

**Challenges and dilemmas in integrating human rights-based
approaches and participatory approaches to development:
*An exploration of the experiences of ActionAid International***

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**I hereby declare that the contents of this thesis is all my own
original work**

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Abstract

Participation and rights fit together, right? The right to participate is a universal human right. Participation, accountability and inclusion are central principles underlying the universal declaration of human rights, and taking a human rights-based approach to development means that 'beneficiaries' become active participants in their development process.

But how do these two approaches to development actually interact with each other in practice? What happens when a bottom-up approach to development is brought together with a universal concept of human rights? What are the trade-offs an INGO committed to participation would need to make in order to engage in rights-based practice?

This thesis is based on an 'extreme' case, the education work of ActionAid International. ActionAid is an INGO committed to transforming power relations at every level, to strengthening Southern participation in shaping and defining development, and to taking a human rights-based approach to poverty eradication and development. Over the past ten years ActionAid has been undergoing a process of organisational transformation and decentralisation in order to create the organisational form to pursue its rights-based vision. In doing this, it built on over 30 years experience of local community development and participatory practice. The organisation worked to integrate its rights-based approach with strongly rooted participatory development, but the process was complex. Translating theory into practice was influenced by organisational history, structure and culture, and the diversity of understandings of what a rights-based approach actually consists of.

This thesis draws from an analysis of ActionAid's practice to argue that rather than complementing and extending each other, rights and participation actually exist in tension. My findings suggest that the two approaches pull the organisation in opposite directions, and that this needs to be acknowledged and worked with if INGOs are to pursue a radical transformative approach to development.

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In addition to the staff of ActionAid, I also interviewed individuals from many other INGOs who were also open in their reflections and interested in my research. Every person I interviewed during my research process had a deep understanding of the challenges of rights-based working and a strong commitment to improving their own practice. It is these individuals that are key, if development is going to engage with the complex process of poverty eradication centred on equality and social justice.

Secondly, I need to thank everyone that supported me intellectually and emotionally to pursue this research and finalise my thesis. Marjorie Mayo has been an amazing supervisor, always available, knowledgeable, motivating and insightful, calming in times of crisis and has also coped very well when I announced (for the third time during this PhD process!) that I was pregnant and therefore had an unmoveable deadline! My children, Ira and Sol, have been a great counter-balance to studying and have reminded me that there are more important things in life than ensuring that I've read the latest literature on rights-based development. My partner, Russ, has helped me stay (relatively) sane, in his role as my 'IT helpdesk', but more importantly in juggling everything in our lives and ensuring that with everything going on we still have time to have fun! My parents, Mike and Ines, have been incredibly supportive, whether through reading different chapter drafts or helping with childcare so that I could actually complete my work. Finally, I was lucky enough to meet Cathy Shutt a couple of years ago who volunteered to read my draft chapters and has been great at giving critical yet encouraging feedback.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

The most effective way for people living in poverty to claim, secure and enjoy their human rights is to organise and mobilise with others, have a voice and develop their power to negotiate (ActionAid's Human Rights-based approach to Poverty Eradication and Development, 2008: 1-2)

Participation and rights fit together, right? The right to participate is a universal human right. Participation, accountability and inclusion are central principles underlying the universal declaration of human rights, and taking a human rights-based approach to development means that 'beneficiaries' become active participants in their own development (Eyben, 2003).

At the turn of the century the human rights language became widespread among international development practitioners. Organisations operating across the political spectrum immediately identified the potential of rights to support their vision of development. They were embraced in equal measure by those propagating neo-liberal individualism, and those working with a radical understanding of social justice involving transformation of power relations. However, while the language was easily adopted by many, working with rights caused complications in practice (Munro, 2009).

Overview of my research

The starting point for my research was to understand more deeply how participation and rights interact in practice. I used a case study approach (discussed in Chapter Three) and explored the dynamics and dilemmas experienced within an International Non-governmental Organisation (INGO)¹ as it translated its rights-based theory, based on transforming power, into practice, between 2006-2009.

¹ I view INGOs as a sub-set of NGOs, but note that much of the academic literature refers to NGOs generally – even when describing International or Northern NGOs (i.e. an organisation with presence in the North and South). Because of this when I refer to the literature on NGOs I use the term NGO, unless the author specifically mentions INGOs. But in my own research, where I am clear that I am focusing on an International NGO and discussing comparable International NGOs, I use the term INGO. The question of what an NGO is, is widely debated. NGOs are a diverse group defined in various different ways, but often referring to what they are not (i.e. not government or market) rather than what they are. Lewis argues that there are two ways in which NGOs are distinct – due to

When I embarked on this research, INGOs and other development organisations were reflecting on the value of rights-based approaches. Emphasis was placed on developing evaluation frameworks, to show why and how investing in rights was preferable to previous development processes (Crawford, 2007; Rand and Watson, 2007). However, as is often the case in development, the discussion focused on 'the new', it appeared to reject (rather than value) what was good about the old. Rights were viewed as completely distinct from previous development trends and discourses. In addition, there was little discussion on the organisational implications of embracing a rights-based approach. Even where research had focused specifically on how organisations were making the links between rights and participation (VeneKlasen et al, 2004) this was based on the assumption that connections between the two approaches were possible and desirable.

In early 2005, while the potential and excitement about rights was being celebrated in ActionAid, the INGO where I had been working since 1998, there were parallel discussions about the role of participatory methodologies. ActionAid was grappling with questions of where and how these methodologies fitted within its evolving understanding of development.

ActionAid had championed participatory methods since the early 1990s. Long-term participatory community development was what ActionAid was known for, in the Global South and Global North. Whole country programmes, such as ActionAid Brazil, had been designed based on participatory principles. For some, rights and participation clearly complemented each other: the role of poor people in articulating and securing their rights was central in any development process. But for others, these two approaches existed in tension: participation was associated with the previous work of ActionAid and linked to a service delivery agenda. This was of limited value if ActionAid was now to focus on government obligations and the role of the state in delivering rights.

I was absorbed and concerned by the debate. I was of the view that participation was central to rights discourse, but in engaging in organisational discussions I also appreciated some of the challenges to this understanding. I started to become interested in the underlying analytical and theoretical debates surrounding participation and rights. I had been aware of the multiple ways participation was

their identity as third sector organisations: 'they do not make a profit, and...their authority is not derived from political process'; and because they are focused on development (Lewis, 2003:327).

understood for some time, and was cognisant of the substantial body of knowledge on this (Guijt and Shah, 1998, Cooke and Kothari, 2001, Hickey and Mohan, 2004). I began to realise that the concept of rights and the practice of rights-based working was equally contentious. Rights have a long history in moral philosophy and political discourse (Freeman, 2002, Mahoney, 2007); and these debates have been extended recently with the rise of rights in development discourse. As I began to read around the issues it became clear that many (VeneKlasen et al. 2004, Pettit and Musyoki, 2004, Ling 2010) assumed that if the normative framework in which these two approaches were pursued were clear, the approaches would blend well in practice.

Given the discussion that was taking place in ActionAid, I was not so convinced that this was the case. I hoped that by exploring the theoretical underpinning further I would be able to develop a deeper analytical understanding of how these two concepts interacted, at a theoretical level and in their practical application. For example, I wanted to understand what trade-offs an INGO committed to participation would need to make in order to engage in rights-based practice. In doing so I began to question whether these two approaches to development are such comfortable bed-fellows as had been assumed by many.

Why this research? A brief contextual explanation

The term 'development' is fiercely contested and involves vastly divergent conceptions. For some, the primary aim of development is national economic growth, with varying attention paid to issues of poverty and poverty reduction. For others, the key issue of development is 'the realisation of human potential' (Thomas, 2000a: 32). Beyond this there are the concerns of the 'post-development' school, which rejects the very concept of development, labelling it a project of western imperialism (Escobar 1994, Esteva 1992).

Fundamental in these debates are the questions of whose views count in shaping a vision of development, and the power relations at play at all levels (international, national, local, household) which determine whose voices are heard and taken on board. Within this there are questions as to whether development can be approached as a technical project, or if a development process requires direct engagement with questions of power and transformation of current power relations (Johnson et al, 2002).

The practice of 'international development', a deliberate project to achieve development, (Thomas, 2000a: 25), is generally presented as having a relatively short history, beginning in 1949 when Truman labelled two-thirds of the world as 'under-

developed'. Since this time there have been various models and trends in international development, influenced by the global politics of the day. A brief reflection on this history is important in understanding the role and position of INGOs in development today.

With the end of Second World War came wide-reaching changes that impacted across the globe, signalling greater international collaboration and also independence of many of the former colonies. Development was understood as a scientific, technical project which could be brought about by well designed interventions. The focus was on economic growth, based on a belief that as a nation's gross domestic product grew the benefits would 'trickle-down', lifting the poorest sectors of society out of poverty. There was an emphasis on state-led industrial development. This focus dominated throughout the 1950s and 1960s, influenced by thinkers such as Rostow (1960), who believed that all societies would converge towards a Western model of modernity, and therefore that development interventions should bolster this natural process.

However, twenty years on and poverty indicators were not improving. Worse still the number of people living in economic poverty was increasing. While some theorists blamed an urban bias for continued poverty (Lipton: 1977), others focused their attention on international relations arguing that the developing countries were systematically undeveloped – being kept poor so that the West could develop (Prebisch, 1950; Frank 1972; Wallerstein, 1974). Debates raged throughout the 1970s and 80s, but it was only with the rise of neo-liberalism in the 1980s that modernisation theory, its Keynesian basis, and its positivist roots were really overthrown.

Proponents of neo-liberalism argue that the market will run itself best without state intervention, the state merely serves to distort the natural market processes, making it inefficient. Milton Friedman played a key role in the emergence of neo-liberal development policy through his influence on US and British policies in the 1980s. For Friedman, the role of the state should be minimised, concerning itself merely with ensuring the conditions exist by which a market can operate freely – i.e. to focus on law and order, and property rights - as government spending made the economy unstable (1962).

Neo-liberalism took hold through a critique of state-led development (Kruegar, 1974) supported by the World Bank, and strengthened by the presence of President Reagan in the US and Prime Minister Thatcher in the UK. This criticism of the state was timely as the modernisation policies were not achieving the economic growth predicted.

Moreover, many developing nations were facing economic crises at the time. The Bretton Woods Institutions (International Monetary Fund (IMF) and The World Bank) pushed for a roll-back of the state, privatisation, liberalisation and a laissez-faire management of the economy. This period also saw the IMF increasingly involved in macro-economic policy in developing nations, with conditions linked to loans, and a push for structural adjustment programmes (SAPs).

SAPs were disastrous for the poor, however. While support for the macro economic austerity and market liberalisation still has many advocates, and is the dominant view held by the Bretton Woods Institutions today, few can deny that the poor suffered the majority of the burden of these measures, or that the impact on women was particularly extreme (Sparr, 1994).

In 1987 UNICEF produced a highly influential publication: 'Adjustment with a Human Face' (Cornia et al, 1987), which explored ways in which vulnerable groups could be protected from the effects of economic adjustment. Although it was not until 1990-1 that the World Bank actually adopted a 'poverty agenda' there was some investment in anti-poverty programmes immediately following this report. For example 1988 a 'Programme to Mitigate the Social Costs of Adjustment' (PAMSCAD) was established in Ghana while in Bolivia an Emergency Social Fund was created (Mosley, 2002: 42-43). These programmes were built on during the 1990s and although the IMF and World Bank continue to push a neo-liberal agenda, they also recognise the need to mitigate the impact of these policies on vulnerable groups.. More recently, in 1999, PRSPs, poverty reduction strategy papers, were developed. These were conceived of to encourage national governments to put poverty reduction at the centre of their plans, and aimed to ensure debt relief benefitted the most poor and marginalised (Johnson, 2002: 142/157).

PRSPs reflected a change in understanding of the role of the range of development actors and a revisiting of the role of the state. They are (theoretically) prepared by national governments with the involvement of a range of civil society groups. The understanding was not so much that the state had no role, but that the institutions of the state need to be reformed. Corrupt leaders were sited as a key reason for state failure, and the lack of interaction between government and their citizens was blamed for on-going corruption. This meant a focus on democracy and good governance, which has been reinforced in recent years following 9/11 and the rise of investment in counter-terrorism measures.

Prior to the 1980s NGOs had operated at the margins, generally considered as radical, alternative actors, emphasising people-centred approaches to development (Lewis, 2005). However, the 1980s had seen increased funding to these organisations. They were expected to provide the social services that were no longer provided by national government. These organisations were conceived as more efficient and effective than the large government bureaucracies, and better at reaching the poor (Lewis, 2005).

The New Policy Agenda (Robinson, 1993) – which linked liberal economics, democracy and ‘Good governance’ – built on the increased NGO activity of the 1980s and brought development NGOs into the development mainstream. Much NGO activity today can be understood either as collaboration with a mainstream development agenda, or, to a greater or lesser extent, as adversarial positioning designed to influence the development mainstream.

‘Good Governance’ focused on the reform and strengthening of public institutions accompanied by a strong and active civil society (DfID, 2006). NGOs and other civil society groups were expected to hold public institutions accountable, to ensure that they were playing the roles expected of them within the new development discourse – shaped by neo-liberal understandings of the relationships between state and market. Civil society organisations generally (and NGOs/INGOs specifically) were not only expected to compensate for a lack of state welfare support by delivering a range of social services (which included the ability to compete against national government and private sector organisations for lucrative service delivery contracts), but also to represent the ‘poor and excluded’ increasingly in technical debates on development (Thomas, 2008).

This partnership of government and civil society is still favoured in many quarters today, with International aid to national governments targeted at general budget support and sector wide approaches, while aid to NGOs:

[I]s frequently framed as stimulating the demand side of accountable governance and policy making, providing opportunities for using participatory methodologies in working towards advocacy, empowerment and representation among marginalised groups. (Brock and Pettit, 2007: 6)

This position was consolidated through the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (OECD 02.03.05) (Eyben and Ladbury: 2006).

The increased presence and funding of NGOs perhaps unsurprisingly gave rise to a more critical examination of their role, as both practitioners and academics began questioning

how to move 'Beyond the magic bullet'² (as NGOs were unrealistically tasked with solving any poverty-related issue) and whether NGOs were 'Too close for comfort' (to the official development mainstream). Issues of internal management were raised, and concerns about NGO accountability rose to the fore. However, as noted by Lewis (2005), many of these criticisms reflected the concerns development donors had regarding NGO capacity to play the roles expected of them. Little attention was given to exploring the broader questions of development ideas and theory or the role that NGOs could play in developing alternative development discourse.

The rise in the role of NGOs as actors in development was accompanied by a narrowing of the debate about development itself. In 2000 the 'Millennium Development Goals' were agreed (the dynamics and debates surrounding these are explored more fully in Chapter Two), coordinated by the United Nations and aimed at tackling the human cost of under-development. Multi-lateral and bi-lateral donors, the UN, governments, NGOs and other civil society activists became relatively united in their focus on these goals.

However, while shared agendas make partnership working more straightforward, and enable funders and implementers to collaborate, they can also squeeze the space that enables different people's voices to be heard within development processes. While many people working in or with NGOs were content for these organisations to act as part of a development mainstream, conceiving their role as ensuring that the needs of poor and excluded people were considered, others called on NGOs to take a more radical stance. In 'Can NGOs make a Difference?' (Bebbington et al, 2008) the contributors argued that these organisations had become subsumed into the neo-liberal mainstream. They suggest that NGOs have become too involved in developing interventions aimed at ameliorating poverty, rather than taking on the broader questions of what development should be about. And they urge NGOs to reclaim their radical roots and challenge neo-liberal assumptions as to how countries develop.

The role of NGOs (and International NGOs) in development has therefore been complex and contested. Are they collaborators in the development mainstream, actors in a project which some challenge as driven by the West and reinforcing global power relations and inequalities? Or are they, potentially, radical actors, enabling poor and excluded voices to be heard in international development debates, proposing alternative visions of development focused on people-centred empowerment, equality and social

² Titles from the 'Manchester Conferences' (1992, 1995) (Lewis, 2005)

justice, and challenging agendas dominated by the proponents of free trade and economic growth?

My research, focused on the actual practice of integrating rights and participation is therefore situated within the wider questions of (I)NGO role vis-à-vis the international development project. Questions such as: *'What does engagement with rights mean in relation to the wider issues of North-South global relations?'* and *'Who is being developed, in whose vision and why?'* exist in the background to my research, and I return to reflect on these broader questions in my conclusion.

What is the research?

The research presented here builds from a 3-year period of engagement, March 2006 – February 2009, with ActionAid's education work. Over the period I used a range of strategies (described in Chapter Three) to explore and understand the challenges and dilemmas ActionAid faced in integrating a rights-based approach with a participatory approach to development.

During my period of research ActionAid was changing dramatically. The new organisational strategy (2005-2010) had extended the organisation's decentralisation agenda, and committed ActionAid to a radical new organisational form. This was leading to a new organisational structure with different management and governance arrangements. These shifts sought to transform power relations within the organisation to enable stronger Southern participation in setting the organisational agenda. The ultimate aim was to strengthen accountability to poor and excluded groups in the South, the key 'rights-holders' in development. At the same time ActionAid was continuously evolving and developing its understanding of a rights-based approach to development. This involved grappling with many issues, including clarifying its rights-based theory, and exploring the implications of this theory on different parts of its practice.

Much of my research therefore focuses on the specific dynamics encountered by ActionAid as it worked to align its organisational form with its interpretation of a rights-based approach: an approach aimed at bringing about equality and social justice through transforming power relations. I explore the dilemmas faced and strategies used in reconciling these two processes: of becoming a decentralised organisation strongly rooted in participatory, bottom-up development, and of working within a visionary global organisational strategy centred on a commitment to rights-based practice. I focus on the different perspectives that existed within the organisation of what a rights-based

approach entails, and consider questions of diversity and coherence in developing organisational wide rights-based practice. Fundamentally I ask whether it is possible to adhere to a transformative view of participation while engaging in a universal human rights-based discourse.

Although my empirical research is focused on ActionAid I use this particular experience to shed light on the implications of rights-based working more generally. The experience of ActionAid is acutely relevant given the level of commitment to rights shown by the organisation, in relation to its organisational form and practice. As I show through my findings no other large international NGO had gone as far in framing its development practice by rights-based analysis, or transforming its organisational structure to support such an approach. The challenges and dilemmas ActionAid faced are therefore likely to be relevant to any other organisation working in this field. As such I discuss the wider implications of my research in my conclusions.

Who am I?

Throughout my research I have taken a Critical Realist approach to research (Archer et al, 1998), and emphasised the role of interpretation in relation to social knowledge (cf. Chapter Three). This approach emphasises the importance of the position of the researcher. It is therefore important to share a little about myself and my positionality, as I approach this research.

Background

Brought up by left-leaning parents, products of the 1960s radicalisation of students, it was perhaps unsurprising that as a young woman I had a wish to 'fight for social justice'. Politics and political debate had been a large part of my upbringing, and a belief in the need to change the world, to tackle inequality and discrimination has influenced my choices through life.

I joined ActionAid as a volunteer in 1998, a slightly naïve 23 year old. I had just returned from 18 months 'community work' in Mexico - my introduction to the developing world. On my return I split my time as a volunteer between Amnesty International and ActionAid. For various reasons I enjoyed my ActionAid experience much more than my work at Amnesty, but perhaps most relevant of these factors was the positive attitude of staff, the sense of possibility and a commitment to making a difference.

In ActionAid I joined the *Reflect* team, a small team focused on supporting practitioners around the world to share learning and exchange ideas on a 'participatory approach to adult learning and social change' (www.reflect-action.org). Six months later I started my first paid job at ActionAid.

During my time at ActionAid (I was an employee there until February 2006) the organisation appeared to be in continual flux, and my own role evolved considerably. This was partly the natural process of moving up through the hierarchy as I gained experience and knowledge, but also reflected a changing understanding of development, of organisational purpose and focus. So, for example, my initial role looking at adult education and numeracy morphed into a focus on rights and governance as ActionAid changed its understanding of poverty and strategies for fighting poverty.

In supporting the *Reflect* and governance work, I was aware that there was frequently a disconnect between what was happening, understood, or conceived as possible at the local level, and the expectations that we had an international level. For example, *Reflect* facilitators were often young community activists with little formal education or exposure to life beyond their local area, operating within the constraints of local power relations and expectations. And yet we expected these individuals to work with our (international) vision of strengthening relationships with, participation in, and influence over local government. We intended members of *Reflect* groups to become activists, engaged in local and national social, economic and political debates. Moreover, even though we understood broadly the differences in civil society organisation, experience, expectations, and potential, across Africa, Asia and Latin America, we still hoped that all *Reflect groups* would become 'political', engaging with questions of power and gender relations. In reflecting on these issues within the Reflect Team it was clear that there were no easy answers, or specific sources of theoretical knowledge to which we could turn.

My early life had shaped my political motivation. My experiences of working with *Reflect* influenced my commitment to participatory empowering approaches to development, and also to pursuing a participatory approach to my research.

Specific interests and motivation for this research

The initial impetus for embarking on a PhD had personal and broader academic aims. From the academic perspective I had become aware that there was a gap in wider knowledge and understanding across the sector concerning the dynamics of shifting to rights-based practice. I hoped that my research would contribute to understanding the

dilemmas and trade-offs involved when embracing such a development agenda. Also, given my experience with *Reflect* and the tensions I had become aware of through our practice, I wanted to explore how adherence to a bottom-up development process interacted with a universal development vision. I hoped to understand better the organisational implications of working with both these understandings.

However, I also considered myself a practitioner. This research was motivated by my interest in, and commitment to, improving practice. Schön suggests that ‘too much practice’ can lead to a practitioner acting without reflection, and ignoring phenomena that do not fit into their categories, and yet:

A practitioner’s reflection can serve as a corrective to over-learning. Through reflection, he [sic] can surface and criticise the tacit understandings that have grown up. (Schön, 1983: 67)

Beyond this he urges the reflective practitioner to embrace uncertainty, and be active in their situation – reflecting on how they influence a given situation, but also recognising that there are many other factors in operation. The idea of a reflective practitioner resonates strongly with how I strive to approach work in general, and this research in particular.

Lewis (2005) suggests that many people who write about NGOs may not have the distance required to be properly analytical, claiming that research with NGOs is not the same as research about NGOs. However, having worked inside an NGO, I was also aware that the complexity of practice, the nuance in decision-making and the range of considerations influencing day-to-day practice were often not well understood by people looking at the organisation from afar. In my experience, research about NGOs can suffer from as many problems as research with NGOs. I therefore envisaged a further dimension to my research – as contributing to the way that research about NGOs can be pursued – balancing the roles of academic researcher and practitioner. This meant playing a role as a critical friend, juggling my insider knowledge and connections with the theoretical perspective and the distance the study format provided (cf. Chapter Three).

Beyond the academic/practitioner dynamic there was a third motivation for my research. ActionAid’s organisational transformation (described in Chapter Four) had raised many questions regarding the role of International NGOs more broadly. I wanted to understand more about the role of people, who were committed to a development understanding centred on social justice and equality, and based in the Global North.

I had spent considerable time working in the Northern Office of an INGO but I was unsure what the future held for such role. Much of the discussion on North-South power relations within INGOs appeared to involve many assumptions: about who the actors are, their individual power and how they are able to represent people living in material poverty. For ActionAid many of the organisational decisions were being made based on 'geography'. But I was not convinced that this was the only factor that was relevant; for example my experience of working in the International Reflect Network suggested that individual experience, context and conception of development, and personal politics all impacted on how members of the network interacted and valued different perspectives. While I did not focus my research specifically on questions of positionality, or explore deeply issues of structure and agency (cf. Bourdieu, 1984, Giddens, 1986) I wanted the space to explore the different dimensions of organisational power relations, to achieve a more complex understanding of North-South relations in development (cf. Chapter Seven).

Overview of Thesis

Following this introductory chapter this thesis contains seven chapters and a conclusion.

Chapter Two is a review of the theoretical concepts that underpin this thesis. I explore the key literature on participation and rights. I reflect on critiques of participation, share the history and dynamics of human rights and human rights-based approaches to development, and discuss how these two approaches have been understood and linked in the literature. I end this section by suggesting that whilst the theory has provided strong evidence for linking participation and rights there has been far less analysis to date regarding the inherent tensions between universal rights and transformative participation, or how these two processes interact in practice.

Chapter Three shares the methodological questions I considered in planning and designing my research, and reflects on the key dilemmas I faced in using a focused qualitative case study to explore the broad questions of participation and rights. I explain my research process, consider what can be known from the material I collected during my research, and recognise the limits of what can be said, based on my evidence.

Chapter Four charts the history of ActionAid. It situates the evolution of ActionAid in relation to wider shifts and changes in relation to the role of International NGOs in development. However, it also highlights specific dimensions of ActionAid's history

which are key in understanding the organisation today. It concludes by sharing the organisational vision that framed my research period: of catalysing and being part of a global movement for equality and social justice. This vision has been the driving force behind ActionAid's decentralisation agenda and central to many of the tensions the organisation faced during my research period.

Chapter Five delves into ActionAid's understanding of a rights-based approach. Based around ActionAid's 'Human Rights-based approach to poverty eradication and development' it contrasts ActionAid's articulation with that of other INGOs. The chapter identifies the central elements that made ActionAid's interpretation unique. In doing so I raise questions on the enormity of the task ActionAid has set itself by using concepts of rights to frame all its work.

Chapter Six uses ActionAid's work on the Right to Education to explore the dynamics in implementing a rights-based approach. Drawing on a series of semi-structured interviews, organisational documents and data collected through a formal organisational review process, I highlight the specific tensions ActionAid faced in implementing its rights-based approach. These derived from its particular understanding of rights and were further confused by the range of perspectives and viewpoints which existed within the organisation.

Chapter Seven is the first of two chapters which look at ActionAid's organisational dynamics. In this first chapter I introduce key literature to describe the context INGOs face at the start of the twenty-first century, and the priority areas where they have tended to focus their work. Drawing from this I explore how ActionAid has responded to this context, in line with its commitment to decentralisation and transforming organisational power relations. I focus specifically on how it has conceived of international policy work, exploring its staff recruitment and organisational relationships to unpack how this process has evolved in practice.

Chapter Eight takes on this analysis from the opposite perspective, focusing on how ActionAid designed and conceived its local programme³. I argue that various issues

³ There are a series of debates as to how 'local' is understood, and some argue that work focused on policy advocacy with the IMF for example can be considered local when involving people based in Washington DC. I am using the word 'local' to describe programmes at the grassroots level directly involving poor people and their immediate context. National programmes are understood as focused on national level policy making and implementation, and could involve either a focus on government

deriving from ActionAid's specific organisational culture, structure and behaviour culminate in a perverse impact, leaving ActionAid's local programme largely disconnected from its national and international practice.

The conclusion steps back from the case study, drawing out key observations from my research which could have relevance elsewhere. Through making links to the wider development context I explore the potential for resolving the dilemmas that the ActionAid case study raises. Building from this I return to raise the broader question of the role of INGOs in transforming North-South power relationships and furthering development alternatives.

or the general public, but include issues that impact across the whole country. Finally, international refers to work targeted at the policies and processes of institutions with an international remit.

Chapter 2: Literature Review: Participation, Power and Rights

Introduction

This chapter provides the theoretical grounding for my thesis through its discussion of the concepts of participation and rights. While the concept of human rights was discussed internationally in the post-second world war era, ideas of participation entered the development arena in the 1970s and 80s, and rights-based approaches to development have a much more recent history. However, rights and participation are contested, as much in relation to their theoretical grounding as in their practical application. How these terms are defined and used is strongly linked to broader political ideology and conceptions of development.

As discussed in Chapter One there are debates as to whether development is a technical or political process. Beyond this, there are questions as to whose role it is to conceptualise and practise development. Debates centre on whether there are universal standards of development, or if development should be understood as responding to local contexts, priorities and perspectives. This gives rise to various questions such as:

- Is there one global development vision or multiple different visions?
- Do development processes expose and challenge, or reinforce, existing North/South global power relations?
- Who are the agents of developments, who they should be, and what different roles are played?

Responses to the questions above tend to cluster around a particular development philosophy and approach. And thus while the language of participation and rights is widespread in development, shared language hides many different understandings. My own research is located within a particular conception of development, one that argues for widespread transformation of power relations and for ideas of social justice based on equality, non-discrimination and inclusivity. This political approach to development influences my interpretation and discussion of the research material, and the challenges and tensions I identify in integrating rights-based and participatory practice. As a background to understanding my interpretation of rights and participation, it is

therefore important to unpack the different theoretical debates surrounding these two approaches.

In this chapter I identify the evolution of the concepts and how they have been used (and abused) within development practice. I argue that ‘transformative’ or ‘empowering’ participation (which leads to a change in participants’ capacity to act and engage with development processes) is fundamentally different from ‘instrumental’ participation (i.e. the processes used to gather poor people’s perspectives, information and knowledge for use by ‘development experts’). This is followed by a discussion on rights and rights-based approaches to development. As part of this, I identify and question a Western individual-liberal conception of rights, and explore the implications of this for how rights have been understood within development discourse.

I conclude the chapter by examining the connections and tensions between participatory and rights-based approaches to development, as located within a transformatory development agenda. Drawing from this I suggest that while there are strong theoretical arguments to link rights and participation there is a gap in academic knowledge as to how these two approaches interact in practice.

A note on transformation

Transformation, transformatory and transformative development are terms that I use frequently throughout my thesis and my analysis of the interaction between rights and participation is influenced by my understanding of these terms. For me, transformation goes beyond incremental change to involve a fundamental break with what was there before. This includes a reimagining of what is possible. For example rather than development processes focused on treating the symptoms of unequal society, transformative development involves redefining the relations in that society ‘in ways that are more inclusive, less unequal and more fair’

(<http://www.wun.ac.uk/research/transformatory-justice-network>, accessed 2.4.2012).

This implies altering the structure – the economic, social and political power relations, expectations and practice within a particular realm, whether this is at household level, nationally, internationally or between different development actors. Given this, the transformative action of an INGO involves not only a shift in their internal structure and organisational power relations, but also in their relationship to other development actors, specifically the role they assign themselves in relation to the poor and excluded communities which they exist to serve. In addition, transformation cannot only refer to the change process itself but must also embed these new way of behaving,

understanding and relating – to ensure that the change is sustained and does not regress or return to previous practice.

This normative interpretation of transformation covers all usages of the term throughout the thesis, unless specifically referenced otherwise.

What this chapter does not cover

In embarking on my research I was aware that there were many different approaches that I could take in deepening academic understanding on the integration of participatory approaches and rights-based approaches to development.

For example, I could have drawn more extensively on the writings of theorists such as Bourdieu (1984) and Giddens (1986) to explore the interaction of a range of factors concerned with the ways in which social actors influence, as well as being influenced by their environments. These theoretical approaches are potentially significant in understanding how individuals and their organisations interpret and practise a rights-based approach and in Chapter Seven I make reference to Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus', understood as the socialised norms or internalised dispositions. These dispositions influence individual action, perception, feeling and behaviour within a specific context but can also be shifted or redefined through events (Bourdieu, 1984).

Equally relevant could have been a more anthropological approach, exploring the complex relations that exist between different development organisations and individuals within them (Eyben, 2011, Lewis and Mosse, 2006). Alternative options included an approach rooted in political theory looking at the nature of globalisation, global civil society and the dynamics created by an increasingly globalised world (McGrew, 2000). At the other end of the spectrum I could have focused much more attention on concepts such as organisational learning and the learning organisation (Senge, 1990) and studied the different strategies put into place to build organisational capacity to integrate rights and participation. All these options were potentially interesting, and any of them could have shed interesting insights in relation to my research area.

However, these would have led to a different thesis, taking me away from my own particular research concerns. So I chose a different path. This was to explore the translation from theory to practice of rights and participation and to understand how organisational dynamics and choices impacted on this. This was due to my specific

interest in addressing the gap in academic theory and current practice that I develop in more detail here. I therefore focus this initial literature review on the underlying theory of participation and rights, and I introduce other areas of relevant literature throughout my thesis when these are particularly pertinent to the issue that is being discussed.

Participatory development

Participatory development challenges the idea that external ‘experts’ are best placed to design development interventions, instead emphasising the importance of local knowledge, experience and skills. A participatory approach transforms the development process, placing the target groups or beneficiaries of development at the centre and supporting them to design, plan and act for their own development. This, in turn, locates the development institution as a facilitator and enabler of development, rather than as designer and controller of a development process. Participatory development emerged as an alternative approach. However, by the late 1990s it had been adopted by major development actors and included in a range of official development processes, most notably ‘Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers’. This makes a discussion of participation complex and confusing. So many different practices are labelled as participatory. This suggests that there is a need to understand the evolution of participation, and to distinguish between forms of participation to support a mainstream development agenda and those that contribute to a radical or alternative vision of development.

The evolution of participatory practice

Concepts of participation have a long history in the West and have, for example, been linked to the spread of Protestantism across Europe in the sixteenth century (Henkel and Stirrat, 2001). However, it was not until the 1980s, when NGOs were first beginning to take root as the major deliverers of public services, that questions began to be asked about how programmes were designed and implemented. At this time Western thought dominated development approaches, and development professionals (usually white and male) with little experience of poverty or rural life, were taking a lead in programme design.

In his reflections Chambers (2006), widely credited with the mainstreaming and popularisation of participatory approaches, recalls how a group of local organisations and academics began to reflect on, and experiment with, a range of techniques to elicit information from local people, so as to integrate their perspectives into programme

design. What began in the late 1970s as agro-ecosystem analysis in South Asia spread and evolved as different countries innovated with new ideas, and soon became known as rapid rural appraisal (RRA), and later as participatory rural appraisal (PRA).

Supporters of participation developed a wide range of tools and techniques to engage poor people in analysing their context, in sharing their information and knowledge, so that they could act on their analysis to transform their situation or condition. These tools involved 'visuals': large scale maps, calendars and matrices constructed on the ground using locally available materials and concerning a range of issues from health, to local services, to land tenure; theatrical methods (Boal, 1979); and various local art forms (song, dance, music, drama). More recently participatory practice has also embraced new technologies including photography, video, radio, television and internet technologies⁴. There has also been a growing focus on participatory or deliberative democracy with the inclusion of processes such as participatory budgeting, public hearings, debates and citizen juries⁵. These approaches have also been integrated into long-term community organising and adult learning projects (such as *Reflect*: www.reflect-action.org). Manuals and training courses have been produced to support different participatory techniques, emphasising both the technical aspects of participation and the behaviour, skills and relationships needed to engage in community based participatory processes.

While development workers in Africa and Asia were discovering and creating participatory methodologies for development, activists in Latin America were developing 'popular education' methodologies which centred on dialectic learning, reflection and action (Freire 1970, Archer and Costello, 1990). The participatory methods used in Africa and Asia aimed to capture local knowledge to inform project design, complementing 'formal' knowledge sources. In Latin American however, approaches were concerned with challenging and transforming mainstream analysis (Brock and Pettit, 2007). This distinction, between instrumental or consultative participation and transformative or active participation, is of central importance to current debates on participation.

⁴ see for example, the work of Photovoice www.photovoice.org, Living Lens (www.livinglens.co.uk), or *Reflect* and ICTs (www.reflect-action.org) for more information about these types of approaches.

⁵ See for example, Pimbert M and Wakeford T (eds) 2001 which explores citizens' juries, public hearings and participatory budgeting. These types of participatory practice have tended to be used more in Latin America, India and the West than in Africa, and often rely on supportive and strong government institutions.

Although participation was initially conceived as a minor methodology in development, it took hold, partly due to the evangelical role played by Chambers, and the moral argument that participation was a 'good thing'. But also important was its relevance to the emerging development discourse in the 1990s of 'Good Governance'. Over time, participation has become presented as a necessary ingredient for any development initiative, from small-scale projects to national adjustment plans. By the late 1990s the 'participatory movement' (ActionAid, 2006a) had taken hold. Participation had become a key 'buzzword in development' (Cornwall and Brock, 2005):

[There is now a] growing family of approaches, methods, attitudes, behaviours and relationships to enable and empower people to share, analyse and enhance their knowledge of life and conditions, and to plan, act, monitor, evaluate and reflect (Chambers, 2006: 3).

These approaches are defined by the key international journal on participatory practice as offering:

[A] creative approach to investigating issues of concern to poor people, and to planning, implementing, and evaluating development activities. They challenge prevailing biases and preconceptions about people's knowledge. The methods used range from visualisation, to interviewing and group work. The common theme is the promotion of interactive learning, shared knowledge, and flexible, yet structured analysis. (Definition: Participatory Learning and Action, IIED).

The popularisation of the approach challenged earlier development models that treated aid-receiving countries generally, and poor sectors of society specifically, as passive beneficiaries of development. But its wide usage can also be very dangerous. The extent to which every institution claims a commitment to participation suggests consensus among the development community while obscuring fundamental differences. Cornwall and Brock suggest that because of a 'chain of equivalence', based on words such as 'partnership', 'ownership' and 'governance', participation has become inextricably linked with a neo-liberal agenda, narrowing the space for those who believe in other forms of development and wish to fight against the neo-liberal hegemony (Cornwall and Brock, 2005).

Because of the widespread use of participation those initially committed to the concept began to question whether it really was empowering, or indeed the 'new tyranny' (Cooke and Kothari, 2001).

Typologies of participation

Since participation means very different things to different people, there have been various attempts to classify and distinguish different types of participatory processes.

Typologies of participation can be applied in a range of ways. For example, typologies are used to understand the aims of a specific participatory process, to assess its success, to help in planning and design, or for the participants themselves to understand what space is being offered to them. Equally typologies can help in understanding organisational dynamics. This might include exploring how the structure and dynamics enable, empower or exclude different individuals or parts of an organisation, or looking more broadly at the organisation's relationships with others or its understanding of its role.

At a basic level these typologies look at the extent of participation – as first expressed by Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation. For example, Pretty and Pimbert (1994) focus on passive to active participation; Oakley and Marsden (1984) discuss 'planner-centred' to 'people-centred' modes; Burkley (1993) discusses mainstream and radical alternative participation; Hailey (2001) suggests formulaic to dynamic and personal approaches, while McGee (2002) makes the distinction between instrumental and transformative participation agendas.

Key to the ladder is a concept of increasingly active participation – moving from manipulation or non-participation, to consultation as tokenistic participation through to delegated power or citizen control as examples of transformative power. At the first rung target groups in any process might be given some information, while the second might include information gathering from participants on pre-determined questions. A higher rung might include more active consultation, or sharing ideas on broad areas rather than responding to narrow questions. Around the middle of the ladder would be space for interactive discussions, perhaps with regular consultation throughout a project, and above this more structured opportunities for group analysis and learning, akin to community based learning projects such as *Reflect*, mentioned above. The final rung on the ladder describes self-organised groups, motivated to act due to their own analysis and seeking external support for that participation. Here the group themselves determine the parameters, roles and relationships. This ultimate form of participation is akin to Cornwall's (2002) 'claimed' spaces, which are contrasted with closed and invited spaces. While many institutions have formal spaces where staff or staff representatives make decisions, they may also set up invited spaces, where citizens or beneficiaries of the organisation's work are invited to participate. However, there may also be claimed and created spaces, developed or occupied by less powerful actors. Here it is the participants themselves that determine the parameters of discussion and action - organic spaces evolving out of popular action (ibid: 2002).

The different categorisations of participation can be critiqued for being too static, but they can be used in a variety of ways to explore the dynamics of participation. For example, different stages in any process might be located on different rungs of a ladder depending on the technical skill of those involved; the organisational arrangements; the time and resources allocated; the aims and objectives; or the participatory tools themselves. In using the ladder to debate and reflect on a process it can become a participatory tool itself, enabling those involved to define the level of participation they expect, or to identify criteria for the different rungs.

The distribution of power is central to understanding how 'participatory' any process is – i.e. how high up it is placed on the ladder. For example, the extent of control over a process depends on who initiated it, who is shaping it and who or what is motivating participants. Different actors will identify different ideal locations on these 'ladders of participation' and what is 'ideal' in one space may well be inappropriate in another. It can be assumed that more radical activists will aim for citizen control, while official development planners may focus on how best to involve beneficiaries in processes of consultation, retaining the ultimate decision making power themselves. However within these broad categorisations there may still be many differences, including a range of different institutional arrangements to support participatory processes. NGOs, for example, vary greatly in terms of their organisational hierarchy and decision-making processes and the extent to which they enable or desire participatory practice to influence their development understanding or programme prioritisation.

Gaventa (2003) argues that there is a need to understand how different types of power put boundaries on participation. He uses the model of a three-dimensional cube to link Cornwall's spaces of participation to levels of participation (local, national and international) and to different types of power (visible, invisible and hidden (VeneKlasen et al, 2004, see p.33 below). And warns that:

[By] exclude[ing] certain actors or views from entering the arena for participation in the first place... [power] may be internalised in terms of one's values, self-esteem and identities, such that voices in visible places are but echoes of what the power holders who shaped those places want to hear (Gaventa, 2003: 11).

This suggests that in addition to analysing the participatory practice as it occurs, it is also important to explore the dynamics which frame the space and the wider context and history within which participation takes place.

Unpacking power and participation

Active, transformative and radical participation requires power analysis, since those involved need to be 'empowered'. Understanding power itself is a complex pursuit, but this is exacerbated within a process aimed at empowering. While power is often characterised as a relational concept (one person has power over another), the idea of 'power to' or 'power with' are also key to empowerment processes. Empowerment needs to include engaging with power structures and inequalities which impact on the potential to act, but it also involves building capacity to act – which can refer to developing new skills, relationships or understanding (Fawssett et al, 2008: 219).

Empowerment itself is a contested concept, it refers to an ill-defined process with uncertain outcomes. Nevertheless, in the context of the concerns of my research 'real empowerment' must lead to change in power relationships, and therefore is likely to include conflict.

In his famous book, 'Power: A radical view', (2005) Lukes sets out three ways for understanding power, and outlines his own 'three-dimensional' understanding. He begins by challenging the basic assumption of the 'one-dimensional' perspective of pluralists, quoting Dahl (1957) that 'A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do' (Lukes, 2005: 16); arguing that the operation of power is not always easily observable. He doubts that preferences are deliberately made, or that such preferences are equivalent to policies or articulated opinion. Instead he raises the possibility that interests might exist but not be articulated, or observable (ibid: 18).

He then considers a 'two-dimensional' view of power, acknowledging that people who hold this view allow for an implicit operation of power and recognise that:

[There exists] a set of predominant values, beliefs, rituals and institutional procedures (rules of the game) that operate systematically and consistently to the benefit of certain persons and groups to the expense of others (quoting Bachrach and Baratz, 1970: 43-4, in Lukes, 2005: 21).

Adherents to this two-dimensional view recognise a need for:

[Reflection on how] demands for change are suffocated before they are even voiced, or destroyed in the decision-implementing stage[and there is a need] to identify potential issues which non decision-making prevents from being actual (ibid: 22)

However, Lukes argues that although this two-dimensional view highlights how power limits the space available for decision-making, power analysis is still focused on conflict

and observable behaviour. Thus, if conflict does not happen, an observer can never know that 'non-decisions' have taken place. For Lukes it is important to note that a systemic bias can be mobilised and recreated sub-consciously, and that:

A may exercise power over B by influencing, shaping or determining his very wants – to get them to have desires you want them to have... the most effective and insidious use of power is to prevent such conflict from arising in the first place. (ibid: 25).

This three-dimensional view overcomes the behavioural bias found in other conceptions, and appreciates that power is not only attributable to individuals but to groups, moreover it recognises the existence of 'latent conflict'. This goes beyond power to set the agenda, as described in the two-dimensional view, to include power to imagine. For example, questioning of gender relations involves the ability to imagine alternative scenarios, to recognise that relations do not have to be the way they are currently.

This argument has parallels in debates on development. For example, a focus on a specific model of intentional development or development in practice limits the debate on alternative development visions, causing those working within the development sector to focus on ameliorating poverty, rather than asserting radically different development paths (Thomas, 2000b).

VeneKlasen et al (2004) draw on a similar categorisation of power (using the words visible, hidden and invisible power) applying this to development processes. Visible forms of power include laws and policies, whereas hidden power refers to the way that power operates to set the political agenda to benefit the rich elite and introduce systemic bias. However, invisible power is the most insidious as it:

[S]hape[s] meaning and notions of what is acceptable and who is worthy in society. [It] operate[s] at a deeply psychological level to reinforce feelings of privilege or inferiority that, in turn, shape people's understanding of themselves, their world and their potential to act (ibid: 9).

This third type of power echoes the Freirean (1970) concept of 'internalised oppression', shown in Gaventa's reflections on his experience of how power was operating in a mining village in the US during a rights struggle:

[P]ower structures weren't maintained strictly through control of institutions, force and resources. The less powerful had also internalised their powerlessness. They held onto assumptions about certain needs, roles, and possibilities of change that come out of long histories of socialisation. Not having a sense of right to act was paralyzing (Hughes, A. et al.,2003: 8).

