural labour (107.5 million) and livestock, forestry and

plantations workers (6 million). Also, most of the women labour force is concentrated in the disadvantaged informal sector.

Informal sector labour is exploited by denial of statutory minimum wages, gender discrimination in wages and working conditions. Women are often objects of sexual abuse. There is very little protective legislation and even the implementation of Minimum Wages Act is practically non-existent for women workers. Further, the flexible labour markets and the cuts in subsidies on food, education, health and housing, introduced as part of the economic reforms programme, are leading to a decline in the quality of life and dignity of labour.

Urban Poor People

Urban poor are distinct from the rural poor even though they are subjected to similar levels of deprivation, discrimination and rights denials. Living in slums, shanties or on the streets, the urban poor are vulnerable to destitution, disability, mental illness, sexual abuse, chemical addiction and police brutality. Almost all urban poor people have no homestead rights and only 50 per cent have access to shelter. Consequently, they are subjected to forced evictions without resettlement, creating situations of gross human rights violation and trauma.

The share of urban population is expected to increase from 28 per cent in 2001 to 43 per cent in 2020, implying a manifold increase in urban poverty. Casualisation of labour, high dependence on unskilled work, lack of protective labour legislation, and illegalisation will further accentuate the problems and rights denials experienced by the urban poor. At another level, in the name of modernisation or beautification of cities, the urban poor are subjected increasingly to exclusion through public policy.

People living with HIV and AIDS

The people infected and affected by HIV and AIDS live with discrimination, deprivation, exclusion and the denial of their rights. These find expression in shortsighted public policies and exclusionary laws, while, at the grassroots, in the form of anger or physical intimidation. Most PLWHA are denied medical treatment, access to education, marital rights, employment and a dignified life. While their rights are ruthlessly violated in every sphere, there exists no legislation for redressal. Poor care and support from

the government as well as exorbitant drug prices make care and treatment out of reach.

Children and women, who form 35 per cent of PLWHA are the most vulnerable. HIV and AIDS are doubly cruel to women, who are subject to blame, stigma and discrimination. Once infected, they are at enhanced risk of rights violation – denied equal access to treatment, financial support and education. When a woman is HIV positive, she is either abandoned by the family or denied right over her reproductive health. Also, HIV and AIDS leaves women with the responsibility of heading the household.

The affected and infected children bear the brunt of stigma, resulting in their discrimination, rejection and isolation, not only from educational institutions, but also from other areas, like playgrounds and hospitals. Such children are often orphans or left with only one parent. Young girls are more vulnerable to HIV infection due to forced sex work.

Trafficked People

In South Asia, trafficking of people, women and children in particular, is increasing primarily around commercial sexual exploitation. The human rights violation associated with trafficking involves sexual abuse and enslavement, exploitation of labour, torture, denial of freedom of movement. It is the worst form of violence. Trafficked people are denied basic needs of food, shelter, care and protection. Children are subject to the most inhuman conditions of living, as they are least likely to resist and fight oppression.

Trafficking takes place under circumstances that are integrally linked to the larger macro issues of development – food insecurity, gender inequity, feminisation of poverty and lack of political will combined with insubstantial law enforcement against perpetrators. It not only denies the trafficked people their basic rights, but also makes women and girls prone to chronic hunger and HIV and AIDS.

People in Sex Work

Commercial sex workers, apart from the social stigma attached to the occupation, also experience harassment at the hands of law enforcers, and are treated as criminals by the law. Frequently, the harassment takes the form of violence, sexual abuse, humiliation and extortion of earnings. Its consequence could be seen in the low

self-esteem among sex workers and loss of dignity. They are disempowered and exploited and fall easy targets to HIV and AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.

Most commercial sex workers take up this occupation after going through many experiences in life. But there are many others who are born into sex work – caste based sex workers. The men of the community compel women in many tribal and dalit communities into sex work because of traditional norms. However, in both situations, sex workers are confronted with problems of custody of children, accessing public health services, school education, and other entitlements. More recently, sex workers have got organised and are struggling to establish a positive identity and create space to exercise their own choices.

People affected by Disasters

Rights First recognises that disasters – both natural and human made – affect different people differently and that the poor and excluded communities are the worst affected, not only in terms of loss of life and property but also in terms of the capacity to cope with these reversals. It has been our experience and learning that frequently the relief, compensation and rehabilitation reaches the rich and powerful, while the poor and the powerless, are often left out of state and civil society efforts.

Besides the immediate devastation caused by the emergency, there are long-term fallouts. By far, the most significant is on the psyche of the affected people, women in particular. Increasingly, there is a realisation with the state and civil society for psychosocial relief to the affected along with material needs like food, water, clothing, shelter, sanitation, and health care.

The havoc wrought by disasters for children is the worst inasmuch as their education stands disrupted, their food and nutritional status gets adversely impacted, following loss of livelihoods their parents and their susceptibility to epidemics. By far, the greatest health threat is water-borne diseases resulting from lack of sanitation and availability of safe drinking water. During disasters, PLWHA and People with Disability (PWD) face greater marginalisation. In addition, the politics of relief and rehabilitation also results in increased marginalisation of the hitherto excluded.

Realising Basic Rights: Transforming Governance

Given the favourable constitutional and legal environment in India, it is relatively easy – unlike in many other countries – to apply the rights approach to development. Our rights framework is further strengthened by the availability of an international human rights regime. However, in many respects, the national regime is superior, by virtue, especially of the progressive interpretation made by the judiciary from time to time.

Denial of Full Citizenship

The Indian Constitution gives to all its citizens, equal rights as citizens of the country. Further, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) to which India is a signatory, gives all humans, irrespective of class, caste, gender, ethnicity, and nationality, equal access to human rights. However, in reality, poor and excluded people are unable to access and enjoy all the human rights available to them through these instruments. Various social, economic and political processes, individually and collectively, work to deny poor people rights and prevent them from creating new human rights and entitlements.

We strongly believe that to realise full citizenship, every individual and community must be able to freely access and fully enjoy all the human rights available to them through the Constitution of India, case laws, UDHR, and various international covenants, conventions and treaties. Further, people's understanding of rights is dynamic and ever evolving. Given the universal character of human rights, it is not constrained by national boundaries.

