

ActionAid Kenya: a case study of an NGO

Kenya lies in East Africa between 5°N and 5°S. It covers an area of 582,644km² and has a population of over 30 million. Kenya achieved independence from Britain in 1963, and its founding mission was to fight poverty, ignorance and disease. The initial decade was full of promise. The economy flourished and per capita income rose, infrastructure was built up and essential services were increased across the country. Exports of tea and coffee, and an increase in foreign tourism, provided vital foreign exchange.

Unfortunately the initial promise was not sustained, and the last decade has been the worst since independence. Population rates have increased whilst GDP has declined. Industry and services are collapsing and illiteracy, disease and malnutrition are still high. Life expectancy fell from 59 years at independence to just 46 in 2001. In 2003, Kenya was ranked 146 out of 174 in the Human Development Index. The number of people living in absolute poverty (on less than US\$1 per day) has risen from less than 4 million in 1972 to over 15 million today. Kenya is the second most inequitable country in the world with the richest 10% of people owning 47% of the country's national income. With this financial inequity comes huge differences in power and control over resources and services. Gender inequity is also a problem in Kenya and even when laws have been changed in favour of women the practice still lags far behind.

Figure 1: Kenya development indicators

Year	1981	1986	1991	1996	2001
Population (millions)	17.00	20.51	24.34	28.02	31.29
Life expectancy at birth (years)	55.3	57.1	56.6	53.0	46.4
Gross primary school enrolment rate (%)*	111.6	98.1	93.0	84.2	78.0
Adult literacy rate (%)	57.8	65.2	72.1	78.1	83.3
Gross national income per capita (US\$)	440	340	350	320	340

Source: African development bank group

* Gross primary school enrolment = $\frac{\text{number of children in primary school}}{\text{number of children in the country or region who are of primary school age}} \times 100$

The reasons for this decline and inequality are complex and reach far beyond Kenya itself. Mismanagement and corruption are to blame but are only part of the picture. Kenya, like many developing countries, has considerable debts and was forced to adopt structural adjustment policies. Public spending was cut and the currency (Kenyan shilling, Kshs) was devalued in an attempt to make more money available to pay back loans. At the same time prices for agricultural exports (eg tea and coffee) fell and biased international trade rules made things even harder for farmers. In recent years the tourist industry has suffered due to ethnic violence, flooding and the threat of terrorist attacks. All this has meant that Kenya has been struggling to pay an increasing debt using a decreasing income, and poor people have suffered most.

In recent years there have been some promising signs of improvement in Kenya. Multi-party democracy was introduced in 1992, and a new Government was elected in 2003. The press has greater freedom and is now able to report on issues which were considered too politically sensitive a few years ago. The growth of national and local NGOs means that people have more opportunities to make changes in their lives and influence policies.

Figure 2: Some acronyms

NGO – non-governmental organisation
INGO – international non-governmental organisation
BINGO - big international non-governmental organisation
CBO – community based organisation
CSO – civil society organisation

The ActionAid philosophy: a rights based approach to development

ActionAid is an international NGO working to fight poverty in more than 30 countries. Figure 3 shows the range of development work carried out by NGOs, governments and multilateral organisations. Over the years ActionAid has evolved from a primarily service delivery organisation to one concerned with the promotion and defence of human rights. ActionAid do still provide some services, but only within long-term sustainable programmes working for permanent change. This places ActionAid towards the right of the spectrum shown.

Figure 3 - Spectrum of development work



ActionAid’s strategy, Fighting Poverty Together, has 4 main goals:

1. Giving a voice to all.
Everyone has the same basic rights to safe water, food, education, shelter, healthcare, information and a life of dignity, but poor people are often disproportionately denied these rights. ActionAid works by firstly giving people the goods, services, knowledge and abilities they need to improve their lives. Once the basics are in place it is then possible to build the skills, knowledge and organisational support that people need if lasting improvements are going to happen.
2. Linking people and groups with similar goals.
ActionAid forms partnerships with local organisations because they know what communities really need. These organisations are given financial support and training. Linking together people and organisations with common goals allows shared learning and increases the impact of campaigning.