In these conceptions power is relational and contextual and derives from many different sources. A village elder might be held in esteem in his or her village and experience significant power in relation to other villagers, but when interacting with formal government institutions he or she may experience relative powerlessness. That same elder might be powerful in relation to an external NGO, which, although it may have greater financial resources, could rely on the village elder's access to the village. Thus any individual will experience their power differently based on the diverse dimensions of their identity, their sex, ethnicity, age, level of education etc. consequently:

[E]ffective change strategies need to take into account that power operates dynamically at many levels to prevent people's participation and the fulfilment of their rights (VeneKlasen et al 2004: 8).

However, individual empowerment processes are never easy as they seek 'to transform deeply embedded power relations from the most intimate to the most public and visible' (ibid: 9). Furthermore, while many empowerment processes take an actor-centred approach, focusing on developing individual skills and capacities to empower individuals (cf. Schumacher, 1973) there are also questions of how such bottom-up approaches can challenge entrenched structural power relationships – for example the power of political elites and capitalist markets. For example, Korten warns:

'Some NGOs have equated people-centred development with participatory village development interventions. Such interventions are important, but in themselves are generally inconsequential...People-centred development...calls for an equality-led transformation of institutions and values to restore community, redistribute power, and reallocate earth's natural wealth' (Korten, 1995:178-9)

It is these complex and difficult debates surrounding concepts of power and empowerment which form the basis of much of the critique of participation.

Challenges to participation

Drawing on gender and power analysis, early critiques of participation challenged its simplistic understandings of community homogeneity. Participatory approaches were being used by development practitioners to create spaces for community members to reflect on their reality, discuss and analyse their experience, and share their knowledge. But who were the community members? Who was speaking and whose voices were heard? As Chambers commented:

[T]hose whom outsiders meet and interact with are most likely to be middle aged or youths, male, from dominant groups and economically better off (Chambers, 1997: 183).

Guijt and Shah (1998) suggest that participatory initiatives took a naïve view of community, seeing it as harmonious and equitable without recognising the myriad differences which exist, including those of age, economic position, religion, caste, ethnicity and gender. If these differences are not recognised participatory practice may further disempower the very groups it is hoping to reach, by providing more spaces for the more powerful community members to speak out concerning their own interests. Moreover, even if consultation is specifically targeted at women or children, 'complex rules of deference and propriety...govern what they can say, who, and to whom' (Jellema, 1998: 116-7).

Fiedrich (2000) builds on this point and suggests that community members will not only say what they think development practitioners wish to hear, but that development workers are prone to find empowerment 'where it belongs' (i.e. in development projects). This leads to people exaggerating the results of participation by failing to acknowledge other events which might have had impact during the project period and also by missing alternative outcomes which were not originally predicted in the project plan or monitoring framework (Feidrich and Jellema, 2003)

Other early critiques focused on the romanticisation of local knowledge, and a denial of the knowledge of the development professional. This action limits the ability of those facilitating the participatory process to challenge inaccurate information or negative cultural practices, and also reinforces the power relations between the project coordinators and participants as information sharing is only one-way, thereby preventing true collaboration and exchange (Archer and Newman, 2003).

In 'Participation: The New Tyranny?' Cooke and Kothari (2001) focus on the technical, political and conceptual limits of participation (2001: 5). They identify 'methodological revisionism' as a key contributor to what they perceive as the tyranny of participation. Participatory practitioners continually revise their practice, claiming to overcome the challenges through technical adaptations, thus enabling participatory practice to continue to spread. Worse still revision is compounded by three further tyrannies: of the decision-making and control (with flawed participatory practice overriding existing, and legitimate, decision-making processes); of the group (where group dynamics reinforce the interests of the powerful); and of the method (through driving out other methodologies which have advantages over participatory approaches) (2001: 7). Contributors to the volume deepen these criticisms by raising a range of related issues.

For example, Cleaver (2001) explores the preferences held by participatory practitioners for certain types of institution; while Hildyard et al (2001) argue that there is a general lack of understanding of how local power operates. Taylor (2001) and Kothari (2001) describe how participatory practice can obscure or reinforce such power dynamics; and Mohan (2001) criticises the Eurocentric nature of participatory tools and processes, including the way non-local development workers conceive their roles and form their understanding.

These criticisms indicate a naivety among participatory practitioners, made worse by the 'tyrannical' nature of participation which encourages practitioners to be viewed akin to a shaman (Francis, 2001). Cooke and Kothari end their introduction by claiming that the critiques in their volume are more overarching and fundamental than earlier critiques, particularly given:

[H]ow the language of empowerment masks a real concern for managerial effectiveness, the quasi-religious associations of participatory rhetoric and practice; and how an emphasis on the micro-level of intervention can obscure, and indeed sustain, broader macro level inequalities and injustices (Cooke and Kothari, 2001: 14).

However, despite these hard-hitting criticisms the edited volume concludes by suggesting that many of the problems can be overcome through being open and honest about the complexities of participation, and recognising the power relationships that exist in the community and in the development profession. The authors therefore do not dismiss the concept outright, but highlight its difficulties.

These critiques have led to a refinement of participatory practice, with many practitioners placing greater emphasis and awareness on understanding community dynamics and the role of the development practitioner. However, it is easier to overcome the criticisms in theory than in practice and the danger of methodological revisionism still applies, especially given the extent of support for participation and the fact that many who are willing to fund the approaches are searching for a technical solution to development (Chambers, 2007). Moreover, there is still a lack of critical thought with regard to the limits of participation per se. Brock and Pettit (2007) highlight that participation does not necessarily lead to effective 'voice', as this is not only dependent on the spaces for participation, but also on whether there are institutions which will respond. This suggests that participation needs to be considered in relation to wider power structures and forces for change, and balanced with work focusing beyond the micro-level (Korten, 1995).

There are two distinct responses to the challenge of engaging with structural power relations. These involve either supporting the role of local participatory practice in influencing national understanding and practice; or investing in a separate stream of work designed to engage with and challenge structural inequalities. The first option has led to various attempts to use participatory processes to build links between micro level realities and the making and influencing of national policy. Such ideas were key in the development of Participatory Poverty Assessments, a term coined by the World Bank in 1992 and used by a range of governmental and non-governmental institutions to include 'poor people's views in the analysis of poverty and the formulation of strategies to reduce it through public policy' (Norton et al, 2001: 6).. However, these processes tend to view participation as instrumental rather than transformatory (McGee et al, 2002), a dynamic I explore in Chapters Five-Eight. The latter option has led to many NGOs and International NGOs becoming directly involved in advocacy work – which is also discussed in detail later in this thesis (Chapters Four and Seven). In response to these actions it is important to note that unless sustained effort is placed on really listening and responding to the outputs from local participatory processes it is likely that organisations will end up with 'policy-based evidence' rather than 'evidence-based policy' (Marmot, 2004). This is a situation that is reinforced by funders who expect organisations to define in advance the outcomes of any development intervention (Welbourn, 2007) suggesting that the aid system itself constrains the creativity and potential of participatory practice.

The majority of these criticisms are targeted at the aid-led development mainstream, where participation has been given a privileged place on the agenda, sold as the solution to any and all development shortcomings. Many would argue that this conception of participatory development has no intention or potential to be transformatory: its ultimate goal, even if not expressed as such, is to legitimise a Western style economy and democracy. This is very different from the emergent participation as experienced in Latin American popular education movements, where participation was a political process, aimed at social transformation. However, it is also noteworthy that much of the published writings on participation, follow an anglo-centric academic tradition and are consequently limited in the debates and practice they consider (Brock and Pettit, 2007). Brock and Pettit suggest that further insights, learning and strengthening of practice could be achieved through building stronger links between participation in development and deliberative democracy, or participation for citizenship (ibid: 5). The question remains, however, as to whether these more political participatory processes

can ever be brought into the mainstream, where funding relationships and understanding of what constitutes development are dominated by Western thinking and characterised by unequal North/South power relations.

Moving forward with participation

It was perhaps typical of participatory practice that the challenges raised in 'Participation: The New Tyranny' were reviewed in a conference two years later entitled 'Participation: From Tyranny to Transformation? Exploring new approaches to participation in development'. Here a range of practitioners and academics explored the extent to which participatory practice had responded to its critiques. The conference suggested that the new and innovative strategies developed by people, mainly in developing countries, to express their agency in development arenas, established participation as a legitimate and transformative approach to development.

The papers address a range of issues, emphasising the importance of balancing grassroots participation with a wider political agenda, including engagement with political institutions at national and international level, while also highlighting the importance of participatory spaces as ways of practising these types of engagement, using them as rehearsal spaces to build skills and confidence to get voices heard (Williams, 2003, Kesby, 2003). Many also challenged the claim that participation undermines pre-existing decision-making and action processes, suggesting that the way that participatory practice is contextualized and evolves is dependent on local culture and that it is only through understanding local institutions and social norms that participation can be properly implemented (Henry, 2003). Drawing on concepts such as citizenship and participatory governance the conference participants reaffirmed the importance of participatory processes, while also recognizing that participation is not a panacea, and has limitations:

Agreed, the participatory methods alone are inadequate....but they clearly provide openings to several other issues that may otherwise have not become evident (James, 2003, conference abstract).

However, on a more cautionary note, Mathie and Cunningham (2003) suggest that it is the influence of external actors, such as NGOs, which can corrupt transformative development. They argue much can be learnt from endogenous community-driven development, which draws on a range of assets and deep knowledge of the context without the involvement of an external agency:

NGOs that have been “purveyors” of participatory approaches can learn from these experiences, and try to simulate them. Yet this may require the most challenging transformation of all – that of the principles and practices of the NGO sector and the needs-based, problem-solving paradigm in which they operate. (Mathie and Cunningham, 2003, conference abstract).

Much of the discussion at the conference could be interpreted to suggest that a move to rights-based working would provide the perfect opportunity to rescue participation, placing it:

[W]ithin a radical politics of development that is analytically and strategically informed by a notion of ‘citizenship’ ...[reconstituting] participation as a genuinely transformative approach to development (Hickey and Mohan 2003, conference abstract).

However, as the next section illustrates (a discussion which is further developed throughout my research), many of the same tensions and tyrannies could remain in the move to rights-based practice, depending on how rights are interpreted and how a rights-based approach is conceived and practised.

Human rights and development

The rationale of poverty reduction no longer derives merely from the fact that the poor have needs but also from the fact that they have rights – entitlements that give rise to legal obligations on the part of others. (OHCHR, 2005: paragraph 19)

Human rights and rights-based approaches to development have been growing in popularity since the end of the cold war, and particularly over the last ten years. Uvin (2004) comments that adding human rights language to development discourse:

[F]orces development practitioners to face up to the tough questions of their work: matters of power and politics, exclusion and discrimination, structure and policy (2004: 2).

However, there are diverse reasons behind the growth in interest in rights and development, and not all agencies that use the language of rights would make the links to power and politics.

The wide range of applications of the term ‘rights-based development’, coupled with the multiple interpretations of it, have led to much scrutiny and criticism. Reflecting on the experience of participatory development, Pettit and Wheeler (2005: 1) ask ‘how do we know that ‘rights-based development’ is not just putting new labels on old wine?’, and Piron (2005) questions whether rights-based approaches are ‘more than a metaphor?’. This section begins by outlining key theoretical debates on rights. These theoretical

debates are of central importance to understanding the practical challenges experienced in implementing a rights-based approach, and I return to reflect on these in my discussion of ActionAid's rights-based work later in this thesis.

Following the theoretical discussion I then look briefly at the rise of rights in development, including the 'Right to Development', and explore whether rights offer a fundamental re-conception of global power relations and development, before looking at the growing use of 'rights-based approaches'. The section concludes by returning to the issue of participatory development, asking what impact the rights-based discourse has on participatory practice, and whether linking rights and participation provides a framework for a radical (non-mainstream) bottom-up approach to development.

Understanding rights

While some argue that the concept of rights derives from deep moral ideas of justice and human dignity that can be found across many cultures and religions, others emphasise the distinctiveness of 'rights' as Western and modern. Rights have been defined through people's struggles across the world. However, much of the focus on rights in development takes the Universal Declaration as its reference point, and draws from the International Bill of Rights as supported by the UN system. This international interpretation draws directly from the seventeenth century Western concept of **natural rights**, attributed to the individual (Mahoney, 2007).

At this time it was generally agreed that rights were a precursor to civil law but that these rights could, and should, be enshrined within a legislative framework as part of a social contract. This thinking influenced constitutional development in America and France - the 'Bill of Rights' and 'The Rights of Man', respectively. It is noteworthy that although the American and French revolutions proclaimed universal rights in theory, in practice these bills restricted rights to white, propertied males (Freeman, 2002: 153).

However, in Britain, by the end of the eighteenth century there was a growing critique on the idea of natural rights. For example, Burke, watching events in America and France, emphasised the importance of inherited social structures in determining rights. 'Natural subordination' meant that rights were a product of hereditary and tradition (Mahoney, 2007: 27). From his utilitarian perspective, Bentham argued:

Natural rights is simple nonsense... Right, the substantive right, is the child of law; from real laws come real rights; but from imaginary laws, from laws of nature, fancied and invented by poets, rhetoricians and dealers in moral and intellectual points, come imaginary rights... (Quoted by Mahoney, 2007: 30)

These arguments did not condemn the notion of rights per se, but did reject the idea that such rights were natural. This was an early statement of a **constructivist** view of rights –rights were conceived as the product of human thought or evolution.

The focus on rights decreased in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, the horrors of Nazism and the spirit of post war collaboration brought rights back onto the agenda internationally (Freeman, 2002) and as a basis for the welfare state in the UK (Marshall, 1950 and Tawney, 1931).

The debate over whether rights are naturally given or socially constructed remains relevant in understanding rights today, for it is closely related to the questions of whether rights are culturally defined, or universally relevant, and whether they are inalienable. It also relates to debates as to whether rights only exist through belonging to a nation state or more broadly, as a global citizen (Pogge, 2002, Sen, 2009).

Gready and Ensor (2005) argue that both natural rights and a social contract of rights resonate. They note that there are countless examples of groups of individuals appealing to a higher sense of morality and justice, claiming rights as ethical entitlements as part of their struggle, suggesting a natural conception of rights. Various social and political movements, such as the anti-slavery movement or the suffragette movement, depended on a universal conception of rights. Moreover, campaigners in these movements demanded political rights so that they could defend their economic and social rights, highlighting the interdependence of rights.

However, Gready and Ensor also argue that because of very real power imbalances there is a need for a social contract approach, so that inequalities can be challenged. For these authors then, rights continue to evolve at the interface of natural rights idealism and activism; and social contract pragmatism and enforcement (Gready and Ensor, 2005: 5).

Describing, distinguishing and categorising rights

The idea of socially constructed or naturally received rights resonates in the modern day distinction between moral and legal rights. For example, Cranston (1973) differentiates between ‘legal rights’, which vary from country to country, and ‘moral rights’, which are independent of legislation, and logically pre-exist laws. He also distinguishes between universal moral rights, and special moral rights - the latter being applicable to specific groups of people, for example consumer rights, or child rights (described in Mahoney, 2007: 72-3, quoting Cranston, 1973). This analysis has direct relevance to how rights have entered development discourse, with a strong focus on

government obligation and legislative frameworks, along with a recognition of the need to further develop and distinguish the rights of historically excluded groups (for example indigenous populations).

Drawing on the analysis of others, Mahoney argues that human rights are not just an abstract concept. Rather, there is an intrinsic need for institutions to support human rights (Pogge, 2002); rights suggest an entitlement, and while rights are reasons to inform how we should treat each other, (Orend, 2002) they are also 'a personal prerogative, a power' (Mahoney, 2007: 84). The idea of entitlement and obligation is central to how rights are pursued in practice by development actors.

Others have sought to distinguish between different types of rights. For example, the distinction between a 'liberty' and a 'claim' right is attributed to Hohfeld (1919). Liberty rights give humans the freedom to act in certain ways – but it is up to the individual to take up the right, whereas claim rights require someone else to deliver, to enable an individual achieve the right. Other terminology has also been used to make similar distinctions, such as negative and positive rights, active and passive rights, the right to act and the right to receive, procedural and substantive rights, or libertarian and welfare rights. These distinctions were drawn on in the development of the two international covenants that led on from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (see below).

Beyond the broad categorisation of rights there are also questions as to whether there exists a 'hierarchy of rights'. Cooney (1998) argues that some rights are more basic than others, and that the basic rights lead to implied rights. For example, the right to life is foundational, and the right to healthcare implied from this. Orend (2002) describes first and second level rights – commenting that while security, subsistence, liberty and equality are first level, the more specific rights contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are second level (described by Mahoney, 2007: 77). Rawls discusses 'a special class of urgent rights', including freedom from slavery, liberty of conscience and the security of ethnic groups, and he is clear that they are universal, and 'binding on all peoples and societies...' (Rawls, 1999: 81). Mahoney summarises these discussions by distinguishing between basic human rights 'those which are general and universal' and instrumental human rights, which are 'means to achieving or expressing or specifying basic rights, and which may vary according to circumstances of culture, time and place' (Mahoney, 2007: 77).

A different approach to prioritising rights comes from Nussbaum and Sen's (1993) 'capability framework'. The framework sets the goal of maximum individual freedom

and human flourishing in which capabilities provide opportunity and ability to achieve a life of human dignity. The concept of capabilities emphasises the need to consider the content of rights – moving beyond rights as an abstract concept to considering how rights can be secured by different people in different contexts. This is central in considering how rights and participation interact in development processes.

Gready and Ensor (2005) distinguish between a theory of rights and its application stating that:

Whereas fundamental human rights and justice can be construed as absolute concepts and non-negotiable, the application, interpretation and realisation of rights and justice are negotiable within the context of specific political, historical and cultural conditions (2005:11).

They argue that the distinction between a ‘choice’ and an ‘interest’ theory of rights can help in understanding how rights are developed in practice. Choice theory argues that a right exists when a right holder is able to exercise control over their claim on another’s duty; a right therefore requires a right holder, who waives or enforces the duty. This is comparable to a legal theory of rights. Interest theory, however focuses on individual interest rather than the legal formulation of those rights and:

[I]mply constructive engagement with cultural norms....and suggests that the struggle for justice is at times best served through rights defined locally first and globally second. By grounding rights in individual interests – that is to say, well-being – the political, social and moral necessity for legal rights is also revealed, and their aspirational aspect, emphasizing what should happen over what can happen... (ibid: 2005:11)

Interest theory allows for rights to be generated locally and thus to be dynamic. This dynamic, of enabling locally defined rights, is central to my findings and is explored further later in this thesis.

The authors also note that, by drawing on Kant’s distinction between perfect and imperfect obligations (whether rights are the duty of a particular body, or ‘addressed generally to anyone who can help’ (2005:12)), this conception of rights in practice may be extended so that:

there are rights in search of duties, right holders in search of duty bearers....[a] reformulated social, political and legal agenda...[with] the responsibility of different actors...(ibid, 2005: 12).

The idea of a dynamic definition of rights and shifting duty bearers is particularly relevant given the current deterritorialisation of development (Robinson, 2002), the realities of globalisation and shifting national and international responsibilities. It also

has particular relevance when considering the action of International NGOs in conceptualising and implementing rights-based approaches to development (see below).

These debates about the philosophical and social nature of rights, and preferences for particular hierarchies in supporting and implementing rights play a major role in understanding the way human rights are conceptualised in international law, international politics and global economics.

Human rights and international law

Through the United Nations system there is now a substantial body of international law regarding human rights. Support for human rights operates through a dual approach - through providing a legal framework (treaties are ratified and then integrated into domestic law – which may include specific national legislation, policy and resourcing) and through political pressure exerted through the UN system. This dual approach, of a legal framework and political pressure, is crucial at every level when translating human rights theory into practice.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent legislation

The United Nations came into being in 1945 based on a charter which stated that the ‘people of the United Nations’ were determined:

- to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and
- to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and
- to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom, (<http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/preamble.shtml> accessed 25.3.12).

There was a recognition that national bills of rights had not protected the world against Nazism, and a belief in the need for an international bill of rights. The Universal Declaration was conceived as a short, inspirational, and energising document that could be used by ‘common people’. A United Nations Declaration is not legally binding, but it has high political and moral significance.

Drawing substantially from concepts enshrined in earlier US and French Bills of Rights, the Declaration brought the concept of universal rights into the international arena, for the first time suggesting a shared international moral and legal code.

The move from a Declaration to institution building and standard setting, and a legally binding covenant was a slow process. The initial political will gave way to Cold War politics, and soon discussions were polarised, with the US and Western Democracies championing the importance of civil and political rights, and the Communist and Socialist states, as well as the newly independent former colonies, emphasising the importance of economic and social rights. It was not until 1966 that two covenants were developed, codifying the rights in international law. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights (ICESCR) took 10 more years to be formally ratified and to date there are still many countries which have only ratified one of the covenants - for example, the US has yet to ratify ICESCR. While the Declaration has significance as 'customary' international law, it is only through ratification of the covenants themselves that states are legally bound to 'protect, respect and fulfil' ⁶ the range of human rights.

Following these two covenants there has been a series of additional international treaties regarding specific categories of human rights, notably The Convention of the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD, 1965), The Convention for Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979) and The Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989). The principles of non-discrimination also cut across all the international treaties⁷. In all the treaties the primary contract is between the state and its citizens, with the citizens as 'rights-holders' and the State as 'duty-bearer'.

The treaties spell out obligations of the state to promote the rights; to translate them into policies and practices for all; to prevent violations; and to provide remedies to victims should their rights be violated. The framework of obligations creates the space for civil society activists to demand governments fulfil specific rights (see Chapter Five for more discussion on this). Unfortunately, even among states which have ratified the treaties and despite the universal nature of the declaration, human rights fall far short of universal application in practice. As Freeman (2002: 171) comments: 'Human Rights declarations are cheap, whereas Human Rights implementation is rather expensive' and

⁶ *Respect* refers to what government does through its organs, agents and structures of law – i.e. Ensuring there is constitutional provision that is non-discriminatory; *Protect* refers to the steps taken to prevent acts of direct and indirect rights violations, and *fulfil* requires taking measures to ensure that people can secure their rights, for example providing non-discriminatory access to education.

⁷ Unlike the ICESCR anti-discrimination law is rarely qualified, it is absolute rather than subject to progressive realisation. This means using anti-discrimination law to secure certain rights can be more powerful than ICESCR, especially as international courts are more willing to pass judgement on this type of violation, see Newman, 2007: 52

there are various factors which act to constrain the implementation of these rights – due to structural, social and economic inequalities, power relations and political will. There are also theoretical challenges to the UDHR.

Theoretical challenges to UDHR

There are various theoretical challenges to the UDHR which derive from unresolved ideological issues regarding how the human rights were selected, defined and universalised. This section looks briefly at four key challenges which are particularly relevant to my own research in relation to the links between participatory and rights-based approaches.

1. Universalism versus relativism: Universalism sees human rights as timeless and absolute moral truths, while cultural relativists say that they are expressions of a particular culture. Given its links to the US and French Bills of Rights, the UDHR is clearly based on an eighteenth century interpretation of individual freedoms, linked to a twentieth century preference for liberal democracy. It can be argued that UDHR itself is a product of Western Imperialism, and this claim has enabled some to reject the concept of universal human rights. Arguing against this, Freeman (2002) emphasises that the charge of Western Imperialism is irrelevant as clearly the UDHR is ‘morally good’. Others emphasise that:

The Universal Declaration...proclaims a set of individual rights and government obligations that are appropriate for modern states, but it does not require abandoning all of the moral, ethical, religious or philosophical norms that guide most people’s lives. Human rights norms do not mandate a particular social order or how a country balances competing priorities (Hannum, 2005: 353).

Parekh (2005: 284) argues that when pitted against each other, ‘moral universalism and moral relativism are incoherent extremes’ and there is a need for pluralist universalism in relation to human rights. He states that humans belong to a common species, share basic needs and require certain conditions under which to develop their capacities and live meaningful lives. But they live in different contexts, with different histories, cultures and expectations, with distinct internal tensions. Echoing Gready and Ensor’s (2005) discussion of natural or social contract of rights, he argues that inequalities within cultures imply the need for universal human rights, but that these rights need to be interpreted within a cultural context.

Kolodziej (2003:10) builds on this to suggest that human rights are a ‘universal force and normative ideal’ but are clearly delineated within different ideational contexts. The idea of pluralist universalism is clearly problematic when there is a clash between a

human right and a cultural context. Here the writings of the feminist Phillips (2002) are important, and given the centrality of this to the interaction between participation and rights, I discuss this extensively in Chapter Five.

While questions of universalism and relativism have led to critiques of the UDHR in theory, in practice it is important to note that no country has explicitly rejected the Declaration⁸. At the Vienna Conference in 1993, where 171 countries participated, it was proclaimed that:

[H]uman rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent and interrelated. The international community must treat human rights globally in a fair and equal manner, on the same footing, and with the same emphasis...it is the duty of states...to promote and protect all human rights (point 1.5 Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action).

However, although it might be widely accepted that the UDHR is a force for good, it is also clear that UDHR does focus on individual rights and freedoms. In addition, the state is identified as the sole 'duty-bearer'; there is little focus on collective rights, or how other bodies can both protect or abuse human rights.

This is challenged directly by Ensor, who argues that liberal rights as conceived within UDHR run the risk of undermining communities because of their failure to recognise that the 'self' is embedded in communal commitments and values (2005: 254). Instead he argues for a cultural theory of rights (a point I return to in Chapters Five and Six when considering rights-based approaches). Others argue for the importance of collective rights.

2. Collective rights? Kolodziej (2003, 8) highlights how preferences for individual or group rights 'shift in focus as one moves across regions'. Whereas neo-liberal thought privileges individual human rights, others stress group claims over individual rights. This is often apparent in religious communities where religious doctrine is upheld above individual freedoms. He gives as examples the Catholic anti-abortion lobby, or conservative Islamic interpretations which specify particular roles and behaviour for women. But he continues to note that collective or group rights can also be applied to a specific group of people - for example, in the right to national self-determination.

⁸ Although some countries abstained from the original vote – notably Saudi Arabia and some countries from the communist block.

Another way of using the concept of 'group rights' is to describe rights that are unique to a specific group. While there is some concern that the concept of group rights can be dangerous as by appealing to group rights individual rights can be denied (Jones, 2005: 147) there are also forceful arguments for this type of right. For example, Orford (2001: 137) suggests that only those who have not had their rights abused could argue against this type of right. For example, white men from the West may deny the concept of group rights, but women, black people, homosexuals or those living in poverty who struggle to secure their human rights are clearly able to argue for them as a group.

This view is reinforced by Patel and Mitlin's (2009) analysis of the way Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI) have pursued their rights. Patel and Mitlin argue that a rights-based approach (see below) has tended to favour individual rights over collective solutions, and that such an approach would be inappropriate for poor vulnerable women acting as part of SDI. Collaborative engagement is a safer option than confrontation (ibid: 114) and is more strategic, and more likely to achieve sustainable rights:

The state rarely acts in the interests of the poor...[but] if what the poor want is also good for the larger city then the solution becomes attractive...SDI affiliates aim to establish a commonality of interest to further their strategic needs...[They] develop alternatives, build relationships and then negotiate within those relationships (ibid 120-121).

Collective rights can therefore be argued from a solidarity perspective, and have an important role to play in development action – where a range of different strategies may be used to mobilise a specific group of people, for example to mobilise girls to fight for a series of specific interventions to enable them to access their right to education.

Collective action might target human rights as described in the UDHR or advocate the inclusion of additional human rights in the UDHR. How they are conceived and pursued is of central relevance to INGO action, considering both how local groups are mobilised, but also how wider solidarity links are developed, across local boundaries and national borders.

3. Feminism and human rights: The development of CEDAW responded to the early feminist critiques of the Universal Declaration: that rights that were of fundamental importance to women had not been included in the original Declaration because of an artificial line existing between the public and private sphere. The existence of CEDAW has been instrumental in debates and legislation to protect women and children against rape, domestic violence and child sexual abuse.

However, the campaigns on such issues have demonstrated the complexity of moving from rights theory to rights practice. For example, Kapur (2005) highlights how many of the anti-violence campaigns portray women as weak and vulnerable; and that this has enabled restrictions on women's rights under the pretext of the restrictions being for their own protection. Arguing that the underlying concepts of CEDAW have been manipulated, and used as an excuse for Western imperialism in relation to how women are viewed and 'rescued' from their 'brutalising cultures', Kapur (ibid:133) notes how religious groups and conservative forces have argued that the language of women's rights is bound up with the concept of a Western woman, leading to women in the South being forced to choose between their religion and their gender. Furthermore, by focusing on the individual victim the structural causes of oppression and violence are ignored. Feminist critiques therefore emphasise the need to take a structural perspective on women's rights, to understand how women's rights are being defined and taken up, and by whom, in order to readdress the balance between universal rights and social construction.

Cornwall and Molyneux (2008) suggest that rights have been adopted selectively to suit specific regimes and political preferences. They ask what notion of 'womanhood' is embodied in human rights discourse and warn that female solidarity can never be a given. But, they also argue that rights language is important in mobilising for gender and social justice:

Struggles to acquire legal rights achieve more than encoding claims in legislation; they foster a sense of entitlement, of the right to have rights, that in itself constitutes an important dimension of rights practice (Cornwall and Molyneux, 2008: 15).

This discourse highlights the importance of power analysis in understanding human rights. The experiences of women illustrate how complex power relations and social inequalities impact on how human rights are defined and applied in practice. Moving from legislation to actually accessing rights is dependent on a range of factors, and may require additional policies to ensure that any right is 'accessible, available, adaptable and appropriate' (4A framework)⁹. The process of moving from a theoretical conception of rights to practical implementation of that right in context is of central importance to how a rights-based approach evolves in practice (cf. Chapter Five).

⁹ The Right to Education campaign uses the 4A framework to assess the extent to which the right to education is being respected, protected and fulfilled, see www.right-to-education.org

4. Marxism and human rights: A final critique of the UDHR comes from a Marxist perspective. Marx argued that the emphasis on individual rights as an ideology helped to mask the class nature of society, thereby protecting the interests and freedoms of the bourgeoisie over those of the proletariat. Based on this criticism, Marx is often portrayed as an enemy of rights. However Corlett argues that Marx's critique relates to how rights are exercised and protected in capitalist societies, rather than as a critique of rights per se, and he suggests that Marx's condemnation of capitalism 'itself implicitly acknowledges certain moral rights...that when respected protect the interests and legitimate claims of all persons' (Corlett, 2005: 248-9).

The Marxist critique exposes a fundamental concern with the language of rights, and Orford (2001: 177) notes that 'the language and concepts of rights provides no purchase for resisting the excesses of capitalism'. The ease with which rights are associated with neo-liberal agendas of personal freedom (Harvey, 2005) reinforces this critique and highlights the key challenge faced by those wishing to work with rights to further agendas of social justice and equality. As Newman (2005) notes human rights are a concept empty of deeper political ideology and as such open to many different uses and interpretations.

The slippery nature of rights means that there is no automatic assumption that a rights-based approach to development will challenge a mainstream development approach rooted in neo-liberal philosophy and aimed at promoting global economic growth, rather than engaging with concepts of inequality and powerlessness. This issue is explored further in Chapter Five.

If human rights discourse only supports the concept of a human as property owning, self sufficient, atomistic, competitive and individualistic there is no space for collective control over common resources. The problems of an uneasy coexistence between global capitalism and human rights for social justice can be seen when exploring how rights are defined and prioritised today.

Working on rights today

It is generally agreed that the rise of interest in rights in relation to development coincided with the end of the cold war, and the shift to liberal democracies across much of the world. In addition to this in the early 1990s there were a series of UN conferences which explored human rights issues (Rio Earth Summit 1992, Vienna Conference 1993, Beijing Conference, 1995) which furthered international interest and collaboration on rights.

At this time there were many changes in the field of development. For example, there were shifting expectations of NGOs and increasing critiques of their practice. This included concern with the limitation of how traditional development projects could bring about long-term development and social change. Civil society actors recognised the need to tackle the structures of inequality and exclusion:

[T]o confront these at the legal and political as well as social, cultural and economic levels...[Additionally] the rise of more vocal and organised civil societies and social movements in many contexts also blurred the traditional lines between rights and development. Development therefore needed rights as much as rights needed development (Pettit and Wheeler, 2005: 2)

However, an increase in interest in rights cannot be attributed solely to a push from civil society actors. The rights discourse also attracted interest from a range of international and bilateral development actors who had differing reasons for their focus on rights. The increased emphasis on aid harmonisation, which culminated in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005), needed to be balanced with an investment in strong public institutions and civil society monitoring. Rights therefore found their place within the new policy agenda of the 'post-Washington consensus' (Edwards and Gaventa, 2001).

The implications of a rights-based language and framework are far-reaching, and yet are dependent on who is speaking, whose rights are considered, and how these rights are understood. Global power relations and structural inequalities have determined where global attention has focused, and which rights are prioritised. For example, the influence of value base and whose priorities count is clearly illustrated by the fact that rights-based development has focused on rights and obligations as expressed in the UDHR (i.e. between states and citizens) rather than on the idea of collective rights as expressed through the right to development.

Right to development and rights in development

[D]evelopment is a comprehensive economic, social, cultural and political process, which aims at the constant improvement of the well-being of the entire population ... States have the duty to co-operate with each other in ensuring development and eliminating obstacles to development. States should realize their rights and fulfil their duties in such a manner as to promote a new international economic order based on sovereign equality, interdependence, mutual interest and co-operation among all States (The Right to Development: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/rtd.htm>, accessed 6.2.11)

Many in the Global South saw the 1986 UN Declaration on the Right to Development as:

[A] key milestone....that would result in a New International Economic Order (NIEO) that was fair to poor countries.... Pointing to inequalities between North and South, it stresses the collective obligation of all states to create a just and equitable international environment for the realisation of the right to development. (Cornwall and Nyamu-Musembi, 2005:12).

Originally proposed in 1972, the declaration was a framework for international resource redistribution. It described a group right, obliging Northern governments to support the development of Southern populations. The language implied that development assistance was legal obligation rather than ethical or moral duty. However, when the declaration was finally agreed fourteen years later, it was passed as a resolution rather than a treaty, and therefore was non-binding (Uvin, 2004: 41).

Had development practice been based on this declaration it is likely that a whole range of development interventions (from aid, to technical support and policy advice, to trade and debt relief) would be shaped differently today. However, the majority of northern governments have not supported the Right to Development:

[I]ndustrial countries rejected this because they saw it as the imposition of one-sided obligations and an invasion into what should be, according to them, the discretionary/ voluntary field of development assistance. (Cornwall and Nyamu-Musembi, 2005: 13).

Thus the Right to Development plays a backseat in development today. It is still supported by many Southern governments and civil society activists, but largely ignored by donor agencies: 'legally it was a milestone but politically and practically it has been a total failure' (Uvin, 2004: 42). The failure to challenge and transform these international power relations is demonstrative of the on-going Northern dominance in international development.

Instead of the radical propositions contained in the Right to Development, rights in development have focused on the domestication of the international legal human rights framework. Through this process the responsibility for human rights has been located squarely at the door of national governments, with little interest or attempt to alter international power relations, or to identify specific obligations on the part of donor countries. Cornwall and Nyamu-Musembi (2005) suggest this shift runs the danger of depoliticising international poverty, abandoning the radical edge that the initial struggles for rights contained, as well as the overt obligations incorporated in the Right to Development. Rights are often conceived in a technical format, as a quick fix in development without considering tough questions concerning the international distribution of power.

Moreover, Cornwall and Nyamu-Musembi assert that the lack of international accountability (such as that enshrined in the Right to Development) undermines any real commitment to rights by bilateral donors, rendering the rights-based approach largely meaningless:

[A] bilateral development agency's primary accountability is to citizens/ taxpayers in its own country...accountability to the recipient state's government is of a loose diplomatic nature, rather than a legal one...[and] direct accountability to the ultimate recipients is non-existent....[W]ithout the possibility of direct accountability...it seems fair to suggest that international development agencies, to varying degrees, use the language of "rights-based approach" to development largely to invoke the discursive power of the concept of rights, without intending to bear the weight of the entirety of consequences that flow from it (Cornwall and Nyamu-Musembi: 2005: 15).

In addition to this lack of international accountability there are also concerns relating to how rights have been prioritised, especially since the increased conflation between international development and 'the War on Terror'. The emphasis on political and civil rights above the economic, social and cultural is reminiscent of the debates that raged during the cold war period, and suggest that little has changed in the West's approach to development, or the corresponding power relations which drive international decision-making and practical accountabilities.

This raises the questions of whether the rights discourse adopted by NGOs differs substantially from a mainstream neo-liberal interpretation of rights. This is a particularly prescient concern given analysis on the impact of donor agendas on NGO practice (Wallace, 2006 Eyben, 2006, Edwards and Hulme, 1997 – see Chapter Four for further discussion). The ability of NGOs to promote an alternative development process and vision is dependent on how they translate understandings of rights into their rights-based practice, a subject introduced here and explored further in Chapter Five.

Human Rights-based approaches

With the advent of interest in rights there has been a burgeoning of rights-based approaches to development. Given the centrality of the United Nations in determining the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, understanding their conception of a human rights-based approach is relevant to understanding rights-based practice:

A human rights-based approach is a conceptual framework for the process of human development that is normatively based on international human rights standards and operationally directed to promoting and protecting human rights. It seeks to analyse inequalities which lie at the heart of development problems and redress discriminatory practices and unjust distributions of power that impede development progress.

Mere charity is not enough from a human rights perspective. Under a human rights-based approach, the plans, policies and processes of development are anchored in a system of rights and corresponding obligations established by international law (UN, 2006: 15).

The UN continues by stating that any rights-based programme should have the fulfilment of human rights as its main objective; and should include working with rights-holders and duty bearers. It should be guided by the principles and standards derived from international human rights treaties (ibid: 15).

Gready and Ensor (2005: 24) draw from documents produced by the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights to note four categories of human rights-based programming. These include: rights as the (incidental) outcome of development work; rights understood as part of sustainable development; specific rights as a goal of development projects; and finally the realisation of all human rights as the ultimate goal of development. Others have also emphasised that a rights-based approach involves neither charity nor simple economic development, 'but a process of enabling and empowering those not enjoying their economic, social and cultural rights to claim their rights' (Cohen 2005: 7); and that it "[reflects] a holistic understanding of the nature of well being' (Eyben 2003: 2).

Whereas previously those delivering development programmes, including NGOs, often treated project recipients as passive beneficiaries, rights-based approaches highlight the need for active participation of beneficiaries – as 'partner citizens' in claiming their rights. The focus is on enabling and empowering people.

This people-centred approach is complemented by a focus on the importance of national government accountability. VeneKlasen et al (2004) comment on how the human rights system has enabled development actors to expand their opportunities to engage with governments and multilateral institutions, to strengthen their policy work (cf. Korten, 1995 understanding of empowerment).

Thus, while development offered those working with legal rights the ability to link to people as active citizens, rather than passive recipients of legislation, human rights offered development practitioners the potential to move beyond the idea of service delivery or charity, and to engage with the systematic causes of inequality and poverty:

Most, if not all, organisations see a "rights-based" or "human rights" approach as a catalyst that can transform the practice of development from a focus on identifying and meeting needs to enabling people to recognise and claim rights that are enshrined in the UDHR... [and as such t]he common principles of rights-

based development, then, might be seen to reside in shifting how development actors “do business” (Nyamu-Musembi and Cornwall 2004: 45).

In addition there is evidence that human rights language has strengthened development practice at the local level. For example, a piece of research compared rights-based and non rights-based projects, looking at issues of participation and inclusion and fulfilling obligations, and concluded that rights-based projects have more success in:

[A]ttaining impacts that will lead to sustained positive change...[t]hey link citizens and state in new ways and create systems and mechanisms that ensure that all actors can be part of accountable development processes (Crawford, 2007: 8-9).

Gready and Ensor (2005: 14) argue that ‘not only are human rights possibly reinventing development, but development has the potential to reinvent human rights’.

However, actual rights-based practice varies significantly between organisations. Actors who adopt rights-based approaches may do so with a variety of motivations and levels of commitment. Nyamu-Musembi and Cornwall (2004: 47) argue that while language and even practice may be empowering and transformatory, there are serious limitations to what can be done within the national borders if rights-based practice is confined to human rights as interpreted by the Universal Declaration. The extent to which those involved in rights-based programming recognise the need to link beyond national governments in the South and include international actors in the North in their rights-based practice, is unclear.

The link between power and rights is given as a key ingredient for ‘rights in development to be able to be a catalyst for change, rather than a top-down bureaucratic exercise’ (Hughes et al, 2005: 63).

It is also important to note that many organisations that claim to follow a rights-based approach focus on rights-based principles of participation, equality and non-discrimination (Jones, A., 2005) rather than relating their work to legal frameworks, a point I discuss in detail in Chapter Five.

Understanding the global context

In 2000 the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were agreed. These eight goals are coordinated by the United Nations and aimed at tackling the human cost of under-development.

Human rights and the Millennium Development Goals are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. The Goals are underpinned by international law, and

should be seen as part of a broader integrated framework of international human rights entitlements and obligations (UN, 2006: 8).

The MDGs focus on key social issues, from hunger, health and education to environmental sustainability, with the final goal calling for a 'partnership for development' - which looks at the role of international trade, debt and the private sector in development. The MDGs provide much of the framework for development aid and strategy today across a range of different institutions, from multilateral and bilateral donors, to INGOs and local civil society activists:

The power of the MDGs lies in the unprecedented global consensus and commitment that they represent. They establish a common index of progress, and a common focus for global partnership for development, which emphasises the needs of poor people (Heyzer, 2005:9).

For example, many aid agencies (for example, The UK Department for International Development, Swedish International Development Agency, Canadian International Development Agency) have realigned their policies (and in some cases their organisational structure) in order to support the MDGs.

However, there is also substantial criticism of the goals, for their technical usage, universal application and focus on outcomes rather than process and progress, as well as the selection and wording of the goals themselves.

For example, ActionAid (cf. International Education Strategy 2005-2010) argues that while the 2000 Dakar Framework for Action on Education for All took a holistic view of education, encompassing early childhood, primary, secondary and adult learning, the MDGs focus exclusively on universal primary education, thus diverting attention from other important elements of education. Women's rights advocates are equally frustrated by the lack of goals on reproductive rights and the absence of issues such as violence against women, seeing the MDGs as a step back from prior achievements on women's rights, and questioning what the relevance of MDGs are for their current work:

Especially when, at face value, the MDGs are operational and are devoid of any analysis of power relations. Nor do they take into account the inequities within the global economic system that exacerbate existing inequalities (Heyzer, 2005: 10)¹⁰.

¹⁰ Heyzer continues to argue that there has in fact been progress, as many of the MDGs use sex disaggregated data in monitoring, but that real progress will not occur until connections are made between the MDGs and global agreements such as CEDAW

Other criticisms focus on their possibilities for implementation, suggesting that they contain unrealistic expectations (Clemens et al, 2004), or critique the continued power of the neoliberal framework pushed by the IMF. While the IMF insists that it helps 'poor countries achieve the sustained high levels of growth that establish the basis for poverty reduction' emphasising its policy advice, technical assistance, financial support and debt relief (<http://www.imf.org/external/np/exr/facts/mdg.htm>, accessed 26.10.11) there is much evidence to suggest that the IMF's macroeconomic policies undermine the achievement of the MDGs themselves (ActionAid, 2005b, 2006b, 2007).

The MDGs, like many earlier development ideas, could be considered an empty concept. Their wording and focus on discrete targets mean that they are open to a range of different interpretations, dependent on the framework within which they are conceived. For example, they can be used equally within a neoliberal framework, or to support ideas of human capabilities, and development as freedom (Sen, 1999). Both Painter (2004) and Shetty (2005) argue that because the MDGs are based on a human rights framework as developed by the United Nations, this gives legitimacy, power and value to the MDGs, meaning that:

Development is not a question of welfare of charity, but an issue of rights and entitlements, based on a recognition of the structural and underlying causes of poverty (Shetty, 2005: 74).

In considering whether the MDGs offer increased opportunity for a rights-based approach to development it is important to consider two dimensions of globalisation. Firstly, as already argued in previous sections, there are a range of powerful institutions that impact on a nation's ability to advance its human rights record. The G8, Bretton Woods Institutions and private sector trans-national corporations, are able to apply a great deal of pressure on national governments and international institutions, potentially with aims that do not accord with the development of national human rights. Unless there is a dramatic change in international power relations, and a redistribution of wealth across nations it is unlikely that national governments will be able to deliver on the rights agenda, or secure their nations right to development. Both Mahoney and Freeman suggest the need for a wider global ethic to exist alongside the human rights frameworks (Mahoney, 2007: 165; Freeman, 2002: 177).