In this context, our role is to enable empowerment and capacity building of individuals, peoples and communities, who are denied access to human rights through collective action and legal remedies, thus reclaiming their full citizenship. For this purpose, AAI

and its partners will support the building of the alliance of the excluded people and strengthen community capacity in order to access and enjoy human rights guaranteed by the Constitution of India and UDHR. Also, we will support people to collectively act to evolve and define new human rights, standards and entitlements.

It is the state and international community that must create an enabling policy and legal environment that leads to the fulfilment of the basic needs of all – food, water, health, livelihood, education, housing, and human security – through people's participation and voice in the larger political and social processes. Hence, our core rights agenda would be to engage with the state and international community to ensure the translation of basic needs of poor and excluded people into rights and entitlements.

Realising Basic Needs

Working towards realising full citizenship for the excluded people, we will focus our efforts around six rights-based themes, which overlap and intersect each other. These themes relate to basic human needs where the urgency is greatest for poor people and our distinctive approach and experience can make the most difference. This thematic framework, together with our core constituencies, will guide the whole spectrum of our work, including research, advocacy and campaigning – from local to international levels.

We believe that such a thematic framework offers greatest potential to lay the foundation for connectivity between the constituencies and rights-based themes – reflecting the denial of rights and fostering collective action through active realisation and solidarity of the communities that experience rights denial and social exclusion. This will be guided by our fundamental commitment to specifically focus on women and girls'

rights, children's rights, rights of people living with HIV and AIDS and rights of persons with disability. Hence, every action taken would contribute towards strengthening the agency of poor and excluded people.

Right to Food and Livelihood

The root causes of hunger lies in the denial of right to food security – lack of access to, and control over natural resources, like land, water, forests and its produce, minerals, and seeds, which are the livelihood of millions of poor and excluded people. Denial of right to food compromises people's ability to achieve other rights – rights to life, livelihood and employment. Unfair trade rules that protect the interests of transnational corporations are increasing the cost of agriculture for the small and marginal farmers, as also displacing artisans from their traditional livelihoods. State is obliged to identify groups that do not enjoy adequate food and livelihood security and undertake remedial measures.

Key actions

- ▶ Access to food for the poor and excluded people with sustainable livelihood, guided by community control and management of natural resources – land, water, forest, minerals and seeds
- ▶ Ensure women's access to and control over natural resources – land, water, forest, minerals and seeds and participation in the implementation of food related programmes of the state
- ▶ Secure state responsibility for food security and sustainable livelihoods to PLWHA, including their right to care and treatment, property rights and rights over land
- ▶ Campaign for enforcement of food entitlements, i.e., effective functioning of public distribution system, employment guarantee, and other social security schemes. People's right to information to implement and monitor social security schemes
- ▶ Advocate and campaign for the reversal of unfair trade and fiscal rules and practices imposed by national governments, influenced by the World Trade Organization (WTO), World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF)
- ▶ Right to just conditions of work – minimum wages, working hours, a safe and healthy work environment, the right of women to protection in the workplace,

non-discrimination and equality of treatment with freedom concerning the choice of occupation and place for their performance

- ▶ Hold the state accountable for non-accessibility of food security schemes through mechanisms such as budget tracking, social audit, public hearings, and people's report cards.

Right to Education

In India, right to education is a fundamental right. It implies specific obligations on the state to ensure primary education to all children between the age group 6–14, without any discrimination. In keeping with this spirit, we envision that all children have free access to quality education within an equitable system that respects children's rights, especially those of girls, so that they can live a life with dignity.

Key actions

- ▶ Access to quality education with equal participation of girls and boys. This includes availability of trained teachers, adequate infrastructure, including toilets for girls, and teaching and learning materials
- ▶ Enabling children who are presently out of school for social, cultural, economic, and political reasons, to enrol in formal schools and engage in learning
- ▶ Advocate reforms in policies and systems to enforce inclusive education for children with disability and children infected or affected by HIV and AIDS
- ▶ Public budget tracking and influencing resource allocation in line with agreements of the Dakar Framework for Action on Education (2000) and the UN Millennium Development Goals
- ▶ Advocate for locally relevant and livelihood oriented curriculum. Create teaching and learning material in the language of the children.
- ▶ Hold the state accountable for non-accessibility to school education by children from poor and excluded households through budget tracking, social audit, public hearings, and people's report cards.

Right to Health

The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is a fundamental right. According to the UN

Charter, states are obliged to ‘undertake measures to eliminate epidemics and malnutrition’. It is the responsibility of the State to provide effective, efficient and affordable primary health. It is obliged to ensure care and treatment to PLWHA and formulate policies to protect them from stigma and discrimination.

However, the policy of liberalisation is basically making healthcare unaffordable to the poor, through a strategy of under-funding of health and social services by the State. Women and children, who are the most vulnerable, have the least access to healthcare information, treatment and drugs. Faulty policies and programmes of the State is the major cause for this lack of access.

Key actions

- ▶ Ensure free access to quality healthcare through state funded healthcare centres and hospitals for poor and excluded groups – particularly women, children, persons with disability and PLWHA
- ▶ Ensure state support to reinvigorate traditional medicinal knowledge systems by protecting people’s intellectual property and preventing bio-piracy
- ▶ Empower women living with HIV and AIDS to protect them from violence, freedom from stigma and discrimination and freedom to make informed choices for safer sex practices
- ▶ Advocate policies for proper and timely availability of treatment at affordable cost for PLWHA, and integration of HIV and AIDS care into the primary healthcare system of the State.
- ▶ Hold the State accountable for non-accessibility of quality healthcare by the poor and excluded through budget tracking, social audit, public hearings, and people’s report cards.

Right to Housing

Right to adequate housing comprises an obligation on the state to ensure legal security of homestead tenure, protection from involuntary displacement and forced evictions, make available services and infrastructure, and provision for 24-hours shelter to the urban homeless. Further, the state must ensure the right to housing, with a priority to people in vulnerable situations, through legal mechanisms and public policies. However, the state

accounts for much of housing rights violations. Millions of people, evicted forcibly from their homes, are rarely relocated, compensated, and rehabilitated.