3. Influencing the powerful through national and international campaigning.
Working in poor communities will not have much impact in the long-term unless the conditions that keep people poor can also be changed. ActionAid uses experience in poor communities to inform national and international campaigns and has international campaign teams working on education, food and HIV/AIDS.
4. Equal rights for women.
Throughout the world, women are more likely to be poor than men due to their lower status and lack of power. ActionAid works for men and women to have equal status and challenges practices that violate women's rights. Some development work has actually increased the workload of women by expecting them to fit additional income generation work into their already busy working days. ActionAid works with women to ensure developments make their work easier.

ActionAid in Kenya

ActionAid began operating in Kenya in 1972 and now works with over a million poor and marginalised people in remote rural areas and urban slums. In recent years ActionAid has increasingly worked through local partner organisations. This has led to a reduction in directly employed staff but an increase in the number of people who benefit from the work. Campaigning has also become a bigger part of ActionAid Kenya's work in the last few years.

The examples below show how ActionAid's work in Kenya fits in with the four organisational goals.

Giving a voice to all

Peace and conflict resolution committee, Isiolo district

Isiolo district near Mount Kenya is hot, dry and extremely poor. People are mainly pastoralists and several ethnic groups live in the area leading to conflict over resources such as grazing land and water. Livestock rustling, banditry and violence have been common for many years.

In 2000, ActionAid helped set up the Peace Committee to resolve the reasons behind the conflict. Women were the first to start talking because they often suffered from the violence (through direct attacks, attacks on family members, loss of family income) despite rarely being the perpetrators. Gradually more people in the community changed their attitudes towards violence and wanted to stop it.

“There was a problem in Isiolo so the elders and the local administration came together. There are many communities in this district: the Borana, the Somali, the Meru, the Tswana. We decided that one way to prevent theft and murder was to impose fines.” Muktar Ungiti, Chairman

A scale of fines for various crimes was agreed and put into place. Fines were imposed on communities rather than individuals and so there was a strong social pressure to keep the peace. Over the next few months people started to hand in guns and levels of violent crime decreased.

Busia community development organisation (BUCODEV)

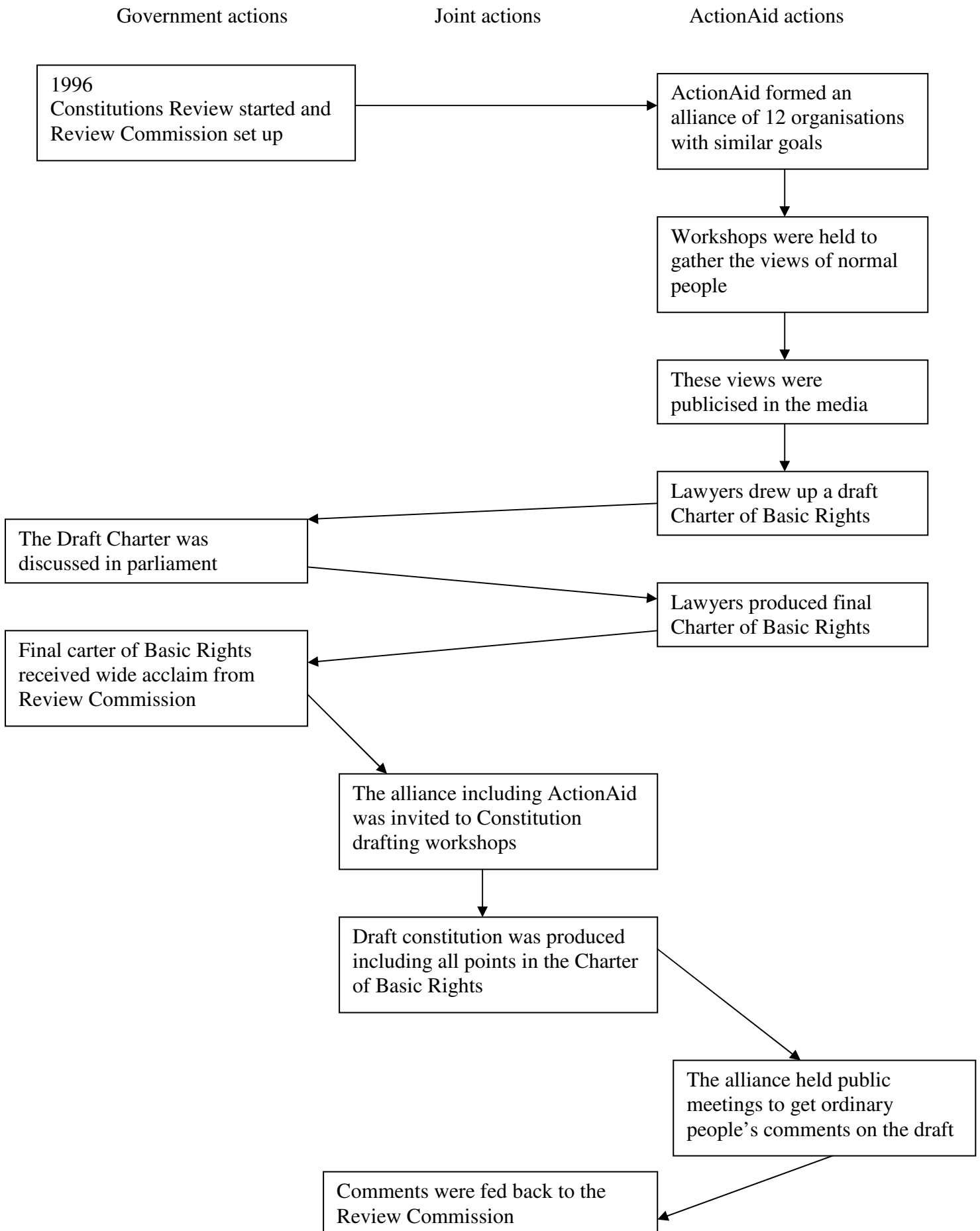
The river Nzoia runs across the Bundalangi plains near Lake Victoria and the border with Uganda. The river has always been prone to flooding and in the 1980s a 32km dyke was built to try and solve the problem. However the dyke was poorly constructed and so burst on several occasions. In 1997, during the El Niño rains, many people were left homeless by floods. The government finally agreed to act. World Bank funding was obtained in 2000 to repair the dyke properly but corruption meant that little of the money was actually spent on the repairs and, once again, the job was poorly done. In November 2001 floods once again made people homeless and forced them to sleep on the remains of the dyke. There were over 400 cases of cholera and 19 people died.