Yet globalisation has also increased connectivity among peoples across national borders. A transformationalist (McGrew, 2000: 351) conception of globalisation emphasises the shifting global power relations and the need to recognise how increasing connections among civil society activists at a global level have meant that people have

acted together in unprecedented ways. This includes the reaction to the World Trade Organisation meeting in Seattle in 2000, the mobilisation of Global Campaign Against Poverty in 2005 and the recent 'Arab Spring' where social media played a significant role in enabling people to connect across much of the Middle East and demand their rights in early 2011. The ease of communication, especially between urban dwellers who have internet access, and participate regularly in social media spaces, but also including rural communities, is enabling people to take a stand in new ways, and collectively demand their human rights.

Stammers argues that historically social movements have been a major source 'for the construction and development of ideas and practices in respect of human rights' (Stammers, 2005: 322). However, he also offers a cautionary warning on the ways in which human rights have been institutionalised, or codified as a result of social movements, suggesting, as discussed earlier in reference to women rights (p.48), that 'there is a real danger that...human rights can come to sustain rather than challenge particular forms of power.' He continues by advising that:

Activists should not assume that human rights...can be simply or easily assessed as being either 'good' or 'bad'. A key issue for an activist must be trying to discern how and when human rights claims and the institutionalisation they typically demand do, in fact, challenge relations and structures of power rather than threaten to, or actually, serve it (ibid: 323).

This indicates the importance of differentiating between using the concept of a right as a tool for mobilisation, and the focus on developing legal recognition for a specific right. It also suggests a need to understand how rights-based practice interacts with current global relations centred on an unequal distribution of power between nation states. The language of rights may create space for coordinated local-national and international action in bringing about more accountable government action and greater investment in pro-poor development. However, there are questions as to the extent such action can contribute to structural transformation of power. For example, does campaigning for international action on development contribute to a broader concept of the Right to Development, or entrench global power relations further, as the rich Northern Countries agree to targets for Southern development? In order to understand this dynamic further it is necessary to explore the interaction between rights and participation.

Rights and power: redefining participation?

While rights-based approaches can be top-down and appropriated from above, they can also take their place in a long history – spanning anti-colonial and anti-

apartheid struggles...of attempts to use, construct and appropriate rights from below to challenge power holders. However, while the rights-based approach identifies structural concerns, can it transform them? The challenges to power often appear local and fragmentary...rather than systemic (Gready and Ensor, 2005: 27).

Much of the earlier criticisms of participatory practice focused on its lack of understanding of power, its emphasis on the micro at the expense of understanding and challenging structural inequalities, and its technical rather than political perspective. It is clear that some of these criticisms are equally applicable to human rights-based approaches. Depending on how they are conceived and operationalised, rights can be a vehicle for furthering neo-liberal agendas and Western power. Alternatively they can be conceived and practiced in order to transform global power relations, to fundamentally challenge the structures which keep certain sectors of society living in poverty. By linking rights and participation the potential to radicalise participatory practice, and locate rights-based working within an empowering transformative process becomes clear.

Despite the critiques of the UDHR mentioned earlier, the existence of such an international vehicle provides a good reference point for people who prioritise human development above national economic growth. Human rights are an alternative development target. They also provide civil society actors with the potential to engage with national and international actors, to encourage – through joint action or adversarial advocacy - duty bearers to deliver on their obligations. And significantly, by integrating rights into participatory practice it becomes possible to address some of the critiques of participation, bringing back a radical political understanding of a development process – linking local capacity building with directly challenging the structural causes of poverty and oppression.

In addition the importance of participation to rights is clear. VeneKlasen et al (2004) suggest that rights without participation:

[Runs the danger of missing the] dynamic aspect of the political process that shapes the extent to which rights are enforced and realised in people's daily lives.... While working with laws and legal systems is critical, it has become clear that narrow legal approaches usually fail to expand the scope of rights or appreciably strengthen accountability and capacity to deliver resources and justice...(2004: 7).

They continue to highlight the need to start with:

[A]n understanding of rights as a political process... Going beyond “what the law says”, this understanding builds on a notion of rights as a work in progress that is forged and refined through social struggles (ibid).

Integrating participatory approaches with rights, therefore, enables a process of challenging and expanding the current rights agenda. While rights provide participation with the political framework it needs to be able to reassert its contributions to alternative development and social justice, participation offers rights an ability to make connections with people, to move beyond legalistic definitions and to become meaningful in practice.

As this chapter has shown, participation and rights have been individually analysed and critiqued. The limitations and politics of each approach has been discussed and understood. However, academic reflection on how these approaches interact in practice is much more limited. There has been a lack of analysis of how an agenda of transformative participation, which aims at enabling excluded voices to influence development discourse, interacts with concepts of universal human rights. How can a bottom-up approach to development, focused on challenging entrenched structural power relations at every level, be supported within a development process framed by a concept of inalienable and universal human rights?

Where the literature has explored the links between rights and participation (cf. VeneKlasen et al, 2004; Pettit and Musyoki, 2004; Ball, 2005; Ling, 2010) this has generally been premised on the idea that these approaches are complementary and mutually supportive. For example, Pettit and Musyoki (2004) discuss how participation can enable rights to move beyond universal legalistic interpretations, to recognise processes of power and include voices of people often excluded from development debates. While Ling (2010), explores how ‘active participation’ could extend and strengthen Amnesty International’s work, emphasising that:

Participation holds a particularly critical position in RBAs [rights-based approaches] because of the premise that exclusion from decision-making on matters that affect them is in itself a rights violation – or at least a major hindrance to people's ability to have control over decisions that affect their attainment of other rights (Ling, 2010: 8).

However, Ling also recognises that there are challenges for an organisation in embracing a participatory approach:

It is essential to recognise that adopting a more participatory approach to social change work...may well demand significant changes in organisational procedures and norms so as to accommodate the more dynamic, open and

inclusive pattern of work and relationships that participation entails. This can generate tensions at the organisational level as ethical dilemmas arise and trade-offs have to be made (ibid: 35).

He continues to suggest that such tensions can be resolved:

It is through open and inclusive dialogue amongst key internal and external stakeholders, based on shared principles, that the necessary compromises can be negotiated so as to support the attainment of common objectives.

My research however starts by questioning whether these tensions might be more complex and potentially deep-rooted. But before exploring these issues in more detail, it is necessary to step back, to further define my research questions and my research process. My research methodology is therefore the subject of the following chapter.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

In reflecting on methodological questions and refining my research interests I found it useful to keep returning to the question of why I was doing this research. I knew a PhD must contribute to academic knowledge, and like any student I had chosen my subject because I wanted to deepen my own learning and understanding. But I also embarked on this PhD as a practitioner. A PhD provided an opportunity to step back and reflect, but I was also keen that my research would contribute directly to strengthening practice, particularly INGO practice. INGO staff typically dedicate little time to reading and reflecting, and they are unlikely to read a PhD thesis. This meant that to influence practice my research process needed to encourage reflection and action; the research itself needed to be engaging and participatory. I started by considering how I could balance process and product. I wanted to ensure a useful process for those involved while also producing a rigorous document, which was theoretically sound, methodologically coherent and contributed to academic knowledge.

As mentioned in my introduction, too often research on NGOs is either carried out by academics who have little experience of working inside an NGO, or by staff themselves who have their own agendas in reflecting on and documenting experiences (Lewis, 2005). When I embarked on my PhD I was employed by ActionAid but one year into my research I left. While I continued to engage significantly with the organisation I was no longer a true insider. This insider-outsider position was a unique opportunity and has impacted extensively on how I conceived my research and how the process evolved.

This chapter starts by very briefly summarising my research, before turning to explore key debates in social research methodology. I build from this to explain my own approach, the research process I followed, the methods I used, and the ethical issues I considered. I approach this discussion as a reflexive practitioner, considering the key dilemmas I faced in positioning and developing my research.

A brief summary of my research

My overall strategy can be described as qualitative research (with one exceptional element that I discuss in more detail below) rooted in a critical realist position. I took a case study approach to my research, and focused on ActionAid's education work, over a

three-year period: March 2006-February 2009 (these choices are discussed fully below). Following my decision to take the case study approach, my research process can be divided into three periods, although the lines between the three are blurred.

My preliminary focus (March 2006-May 2007) was on document analysis, and involved close collaboration with the education staff at ActionAid. I read, in detail, ActionAid country level documentation of education work and the education materials produced by the International Education Team (IET), the team responsible for supporting education work across the agency. This was followed by a series of interviews, focus group discussions and participant observation, involving members of the IET, and country level 'Education Lead' staff. Meanwhile I continued to undertake text-based analysis. In exploring how the written word complemented or came into tension with oral communication, I was able to unpack some of the challenges in translating rights-based theory into practice.

In my second period (January 2008-March 2009) I deepened these observations through interviews with other (i.e. non-education) staff across ActionAid, and with staff in other comparable organisations, who were responsible for rights-based work. I also had the opportunity to extend my analysis through participation in the ActionAid's 'Education Review', which I jointly coordinated (see below).

The third period (January 2010-October 2011) involved further interviews, integrated with a process of reflection and analysis. My work during this time largely centred on making sense of the material I had gathered, and producing this thesis.

As I describe below, this PhD has shifted and evolved over the past six years in response to the opportunities and challenges faced in studying an ever-shifting phenomenon – of real people working in development. Voluntary sector organisations are characterised by continual change – of funding, staff, function and understanding. I was fortunate that my on-going relationship with ActionAid, particularly with the Head of Education, meant that, while a range of external events challenged my initial approach, new possibilities opened up to me during the course of my research.

However, before exploring the opportunities and challenges presented during the research and the choices I made, it is important to step back briefly to explore the key debates which characterise social research. These debates shaped my decision-making process and understanding of what could be known through social research, and influenced my choices and practice, as I developed my research strategy.

Key issues in social research

[M]ethodological considerations stem from the obvious; that different researchers can offer different interpretations of the same data. Methodology requires researchers to justify their particular research decisions, from the onset to the conclusion of their enquiry' (Clough and Nutbrown, 2002: 18).

In considering social research there are two divergent worldviews on the nature of social phenomena. This section therefore contrasts positivism and interpretivism briefly, before exploring critical realism, the approach which frames my research.

Positivism and quantitative research

In 'The Reflective Practitioner' Schön argues that a positivist worldview has dominated western thought since the nineteenth century and that by the early twentieth century:

Meaningful propositions were held to be of two kinds, either the analytic and essentially tautological propositions of logic and mathematics, or the empirical propositions which express knowledge of the world. The truth of the former was to be grounded in the fact that their negation implies a self-contradiction; the truth of the latter, in some relevant empirical observation...all disagreements about the world could be resolved, in principle, by reference to observable facts (Schön, 1998: 32-33).

The idea that that an objective, independent external social world exists, and can be discovered by the researcher, not only dominates approaches to social research but also influences how development processes are designed and evaluated (Wallace, 2006; Eyben, 2006). The positivist tradition conceives the social world as patterned and predictable, laws of causation are believed to exist, waiting to be tested or discovered by the researcher who is the knowing party (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2004: 7).

Positivist worldviews are often associated with quantitative research. They draw heavily on natural science methods, using measurable and contrasting data to deepen understanding of 'reality' – conceived of as an objective truth. Social phenomena are studied as a scientist would study scientific phenomena, and data (information and facts which are believed to exist as objective truths and can be recorded) are collected, ordered and analysed to determine general principles. Researchers create the research conditions, testing hypotheses within a research context. The research aims to draw conclusions and explain a 'truth' about the social world.

Interpretivism and qualitative research

Interpretivism is contrasted with positivism. For interpretivists the social world is fundamentally subjective, and how it is understood depends on who the researcher is, on their position, interaction, interpretations and on their world-view. Meanings are

context specific, influenced by who you are, your class, gender, culture, experience, knowledge, beliefs etc. There is no absolute truth, and thus the purpose of social research is to deepen understandings of the meanings and functions of human action, discovering and exploring in natural settings.

While the researcher in a positivist process is presented as objective and neutral, the interpretivist researcher is subjective, self-aware and reflective. She or he acknowledges their own position and power, and how this might influence the research process and analysis. The interest is in exploring different perspectives. Interpretivism generally takes a qualitative approach to research – a loosely defined group of research methodologies which involve ‘observation, interaction, interview, narrative and discourse analysis’ (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2004: 3).

Traditionally academia has favoured a positivist approach to research, emphasising the need to discover and the importance of building knowledge that can be applied across contexts. With this there is a concern for the objectivity of the researcher and distance between the researcher and researched. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2004: 4) observe that while quantitative research is described as hard, objective, strong, value free, generalisable, representative and measureable; qualitative research is considered as soft, subjective, process driven, looking for meaning and representational. Quantitative research is understood as ‘real science’, whereas qualitative investigation is situated as ‘merely interpretive’ and therefore less powerful. Qualitative researchers take issue with this, rejecting the very basis of quantitative research, claiming it is not possible to discover an objective truth but only to deepen understanding of interpretations and meaning.

More recently social researchers have recognised the benefits of combining the tools and methods associated with qualitative and quantitative research, and while some (Smith and Heshusius, 1986) argue that the epistemological basis on which these methodologies rest means that the approaches can never be reconciled, others (Bryman, 1992) argue that there are many advantages in designing a research process which uses methods associated with both approaches. Reflecting on the possibilities of linking different approaches I have taken a qualitative approach to my research but I do not completely reject methods (i.e. surveys) typically associated with quantitative approaches.

Critical realism – A midway in research?

While positivists focus on the objective discoverable world, and interpretivists argue that only interpretations can be known, critical realists strike a middle ground. Bhaskar (1975) rejects the view that cause and effect are necessarily linked in a set way but suggests that, by focusing on specific factors within a research context, causal relationships can be identified because they are regularly confirmed.

[Critical realism] seeks to avoid both scientism and science-envy on the one hand and radical rejections of science on the other (Sayer, 2000: 3).

Critical realists value an interpretative approach, but also argue for causal explanation. Furthermore, they recognise the importance of the structured social world and how this impacts on interpretation:

The role of the critical ethnographer is to keep alert to the structural factors while probing meanings: to explore, where possible, the inconsistencies between action and words in terms of structural factors, to see to what extent group processes are externally mediated (Harvey, 1990: 13).

[The] elements of critical social research, are abstraction, totality, essence, praxis, ideology, history and structure...[it] denies that its object of study is 'objective'....[it] cuts through surface appearance...by locating social phenomena in their specific historical context (ibid: 19).

Critical realism is the basis for Pawson and Tilley's (1997) 'Realistic Evaluation'; an approach used extensively in the UK and beyond and used to evaluate projects aiming at 'social change'(see for example www.communitymatters.com.au). Their starting point is that social programmes are designed with the aim of 'social betterment':

[Social programmes are] shaped by a vision of change and they succeed or fail according to the veracity of that vision... realistic evaluation asks not, 'What works?' or, 'Does this program work?' but asks instead, 'What works for whom in what circumstances and in what respects, and how?' (Pawson and Tilley, 2004: 2).

Emphasising the interplay between theory and reality they note:

Programmes are products of the foresight of policy-makers. Their fate though ultimately always depends on the imagination of practitioners and participants. Rarely do these visions fully coincide (ibid: 3).

Given this, they argue for explanations in social science to be understood as 'generative causation'. Cause and effect are linked given 'the right condition and circumstances' (1997: 34). Within social research, human actions need to be considered in relation to the society in which they are embedded – to understand its 'personnel, its place, its past and its prospects' (ibid: 64). The translation of theory into practice depends on how

individuals interpret the theory (2004:5); but is also dependent on 'open systems' – affected by a myriad of events which are external to the programme. The need to understand individual actors within ActionAid, and the wider environment in which the organisation operates, therefore derives from this realistic evaluation perspective.

The process of realistic evaluation contrasts with how evaluation is often pursued in international development. For example, to raise money NGOs are generally required to describe their planned interventions and intended results. Evaluation will tend to focus on reviewing the intervention and identifying outcomes – related to the indicators described in the project plan (Wallace et al, 2006; Eyben, 2006). There is little room for findings that do not fit into the project format, or discussion of the individuals involved in planning and supporting the action. All too often the wider operating context is ignored and there is an inherent assumption that development interventions can be controlled, and will lead to previously defined outcomes. While this may be appropriate for certain types of intervention (for example vaccination drives), social programmes are typically more complex. The pressure to show connections between input and outcome can limit an organisation's (or individual's) ability to learn from their work, delinking evaluation from learning (Shutt, 2006) and therefore limiting its potential to lead to change. Moreover, this can reinforce an assumption that development is a technical linear pursuit.

By framing my research using ideas of realistic evaluation I intended to challenge this current default position and expose the complexity of putting a rights-based approach into practice. In taking this approach I also consider Eyben's (2011) emphasis on the relational aspects of development important. She describes development as an emergent process – uncertain, relative and complex - to understand how power relations and the contested nature of many concepts impact on actual practice.

Defining my approach

Building from my understanding of social research methodology, and my interest in critical realism and realistic evaluation, there were two considerations that led to my choosing a 'case study approach'. Firstly, I could see the value of an in-depth study that would provide me with rich data from which to develop my understanding and interpretations. I recognised that I would not be able to draw objective truths or conclusions from this approach, but believed that through engaging deeply in one context and drawing on realistic evaluation theory, I would learn and develop insight

which could shed light on other similar processes. Secondly, returning to my wish to promote learning and action within my research process, I was keen to study an experience in which I could become deeply involved.

Research Phase One: Choosing a case study approach

The term 'case' and the various terms linked to the idea of case analysis are not well defined in social science, despite their widespread usage and their centrality to social scientific discourse (Ragin, 1992: 1). There is disagreement among social scientists regarding the validity of case study research and questions about what constitutes a case.

In their publication 'What is a Case?' Ragin and Becker (1992) offer two approaches to understanding a case. Ragin describes how he is concerned with wanting to understand what makes a case a case, treating it as a distinct discoverable concept, while, in his understanding, Becker asserts that cases are constructed through a research process, and that:

To begin research with a confident notion of what the research subject is a case of is counterproductive – researchers probably won't know what their cases are until the research – including the write up – are virtually completed (Ragin, 1992: 6).

The idea of a case as a process of learning and reflection is central to Flyvberg as he challenges 'five common misunderstandings about case-study research'. In his view the contentious nature of case study (which leads to many questioning their theory, reliability and validity (2004: 391)) is because of a misconception of what case study research can bring. For Flyvberg, a case study is a learning process, which should not be concerned with proving a particular thesis. Instead of looking at a case as something from which generalisations can be made, he asserts that cases can be critical, extreme or paradigmatic, and that the focus should be on understanding the complexity, and on creating a narrative, a 'virtual reality' which:

[d]evelop[s] descriptions and interpretations of the phenomenon from the perspective of participants, researchers and others (ibid: 400).

Flyvberg notes that in his research:

I demur from the role of omniscient narrator and summarizer. Instead, I tell the story in its diversity, allowing the story to unfold from the many-sided complex and sometimes conflicting stories that the actors in the case have told me (ibid: 400).

In reading Flyvberg, and writings on complexity theory in development (see for example Groves and Hinton, 2004; Eyben 2006); I realised that I wanted my thesis to emerge as a story, to expose the 'messes' of development (Eyben, 2011: 32). Through my research I also hoped to support the organisation to reflect on and learn from its practice.

Why ActionAid, Why education?

Once I had decided to take a case study approach I needed to identify an appropriate case to study. Choosing ActionAid, and its education work, was an obvious choice for me, for three reasons.

Firstly, ActionAid was (and continues to be) without doubt an 'extreme case'. More than any other large UK INGO it had a reputation for its participatory work. This included its community level work, where it was an early subscriber to using participatory approaches to community planning (ActionAid 2006a). It had also integrated concepts of participation and empowerment into its organisational learning and planning and accountability system, ALPS. Beyond this, in 2005, it embarked on a new strategy framed by human rights and started restructuring its organisation to align it with its commitment to rights-based working (ActionAid, 2005a). It had a strong political analysis and emphasised the need to engage with and transform power relations at every level as part of a poverty eradication process.

As an organisation committed to the importance of rights and participation ActionAid had everything going for it; and I wanted to understand the challenges of implementing their approach in practice. If ActionAid encountered difficulties in blending its rights-based work with participatory principles it was highly likely that any other organisation would face similar challenges. Equally, the strategies and opportunities that ActionAid took to link these two approaches could provide useful insights for others. Thus, I chose an extreme case, which on paper had all the elements for successful practice precisely to open up debate about that practice, to expose any assumptions and to emphasise the complexity of implementing a rights-based approach to development.

The second reason built on and extended the first. ActionAid had long had a reputation in the field of international education. The organisation evolved a focus on education early on, with sponsorship money spent on school uniforms and learning materials (Archer, 2008), and since the 1990s had played a leadership role across the sector. For example, ActionAid set up and coordinated the NGO Education Forum (a meeting of UK INGOs involved in education work) that had met throughout the 1990s. Also, in the run

up to the 2000 UNESCO 'Education For All' summit in Dakar, ActionAid had been instrumental in the establishment of the 'Global Campaign for Education' (GCE). But alongside this international policy profile it had a strong reputation for its local level (participatory) education work – with *Reflect*, and with programmes such as 'Access' which linked non-formal education to the formal system (Archer, 2008). If ActionAid was an extreme case among INGOs in relation to work on rights, education was 'an extreme case' within ActionAid.

Nearly all of ActionAid's country programmes were involved in education work and funded partners to implement education programmes locally. Education coalitions were widespread across the national programmes with a clear focus on the 'Education for All' agenda¹¹. The education staff, especially those working at international level, had framed their work within an understanding of rights long before ActionAid had formally adopted a rights-based approach. Within the organisation it was seen as a strong example of a 'theme' of work. It was well rooted at local level and had strong national and international presence. Beyond this, it was relatively straightforward to fundraise for education (a double-edged sword as explained below); it had a strong International Team, headed by a staff member who had been at ActionAid since 1990, who had good understanding of ActionAid's current practice and the organisational evolution. All these factors meant that a focus on education was ideal in order to gain insight on the interaction between participation and rights.

The third reason for my choice of case relates to my personal connection – to ActionAid and its education work. It was not coincidental that I chose to develop my research with an organisation, and a team, with which I had a substantial history. My eight years of working with ActionAid, and ongoing collaboration, not only meant that I had my own direct experience of the possibilities and challenges experienced by staff in the organisation, but also that I had strong personal relationships with many staff. This brought with it opportunities and constraints.

For example, the way staff responded to me differed from that of a truly external and unknown person. I realised this early in the research, and this observation was

¹¹ This Framework for Action was developed at the Dakar World Education Forum (A UNESCO summit attended by Government representatives and Civil Society Activists) in 2000 and focuses on six education goals – covering the full span of education, from early childhood, school-based and adult learning. The framework is much broader than the Millennium Development Goals, which only cover primary education.

reinforced during the Education Review (see Phase Two below) where the joint co-ordinator was external, an unknown entity. In my interviews there were frequent assumptions about what I knew, references (implicit and explicit) to previous events or interactions. In addition it appeared that people were less likely to self-censor than they might in responding to external researcher. Where I knew staff well, the interview process evolved much more as informal dialogue than a formal interview process.

Robson (1993: 297) notes that the 'insider' has various practical advantages in carrying out 'real world research', including intimate knowledge of the context, its history and politics and 'how best to approach people' (ibid: 298). By working with ActionAid I could draw on my in-depth knowledge of organisational history and culture, my understanding of the different personalities involved, the space available within the organisation and the opportunities and constraints offered by how power functioned informally across the organisation. I could also reflect on my own work experiences, and visits to country programmes and local communities. It gave me a level of access to information and personal interaction which I do not think I could have achieved with an alternative organisation.

By developing my research with ActionAid I felt it would be easier to act on the participatory approach I intended to follow. My on-going relationship with the organisation meant that I had increased opportunities to feed research into practice, to collaborate with staff members in analysing and critiquing research data, with the aim of strengthening my own research and their practice. These opportunities occurred, for example, through involvement in consultancy work and through social occasions with a range of staff.

However, with all these advantages came disadvantages. Robson (ibid: 300) identifies difficulties in interviewing colleagues, especially when they are a higher status than the researcher, and the problem of dealing with making mistakes in a piece of research given that the researcher will need to interact with the organisation following the research. Finally he also flags the difficulties in objectivity. Given that my main relationship with ActionAid during my research was as a consultant rather than direct employee my relationships were distinct from those described by Robson, and less defined by hierarchy. Moreover, as I describe in detail below my relationship changed over the course of the research, enabling me to be less concerned about differences in interpretation and analysis than I might have been had I continued being closely tied to the organisation. However, I recognised that in developing my research and

understanding I might be blinkered by what I had experienced in the past. This could prevent me from being truly open and listening to what people were experiencing during my actual research period. I also realised during the research process that many of the people I interviewed assumed a level of knowledge that I no longer had, and therefore did not take the time to explain assumptions to me as they might do for an outsider. I also needed to consider the impact of the way I had left ActionAid – my team had been closed and I had been made redundant. This reality meant that some staff I contacted were concerned that I might have an axe to grind, whereas others were more open with their time than I would have expected. This was perhaps due to a feeling of guilt, or a need to prove that participation, and my earlier work, were taken seriously. Considering this dynamic I realised that in analysing my interview materials I needed to go beyond understanding respondents' positionality in relation to ActionAid and reflect on their positionality in relation to me. Allies (1999) argues that a researcher has both theoretical and practical positionality. The former is governed by their personal history, culture and belief system. The latter is due to the particular position the researcher holds during the research. This implies that positionality must be understood as a dynamic concept shifting over time due to real shifts in both the researcher's context and their interaction with the location they are researching. For example, Maher and Tetreault note that positionality is "not in terms of fixed identities, but by their location within shifting networks of relationships, which can be analyzed and changed" (1994: 164).

Understanding positionality in my research therefore went beyond an awareness of my subjectivity and belief systems, to involve reflection on my changing relationship with ActionAid. I needed to be continually reflexive in my practice, to create time and space to step back and ask myself what assumptions were influencing my research process, the way I listened, what I heard and what I chose to explore more deeply.

Defining Research Questions

As noted earlier, I had identified a broad interest area through my early literature review and my experiences of working in development but once I had decided to explore the experiences of ActionAid I took sometime to focus my research. My first step was to engage deeply with organisational documentation, taking a 'grounded theory' (Glaser and Strauss 1967) approach. This meant that rather than starting from a hypothesis, I built from the data I collected and used this to develop my understanding of how rights and participation interact in practice.

This was a period of collaboration and co-construction of knowledge. During this time I was working as a consultant for the IET, producing a resource pack for practitioners and activists on the right to education. I had frequent meetings and discussions with education staff (mainly from the IET) about this work, which became an opportunity for exchange and to have my ideas challenged and strengthened. I also had access to a range of documentation produced by country level staff, concerning their work on education rights. This work gave me extensive opportunity to discuss understandings of and challenges in pursuing rights-based practice. Staff in the IET were appreciative of my input. At the time they were grappling with how to define their role vis-à-vis the country programme, and were continually reflecting on their understanding of rights-based approaches. My research, and their practice, evolved together.

In comparing these country level examples to international discourse the disjuncture between how rights were discussed internationally and practised nationally was clear. This observation reinforced my interest to reflect further on the dynamics of moving towards a rights-based approach, and the inherent tensions involved, in an organisation that historically valued participatory practice.

I had started with a broad area of interest – the interaction between participation and rights. Through this close interaction with ActionAid’s education staff, and deep review of their documentation I identified two areas which I wanted to explore further. I developed these into the following research questions, which framed the remainder of my research.

- 1. How is a rights-based approach understood?** Many organisations claim to operate a rights-based approach and yet these organisations differ extensively in their understanding of ‘development’ and their role within it. Even within ActionAid it was clear that different staff members understood a rights-based approach very differently. This appeared to be informed by many different elements, including where they ‘sat’ (position in the organisation and country context), what their work focus was and when they joined the organisation (i.e. prior to or post its move to rights-based working). A key dimension for my research was to explore the nuances in understanding of a rights-based approach. I built from this to explore the implication of rights-based theory as applied in practice, specifically in the context of a wider commitment to participatory development.

2. How do 'organisational dynamics' interact with implementing a rights-based approach? How a theory is understood is not enough to guarantee how it will be practised. I wanted to understand how the culture, structure, power relations and values of an organisation impacted on its ability to translate its theory into practice. During my research period ActionAid was going through a decentralisation process, driven by its ideological commitment to strengthening Southern perspectives in development. The organisation was preaching the importance of participation, bottom-up development and the need to transform power relations, while also asserting a commitment to a universal human rights-based approach. I wanted to look more deeply at how power relations shifted as the organisation 'internationalised'¹² and how this impacted on the potential for rights-based working.

These two questions were extended by a focus on two further factors to contextualise the specific dynamics experienced by ActionAid: the influence of external expectations, and the background and motivation of individual members of staff.

The influence of 'external expectations': INGOs depend on multiple relationships: with funders, with partner organisations, with people living in poverty and with other civil society activists. These actors bring their own analysis, perspectives and understanding of development and of the role of INGOs in development. While I did not intend to explore deeply each relationship, I wanted to understand how ActionAid interpreted these multiple expectations, how these different pressures interacted and how these different relationships influenced the organisation's ability to implement its rights-based approach.

The impact of staff backgrounds and motivation on their rights-based work: Pawson and Tilley note that social programmes are designed by policy makers, but 'their fate...depends on the imagination of practitioners and participants' (2004: 3). Staff in INGOs came from a range of different backgrounds, they have their own reasons for working in development, their own politics, vision of development and vision of the organisation. Rights discourse can be used (and abused) in many different ways and I was interested in reflecting further on the importance of individual preferences and perspectives.

¹² 'Internationalisation' refers to a process of organisational change which most would describe as decentralisation, it is explained in more detail in Chapter Four.

An ethnographic approach?

Throughout my research I drew on elements of ethnographic study. Ethnography has its roots in social anthropological study (Hammersley, 2005), which commonly employs research techniques that include living in a 'community' for a year or more and involving oneself in everyday life. The aim of such a process is for the researcher to understand the lives and cultures of that community from the perspective of an insider. While initially anthropologists used observation only, Malinowski (1922), widely credited as the founder of the methodology of modern ethnography, emphasised the importance of interacting with informants in order to understand their culture, suggesting the need for participant observation. Here researchers not only observe the culture and people they are studying but interact with it – with the level of immersion and integration dependent on the context, research design and aims.

[E]thnography not only implies engagement of the researcher in the world under study; it also implies a commitment to a search for meaning, a suspension of preconceptions, and an orientation to discovery...[it] involves risk, uncertainty and discomfort...[researchers] themselves are the primary research tool with which they must find, identify, and collect the data' (Ball, 1990: 157).

Active observation or participation is supported by self-awareness, of 'self-conscious engagement with the world' and of reflexivity (ibid. 159).

Today, ethnographic methods have been adapted and applied in a range of contexts, from longitudinal studies such as those historically used in the field of anthropology, to one-off meetings with groups, internet based investigation, critical-ethnography and self-ethnography. Inevitably different types of criticism can be made of all these different approaches. Common concerns involve the time needed to 'do ethnography' or the tensions between ethnography as knowledge-building or understanding, versus ethnography with an overtly political standpoint.

There has also been a recognition of the need to link observation and informal conversation to a more structured process of data collection from a range of other sources, for example through semi-structured interviews and access to text-based sources. While ethnographic purists might critique the use of any method beyond observation and participation (as this is likely to set up research conditions that are second hand (not entirely natural and may introduce 'false' behaviour, non-genuine voices and a focus on individual/ internal views rather than public behaviour) others will argue for the importance of interviews, discourse and narrative analysis. This tension is identified by Hammersley (2006) who posits the aim of ethnography as

seeking to understand the perspectives of the people being studied, while at the same time developing an analytical understanding of these perspectives, 'one that is likely to be different from, perhaps even in conflict with, how the people themselves see the world' (ibid: 5). This creates a tension between trying to understand people's perspectives from the inside while viewing it from a distance.

These discussions impact on the extent to which this study, which employs a range of methods, could be described as ethnographic. While it does not subscribe to a purely ethnographic approach there are common aspects in the methodology, and some of the areas of tensions will also be shared – particularly the balance between participant and observer, as well as action and discovery, a balance that shifted as I developed my research process.

Phase Two: A broadening research agenda

My initial interest had been to follow a participatory action research approach, engaging deeply on a regular basis with selected individuals responsible for translating ActionAid's rights-based approach into practice. In 2006 I had agreed with the IET to focus on the work of three countries (Malawi, Kenya and Ghana), and we had approached the 'Education Leads' (main education contacts) in these countries asking if they would participate in the research. They were all keen to do so. However, by 2008 my research focus had shifted and broadened, I explain why after introducing the concept of 'participatory action research'.

Participatory action research

The aim of direct involvement with those 'being researched' would be rejected by many; arguing that such closeness interferes with the research context. But as I wanted my research to be a useful empowering process for those involved I thought it necessary to engage staff as active participants.

When first considering my research strategy I was very attracted by the ideas of participatory action research, described by Smith as a political process, 'a philosophy and methodology for social knowledge and change' (1997:175) which enables 'personal and social transformation for the liberation of oppressed people' (ibid: 177).

The ideas of collective investigation and pursuit of a reflect-action cycle appealed to my participatory background, as did the recognition and valuing of participants' knowledge and perspectives. I was also interested in the research itself creating space for those

involved to join in a process of 'shared struggle and mutual support' (ibid: 182). Moreover, the wider vision of such research – to challenge power relations and oppression so that the research itself contributes to social (or in this case organisational) change - resonated with my beliefs. However, although I had wanted to follow this process, my approach shifted over time. In reality I became a much more traditional external researcher.

There were various reasons for this shift, in part due to changes in my research context. For example, I had a break from my research following the birth of my first child, and when I returned to work 8 months later (January 2008) there had been extensive staff movement, the Kenyan and Malawian leads had left and had not been replaced, and staff in the IET had also changed. Moreover, my period of absence impacted directly on how close I felt to ActionAid. The (continual) organisational changes which characterised my research period meant that, although I still had strong relationships, I had become more of an outsider.

Furthermore, in early 2008 ActionAid was beginning to discuss a formal large-scale review of their education work; and this created the perfect opportunity to channel my reflections into a more strategic international discussion. This second period of research was dominated by the (joint) coordination of the 'Education Review' (see p. 87), a process that gave me access to extensive amounts of data and opportunities to interview a wide-range of staff. However, it also gave rise to tensions within my research, challenging the participatory action research model I had intended to follow.

I had designed my research with the assumption that I would engage frequently with a small group of ActionAid staff over a specified time period. Together we would construct knowledge and understanding. Through my involvement in the Review I was now connecting with many more people, but on a different basis. As I reflected on this I realised that my shifting focus was moving me away from an action research model. While I could still locate my research within a realistic evaluation framework, I could no longer claim that the research process itself was participatory. Instead I was leading a process and asking others to contribute to my understanding and interpretation, feeding back at certain points but, largely, controlling the process and holding onto the power.

In reflecting on this I realise that my initial design of the research was problematic. While I had the support of the Head of the IET, we had not created space to discuss my research methodology with the wider team, and people were less able to give time than I had originally hoped. This, added to the staff changes discussed above, meant that it

was not realistic to have the continual close interaction I had initially intended. But also as I was the person engaging with the academic literature on the subject and writing up the experience within a PhD format, there was a level of responsibility I felt I needed to take for the work, which did not sit neatly with a participatory action research approach. The shift perhaps also occurred due to the constraints experienced in producing a piece of research that meets traditional PhD requirements. Despite these constraints I was able to build in, and take advantage of, frequent moments for feedback, sharing observations and interacting, which came to substitute for my original aim of continuous engagement and participation.

My role as researcher

During this second phase of research I reflected extensively on my role as a researcher. There was a key dynamic I kept encountering: how to strike a balance between different positions? Was I a practitioner or academic, a facilitator or researcher, an insider or outsider? I was aware that my decision on each of these points would impact on how I carried out my research.

For example, even before I encountered problems with my participatory action research approach I knew that my process would not be fully participatory. There were certain hypotheses and observations that I wanted to explore and deepen, inviting people to participate in my framework. I hoped that through participating in the research participants would feel empowered and inspired to act on our discussions. But I was not envisaging a context where they would claim the space or lead the process.

I wanted to uncover and understand how different staff interpreted and implemented a rights-based approach; to gather their perspectives and through the process to encourage their reflection: to build my learning with others. So I needed to be a facilitator. But I also wanted to extend and deepen my own analysis and produce this thesis. I could be flexible and responsive but I also needed to be clear where my boundaries were.

Clough and Nutbrown (2002: 17) outline a range of research approaches. Following their criteria I felt that my interest fell somewhere between an interpretative approach - an involved, empathetic researcher aiming to fully understand - and a critical approach - politically engaged and aiming to transform a situation. I therefore deliberately designed my work to operate on a variety of levels. I engaged with some key participants deeply and interacting with them frequently to explore their work and experiences, working as a critical researcher. But I also interviewed a range of other

informants, drawing their voice and perspective into my narrative, and using their experiences to shed light and reinforce insights gained through the main interactions, to strengthen my interpretation.

What is contained in my Chapters Four-Eight then, is my interpretation of what I have read and heard. It is informed by my positionality, my theoretical stance regarding what should be prioritised in rights-based development. It is a reflection of my learning process as I reflect on this extreme case. While I point out perceived tensions – both in theory and practice – another researcher, with a different value base and a different set of interests could interpret the data I have collected very differently. They could hear different nuances in participants' responses, assign different levels of importance to the various contributions I have received and follow up on different leads.

ActionAid agreed to the research taking place, to my access to information and to my interpretation of any research outcomes. They were supportive of the process and were interested in the research outcomes. But the final product is my own analysis, an academic product - a researcher giving a perspective on work undertaken by others. It was shared with them for further comment and reflection but on the clear understanding that they could not censor the work, or prevent its publication.

Phase 3: Analysis, reflection and writing up

My third and final stage in producing this work began in January 2010, as I started the process of analysis of the vast amounts of research material I had collected. I had had another enforced break with the research following the Education Review (due to the birth of my second child). The nine months break was useful in terms of giving me the opportunity to step back completely from the data collection phase and approach the material I had collected with a fresh eye and an even more open mind. However, it also meant that the information and analysis I share here presents the view of an outsider.

Reflecting on research methods

Clough and Nutbrown (2002: 22) describe research methodology as a recipe and methods as the ingredients. As I described above, my recipe was realistic evaluation, but what were my ingredients? I chose three approaches for gathering information and interacting with staff; and extended this through analysis of a range of documentation. My analysis of this material was ongoing throughout the research period, however, as I

explain below, I also took time after the 'information gathering' period (March 2006-February 2009) to further analyse and develop my understanding.

Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis refers to a detailed analysis of speech or written text. It can be used to draw conclusions about specific language usage, or to explore social processes and structures (Hammersley, 2004). At its most extreme it will use coding and symbiotics to explore specific words chosen, sentence structure, pauses or even the type of laughter. Alternatively it can be used to look more broadly, identifying areas of interest and commonality, focusing on the entire conversation and the types of language used. I did not use in-depth discourse analysis but I did use a more broad approach to analysing text and interview data. I explored written material alongside interviews and focus group discussions to deepen my understanding and collect further ideas and knowledge.

Documents explored

There were four key groups of documentation that I analysed:

- Official organisational publications and public website (e.g. strategy documents, policy position statements) – concerning ActionAid
- Education specific internal documents (internal guidance to country programmes from the IET, meeting reports, national documentation)
- Education specific documents produced for external audiences (research publications, Education Action magazine, policy-advocacy documents)
- Documentation generated by the Education Review (surveys, interviews, in-depth country studies).

I also analysed key organisational publications and websites of large International NGOs which I considered were comparable to ActionAid (namely: Oxfam, Save the Children and Christian Aid).

I began my research by reading documentation of ActionAid's education work - 65 education case studies were collected from across 20 countries during 2005 and 2006. These helped shape my understanding of the tensions involved in ActionAid's rights-based practice. I continued engaging with a wide range of organisational material to deepen understanding of different issues throughout my research.

The different types of written material involved and the diverse cultural contexts in which they were produced meant that it would have been difficult and ill-advised to

carry out an in-depth discourse analysis. For example, I have a lack of understanding of how the English language is used across the countries and cultures, which means that I would have risked ascribing euro-centric values to the words used had I attempted to do analyse language this way. However, through considering the different texts produced by the organisation I was able to explore ActionAid's specific language, how it was used and practised, and develop deeper insight into how staff viewed and used rights-based terminology. The mix of formal international publications, internal documents and national materials gave me valuable insights into the complexity of articulating and practising a rights-based approach.

Reading and analysing the documentation was an iterative process. This was particularly complex given that the first reading of the material was often for another purpose, with my 'consultant's hat' on. For example, my initial engagement with the 65 education case studies focused on identifying examples which could be used in the resource pack on Education Rights (Newman, 2007). Here I was looking for ideas and experiences which could be adapted by education staff as part of a rights-based approach to education. However, in reading the material it was clear that much of the practice described was contradictory and challenged international concepts of rights-based work (see Chapter Six). I therefore marked up different sections of the material in different colours, seeing this first reading as an opportunity to gather information on the general challenges on rights. This served as a basis for my interviews where I could ask questions leading on from the written material. However, after interviewing staff and participating in focus group discussions (see below) I then returned to the written material, with greater focus. This time I read the material looking specifically for ideas and examples which either confirmed or challenged what had been shared orally. I often ended up reading the same material three or more times to add depth and flavour to my understanding.

By linking a text-based analysis to a series of interviews and group reflection opportunities I was able to look at the differences and similarities between what people said, and what they reported on and documented. In taking this approach I assumed that what people said reflected how they understood rights in theory, whereas what they documented and reported on illustrated their conception of rights in practice, or how they interpreted organisational expectations for their practice (see Chapter Six). When staff spoke about their understanding of a rights-based approach it tended to focus on abstract concepts of rights and rights-based working. Moreover they frequently repeated the organisational language, and so it was difficult to know to what

extent they had considered different understandings of rights. However, documentation tended to focus on writing up practical experiences of implementing (education) programmes. Here staff were forced to apply rights-based theory to their work, using the language and concepts to describe practice and outcomes of their work. Although it was still not possible to know the extent to which understanding of rights had been internalised through the documentation efforts, staff were forced to categorise their work, explain choices and identify outcomes, generally to illustrate their understanding of rights-based practice. I considered that any disconnect would shed light on the complexity of translating a rights-based approach into practice.

Interviewing

Interviewing was my primary research method. There are many forms of interviewing, spanning structured approaches (aimed at discovering specific pre-identified facts), semi-structured (where guidelines and specific areas of discussion are outlined), and non-structured (akin to an open conversation). Unsurprisingly the different forms are linked to different epistemological understandings, scope and aims of research. Hammersley and Gomm (2005:1) note that 'interviewing has long been one of the methods of data collection most widely used by social researchers', and that its usage is now subject to a radical critique. This critique suggests that interviews should be viewed as 'social occasions' – with attention paid to context and relationships (including self-presentation and the relationship with the interviewer).

Thus in deciding to use interviews I reflected on various questions. How open-ended would my questions be? How much should I interrupt the respondent? What relationship was I trying to build with the respondent? How much should I involve them in the follow up to the interview? Should I share the transcripts? What about the analysis? Should participants be asked for their opinion of the analysis?

I used a semi-structured approach, identifying the broad areas for discussion but remaining flexible, enabling respondents significant latitude to share whatever they felt was important and following up points as they arose. Interviews took place face-to-face where possible, and if not (i.e. with staff based overseas) I used phone or preferably Skype. When technically possible, I recorded the interviews and spent time transcribing the recordings. I also kept notes during the interview itself and wrote up brief reflections, noting what had interested me the most, what I had found most surprising, or what I needed to follow up on in my next interview etc. I shared the transcripts with respondents, but did not share my notes, as I considered these my own reflections.

I started each interview by introducing myself and my research, clarifying any questions and agreeing confidentiality issues. I approached these interviews as a chance for open exchange, and the majority of people involved noted that the interview had encouraged them to reflect on their practice, that they were interested in my research and wanted to hear back from me on my findings.

Who did I interview?