Key actions

- ▶ Action research on town planning, urban reforms and settlements, migration, beggary and destitution
- ▶ Support homeless people and people living in slums and shanties to organise themselves – at local, national and international levels – and assert their right to safe housing and shelter
- ▶ Challenge the principle of eminent domain to prevent involuntary displacement and forced evictions, and advocacy for a people’s housing policy by the homeless people
- ▶ Participation of the excluded and poor in the drafting and implementation of master plans of cities/towns
- ▶ Ensure participatory programmes to evolve city charters and their implementation by the local self-government institutions

Right to Human Security

Annually, millions of people are affected by conflict, fanned by caste, class, religion and ethnic violence – in domestic and public spheres – and by natural disasters. We perceive these as a denial of right to human security, which affects different people differently. Our experience tells us that the most vulnerable and least powerful suffer the greatest, especially women and in particular those living with HIV and AIDS, or engaged in sex work or trafficked, and children who are abused and experience violence.

Intense competition for natural resources, the identity and dignity crises, a deep-rooted patriarchal system, and environmental degradation contribute to the threat of human and natural disasters, subjecting millions to live in daily fear of violence and conflict. The State has an obligation to prevent violations to human security so that people, particularly poor and excluded, live without fear and with dignity. This involves mitigation of potential crises, reduction of risks and provision of relief and rehabilitation in post-disaster situations.

Key actions

- ▶ Support poor and excluded people in accessing with dignity relief and reconstruction assistance provisioned by the State and civil society, to overcome the impact of violence, conflict and disasters.
- ▶ Ensure availability of the state justice system to protect women and girls from violence – within and outside the family. Also, support women who have suffered violence to seek justice.
- ▶ Campaigning for laws, policies and institutions that protect the rights of people in conflict and disaster situations, particularly women, children, persons with disability and PLWHA.
- ▶ Work with women's movements and civil society for effective conflict resolution and peace building.
- ▶ Support poor and excluded people and their movements to demand implementation of international conventions, covenants, and treaties that protect human security in conflict and emergency situations.

Transforming Governance

Democratic societies require active citizenship to strengthen and sustain democratic practices and institutions. In other words, all individuals and communities – irrespective of class, caste, gender and age – have the right to engage in its creation and re-creation. This is possible only when all citizens are informed and empowered to engage in the democratic processes.

However, the structures often disempower certain categories of citizens, by preventing them access to human rights, entitlements, information, and participation in public policy discussions and decision-making. Active citizenship (as it is implied here) is essentially the assertion process experienced by those citizens who have been denied rights and for whom the structure prevents space for manoeuvre. It is empowerment, that comes to excluded people through mobilisation and knowledge, which enables them to participate in political, social and economic institutions. This is possible primarily through a policy of positive discrimination in favour of social categories in vulnerable situations.

Even while recognising the ultimate responsibility of the State insofar as people's access and enjoyment of their human rights are concerned, our experience shows that rights actions need to be directed at non-state actors as well – individuals, family, civil society, markets, para-statal bodies, donors, corporates, multinational corporations – whose private and public actions have implications on people's access to human rights. Put together, it implies that rights actions must facilitate poor and excluded people to form their alliances at local, state, national and international levels to take forward their respective struggles.

AAI-India and its partners are committed to rights action to realise six basic needs – food and livelihood, education, health, shelter, housing and human security – of the poor and excluded people. In this context, we believe that a just and democratic governance from the perspective of poor people provides the overarching framework for their realisation. In other words, poor and excluded people must work together to transform governance so that they are able to question, claim rights, make decisions and hold public institutions accountable. Also, it will involve their participation in monitoring public policies and implementation at local, state, national and international levels.

To augment the alliance building process, we would facilitate creation of platforms where poor and excluded people can use participatory methodologies – such as Reflect, Stepping

Stones, participatory rural appraisal (PRA), people's planning, participatory vulnerability analysis (PVA), participatory poverty assessment (PPA) – for their empowerment, institution building and leadership development. It is through engaging in the spiral process of |action–reflection–learning–planning, to a higher level of action, that the excluded can strengthen their analysis of their own situation and build community capacity for transformation and change.

IV CHAPTER Approach and Strategies

In order to work in the rights mode, there are certain non-negotiable principles that would illuminate and guide all our actions:

- ▶ **Taking Sides with the poor and excluded people:** In all our actions and initiatives we will continue to unambiguously take sides with individuals and groups being denied human rights, dignity and justice. While taking sides we will not be constrained by the divide between public and private spheres or by national or state boundaries.
- ▶ **Commitment to empowering processes:** Human rights can be fully realised only through processes that are empowering, democratic and participatory. Hence, we will promote systems that enable our core constituencies to lead the process of designing, implementing and monitoring programmes that affect their lives.
- ▶ **People's claims on all human rights:** We firmly believe in the indivisibility of human rights – *all peoples have equal claim over all human rights, be it economic, cultural, social, civil, political, environmental, or solidarity rights.*
- ▶ **Commitment to rights of women, children, persons with disability and PLWHA:** Women, children, persons with disability and PLWHA experience a system of unequal power relations and denials which are inherent in and affect all human activities and spheres. Hence, we will be following the twin-track approach of:
 - ensuring their integration in all our programmes
 - supporting programmes that are specifically led by women, children, persons with disability and PLWHA.
- ▶ **Ensuring equity and justice for women and girls:** Women and girls have faced patriarchal discrimination

and deprivation resulting in social, economic and political inequalities between women and men. To transform this situation, we are committed to their just and equitable participation in decision-making, redistribution of resources and change processes. We will collectively struggle against denial of their entitlements and discrimination at all levels.

- ▶ **Respect for people's knowledge and dignity:** We believe that communities are repositories of traditional knowledge that must be universally acknowledged and respected. Also, the state has an obligation to protect and preserve traditional knowledge and complement it to enable poor and excluded people to make informed choices.
- ▶ **Ensuring community accountability and transparency:** Even while recognising that we are accountable to multiple stakeholders – namely our partners, civil society, donors, ActionAid International and our own conscience – we will be primarily accountable to our core constituencies, the communities that we work with. This accountability will be ensured through transparency in all our actions and decision-making. Community capacity to undertake periodic social audit will be strengthened and our NGO/CBO partners will be encouraged to initiate mechanisms for greater transparency.
- ▶ **Commitment to joint working and shared learning:** We believe that we are one of the many civil society actors wanting rights action for social change. Hence, we will proactively seek support and provide assistance to make the maximum impact. We will develop mechanisms to share human resources and whatever we have learnt from our programmes, with the larger ActionAid International family.