At this point the people decided that they had to act and formed BUCODEV. Initially they concentrated on filling in the gaps in the dyke and making temporary repairs. ActionAid Kenya supported BUCODEV in raising awareness of the problem and lobbying the government for action. Eventually the government and World Bank inspected the dyke and it was agreed that the repair work had not been done properly. BUCODEV forced the government to release approximately £127,000 to get the work done properly.

Linking people and groups with similar goals**Basic rights campaign**

Although Kenya signed up to the UN Declaration of Human Rights and recognised political and religious rights in its Constitution there was no mention of social or economic rights. In 1996, Kenya started a Constitutional Review process and ActionAid has contributed as shown in the flow chart in figure 4.

Figure 4: Constitution Review process



At the moment the review is in the final stages and the Constitution should be agreed by the end of the year. The combined impact of the organisations in the alliance has been far greater than 12 individual campaigns could ever have been.

Sugar campaign for change (SUCAM)

Sugar cane is essential to Kenya's economy, but the people producing it are mostly small farmers who are often exploited by the sugar industry. Kenya makes about £24 million a year revenue from sugar, but farmers are owed more than £16 million in delayed payments. Sugar companies have always tried to exclude farmers from their decision-making processes, and farmers suggest that the companies want to keep them poor in order to stop them becoming independent.

ActionAid realised that farmers would have greater bargaining power if they worked together, and so helped to set up SUCAM. This NGO informed farmers of their rights and encouraged them to work together. SUCAM successfully lobbied the government, and in 2002 a new Sugar Bill was adopted; the first law to regulate the sugar industry. This Bill states that 7 out of the 14 members of the Sugar Board must be elected farmer representatives, and farmers now have to be paid within 30 days of their crop being collected. SUCAM and ActionAid are now working to ensure that the bill becomes reality, and are continuing to lobby the Kenyan government to recognise the rights and interests of farmers.