Category of person	Number of Interviews	Interview period
National Education Staff (ActionAid)	3 Staff (from Malawi, Kenya and Ghana), interviewed 3 times	June 2006-September 2007
International Education Staff (ActionAid)	7 Staff, interviewed once Team head interviewed 3 times Additional focus group discussions – involving different combinations of the team	April 2006-February 2009
Non-Education International Staff (ActionAid)	7 + 8 (Education Review)	January 2008-February 2009
Non-Education UK staff /trustees (ActionAid)	6 + 3 (Education Review)	January 2008- February 2009
Ex-ActionAid Staff/trustees (UK and International – for AA History)	15	January 2010-July 2010
Staff from other UK based INGOs (non-ActionAid) and academics	12	January 2008 – December 2008

A full list of people I interviewed, along with their job titles, is found in Appendix 1.

As is clear from the table, the only people who I interviewed who did not have a specifically international focus (or Northern/UK focus) were the Education Lead staff from Ghana, Malawi and Kenya. Even these staff had been recommended, by the IET, in part because of their strong international connections. I also took advantage of the presence of these particular education staff during their visits to the UK. The fact that these staff had travelled to the UK immediately suggests that they had a level of

international exposure which might not be shared across the different country programmes.

For all other interviews (non-education or ex-ActionAid staff and trustees, and non-ActionAid staff) I only spoke to people who had international remits. Actual job roles were varied, spanning impact assessment, shared learning, programme support, policy-advocacy and fundraising.

My research informants were therefore a very specific group: people who had knowledge of, and exposure to, the international dimension of INGO work. There are many other voices that I did not have direct access to – specifically local staff, partners, and the poor and excluded people with whom ActionAid works. In drawing inferences from these interviews I have also reflected on the voices I have not heard, the perspectives I was not privy to, and the experiences I could not know. Those excluded from my research are often those who are excluded from discussions on international development and I am aware of the irony here.

I have also considered how the voices I heard directly were mediated by who I am, who the research participants thought they are speaking to and what they thought I wanted to hear. For example, I had an early experience interacting with the IET where one staff member started speaking and then stopped herself, asking ‘Am I responding to you with your PhD hat on, or as a consultant working for our team?’.

Group discussion

Group discussion was a minor method used in my research, due to the logistical difficulty of bringing groups of people together. In the literature review I discuss the problem of group dynamics and the influence of power relations within participatory processes (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). However, there are advantages to this process. The researcher creates the boundaries of the discussion, but the discussion itself is likely to be more free flowing than that of an interview (as group members will react to each other rather than the researcher only). This could lead to richer information, as participants have greater control over the direction of the process.

During my research I found that group discussion was useful in gaining alternative perspectives on data analysis. For example, I shared my observations and reflections developed in the research process and encouraged discussion on their validity or otherwise. I found it important to hear the differing explanations offered by the IET, reflecting their own positionality and experiences. As I took a critical realist approach to

my research I was interested in how group discussion could bring out multiple perspectives and possibilities. But I also felt that this was an appropriate space to consider a collective perception of truth and validity – if there was broad agreement among participants, their analysis presented a probable truth.

Aside from an early group discussion with members of the IET (in 2006) I had little opportunity to set up such spaces. However, I took advantage of my role in the Education Review and used these spaces to consider my reflections and findings alongside the more formal discussions of the review. For example, we met frequently in 2008 to discuss how to frame the Education Review. In doing this, it was relevant to share my early findings and determine which aspects warranted further exploration within the review process. These discussions acted as informal feedback on my analysis.

Observation

As noted above observation is a key element of ethnography, with different levels of participation sought in different contexts. Observation played a minor role in the research process, as it was dependent on where I was invited. I was also concerned that staff did not feel observed or judged by my presence, as this might impact on my ability to build (or maintain) collaborative relationships built on trust. There were a few opportunities for ‘formal observation’ as I participated in IET meetings in 2006/7/8 as an observer, but I also used chance interactions with staff, for example in the kitchen over a boiling kettle, as an opportunity to reflect, share and observe.

Team meetings

In agreeing my role as observer for the team meetings we had extensive discussions on ‘ground rules’. There were certain parts of the meeting I was not invited to observe (for example those concerning staffing issues); and as part of the agreement I was asked to clarify my research position and give feedback at the end of each meeting.

I emphasised that my interest was in how ‘participation’ functioned within the organisation and that in these meetings I was particularly interested to see how the international team set its priorities and considered country programme perspectives, information and voice in their agenda setting process. The IET were all committed to responding to country level priorities and wanted country staff to influence their international agenda. Therefore they considered my observations and feedback as helpful, it encouraged them to bear alternative perspectives in mind.

Participation in these meetings was a great opportunity to observe and understand further the priorities of those working in education, as well as sharing with them my own observations and analysis. I aimed to act as a collaborative friend rather than a judgmental outsider.

Kitchen discussions

Although I was no longer a staff member I still interacted with a wide range of staff on a regular basis, either through consultancy work or socially. This informal interaction was influential in my analysis and reflection in the research. But it gave rise to significant ethical issues. While most staff knew the broad topic of my research they may not have had this in the front of their minds when we spoke informally in the office. What was said to me in these contexts was said on trust, due to past work relationships and friendships. I had to ensure that I operated ethically (see below). For example, I do not quote (directly or indirectly) from any of these discussions, but I did use them to inform the types of questions I asked or information I looked for at other points in my research.

Additional Information Sources

Memories and experiences

Memories of my own experience as an ActionAid employee span a wide range of issues, including how organisational dynamics and North-South relationships impacted on my day-to-day work, the organisational culture, management practice and information flows. Also, during my eight years as a staff member, I had visited about 20 different countries, across Latin America, Africa and Asia, for example Bangladesh, Mali, Uganda, Brazil, Nigeria, India and China. These trips gave me an opportunity to interact with staff members, partners and grassroots project participants, and observe challenges and opportunities across diverse contexts. There were some challenges that repeated themselves often: for example, the complete isolation of villages and extreme material poverty that individuals were experiencing. However, there were also various differences: the level of civil society activism, the individuals involved in supporting programmes and the relationships between ActionAid and its partners. Memories helped to remind me why I was doing the research, about why I cared. However, they also became more distant, especially since as I write this it is five years since I set foot in a developing country or rural community.

In reflecting on and using my memories I needed to ensure that they did not undermine my ability to listen to new information arising through the research. The use of

memories in my research and analysis has led me to reflect, throughout the research process, on my own position and the shifting dynamics of my relationship with ActionAid. For example, as is shown in Chapter Eight, I relied on my experiences in relation to the local programme, which help to shed light on some of the observations made by those I interviewed during my research. However, in Chapter Seven, I draw on ideas communicated to me during the interviews to explain ActionAid's culture and power relations, rather than assuming that my experiences were representative.

Co-ordination of the Education Rights Pack

In 2006-7 I took the lead role in developing a resource pack for 'Activists and Practitioners' working on Education Rights (Newman, 2007). The pack was designed for use beyond ActionAid, but it was structured in six chapters linking to the six ActionAid education strategy objectives, and drew on material generated by ActionAid and its partners. The pack aimed to support a participatory approach to rights-based practice (see Appendix Three).

I have not analysed the pack, or how people have used it, in my research, for two reasons. Firstly, in focusing my research I decided not to look in detail at the capacity building/training initiatives that accompanied ActionAid's organisational change process. I was more interested in how practice evolved, rather than how specific initiatives influenced that practice. Secondly, I felt given my direct involvement in the pack it would be very difficult to develop a good understanding of how staff received and thought about the pack. In all likelihood they would be cautious in what they would communicate to me, and I would find it difficult to 'hear' comments properly, I was too involved. Despite this the pack was still relevant to my research in three ways.

Firstly, my production of it coincided with my initial research phase, and reading the materials undoubtedly contributed to my awareness of the gap between international conceptions of rights and national and local practice and therefore to enabling me to develop research questions. I explore this further in Chapter Six. Secondly, through producing the pack I was in touch with many education lead staff throughout 2006 and early 2007. These interactions contributed to building my understanding of their perspectives and their practice, and their knowledge (and opinion) of me. Thirdly, my investment in the work gave me ownership and a stake in how ActionAid implemented its work on education rights. I am aware that much of my later reflection and analysis builds upon the initial conceptions of rights and participation that I described in the pack.

ActionAid's Global Education Review

ActionAid's Education Review was important for my research in two ways. Firstly, it enabled me to formally share my initial findings with ActionAid. Secondly, in the process of co-ordinating the review I was able to gather additional information and deepen my understanding across a range of areas.

In coordinating the 6-month review I was joined by Yusuf Sayed, an academic (with a practitioner's background) based in the Education Department of the University of Sussex. While I brought insider knowledge of ActionAid and an interest in participation, he brought a deeper understanding of education policy and current debates within International Education. He also brought an alternative view on rights. I was interested in the process of securing rights but Yusuf's focus was on substantive rights and the education system itself. He wanted to understand what types of intervention created a quality education system. Our different approach to rights inevitably influenced how we interpreted our roles as review coordinators, what we hoped to 'discover' during the review process, what we were looking for in the data collected and how we interpreted it. Fortunately, we worked well together and collaborated to develop the five different elements of the review (in-depth surveys; semi-structured interviews – internal and external; 'Critical Stories of Change'¹³; and in-depth country reviews)¹⁴.

Working with surveys

Working on the Education Review I found myself involved in designing a complex quantitative survey. The terms of reference had stated the need for a survey, and Yusuf was convinced that this should be quantitative in order to generate the wide range of data requested by the IET. He felt if we approached the survey another way the analysis would be too complex. I followed his advice as we had agreed early on in our partnership that I would focus on developing a methodology for the interviews, stories of change and in-depth country reviews, whereas he would take a lead on the survey given his experience in large-scale data analysis (he had previously worked for UNESCO producing its Global Monitoring Report on Education).

¹³ An ActionAid methodology which aims to produce a 'story' of a particular intervention in all its complexity – recognizing that ActionAid is only one actor in the process and that the process itself is impacted by a range of external factors.

¹⁴ These five elements had been pre-determined during the development of terms of reference for the Review (which I had also drafted based on conversations with a range of ActionAid staff).

However, while we divided the tasks, we collaborated extensively in developing the different methodologies; and this, for me, gave rise to a tension. I had rejected survey material for my PhD research because of my concerns about their premise. I took issue with their supposed objectivity and the assertion that through surveys neutral data can be collected and analysed to understand causal relationships. I felt that they constrained participation. Quantitative surveys determine the parameters of the research, respondents are asked to confirm, contradict or add detail to what is presumed to be already known. They are framed to discover a truth, based on positivistic assumptions. They are extractive and place the researcher above the researched. These were all characteristics I was trying to avoid and yet I was now involved in collecting considerable amounts of information through this process. More challenging still I wanted to reuse some of the data within my PhD findings; specifically sections of the 'Education Lead Survey' (see below).

The survey was designed to be analysed using the statistical package SPSS. However, we made a few adjustments to encourage a more equal process of exchange, negotiation and discovery. For example, all education staff were invited to suggest topics for the survey and comment on early drafts. We trialled the survey in Uganda and worked with an ActionAid UK trustee and the Ugandan staff to refine and improve it. The IET critiqued each question, suggesting alternative and additional areas in some cases, or challenging the specific wording in others.

We also tried to create a more dynamic process of survey response. For example, we suggested that rather than answering the survey on their own education staff should include others, and facilitate a broader reflection process. We deliberately included questions that no individual would be able to answer without asking for information from others. And we urged staff to discuss and complete the survey over a two-day period, with the hope that this would create more space and time for reflection. We did not monitor what happened in practice, but in documenting their reflections many staff did note that they had worked in small groups to look at different elements of the survey; and that the survey had contributed to their reflection and learning, generating ideas and energy to make changes to practice at the country level.

Reusing and interpreting review data

In using information from the survey within my interpretative critical framework, I was fully aware of the potential problems and contradictions which arise. However, I was also convinced that these could be minimised through an appropriate analysis and

interpretation process. By detaching research methods from their epistemological roots it is possible to use quantitative data within a qualitative interpretative framework; reflecting on the positionality of those responding, and my own positionality in interpreting their responses (Bryman, 1992).

In Chapter Six I draw on various pieces of information generated through the Education Review. I ensure that I have labelled clearly data and analysis from the Review itself and where I have included my own analysis, produced as part of my PhD research after the Review was completed. Particularly relevant is my analysis of the responses to two questions which I devised (neither of which were analysed in the formal Review report):

2.10: What piece of work best reflects the strength of your work in education?

6.4: What piece of work that you are involved in best exemplifies a rights-based approach to education? (Education Lead Survey, ActionAid 2009a)

In reading through the survey data I was particularly interested to see how responses to the two questions differed. In analysing the difference I was aware that there were other factors that may have been relevant. I discuss this further in Chapter Six.

There were two other areas of work from the Review that I drew on in my analysis. Firstly, I have referenced one of the 'Critical Stories of Change' which explored the dynamics of an international research project from the national perspective. This story was written by an external consultant, whom I contracted based on the terms of reference I developed. I have referenced her work as I would any other document, but used it to add detail to my findings in a way I would not have done with a document produced entirely externally to my process. I feel justified in doing this because of my level of involvement in the work but also note that the writing and analysis contained in the document is owned by the author.

Secondly, within the review process I conducted all the internal interviews (Yusuf focused on the external ones). I have therefore drawn liberally from the views shared during those interviews (where I have quoted them directly this is marked).

ActionAid's history

While the main focus of my research was on the current strategy period, I was aware that the possibilities and challenges faced by the organisation during this period were linked to its history (Harvey, 1992). I had joined the organisation in 1998 at the same time as it began discussing a rights-based approach, but why had the organisation embraced rights so extensively?

In order to understand more about the organisation that ActionAid had been and its organisational dynamics, I used two strategies: interviews with ex-ActionAid staff (and current staff who had been with the organisation more than 15 years); and analysis of organisational archive material.

I started by contacting several people who had been at ActionAid when I first started. Through this I was given two useful leads. First of all, Karen Twinning Fooks, who had been the Africa Regional Coordinator when I joined in 1998, suggested I posted some questions on the 'ActionAid Alumni' group on 'LinkedIn'. I crafted five questions to get discussion going and to elicit different views on ActionAid's evolution and culture. Very few people responded to the group, but various people did contact me and said that they would be willing to be interviewed directly.

In this process I focused on 'international staff' and was fortunate to be able to interview the key chief executives (see following chapter) who were instrumental at specific points in ActionAid's history. In addition, I interviewed some marketing, fundraising and policy staff. I also received written input from a few ex-staff based overseas, including someone who was writing a history of ActionAid Kenya.

The second lead was a recommendation to explore more fully the ActionAid archive. I was amazed by the material I found. I read minutes of trustee meetings since 1971, and the various publicity materials, market research, internal memos and policy documents. These gave me an insight into the discussions and priorities throughout ActionAid's period of operation. They also gave me a sense of the organisation prior to my joining. Following a similar process to the one I had used throughout my research – of linking written material to interview data - I was able to deepen my analysis and interpretation of the material; drawing together different perspectives on key events. Understanding more of the history of the organisation gave me insights into the specific context, possibilities and struggles experienced by ActionAid. It deepened my appreciation of how important an organisation's history is shaping its current day operation. I therefore begin my findings section with an in-depth analysis of the history, as a basis from which to make sense of my other findings.

Interpretation and analysis

Analysis and reflection were on-going throughout my research, but as I began the 'writing up' process I began a phase of deeper analysis and sense-making. The broad areas of research had been clarified towards the end of the first phase, but I now needed

to group the (excessive) information I had gathered and link this to the research questions I had identified. This final phase of work can be characterised by detachment from ActionAid, a distancing between me, as the researcher, and ActionAid as the object of research. I have spent the last year exploring the themes that emerged during the research, and locating these within the wider context, or social structure – confronting the ‘taken for granted’ (Harvey, 1992: 14).

When I started writing up my research I took the decision to distance myself from ActionAid, to give myself space to reflect and consider, and to ensure an ‘end-point’ to my research. This impacted on my positionality, as I no longer experienced the close ties I had initially had with ActionAid. This distancing enabled me to ground my interpretation of ActionAid’s experience within the academic literature and theories on rights and participation, breaking with the organisational discourse which often shapes research on INGOs. However, I have continued to share my findings with the organisation. For example, in June 2010 I was asked to write a briefing note to be included in the pack of materials given to external consultants in their review of ActionAid. This gave me an opportunity to share my reflections with ActionAid staff and external reviewers; and gave ActionAid staff the opportunity to challenge me on my findings. This was a useful process, as the comments I received encouraged me to reflect further on my conclusions, for example:

I like the paper and thought it captured some key issues very clearly...[but] I am not sure I agree with one of your implicit conclusions ... that there should be more context-specific determination of rights ... as the universal nature of rights is one of the defining qualities - and one risks tolerating reactionary arguments (e.g. "in our culture girls don't need education") (email from David Archer, 5th July 2010)

I also shared a near final version of my thesis with David Archer, who offered some further points, or suggested nuances which I have attempted to integrate, and he also made the following comment:

Overall I really liked what I read – and I am very keen to see the conclusion! I can see some genuinely helpful insights and we should make sure that we use this / share this with colleagues across AA at an appropriate point (email, David Archer, 8th September 2011)

I take this feedback to suggest that my findings resonate with some of ActionAid’s broader observations and concerns, reinforcing my belief that, while I have based my approach on interpretation and subjective analysis, the reflection fits well within the realistic evaluation approach.

Using Nvivo

Early on in my research it was suggested that Nvivo, a computer package designed to assist in organising qualitative data, would help my analysis process. As I began the focused period of writing, my first stage was to read a few of my interviews and generate a set of codes, which I then applied to about 15 of my interviews. I found that as I went through the interviews in detail I thought of additional useful codes and began adding these codes to the later interviews; taking an inductive rather than deductive approach (akin to grounded theory). However, as I added codes I realised that then I would need to return to the initial interviews and recode them and the more I reflected the more I felt that although the process of coding had been a useful way to ensure I reread the interviews carefully, the outcome would not serve my purpose.

I found that coding an interview ultimately simplified it – reducing it down to key points which I had selected through an iterative process, but also associated with ‘finding an answer’. And yet my research premise was arguing against this, concerned more with exposing the complexity, the nuance and the different dimensions and ways of approaching the issue. As I used Nvivo, instead of being immersed in the data and recognising its rich and context specific nature, I was abstracting, using the interviews as illustrations of my theory rather than allowing the different voices I had collected to influence my thoughts and process. Use of Nvivo was creating what Beardson et al (2011; 79) describe as ‘disembodied aggregations’; a process I was striving to avoid.

Although I found Nvivo unhelpful in terms of generating ‘product’ for my analysis, the coding process itself was helpful. Through defining and applying codes I became clearer in how I was understanding terms. For example, I chose the code ‘rights-theory’ and began by applying the code only when respondents described directly how they understood human rights. But later I used it to cover organisational understanding/lack of understanding of rights and use of rights language. The coding process also suggested links between topics that I had not considered before. For example, the two codes ‘working with partners’ and ‘understanding rights-based approaches’ frequently coincided. This led me to reflect how partners’ understanding of rights-based approaches impacted on how ActionAid was able to implement its rights-based approach, and how the organisation valued knowledge and information generated from the local level.

This meant that although I have not used Nvivo analysis in presenting my findings, my process of experimenting with it has been useful; and contributed to my process of analysis and understanding.

Challenges and ethical considerations

As with any research, I faced a range of ethical issues, and many challenges, the majority of which have been already been covered. However there are two final challenges to address: tensions in international research and issues of confidentiality.

International research

In 'doing' international research, I was trying to develop understanding at a distance. This reality gave rise to a practical problem – of how I could truly understand something I was not directly experiencing (an inherent problem in social research) - and ideological problems. Given current global power relations was my entire study a contradiction, reinforcing the power of the Global North in defining and implementing development?

During my upgrade process I was challenged on how much could be known without my spending significant time 'at country or local level'. And I was advised to consider frequent trips to one of my 'study' countries. As I considered how to address this (given my wish to limit international travel for environmental and personal reasons), I realised that in many ways this constraint in my research could be used to my advantage. By acknowledging the parallels between my position and INGO staff working in international offices, I could expose some of the key challenges in articulating and implementing a rights-based approach. In considering what could be known and by whom, how knowledge is valued, shared, transferred etc. in relation to my research, I was also developing a wider position and understanding which could be comparable to that experienced by ActionAid's international staff.

I had to deal with the practical issues of the quality of information flows and the difficulties of building relationships of trust when operating at long distance. I had to rely on how national staff understood and interpreted my interests and the decisions they took on how they prioritised and valued information and knowledge made available to them (by partners or grassroots actors). This dependency, trust and cross-cultural exchange is experienced by INGO staff on a daily basis (cf. Suzuki 1998).

Equally, international NGO staff face the challenge of silent voices, especially those working at the local level: partner organisations and programme participants. I did not have the opportunity for direct ethnographic observation in my research because I was not 'there'. My research methods did not create space for these silent voices, and at best I could expect to hear them mediated through documentation or by the lead education staff. While I recognised that this position was not ideal in terms of understanding the local perspective in developing rights it was pragmatic. Key to addressing it was to ensure that I did not make excessive claims about my understanding of what is actually happening at the local level. This has influenced how I have presented my findings. I realised that there would be many unknowns. But also felt that these unknowns were interesting. If these voices were not reaching me, then in all likelihood they were not reaching other international staff. I reflect on this further in the organisational dynamics section (Chapters Seven and Eight).

The challenge of power relations, which exists in international development generally, and in ActionAid specifically, was more complex. Development has an uncomfortable history, linked to decolonisation and a feeling of guilt or responsibility for 'the other'. Current power relations between the Global North and Global South are reinforced through development practice, with the North often raising the money and the South spending it. People in the North often believe that they know best what should happen in the South, and feel that they have a right to influence the development process because of the financial aid they give (Eyben: 2006). Within ActionAid, part of the reason for the move to the new structure was to minimise these North-South power imbalances. Throughout the research process I have asked myself whether, by focusing on this international perspective, I was reinforcing the unstated belief of many in development that international processes are more important than what is happening nationally and locally. Alternatively was my emphasis on participation contributing to the rebalancing of power? By noting the tensions and gaps was I promoting the voice and perspective of those often excluded from development processes? In writing up the thesis I aim to do the latter, but the reader will be the ultimate judge!

Confidentiality and criticism

My research is focused on one organisation – ActionAid and I have taken a critical approach. At times in writing up my findings I have questioned whether I have been over-critical. Despite its short-comings I do believe that ActionAid is truly committed to transforming the traditional role of an International NGO. It is deeply committed to working with poor people, to support them to define and fight for their own

development agenda, and to using its connections and expertise to include their voices and perspectives directly within international development debates. The fact that the organisation has been willing to open itself up to this research and allowed me to explore and expose tensions in practice is a testament to its wish to continually learn from and strengthen its practice. This has meant that, while I want to expose the tensions in ActionAid practice, I do not want to undermine the reputation of the organisation, one to which I am personally committed and in which I appreciate the extensive commitment among the majority of staff. Among its peers ActionAid deservedly has a good reputation and I would like my research to contribute to this. The organisation is ideologically committed to transforming power relations and eradicating poverty, and is able to reflect critically on its practice. This does not mean that I do not have extensive criticisms of its current practice and assumptions. However, I think many of my criticisms relate to the development sector as a whole. I use ActionAid's experience to expose the deep dilemmas involved in linking participation and rights, rather than to criticise organisational practice per se.

The second challenge of confidentiality derives from the small number of participants in my research. The IET only has five staff members, the education leads are often the only education staff in their national country programme. The different research participants spoke subjectively from their position and experience. This means that it is very difficult to introduce any degree of anonymity. In writing up the research I have struggled with how to balance my concern to protect the identities of informants, while noting their position and relationship to me. I have taken care to present a picture and analysis as I have experienced it, and show this in all its complexity.

On a practical level I have checked back with those interviewed on quotes I have planned to use, and where appropriate showed how I intended to use their words, by sending them the paragraph in which their quote was situated. All quotes included have been approved. In fact, it is worth noting that very few people minded about anonymity, and most of the people I interviewed showed high levels of reflection and critical thought. Perhaps this is a testament to the type of organisation ActionAid is, the culture it has which which enables staff, at least those sitting at international levels, to speak out openly.

However, I was also keen to avoid a situation where I would be prevented from making a specific point due to my feeling of concern and responsibility towards those individuals involved in the research. Therefore, at times I have paraphrased in order to

make my point. I hope that the time and effort invested in collaborative investigation, feedback and shared analysis will result in ownership of the research by ActionAid, that the organisation will continue to see my role as a critical friend rather than jury and judge.

Final thoughts

In reflecting on my PhD journey, the methodological decisions that I have made and the limitations imposed due to my epistemological and ontological beliefs, I think it is important to consider again what can be known from this research.

I present my case study as extreme, and my process as subjective and interpretative. However, ActionAid is functioning within the operating context of international development at the start of the twenty first century. It works with its peers in a wide range of advocacy initiatives at national and international level, it competes against them for funding, media attention and public recognition. It engages, as other INGOs do, with 'poor people'; meets the same requirements of the Charity Commission and equivalent bodies across the world; and is affected by the same trends in international development, by world crises and opportunities. Moreover, as I discuss in detail later, its staff are drawn from broadly the same background and bring with them comparable skills, motivation and interests. I reflect on how distinct ActionAid is throughout this thesis, and argue that, while much about the organisation is internally driven and specific, there are strong influences and parallels that can be drawn across the sector.

In terms of my own positionality this clearly influences my interpretation, and the story to be told here. But in returning to Pawson and Tilley's (1997) explanation of realistic evaluation, I argue that my work has the potential to hold wider relevance. By drawing together different voices I set out to explore the challenges of rights and participation as interpreted by different practitioners as they move from theory to practice, within the specific context of international development in the early twenty-first century.

Chapter 4: Introducing ActionAid

Introduction

ActionAid is a large International NGO, registered in the UK in 1972. It started as a conservative charity with a mainstream agenda; but today is arguably the most radical large INGO, distinct in its structure and approach. In making this claim I am considering its reputation among peer organisations in the UK, and also based on a review of publications concerning NGOs, where ActionAid is frequently given as an example of 'good practice' in relation to its accountability framework, its decentralised structure and its rights-based analysis (Hinton and Groves, 2004; Eyben 2006; Bebbington et al, 2008; Hickey and Mitlin; 2009; Shutt, 2009).

Its strong political analysis locates poverty as a human rights abuse, the result of an unequal distribution of power, and it derives its organisational structure and approach from this perspective. Why and how this organisational transformation occurred is beyond the remit of my research. However, an overview of the organisational history, culture and dynamics is relevant to understanding ActionAid, as it shapes its 'room for manoeuvre' today (Shutt, 2009). An appreciation of the historical context helps to explain the structural opportunities and constraints presented to the organisation during the strategy period I researched. It gives insight into organisational functioning, the role of individuals and the expected behaviours and relationships within the organisation.

The extent to which organisational change happens through a managed and internally controlled process, or is driven by external shifts in environment, is the subject of wide-scale debate. Grey (2005) notes that the conflation between organisational theory and organisational management means that organisational theory has acquired a practical status. It not only influences how people explain organisations, but also how they manage them; this leads to an assumption that organisational change can be planned and managed. Such a belief is challenged by a range of theorists, members of the broad-based critical management school, whose understanding of organisational change mirror many of the ideas raised in the previous chapter on critical realism and the complexity of understanding or explaining social change (cf. Dar and Cooke, 2008).

In exploring the evolution of ActionAid, it is impossible to state with authority the balance between internal drivers and external pressures. However, it is clear that there

have been deliberate efforts to create change, responding to evolving organisational analysis of its role and function. It is also clear that while ActionAid's development discourse resonates with the discourse of comparable organisations across the sector, its structure, culture and function are distinct. Furthermore, although the organisational approach to development has transformed over the past 40 years, there are many aspects of its organisational functioning which remain constant. When asked to describe ActionAid in less than 5 words one respondent commented, based on her experience in the 1990s, as 'continuously restructuring and restructuring': many staff would echo this today.

Given the extensive reference to ActionAid in recent academic publications, as noted above, there is surprisingly little written about its history. Although the following quote could explain this:

ActionAid has always ignored its history, when I started it looked down on rather than learned from its history, and the same thing may be true today (Interview, Colin Williams, ex-Africa Regional Director, staff member 1981-2003)

The lack of alternative sources of documentation mean this explanation of ActionAid's evolution, based on the insights shared through interviews with a range of (mainly international, UK based) staff, and extended through the use of archive material, reflects my specific interests and interpretation. It focuses on specific aspects of the organisation which I consider relevant to understanding the organisational behaviour and opportunities today.

Before exploring ActionAid's specific history and evolution I discuss briefly the rise of INGOs and their shifting roles in development, picking up on the remarks I made in my Introduction.

NGOs receive funding and acclamation, and critical challenges, in almost equal measure. There are those who see NGOs as having a comparative advantage as flexible and innovative, effective and cheap and more able to work closely with the poor than donors or governments (Lewis, 2008: 41). But others berate these organisations for becoming complicit in mainstream development practice and failing to offer an alternative development practice based on a transformatory agenda (cf. Bebbington et al, 2008). Beyond these broad questions concerning NGOs' role in development, others question NGOs' ability to manage their development interventions, asking whether they are able to properly represent and give voice to the poor people they exist to benefit. Equally

there are questions as to whether they have the management systems to deliver efficient and effective services, or the sophistication to handle multiple accountabilities and competing demands (Edwards and Hulme, 1995). These positions derive from the two fundamentally different starting points in understanding development – as a technical pursuit to ameliorate poverty, or as a process of engaging and transforming structurally embedded power relations. As INGOs entered the development mainstream these opposing approaches influenced the roles that these organisations were expected to play and their relationships with other development actors.

This chapter briefly introduces how development NGOs have been discussed over the last 30 years, with many of the themes introduced here to be revisited in Chapters Seven and Eight, when I explore ActionAid’s organisational dynamics during my research period. I begin by noting the increasing prominence of non-governmental actors, and the types of challenges these organisations faced at the turn of the century. I then share the writings of David Korten (as I believe his discussion of the evolution of NGOs resonates strongly with ActionAid’s own evolution and the type of organisation that ActionAid has been striving to become), before turning to consider ActionAid’s organisational evolution.

Understanding International Development NGOs

[Development NGOs] are so diverse that whatever is said of one kind of NGO can be contradicted by looking at another one elsewhere (Wallace, 2000: 20)

Development NGOs are a diverse group defined in various different ways, as much by what they are not, as what they are. In trying to categorise NGOs authors have explored how they are funded, staffed, managed, and governed, their relationship with state and private sector, their size and scale, and their level of operation, focus and activities. A full discussion of what defines an NGO is not included here. I am more interested in the general role ascribed to a particular sub-set of these organisations, International Development NGOs (INGOs), self-governing, not-for profit organisations that operate across national borders, and in general raise funds in the Global North to combat poverty in the Global South.

As discussed in the introduction, the 1980s saw a meteoric rise in the numbers of NGOs and the range of activities pursued. By 2000 INGOs were disbursing between US\$12-15 billion a year, with at least 35,000 organisations working internationally (Edwards and Fowler, 2002: 1). With this increase in scale came a shift in NGO action – from

'development as delivery to development as leverage'; building from their work at the grassroots to engage in structural debates on poverty and inequality (ibid). More recently, Yaziji and Doh (2009:16) noted that the annual turnover of the 'NGO sector' was more than \$1 trillion; and that there had been a 400 percent increase in the number of INGOs over the previous decade.

In response to the huge increase in the presence of NGOs, the 1990s brought a new critical focus on these organisations, raising issues of legitimacy, accountability and effectiveness; along with discussions of management issues. Lewis notes that while NGOs had been largely invisible in development studies 'a slew of books and articles' appeared towards the end of the 1980s and throughout the 1990s and the first academic conference on NGOs took place in 1992 at the University of Manchester (Lewis, 2005: 203-4). While many of these UK based academics believed that NGOs could (and should) work to transform current mainstream development practice, a different agenda was emerging from official donors, emphasising the need for partnership between NGOs, government and for profit actors:

The managerialist language of organisational strengthening, capacity-building, strategic planning and best practice was an essential aspect of this agenda, and much of it began to drift a considerable distance away from the more radical approaches of writers on NGOs (ibid: 205).

Wallace and Eade (2000) comment that while management was often seen as a 'pejorative term' in the 1960s and 70s, 'at best irrelevant, at worst incompatible with commitment' by the 1980s and 90s:

Corporatism, strategic planning, and formal accountability became the order of the day: a way to contain if not to understand the complex environments in which development and humanitarian programmes now had to function (Wallace and Eade, 2000:15).

Lewis notes that while the early work was broadly positive about the potential of NGOs and urged NGOs to unshackle themselves, to scale up, capacity build and work in partnership in order to strengthen impact, by the mid 1990s, probably due to the increased in NGO activity, the writing became more critical (Lewis, 2005: 206).

Many of the harshest critics of NGO action critique from a perspective of wanting these organisations to deliver an alternative development agenda. This perspective is a key driving force for Korten's (1990) 'Getting to the 21st Century: Voluntary Action and the Global Agenda', a treatise that lays out a vision of a role for NGOs, as people's movements. He notes:

The development industry seeks to maintain an apolitical and value-free stance in dealing with what are, more than anything else, problems of power and values.

It is becoming evident that the hope for dealing with the global development crisis rests not with the development industry, but with the great social movements of contemporary society (Korten, 1990: preface).

And he argues that transformation, rather than growth, is the big development issue of the 1990s. For this to happen a different sort of NGO is needed, one that nurtures and enables people-centred development; and understands development as a people's movement.

In exploring how people's organisations might come about Korten reflects:

I was struck that there seemed to be a definite pattern of evolution within the community away from more traditional relief activities and towards greater involvement in catalysing larger institutional and policy changes (ibid: 115).

He identifies four generations of organisation: Relief and Welfare (a short-term view of immediate assistance, delivering services to meet the needs of a specific section of the population); Small-Scale Self Reliant (developing the capacities of local people to meet their own needs; 'empowering' village people); Sustainable Systems (seeking to change policies at local, national and global level, in response to the realisation that on its own an NGO cannot achieve substantial wide-spread change); and People's Movements. This final generation differs from the previous three in that the organisation should be considered as part of a 'fourth sector' drawing on political, economic and normative power. These organisations are pictured as cooperatives, with a democratic structure, mobilising independent individuals at local, national and global levels:

The job of the fourth generation VO [voluntary organisation] is to coalesce and energise self-managing networks over which it has no control whatever. This must be achieved primarily through the power of ideas, values and communication links...What makes them coalesce? What activates them? How can integrative power be used to sustain and focus their commitment? These VOs involve themselves in the broader movement of which they are a part as social and political activists. Their effectiveness depends on working from a well articulated philosophy or vision... Nurturing this movement will call for a new kind of voluntary action by a type of development-oriented VO that bears little resemblance to the more conventional NGOs.... [they should] build alliances with other people's movements that deal with related elements of the global crisis (ibid. 127-8).

As will be shown below, ActionAid's evolution resonates with Korten's generations. And its current framing of work reflects much of Korten's theory of development and the ideal of a fourth generation organisation. Although written back in the 1990s, Korten's

approach continues to offer ways forward for INGOs aiming to avoid the shortcomings and tensions that have been outlined above. As such it offers a framework for analysing the aims of ActionAid's strategic development, and key aspects of the organisation's history, to question how far the organisation has achieved (or even desires to achieve) Korten's vision of a people's organisation. A key challenge for ActionAid, and other INGOs who wish to focus their work within a transformatory agenda, is whether this is possible given their current structure and position within the International Development sector. I return to this question in my conclusion.

The early days

Establishing ActionAid

Cecil Jackson Cole, or CJC as he is commonly referred to, was an eccentric businessman and philanthropist who had been involved in the start up of many charities since the Second World War, including Oxfam and Help the Aged. He called a meeting of the 'Christian Youth Appeal' (CYA) on January 12th 1971 with the aim that it would 'give Christian youth in its own name increased opportunities to help the needy' (CYA meeting minutes, January 1971, ActionAid Archive).

The CYA had three main aims: to supply doctors, nurses and medical equipment to 'denuded countries'; to help in the UK with the rehabilitation of former drug addicts and other necessitous young persons; and to arrange support for orphans and other necessitous children overseas, in cooperation with overseas churches (ibid). A small group of volunteers met monthly during 1971 and discussed various 'appeals' and fundraising, including sponsored swimming and knitting, and door-to-door collections. The meetings and focus of work continued in a similar vein until March 1972, when Ian Kerr was appointed as the general secretary, charged with bringing the charity's income to £100,000 per annum within two years (meeting minutes, March 1972, ibid.). The fact that Kerr's task was income related and that no reference was made to how the money would be spent is unsurprising given the types of issues minuted during CYA meetings. Burnett, who joined ActionAid in 1977 (as the UK director) comments that CJC was more interested in raising money than spending it (written reflections).

In November 1971, the CYA adopted a cry of 'Action in Distress', and this became the official name of the organisation until 1979. With Kerr in the driving seat the organisation began to formalise and grow. Much of the minuted discussion during these early days echoes those of any other newly emerging organisation, struggling to clarify

its role and purpose (see Avina, 1993: 'start up' phase). Burnett (written reflections) states that it took his joint directorship with Roland Hodson (who joined as overseas director in 1974) to develop Action in Distress as an independent charity with a focused programme, whose fundraising served its overseas development rather than vice versa.

By the end of the 1970s the focus on youth projects in the UK had been abandoned, and the organisation also rejected its strong Christian basis and became secular. Following a push from CJC, child sponsorship had been firmly established as the mechanism for raising money and for implementing programmes overseas:

[W]hilst [child sponsorship] has been done in America with great success, to date it has not been tried in England, and thus the CYA would be pioneers in this field (CYA meeting minutes, March 1971, archive)

While the move for child sponsorship was initially motivated by a funding opportunity this mechanism quickly influenced how ActionAid's programmes developed and still remains a strong influence today (see below).

Building an organisation

When Hodson was brought in as overseas director in 1974 he had little development experience. A major concern on joining ActionAid was to create a distinctive relationship with the UK public:

These other International NGOs [Oxfam, Christian Aid, Save the Children Fund] had a sort of consensus between them about how they should do development, and believed that they could decide how best to spend the money with little direct accounting to their funders. I liked the idea of telling people very specifically about what would happen to the money they gave: they would know for example that £50 went to dig a well in Kenya...child sponsorship was part of a bigger plan to be transparent with the money raised (Interview, Roland Hodson, ex-CEO, staff member 1974-1991).

The focus on transparency and accountability to individual UK donors had a profound affect on the organisational management system which continued to dominate during my research period.

Leadership is important for any organisation, and this is especially true in the early days when there is no precedent or clear expectations of what a leader should bring. Hodson was the Chief Executive (CEO) from the mid 1970s until 1991 (aside from a three-year stint as Country Director in Nepal). This period was one of rapid growth and development for ActionAid, and much of how the organisation operates today is due to norms established at this time. For example, the relationship between the CEO and the

Board of Trustees was always (aside from a period in the mid 1990s, see below) one of the board supporting the CEO in implementing their vision for the organisation¹⁵:

We had grown up when AA was small, and if I didn't believe in something then I wouldn't put it to the board....Most of the board weren't programme people, and a successful organisation needs one person to take responsibility for decisions (ibid).

During interviews various staff members commented on the personal power of Hodson. For example, staff mentioned how he brought people into the organisation because he felt they were interesting; or would decide to set up a new Country Programme and just do it; or how he negotiated the full support from the board in implementing new planning and management systems. A recurrent theme is that of a dynamic visionary, a strong and powerful leader. However it is also evident that while he had a lot of support during his early years, staff dynamics became more complex and conflictual. One explanation for this was that as the organisation grew throughout the 1980s more people joined with international development experience and understanding.

For example, Andrew Bunbury, who joined in 1980 as India desk officer after several years of working in the developing world, reflected that most of the London based staff at that time had no development exposure. In particular, the other country desk officers were young and inexperienced and in the main performed a secretarial role (answering letters from sponsors, carrying out administrative tasks based on an index card filing system, calculating and distributing funds owing to the programmes and acting as a postbox for communications between programmes and the London office). Staff were poorly paid, reflective of the sector at the time which was run largely by volunteers or secondary bread winners (interview, January 2010). This context was mirrored with the board of trustees, for example, Burnett noted that in a board meeting he attended they spent more time arguing whether the north or south side of Grimsby High Street was the better location for a charity shop, than whether to open a new programme in Burundi.

Flynn, who spent 22 years as Director of ActionAid Ireland, also reflected:

'In 1984 it was a simple third world charity, quaintly British (for me!), long stay staff and highly introverted. The HQ in Upper St. London resounded to the

¹⁵ More recently a general assembly has been established (it first met in June 2009, subsequent to my research period) and governance relationships have become more complex. It is said to be influential in determining the course of ActionAid, and holding the CEO accountable (cf. email from David Archer, 2011).

clatter of manual typewriters and a charity shop in the front of the building...The CEO had a background in book selling¹⁶ and the Board consisted of the well meaning great and the good (some titled gentlemen and some conservative MP I can't remember but was definitely from the old colonial school) (Email correspondence, January 2010, Liam Flynn).

ActionAid's early work mirrored the practice that had emerged during British Colonialism, when missionaries provided many education and healthcare services to rural populations. This had been continued by volunteerism during the period of decolonisation. Throughout this time development was conceived as philanthropic charitable endeavour – with no attention paid to the politics of development.

But the 1980s were a period of change for INGOs, and ActionAid like other organisations expanded dramatically during this time. For ActionAid the increasing focus on development issues in the UK throughout the 1980s, spurred on with events such as Live Aid, contributed to its potential for expansion and led to the organisation opening many more programmes. By 1990 the organisation was working in over thirty countries. This meant more staff, sponsors and programmes, and greater attention on organisational management and development practice. Organisational structures developed, salaries increased and the organisational culture professionalised. For example, Bunbury (interview) noted that soon after he joined desk staff began to be replaced by people with more relevant experience, required to contribute to dialogues on programme content.

ActionAid's growth was not only related to the number of countries in which it operated, but also the size of programmes within countries. In line with the shift in official development policy and the roll back of the state (see Chapter One), ActionAid's role and profile in service delivery grew throughout the 1980s:

For a long time in the late 80s, ActionAid Kenya almost replaced the government in the Development Areas for service delivery (Education; health; water; agricultural extension; micro enterprise development) (E-mail correspondence, Sept 2010, Geoffrey Atieli, Programme Development Manager, ActionAid Kenya, 1981-2003).

Throughout this early period, the 'start-up and expansion' phases (Avina, 1993) the organisation sat squarely within Korten's conception of a 'Relief and Welfare' organisation. The focus was on raising money and contributing to the welfare of individual children through the 'menu approach' (Hodson, interview) – with every

¹⁶ Flynn joined while Hodson was Country Director in Nepal so this comment refers to another CEO.

sponsored child receiving primary education, vitamins and nutritional monitoring. However, debates towards the end of the decade focused on a deeper analysis of the organisational role and contribution to development.

An evolving development approach

The initial development approach was driven almost entirely by child sponsorship and therefore focused on the needs of individual children, but towards the end of the 1970s and throughout 1980s there was a gradual broadening of approach. The strict focus on individual children gave way to working with families, and in turn community projects were established, including, but not exclusively focused on, education programmes. Throughout this period the central tenet was that every sponsored child should have access to primary education. Bunbury noted (interview) that when he joined in 1980 the ‘major issue was should ActionAid just be running education programmes or doing community development?’.

By the mid-1980s, the argument for community development had been won and in 1986 ActionAid began working in Development Areas (DAs) – ‘aiming to promote a sustainable level of subsistence for all members of the community by focussing on poor families’ (ActionAid Review, 1986, archive). The move to DA work is significant for three reasons. Firstly, there was an overt statement of the need to ‘plan with communities an integrated and comprehensive attack on poverty’ signalling the early efforts of ActionAid to ensure poor people’s participation in their development. Secondly, DA work continued to form the basis of much of ActionAid’s programming during my research period – with the majority of funds spent at this level. Thirdly, as noted by Atieli (email correspondence), the DA approach developed by ActionAid was adopted by several comparable NGOs, including World Vision and Plan. This suggests that although ActionAid was critiqued in the UK for its conservative approach and involvement in child sponsorship (see below), its development work was highly respected by many¹⁷. The tension between UK profile and analysis, and Country Programme priority and reputation continues today.

The shift to a DA approach was also significant as it was the first systematic attempt to manage a development process. It was also the first time that the UK based staff

¹⁷ Although these organisations were not the same ones that criticised ActionAid in the UK, and were similar to ActionAid in that they raise funds through child sponsorship.

formally began to exert control over national level programming. Previously Country Directors and local staff had been able to design programmes as they felt appropriate, as long as they satisfied the basic criteria of child sponsorship. This meant that while some programmes focused exclusively on education, others experimented with water, irrigation and health projects for example, with different roles and links with local government depending on what was considered appropriate in the context. The shift to centralised planning was rejected by many, but is perhaps influential in the types of power relationships which emerged across the organisation – with the ‘centre’ setting the broad development agenda, with significant latitude for local planning and interpretation (see below).