Strategic Objective 1

Building Alliance of the Marginalised

Poverty and social exclusion are outcomes of social, economic and political processes that are often sustained by norms, laws, policies and institutions instituted by the powerful at the local, national and global levels. We believe that the poor and excluded can change them through their shared understanding and collective action.

Accordingly, our effort will be to facilitate formation of gender-just and disability sensitive organisations of poor and excluded people and build community capacity to negotiate with the state. We will support platforms, where poor and excluded people can share their experiences and amplify their voices, to create shared alternatives and build social movements to access rights and justice.

We are convinced that the platform process will motivate social groups and communities experiencing different manifestations of poverty and exclusion, to join hands and actively participate in building an alliance of the marginalised that will lead the movement for transformation and social change. While facilitating these processes, we will ensure that organisations, alliances and movements of poor and excluded people do not reproduce and reinforce patriarchal values and roles.

Strategies

- ▶ Facilitate critical analysis of poverty to understand the marginalisation and social exclusion processes and their structural causes using participatory and gender sensitive participatory methodologies.
- ▶ Support the process of women, men, girls and boys accessing information and knowledge on laws, policies and programmes that affect their lives, to enable them to make informed choices and build alternatives.
- ▶ Strengthen leadership of poor and excluded to organise, demand, and claim their rights at the local, national and global levels. Also, facilitate formation of organisations of women, children, persons with disability and PLWHA, and enable building of their alliances and networks.
- ▶ Facilitate formation of an alliance of the marginalised to lead the movement of poor and excluded people

to challenge social processes, institutions and policies that perpetuate poverty, social exclusion, inequity and injustice.

- ▶ Strengthen the leadership of women, persons with disabilities and PLWHA and support platforms to challenge stereotypes, discrimination, exclusion and prejudices effectively.

Outcomes

- ▶ Increase awareness among women and men on social and cultural processes, laws, policies and programmes, that affect them adversely and enable greater consciousness of their human rights.
- ▶ Emerging leadership, particularly of women, persons with disability and PLWHA, to challenge the unequal and unjust power relationships and assert their rights in public and private spheres.
- ▶ Strong and sustainable community level organisations and institutions of women and men to challenge anti-poor and anti-women laws, norms, public policies and processes.
- ▶ Strong and sustainable community level organisations and institutions of disabled people to effectively challenge stereotypes, discrimination and processes that exclude them.
- ▶ Establish alliances of the marginalised that foster solidarity within the poor and excluded peoples for wider collective actions to assert human rights, entitlements, and justice.

Strategic Objective 2

Facilitating Just and Democratic Governance

Democracy is one of the imperatives for poor and excluded people to secure justice and accountable governance. But democratic states are contested institutions, which can be expected to act in the interest of poor and excluded people, only to the extent that they can influence and coerce it to do so. They can do it in a variety of ways, including by directly participating in governance – planning, implementation and evaluation, by enforcing accountability for both expenditures and outcomes through measures like social audits, right to information, budget analysis and report cards, and through poor people's organisations and social movements.

It is our argument that the only feasible way of ensuring just and democratic governance is for people to exercise direct control over a significant part of the levers of government. In other words, there can be no justice without the active agency of the poor and excluded people themselves, not merely as recipients of public services but as active partners in all that the state does in relation to people's lives.

Strategies

- ▶ Facilitate active participation of the poor and excluded women and men in governance – planning, implementation and evaluation of laws, policies and programmes.
- ▶ Support organisations of poor and excluded people and their movements to ensure accountable, transparent and gender-just governance.
- ▶ Promote monitoring of the state delivery of rights and services through budget tracking, public hearings, social audit, report cards, citizens' tribunal and likes.
- ▶ Campaign for micro-macro linkages so that policies, laws and programmes are adequately informed by the initiatives, struggles and learning from the grassroots.
- ▶ Campaign for protection of rights of women and girls, children, persons with disability, and PLWHA, particularly during natural disasters and social conflicts.
- ▶ Formulation and implementation of laws and policies to ensure full participation, meaningful inclusion and protection of human rights of persons with disabilities and PLWHA.

Outcomes

- ▶ Deepening of democracy through gender-inclusive and disability-sensitive participation of the poor and excluded in institutions, functions and processes of governance.
- ▶ Formulation and implementation of new laws, policies and programmes, which are pro-poor, disability sensitive, and gender-just.
- ▶ Direct linkages between grass-roots struggles and social movements and public policy discussions, laws and programmes through campaign and advocacy initiatives.

- ▶ Enhanced accountability and transparency of institutions of governance to poor and excluded people, and pro-poor and gender-just access to resources and services for fulfillment of their basic rights.
- ▶ Protection of rights of women, girls, persons with disabilities and PLWHA during natural disasters and social conflicts.

Strategic Objective 3

Enforcing Rights of Women and Girls

The denial of rights of women and girls is at the core of social inequity and poverty. They have poor access to drinking water, food, health, shelter, education, let alone minimal dignity and justice. Increasing violence, continuing child marriage, lack of access and control over land and natural resources, lack of control over earnings, lack of reproductive choice and sexual freedom, and poor political participation are of critical concern. *The root cause of their exclusion and powerlessness lies in the deeply entrenched patriarchal institutions.* This gets further compounded with the growth of fundamentalism, and by globalisation and privatisation.

Our strong feminist conviction guides us in overcoming this position. It will work to change the existing unequal gender relations by removing all ideological and institutional barriers of rights and entitlements for women and girls. We will facilitate action on the rights of women and girls, not only as a cross cutting, but as a stand-alone issue. Along with supporting women and girls from our core constituencies to assert and claim their rights, we will also engage with women and girls experiencing multiple marginalisation, e.g., women and girls in custodial institutions, on the streets, sex-workers, women living with HIV and AIDS, survivors of violence, disabled and mentally ill girls and women.

Strategies

- ▶ Facilitate gender analysis within women and girls from our core constituencies to understand the oppressive patriarchal power structures, both in the domestic and public spheres
- ▶ Facilitate formation of women's collective to challenge social processes, laws, policies and institutions at the local, national and global levels, which are anti-women and anti-girl. Also, linking them with existing women's movements.