Influencing the powerful through national and international campaigns

Elimu Yetu Coalition (education for all, EYC)

In 1998, ActionAid chose education as one of its long-term campaigning issues. The international Elimu campaign was formed with the aim of ensuring a quality primary education for every child. Elimu supported national coalitions and represented their views to various international bodies such as the World Bank and UNESCO. In 1999, the Elimu Yetu coalition was set up in Kenya with support from the global campaign. It aimed to influence national policy to ensure that every child in Kenya had access to high quality primary education. Input to the Constitutional Review process (described earlier) ensured that education was recognised as a basic human right, and provision was recognised as the responsibility of the state.

At the World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000, Kenya was one of 164 countries that committed to providing education for all by 2015. EYC and ActionAid supported the Kenyan government in the participatory development of a plan for ensuring this. A victory was gained in 2002 when primary school fees were abolished and EYC has worked to ensure that schools are free in practice as well as in policy. This should start to reverse the decline in primary school enrolment shown in figure 1.

Kenya coalition on access to essential medicine (KCAEM)

More than 2 million Kenyans are living with HIV/AIDS and this is having a devastating effect on the economy and social structures. The disease cannot be cured, but it can be treated to allow people to live a longer, healthier life. Unfortunately few

people in sub-Saharan Africa have access to the antiretroviral medicines needed. The prices set by the big pharmaceutical companies are too high, and trade rules restrict the production of cheaper copies (generics). ActionAid Kenya plays a prominent role in ActionAid's international HIV/AIDS campaign and has promoted the treatment needs of poor people to various audiences in Europe and the US. Recently there have been relative successes at lobbying the World Trade Organisation to reduce patent protection on antiretroviral drugs, although a lot of work remains to be done.

KCAEM was made up of 20 organisations in Kenya including ActionAid. They campaigned for people's right to medicine, and were successful in getting the average price of antiretroviral drugs reduced from about £650 to £56 a month. In May 2002 the coalition managed to defeat pressure from the pharmaceutical industry, and new legislation was introduced to enable the government to make and buy generic drugs. This legislation would not have been possible without the support of the international campaigning network.

Equal rights for women

Thakara women water users association (TWWUA)

Women traditionally played a minimal role in development activities in Thakara, partly because they were not allowed to sit in meetings with men. Women were expected to do most of the household chores and would walk up to 15km a day to collect water.

Consultation with the Thakara community revealed that access to clean water was their main problem and ActionAid Kenya identified a local river as a potential source of piped water. After several discussions it was agreed to put women in charge of the project to reflect their traditional role. Women were trained in management techniques, protection of the water supply, maintenance techniques and record keeping. This improved their confidence, self-esteem and power in the community. Eleven separate kiosk management committees were set up and 14,000 households now have easy access to clean water. Profits from the kiosks have been used to run education courses.

<p>“I never dreamed that I could be involved in a project that would impact my life in such a way.” Stella Kobia</p>
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Lelaitich Mara women's savings group

In 1988, a group of women in Chepkebit village decided to build tanks to collect rainwater so that they would not have to drink dirty water from the river. They got an initial grant and used the money they made from selling the rainwater to build more tanks. The women soon realised that they could work together to solve other problems too, and so they set up a savings group. Women who would not normally be considered for bank loans were able to borrow small amounts of money to set up businesses, improve homes or pay school fees.

In the late 1990s, ActionAid helped the group with its most ambitious project yet. The group used a small loan to set up a business selling diesel and paraffin. A young single mother, Alice Koibasot, is employed to run the station which earns about £170 a day. The profit is used to provide even bigger loans to members. Men have been

amazed that women are able to run a business so efficiently, and their respect for women has grown.

Why did these projects work?

There are underlying themes behind these, and other ActionAid projects, that have ensured their success:

- Empowering people to take action for themselves
- Focus on long-term change rather than delivering services
- Working with communities and CBOs to identify real needs
- Building on existing networks and institutions
- Using community based work to inform campaigns
- Linking groups to strengthen campaigning work

Questions

1a) Describe the trends in life expectancy and gross national income per capita between 1981 and 2001.

b) Suggest reasons for these changes.

2) Explain, with examples, ActionAid's approach to delivering services such as education and water. What is the reasoning behind this approach.

3) ActionAid aims to work with the most marginalised and vulnerable people and enable them to stand up for their rights. Give evidence from this article which supports this claim.

4) Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of each of the ways of working shown in figure 3. Do you agree with ActionAid's approach? Give reasons for your answer