The introduction of DA work was followed in 1990 by ‘ActionAid’s Approach to Rural Development’ written by Hodson. This paper detailed a conception of development as a linear process, planned and managed, with specific inputs leading to desired outputs. The belief that ActionAid could largely control and monitor the development process and prove the impact of its inputs was reflected in my interview with Hodson:

One of the big things I did as CEO was related to developing a better planning process. Developing a programme is a management task, you need to monitor, evaluate, report and then plan. I tried to professionalise the system, bring in programme design and M&E [monitoring and evaluation]. It was very resisted...but by the time I left we did have programme reviews. Teams for each country would come to London for a week to justify their plans and budget and then they would spend a day with the board. (Interview, Hodson)

Hodson’s approach focused on ‘significant benefits’; and gave programming commitments on health, education, water, sanitation, agricultural extension and income generation, in the target community over a 10-year period. This approach resonates with the technical ‘results-based management’ development discourse which exists today (Wallace, 2006, Shutt, 2011), and became the subject of heated debate across ActionAid. While some staff felt it was important to determine centrally how ActionAid benefited communities there was also a strong school of thought that communities themselves should identify their priorities and benefits – a ‘more relativist or anthropological approach reinforced by the work on participatory approaches’ (Tony German, Interview 2010, staff member 1978-1993). The question as to who should determine ActionAid’s developmental priorities, and how they should influence organisational decision-making and action remained relevant during my research (an issue I discuss extensively in the following chapters).

In addition to the need to plan development interventions Hodson's paper also discussed sustainability, noting:

The record of many governments in poor countries of service provision in remote and poor areas is not good....most poor governments will face severe resource constraints into the foreseeable future. In most cases we believe that a strategy based solely on service delivery by the government will not be realistic...It is highly likely that very resource-poor areas and countries may not be able to match the high level of services that we have come to expect as a birthright. Nevertheless, ActionAid will strive to achieve measurable improvements and to satisfy basic needs (ActionAid, 1990: paragraphs 7.6.4 and 7.6.6).

The document continues to equate sustainability with local capacity building, so that local groups continue to manage services after AA withdraws. There is no discussion of building links with other institutions or any concept of rights. Rather the approach echoes Korten's second generation of 'Self-Reliance'. This is significant because the model of DA work which evolved at this time remained powerful during my research, despite organisational shifts in understanding of development and its role within a development process.

The tone and focus of this paper sits in stark contrast to the next articulation of ActionAid's approach, contained in 'Moving forward in the nineties'.

Refining and refocusing

....when I arrived at AA it was a very coherent organisation..ActionAid's method in programme delivery was area-based development, basically doing the job of local government, delivering services in the absence of state capacity... when I left it was a bit of a mess, but it had a much better approach to development (Interview, 2008, Nigel Twose, ex-Country Director, ActionAid Nepal/ex-Policy Director 1990-1997).

The 1990s were a period of turmoil for ActionAid, and the organisation which emerged at the end of the decade was very different from the one at the start. In 1991 Hodson left ActionAid, and with the departure of the man credited with much of the early development of ActionAid, came possibilities to radically shift the internal politics of the organisation, and its external approach to development. The influence of Hodson had been divisive among staff, between those who supported his approach and vision, and those who agitated to overthrow him. This meant that his personal power was felt long after he left ActionAid, as the organisation struggled to redefine itself.

Martin Griffiths joined as CEO in 1991. He had a background in the diplomatic service, and prior to joining ActionAid had been a programme director at Save the Children Fund. The arrival of Griffiths signalled widespread change across the organisation. He

reflected (interview, 2010) that when he joined ActionAid the organisation was in crisis; reeling from the shock of Hodson's departure. Some of those I interviewed suggested that Hodson had been squeezed out, and that staff (especially Country Directors) saw this as an achievement in itself, adding to the potential for bottom-up power and influence from the Global South. This was significant for later discussion on regionalisation (which began in 1993 and was a precursor to the internationalisation process that ActionAid embarked on at the end of the decade).

Griffiths recollected that he was surprised by the level of internal division in the organisation, and when he joined his immediate task was to manage the transition. This included extensive restructuring and refocusing of programmes, working with an unpredictable board¹⁸. It also meant understanding the culture of ActionAid which had been dominated by a powerful founder and leader.

For example, Griffiths shared how when he first came into ActionAid he thought he should listen to people, to understand what they wanted. But most staff did not want this. They wanted to know what his vision was, they wanted him to be a leader. This cultural tradition was still present as I wrote up my thesis, with staff waiting to see what the impact of the new CEO's arrival would be on the organisation. In response to this expectation Griffiths wrote 'Moving Forwards in the Nineties' (1992), in one weekend, and was amazed how quickly this document became the reference point for ActionAid's approach. In describing his experience at ActionAid he commented:

We had a really interesting and intellectual time... I was fascinated by it, there were great arguments, great depth...The funding structure was so tight¹⁹, we didn't have a penny to spare, so it was all about trying to squeeze space for individual opportunism, waywardness, new projects. Carving out space for people to breathe was difficult in AA, but perhaps because there was repression there was an incredible dynamic. I've never come across an organisation that was so stimulating and I felt so proud of...I'd learnt a lot about community development in UNICEF but AA taught me about debate (Interview, Martin Griffiths, CEO 1991-1995).

Reflecting on the changes in the 1990s, Twose commented

¹⁸ Various people I interviewed suggested that in the early to mid 1990s the board became much more assertive, and played a more active role in governing the organisation; often disagreeing with the CEO. However, by the time Salil Shetty took on the role of CEO at the end of the decade relationships had improved and the board were supportive of his vision.

¹⁹ This refers to the flexibility to spend child sponsorship money – at the time 90% had to be spent in country, and 90% of country spend had to be spent directly at the community level. During my research period there was a little more flexibility in sponsorship spending, but it was still focused at local level.

Martin played a key role in authorising, enabling and encouraging the development of ActionAid, but he didn't lead it. And the SMT didn't have a clear sense of how they (we) wanted to move the agency, so it happened organically, from an environment which encouraged debate (Interview, Twose).

During my research period the space for ideas and debates was still very present, at least at senior management level. For example, the International Director's team meetings were rumoured to be full of heated discussion concerning ideological position taking and developmental priorities. As with the earlier period there was a greater focus on political and moral decision-making, rather than organisational management, reflective of the views of an ex Regional Director for Africa:

There has always been a tendency for AA to think that being an organisation is not important, or far less important than our policy, our approach (Interview, Williams).

The ideas expressed in 'Moving Forward in the Nineties'; were developed further in 'Giving People Choices' (ActionAid/Twose, 1994) and together these documents led to the first organisational strategy (developed with the support of external consultants in 1994)

to ensure consistency, to give a greater chance of effective use of resources and to enhance a common identity across the organisation (Griffiths, Archive Material).

The interest in strategy development was perhaps reflective of the types of debates happening in NGO management at the time, as noted above (Wallace 2000, Lewis, 2008). 'Giving People Choices' emphasised the need to learn, so as to strengthen practice at the local level; and the need to develop expertise as ActionAid which could be used for advocacy and influencing work, and to scale-up impact:

The problem with a lot of advocacy is that it frequently lacks field data, it goes with ideas rather more than science, I thought that what AA could do, much more than Oxfam for example, was use its own raw data – this was priceless, it could be advocacy about UN in Burundi, or internationally on a specific topic – the Development Area data was a completely unused piece of treasure (Interview, Griffiths)

This focus on advocacy and scale up (and organisational learning) also resonates strongly with the debates across the INGO and academic sector at the time (cf. Lewis, 2005). In addition it suggests a move within the organisation towards Korten's third generation, 'Sustainable Systems', recognising that ActionAid could not achieve scale and impact on poverty through its own local work but that it needed to influence more powerful players – government and international institutions.

However, although there was support for investment in advocacy work this was by no means unanimous across the organisation. German (interview) remembered that when he first tried to do policy work in the early 1990s, it was seen as a distraction by Country Programme staff who were 'much too busy managing the programme'. It was only when Africa and Asia regional policy staff were appointed that policy work began to be taken seriously at country level, and this was in part because regional staff were more able to respond to country level policy priorities. This suggested that while there was intellectual support in the UK and at the higher levels of the organisation for policy work, country staff were less convinced of its relevance. This dynamic was repeated in the more recent discussions on rights-based working (cf. Chapters Six and Seven).

The emphasis on participatory work and the importance of poor people's perspectives, in relation to policy, research and influencing work is noteworthy here. The commitment to local perspectives and knowledge is rooted throughout 'Giving People Choices'; which notes that:

[Working] effectively with the poor requires a thorough understanding of the causes of poverty in each and every place, and especially an understanding of how people themselves perceive poverty (ActionAid, 1994: 5).

It cautions that:

[W]e sometimes find that poor families have immediate priorities which are different to those which our experience elsewhere might recommend... [ActionAid must ensure that] development initiatives and their pace of implementation are formulated in line with community priorities (ibid:9).

The recognition of a potential tension between bottom-up and top-down development; the complexity of working with different perspectives, and the rootedness in local experiences were central challenges which were felt in ActionAid throughout my study period. However, the later strategies do not discuss this dynamic, and as I explore later (Chapters Six, Seven and Eight), the recognition of disparate local (and national) realities seems to have become less present across ActionAid.

In addition to the start of advocacy work two other key shifts (discussed below) were set into motion at this time: partnership and regionalisation. It was also during this period that staff across ActionAid started to discuss concepts of rights:

A man called Ganesh who was the head of the field office began talking about rights – in reaction to the brewing conflict between the Maoists and the Nepalese Government, and the fact that people were being denied basic services as they were caught in the middle: 'how can we talk about service provision when people are denied rights'. He may not have used the language of rights explicitly

but it was the first time that I had heard an ActionAider use these kind of concepts at all. I am sure that in other parts of ActionAid similar discussions were emerging (Interview, Twose).

I pick up on this discussion below.

The fact that so much changed in a relatively short period (Griffiths left in early 1995) suggests that AA was ready for change, but also that there was considerable power among those in charge (namely Griffiths) to implement change. However, it is noteworthy that neither management processes nor organisational systems or structure shifted during this period. The shift was located at the intellectual or political level, concerning the ideas of development rather than the processes of development management. The organisational culture was one of discussion, reflection and exchange, with less focus on planned action or implementation.

In addition, although these intellectual discussions were dominated by white Northern (male) staff, it is clear that much of the input for these debates came from experiences in the South. For example, the archive material suggests that the push for partnership work came through experiences in Latin America and India (arguably country contexts where civil society was most politicised and active), and the push for regionalisation was initiated by Country Directors from Africa and Asia. Although the formal power resided in the CEO, and he set the parameters of the debate, space was created to hear alternative views, and for individuals to push their specific agendas. Particularly relevant in this dynamic was the role of Country Programmes.

The role and profile of Country Programmes

Unlike many other UK INGOs which favoured partnership with local organisations (E.g. Christian Aid) or sent missions of professional staff overseas (E.g. Save the Children and Oxfam) ActionAid established country offices early on. These offices were necessary to manage the bureaucratic funding mechanism (including identifying children to sponsor, collecting messages from children and ensuring that the 'menu of benefits' were delivered). ActionAid directly employed large numbers of staff overseas, ex-patriots took the leadership roles while nationals filled the administrative functions.

Throughout the 1980s ActionAid was opening programmes across South Asia and Africa and, by 1998, when the organisation formally adopted a rights-based approach there were 37 Country Programmes in operation

(<http://web.archive.org/web/19980425122038/http://www.actionaid.org/>, accessed

20.10.11)²⁰. The majority of these offices were based in local development areas, with little if any presence in the capital city:

At one point we had thousands of staff and thousands of motorbikes. There were strengths and weaknesses in this approach. For example in Kenya the programme was huge and they were a major influence nationally (Interview, Hodson).

AA Kenya had more than 600 staff, a significant proportion servicing the sponsors, and yet others working with individual children to inculcate life skills, especially in agriculture and vocational trades (E-mail correspondence, Atieli).

Country Programmes were big and powerful, and within this structure Country Directors were almost omnipotent. While the UK held the purse strings and, in theory, required Country Programmes to jump through hoops in planning and reporting on their development work, the day to day running of the programme and decision-making were all made at national and local level. Country Directors could run their programme as they saw fit. They influenced the organisational culture, staff make up, vision of development and relationship with other actors in the country. Each Country Programme was very different in its management style and approach to development, its relationship to the UK office, and its role in its national context.

For example, when I started at ActionAid (in 1998) I was quickly informed which countries it was worth contacting to develop more innovative work and which were best ignored. The diversity of national organisational culture continued to be important for ActionAid throughout my research, and influenced the extent to which a Country Programme engaged with international agendas, prioritised different types of work and empowered staff to develop their own work plans.

It was also clear that different countries programmes had different levels of power nationally; for example, it was alleged that at one point AA The Gambia had a larger budget than the national government. This gave ActionAid programmes significant influence in the national development agenda; and these external relationships impacted on how powerful Country Directors felt within the organisation.

²⁰ These programmes were located mainly in Sub-Saharan Africa and South/South-East Asia. The Latin American and Caribbean Region only has three country programmes (Brazil, Guatemala and Haiti). The small number of programmes and language issues meant that I was not able to draw substantially on their experiences in my research.

Thus, although officially organisational power resided in the UK, in practical terms the Country Programmes had significant influence at national level and in relation to the broader organisational direction.

Child sponsorship

The choice of child sponsorship as a fundraising mechanism has had a great influence on ActionAid throughout its history, and the organisation today. For example, ActionAid's internal management systems (information systems, finance systems and patterns of communication) developed to serve a child sponsorship programme. The importance of child sponsorship impacted on the role of marketing and financing in the organisation. For example, because of the planning and reporting systems, during the 1980s and much of the 1990s, somewhat perversely, those with little or no development expertise became responsible for signing off local development work.

While the formal power relations have shifted more recently, there are still many aspects of child sponsorship which influence how ActionAid frames and reports on its work. Beyond the impact on internal debate on development approach, it has also been an influential force on the external perception of the organisation. It has been a source of continual angst, with the child sponsorship image existing in an uneasy tension with the image ActionAid has attempted to develop as an organisation. But the stable income source has brought many advantages, not least the ability to plan and it has been instrumental in ActionAid's ability to embark on deep organisational change.

Child sponsorship depends on creating a direct bond between an individual donor based in the Global North and the beneficiary, a poor child based in the Global South. A review of child sponsorship in 2005 noted that:

The majority of the child sponsor's donation²¹ is spent on the various projects undertaken by ActionAid within the Development Area (DA) in which the child resides. In return, the child sponsor currently receives, direct from the Country Programme:

- Three written reports each year, focusing on ActionAid's activities within the DA
- Two personalised messages from the child each year
- A photo of the child once every 3 years

²¹ The exact percentages have shifted over time, at the time of the review (2005) child sponsorship was defined as 80% restricted, and 20% unrestricted income (this division was also current in 2008). For most parts of the organisation, 70% of the 80% is spent at community level, 10% goes to a flexible fund, 10% to a national fund and up to 10% as sponsorship costs.

It is the child's face that evokes hope to inspire a person to become a child sponsor and it is their letters and drawings that then help retain and increase the sponsor's support (ActionAid, 2005c: 7-8)

From the mid-1970s until the mid-1990s child sponsorship made up the majority of ActionAid income. When I embarked on my research funding had become a bit more diverse, but in 2008 the mechanism still brought in about 56% of ActionAid's income (this figure refers to regular-giving which includes child sponsorship and other forms of monthly donation) (ActionAid 2009b: 18).

The organisational management systems emerged to ensure that ActionAid would 'give account' to the individual sponsor, based on the deliverables agreed when contracts were signed. But the sponsors had minimal expectations of holding ActionAid to account. This gave the organisation great flexibility to be experimental or dramatically change direction; and many people whom I interviewed noted that it was this broad and dispersed funding base that enabled ActionAid to embrace the rights-based approach to such an extent.

However, this freedom to shift strategic approach has also been constrained by the direct links established with communities through the child sponsorship process. For example, children included in a sponsorship process were geographically located, and sponsored for 10 years. Therefore, ActionAid was obliged to work with specific geographical communities over an extended time-frame, which influenced how it developed its rights-based work (see Chapter Six and Eight). It was also suggested that the ease with which child sponsorship funding has arrived at country level has meant that Country Programmes have managed to avoid planning their work strategically. They could 'get away' with poor quality work that did not reflect rights-based practice precisely because of the child sponsorship system (see Chapter Eight).

However, beyond the influence on operational dynamics there are various ideological issues resulting from child sponsorship. For example, during the 1980s there were internal debates concerning who should influence the development programme. A staff conference debate was dedicated to the question of whether work should be:

Conditioned by the need of communities overseas as perceived and defined by overseas staff in relation with the people overseas, or should it be the needs of fundraising factors through sponsorship? (Staff conference topic, 1986, Archive)

Reading through the meeting minutes suggested that there were fierce disagreements at the time, and the eventual conclusion was to design programmes that serviced the needs of both.

Internal debates on child sponsorship also responded to external public discussions. For example, during the 1990s there were campaigns by Christian Aid and The New Internationalist which raised moral questions about child sponsorship and opened up the process to public scrutiny. This intellectual critique of child sponsorship labelled the advertisements and illustrations of development portrayed by child sponsorship as exploitative, patronising and undermining of a progressive approach to development (Coulter: 1989). Such was the impact of these debates that Griffiths reflects:

When I saw the AA job advert I thought it would be interesting...People said what is wrong with you, you're out of your mind why would you want to work for AA, it's a sponsorship organisation. The pariah status of AA because of being a sponsorship organisation was high (Interview, Griffiths).

More than one person I interviewed suggested that ActionAid's interest in creating a public profile of itself as a radical rights-based organisation responded directly to its wish to overcome its earlier profile as a sponsorship organisation. It had to prove that sponsorship did not define what it did. Interestingly, while staff in the UK remained divided on their views on child sponsorship (with many people advocating the benefits, while others agreeing with the academic and peer critique) in many Country Programmes reflection has been much more measured and pragmatic.

The dynamics surrounding child sponsorship and its integration with a rights-based approach were well expressed in the 2005 Sponsorship Review:

ActionAid faces a dilemma. On the one hand, the current marketing of Child Sponsorship has been extremely successful for recruiting people as child sponsors. In competitive fundraising markets the images and messages that are used still resonate with the general public's desire to make a difference....it is tempting for us to not fix something that isn't broken.

On the other hand, in some approaches there is a disconnect between how we market Child Sponsorship and our values and approach to addressing poverty. This extends into how we communicate our policy work in the North, with differences between the image and messages we are putting out through media and campaign work and those that fundraising is communicating (ActionAid, 2005c: 34).

This tension was also noted in the 2010 ActionAid review (ActionAid 2010b) where concerns were raised about the 'political economy' of the organisation, suggesting that child sponsorship was fundamentally incompatible with its development approach.

In addressing these issues ActionAid has faced a tough challenge. Experiences in experimenting with other forms of fundraising have been less successful. For example, one fundraising staff member commented:

Brazil tried a new model – of getting a group of sponsors to sponsor a community – but it didn't work, it is the individual link that grabs people – and then it is about how this is nurtured and people are moved on.

The importance of the individual link is confirmed by reading 'supporter feedback' (every month ActionAid asks for feedback from child sponsors including why they became an ActionAid supporter); comment after comment identifies the importance of a personal link and the direct connection with children; for example:

I felt that for £3.50 (approx) a week this was the best thing I could do with my money. It was the right thing to do. It was more real that the money was going to a person and not a 'cause'.²²

This way I can have a personal relationship with my sponsored child, family & community and hopefully see the progress over the years. Maybe, even visit one day as I intend to keep this up for always.

In addition, many sponsors saw the existence of sponsorship as a positive defining feature which caused ActionAid to stand apart from other INGOs

Although I already support international development relief via Oxfam, I felt it was now important to do something on a much more personal level.

As a member of Viva!, ActionAid, Amnesty International, Free Tibet and Medical Foundation (for torture victims), I know only too well the horrors that go on on this planet. ActionAid is a chance to help a child reach their potential in life and to help their whole community.

Among these sponsors there was also a clear desire that money was spent at the local level, as reflected in these concerns shared by one sponsor:

Having signed up I have been worried about what I have read on a website (sponsorchild.org.uk) which says "..... with Actionaid, more of the funds are used for political action and campaigning on behalf of communities and less for directly helping them on the ground..." This has been causing me a lot of worry as I am not a politically minded person and it is very much not what I want to fund or support. Can you please call or write to me about this as if I thought my money really in truth was being spent like this I would want to terminate the sponsorship. I really want to feel that we are supporting this little girl and her family and their community with daily needs and education.

The perceived need of child sponsors to see the tangible results of their donation impacted on how ActionAid described its work and communicated the development

²² I read though all the comments for April and August 2009 (available on the ActionAid Intranet: hive.actionaid.org only accessible with a password) and selected comments which I felt clearly illustrated the general view from child sponsors, the over-riding interest in the personal connection and the concern at political action. There were no comments for these two periods that acknowledged positively ActionAid's rights-based work or campaigning. However, this could be reflected of the type of people that responded to ActionAid's request for feedback.

process. This reality continued to create a disconnect between ActionAid's strategic approach and how its work was communicated (for example through its website). This disconnect was not just an issue of communication, but also impacted on local staff and partner expectations of what work they should support within a rights-based approach (see Chapter Eight). This position was reinforced by the unequal power relations which have evolved in the organisation which gave the UK (Northern) fundraising department(s) disproportionate influence over how ActionAid's work was documented and communicated.

During the research period, ActionAid tried to 'Reinvigorate child sponsorship', bringing it in line with its rights-based messaging, and simultaneously invested in scaling-up other forms of income – including other regular giving systems, official donors (project funding and unrestricted partnership income), trusts and foundations (mainly project funding), individual large donors (individuals who donate more than £5000), community events and more recently corporate donations. More recently too, ActionAid UK developed the concept of a 'supporter journey' which aimed to build involvement and understanding of ActionAid's work over the sponsorship life-cycle.

Despite this, and the strongly articulated commitment to downwards accountability, ActionAid internal management systems continued to service the needs of child sponsorship during my research period. Documentation was written for the audience of individual Northern donors. This not only impacted on what was considered important and documented, but also on what was reported on from local level. It is therefore fair to suggest that child sponsorship continued to have a significant hold on programme design and delivery at local level²³.

The problem of communicating rights-based work to UK supporters and the general public is reflective of mainstream western views of international development. There has been increasing awareness and interest in development, particularly due to the efforts of celebrities such as Geldolf and Bono and with the momentum achieved around the 'Make Poverty History' campaign. These media events have done little to expose the complexity of development, however, and have called on UK publics to give charity, rather than take personal or political action (Darnton and Kirk, 2011). I return to this point later in my thesis.

²³ I have not looked at this directly in my research but the influence of child sponsorship on local programmes has been repeatedly communicated from diverse sources during my research.

Transformation at the turn of the century

Under the leadership of Shetty (CEO from 1998-2003) the organisation moved formally from focusing on 'basic needs' to 'basic rights'. This shift also meant moving from a conception of the organisation's role as developing 'Sustainable Systems' (Korten's third generation) towards that of a 'People's Organisation' (Korten's fourth generation).

While the seeds of this transformation had been sown during Martin Griffiths' leadership it took the action of Salil Shetty to significantly change structures and practices, and the pace of change under his leadership was startling.

The discussion of rights developed from the promulgation of entitlements (a concept discussed extensively in India, following the work of Sen, 1982). The basic philosophy was that rather than deliver services themselves, ActionAid should work with poor people to ensure that they receive their entitlements from the public sector. This participatory approach to securing rights starts from the opposite end of the spectrum from the legal basis of rights, as framed by organisations such as Amnesty International (see Chapter Five for more discussion on this).

'Fighting Poverty Together' (FPT) (organisational strategy 1999-2005) was developed in 1998 by an internal team of staff drawn from across the organisation (and coordinated by Ramesh Singh, who succeeded Salil Shetty as CEO). This was the first time ActionAid staff had been involved in strategy development, a participatory process which was extended with 'Rights to End Poverty' in 2005 (and built on further in 2010-2011, see Newman with Archer, 2011).

A much fuller discussion of ActionAid's rights-based work is found in Chapters Five and Six and forms a core part of the findings of this thesis.

The appointment of Shetty was a radical move for ActionAid, signalling a break from the tradition at the time of INGO leadership dominated by staff from the Global North. While there had been various Asian staff appointed to head up African (and Asian) ActionAid Country Programmes, this was the first time a non-white man was appointed as CEO. Burnett reflected that the board was very divided over his appointment. But the significance of Salil Shetty's recruitment went beyond skin colour or country of origin. He had been Country Director in Kenya and had made significant changes there, and his position on ActionAid's weaknesses and the need for change were relatively well known, as was his interest in moving the organisation away from the exclusive focus on local community development, which had been dominant until this time. His 13 years

experience with ActionAid, and broad supporter base in the South were reinforced by a relatively supportive board, which now included more progressive members, such as Robert Chambers (and Ken Burnett). For example Robert Chambers reflected:

Under Salil, when Ken was chair, then Karen, the board meetings became enjoyable collegial occasions, we felt we were on the same wavelength, that we were innovating, we all enjoyed them (Interview, 2010, Robert Chambers, Board Member 1992-2006).

'FPT' not only introduced the language of rights across ActionAid's work, but also set in motion ActionAid's decentralisation programme. Salil reflected:

I'd been convinced for a long time that AA needed to use its grassroots experience to influence government – and that staff had to act as national citizens at this level – you couldn't do advocacy in India as an INGO – you'd get so far and then the government would say 'you're foreign'. So AA needed to nationalise if it was going to influence national government.... Momentum was coming from all over the organisation in the South – and the changes could happen as the intellectual leadership of the organisation shifted (Interview, 2010, Salil Shetty, ex-CEO, Staff member 1985-2003).

Antonella Mancini noted:

'When Salil started he had a strong vision, he continued the process of restructuring, relocating the responsibility for programmes from staff in the UK to staff in the Regions, creating targets for the board to have female members and membership from the South. The fact that he had had the experience of working in two powerful Country Programmes gave him the ability to do this. FPT was the first real organisational strategy that gave the organisation a clear cohesion/sense of where it was going – it was inspiring...The strategy was followed by a critical external review which was 40% looking back, 60% looking forwards. It was clever doing a review immediately after a new strategy had been accepted, because the strategy set out ActionAid's ideal and then the review looked at the reality of where ActionAid was, and gave ideas about what needed to change to achieve the strategy. This validated a lot of what Salil and others had been thinking...'Taking Stock' [the review] was very critical about ActionAid's work, too brutal at times, but it modelled a different way of thinking, of evaluating, of being critical about practice' (Interview, 2010, Antonella Mancini, ex-Head of the Impact Assessment Unit, staff member 1993-2005)

For many, 1999-2000 was a troubled time for ActionAid. Approximately half the staff were made redundant as the shift to rights-based working took place. In the UK the marketing division was restructured and culled, and the (formal) power of the UK Headquarters was reduced. At Country Programme level there were huge lay-offs as ActionAid made the move from being directly operational to working with local partners (see below). This restructuring process also enabled senior management to get rid of staff who were considered obstacles to change, including some country leads.

The Asian Country Programmes had been led by Asian staff for some-time, but many of the African Country Programmes were still headed up by ex-patriots:

During the period there was a deliberate shift in staffing in Africa, from white men in shorts to African men and women, there was also a conscious effort to go for people who had an understanding of rights (Interview, 2010, Karen Twining Fooks, ex-Africa Regional Coordinator, staff member 1997-2002).

However, despite this change of national leadership, there were still significant numbers of staff members who remained unconvinced by the new approach, especially in Africa:

The rights-based agenda was defined in a way that seemed strongly pushed from Asia, the African countries were expect to comply and not to define their own angle etc. Certainly some of the gossip in Africa seemed to talk about a shift from a European top down approach to an Asian one. In Africa we never really got RBA in the way it was presented, we used the language because it was there, because that was how people were speaking (Interview, Williams).

While the rights-language did not necessarily resonate with African staff, many people noted that this did not mean that the concept of rights did not exist. For example some mentioned that traditional systems in Africa are very much based on entitlements. The difficulty was in making links to a rights-discourse that was perceived as centrally driven. I explore the diverse understandings of rights and rights-based practice in Chapter Six.

Facilitating factors for change

In the case of AA it is mostly people who came into it who changed it gradually to address the issue of systemic poverty; but from 1997 rapidly changed it!! ...The enlightened SCF [Save the Children Fund] incursion circa 1992-94 gradually moved the whole operation to a more reflective stance....The rise of the Indian contingent (Shetty; Sam and Thomas Joseph; Tom Thomas etc.) brought a sharpened experiential and intellectual bite to the organisation (Flynn, email correspondence).

It is never possible to explain fully why any organisational changes happen, however in ActionAid's case there were certain drivers for change, and key enabling factors.

When speaking to ActionAid staff there are two key factors that stand out in its history: the role of individuals, and their vision for development (particularly, but not exclusively, the CEOs); and the co-existence of a strong organisational planning system with significant space for innovation at the edges. These two dynamics remained influential during my research period (see Chapter Seven).

Although the second part of the 1980s saw the development of strict internal reporting systems there was always space for innovative work 'off the record'. A Country Director

of an African programme mentioned how he was able to support an emerging HIV programme which had nothing to do with the child sponsorship work he was managing, but no-one questioned it. This perception was echoed by many interviewees. For example, Mancini commented that at the time she joined the organisation it was conservative but that it had visionary people, and that the organisational culture enabled these individuals to push for wider change.

David Archer (who joined in 1990 and still works for ActionAid) noted (interview, 2010) that when he joined the policy division no-one really knew what the department should be doing, which meant that he was free to try out experimental ideas, as long as he could raise funding for them.

This space for experimentation and individuals was also identified by Martin Griffiths as key in driving his changes:

There is a theme here about individual people trying to fight against their institutions to get humanity, you are lucky if you find the right people, in AA there were some really good people. (Griffiths, Interview)

And in a different way by Ramesh Singh:

It is interesting how change happens in AA – often organisations change because of a crisis – but AA hasn't faced any crisis – therefore it is about individuals, not one individual but individuals and networks of individuals. It is also about the kind of organisation AA is, and what it is not – it is a chaotic organisation (Interview 2010, Ramesh Singh, ex-CEO, Staff member 1984-2010).

This space for individuals was frequently mentioned during my research period and was cited as instrumental in how ActionAid was able to make such radical decisions in relation to its organisational form. It was also noted as a reason for significant internal conflict and tensions in implementing its visionary approach (see Chapter Eight). This differs from many other organisations, where the space for individual action is assumed to decrease as management processes formalise over an organisation's lifespan (Avina, 1993).

The interaction between the prescriptive system for planning and managing development and the space for creative development approaches led to a culture of experimentation and ignoring central dictates, with significant room for individual interpretation and action. Laurie Adams, noted:

The leeway and space in certain corners is very important in terms of AA culture, it leads to chaos and mayhem and negotiation and re-negotiation, but it is important. (Interview, 2008, Adams, Head of Impact Assessment from 2005)

Another significant facilitating factor for ActionAid's change was its extensive use of participatory approaches. ActionAid began engaging with participatory methodologies in the late 1980s and the techniques of rapid rural appraisal/participatory rural appraisal quickly spread across the organisation. Robert Chambers noted that it was the PRA work that led to his interest in joining the organisation, and by the mid-late 1990s participatory approaches were a key defining methodology for the organisation.

If you want health you go to SCF. You want policy you go to OXFAM or WDM [World Development Movement]. You want emergencies you go to Medicin sans Frontieres...But if you want community-based organisations, participation or PRA, you go to ActionAid (1998, strategy coordination team discussions, Archive material).

Participatory tools had initially been used to enable poor communities to input into programme design and priority setting, but the early 1990s had seen the development of two initiatives which moved the programme from instrumental to transformative participation: *Reflect* and 'Stepping Stones'. These were adult learning packages, which used participatory tools to enable people to analyse their reality, debate, discuss, learn and decide on actions for change. Rather than using participatory tools to extract information that others could use in programme design, these approaches re-situated the ownership of the participatory analysis, encouraging participants themselves to act. These programmes transformed how ActionAid conceived participation and development, and the way that it worked with people living in poverty. Beyond this, the approaches enabled ActionAid to link to a range of locally based organisations and expand its reputation in the UK. A parallel initiative, 'Listening to Smaller Voices' (which focused on the voices of children in relation to environmental and socio-economic change) focused ActionAid on the different dynamics and views which exist within households, moving beyond a 'community' focus to recognising the differences in perspectives due to age and gender. These initiatives contributed to building the organisational capacity to listen to poor people, and an evolving understanding of the need for downward accountability; and coalesced in the initial move to a rights-based approach.

ActionAid 'Today' (2005-2009)

In 2005, when I started my research, ActionAid was an organisation with around 2000 staff members and an operating a budget of 108 million euros (ActionAid, 2005d); a dramatic transformation from the group of volunteers CJC rallied to start the Christian Youth Appeal.

As the previous section has suggested, the organisation had been steadily evolving until 1998 which saw a period of dramatic change. The shift in development understanding and move to a rights-based approach was accompanied by three organisational processes: **internationalisation** changed the power base of the organisation, its decision-making and governance structure; **ALPS** (ActionAid's Accountability, Learning and Planning system) reworked organisational accountability; and the accelerated move to **partnership**; which meant that ActionAid almost completely withdrew from direct operations at community level.

Internationalisation

ActionAid International was formed in recognition that we can have greater impact in our fight against poverty if we act in coalition and partnership with others at local, national and global levels. We believe that the solution to poverty lies in a global movement that is led by poor and excluded people acting against poverty, cutting across national and south-north boundaries. The founding of ActionAid International was our participation in, and contribution to, this movement (ActionAid, 2010: 6).

Although regionalisation had taken place in 1994 and there had been continual discussion of an international organisation since this time it took nearly ten years for the shape of the international organisation to be broadly agreed (see Figure one below).

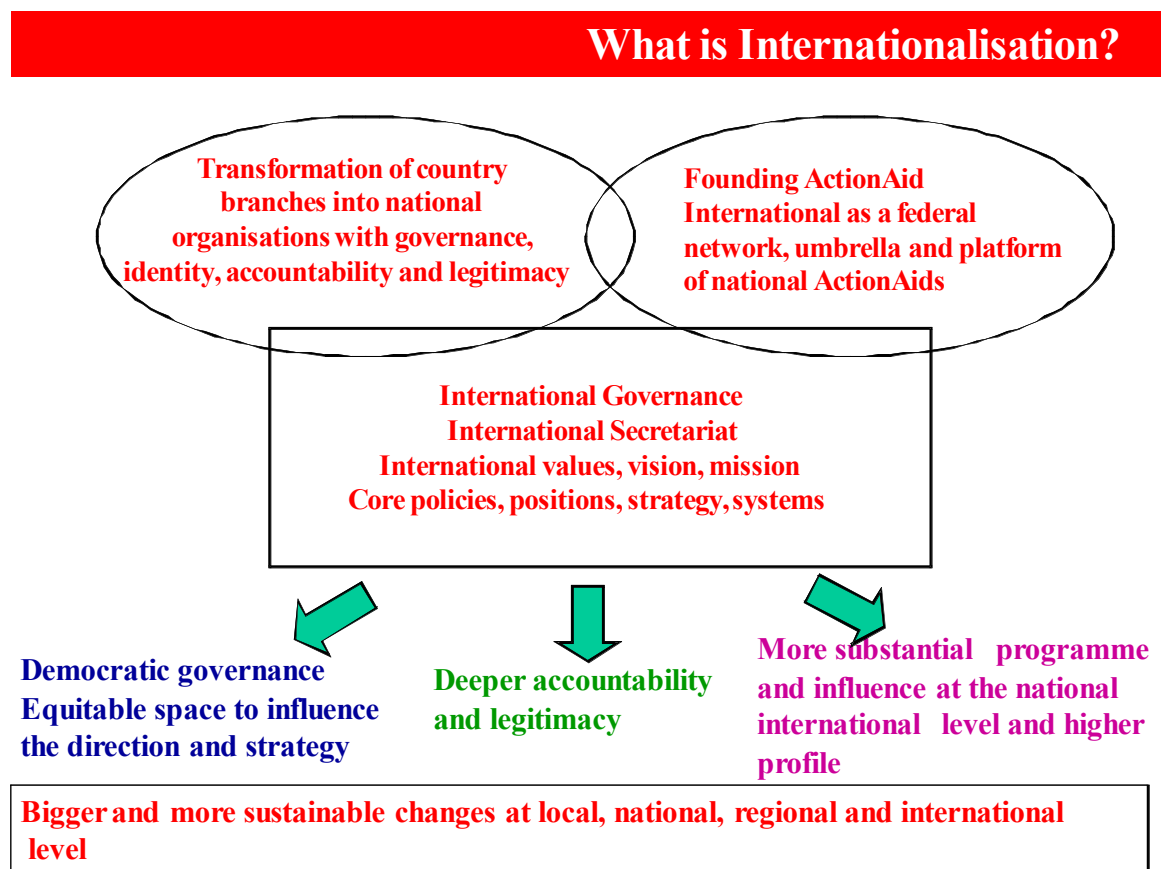
In 2003 ActionAid International was registered in the Netherlands (the country with the most conducive charity legislation at the time) and an international secretariat was established in South Africa. Internationalisation was what many people might more commonly describe as a decentralisation process. It involved establishing Country Programmes as independent organisations, registered nationally, with their own board of trustees, although part of the ActionAid International Federation.

In 2000 INTRAC published a series of papers on different forms of INGO decentralisation, suggesting that this was the necessary 'way forward' for Northern development NGOs (Fowler, 2000: 22). The fact that INTRAC published such a paper indicates that there was widespread interest in decentralisation at this time. However, ActionAid's process stands out as distinct from the processes many other organisations went through (and continue to go through). For example, the INTRAC paper discusses three different decentralisation processes – of deconcentration (when specific functions move from a central office to field offices); delegation (where some decision-making authority is passed to field offices) and devolution (where country level offices become independent with their own board of trustees); suggesting that this final form is the only 'genuine decentralisation' process:

There is a significant difference between a locally staffed office of a Northern NGO and an office which is accountable to a locally constituted board. Power and accountability structures are totally different where a national committee or board has been established (Pratt and Gibbs, 2000: 2)

ActionAid’s internationalisation process conforms to this third type of decentralisation, and there was significant emphasis on shifting organisational power and responsibility. For many other organisations the focus has been on some deconcentration or delegation, accompanied by a focus on ‘upward devolution’ (Fowler, 2000: 20).

FIGURE 1: What is Internationalisation? (Internal Presentation, 2005)



Based on the interviews and analysis contained here, what made ActionAid different from other INGOs, was not the shift in organisational form but the organisational power relations it intended to support. While many INGOs (Oxfam International, Save the Children Alliance, Plan Federation) have shifted to working as transnational networks ‘made up of individuals and groups from a variety of locations – national identity is not a defining feature of membership’ (Yanacopulos, 2002:207). ActionAid has been striving to be international – with Country Programmes strongly rooted as part of national civil society and contributing to ActionAid International on the basis of their national identity, priorities and perspectives.

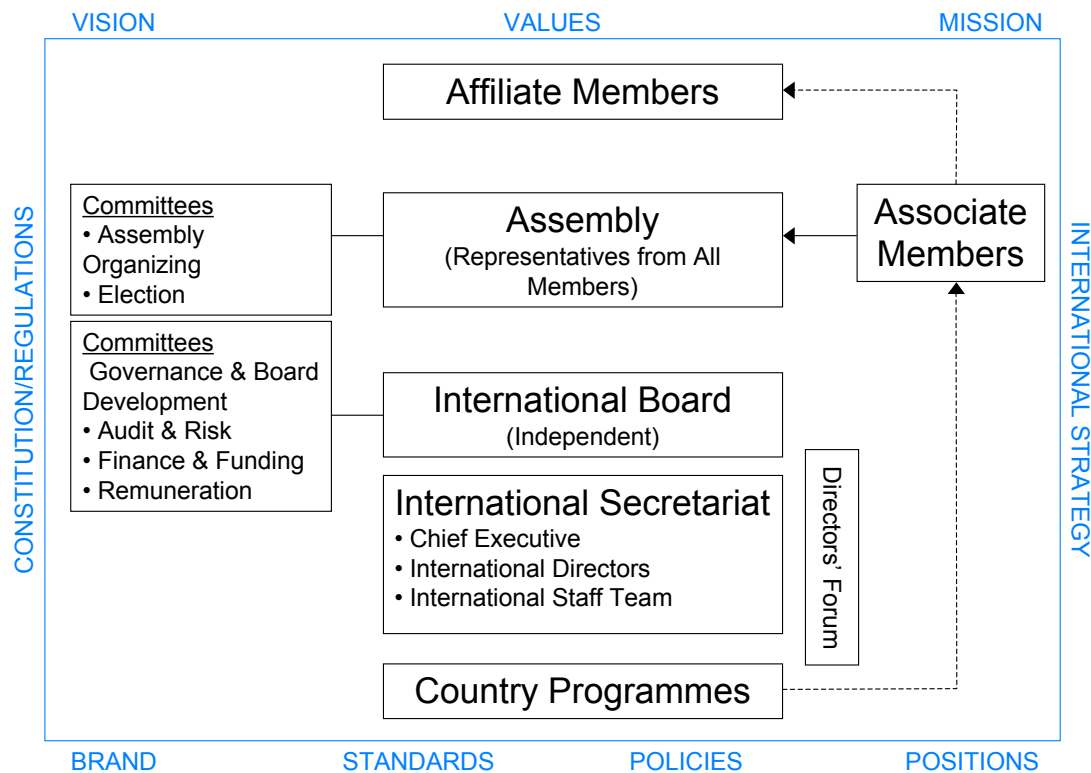
This structure responded directly to the organisational belief in how poverty is caused and reinforced, which focused attention on unequal power relations. If poverty is caused by inequalities in power, development processes needed to engage directly with power relations, working locally, nationally and globally (for example to transform power relations between men and women, rich and poor, and North and South). And there was a strong belief that the organisational form needed to reflect this wider development vision. For example, if Southern voices were to be stronger in development they needed to be heard more strongly within the organisation. Moreover, as Singh pointed out:

When I joined [1984] the paradigm was one of transferring resources, it then moved to transferring technology, and then shifted again to being about transferring power. It is untenable to have an organisation based on raising money in one part of the world and spending it in the other in today's world – therefore AA needed to change. The world had changed, you can't just think 'global act local' when the impact of global changes impact local (and so quickly, there is an increase in petrol price and communities feel this 24hrs later). I had the vision of AA as a citizens' organisation – based nationally and locally, but internationally connected (Interview, Singh).

The process of internationalisation was a slow one and was on-going throughout my research. For example, while the federal model of operation had been agreed in 2003, this evolved and in May 2009 ActionAid registered as an 'association' which enabled a first meeting of the ActionAid General Assembly to happen a month later.

The aim of becoming an association was to balance the wish for democracy, participation and accountability (with the assembly including a representative from each member of the ActionAid federation) with the need for efficient and effective governance from a small board which could meet regularly (ActionAid, 2010: 12). The organisational structure that had evolved by 2009 is described in Figure Two, along with the organisational 'glue' – the strategies, values, processes and themes of work that hold the structure together. A further diagram which illustrates the relationship between the International Secretariat, Country Programmes and 'themes' of work is included as Appendix Four.

FIGURE 2: ActionAid International Structure (ActionAid, 2010a: 13)



In achieving its organisational structure ActionAid has worked with a mixture of processes: supporting Country Programmes to establish themselves as Affiliates ('Associates' as shown on the diagram are organisations in the process of becoming affiliates); creating new ActionAids (such as ActionAid Sweden); and joining with pre-existing organisations in some countries (for example, Mellempfolkeligt Samvirke in Denmark and Auscare in Australia). The shift in structure and the development of new organisations has been a complex and time-consuming process. It required considerable investment, justified in the name of achieving a global citizens' organisation – rooted nationally in the global North and global South.

The internationalisation process provides the backdrop to the research period. Over the period of study ActionAid moved from having six Affiliates (mainly Northern based) to having fourteen affiliates and seven Associates. This meant that organisational dynamics were continually shifting.

Accountability, learning and planning: ALPS

In 2000 ActionAid developed an organisational 'Accountability, Learning and Planning System' (ALPS). This system provided the organisational values, principles, attitudes

and behaviours, and has been central in determining how ActionAid conceives its role and relationship within development:

It starts with a belief that poor people and their own organisations are both capable of and should be involved in managing their development processes (David and Mancini, 2004: 8).