- ▶ Strengthen women's organisations, movements and networks and their alliances at national and international levels.
- ▶ Raise consciousness and change patriarchal norms leading to the exclusion of girls and women, within civil society.
- ▶ Include women and girls with disabilities and HIV and AIDS in the ongoing struggles of women and their movements.

Outcomes

- ▶ Women and girls from our core constituencies achieve enhanced understanding of their rights and entitlements.
- ▶ Empower and conscientise women's groups actively participating and negotiating for their rights both in the private and public spheres, and help them gain greater access and control over productive resources
- ▶ Emerging networks and alliances of women's collectives at the local, national and international levels.
- ▶ Free women and girls from all forms of violence, which have direct or indirect impact on them.
- ▶ Change in anti-women and anti-girl belief systems and norms, both in the private and public spheres. Ensure men and boys become active partners in fighting patriarchy.

Strategic Objective 4

Addressing Immediate Poverty Needs

Often the needs of the poor and excluded are so urgent that they must be fulfilled before they are in a position to organise and struggle for rights. Such needs may arise during natural disasters, forced evictions, long-term impairments, epidemics, and the likes. While it is the responsibility of the state to ensure that distress needs of people in vulnerable situations are adequately addressed, we believe that civil society also has an obligation.

We commit ourselves to address the immediate poverty needs of women, men, children, persons with disability and PLWHA from the most poor and excluded communities. This is mainly to ensure that they are able to overcome the immediate crisis and move on to challenge the structures and systems that deny them their human rights, entitlements and justice. Here, the

challenge is in making the transition from the relief mode to rights mode, as poor people continue to see us in the role of a provider and not as a partner in the struggle for rights and justice. Therefore, it is imperative that even while addressing immediate needs we engage with poor and excluded people to enforce the responsibility and accountability of the state and other duty bearers.

Strategies

- ▶ Support poor and excluded women, men, girls and boys in accessing appropriate assistance for relief and rehabilitation with dignity.
- ▶ Create community preparedness and self-reliance by building effective community based systems to cope with emergency situations through the active involvement of women and their groups.
- ▶ Establish accountability of the state and other civil society actors for timely relief and for a long-term plan to address the situation.
- ▶ Combat anti-women and anti-girls distress coping strategies, such as trafficking, violence, scaling down of consumption, and preventing the withdrawal of girls from schools.
- ▶ Identify and address specific rehabilitation needs of persons with disability and PLWHA to cope with their distress, particularly those that cause exclusion, discrimination and disempowerment.

Outcomes

- ▶ The immediate poverty needs of most poor and excluded individuals from our core constituencies will be addressed in times of extreme distress.
- ▶ Capacities and resources of our core constituencies are enhanced to cope with distress situations and become more self-reliant.
- ▶ The poor and excluded groups, and within them women, children, persons with disability and PLWHA, establish direct linkages with state social security schemes for greater access with dignity to basic public services.
- ▶ Issues of human security and other rights of women and girls are addressed and protected.

Strategic Objective 5

Diversifying Resource Base

During the earlier strategy period we had made our modest efforts to diversify our resource base. We will continue our efforts to generate ethical funding and human resource support from Indian civil society. This need also flows from the fact that we are broadening our core constituencies. This requires us to innovate funding products that will ensure stable, long-term funding for rights-based work with poor and excluded people. In this context, we would also like to draw the attention of the Indian middle class to the causes of securing rights and justice.

At the programme level, the communities of poor and excluded will be able to leverage from the state their entitlements available through various social security schemes and development initiatives.

Strategies

- ▶ Mobilise human resources for strengthening rights-based work at the grassroots.
- ▶ Diversify resource base for directly benefiting the poor and excluded people with specific focus on women, children, persons with disability and PLWHA by raising ethical funds within the country from civil society through sustained brand identity.

- ▶ Harness alternate resources to carry forward the rights and justice work through generating sufficient resources from bilateral and institutional donors and influence their policies and programmes.
- ▶ Leverage funds and entitlements for poor and excluded people from the state. This will include focus on policy influencing and advocacy for change in existing systems and mechanisms dimension.

Outcomes

- ▶ Monetary and human resources raised from local sources for rights-based programmes.
- ▶ Diversified resource base and increased civil society participation in rights work of the poor and excluded.
- ▶ Leveraging resources from the official and institutional donors and influencing pro-poor policies in their programmes and funding support.
- ▶ Optimum utilisation of developmental funds and entitlements from the government.

Reaching Out: Strengthening our Partnerships

Over the past three decades, there has been a conscious shift in the nature of our partnerships- from a 'donor-recipient relationship with formal NGOs to that of a 'partnership for social change' which may or may not involve funding, with various civil society actors, including social movements, NGOs, CBOs, and their alliances and networks. While the former was primarily fund driven, the latter is stimulated by the desire to share and collaborate for optimal results.

Built on the foundation of our grass-roots experience, our partnerships will continue to be dynamic. We will initiate steps to transform ActionAid International India into a shared learning organisation. In this context, we will open our organisation to job placements for cross learning from ActionAid International, its associates, affiliates and Country Programmes.

Our Partnerships

Our mission of fighting poverty and patriarchy will guide us in our approach to partnerships and prompt us to examine, analyse and engage with the structural nature of power and its redistribution in society. This derives from the understanding that to overcome poverty and exclusion, poor people need to collectively act to transform social, economic and political processes that perpetuate unequal and unjust power relations. And our role as civil society actor is to support them in their assertion. In other words, our actions will be political in nature, but they will not be in favour of or against any political party.

In order to achieve maximum impact and best utilisation of resources, we will make all possible efforts to work in partnership with other like-minded civil society actors. Our partnerships will be informed by only one consideration: Will the partnership enable poor and excluded people to change existing power relations in their favour?

While our primary identity now is that of a donor agency, we will continue to expand our role to create new identities for ourselves. In this context, we will attempt to make our modest contribution to the larger civil society efforts on participatory action research, policy influencing and advocacy, direct programme implementation, community capacity building, technical support in promoting participation and accountability, and fundraising. We believe our engagement in such efforts will enable our staff to better understand the grass-roots reality, thus endearing us to the poor and excluded people and their social movements.