It aimed to:

- deepen our accountability to all stakeholders, but particularly to the poor and excluded people with whom we work
- ensure that all our processes create the space for innovation, learning and critical reflection, and reduce unnecessary bureaucracy
- ensure that our planning is participatory and puts analysis of power relations and a commitment to addressing rights – particularly women’s rights – at the heart of all our processes (ActionAid International, 2006: 5).

ALPS defined organisational principles, attitudes, behaviour and processes, all focused around the core values of downwards accountability and transparency. While there have been doubts as to whether it has succeeded in its purpose of downwards accountability (with more attention focused on transparency) investment in such a system, in 2000, was ground-breaking.

David and Mancini (ibid) commented that ALPS ‘goes against the flow’ in its recognition that social development, rights and justice cannot be planned for, managed and delivered linearly. ALPs recognised that these processes are complex and unpredictable, and need to be supported by a reflexive and reflective organisation. The framework of ALPS fits squarely within Power et al’s (2003) vision of ‘bottom-up learning,’ and its novelty in 2000 meant that ActionAid received significant attention and accolade from a wide range of development actors.

ALPS signalled a distinct break with ActionAid’s earlier reporting systems. Although it contained elements typical of any planning and accountability system (for example programme appraisal, reviews and plans and reports), the focus was on **how** these elements were generated. The involvement of primary stakeholders (i.e. poor people) in planning, budgeting and assessing the value of interventions was central. Through annual ‘participatory review and reflection processes’ which involved a range of AA staff, partners, community members, peer organisations and donors, ActionAid aimed to create the conditions for honest and collaborative reflections on what has and what has not worked well. This reflection was then linked directly to future planning and budgeting processes to ensure that lessons were learned and strategies adjusted.

However, it is important to note that while there was emphasis on transparency to the poor and marginalised people with whom ActionAid worked, in practice this has been distinct from accountability. There were no systems by which poor people could actually hold ActionAid to account, no exit or guarantee of voice. The extent to which ActionAid listened and learned was dependent on the motivation of the individual staff involved, and how conducive and interested their management is. This point is revisited in Chapter Eight.

Writing in 2004, David and Mancini (who were the main custodians and key authors of ALPS during its inception) commented that while there were clear successes with ALPS there were also continual tensions. Key challenges arose in relation to staff expertise and behaviour. To internalise and practise ALPS an attitudinal shift was needed, to value the involvement of poor people and support what were frequently considered as time-consuming participatory processes. They noted that there had been very little attention to recruitment and induction processes to ensure that staff understood and acted in line with ALPS values and philosophy. There was also an on going tension between downward accountability and the need for upward reporting – whether this was driven internally in order to understand progress against strategy, or through external relationships such as in accessing funding from donors:

We are getting frequent requests from NGOs, bilaterals and multilaterals to talk about our new accountability, learning and planning system, at the same time our funding department are pressurised to conform to normal practice....While the IAU [Impact Assessment Unit] – with the support of the Policy Director and the CEO – are able to argue the point, most fundraisers and members of marketing teams are not (ibid:17).

David and Mancini also warned of the potential tensions that would arise between an organisational imperative and development imperatives during the internationalisation process, recognising that this process presented huge structural and cultural changes which would require:

The development of a unifying set of core values, common vision, identity, mission strategies, standards and systems for collective determined action across organisational and national boundaries...[T]here is a danger that the uncertainty of transition will create a demand for some standardised practices and tangible outcomes (ibid: 24).

The tension between supporting a bottom-up participatory development process, while holding onto shared organisational values and visions for development, was at the heart of the challenge ActionAid was facing in implementing its rights-based approach.

Partnership

During the 1990s UK INGOs were beginning to question their role in development and there was extensive introspection regarding the role and relationships between Northern and Southern NGOs. Discussion on 'being operational' and 'working with partners' took place and there was increased interest in the role of Northern NGOs in building capacity of Southern Organisations. This was perhaps in response to wider discussions across the development sector. For example, in the early 1990s donors were discussing different forms of allocating aid, including directly funding Southern-based organisations. The preference for funding Southern-based organisations increased further in the UK in 1997 when Clare Short took over as Secretary of State for Development.

Until the early-1990s the fact that ActionAid itself delivered social services, performing the role of local government, was relatively unquestioned within the organisation. But, in 1993 an international seminar on 'working through local institutions' was held, lessons were shared from ActionAid's experiences in India and Latin America, where partnership models had existed for sometime. However, although there were extensive discussions at this time, there was little change in ActionAid's general mode of operating. This was perhaps because Griffiths himself was unconvinced of the benefits of working through partners. Although he saw the need to work with and develop local civil society he also felt that direct operations were a great asset for ActionAid in terms of connecting with local people, their knowledge and perspective, and really understanding what was happening on the ground (Interview, Griffiths).

However, the move to partnership working was central to 'FPT', which included a strong emphasis on the need to nurture and develop local organisations. By the end of the strategy period all Country Programmes were delivering the majority of their work through local partners; and those Country Programmes (Nigeria and Brazil) which were established during the strategy period delivered all their work in partnership.

The primary driver for partnership work was ideological. If ActionAid was to facilitate the emergence of internationally networked citizens' organisations it needed to support the strengthening of national civil society. Operating within a rights-based framework meant organising, catalysing and nurturing locally based rights-based action. There was also a wish to respond to challenges coming from various quarters at the time that northern NGOs were replicating colonial power structures by displacing national governments in directing development/social services. However, working in

partnership also responded to another real need in ActionAid. If advocacy work was to be scaled up and national offices were to be established, focused on engaging in policy debates (also part of the FPT vision), there was a need to draw in other sources of expertise for local level work, hence the support to partner organisations.

Partnership work initially referred exclusively to small local organisations that ActionAid funded to manage child sponsorship and implement its development approach. This relationship of resource transfer impacted greatly on the quality of partnership and is discussed later (Chapter Eight). While such organisations still dominated in ActionAid partnerships, since the turn of the century the concept has evolved considerably. For example, during my research period, ActionAid was working with networks, coalitions and social movements at every level, as well as working with national NGOs, academics and government on a wide range of initiatives.

The fact that the majority of grassroots work depended on partnership, meant that the challenge of implementing a participatory rights-based approach also involved questions of who the partners were, how they conceived their role at the local level, how they engaged with communities, and how they valued grassroots perspectives and knowledge.

A new organisational strategy: 'Rights to End Poverty'

In 2005 ActionAid developed a new organisational strategy: 'Rights to End Poverty' (R2EP): ActionAid International Strategy 2005-2010 (ActionAid, 2005a). My research took place during this strategy period.

'R2EP' built on 'FPT', and in reading the two strategy papers the relationship between them is strong. Following a series of organisational reviews, comprising 'Taking Stock II' (2004), 'R2EP' was developed through an eighteen-month participatory process. The strategy development process invited board members, staff, selected donors and partner organisations across the globe to comment on, and feed into, various drafts. It was framed as presenting an alternative to neo-liberal driven development, echoing the pronouncement of the 2004 World Social Forum that, 'Another World is Possible'. It aimed to provide a global framework for ActionAid's work, uniting a largely decentralised organisation (with a vision for further decentralisation) around core strategic goals and thematic areas of work.

The strategy reinforced the importance of a rights-based discourse and analysis and provided a vision of ActionAid as part of a 'global anti-poverty movement': a networked

organisation made up of locally based ActionAids linking to a range of social movements and other civil society organisations across the world.

'R2EP' is more absolute in its aims and vision than 'FPT'. It uses stronger language to describe ActionAid's contextual understanding, goals and strategies. For example, 'poor and marginalised people' is replaced by 'poor and excluded people' and the use of words such as injustice, power relations and rights are much more ingrained and widespread. Singh reflected:

R2EP was 60% a continuation of FPT, what was new was the content of rights – while R2EP didn't identify specific rights-holders (except women) it identified what rights (the 6 themes) we would work on; this was a break with the past where strategy had been about methods, about the how rather than the what (Interview, Singh).

Beyond giving content to ActionAid's work Singh emphasised that the new strategy centred on 'thinking internationally'. To respond to this the strategy led to an important structural change. A new organisational hierarchy was developed, whereby thematic heads (i.e. the heads of Education, HIV/AIDS, Food Rights, Human Security, Governance and Women's rights) were placed above Country Directors. This move signalled a need to work within these specific thematic areas, and was intended to facilitate a greater coherence between national and international work. It also suggested that the power of the Country Director was to become more measured. This shift in power relationships inevitably gave rise to some tensions, and influenced how countries engaged in the thematic work. The formal and informal operation of power within ActionAid is considered further in Chapter Eight.

The strategy identified four goals,

- Goal one: poor and excluded people and communities will exercise power to secure their rights
- Goal two: women and girls will gain power to secure their rights
- Goal three: citizens and civil society across the world will fight for rights and justice
- Goal four: states and their institutions will be accountable and democratic and will promote, protect and fulfil human rights for all.

to be implemented through six strategic themes:

1. women's rights
2. the right to education
3. the right to food
4. the right to human security during conflicts and emergencies
5. the right to a life of dignity in the face of HIV and AIDS
6. the right to just and democratic governance.

The strategy also identified six organisational goals:

1. Strengthen our governance and deepen accountability
2. Strengthen staff capacity
3. Strengthen our structures and systems
4. Strengthen our communications and campaigns
5. Increase our supporters and mobilize supporters and partners behind our mission
6. Increase and diversify income.

(ActionAid, 2005a).

Although 'R2EP' created international teams with specific thematic focus, it gave little guidance as to the specific role or composition of these teams. This meant that in practice the international teams evolved directly from what had been there previously. For example, the IET remained largely based in the UK, building on its prior work, relationships and ways of interacting with the wider organisation and other partners. I discuss this in more detail later (see Chapters Six, Seven and Eight).

ActionAid as a fourth generation organisation?

The changes in organisational structure, focus and operations of ActionAid reflect the overall changes in the sector as a whole: moving from a charitable focus which echoed nineteenth century Victorian philanthropy; to one that considers, and challenges, the structural relationships and inequalities which keep huge sectors of the world living in economic poverty. However as discussed later in this thesis (Chapters Five and Seven) ActionAid's transformation appears to go further and deeper than many comparable INGOs.

Revisiting Korten's generations, it is clear that ActionAid has moved beyond Korten's third generation. The organisation's vision of social justice is not one of ameliorating poverty but of fundamentally transforming the rules of the game. Its strategy and form signal a commitment to building a new type of society, where poor people have access to economic, political and social power and no longer exist on the margins.

However, comparing ActionAid to Korten's description of a fourth sector organisation suggests that while ActionAid shares many elements of the development vision, various issues need to be further understood. For Korten, a people's organisation cuts across a three-sector model of state, market and civil society, and reflects attributes from each of these sectors. Significant in this is the extent to which the organisation is run by 'the people' themselves. ActionAid's governance system emphasised increasing the

participation of poor and excluded people and groups, and during my research period increasingly strong links were developed with Social Movements. But in many ways its operation is still comparable to other INGOs. It operates within the same global system and faces the same challenges as other INGOs. These include: the relationship between Northern and Southern staff; the funding systems and structures; the complexity of accountability, and of monitoring and understanding change; and the increasing pressure, and expectation, to participate in international and national policy debates. While its decentralisation process, governance structure and emphasis on its connection to social movements sets it apart from other large UK INGOs, its funding and accountability challenges reflect that of its peers.

This tension is played out through considering the extent to which ActionAid is a transnational or an international organisation (Yanacopulos, 2002). For example, Singh emphasised the implication of being a citizens' organisation

Recently I was asked at a board meeting about the country exit strategy – which doesn't exist in AA – but why should it exist, having a country exit strategy suggests that you are foreign, so you should leave, but AA isn't constructed in that way – the national organisations are part of national civil society – they are citizens' organisations (Interview, Singh).

The idea of being a federation of national organisations is significantly different from the traditional INGO model; and reinforces the desire expressed above to be a truly international organisation. However, as Clark notes, in developing transnational civil action there are:

Two key variables...the degree of decentralisation...and the degree to which decision-making lies with volunteers and CSO members (via elected committees of representatives) or with professional staff in international secretariats. Do CSOs help citizens to achieve a voice for themselves or do they speak for citizens? The former are more evidently representative and democratic, the latter usually have swifter, clearer decision-making and may appear more professional (Clark, 2003: 5).

This dynamic is at the heart of ActionAid's struggles as it attempts to translate its rights-based approach into practice. The way in which it interprets its role, and manages the tension between centrally-led, professional action, and local participatory bottom-up development, signals the extent to which it fulfils its mission as a citizens' organisation, an organisation akin to Korten's vision of a Fourth Generation NGO, or 'People's Movement'.

This chapter has given an overview of ActionAid's evolution. It has identified the importance of leadership in setting the organisational vision and driving forward

change and the extent of organisational space that exists for individuals to pursue their specific agendas. It has highlighted the tension between strong diktats from the centre, and significant power residing in individuals, enabling Country Directors, for example, to determine the extent to which they will respond to policy from the centre. It has also emphasised the way the central funding mechanism, of child sponsorship, has influenced organisational relationships and expectations, and the tensions between the perceived needs of individual sponsors in the Global North, and the programme expectations in the Global South. Finally, it has shown that the organisation has undergone significant change since it first came into being – change that responded to external shifts in opportunity and expectation of INGOs, and to internal visions and opportunities.

The ActionAid that existed during my research period had over 30 years' experience in service delivery. It had moved from a focus on delivering a menu of benefits to individual children to supporting a wider geographical community, and then shifted further to engage with specific groups of excluded people. The changing organisational form and function interacted with a mix of long-stay staff and newer arrivals, recruited in order to take on new organisational agendas in the move to rights-based working. While ActionAid located its future as part of a global movement for social justice and equality, its history was one of a traditional INGO. This impacted both how it pursued its current role and the potential for organisational evolution.

The following chapters discuss the interaction between theory and practice, as I explore how the organisation conceived of its rights-based approach, and the challenges it faced in operationalising its vision. In doing this it is important to appreciate the specific dynamics of ActionAid as presented by this brief organisational history, and the influence of the wider context in which INGOs find themselves at the beginning of the twenty first century.

Chapter 5: Articulating a rights-based approach

Introduction

As explained in the previous chapter, ActionAid's 2005-2010 strategy 'Rights to End Poverty' framed all of ActionAid's work within a rights-based approach. At this time the language of rights was commonplace across the development sector, peppering statements and publications of multi and bi-lateral donors, the United Nations, INGOs, smaller solidarity organisations and local, national and international social movements. On one level there was broad agreement that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) was the framework and the key reference point from which diverse rights can be fought for and secured. However, closer examination shows that there existed a wide variety of interpretations of what a rights-based approach meant when put into practice. As with many development debates, the roles of policy, people and process are key to understanding the different interpretations of a rights-based approach. But there are also distinctive factors derived from the specific nature of universal human rights and the accompanying discourse, which involve a series of principles including the 'right to participate'²⁴.

Based on a mixture of publicly available documentation (published documents and website material), and the interviews that I conducted, this chapter begins by looking broadly at how different large UK INGOs used rights-based language and analysis in their work. Building from this, it then focuses on ActionAid's articulation of a rights-based approach, as developed during the strategy period 2005-2010, looking specifically at a paper produced in 2008. By comparing ActionAid's interpretation to other comparable organisations it is clear that, in theory at least, ActionAid's approach was distinctive. However, while the theoretical discussion of ActionAid's rights-based

²⁴ While there is no statement of the right to participate, the expression can be seen through various articles in the Universal Declaration. For example Article 21 states: 'Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives' while Article 27 declares: 'Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community' <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/> accessed 3rd October 2011. The right to participate is seen as a central principle in a rights-based approach <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/FAQen.pdf> accessed 3.10.11.

work was strongly framed, interviews conducted with a range of staff suggest a more complex picture in practice. The second part of the chapter therefore raises questions on the extent to which the published understanding of rights was shared, and suggests that there were divergent views on many aspects of ActionAid's rights-based work. This issue is expanded on in the following chapter when I examine ActionAid's 'thematic' work on the Right to Education. Key in this were the differing interpretations of how service delivery integrated with a rights-based approach.

Defining and using rights: understandings across large UK

INGOs

This section focuses on three important dynamics which shape how organisations have understood rights-based approaches. Firstly, it considers the distinction between legal and empowering approaches, as noted in Chapter Two (Piron, 2005; Gready and Ensor, 2005). It then focuses on the extent to which rights language is conceived as a political statement involving the transformation of power as opposed to a set of technical targets identified as the focus of a development intervention. One way of exploring this is in relation to top-down or bottom-up development; for example, whether rights are understood as universal or locally defined (Gready and Ensor, 2005). This is linked to a discussion on the interplay between a process-led or outcome focused rights-based approach. The third issue draws directly from the first two, and concerns the extent to which rights-based language is used to define and frame work across the organisation – i.e. is it just 'an approach' or does it influence all organisational functioning and decision-making; would the organisation claim to be 'rights-based'? Implicit in this is a consideration of the role of service delivery and how conceptions of service delivery and rights interact to challenge in some cases, and support in others, the practical action of INGO service delivery. Figure Three (overleaf) illustrates these different dimensions in summary form.

FIGURE THREE: Continuums of a rights-based approach	
Legislative -----	Empowering ²⁵
Outcome focused -----	Process focused
Universal rights -----	Locally defined rights
Top-down -----	Bottom-up
(development)	
Instrumental -----	Transformative
(participation)	

Empowering or legalistic approaches

Chapter Two noted that rights-based approaches draw on the international human rights framework, but that in interpreting this in practice many organisations make the distinction between legal and empowering approaches. Put simply, a legal focus implies focusing attention on government (and other relevant organisations) duties - to respect, protect and fulfil human rights (<http://www.unfpa.org/rights/approaches.htm> accessed 3rd October 2011). In contrast, an empowerment approach focuses more attention on the use of rights principles – participation, non-discrimination, equality and accountability - to guide an approach to development²⁶; involving poor people as active partners in their development (Eyben, 2006). This divergence in interpretation was reflected repeatedly in my interviews with staff from different UK INGOs.

For example, Allison Burden emphasised CARE’s principle-based interpretation:

My role is to convene a group of people interested in rights-based work...to further understanding of how the rights principles work in practice (these principles are around partnership, accountability, empowerment, dignity, respect, equality). CARE took on the rights language in 1999, they had a new

²⁵ Legislative approaches can be empowering, and empowering approaches can involve legal elements. However, as suggested by Gready and Ensor (2005), legislative approaches tend to take a legislative and technical perspective, for example drawing on the expertise of lawyers, while empowering approaches focus on building individual knowledge of rights and capacity to demand rights.

²⁶ The OHCHR produced a ‘Frequently Asked Questions on a human rights-based approach to development cooperation’ which identified the following principles of a rights-based approach: equality, non-discrimination, accountability and participation (OHCHR, 2006: pp. 23-27)

strategy and vision at this time. While it is hard to say exactly what the motivation was, there was a change in development discourse, and this most probably impacted both internally and externally on the organisation, so CARE shifted in line with this. The legal framework, and work with government has not formed a core part of CARE's rights-based approach to date (Interview, 2008, Allison Burden, Senior Technical Advisor, Rights-based Approach and Governance, CARE USA).

This distinction between different approaches resonates with Jones' (2005: 81) reflection on how CARE had done more on the **promotional** (working in partnership with government and others in the pursuit of rights) than the **violations** (denouncing, or exposing government failure) approach to rights. For CARE the focus was on how service delivery was conceived within a rights-based approach - developing strategies for active participation of poor and excluded communities; rather than emphasising government obligations.

Rights-based principles are clearly important, and many organisations noted how engagement with these principles had transformed and strengthened their development practice, specifically how they engaged with and involved 'poor people' as active participants in their work. However, the outcome of principle-based, rather than legally focused, rights-based approaches can be very different; as exemplified in a comment from the UK policy coordinator of the Global Campaign for Education:

PLAN have a campaign on universal birth registration, but they don't use rights to frame their work - so the campaign on birth registration is done through registration drives rather than looking at the relationship between rights holders and duty bearers; rather than, for example, looking at the responsibility of government to deliver education even if children haven't been registered at birth. Rights then are just about children having rights to school, not about how schooling is delivered. PLAN still have PLAN schools and PLAN communities, and child sponsorship is used to pay school fees (Interview 2008, Lucia Fry).

Uvin (2007) warns against the dangers of 'side-stepping' the role of government obligation in rights-based practice, asserting that if this is not considered, the language can merely become 'a figleaf for the continuation of the *status quo*' (ibid: 600). The danger is that, instead of working to strengthen government fulfilment of their rights obligations, organisations continue to deliver services themselves. This can 'let the state off the hook' and undermine the potential for citizens to develop strong relationships of accountability with their government.

Discussions with Save the Children (SCF-UK) illustrated a similar tendency. For example SCF UK claimed to frame all their work by a focus on child rights. But one person I interviewed explained how, while SCF UK had adopted rights-based language,

and had five pillars of child rights programming, the organisation was not actively using a legislative framework in its rights-based work, or conceiving of the government as primary duty holders. The rights-language was used in the background but the organisation continued with service delivery work, viewing rights as entitlements that it could directly deliver.

This view was implicitly echoed in much of SCF's website – for example a page on their website entitled 'Achievements and ambitions' did not mention the word rights, and commented that:

We're also aiming, ...to become the top emergency response agency for children – raising more money, responding more quickly and effectively, saving more lives. And we'll help more children in fragile countries – the places where war, disasters and the collapse of government put children at risk (accessed May 2010).

Such language suggests that SCF was delivering 'rights' to children, rather than putting pressure on governments to do so (although it is important to note that this quote refers directly to work in an emergency context, when it could be argued that government may not be capable of fulfilling their obligations).

The different interpretations of how to practise a rights-based approach can be seen in considering the evolution of the 'UK Inter-agency group on Human Rights-based Approaches', which first met in 2005:

[F]ormed from representatives from different UK NGOs who are actively implementing or are seeking to be more actively involved in implementing development and emergency programmes that have human and civil rights as an integral component (Sleap, 2006: 1)

The group initially focused attention on human rights-based programming and received funding from DfID to explore the impact of local projects designed within a 'human rights-based approach' as compared to more traditional development work (Crawford, 2007)²⁷. However, when I first made contact with the group in 2007 there had been a

²⁷ The 2-year research process compared 7 rights-based approach projects with 7 traditional INGO projects in 3 different countries, and concluded that the projects which integrated a rights-based approach were more likely to achieved 'sustained positive change' – because of the emphasis on engaging with the structural dimensions of poverty. These approaches reduced vulnerability and increased opportunity for meaningful participation in a range of public spaces. Drawing from an analysis of Oxfam USA, CARE USA and the UN understandings of Human Rights-based Approaches, three common threads were identified. 1. RBAs frame problems as rights - linked to international, national or customary standards; 2. they emphasise the capacity and agency of rights holders; and 3. They engage and hold duty bearers accountable for meeting their obligations. However, the

noticeable shift to engaging with high-level policy issues; with a much stronger focus on legal obligations. There were clear divisions in the group as to the relevance of this approach. For example, in relation to discussions about a 2-day proposed conference on Human Rights-based Approaches one group member posted the following:

While certainly interesting, I'm afraid this tentative conference TOR [Terms of Reference] as it stands, wouldn't be hitting the key points that are holding us back in Concern. It is quite focussed on international legal mechanisms whereas we are much more concerned with local level strategies to promote a HRBA (<http://uk.dir.groups.yahoo.com/group/HRBA/>, September 2008, Sinead Walsh, Concern).

This was met by the following response:

Overall, the feeling was that having held two conferences now as a group on what constitutes RBA and RBA programming (focussing in the main on participation and inclusion elements) that it would be more appropriate at this stage in terms of learning and development to look at the accountability/obligation strand of RBA - very practically, in terms of useful tools and measuring outputs (ibid: Miranda Kazantzis, Amnesty International).

In fact, all the messages posted in 2008-2009 focused on rights-based advocacy work in relation to the MDGs, with no reference to programming issues.

There are many possible reasons for this, including staff changes within organisations; for example, CARE had initially chaired the group but Amnesty took over in 2008. Equally relevant could be the external influences. For example, there were wider shifts in the role of INGOs in the UK after 2005 (with the Make Poverty History Campaign) which led to a greater focus on MDG campaigning, and potentially less attention on programming²⁸. What is most relevant though, is the lack of connection between the two areas of debate. The messages either concern global targets and discussion on government capacity to meet these, and how they should be measured; or focus on practical programming approaches, including concepts of participation and empowerment – and the impact of such a programming approach as compared to a more traditional needs-based programme. No individual or organisation involved emphasised the links between these two approaches in the online forum.

publication does not look at how these statements are translated into practice, or to what extent the organisations balance a legal and empowering approach. (Crawford, 2007).

²⁸ By 2010 when I shared reflections from my own research, the meeting was only attended by three people who were discussing closing the group due to lack of engagement, perhaps suggesting a shift in interest in rights across all UK INGOs.

This apparent dichotomy between empowering and legal approaches was not, however, reflected in ActionAid's articulated understanding of a rights-based approach. As discussed further below, the wish to span both approaches gave rise to challenges in practice, an issue that was exacerbated by the organisational wish to engage across two further continuums - the process/outcome continuum, and the universal/locally defined conception of rights.

Outcome/process and universal/locally defined rights

A rights-based programme that emphasises 'process' will have a very different set of objectives, activities and participants from one that focuses on 'outcome'. For example, if the only issue that is considered important is that a specific right is secured, a programme of work will focus on achieving that outcome. There may be little (if any) consideration regarding who is involved in the action, or how they are involved.

Decisions might focus on which organisations to target, whether the focus should be at international or national level, if the aim is to secure a legal guarantee or to ensure previous legislation is implemented etc. By contrast, if process is emphasised, more attention will be focused on who is designing, leading and implementing any activity. Their capacity will be explored, and the relationships between those involved will be discussed. An activity might be considered as successful, or at least partly successful, even if the targeted right is not fully achieved – if participation in the process itself is deemed to be empowering (for example strengthening relationships between community members and local government).

Oxfam GB's strategic plan, 2007-2010 was framed by rights: to a sustainable livelihood; to basic social services; to life and security; to equity; and to be heard (Oxfam GB, 2007: 2). Its organisational 'belief system' was founded on a belief in human rights as well as a recognition of unequal power relations impacting on people's vulnerability - with poverty as 'the result of decisions taken, intentionally or unintentionally by those in power'. Within the Strategic Plan it was stated that 'all our work comes from a rights-based approach' (ibid: 1). Brouwer, et al (2005) noted that the:

[U]niversal language of rights has helped the Oxfam affiliates and their partners to speak a common language, and to express in authoritative and internationally accepted terminology the essential elements for achieving human development and global justice (Brouwer et al, 2005: 75).

However, the authors also noted that, while rights language helped in analysis and in identifying targets of policy campaigns, there was less evidence of rights actually transforming organisational practice. Equally, none of the Oxfam staff interviewed (the

Chair of the Board, the Education Adviser, the MDG Campaigner and the Right to be Heard Adviser) felt that Oxfam was actively pursuing a rights-based approach to its work. As one interviewee stated:

Rights-based Approach language is not used explicitly. The aims of Oxfam are formulated using rights language, and some of the principles are incorporated. Interest in rights depends on who you are talking to; there are patches of passion - but one of the best regional people is an ex-ActionAider! (Interview, 2008, Sheila Aikman, Oxfam, Global Education Adviser 2002-2008)

The suggestion that rights were used to identify project aims, but not to shape practice implies an 'outcome' approach in which success would be measured by whether a policy campaign achieved its goal, rather than exploring who was involved or how.

Within the outcome/process continuum, a further consideration is the question of who is identifying which rights should be the focus of work. This involves reflection on whether the focus should be limited to those contained within the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (and later international agreements such as the Convention of the Rights of the Child etc.) or if the focus is on enabling people at the grassroots to define and develop rights, drawing from their local context. A brief look at Christian Aid's 'Doing Justice to Poverty' (2010) – an organisational position paper which outlines Christian Aid's understanding of poverty and its implications - is illuminating in this regard.

The paper starts by outlining four different approaches to understanding poverty. These are: list-based approaches (which includes rights-based approaches derived from the internationally agreed framework of human rights); participatory approaches (defined according to the views of those living in poverty); social exclusion approaches (focused on inequality between groups) or monetary approaches (focused on income or consumption) (ibid:5). The fact that Christian Aid define a rights-based approach as a 'list' suggests a 'universalist' conception. A consideration of locally identified and defined rights would have stronger links to participation and inequality.

This universalist perspective is reinforced through the paper's discussion on participation. The document notes that Christian Aid recognises that, although participation can be empowering, and useful in identifying 'those aspects of poverty that are most binding', there are 'flaws' in such an approach:

'Were a community to exclude female education, say....we would nevertheless continue to emphasise the importance of this. We are dishonest if we claim not to insist on our own views of poverty....We do not make exaggerated claims to

speaking for people living in poverty, but rather recognise that we are speaking for ourselves, informed by our understanding of their experience (Christian Aid, 2010: 9).

This statement reflects a very real problem that organisations face when trying to support participatory practice. In many ways Christian Aid should be congratulated for being open and honest about the dilemmas which arise when views developed through participatory approaches come into conflict with organisational values. And for recognising that they have core values that are not open to challenge. However, this limitation on participation has widespread implications for bottom-up learning and transformative practice. For example, it implicitly limits participation to consultation or discussion within spaces created by Christian Aid (or presumably partners) rather than conceiving of participation as agenda-setting or enabling poor and excluded people to determine their own vision of development (see Chapter Two regarding 'ladders of participation' and 'spaces of participation'). The power is very much retained by Christian Aid, which stands by its official views, rather than taking an ecological approach to organisational beliefs (Ellerman, 2003²⁹). Thus, participation is conceived as a one-way process, rather than building ideas of mutual exchange, learning and discovery as emphasised by Chambers (2007) and though some of ActionAid's work (for example, Newman and Archer, 2003).

The interaction of the universal approach to rights with a limited view of participation suggests a top-down outcome approach to rights. There is less focus on transforming power relations through interaction at local level, or on supporting the emergence of alternative development visions and practices.

My engagement with these other INGOs was not of a comparable depth to my engagement with ActionAid. However, the contact I did have – through interviews and reviewing publications - suggested that there was an emphasis on outcome-focused universal interpretation of rights for most of these large INGOs. For example, a common action within rights-based practice was for the Northern policy team to lobby Western governments on how their actions constrained national ability to secure the right to

²⁹ Ellerman comments that the development views espoused by a specific organisation become associated with its brand, and therefore a challenge these views becomes interpreted as an attack on the agency itself (ibid: 41). He argues that it would be beneficial to development for organisations to take an open learning model, based on the 'ecology of knowledge' and to encourage debate between views; rather than adhere to their development dogma, so as to encourage discussion on challenges to 'doing development' through such a process learn from their practice.

education. Success was claimed if an aid-giving country agreed to increase aid to education. This action is clearly an important part of rights-based practice. But it is very different from the idea of transformatory participatory development, where poor and excluded groups are supported to articulate and fight for their own development vision.

The balance between universal and locally defined rights is clearly very complex, and complicated. There is extensive discussion, as noted in Chapter Two, on the dynamics between universal and culturally specific understandings of rights which cannot be resolved by simply pitting one against the other. For example, Phillips (2002) argues that:

[W]hile cultural relativism grasps a truth about the contextual nature of principles of justice, it does so in a way that seriously overstates the incommensurability of the discourses that arise in contemporary societies, and wrongly represents the difference between cultures as a difference between hermetically sealed, internally self-consistent wholes....it ignores the multiplicity of cultures with which any one person is associated...[and] encourages us into a troubling suspension of judgement when competing principles collide (Phillips, 2002: 116).

She notes that this is particularly problematic as norms of justice are not formulated under conditions of gender equality. But, in arguing that cultural relativism 'is not a useful ally for feminism' she continues to explain that, for similar reasons universalism is unattractive also. Universalism derives its claims of authority based on an assumption of impartial truth, and yet it is developed from a masculine provenance, it equates equality with sameness and does not allow for difference, therefore leaving untouched structural inequalities. (ibid: 117). Given this universalism promises more than it can deliver. Moreover, universalism obscures the position that there are some differences that are valued, 'women do not want their acceptance into the world of equals to be made conditional on others not noticing whether they are female or male' (ibid: 119).

Christian Aid's position is derived from the recognition that cultural practices have often been used as an excuse to limit the rights of particular groups (a position echoed by David Archer as noted in Chapter Three, p.92). However, as Phillips argues, an appeal to universalism is not without its complexity. She identifies three basic principles from which to debate cultural relativity and universalism – harm, equality and choice (ibid. 135) - but also recognises that these principles are also subject to contestation. Therefore, there is a need to create space for 'inclusive participation', bringing together

all relevant groups to debate cultural claims and universal rights within a specific context. But she also warns against being too ‘starry-eyed’ about democracy, or postponing action in the hope that ideal democracy will occur (ibid: 137). This analysis is of central importance in considering the role and relationship between locally defined rights and universal Human Rights as identified within the UDHR; or between organisational conception and prioritisation of rights in contrast to local definitions and preferences. I revisit this dynamic in Chapters Six and Eight.

Using rights to frame work

Beyond the continuums discussed, there are two further aspects of rights which require consideration. The extent to which rights are integrated with a political analysis that conceives development as a process of social transformation; and the level of importance rights have across the diverse aspects of an organisation’s work.

As Chapter Two indicated, it is not a given that rights-based language will provide a political analysis or framework for work. For example, as Harvey (2005) notes, the concept of rights can be supported within a neo-liberal framework, a view reflected in an interview with a UK based Oxfam staff member:

[R]ights are not so principled, they can be quite right-wing and libertarian, you can sign up to the right to education but still believe that the private sector should deliver it (Interview 2008, Max Lawson, Millennium Development Goals Campaigner).

The need for a wider philosophy to work in tandem with a rights-based approach was also identified by Philippa Lei:

World Vision uses the language of rights but only within its moral/biblical framework as a way of achieving a full life. The rights language is not so convincing, and so is only used in conjunction with other language or ways of talking about things (Interview 2008, Philippa Lei, Senior Child Rights Policy Advisor, World Vision).

In fact, for many organisations rights language was integrated into their wider development discourse, rather than providing the basis from which to define their approach. For example, an analysis³⁰ of Oxfam GB, SCF UK, Christian Aid and CAFOD’s (the ‘Big Overseas Agencies Group’) mission and value statements suggests diverse ideological starting points in the analysis of poverty, and therefore distinct development

³⁰ Based on website material and including statements of vision, mission and approach, carried out in February 2008

approaches. Christian Aid and CAFOD develop their work based on social justice derived from Christian values, while Oxfam and SCF emphasise humanitarian efforts to meet basic human needs.

For example, Christian Aid start their 2005-2010 strategy by stating that:

The essential purpose of Christian Aid is to expose the scandal of poverty, to help in practical ways to root it out from the world, and to challenge and change the systems which favour the rich and powerful over the poor and marginalised... Christian Aid's work is founded on Christian faith, inspired by hope, and acts to change an unjust world through charity (Christian Aid, 2005: 3).

The 'imperative from God' to end poverty is interpreted through organisational values and approaches to work. While rights are referred to in the organisational strategy there is no mention of a rights-based approach (a point discussed by McGee (2010: 639) who noted that the organisation preferred discussing 'working with rights' to a rights-based approach). The main thrust of the rights-language is towards accountable governance, and the right of poor and marginalised people to make decisions about how to live their lives.

The later paper (discussed above, Christian Aid: 2010) barely discusses rights. When it is mentioned, this is in relation to people having:

[A] right to power over their own lives, a right to live outside of poverty. Such a right implies an equivalent obligation...to the local, national and global society (ibid: 9).

Rights are revisited towards the end of the document in relation to international campaigns 'promoting the right to independent development for people and countries in poverty' (ibid: 13). However, there is no discussion of government obligations in relation to rights, or government obligation more generally in terms of poverty eradication and social justice. The discussion of government responsibility is kept in the background. Additionally, while there is a discussion of politics and power and an identification of poverty as disempowerment the choice of wording concerning rich elites, and the impact of a poverty eradication process on these groups is only weakly articulated. Ideas of transformation of power are hinted at rather than identified explicitly.

Those interviewed both inside and outside ActionAid commented that ActionAid had gone further than any other large INGO in articulating its understanding of a rights-based approach and locating its practice in relation to this. For example, in response to

a question concerning how different INGOs had pursued their rights based working John Gaventa commented:

ActionAid has really pioneered the way on rights-based working in terms of larger INGOs. (Interview 2008, John Gaventa, Chair of Oxfam GB)

The UK policy coordinator for the Global Campaign for Education echoed this view:

ActionAid are more radical in their approach to rights, and their commitment to a rights-based approach. It is central to their work.... Other organisations embrace the language but don't adjust their practice in the same way (Interview 2008, Fry).

Moreover, although Oxfam's strategy was framed by rights, when I interviewed Oxfam staff in 2008 there had not been a corporate process to identify what a rights-based approach meant in practice, or an internal document to outline the theory of rights-based working. Staff felt that rights concepts were merely terminology, used in the background but with little influence on decision-making process or programme development:

In many organisations, staff have heard the rights language as part of the mission, but in some cases it risks becoming a framework for categorising rather than working out what a rights-based approach actually means as a methodology....In Oxfam's case there was a big 'retreat' of trustees and senior people about 10 years ago to decide on this direction, so it actually proceeded the shift/emergence of RBA in DfID and others.... Some people would think after 10 years we should look at all this, but I don't think there is an appetite for that (Interview 2008, Gaventa)

For rights to provide an ideology and framework for practice the language needs to be linked to broad values and principles. For ActionAid these were strongly rooted in a belief in people's participation and empowerment, and social justice rooted in transforming power relations. Thus while the other organisations may have mentioned power and powerlessness this was not being discussed in relation to rights-abuses. This meant that the solution did not necessarily involve supporting people's organisations and action to secure rights. This more superficial use of rights contrasts with Watt's³¹ reflection on how rights influenced ActionAid:

ActionAid talks about rights more than other organisations, it uses the language more in its publications.... RBA informs how AA thinks about issues, analyses problems...[Rights] influenced how poverty was conceived and understood, and impacted on the way the organisation related internally. For example the

³¹ Watt worked at ActionAid for 7 years, originally as Education Policy Officer and later a Senior Policy Co-ordinator in AAUK. He was interviewed shortly after he left ActionAid to work for World Vision.

processes of decision-making; and how the organisation began talking about women's rights rather than gender – it made the analysis more political, more about making political choices (Interview, 2008, Patrick Watt)

To understand the relevance of this statement it is necessary to explore ActionAid's articulation of their rights-based approach, and how this was distinct from the other organisations discussed.

ActionAid: a distinct rights-based approach?

'R2EP' identified ActionAid's 'people-centred' approach to work as a key defining factor of the organisation. Included within this was its rights-based approach, described as follows:

We embrace and respect the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent related UN covenants and declarations. The focus of all our work is to ensure that the rights of poor and excluded people are respected, promoted, protected and fulfilled and they are our primary stakeholders. We also direct unrelenting attention on the responsibility, both of the state and of other powerful institutions and individuals, in respecting, promoting, protecting and fulfilling the rights of poor and excluded people. We will deepen our experience and skills in implementing the rights-based approach during this strategy period. (ActionAid, 2005: 11)

This definition made a legal approach to rights central, which differed from the conception of rights within the previous organisational strategy ('FPT'). It linked the ability of poor people to secure their rights directly to the responsibility of power holders to deliver. As the strategy document did not give the space to describe in detail ActionAid's understanding and approach, it was agreed that this definition of a rights-based approach would be extended and clarified. In June 2008 ActionAid's 'Human rights-based approaches to poverty eradication and development' was finally published.

The paper was the product of three years of discussion and debate across the organisation. The fact that it took so long in production (and so many versions were produced) is indicative of the level of disagreement across the organisation as to how to define its rights-based practice. What was published and circulated in 2008 reflected how rights-based understanding had evolved over the preceding three years, and the final document differed from earlier versions on two counts. Firstly there was an explicit recognition of the role of service delivery in relation to rights-based practice, a relationship which had been denied in earlier discussions. Secondly, rights in the final version were conceptualised as derived directly from the Universal Declaration of

Human Rights, whereas earlier versions had allowed for local identification and definition of rights (cf. ActionAid, 2007b: draft version 6).

The final version of the paper was only disseminated towards the end of my fieldwork, and therefore I did not discuss the paper directly with staff I interviewed. However, the paper itself is very relevant to my analysis, as it describes why ActionAid felt it important to frame all their work and understanding by rights discourse. It gives a clear rationale and focus for ActionAid's work. In addition it lays out the various elements considered to be involved in rights-based practice. It is therefore important to reflect on this before exploring the perspectives and experiences of staff working within ActionAid in translating its rights-based vision into practice.

'Human rights-based approaches to poverty eradication and development'

The development of the paper was led by a high-level international team (including international staff and country directors) and drew on diverse experiences across the organisation. The final paper was designed to present the theoretical grounding for a rights-based approach, but also to recognise the practical implications of working in this way. It responded to the positive and challenging experiences that staff had had in developing rights-based work. While it did not claim to be a practical guide (this was developed later – and finally published in 2010 (ActionAid, 2010c) after I finished my research), it gave broad suggestions on the key elements of a rights-based approach. It also aimed to articulate what made ActionAid's rights-based work distinctive.

The paper started by stating 'that our approach places as much emphasis on how we go about our work – the process we follow, as what we aim to achieve – the outcome' (ActionAid, 2008: 1). It emphasised the link between poverty and human rights 'from the perspective of people living in poverty' and made strong political assertions on how poverty and rights abuses occur:

We believe that people who live in poverty should understand their experiences of want, fear, discrimination and exclusion in terms of human rights abuses, violations and exploitation, and not in terms of natural phenomena, as the consequences of their own failings, or as situations they have brought upon themselves....We believe that the rich and powerful, at all levels, structurally deny the rights of the poor and excluded....[they] capture the state structure and apparatus to deny or violate rights for all, and to maintain the conditions that allow oppression and injustice to continue (ibid:1).

People are denied their human rights, not through mere omission, forgetfulness or lack of effort, but due to unequal power relations.... On the individual level,

poor people face discrimination, violence, oppression, and exploitation in their day to day interactions with other individuals....On the more complex structural level, people are denied their rights in the very way that they act, expect and accept that the world operates. It invisibly structures a set of beliefs, laws, institutions, policies and behaviours such as caste, ethnicity, race or gender, as well as broader concepts of patriarchy or deep-seated political-economic belief systems such as neo-liberalism (ibid: 4).

This analysis had major theoretical and practical implications. On a theoretical level it overtly politicised ActionAid's approach to development: through this analysis eradicating poverty could not be understood as a technical project, but needed to be focused on tackling inequality and transforming society (Johnson et al, 2002). The practical implications of this were widespread. If ActionAid's work was to challenge power relations, the organisation needed to be prepared to address, in its development process, the lives of the rich and powerful members of every society. The analysis shifted understanding of what needed to be done and who needed to be involved. Power relations could not be transformed by working with poor and excluded groups alone, but included a different type of engagement with rich and powerful sections of society. But even more importantly transformations of power, as noted in Chapter Two, are likely to bring about conflict (see p.31). Working in this way required a recognition that that not everyone within a rights-based development process will be a 'winner' (Hickey and Mitlin, 2009).

The paper continued by distinguishing between human rights - defined through international statutes, morally given, and applicable to all human beings regardless of their citizenship - and legal rights. Legal rights are described as reflecting the balance of power between groups in society, and are therefore considered as liable to abuse, echoing Cranston's 1973 differentiation between legal and moral rights (see p.41) and building on the 'constructive' view of rights as first discussed by Burke and Bentham. Given this limitation, human rights are noted as the basis of ActionAid's work, and:

[F]or the most part, therefore, ActionAid looks to these international human rights instruments....to frame the content of the rights we work on and which we advocate for (ActionAid, 2008: 3).

However, the approach:

[R]uns deeper than simply the 'what'[to] focus on how these rights are claimed, secured and enjoyed by the rights-holders. Human rights are about flourishing as a human being...rights secured and enjoyed in ways that are empowering, strengthen people's ability to negotiate with the powerful, build dignity, and increase freedom and choice to imagine...[A]ctive agency and actions of the rights-holders need to be an integral part (ibid: 4).

Broad principles were given in relation to 'how' rights should be secured; starting with raising critical consciousness by using participatory empowering processes. It is recognised that service delivery (referred to as 'practical solidarity') can be an entry point, and a means to an end in this work. For example, ActionAid may directly (or through a partner organisation) fund an alternative model for securing a specific service, with the aim that:

The analysis and plan that led to the prioritisation of the issue for collective action and ActionAid's intervention may then form the basis for linking to local, district or municipal plans, and hence become part of what the state has a duty to provide (ibid: 5).