Supporting CBOs and NGOs

During the past three decades we have demonstrated our ability to work with formal (NGOs) and non-formal (CBOs) organisations that are active at the grassroots. We will continue to strengthen our ability and programmes to work in partnership with such organisations. However, in the current strategy period, we will make special efforts to partner organisations that are led by people from our core constituencies – namely *dalits*, tribals, MBCs, minorities, women, persons with disability and PLWHA.

In this context, we will support individuals from our core constituencies to enhance their leadership skills through the community fellowship mechanism. Further, we will make efforts to network CBOs to build the critical mass for collective action. Our networking will be guided by geo-political viability, lateral linkages beyond community boundaries and integrating of diverse issues.

A criticism that is often levelled against resource-rich NGOs wanting to engage in direct action at the grassroots is that they prevent local NGOs and CBOs from emerging and growing. We are convinced that rights-based change is a long drawn process and is better achieved through

local initiatives. Hence, we will engage in direct action only when there are no NGOs/CBOs active within the community, or where they are unwilling to engage in rights-based action on issues and concerns of the community they claim to represent or work with.

Social Movements and Trade Unions

Presently, a number of social movements on rights of poor and excluded people – namely dalit rights, rights of indigenous people, women's rights, displacement, farmers' rights – are underway. We believe that to achieve our mission, it is imperative that we actively engage with movements. While our preference will be for establishing non-funding relationships with social movements, we will provide minimum critical support when approached by social movements. However, in such situations we will refrain from creating conditions for parallel movements to emerge.

We recognise that trade unions with their labour class membership offer opportunities for solidarity to influence public policies, programmes and institutions. However, many trade unions have direct linkages with political parties. Our partnership for rights action will only be with those trade unions that are not affiliated to any political party, e.g., the new trade union movement, construction workers union, agricultural workers union. Our guiding principle in such partnership will be strategic coherence, seeking their support to strengthen people's campaigns and struggles.

Critical Engagement with the State

Our engagement with the State and its institutions will be guided by the constructive approach of 'cooperate where we can and resist where we must'. However our resistance to state policy will always be non-violent. At the core of our critical engagement with the State will be the aspiration to ensure realisation of all human rights enshrined in the Indian Constitution and the International Human Rights regime. We will engage to foster a just and democratic governance through action research, budget analysis, public

hearing, social audit and other participatory processes, thus enabling the governance institutions to understand and mitigate the systemic causes of rights denial and injustice to the poor and excluded.

We will pro-actively engage with statutory institutions – National and State Human Rights Commissions, National SC/ST Commission, National Commission for Women, National Commission for Minorities, National Commission for Safai Karamcharis – that are bestowed by law with the responsibility of preserving human rights and redressing rights violations. In order to build our critical understanding on poverty and social exclusion, we will interact with social work institutions, law schools, universities and other academic institutions.

Collaboration with Civil Society

We believe that civil society actions can reverse the process of poverty, exclusion and injustice. We will forge partnership with civil society organisations, at the local, national and global levels, to serve the interests of the poor and excluded. Our experience of creating and nurturing civil society platforms is in a nascent stage and we are committed to learn and scale up with effectiveness. We are convinced that platform politics should be guided by the principles of acknowledging the strengths of each civil society partner and participating in a non-hierarchical and non-dominating manner. Also, we will strive for critical engagement with the corporate sector to ensure their social and environmental responsibility.

Further, to make the maximum impact on poverty and exclusion, we will make efforts to create platforms of INGOs and donor agencies. In this context, we have had some experience and learnings from our emergencies work and our work on education through the Commonwealth Education Fund. During the current strategy period we will take steps to further deepen our partnerships.

Looking Within: Organisation Implications

The organisation objectives strive to establish consistency between our mission and values and our policies, systems and practices. They are located in the larger organisational process of 'Internationalisation of ActionAid', that acts as a natural binding force and the Global HR/OD document that provides the organic link with ActionAid International. The organisational objectives seek relevance within the context of change management to evolve systems and structures necessary for a national organisation that is affiliated to ActionAid International.

Affiliate of ActionAid International

ActionAid International aims at creating a global movement that will link people and organisations in developed and developing countries as equal partners in the fight against poverty and injustice. As an associate¹ of ActionAid International, it is imperative for us to change and organise ourselves to act accordingly. Also, internationalisation provides us an opportunity to make our work more accountable and effective.

The emerging international structure will strengthen our work by enabling us to build solidarity between the poor and excluded people across national boundaries. Further, it will enable us to proactively access professional competencies from other affiliates and country programmes for cross learning through job placements.

ActionAid International is an umbrella organisation of its affiliate organisations, which come from the transformation of ActionAid country programmes into national organisations through a process of demonstrable independence and public support. It is governed by an international board, comprised of

representatives of affiliates as well as independent individuals. The affiliates share goals, values, identity and strategy with the ActionAid International.

National Governance and Accountability

ActionAid International-India will create a Board with tripartite representation from: our core constituencies, civil society actors and ActionAid staff. The objectives are to:

- ▶ Ensure principles of just and democratic governance in our organisation, programmes and financial management.
- ▶ Bring poor and excluded people as credible actors, from the Indian and global civil society to the centre of our governance.
- ▶ Ensure the highest standards of downward accountability and transparency through participation.

We are committed to gender sensitive governance by ensuring that the chair of the ActionAid International-India Board is a person from the feminist movement.

We will ensure the highest standards of just and democratic governance from the perspective of poor and excluded people. Towards this end, we will support participatory processes to determine our positioning on issues of the poor and excluded people and seek relevance through regular assessment of the external environment. We will develop our governance manual that establishes ethical standards for the organisation, detailing roles and support mechanisms.

We will promote collective leadership, both at governance and management levels, so that ownership and

¹ To become an affiliate of ActionAid International, all country programmes are expected to go through the transition phase of being an associate of AA International. ActionAid International-India is currently an associate of ActionAid International.

responsibilities will be shared. This will include introducing mechanisms to monitor the functioning of the organisation, the difference made in the lives of people through our collective efforts and compliance to our policies, strategies and financial management systems.

Organisational Objectives

To enhance our organisational effectiveness we will engage in:

- ▶ Deepening accountability and transparency.
- ▶ Strengthening decentralisation and horizontal working.
- ▶ Enforcing gender and social equity.
- ▶ Achieving learning organization.
- ▶ Aligning organisation structure to vision, values and strategies.