However there were various criteria given to limit service delivery. It was emphasised that such action should only be undertaken as part of a wider strategy, when the government was not in a position to deliver, and in a way that ensured that the government was not able to 'shirk its responsibility' (ibid: 6). Moreover:

Engaging with communities through the provision of services – as a strategic means rather than as an end in itself, does not mean that the service-focused work is of any less importance. It demands the highest level of quality in terms of participatory analysis and community organising and planning, of technical knowledge and best models of practice, and in identification and empowerment of, and work with, the most excluded and marginalised (ibid: 7).

Beyond a focus on participatory and empowering work at the local level, three further components were discussed. Firstly, creating alliances and campaigning to influence public opinion. Secondly, developing inclusive, participatory and representative democracy (going beyond periodic elections to creating new democratic spaces).

Thirdly, the strategy also considered the importance of engaging with state authorities:

The human rights framework and our human rights-based approach are premised on the firm belief that the state is the primary duty bearer and is responsible for respecting, promoting, protecting and fulfilling the human rights of its citizens (ibid: 8).

After the initial strategic action, the next step is usually to tackle the dominant and pervasive individuals, systems and structures of power. This requires more power-building strategic action by mobilising like-minded groups, networks, alliances, social movements, knowledge, resources and public opinion. It requires engaging with formal power structures (state structures and public bodies) and creating new public spaces in which the marginalised are more in control of the process, such as through social audits, participatory budgets, and people's commissions and platforms. It is critical at this stage to receive support and solidarity from NGOs and the broader social movements (ibid: 6).

Work at the national level included demanding rights that were not yet recognised in national constitutions; and research to evidence how those rights, which were theoretically guaranteed, were actually delivered in practice. This could include a focus on how international bodies (governmental and corporate) were contributing to rights violations.

Finally the paper suggested that rights-based work required a shift from geographically based (Development Area) programming to a focus on identity-based programming:

Our rights-based approach introduces a different hierarchy of planning, placing the rights-holders – the people who live in poverty – before the geography they live in (ibid: 7).

This shift was explained by Singh as central to ActionAid's new approach. It had begun in 2000 when the idea of Development Initiatives (DI) had first been discussed. While DIs were still based on a distinct geographical area they had 'clear policy or practice change targets, targeted to a certain group of poor and marginalised people (slum dwellers, street children, Dalits, adolescent girls)' (Singh, e-mail, 2002, archive material,). The aim of DIs was to root ActionAid's advocacy work, enabling connections between local programming and national policy advocacy. However, the rights-based approach took this concept one step further, enabling ActionAid to focus on the specific groups of people they were to engage with, rather than consider where they were living:

In the approach - the primary organising principle is the poor and marginalised people. In other words, first we identify who are the poor and marginalised people that we want to work with and then only we think of an area (Singh, e-mail, 2002, archive material).

The significance of this shift was deep-rooted. It not only enabled ActionAid to link to geographically diverse groups of people within its programming approach, it also meant that not all of its policy-advocacy work needed to respond directly to the experiences of the geographical communities with whom it was working. Rather policy could be developed in response to wider national or international processes. I return to this point later (Chapter Seven). However, the paper also emphasised the need to respond to local (geographical) realities:

Local flexibility, adaptation and translation of the human rights-based approach into specific agenda, methods, tools and techniques to suit the context are essential ...[as is] working with and supporting poor and excluded people's communities, organisations and social movements in setting the agenda and taking the lead (ActionAid, 2008: 9).

The paper's emphasis on local flexibility and design in programme offers a clear expression of one of the central dilemma that ActionAid faced. How to coordinate a shift to more political rights-based work, while also ensuring the freedom for local programmes to operate and develop as context specific, bottom-up expressions of development visions and priorities? This practical consideration is discussed extensively in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight, and derives from the theoretical tension between a commitment to universal human rights and to bottom-up participatory development.

While work at national level was mentioned in passing, the main focus of the paper was on the local level work. There was very little attention paid to how local communities' work could, or should, link to work at the national and international levels. Moreover, while there was an implicit suggestion that the role of ActionAid and partners at the local level was to support communities through strategic practical solidarity with the aim of organising, mobilising and catalysing rights-holders, there was no discussion of the role of ActionAid, or individual staff, in national or international action. Research and evidence was seen as essential for this work, but the actual processes of building from and using this research were not discussed. Movements of poor and excluded groups were noted as necessary for agenda setting, but how this might be facilitated was not discussed. Without clear strategies to ensure that grassroots groups participate in priority setting ActionAid ran the risk of 'cherry picking' (Beardon et al, 2011: 81) - of using local evidence to support their pre-determined policy agendas.

A final point worth emphasising is that the paper was produced through discussions between senior international staff³². Thus, this organisational understanding of rights and a rights-based approach was developed by those working at an abstract policy level, focused on international programming, and did not include staff engaged in local development work. The paper was offered as a way of sharing understanding of rights to staff across the organisation, but did not build from the reflections and experiences of programme staff. I return to explore the significance of international and national perspectives and understandings of rights in the following chapter.

³² The Latin America Regional Director, the Head of the Knowledge Initiative, the Head of Impact Assessment, the Governance Theme Head and the Women's Rights Theme Head

Monitoring and understanding rights-based work

The theoretical explanation of a rights-based approach can be understood further when analysing the framework developed by ActionAid to monitor and evaluate its achievements in relation to the strategy. In developing the monitoring framework the following points were noted:

ActionAid seeks to bring about changes which are not easily quantifiable, namely the empowerment of poor and excluded people, transformation of what and how people think, strengthening of peoples' movements and organisations, changes to policies and practices achieved through efforts with many others. These changes are mostly long term.

ActionAid's best programmes are arguably the result of the freedom to develop strategies and programmes that are responsive to local realities rather than hierarchical impulses. This very diversity and freedom which is our strength make it counterproductive to try to develop and impose universal ways of analysing or reporting (ActionAid, 2005: Appendix: 3).

There was a wish to protect the local space, and recognise the complexity of ActionAid's development approach. The 'Global Monitoring Framework' (GMF, ActionAid 2008b) focused broadly on changes in power relations. It was developed during 2007/8 and rolled out in 2009.

The framework asked staff to consider which right they were pursuing, who was involved and what was the resulting change. The implicit suggestion was therefore that the specific 'right' that would be worked on should be identified during the planning phase. This implies a need to consider who is involved in planning the work.

'R2EP' had identified four categories of change: increasing rights awareness; an improvement in the conditions – tangible or intangible (social, political or economic) - of poor and excluded people; increase in organisation and action of civil society; and changes to policies and practices of duty bearers.

In considering change the 'GMF' asked staff to explain on whom the work had made an impact, whether they were the most excluded, whether the change was sustainable and how it impacted on power relations. The change process was further unpacked to explore the different factors (which include many non-related to ActionAid or partners organisation) that influenced or created the change. Within this broader appreciation of the change process the impact and relevance of ActionAid and its partners' actions were explored. Finally staff were invited to consider whether the work was making ActionAid more accountable, effective, dynamic and 'international' as an organisation.

The framework continued by delineating three groups of people: 'rights-holders' or poor and excluded people (which included social movements and membership-based NGOs); civil society (which included donors, voters, AAI supporters, consumers and NGO networks and coalitions) and 'duty bearers' (referring to states, government, inter-governmental organisations, donors, companies and society in general). The identification of social movements as part of the category of 'poor and excluded' people, rather than civil society (which is conceived of as more professional rather than membership-based organisations) is a point I return to in Chapter Eight.

This broad approach to change, which focused beyond an analysis of specific rights and encouraged staff to consider the wider socio-political context reinforced the organisation's interest in all encompassing change - of changing relationships within society. The framework recognised that change could occur without specific rights being secured, or vice versa. It also emphasised that change provided opportunities for learning even if rights were not secured. It highlighted the importance of the underlying politics, of inequality and injustice, and the need to create new relationships between rights-holders and duty bearers at every level.

The 'GMF' was designed as applicable to any work that ActionAid was involved in – equally relevant for international policy work, as for local participatory practice. By leaving the guidelines broad, but principle based, the aim was to focus on the complexity of the development process, to encourage learning and reflection rather than adherence to centrally defined indicators.

The emphasis on learning from change built on ActionAid's ALPS process, and was intended to ensure that evaluation did not just become associated with upward reporting requirements or form-filling responding to funding needs. However, the ability to learn also needs to include the flexibility to respond and change organisational practice (Raeside, 2011) an issue which is explored in Chapter Eight and in the Conclusion.

The two papers discussed here ('ActionAid's Human rights-based Approach to Poverty Eradication and Development', and the 'GMF'), imply that there are three key ways in which ActionAid's use of rights and rights-based approaches differed from the INGOs discussed earlier. Firstly, by grounding its entire analysis and functioning within a rights-based framework there was a deliberate effort to be a 'rights-based organisation'. This did not appear to be an overt aim of the other organisations. Secondly, ActionAid's understanding of rights was a strong expression of an ideological and political

commitment to poverty eradication. It led to specific organisational values, in contrast to the religious and/or humanitarian basis of the other organisations. Thirdly, by emphasising the need for a rights-based approach to span both empowerment and legal dimensions of rights, and by valuing both process and outcome equally, ActionAid was taking a qualitatively different approach from other INGOs. The other organisations had tended to focus either on the legal framework – often in relation to the agreed targets of development (MDGs) or on a principle-based approach - to inform programme work with no reference to ‘duty bearers’ or legislation. ActionAid however, stressed its plan to engage in both types of work, and to pay attention to the ‘how’ in addition to the ‘what’.

Explaining ActionAid’s approach: contradictions and misunderstandings

The previous section suggested that ActionAid had a well-developed and strongly articulated rights-based approach. But while the paper gave a clear articulation of ActionAid’s conception of a rights-based approach, interviews with various staff across ActionAid suggested that a shared understanding of rights did not exist.

Rights work was continually evolving in ActionAid, and continues to develop beyond the end of my research period. The evidence, opinions, observations and analysis presented here refer specifically to interviews I conducted in 2008, as this was around the same time as the paper was internally disseminated. However, in reflecting on the quotes included here it is important to note that the same individuals may now hold a very different understanding of rights (a view confirmed by one individual when, in 2011, she gave permission for me to include quotes from our earlier interview).

A good place to start exploring how rights were understood across the organisation is with a staff member whose unit was intended to support capacity building on rights-based approaches. She stated:

The way that I/ActionAid sees RBA is both in process and in content. So the content is what we are aiming for – rights as standards as outlined in the Universal Declaration – and in order to ensure that everyone is able to secure and enjoy those rights AA works in a certain way (Interview, 2008, Kate Carroll, Policy Officer, Knowledge Initiative).

While this statement resonates with the document above, another staff member, offered an alternative interpretation of the role of Universal Declaration:

We are talking about human rights, legal rights, but going beyond that and saying that the legal recognition of rights is limited and we need to be pushing the frontiers. Our understanding is moral, ethical, philosophical so that even if rights aren't enshrined in international law we wouldn't limit ourselves to the Universal Declaration, unlike Amnesty for example; our conception goes beyond this (Interview, Adams).

This difference in assessment of the significance of the Universal Declaration is key to the ambiguities of ActionAid's theoretical understanding, and thereby its practice. If an organisation aims to challenge and open up space within the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to explore alternative rights this suggests practice with a greater emphasis on local level definitions of rights. In this case, national work emerges as building on local articulations and prioritisation of rights (cf. Philips, 2002). However, if the organisation is focused on the implementation of the Universal Declaration, local and national work becomes about achieving rights that have already been agreed internationally. Thus development becomes a process of reaching internationally agreed targets rather than supporting a range of alternative development visions and processes.

This divergence in opinion was reflected in the multiple versions of the ActionAid paper on its human rights-based approach to development, and by the time of its publication ActionAid had moved closer a universal conception of rights³³.

Uncertainties about the status of the Universal Declaration however, were not the only problems in interpreting the organisation's rights-based approach. Equally problematic was the level of focus (whether rights-based work only referred to local practice or was relevant internationally) and where ActionAid was placed on the empowerment-legal approach continuum.

For example when asked to describe ActionAid's rights-based approach one staff member commented:

My understanding is that poor people should be at the centre of everything we do and their rights are paramount in how we organise ourselves and how we

³³ For example, an earlier draft qualified the focus on UDHR, stating: 'ActionAid looks to these international human rights instruments and to national Constitutions and laws which are consistent with the International Bill of Rights to frame the content of the rights we advocate for....But maybe even more importantly, we also facilitate people living in poverty or who are excluded to define new rights that enable them to live lives of dignity' (ActionAid, 2006d: 4-6). The idea of defining new rights is missing from the later version of this paper, replaced by weaker wording which enables those living in poverty to 'elaborate on these rights' suggesting giving content to those rights that are already part of the UDHR rather than identifying new alternative rights.

work. So rather than providing services or responding to an immediate need, apart from in an emergency or post-conflict context, we would work with poor people to demand what they are entitled to, that is what their rights are, from their government (Interview 2008, Sonya Ruparel, UK/Operations Manager, International Partnership Development).

This people-centred approach is a very different starting point from the following reflection on ActionAid's rights-based work:

As I came to it I thought rights are something to do with laws, and laws are something to do with lawyers so why don't we try and find a lawyer who can open the doors for us to understand in a more rigorous way what this is all about...RBA is a fairly meaningless term, you can do anything under RBA, certainly in emergencies when the capacity of the state is suspended ...we talked about rights-based analysis, so that this becomes the basis of your approach. If your analysis says the best thing to do is to sling food out of helicopters, do it. What you can't have in emergencies is an ideology which gets in the way of saving lives, of humanitarian relief. But at the same time if the government has the capacity then this wouldn't be the way to do it. So we talked about rights-based spectacles to frame the analysis. (Interview 2008, Roger Yates, Head of Human Security in Conflicts and Emergencies)

Whether rights are directly derived from UDHR, a way of framing analysis, or a development approach that means placing people at the centre of work, inevitably impacts on how individuals translate ActionAid's stated position on rights into practice. Not surprisingly then there was a commonly held view that:

There is a huge lack of confidence of what is an RBA around ActionAid. When people come to the knowledge initiative and ask for training, I put forward something that I think an RBA is and they say OK, and then that gets taken as AA's understanding of RBA, which is slightly disconcerting...there isn't much coherence...everyone has different opinions (Interview, Carroll).

The lack of coherence led to considerable confusion among staff in terms of applying the approach:

It is a phrase that is often used organisationally without there being a lot of understanding of what is underneath it. How it is understood and implemented is really different across the organisation. That is true even within this building, and definitely across the South as well. I think quite often RBA is seen as a policy thing within ActionAid rather than something that is to be done on the ground (Interview, 2008, Rebecca Ingram, UK fundraising).

This comment directly contradicts the people-centred approach discussed above, and suggests that while the paper discussed earlier showed a strong link between legal and empowering approaches and between content and process, in practice these connections were not well understood.

However, while there were confusions in describing a rights-based approach, it is also important to point out that many international staff took a very pragmatic approach to understanding rights in at local level. For example, one interviewee suggested:

At local level it is about how people negotiate their rights. For example it is about how people negotiate to get to their fields and plough. There is no point in saying I have a right to get to my field, it is about whether I am able to negotiate with whoever to get there. The programming needs to be looking at how to help people negotiate at that level, rather than getting all high and mighty and saying but we have all these rights (Interview, Yates).

Another insight into how ActionAid conceived of rights in practice comes through a comment from a UK staff member:

A lot of the time rights is a rhetorical flourish. Really we are just saying that these things shouldn't be privileges. ...It depends how serious we really are about rights having a moral and legal content (Interview, Watt).

The different weighting given to a rights-analysis rather than rights-based practice varied from respondent to respondent. For many, the way that ActionAid used rights-discourse to frame its understanding of development was clear:

ActionAid will work looking at people's needs as rights...So as opposed to seeing education as a charity, ActionAid would see it as a right, so would work towards securing that right. In a process that might involve organisation, mobilisation, advocacy, lobbying, campaigning, that would involve a relationship with the state and its different manifestations (for example local government) to ensure that education was provided by a state body (Interview, Carroll).

However, while many staff were clear about how a rights-based theory framed their analysis, for some there were concerns as to how this position translated into practice, especially at local level. For example, there was a general concern among international staff regarding a perceived tension between service delivery and rights (which the 2008 paper discussed above was clearly trying to address), and a feeling that shifting from a service-delivery approach to a rights-based approach at the local level was particularly difficult.

It is noteworthy that throughout my interviews and also with my other interactions with ActionAid staff there was little, if any, mention of any difficulties in working with a rights-based approach in national and international work. In addition there was no discussion on what makes a 'rights-based policy process'. I return to discuss this extensively in Chapters Six and Seven. But, before exploring in depth how rights-based practice emerged through ActionAid's work on the Right to Education, it is necessary to reflect briefly on the relationship between service delivery and rights.

Service delivery and rights-based approaches

The 2008 document laid out a vision for the role of service delivery within a rights-based approach. However, the organisation had previously understood these two approaches as existing in tension. This position derived from the recognition that if an NGO delivers a service this can inadvertently excuse the government from their rights-based obligation. The fear was that such action would undermine the contract between government and citizen. For example, based on previous experience of receiving a service, community members may look to an NGO to deliver a range of social services, rather than working to hold their government accountable (Green, 2008; Newman, 2007).

The inclusion of 'practical solidarity' within the 2008 document therefore illustrated a shift in ActionAid's understanding. The argument for service delivery is complex and will be explored further in Chapter Six. However, it is important to recognise a key issue here. Although, by 2008, ActionAid had recognised the role of practical solidarity, the organisation placed considerable emphasis on how service delivery was designed and delivered. The work needed to focus on making government services function, rather than operating in parallel. For example, the country director from ActionAid India explained:

Within our education work ActionAid India have focused on how to make government schools function – this includes a range of things, for example working with teachers, local government, school management committees etc. There have been strong relationships built with teachers unions in India, to strengthen the focus on making government schools function. We also have ideas as to how to make child sponsorship more appropriate. Through shifting the focus from sponsoring individual children to sponsoring a government school, then all the children benefit. (Interview for Education Review, 2009, Babu Matthews, Country Director ActionAid India)

This emphasis on service delivery through the government system reflects the importance of process rather than a focus on immediate outcome. It is fundamentally different from the service delivery as discussed in the earlier part of this chapter, for example in relation to 'Plan Schools'. The aim of ActionAid's practical solidarity was to strengthen the government system rather than compete with it. It was seen as a way of sustaining the engagement of poor and excluded groups within a more long-term strategic vision. By ensuring that children were able to access their rights in the short-term, and doing this in a way that built connections between community members and their government, it was hoped that such action would contribute to the longer-term vision of transformation of power and eradication of inequality and poverty.

While the reasons for discussing service delivery are clear, given the realities of poverty and the contexts in which ActionAid was working, this shift from an absolute view was not without its complications. This was of particular concern given the potential for service delivery to become a 'fig-leaf' (Uvin, 2007:600) for maintaining previous practice. This is one of the major tensions that will be explored in the following chapter.

Concluding comments

This chapter has shown that while ActionAid's articulated vision of a rights-based approach was qualitatively different from comparable INGOs, its actual practice suggested a more complicated picture. The theoretical underpinning of ActionAid's approach emphasised the need to engage in legislative and empowering rights-based work, to pay attention to issues of process and outcome, and to frame all work at local, national and international level within a rights-based discourse which centred on the transformation of social, political and economic inequalities. The organisation therefore defined its work across all the continuums described at the start of this chapter. The analysis shared at the end of this chapter suggests that while the theoretical underpinning was clear, the practical application of a rights-based approach was more complex. The following chapter explores these dynamics further, asking specifically how a commitment to universal human rights, interacts with a focus on transformative participation, as was described in Chapter Two.

Chapter 6: Implementing the Right to Education

Introduction

Through an exploration of ActionAid's work on the Right to Education, this chapter builds from the issues discussed in the previous two chapters. I analyse the strategies, challenges and tensions experienced by the organisation in moving from its theoretical articulation of rights-based practice to programme implementation.

The particular importance and relevance of ActionAid's education work was noted in Chapters Three and Four. The 'Education Theme' was viewed by many across the organisation, as the most established of the six thematic areas identified in the organisational strategy. The theme had extensive experience, connections and profile at local, national and international level. It was headed by a staff member who had joined ActionAid in 1990, someone personally committed to ActionAid's rights-based approach with good knowledge and understanding of the organisational dynamics and history.

This chapter begins by discussing the 'International Education Strategy' (IES). It then moves on to explore education work at the country level. It is based on three 'moments' of information. Firstly, I discuss the case studies of country level education work produced in 2005/6 and detailing 'best practice' work at local and national levels. Secondly, I reflect on interviews with three Education Leads in 2006/7, in which I discussed with them their country level education work, and their relationships with the 'IES' and IET. Thirdly, I draw on material generated by the Education Review in 2009. As explained in Chapter Three, I compare responses to two questions relating to country level perceptions of best practice. In addition to country level information, I also draw on international level data. This includes two key sources, the interviews and focus group discussions with the IET staff, and the advice and guidance the team developed for the Country Programme staff, relating to the implementation of the 'IES'. I also discuss certain activities the team developed, specifically, 'Multi-country Projects', to strengthen country level work on education rights.

In reflecting at a general level on the information discussed in this chapter, it is notable that the pressing issue for staff was the role of service delivery in relation to rights-based practice, an issue that had been partially resolved internationally by 2008 (cf.

paper discussed in Chapter Five). For example, it was clear that while the two approaches were considered distinct by many international staff, in practice there were strong connections between them, in the national and local education work. The relationship between in-country practice and international aspiration is reflected and expanded on in the subsequent chapters (Seven and Eight), when I explore more broadly the relationships within ActionAid. Underlying all these discussions is the interaction between international understandings of rights-based work and the role of bottom-up transformatory participatory practice.

A final cautionary note is a reminder that where I discuss the local level work this is drawn directly from written and oral reports made by national (and in some cases) international level staff. This means that the analysis of the local programmes is limited to how this work was reflected on, represented, and influenced national and international work, based on communication from staff at these levels.

The International Education Strategic Plan (IES) 2005-2010

Education Rights as understood by ActionAid were communicated by the 'International Education Strategic Plan' (IES, IET 2005a) and associated materials, most specifically: 'Education Rights: A resource pack for practitioners and activists' (Newman, 2007)³⁴. The IES was a year in development, beginning in June 2004, and involving diverse representatives from across the organisation³⁵. It was approved in May 2005, at about the same time as 'R2EP' came into being, and there was a deliberate attempt to ensure each strategy influenced the other. 2006 was the first year that country programmes organised their education plans in line with an international strategy, and this process was further consolidated in 2007 (IET 2006a 2006b; IET, 2007a). The IES provided a framework and vision by which to structure and prioritise work and there was an expectation that countries would develop national level plans to give detail and content to the strategic goals.

³⁴ As noted in the methodology chapter I put together this rights pack at the beginning of my PhD research, and I have not analysed the publication in my research given my involvement in producing it. The pack adapted ActionAid's general rights-based approach for ActionAid's work in education.

³⁵ Information related to strategy development is captured in a range of documentation, including minutes of the 'Education Working Group' (disbanded in December 2004); records of International Education meetings, and discussions on R2EP. The IES was developed with input from International Directors and Country Directors, the IET and Lead Education Staff. There was also input from the other thematic teams – as well as concrete planning to ensure links between the different themes.

The IES began with an analysis of the international education context, and was followed by a comment emphasising the importance of local education work:

‘Education is part of the DNA of ActionAid. We are widely recognised as one of the leading international NGOs in the field of education... Yet most of our achievements in education are not visible at an international level. In thousands of communities across dozens of countries we have helped to ensure poor and excluded children gain access to quality education.... This local engagement has been the base of all our education work - the reason we have the credibility to convene others and to get a seat at national and international policy tables’. (IET, 2005a: 1)

Six strategic goals were identified:

Strategic goal 1: We will secure constitutional rights to basic education where these are not in place and ensure they are enforceable in practice

Strategic goal 2: We will work with excluded groups to secure free access to quality education as a basic right

Strategic goal 3: We will secure adequate resources from governments and donors to ensure effective delivery of education for all

Strategic goal 4: We will secure sustained and meaningful citizen participation at local and national levels, and increase the transparency, accountability and responsiveness of education systems

Strategic goal 5: We will secure schools that respect all children’s rights and provide education that is empowering, relevant and of good quality

Strategic goal 6: We will challenge the reduction of the EFA [Education For All] agenda to primary schooling and ensure balanced investment in early childhood education, adult learning and secondary education (ibid).

These strategic goals were complemented by three operational goals:

Operational goal 1: We will strengthen our internal organisation / structure and capacity

Operational goal 2: We will strengthen our policy, research, campaigning and coalition-building work on education at all levels.

Operational goal 3: We will build strong linkages to the other five priority themes of ActionAid, building at least one example of excellent collaboration at each interface (ibid).

The mix of strategic goals indicates that the need for both empowering and legalistic approaches to education rights was recognised. In addition, there was specific emphasis on the role of ActionAid in strengthening the relationship between citizens and their government within the education system (strategic goal 4). The strategy also suggested a commitment to working across different levels, whether this was about mobilising, organising or working in solidarity with excluded groups (goal 2); campaigning at national level (goal 1); or targeting the obligations of the international community (goal 3). In fact all of the strategic goals could be interpreted to suggest work focused at different levels, and covering a range of approaches.

Underlying much of the strategy was an emphasis on connections between different levels of work. For example, under operational goal one it was noted that the education theme would work to encourage:

[A]ll staff to see themselves as involved in ***programme, policy and campaigning*** [original emphasis] work on education (breaking down old distinctions / barriers) – and to work towards a condition where there are seamless connections between local, national and international work (ibid: 6).

The strategy also included a framework for monitoring and evaluation, and a risk analysis. Both of these called for reflective practice to be integrated into the strategy implementation process. However, although the overall framework of the strategy emphasised work across the spectrum, the framework for monitoring and evaluation and the risk analysis were much narrower in focus. For example, the risk analysis focused exclusively on risks associated with the national to international link. There was no mention of local programme quality or the links from local to national level.

For example, the monitoring framework identified a series of core indicators to be monitored during the strategy period, with only two indicators referring to local level work:

- Number of projects / countries that persist with traditional service delivery work that is in tension with this strategy
- Level of Community / grassroots participation in key advocacy work (ibid: 10).

These two indicators sent a clear message that country programmes should not continue with their previous work of building schools, training volunteers as teachers, providing school materials etc. They also emphasised the need to support community participation in advocacy work – although it was unclear whether this was local or national (or international) advocacy work. Moreover, there was no detail on how participation was understood. For example was participation conceived as instrumental or transformative? Did grassroots participation mean encouraging community members to physically participate in demonstrations on education, or was it about taking a lead from local people, based on their active participation in decision-making and agenda setting?

The major focus of the indicators was on alignment with the international strategy – whether this was in relation to activities pursued, relationships built, policy changes achieved or resources allocated. The emphasis on national to international links, and the lack of focus on local programming, country level connectivity or capacity in rights-

based practice, gives an insight into the priorities and considerations which were at the fore for those developing the strategy. In all likelihood the lack of attention on supporting and building from local practice was an oversight rather than a deliberate decision to focus on other levels of practice. However, it had potentially wide implications given the reality of education practice in subsequent years.

Understanding education rights, the national perspective: 2005-2007

Best practice, 2005

In 2005 and 2006 country programmes were asked to document examples of a range of innovative practice which could feed into a resource pack (mentioned above) to be shared internally and externally on the Right to Education. Around 65 case studies of differing length, detail and focus were collected across the organisation, illustrating what country programmes identified as their most exciting and innovative best practice. The distance between how rights were conceived internationally and understood by the IET at the time, and the reality of national level practice becomes clear. Taken together, the studies suggest that, at the time, country staff found rights-based approaches easier to conceptualise at national than local level, and easier to describe in theory than to implement in practice.

Consistent with the methodological considerations discussed in Chapter Three I draw on case studies at a very general level here. I have selected specific examples that are reflective of the type of education work documented in 2005. I have deliberately avoided any in-depth comparison or analysis across the 65 case studies, as I do not believe such analysis would present anything meaningful. This is in partly because the materials were not produced with the intention of doing this type of comparison, but also because of the diverse contexts and methods by which the experiences were documented.

The majority of the studies focused on local level action, suggesting that this was where more time and energy was spent in terms of education work. In the main they described service delivery projects, or projects delivering specific messages on the importance of education. While some used rights-based language to describe the work, these generally went on to describe a range of interventions which were top-down in their design, made few links to government offices or human rights obligations, and

passed a large part of the education resourcing burden onto community members (for example to construct classrooms or teachers' accommodation).

One example of rights-based language used for service delivery work was the use of the word 'mobilisation'. There were many case studies concerning mobilisation: for girls' education (Ethiopia, Ghana, The Gambia, Kenya, Nigeria, Malawi); with pastoralist communities (Nigeria, Kenya, Ethiopia) and for HIV/AIDS orphans (Ghana, Ethiopia). In all of these examples the word 'mobilisation' was understood as encouraging the local community to value education and to send their child to school. There was no concept of a political approach to mobilisation - for example using the word to refer to work to support excluded groups to raise their voice and demand their right to education from duty bearers, or to demand respect for their rights within the education system. For example, mobilisation for girls' education was described in this project:

There is a high level of gender discrimination among the locals as girls have over the years been denied the right to education and have been equated to assets that bring quick wealth to their fathers....Most of these women never enjoyed the privilege of going to school and they have realised that education is vital if development is to be achieved....The larger part of their effort...is dedicated towards promoting the education of the girl child and sensitising the other members of their communities, especially men, on the significance of educating all children equally. They contribute funds to a common pool, later used to support the education of girls (ActionAid Kenya, 2005/6).

The document continued to note that a project participant commented: 'I will not let my daughter stay at home because I have learned how valuable education is if she is to prosper in life'.

It is clearly important to build awareness of the value of education, and it is widely recognised that increasing girls participation in education is not only key in struggles for women's rights, but also has direct impact on family poverty indicators. However, a rights-based approach implies that such work needs to be accompanied by a focus on the education system itself. For example, this might include challenging the content or process of education, addressing issues of: low quality; relevance to the specific group; accessibility given infrastructure or time-tabling; or facilities, such as toilets. Such work might also include pressurising the government to deliver on its obligations in relation to education, rather than focusing on the generation of specific funds from community members to support girls' education.

In another mobilisation example from Ghana it was explained that: 'ActionAid provided training for all the SMCs [School Management Committees] in the district to improve

their capacity to mobilise communities to support schooling'. It described how community groups came together to construct classrooms and teachers' accommodation, and teachers were subsequently recruited (although at times community members paid for teachers' living costs as they waited to receive their salaries). The common 'ingredients' of mobilisation efforts therefore included classroom construction, persuading families to prioritise education in family expenditure, and raising awareness among community members of the importance of investing in education. These suggest something very different from the types of work outlined in Goal Two of the IES (see p.170).

Another activity mentioned in many of the case studies was the provision of individual bursaries, funded by ActionAid, to support the education of selected children. This process undermines a concept of education as an inalienable universal human right, especially when the country programme develops criteria to identify those deserving of a bursary:

The girl child must be active and interested in school; must have lost one or both parents; must be intelligent; both parents may be alive but poor. (Case study material, Ghana, 2005/6).

It also brought about implementation problems:

Due to the huge number of kids (365) orphaned by HIV/AIDS the project is facing a big challenge in mobilising the required funding to support them. (Case study material, Ghana, 2005/6).

The value judgement as to who 'deserves' education is in direct tension with the concept of a universal right to education. In addition, the practical difficulties of implementing such a process illustrate why it is so important to hold government accountable to its obligations. A predictable response from government with regard to this work would be that if ActionAid was funding children to go to school why should they allocate additional resources to this same purpose?

Even when the project had the potential to be delivered with human rights objectives it was clear from much of the material that these links were not always being made. For example, in Ethiopia a series of initiatives were developed focusing on children's rights clubs and student councils. The generic idea behind the clubs was to enable young people to gain knowledge of their rights (based on the Convention of the Rights of the Child, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) but it was evident that the way the programme had been designed and implemented fell short of this goal. A key task of the rights clubs was 'to take correct measures against the disciplinary problems that

emanate from breaking/ misconceptions of the working guidelines of schools' and there was a focus on school rules:

[F]or the proper implementation of the policy, one common method is to assign student-police members. They are responsible to ensure that the rules and regulations are effectively realized with the aim to mould the behaviours of students (Case study material, Ethiopia, 2005/6).

The case study noted that the school councils were democratically elected, suggesting that they provided the opportunity for young people to actively participate in rights-based processes. But this was qualified by the statement:

[W]ith this in mind, from among the students of a given class, those considered to be disciplined, interested and who are academically at the top rank are democratically elected (Case study material, Ethiopia, 2005/6).

Of the 65 case studies collected, the majority contained statements that were similar to those discussed above. About 20 of the examples were coherent with a rights-based approach; and three examples fitted firmly within a broad conception of rights-based approach (i.e. targeting governmental obligations on the right to education). However, these latter examples focused entirely on national level campaigning and advocacy rather than local level engagement. For example, much of the work from Guatemala appeared to be focused on building relationships with government and influencing curriculum development to respond to Mayan culture, but there was no evidence as to how this work linked to the local level. In Malawi extensive work was done to examine the education budget which involved the national education coalition in a range of public campaigning and political influencing activities, but no mention was made of local work in this context. These examples were aligned with a generic conception of rights-based practice as understood across the sector, but there is less evidence that they were developed in line with ActionAid's articulation, as discussed in the previous chapter, which emphasised process and participation of poor and excluded groups.

The brief extracts included here give a flavour of the types of work and thought processes occurring within education programmes at the start of the strategy period. Taken collectively, they suggest that country programmes were operating within a different paradigm from that discussed internationally.

However, there are alternative explanations as to why the case studies presented a starkly different picture from the one painted in the IES. For example, it could have been an issue of timing – the Education Leads who were responsible for compiling country case studies were simultaneously participating in developing the international

strategy. They may well have been aware of the distance between the aspirations involved in the strategy and the realities they were documenting, but the examples selected could be representative of the practices available for documentation at the time. Although the previous strategy had been framed within a rights-based approach, it was generally acknowledged across the organisation that there had been insufficient support for the transition to rights-based working (Taking Stock II, 2004). Was the fact that these experiences did not fit neatly into the international conception of rights merely a reflection of the previous practice?

It is also possible that the case studies reflected weak documentation skills rather than weak practice per se. ActionAid staff at the time had had little support in developing documentation skills. In commissioning the case studies, national staff were given sub-headings/ questions to respond to³⁶ and while some countries used the format provided, many did not. Also, while the importance of reflection and learning was highlighted in the guidance notes, there was little advice about how to do this. The organisational culture meant that people spent little time writing, except when reporting to donors on project funding. This style of reporting is often in direct contradiction to documentation for reflection and learning – especially as donors may only be interested in concrete project outputs (Shutt, 2006).

Whether or not these explanations are relevant, it is clear that there existed a disjuncture between the international strategic vision of rights-based work and country level practice. This could have been indicative of a lack of understanding of, or capacity to, implement the international vision, or even an active disagreement with the international position. For example, there may have been a belief that rights-based practice, as understood internationally, was not possible within the country context. Although there had been extensive opportunities to participate in developing the IES it was unclear how active national participation was in practice. In reading through the documented process it is not possible to answer the question of whether the international strategy responded to national priorities, or whether the Education Leads were merely consulted on an agenda and vision set internationally.

Whatever the reason, it was clear that although the balance of projects documented was in favour of local level work, the practice at this level was more rooted in a traditional

³⁶ The format included: who did the project, why (rationale), how (specific tools and processes used), impact, challenges/problems, what would you change next time (learning)?

service delivery approach. Moreover, there were no examples of coordinated action at local and national levels. While the education strategy had emphasised the importance of integrating empowering and legislative approaches, and linking the work across the different levels, there were no examples illustrating these types of connections in practice. The view communicated by the IET, and expressed in the resource pack was that:

As civil society activists, working with people at the grassroots must be the basis of our work. This is the only way to ensure an active and empowered community....[it] enhances the impact and legitimacy of work at national and international levels. It gives the evidence from which to develop policy positions and make claims, and ensures that work at all levels is responding to the real needs of those living in poverty. (Newman, 2007: 11).

And yet none of the documentation available at the time reflected such a position. A key measure of the subsequent evolution of ActionAid's education practice would therefore include a consideration of how these links were being made. I return to this point below.

Evolving practice or more of the same? The view from Education Leads, 2007

In 2007 I interviewed Education Leads from Ghana, Kenya and Malawi. As part of a general conversation about the education work they supported, I asked them what was the implication of a rights-based approach on their practice. Their responses immediately linked rights-based work to service delivery, suggesting that this was a defining issue in their developing practice. They also highlighted a range of issues around shifting practice. For example, the Education Lead from Ghana noted the difficulties in stopping service delivery, especially given community expectations:

Ghana used to do service delivery, but there is very little of it left now. There are only 2 areas where they are trying to build school blocks, these started before RBA [rights-based approach] was introduced. But these are unfinished because RBA started and the budget was cut. They will be looking for another way to do this now....A RBA at the DA [development area] means getting people to understand what their rights are and why they should try and access that right. The people at DA level understand RBA, but they ask '*what should we do now, we need to eat before we have the energy to go and demand, or what should we do now, while we wait for these people to come and do their work?*'. However, they have accepted it, and RBA is reaping results, we have more women standing for leadership positions, *Reflect* women. And some of the other organisations in Ghana are trying to pick up RBA. Until now in ActionAid Ghana was seen as a donor, but they are starting to understand that that is the way we are working now (Interview 2007, Dorothy Konadu, ActionAid Ghana).

The Kenyan Education Lead emphasised the role of government in fulfilling the right to education. But he also emphasised the importance of non-formal education (the contentious nature of non-formal education is discussed below, p.180) as part of the process of enabling the formal education system:

Everyone is entitled to education by virtue of their being, and the government has a central role to play in this right, it is their responsibility. This means that we need a constitutional framework, and a policy/implementation framework alongside. We also need empowerment of citizenry. There is a role for NFE [non-formal education], only when it is part of the process of getting FE [formal education], for example if there are no schools or infrastructure. It is only once the school infrastructure exists that it can get government registration and FPE [Free Primary Education] applies, and the reality is that the need is so great that NFE has an important role to play (Interview 2007, Jackson Karagu, ActionAid Kenya).

In Malawi the role of service delivery in supporting government to deliver the right to education was highlighted:

RBA is a process to ensure children secure their right to education, it involves lobbying, advocacy, capacity building and empowerment. There is also the space for some service delivery, for example if you have built the capacity of communities to demand education infrastructure, but the district assembly just doesn't have any money to provide this, then AA can support it. But it is best to do this through the district assembly or some other structure. One idea is to develop a MoU [memorandum of understanding] with government at different levels, to agree that financing will be split 50:50 if there is demand for something. This would help build structural capacity (Interview 2007, Julita Nsanjama, ActionAid Malawi).

Beyond this Nsanjama also emphasised the importance of local conceptions of rights-based work, and how important context is in developing appropriate practice:

There has been a lot of change in AA Malawi in recent years, now it seems to be much more organised... However, people still don't really know what they mean by the RBA, this is true nationally as well as at DA level. Some time needs to be spent developing a model of RBA – this should start at the national level and then be pulled together internationally. Because every context is different (Interview, Nsanjama).

These quotes identify some of the real challenges faced by ActionAid staff at national level as they grappled with a rights-based approach. The limitations in staff understanding and capacity, the lack of government resources and political will, and community expectations of ActionAid to deliver services were felt across many countries during my research. Moreover, very similar problems were identified in the Education Review (Section 5) two years later, suggesting that any articulation of a rights-based approach needed to face these challenges head on.

Particularly significant is the comment from the Education Lead in Malawi that a model of RBA should be developed nationally, and then pulled together internationally. This is the opposite of the process that was actually followed (as described in Chapter Five), where an international position was developed and then rolled out nationally. The repeated reference, by country staff, to the role of non-formal education and service delivery caused concerns among the IET at the time.

International work on Education Rights, 2006-7

The role of the IET and relationships with the wider education community will be explored further in Chapter Eight. Here I focus on the concrete strategies the IET pursued to support the shift to a rights-based approach across country level education work. These diverse interventions, designed by the IET, were derived from a broad conception of their team purpose:

The IET plays a supportive role to country programmes, and gives them guidance, ensuring that they can and do work in line with the international strategy. This is done with the recognition that different countries have different constraints to working with the strategy, and have different perspectives and challenges (Focus group discussion, September 2006, IET).

Planning guidance from the IET

During 2006 the IET used various strategies to build the capacity of national education staff to implement a rights-based approach. Key in this was the resource pack mentioned above, and guidance notes to support the 2007 planning process. These notes outlined what had been happening internationally in relation to the strategic goals and encouraged the country programmes to respond to this within their national level plans.

The general guidance provided by the IET for country level planning for 2007 stated that:

1. All countries should start to take **education rights** seriously. ... in 2007 we hope some of you may want to link with human rights lawyers to take **legal action** on the right to education...2. All local programmes of ActionAid should have clearly defined the categories of **children excluded** from or failed by the education system – and we should be aligned with these groups and their organisations to secure change...[and] 5. **A key priority in 2007 is for all ActionAid programmes to cease running NFE [Non-Formal Education] centres, stop using non-professional teachers and agree, with teacher unions and governments, timetables for proper qualification processes for all non-professional teachers** (original emphasis) (IET, 2006a: 1).

The reference to non-formal education and use of non-professional teachers both reflect the new analysis and understanding that had been growing in ActionAid's education work. The Education Rights resource pack had noted:

Historically, there has been some tension between teachers and NGOs, not least because of the role of NGOs in promoting non-formal education and using unqualified, voluntary teachers. This practice contributes to undermining the teaching profession...it impacts on teachers' ability to organise around their conditions of service, or to demand appropriate training and salaries (Newman: 2007: 151).

The drive to build stronger relationships with teachers' unions will be explored in more detail in Chapter Eight. However, it is important to recognise here that the advice issued from the IET was a complete break from traditional NGO activity within the education sector. Historically, a key role for NGOs was to coordinate and deliver a range of non-formal education services³⁷. The IET position did not reflect recognition of the current reality of programme practice, where many countries were involved in supporting non-professional teachers.

The general guidance was accompanied by a note on how to code activities. For example, it was suggested that goal one should include:

Work on the legal right to education; national education bills / legislation; influencing national policy; raising awareness/consciousness of rights; media work on education rights; work with parliamentary committees/caucuses; high level lobbying; challenging privatisation (IET, 2006b: 1).

The coding note continued to state that goal four should focus on:

Work with teacher unions; national or local education coalitions; training of school management committees or parent associations (ibid)

and that goal five involved:

³⁷ NGOs working on education have tended to focus extensively on non-formal education programmes – targeted at children not served by the public education system, due to a range of issues including geographical location or inappropriate national education models due to curriculum, language, timetabling or costs involved in accessing the formal education system. These programmes are often run by volunteer teachers with minimal training (provided by the NGOs themselves); use alternative teaching materials and curriculum, and may teach in local languages. As such there are various tensions between the non-formal and formal education system. For example, many of the models are not scalable, or the national education system does not recognise the qualifications achieved in the non-formal system, or because of the impact on the formal teaching profession, or because of sustainability issues when the NGO withdraws its support. Hence, centrally at least, ActionAid have emphasised the need to stop providing NFE programmes (Archer, 2008).

Work on violence against girls in schools; improving quality of education; teacher training; challenging gender stereotypes; addressing HIV in schools; transforming learning processes...[etc.] (ibid).

Various issues are raised from an analysis of the balance of activities suggested in these guidance notes. Firstly, it is clear that the IET felt that a key aim of their work was to encourage the country programmes to align their work with internationally agreed goals. The general guidance and country specific emails (see below) focus as much on what not to do (for example, running NFE centres) as on what to do (for example, work with teachers' unions). Secondly, while the strategy and vision were wide and the activities varied, little support was given to the 'how'. This suggested that the way the activities were implemented should be determined at country level. However, although this gave a lot of space for local level adaptation and responding to context, it could also create problems. The same activity could be implemented in many different ways, some of which could directly contradict what was intended by the strategy. This point is discussed further in Chapter Eight.

Thirdly, the balance between activities focused at the national and local level was uneven. Within the guidance approximately four times as many activities are focused on national level work as opposed to local level interventions. This was in stark contrast to how country programmes actually allocated resources on education. The focus on national level practice within the guidance had various possible implications. It might have influenced the investment that country programmes made across their range of work, tipping the balance in favour of national action (although, as noted in Chapter Four, much of the money raised through sponsorship had to be spent at local level, making this less likely). More probable was a shift in reporting, with country programmes reporting more extensively on their national level work as it was seen more clearly to fit within the international strategy guidelines. A consequence of this could be that less attention was paid to adapting the rights-based approach at local level.