Deepening Accountability and Transparency

We will enforce systems of accountability and transparency as mandated in the ActionAid International's Alps document. Here, our primary focus will be on downward accountability and transparency to our core constituencies. In this context, we will strengthen review and reflection, monitoring and evaluation through innovative participatory methodologies. We will subject ourselves to external assessment to proclaim the cost-effectiveness of our programmes and organisation to our stakeholders.

We will align the human resource management system with the organisational mission and with the Global HR/OD document. Our performance management system will be strengthened through multiple accountability frameworks and by building a culture for team performance and horizontal working. Our performance will then be reviewed by our core constituencies using the participatory approach.

Strengthening Decentralisation and Horizontal Working

ActionAid International-India defines decentralisation as a process that ensures

decision-making at the point nearest to the place of action. We will achieve effective decentralisation through appropriate delegation and devolution of authority, which

will entail reciprocal accountability and responsibility to the organisation. While making decentralised decisions, mechanisms to uphold the democratic spirit and participation will also be created. Since all decision-making must be guided by strategic coherence, staff capacity for decision-making will be strengthened.

To further our commitment to decentralisation, we will make efforts, wherever possible, to work through horizontal groups. The role and accountability of every member of the horizontal group will be clearly defined. The composition of the groups must be balanced in terms of gender, grade and disability. These groups will facilitate change management processes in the organisation and in the programmes. Mentoring and monitoring of horizontal working in the organisation will be institutionalised.

Enforcing Gender and Social Equity

In spite of gender equity being one of our strategic objectives during the earlier strategy period, we acknowledge that our efforts have not been to our expectations. During the current strategy, we are committed to enforcing gender and social equity across the organisation. Also, we will institutionalise capacity building programmes on gender, social analysis and patriarchy for our staff and partners, to enable them to challenge and change organisational processes that exclude women and people from marginalised communities.

We will create an enabling environment through mechanisms for inclusion in the work place and promote dialogue on issues of gender equity and social justice. Our staff will be pro-active in holding periodic sensitisation and regular dialogue to instill belief in the dignity of women and marginalised people and to bring change in attitudes, stereotypes and prejudices. Even while upholding principles of natural justice, we will emphatically deal with sexual harassment at the work place, dowry, domestic violence and sex determination.

We will ensure gender balance and gender mainstreaming in our structure and functioning, with affirmative policies to recruit competent women in leadership positions and invest in building their capacity to meet the emerging demands of their roles. Similar emphasis will be given to recruiting persons from our core constituencies. There will be growth in gender

thematic person power and in establishing linkages with regions and units with a clear mandate, defined role and accountability. Revitalising the gender working group would receive attention with a clear follow-up plan for capacity building. Further organisational processes will be put in place to ensure that adequate resources are allocated for gender mainstreaming from within our regular income as well as to make equal efforts to raise funds for work on gender issues.

Achieving Learning Organisation

We will strengthen our staff capacity in the knowledge, skills, attitude and values required to achieve our mission. We will invest in training staff on core concepts and tools essential for rights-based action and in social animation skills. Building capability in critical thinking, rigorous power analysis, research, advocacy and campaign form part of it. We will also encourage staff to undergo immersion to gain experiential learning by living with people in poverty. This will strive to create an enabling space for staff to develop a forward-looking perspective on poverty and excluded groups. For this purpose, we will actively open up processes of cross learning by offering placements to colleagues from other countries.

We will set up leadership development that focuses on transformational dimension and skills to address challenges while putting into practice the concept of a rights-based approach in building alliances with social movements. Towards this initiative, we commit to strengthen leadership among the women staff.

We will institutionalise shared learning by integrating with the Shared Learning and Knowledge Initiative of ActionAid International. Knowledge mapping and a system for its effective management would be introduced and nurtured. Further, we will carry out upgrading of the existing new staff induction package and introduce mentoring as a tool to support learning and staff development.

Aligning Structure to Values, Principles and Strategies

We will strive to create an empowering and motivating environment through establishing organisational processes that facilitate and ensure internalisation of our core values and principles among the staff. Our organisation structure will adopt the 'matrix reporting' approach with regional, thematic and functional teams organised around expertise and skills. Thematic leadership will be promoted to co-determine the integrated programme management with distinct roles and standards of (multiple) accountability for the outcomes.

Systems would be put in place to ensure that our structure–function arrangement is sustained through collective principles and not determined by individuals and their interests. This will include developing a coordinating mechanism that fosters horizontal interactions around thematic areas and encourages the cross regional initiatives.

The policy-making function will rest wholly with the ActionAid International-India Board. The role of the Country Office will be redefined with functions of programme support, strategic monitoring, external interface and resource management. A set of criteria will guide the optimum size, membership and participation of women and social groups. This will include reforming the existing management systems.

Developing and implementing transparent, staff- friendly and values-aligned policies, covering all aspects of HR and OD, will receive our priority. This will include, apart from others, the security of staff working in difficult areas. Our policies will strive for inclusion of persons with disability and people living with HIV and AIDS. Further, the development of effective internal communications will contribute towards creating high staff morale, of being valued and establishing work-life balance. We will introduce policy compliance audit and conduct organisation climate/culture studies once in two years.

VII CHAPTER The Way Forward

During the previous strategy period (2000–04), AAI's focus was on supporting initiatives that respond to the structural causes of poverty and exclusion, as well on addressing the immediate poverty needs of the most vulnerable. While these efforts could effect some changes, the situation of poverty and exclusion have, by and large, remained constant.

Therefore to make a larger, and lasting impact, we will, during the CSP III: *Rights First* period (2005–2010) engage with different excluded groups and social movements, to enable formation of an alliance of the marginalised. We believe that the alliance will reach the critical mass to challenge unequal and unjust power relations and through a process of empowerment, assert and reclaim their full citizenship rights.

An Effective Organisation

We will...

- ▶ undertake a re-structuring of the organisation to make AAI more relevant to the causes of the poor and excluded people. As part of this process, we will re-organise work teams to ensure gender and social equity.
- ▶ build decentralised thematic teams that form partnerships with respective social movements for participatory analysis and actions to address structural causes.
- ▶ remain in the role of enabler, facilitator and supporter in all our partnerships, taking into consideration our mission. We will make all possible efforts to nurture people's organisations and assist social movements without ever assuming leadership positions.

- ▶ progressively work in networks and alliances, striving to create synergy and solidarity between the various thematic partnerships that we have mandated for ourselves.
- ▶ continue with our efforts to leverage financial resources for our mission from in-country and ethical sources. Here, our preference will be on fundraising from individuals.

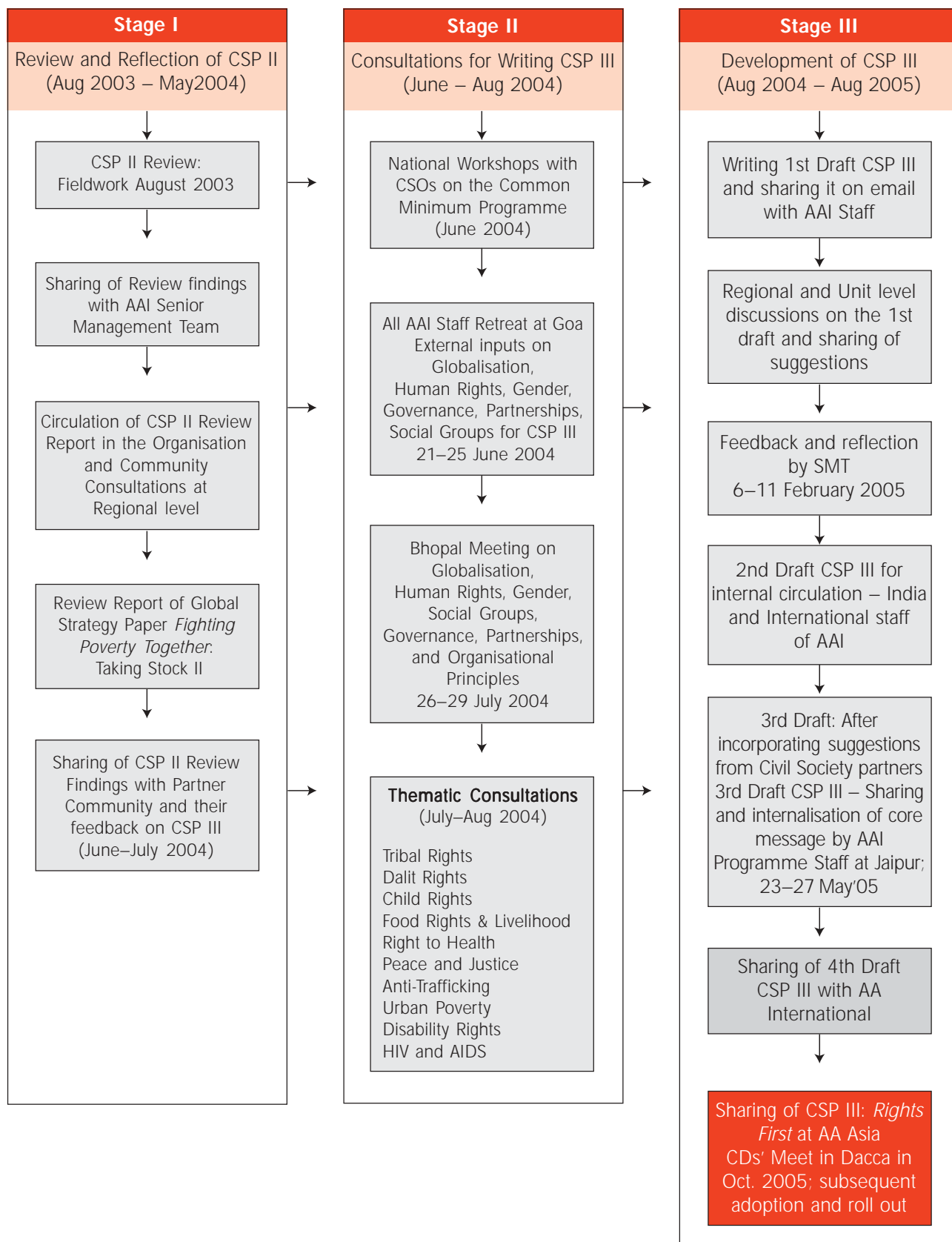
Making *Rights First* Happen

We will...

- ▶ form thematic teams around rights-based issues (namely, food and livelihood, health, education, housing, human security) together with our core constituencies (such as Tribals, *Dalits*, Women and PLWHA – specific focused social groups) and located closer to the points of action. Our efforts would be to evolve thematic teams as horizontal groups with their respective plans. This will help strengthen our linkages with the international campaigns on education, food and hunger, HIV and AIDS and governance and enable us to build micro–macro linkages on the themes.
- ▶ ensure additional thrust to our work on women rights and gender justice, we will strengthen the human resource base of the Gender unit and the staff capacity to engage on the various agendas.
- ▶ upgrade our organisational capacities to ensure greater downward accountability, shared learning and transparency through the creation of appropriate structures and mechanisms. Also, we will revisit our work practices to collectively identify gaps in quality towards the achievement of our mission.

- ▶ ensure larger devolution and decentralisation in AAI's work, for more efficient, and need-based decision-making at the appropriate levels.
 - ▶ Institutionalise ALPS within the Country Programme, with all its principles incorporated. This will give the programme staff more, and better quality time to be engaged in AAI's work and the issues that we take up.
 - ▶ depend on networking and alliance building as a major mechanism for taking AAI's work forward. This will be governed by 'platform politics'. Similarly, partnerships will be built with strategic compatibility as a clear principle. We expect new partnerships with groups that are already in the rights mode of work.
 - ▶ make all possible efforts to institutionalise fundraising from ethical and in-country sources to support rights-based work, in keeping with our strategic objective.
- ▶ need to, in order to take this strategy forward from a statement of intent to decisive action:
 - Develop a framework to assess our progress against the goals, strategies and priorities we have set
 - Develop materials and tools to promote and internalise the spirit and substance of the strategy
 - Manage change across the organisation
 - Unlock financial resources to implement an investment strategy aimed at maximising our income across all sectors
 - Align regional strategies for coherence and synergy
 - Strengthen our capacity to critically reflect, innovate and learn.

The Making of CSP III: *Rights First*



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