This is comparable to Piálek's (2008) observations on gender mainstreaming in Oxfam. He suggests that while considerable effort was put into changing the organisational norms (i.e. how things were done within Oxfam GB, the language used, the programming objectives etc.); the values of staff were largely ignored (or assumed to be changed through changing the norms). Moreover he claims that, having changed the formal organisational norms made it even harder to challenge deeply held values, as staff understood what to say (or not to say) and could separate their organisational language

from their value system. This meant that while people changed their language, the process of work, culture, relationships and expectations were unchanged.

The general guidance was followed up with detailed feedback to every Education Lead on their country plan. The feedback was written in an encouraging and supportive style, showing a clear wish to support the Education Leads and strengthen relationships. However, the feedback also challenged the Education Leads where the country programme had included activities which were perceived as contradicting or undermining the IES. The response to Sierra Leone was fairly typical of the style and contents of this feedback:

It is very encouraging to see such a comprehensive plan for education in Sierra Leone. We are very excited about your work on resources for education, particularly the wide gamut of work planned on the IMF. We congratulate you on taking this work to the level of direct advocacy to the ministry of finance and the Central Bank and working with a wide range of partners on this. Deepening work on economic literacy will be important now. We very much hope you can provide some leadership on this work for the whole of AA International.

Equally exciting is the budget tracking³⁸ work through CEF [the Commonwealth Education Fund] as well as the *Reflect* work for adult literacy with PAMOJA [The African *Reflect* Network]. There is renewed interest in *Reflect* across Africa and so this is very much the time to invest in this. There will be a couple of big international events on this in 2007.

We however have some concerns. It is unclear in what context you plan to give support to Non Formal Education. This is something AA International has taken a strong position on internationally. It is not our role or indeed the role of other NGOs to run education centres. If we do give support we must ensure that the schools are government run and we can provide leverage in any way we can for this to continue, otherwise we will be challenging the role of government by providing education services ourselves. The forthcoming *Activist Guide* on the right to education and *Practitioner's Guide* for using RBA in education will help to clarify this.

There is only one small mention of work on Violence against Girls (under women's rights) and yet VAG in schools was agreed to be a major regional priority on education. We urge you to make stronger links with the women's rights theme on this and build a programme of work in schools. We have rich materials to frame this and a model policy that has just been produced in southern Africa that could really help design effective interventions.

³⁸ This could include tracking the money flow from national to district to school level to ensure that the allocated budget arrived. Or doing more analytical work to explore trends in spending across different education areas, which might include generating gender disaggregated data, or looking at spending across different schools, or on different items – teachers' salaries, teaching materials, classroom equipment etc.

There is also no mention in the plan of work with the Teacher's Union. This is worrisome as you have built quite a solid linkage with Sierra Leone Teachers Union and we would hope to see this continue in solid collaboration in 2007. We urge you to engage with them - especially on the IMF work and on building common positions around non-professional teachers (IET, 2006c).

The signal from the team was relatively clear. The IET emphasised the importance of areas of work supported at international level (finance for education; violence against girls in schools, and building connections with teachers unions) and challenged any investment in service delivery. It is noteworthy that there was no discussion on the process of work, or emphasis on developing local to national linkages. The focus across all guidance and feedback was very much on the 'what' or the content of work, rather than on the 'how'.

Influencing national education work

Another influencing mechanism is through the multi-country projects. The IET have tried to involve different countries in different projects, and this influences the programme work a lot as it becomes framed by external funding. Also it has been important to frame this work within an action research model, the aim being to link the local work to a larger policy-advocacy agenda, ensuring good research and documentation (Interview, Education Review 2009, Archer).

A major role of the IET throughout the strategy period was to design and fundraise for 'cutting edge' education work, to be developed across two or more countries as action research projects. Major projects included 'Transforming Girls Education' (focused on gender and HIV issues) in Tanzania and Nigeria, supported by Comic Relief; 'Stopping Violence against Girls in School' in Kenya, Malawi and Mozambique supported by the Big Lottery Fund, and 'Involving parents and teachers in the improvement of learning outcomes' (focused on teacher quality and quantity) in Uganda, Burundi, Malawi and Senegal, supported by the Hewlett Foundation³⁹.

Each project differed in design, but all took an action research approach. They involved work with local partners, were coordinated at national level by the ActionAid Education Lead, and internationally by a project manager. This person was based in the IET and was responsible for ensuring project delivery, giving some technical support and ensuring that 'findings' were shared between the countries involved. These projects were important for a number of reasons.

³⁹ These multi-country projects generated extensive internal documentation which I read but have not referenced directly given their confidential nature.

Given the organisational structure of ActionAid, and its funding arrangements, management of these projects was the only way the IET could formally engage with education work at the national level. The funding link enabled the team to collaborate directly in developing rights-based practice, and to ensure that the practice was documented and shared internationally. It also provided a formal structure for linking local, national and international work. Thus, the projects not only helped to strengthen adherence to a rights-based approach at local level, but also gave the IET more evidence and legitimacy to discuss issues faced in securing rights at various international fora. The projects were designed to influence and align national and local practice with the international conception of rights. Through taking an action research model there was also an emphasis on learning from practice.

However, it is noteworthy that there were no 'international outcomes' included in the project proposals for these three projects. The focus was on achieving specific aspects of the right to education locally and nationally. Moreover, while the projects were designed to link across the levels, there was no discussion of transformation of power relations amongst the project participants. It is also unclear how local information and perspectives were intended to influence national and international activity. For example, was the focus to build from and with local leadership, or to use local evidence for nationally determined advocacy strategies? Was the local participation conceived as transformative or instrumental? The reason these questions are important is because of the implications concerning whose voices were being heard in wider debates on education policy making. If poor and excluded people were not able to influence ActionAid, then it is unclear as to how ActionAid would have been able to represent these voices when it participated in international fora and policy making. If transformative participation was not apparent within a managed project process, it is difficult to see how it would be possible more broadly. I return to this question in the following chapters.

In addition to the externally funded multi-country projects, the IET used two other strategies to build capacity on rights in the national programmes. Firstly, there were a series of international policy focused publications. These included work exploring the relationship between HIV and education (Boler and Aggelton, 2004; Boler and Jellema,

2005; ActionAid 2006c); analysis on the impact of para-teachers⁴⁰ on national teaching professions; and 'model-policies' to combat violence against girls in schools. While some publications were developed with extensive involvement of the Education Lead staff (for example the model-policy) others were produced centrally and then disseminated. Secondly, the team coordinated research on key areas, specifically 'Education Financing' which led to a series of publications (ActionAid, 2005b, 2006b, 2007b) and advocacy opportunities. The focus was on supporting national level research within a framework provided by the IET:

The strategy for the IMF work was to develop guidelines/ToRs [Terms of Reference] and distribute these to the CPs [Country Programmes] who could then engage their own, national level consultants and coordinate the research themselves. However, although the countries did the research, they did not link this to the next stage, to advocacy, so there is now a need for the IET again – to support CPs in linking the research to advocacy work. (Focus Group Discussion, 2006, IET)

Across all of these materials it is evident that the IET had a specific conceptualisation of what a rights-based approach involved. This conception informed the support materials and influencing strategies used with the wider education community. The focus of the IET's work in relation to education rights was to give support to country programmes, rather than tailoring their international work to build on and learn from country level practice. This point was reflected on by one team member during the Education Review, and is discussed further in Chapter Eight.

The interview and documentation data suggest that the IET's understanding of rights was shaped by the debates that were occurring internationally. This inevitably impacted on the priorities chosen, and:

The problem is that policy people spend a lot of time talking to government, and the world that you see depends on who you relate to, who you spend time talking to. This is what influences who you are, what you believe etc. So unconsciously you begin to mirror whoever you are relating with – if you spend all your time talking to government you mirror what they say to you – so you express your ideas in their terms, use language that they use (Interview, 2008, Rosalind Eyben, Institute of Development Studies)

This observation is apt in relation to the way that the IET invested in their work on education financing. The work responded to the political definition of a human rights-

⁴⁰ These are teachers without professional teaching qualifications who may be employed by government at lower wages than professional teachers, or recruited to teach in NFE centres. The impact of employment of these teachers are widespread. For example, there are concerns that para-teachers may undermine the teaching profession, and lead to a reduction of educational standards.

based approach discussed earlier (ActionAid, 2008, see Chapter Five). However, this work struggled to engage with national priorities, and given the analysis of how this work evolved in Sierra Leone (Beardon, 2009), it would be difficult to claim that the work contributed to enabling more people at the grassroots to secure their education rights.

Hannah Beardon produced a 'Critical Story of Change' (see Chapter Three) on the work on Education Financing in Sierra Leone as part of the Education Review. She pointed out that ActionAid Sierra Leone (AASL) gained visibility and connection with the national government through their work on the impact of IMF conditionalities on education. However, she also noted:

The IMF project has been a valuable and useful experience for all of those involved, building skills, awareness and evidence to engage on the issue of macroeconomic policy. However, many of these same people consider that focusing on the role and influence of the IMF, by which I mean targeting the IMF for change in policy and behaviour, is a waste of energy and resources. Thomas Jonny, who coordinates AASL's work on policy and governance said: "*Focusing on the IMF is like shooting water on a duck's back. Little change on the ground is seen here.*" ...Chasing the IMF without receiving any straight answers will sap the energy of activists over time...and in the end a national focus to build strong coalitions to strengthen accountability and push for alternative national policies will be more productive (Beardon, 2009: 21).

In addition to questioning the value of national participation in international advocacy, there were also concerns about the tensions that arose in participating in this work. For example:

The relationships which ActionAid is in, or sustaining, need to be slowly and purposefully transformed. Madiana Samba [Education Lead] highlighted some of the tensions in this process, which she considers require slow, strong development of partners from the grassroots upwards. The Education Financing Campaign, for example, is a national process which has grown out of the IMF work...[but] Madiana feels that in order for the campaign to be valuable and effective nationally she needs more time than international colleagues are giving to develop the foundations and strategy (ibid: 24).

This negotiation between the slow and time-consuming process of building relationships of trust and participating in the fast paced world of international education policy making, is explored further in the next chapter. But Beardon raises two additional complications: the tension between a theoretical position on the role of government to deliver education and the realities of working in a context where the government resources are very limited; and the tensions between national policy change and local implementation:

In terms of education, the reality reported to me was one where the government just do not have the means to translate the vision of Education for All into practice. The Ministry of Education (MoE) are dependent on foreign and non-governmental allies and donors, such as UNICEF or DfID, to support their own internal functions, as well as the delivery of education services on the ground. The MoE Planning Directorate consists of only one person... Local government, now the hub for delivery of basic education, is so short of capacity that their staff ask ActionAid to provide transport and per diems to attend even a local meeting (ibid: 16).

... the School Management Committees (SMCs) that I met in Western Area on the outskirts of Freetown were incredibly frustrated at the lack of funding and scope to really make a difference to their schools. For them, struggling to fulfil their role without a standing budget, they see the major obstacle to achieving quality education in their schools as the abolition of school fees. And yet, the abolition of school fees is considered by national and international education activists as a major step forward in ensuring that every child is able to access their right to education (ibid: 14).

This discussion adds weight to the argument that rights-based approaches need to engage with service delivery, and that the relationship between services and rights needs to reflect the realities of local contexts. Before reflecting further on this dynamic in education work in 2009, it is important however to note that, although the international education materials produced during my research period took an absolutist view on the role of service delivery in relation to rights, international staff were very aware of the complexity of this in practice.

A less absolutist view?

In reflecting on how rights-based work had been supported in 2006 a member of the IET stated:

There has not been much team effort to support RBA to date, one exercise was tried at the Johannesburg meeting [first International Education Community Meeting, May 2005] but it was done too quickly and didn't really deal with the issues.

What RBA is and how to do RBA has not been communicated clearly, but it might not be possible to do this. RBA is context specific and needs to react to context, it should not be about telling people you're wrong not doing RBA but supporting them to think through how to do it. (Focus group discussion, Sept 2006)

In a similar vein to the national staff, as soon as the IET began to discuss rights-based work, the relationship between rights and service delivery was discussed:

The RBA, SD [Service Delivery] debate has been going on for ages, and in some ways it seems that AA put the cart before the horse. They moved to RBA without saying what it meant, how to do it, and many countries think you either do RBA or SD and don't understand how the two can link. Interpretation of RBA was left to countries' discretion and they weren't really supported. But SD does play a

role: for example if you are a country which has a monsoon every six months you need to plan how to deal with this within your RBA. The very process of moving towards RBA can be a rights-based process. You can't just suddenly stop delivering services - it would be irresponsible (ibid).

This last comment is interesting in relation to the Ghanaian experience discussed earlier (p.174), where the country programme had stopped the service delivery that they had been supporting. Reflecting on the action in Ghana as compared to the view shared here, suggests some confusion within the education community. This was perhaps due in part to the absolutist view contained in the centrally produced documentation.

A later comment by another team member suggested that there was difficulty in articulating the exact relationship between rights and services in the IET:

The PRRPs [participatory review and reflection processes – an annual process that each ActionAid team is required to do] that we have received back from CPs [country programmes] since the IET and international strategy have been in existence have been positive, but it is hard to tell if this is what people really feel, or do they think that they have to say this because we will see the reports? This is a concern because we can see that country programmes are not working in line with the strategy. For example, there is a programme in Northern Nigeria (enhancing girls basic education) which has lots of external interest, with people coming to visit, but it is a service delivery programme. People are also interested in the Guatemalan Early Childhood Development Centres, again this is mainly service delivery (although they are working with the government to get them to take on the initiative), so if people are interested in this, this suggests that they are still doing this sort of work (ibid).

However, the IET were not overly concerned with the gaps in practice, recognising that:

Strategy implementation takes a long time, it needs behaviour change. We are unlikely to see real changes for 2-3 years (ibid).

If this final comment were accurate it would suggest that by the time the Education Review occurred (2009) the conception of rights-based work at country level would be clearer.

Analysis from the Education Review, 2009

The Education Review took place during the first four months of 2009. We collected information from all country programmes, covering: the contents of their education work; their knowledge and understanding of human rights discourse; and how they understood this to apply in programme planning, design, implementation and evaluation processes.

As noted in the methodology chapter, the main tool used to understand national perspectives was the 'Education Lead' Survey. This was a long document that staff were advised to complete over two days. Education rights were touched on implicitly in many places throughout the questionnaire, and one section was dedicated to exploring the theoretical conception of rights held and also asked the lead education staff to give an example of rights-based work in practice. This section begins by reflecting briefly on the key data and conclusions shared in the 'Education Review Report' (co-authored by Yusuf Sayed and myself, with input from research volunteers 2009) before looking in greater detail at responses to two questions that were not analysed as part of the review, but that I subsequently analysed myself for this PhD research.

Analysis of Review findings⁴¹

The data included in this section draws directly from the Review Report (Sayed et al, 2009), and is clearly referenced; the analysis however, is my own, and includes my reflection on the findings.

The information collected through the Review questions suggested that amongst ActionAid education staff sitting at national level, there was a strong shared understanding of what rights are. There was good knowledge of the various international human rights tools (Universal Declaration, Convention on the Rights of the Child etc., see Sayed et al 2009: table 5.1 and paragraphs 133-137) and the theoretical framing of rights reflected the ideas expressed through ActionAid's publications⁴². However, there was concern that, while these international tools were good reference points, they were not easily 'implementable' at national and local level, and staff noted that government officials were not always aware of the international agreements on rights (ibid: paragraphs 138-139). Staff also suggested that these tools were more useful in raising awareness and advocacy, than in supporting the actual achievement of the right to education.

All lead staff agreed that the state was the body responsible for guaranteeing the right to education: it 'has the primary role to provide the right to education', and should be held accountable to do this (ibid: table 5.3). Respondents placed different emphases on the

⁴¹ The data collected in the review process was confidential – I was given permission by ActionAid to re-use it, but I have not included a list of references in the bibliography as the material is not accessible by others.

⁴² i.e. drawing from diverse international treaties and national legislations, being universal in application, inalienable and attributable to individuals.

balance of international community responsibility for holding states accountable, vis-à-vis national civil society, as illustrated by this comment from the Nepalese respondent:

[The role of the international community in ensuring national government obligation to deliver the right to education] could be controversial in some cases because the sole global hegemony, the US, could under this pretext advance its political interest, which it has been doing across the globe. Rather than supranational structures for holding states accountable, we should direct our efforts to support vibrant civil society and empowerment of rights-deprived groups to enjoy rights (Nepal Lead Survey).

The Review also noted that:

[A]ll ActionAid Leads and local education partners share a common understanding of rights which is based on the principle of sameness, that is, the right to be treated equally with the state being responsible for this. Importantly, there is a strong view that rights need strong constitutional and legislative guarantees. Additionally, there is a strong liberal belief that individuals are holders of rights (Sayed et al, 2009: paragraph 148).

However, the Review also noted disparities between this response and the response to questions as to whether rights could be limited in certain contexts (44% of respondents thought they could be, which is at odds with a universal approach), and the appropriateness of affirmative action, which many supported in relation to girls education and education for ethnic minorities, especially at national level (ibid: paragraphs 149-150). Affirmative action is a complex issue, justified on the grounds of structural inequalities to enable equal access to universal rights, but challenged on this same basis given questions of the bias that informs the shape of these universal rights (Phillips, 2002). It is unclear if these contradictory views existed because of the lack of detailed understanding of a rights-based approach, or because an ideal theoretical approach was treated with pragmatism when put into practice.

Another observation from the Review was that 68% of Education Lead staff believed that ActionAid should deliver education services *in emergencies and in the last instance* (Sayed et al, 2009: paragraph 153). It is unclear exactly how the respondents interpreted the statement, as disagreement could have been based on an absolutist position: that ActionAid should never deliver services, or due to the opinion that ActionAid should deliver services in more diverse contexts. Given that the Review found generally that national level staff were clear about the importance of service delivery within a rights-based approach and the overwhelming majority, from Africa, Asia and Latin America, felt that there was a role for this, the latter position is most likely. For example, a range of arguments were given as to the importance of service delivery:

Providing service delivery does not mean anti-rights and only advocacy might not guarantee that work is rights-based. The main difference between service delivery and rights-based are on three accounts: what message we give the community; how we facilitate our discussion with the community; and what is the goal of our intervention. If services assist the community to organise and mobilise then service provision can be integrated in our work (Nepal, Education Lead Survey).

If children need to go to school and government is not able or unwilling, and if AA has the means (through resources raised in the name of children), they are morally and duty-bound to give children education (Zambia, Education Lead Survey).

These examples reflect the pragmatic approach to service delivery discussed at the end of Chapter Five. However, while the country level staff saw strong links between the two approaches, this was more problematic for international staff. For example, communication and fundraising staff explained how:

In terms of the worst areas of work [within the education theme] it is interesting that the IET strategy is all about rights, while at the same time AAI builds schools all over the place, usually with really good explanations. We are still fundraising for this, and some funders, like the Isle of Man, will only fund this (Interview, Education Review, 2009, Lisa Mills, Head of Trust and Foundations, AAUK).

When fund raising and communicating to donors we emphasise what the rights-based approach is, when in reality we are building schools in countries. That can be embarrassing. To explain this, I talk about the internationalisation and freedom of countries on an individual level. (Interview, Education Review, 2009, Rebecca Ingram, Fundraising Officer, AAUK and Part-Time Coordinator of the Comic Relief multi-country project, IET)

These comments suggest that the disjuncture was not between service delivery and rights-based approaches; but between national and international interpretations of rights, and the role of services within this framework.

However, it is also worth noting that much of the emphasis on the links between services and rights by country lead staff could have been due to a response to the context in which they were working, rather than derived from a specific theoretical position. The importance of history and community expectation shines through in these two reflections from the country visits:

Malawians were long exposed to a system of not questioning authorities but this is changing, and after capacity building people are questioning their authorities and demanding social services. However, community expectations of AA Malawi have meant that change is slow, and the shift from a service delivery to a RBA initially caused conflict due to high levels of poverty and different views on child sponsorship. The communities had got used to service delivery from ActionAid and it was not easy for them to adapt to the change in approach. During focus group discussions with mothers' groups, CBOs and SMCs, it was learnt that

people felt they were being neglected by ActionAid due to change of their approach, although they later got used to the new way of working (In-depth Country Review, Malawi, 2009).

At the local community level, members were aware of an RBA, mentioning making claims on duty bearers and holding government to account. Yet it was also evident that for the local community RBA was as much about changes to their material conditions and the provision of services as about making claims. Thus, local communities cited the building of schools, the provision of electricity transformers as material goods which changed their lives. It is possible, as the review team noted in the case of Nigeria and other country visits, that people may become more aware of their rights but for this to translate into changing material conditions not only takes time but depends on other changes to happen alongside (In-depth Country Review, Nigeria, 2009).

These comments suggest the absence of many services at local level, and the lack of clarity as to how change might actually happen, were a major part of the reason for involvement in service delivery. Such a position, of supporting government to deliver education is comparable to CARE's 'promotional' approach; rather than the 'violations' approach discussed in Chapter Five (Jones, 2005: 81). The implication is that although ActionAid's articulation of a rights-based approach differed substantially from other comparable INGOs, translating this vision into practice was more complex. This observation is reinforced by my analysis of additional data gathered during the Review.

Additional Analysis

The Education Lead Survey was divided into two parts with the first exploring the profile of education staff and work, and the second focused on the theoretical underpinnings of this work. Each section contained a question asking Education staff to share a brief example of the work they were involved in. In the first section the question followed directly after a series of tables asking staff to detail the range of work they were involved in at local and national level, and was phrased as follows:

In the box below, provide a brief description (approximately 150 words) of one activity in your country which best reflects the strength of your work in education (Question 2.10, ActionAid, 2009a)

The second question followed a series of statements on rights which respondents were invited to rank, and share their knowledge of international rights instruments:

Please use the space below to give an example of a piece of education work that your country programme is involved in, which best exemplifies a rights-based approach to education (Question 6.4, *ibid.*).

A comparison of the responses to these two questions sheds light on the way Lead Staff understood and applied a rights-based approach, and the importance they placed on this work.

A first point to note is that for all countries, apart from three, different examples were given in response to each question. This could have been because they felt that they should give alternative examples, but equally it could have been because the programme of which they were most proud, or felt was of the highest quality, was not a rights-based programme. In addition a quarter of the respondents left the rights-based answer blank. Again there are various possible reasons for this. For example, it could be simply because the survey was long and the question was quite near the end of the survey. However, given that other questions in the same section were answered by nearly all respondents it also could have been that staff in some countries found it difficult to give a clear example.

In response to the first question many countries (14 out of 27) highlighted work in non-formal education or non-formal teacher training, classroom construction work and delivery of adult education⁴³ as their best programming work. But in their responses to the second question many of the same countries discussed work that fitted clearly with the IES. For example, in response to the first question the Education Lead from Sierra Leone wrote the following (much of which is in direct contradiction with the IES):

- Direct support to access education in remote communities through the support for the establishment of Non-Formal Primary Schools,
- Setting up and training SMC [School Management Committee],
- Supporting the training of teachers on short term courses to quickly enhance their teaching quality and in professional courses through the Distance Education Programme to so to enhance their chances of being employed by government,
- Served as an Implementing Partner for the government of Sierra Leone through the Ministry of Education for the construction of schools, supply of school furniture, teaching and learning materials and the training of SMCs (Sierra Leone, Response to question 2.10).

In response to the second question they highlighted their work on 'Education Financing' and 'Violence against Girls in Schools' (both international projects) as their best rights-based practice. As with any written survey it is problematic to ascribe reasons for these

⁴³ This refers to work with *Reflect* which for some countries is described in terms of literacy development, whereas others describe it more as a process of community organisation. These distinct descriptions suggest that very different approaches are used in practice.

differences, and it is therefore unclear whether this was a learned response to questions from the IET, or illustrative of an actual change in practice.

Many of the examples, given in response to both questions, linked service delivery to rights. For example ActionAid Uganda noted:

We are involved in an advocacy process with the government to provide boarding facilities for children in the island places of Kalangala. This is because the nature of the islands makes them marginalised and isolated. Children are expected to move on water and through thick forest to reach the schools. This has made access to school very risky and consequently many parents have chosen not to send the children, especially girls. The reason for not sending them is mainly because of the risk associated with reaching the school. However, government policy does not support provision of boarding facilities for government aided primary schools. This policy is therefore not favourable to children under such circumstances and makes them lose out on their right to education. We have demonstrated through provision of such a facility that the impact on access and retention of children has been immense and we are using this as evidence to lobby government for a waiver of the conditionality for such hard to reach and stay areas (Uganda, Response to question 6.4).

While Tanzania responded as follows:

ActionAid International Tanzania realized that most girls were dropping out of secondary schools as years went by and girls making it from Primary to Secondary level kept on decreasing. After some discussion with the communities, it was revealed that the key cause of these was pregnancy which accounted to 6% of overall all truancy. It was also noted that a student has to travel long distance to and from school and this made girls more exposed to sexual harassment at their tender age. As the result most girls got pregnant and the parents were afraid of sending their daughter to school fearing this scenario. In 2007, ActionAid started a model project in some of our operational areas where this seems to be a major challenge.

With the objective of modelling girls' access to education and as a strategy of influencing the government, we have initiated a model project on providing hostels for girls. So far we have provided a total of 7 hostels in 6 DAs. These hostels accommodate 355 girls from poor and vulnerable backgrounds who are estimated to be 30% of girls in their respective schools. The government has started taking similar initiatives in the other parts of the country and while launching one of our community hostel, our first lady not only commented on our effort but also challenged the District authorities to start planning for more budget to support this (Tanzania, Response to question 2.10).

The argument of whether or not to model solutions has long plagued NGOs, and at an international level ActionAid has been critical of this role (Archer, 2008). On the one hand there is the recognition that NGOs have more flexibility to experiment, and that only through modelling new approaches can the inflexible structures of government be encouraged to change. On the other hand there is the concern that such approaches work precisely because they are implemented on a small scale, and cannot be replicated,

and that NGO involvement can undermine a public education system (Archer, 2008, Green, 2008). These arguments are directly relevant in the context of a rights-based approach.

In articulating its rights-based approach, ActionAid stated clearly that government is the duty-bearer. However, the organisation also emphasised the participation and empowerment of excluded groups. It is possible to argue that the experimentation and development of a people-centred perspective on the right to education needs to take place outside the formal system – so that it can be truly independent of a top-down vision and respond fully to local needs and priorities. The delivery of such services could be argued to form part of locally defined rights-based action. However there are various further questions that need to be considered here, above all, whether such engagement ultimately undermines an approach focused on government obligation to protect, respect and fulfil the right to education.

Additionally, it is important to understand further the motivation for such an approach. For example, were ActionAid programmes supporting this work as they were unsure how else to implement rights-based practice? Was it therefore an example of Uvin's figleaf (2007: 600)? How involved were local communities in initial programme design, or in advocacy efforts at local and national level? Did the way this work was pursued exemplify a rights-based process, which was empowering for those involved and transforms power? Or was service delivery managed separately from the wider campaigns for change? Unfortunately it is not possible to answer these questions from the materials collected during the Education Review. The only comment that can be made is that the role of local communities within the advocacy process was not discussed. This could be reflective of the fact that this was not a focus of the work, or it could be due to a weakness in documentation, as discussed above (p.176).

Where a link between grassroots participation in project development and policy advocacy processes is directly made, support for new models of service delivery can be coherently argued. However, the following example from Zambia highlights the 'slippery' nature of such an approach:

The construction project has been implemented with the community, where skills are being transferred to the community. Through collaboration (community participation), effective management of the project by the community and seeing their commitment to participate, the Ministry of Education listened to calls from the people and have allocated an extra classroom block. This was only possible because AA and the community had done half of the work. We recognise that a rights-based approach and true

partnership requires honest dialogue and recognition of the fact that our government has limited resources allocated to rural areas and while advocacy continues at national level, children are being denied a right to education. Not because the Ministry of Education doesn't care, but because they can't afford to build schools everywhere (Zambia, Response to Question 2.10).

Such an approach – of encouraging poor and excluded groups to show their commitment to education by resourcing infrastructure development at the local level – was evident in many of 'best practice' examples shared in the survey responses. This local initiative was frequently conceived as the appropriate starting point from which to approach government. Depending on how the work was conceived, and how it was linked to capacity building, information sharing and analysis, it could be argued that this was a pragmatic response in a resource poor context. However, it is necessary to reflect on the balance between community and ActionAid funding, and the impact on future expectations and relationships. Without an overt focus on the rights-holder/duty bearer dynamic, this type of work could contribute to a continual patronage relationship between community members and government, whereas a rights-based approach is expected to strengthen the relationship between the government and its citizens. These are complex debates, beyond the scope of my study (especially as I had no direct links with the local level work). But what is clear is that this practice is conceptually and practically different from the conception of rights-based work as communicated in the IES.

As with the 2006 documentation, there were concrete examples of work that clearly fitted within a generic rights-based approach, i.e. an outcome based approach that was focused on the securing specific aspects of the Right to Education. It is important to note that the number of examples was much higher than in the earlier documentation. But as with the earlier documentation this tended to focus on national action rather than local level work. For example Sri Lanka reported how:

One of key activities implemented during 2005-06 was with an organisation named Elated Schools Development Organisation (ESDO). Together we initiated a programme in collaboration with both state and non-state actors in the aftermath of the Tsunami disaster to influence the policy formulators to ensure a safe school environment through the integration of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) into the national education curricula. The ESDO group managed to agree upon a MoU with the Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights through which ESDO got the mandate to work with school authorities and the ministry to carry out DRR trainings to teachers and students, initially in the tsunami affected areas. As part of this process, the ESDO group was able to develop a strong linkage with the Ministry of Education and started working with other stakeholders to influence relevant authorities to take the DRR aspect

into consideration for the integration into the national curricula (Sri Lanka, Response to Question 2.10).

And Pakistan noted

The quality of education in Pakistan has kept declining, despite political eulogy of successive governments. Dilapidated buildings, lack of trained teachers, missing facilities such as washrooms, furniture, drinking water, etc. remained a challenge to the quality of education. No benchmarks are set for defining the minimum standard of school infrastructural and budgetary requirements. No consideration is given to the basic school requirements. In 2008 AAPK [ActionAid Pakistan] initiated research with the purpose of determining the actual needs of a school and transparent utilization of allocated funds. The strategic objective of the research is to sensitize the government about the minimum essential needs of a school. The research was carried out in 7 districts all across Pakistan. Identification of schools, hiring and training of local research teams, data collection and data entry was completed during the year 2008. Analysis followed by a comprehensive Advocacy Campaign will be launched in the first quarter of year 2009. (Pakistan, Response to Question 2.10)

There are two potential explanations for why national level practice dominated the examples that can be clearly understood as a rights-based approach. Firstly, because of the way their role was structured, it was likely that Education Leads were more familiar with the work that was happening nationally. National level work was directly within their remit whereas local level programmes were often managed at regional and local level, by programme rather than policy staff (see Chapter Eight for further analysis of this). However, an alternative explanation could be that education staff in 2009 were still finding it easier to conceptualise and pursue a rights-based approach at national level.

Much of the work described, at local and national level, was focused on making the government public education system work, and be more inclusive. For example, the work at the national level included: campaigning for flexible school time-tables or annual calendars that respond to local context; investment in strategies to enhance girls' security and therefore participation in schools; and work to recognise the true costs of education and thus increase school budgets. Such work involved a focus on a specific policy – and aimed to create a policy environment which increased access to quality education. It was described using campaigning language, emphasising the work with education coalitions and suggesting a mixture between political lobbying, advocacy and public awareness raising.

This was complemented by work at the local level to ensure that national policy was implemented. Such work included budget tracking initiatives, building capacity of

school management committees, monitoring teacher attendance, and raising awareness among communities of the right to education.

Taken in tandem with the more traditional service delivery work (i.e. work on infrastructure building, curricula development and volunteer teacher training) there was a clear effort to make a monolithic public education system more open, flexible and responsive to local needs.

Looking broadly across the examples then, it is clear that work had evolved, perhaps becoming more 'rights-based' since 2005. While some countries remained rooted in service delivery work (for example Somaliland, Ethiopia), most countries had linked any service delivery work that they were involved in to an interpretation of rights-based practice. Service delivery was conceived as one-side of the coin, to enable relationships to be built with the government. The other side of the coin was to strengthen the government's capacity to deliver the right to education. The examples implied that, on the whole, country programmes were clearer on the types of work that fitted within an agreed conception of rights-based practice than they had been three years previously. But it was also notable that work that was most clearly aligned with the organisational rights-based analysis came from the South Asian country programmes, or involved work developed in collaboration with the IET. Given that Indian staff were believed to be instrumental in ActionAid's shift to rights-based working (see Chapter Four), and the wider level of political activism which characterises South Asian civil society as compared to African civil society, this is perhaps unsurprising.

In addition, there are two caveats to be emphasised here, and they are important. Firstly, the national level rights-based work still appeared to be very outcome focused. There was little to suggest an awareness of process, power dynamics or transformation of power. As such the policy advocacy processes described appeared comparable to that in any NGO pursuing a rights-based approach. Secondly, within the case study material there was only one example (India) where links were made between local and national practice.

Community mobilisation to ground the right to education by making the government schools function best reflects the strength of our work. Its foundation rests on rights consciousness. We work communities to raise their critical awareness of education as fundamental right, with the State's responsibility to ensure its actualization. *Reflect* is used in some locations, while in others critical dialogue is held on the status of children's education. The interface between organised community mobilisation of excluded communities, and local self-governance contributes to making quality education real. The

community participation in various school processes become integral to this community mobilisation, for example, tracking which children are not in school, following up children's regularity of attendance. The quality and effectiveness of community mobilisation is reflected in the processes beyond the local level through organised campaigns or collective protests at district and state levels demanding right to education (India, response to question 2.10).

Aside from this example, the focus was on policy influencing at the national level and policy implementation and government accountability at the local level. Both these strategies fit within a generic rights-based concept and are clearly important in enabling excluded groups to realise rights. They may also lead to stronger more organised communities at local level, able to engage with government bodies and hold local power holders to account. Such practice is crucial in terms of long-term goals of empowerment and sustainability. However there remains the question as to how this empowerment process played out beyond the local level – beyond ensuring that policies agreed elsewhere (i.e. concepts of universal rights) were implemented locally. Across the work there was no illustration of how local voices were being heard nationally. There was no discussion of how local practice was contributing to ActionAid's understanding of the Right to Education more generally. And therefore it is unlikely that ActionAid was able to fulfil its vision of strengthening poor and excluded voices within wider debates on education policy making. I explore this point more deeply in the following chapter.

In considering questions of how congruent the practice described was with ActionAid's articulated approach, there are many challenges. A major issue was that I was considering these materials sitting in the UK, geographically distant from practice, and reliant on documentation gathered through a survey process. I noted the methodological problems of relying on survey data in Chapter Two and, in reflecting on the examples I noted that my observations were concerned as much with what was not there, as with what was present.

For example, had we phrased the questions specifically to ask about the process of work linking local to national work we may have some very different responses. But despite this concern, the lack of immediate inclusion of such examples suggests that they were not at the forefront of the Education Leads mind in addressing the question. Moreover, in a different part of the survey (questions 3.2, ActionAid, 2009a), Education Leads were asked to share significant innovations that they felt should be taken up nationally. And the following question (question 3.3, ActionAid, 2009b) asked what factors might strengthen their work at national level. In responding to these two questions only five

countries mentioned the importance of developing stronger local-national links. More common were suggestions of strengthening staff capacity in policy advocacy and understanding of rights, of building stronger networks nationally, and improving documentation and evidence collection of local programming to use in influencing national policy.

Concluding comments

The diverse examples and individual reflections contained in this chapter present a complex reality concerning the work on education rights. There was a stark difference in focus between international staff, working to implement an international strategy with strong emphasis on rights-based content and process, and that of country staff, grappling with the realities of poorly funded governments and isolated, impoverished communities. And yet, work clearly shifted over my research period. The language of rights was more widely evident among education staff, participation in national level advocacy and campaigning was more commonplace, and there were fewer examples of practice that contradicted the international strategy.

Given the nature of my research it is not possible to say how much this shift in documented practice reflected shifts in actual practice, rather than merely language change (Piálek, 2008). Moreover, the lack of documentation of process-led rights-based work, or examples of strong grassroots voices in national and international practice, suggest that there was still significant space between the understanding contained in the IES and country level practice. While the IET had worked to encourage a shift in content of work within country programmes, they had paid less attention to questions of how to engage with the complex process of shifting power relations within education policy making, or of broadening education policy agendas based on local realities of the conception of a right to education.

A key question, given the analysis in this chapter, is how distinct ActionAid's work was in practice, from that of the comparable organisations discussed in the previous chapter. The examples suggest that, while ActionAid staff engaged with rights-based discourse and used rights-based analysis in framing and developing their work, the understanding and capacity to develop strong links between local and national (and international) practice, were still weak. The work at local and national level appeared to develop in parallel, informed by a concept of rights, but failing to consider the implications of engagement at both levels. This has various implications and is best understood by

returning to the three continuums discussed in the previous chapter – of legislative/empowering approaches, of process focused/outcome focused, and of universal/locally defined rights (Figure 3).

In terms of legislative and empowering approaches, the examples suggest that ActionAid was working at both ends of the spectrum, but that the work involved different people in different locations. National level staff were focused on campaigning for domestication of international human rights standards, legislative reform, constitutional amendments or policy for the implementation of existing legislation. Local programmes were focused on working with poor and excluded groups to engage in holding their local school and local government accountable, and to ensure better transparency and more appropriate delivery of schooling. At the local level capacity building, community organising and participatory adult education methods were frequently used. These are all good examples of an empowering approach.

But, beyond this, the role of service delivery within rights-based practice also needs to be acknowledged. Different staff placed differing emphasis on how service delivery interacted with government obligation to protect, respect and fulfil the right to education. At times this work was complementary and supportive of a rights-based approach; but in other contexts it appeared to exist in tension. ActionAid was drawing on rights concepts extensively in its work but there were many dimensions as to how this evolved in practice. Finally, given how separately the work evolved at the different levels, it can be surmised that those working on education had not appreciated the opportunities and potentials these different levels provided – of how empowering and legislative processes could interact within a process of transformative participation.

The process/outcome continuum appeared to be less well implemented. The local level work emphasised both aspects, but national practice appeared very focused on outcome. The exception to this is in considering the development of education coalitions and partnerships with diverse education actors. I did not explore this work deeply in my research, but it is clear from a range of internal documentation that much of the emphasis at national level was on building strong education coalitions, bringing together NGOs, teachers unions and other civil society actors with an interest in education. As Gaventa and McGee (2010) suggest it is these broad based coalitions that are more able to bring about national policy change. Their finding supports ActionAid's extensive investment in this area. The justification and belief here was that through creating a strong, active and engaged national civil society (with links to global

networks and activists) the right to education would be achievable and sustainable. The dynamic between organised national civil society and poor and excluded groups located at the grassroots is discussed further in Chapter Eight.

However, returning to the process/outcome continuum it is noteworthy that within the material discussed in this chapter, there was no analysis of what a 'rights-based policy advocacy process' might involve. For example, there was no consideration as to how the grassroots voices might influence positioning, priority setting and action at the national level. This suggests that there was limited development of the concept of transformative participation, if this concept is taken as including transformation which reaches beyond the immediate local level. I explore this dynamic further in the following two chapters.

Finally, in relation to universal and locally defined rights; it is important to consider the main focus of the work discussed here which was on making the public schooling system function. There was no analysis of the concept of the right to education beyond a right to schooling. No example explored fundamental questions on the nature of the right to education; for example whether it could be conceived as a collective or public good (as discussed in Chapter Two), or how it acts as an enabling right. The focus was on local input in making schooling more accessible, rather than exploring the wider dynamics around the right to education, which might include looking at alternative conceptions of education, and forms of delivery.

In considering questions of universal and locally defined rights, it is important to reflect on how work on the right to education raised awareness and built capacity on the concept of rights per se. For example, did the approach strengthen understanding of the role of government and the concept of citizenship? Could it have led to struggles for alternative education approaches, or alternative democratic processes? Or was it reductionist in its focus, reinforcing a top-down target driven development agenda? Was the focus on primary school education because of the MDG commitment to universal primary education, or was it because it responded to local priorities and demands? Did the approach enable the development of strong local institutions which could communicate and fight for a locally generated development vision, beyond securing a right to school education? And, more broadly, how did the rights-based practice contribute to ActionAid's desired goal of transformation of power at every level? Given my lack of engagement with the local level programme it is not possible to provide absolute responses to these questions. However, what is clear is that none of

the documentation referred to broader shifts, suggesting that this type of information had not been looked for nationally or internationally.

In order to understand these dynamics further it is necessary to explore the internal organisational functioning which influences and shapes this work. This chapter has presented a picture of what work was valued, shared and discussed by education staff. But these staff are part of a wider organisational culture, shaped by formal structure and informal relationships, which together interact to provide incentives for work, and guide potential practice. The next two chapters ask to what extent the organisational culture and structure, and investment in decentralisation, have enabled or blocked the emergence of strong participatory practice in defining and securing education rights.

Chapter 7: Developing a Rights-Based Organisation: Part One

Introduction

As previous chapters have argued, in articulating its rights-based vision ActionAid completely transformed its understanding of the development process and its role within it. Rather than a technical approach to ameliorating poverty, the organisation was focused on a complex relational view of development, centred on the transformation of power. This approach to development required a new sort of organisation, and was the motivation behind ActionAid's internationalisation process, resulting in the decentralisation that was described in Chapter Four.

However, achieving the organisational structure for a rights-based approach does not happen overnight. VeneKlasen et al argue that it is:

[A] very slow, long process requiring a sustained commitment of senior decision-makers as well as programme staff. Experience has shown us that it can take more than ten years ... [I]nking rights and participation goes beyond a shift in mission and programme approach – it implies changes in staffing, incentives, budgets and priorities (VeneKlasen et al, 2004: 20).

Internationalisation involved a new organisational structure, the recruitment of new staff with different skills and increased partnership working. This shift was driven by a desire to act as part of a movement for equality, rights and social justice. ActionAid intended to shift from operating as a traditional INGO, and focus on working in a:

Unique partnership of people who are fighting for a better world – a world without poverty (ActionAid, 2005: 24).

To become:

A citizens' organisation, internationally connected but rooted locally and nationally (Interview, Singh).

This is the first of two chapters that explore the organisational dynamics which emerged as ActionAid pursued its rights-based vision. I suggest that while the shifts in organisational practice were motivated by a strong ideology, the decisions made and the context in which ActionAid was operating, actually gave rise to new contradictions and challenges.

In 'New Roles and Relevance' the authors argue that:

It is only through engagement with local as well as global, with learning, reflection and informed change in development policy and practice that NGOs will find ways to address poverty reduction and social justice agendas that are relevant to poor women and men, local institutions and partners, as well as pertinent to international and more influential global development actors (Lewis and Wallace, 2000: xvii).

I have therefore focused Chapter Seven (or 'Part One') on the organisational impact of increased engagement in global policy work, and Chapter Eight (or 'Part Two') on the role and position ActionAid gave to its local programme.

Chapter Seven explores how ActionAid's interest in increasing policy engagement and advocacy work impacted on the organisational dynamics. The focus on legislative or obligation-based approaches to securing human rights led the organisation to recruit an increasing number of 'activists', charged with strengthening ActionAid's involvement in national and international policy processes. This had a profound influence on diverse aspects of the organisational culture. I explore the tensions between engaging with policy processes, driven by agendas external to ActionAid, and balancing this with the wider organisational vision of strengthening the voices of the poor and excluded in local, national and international development debates and policy making. As part of this analysis, I look at the internal dynamics of the Education Theme, to understand how formal and informal power relationships impacted on ActionAid's ability to listen and respond to grassroots voices, and by extension, to ensure that these voices would be able to influence wider development agendas.

This discussion is extended in Chapter Eight (Part Two) where I focus on questions of structure, culture and management to shed light on the organisational constraints in linking rights and participation. In this second part I consider the role and function of the local programme, and the value placed on information flows within the organisation. Together these two chapters identify the multiple challenges and tensions which shaped ActionAid's ability to implement its understanding of a rights-based approach to development. Throughout this discussion I suggest that the two processes, of internationalisation (decentralisation) and transforming practice, came into conflict. And that this was in part influenced by a lack of reflection on how ActionAid functions; and in part due to a gap in critical understandings of rights-based theories themselves.

As with the previous findings chapters, the material drawn on here comes from a mix of different sources – including the interviews that I conducted, and an analysis of

organisational documentation. In addition this chapter includes some discussion of comparable INGOs, based on material shared on their websites. I start with a brief reflection that builds on the discussion that was introduced in Chapter Four, on the role, position and challenges experienced by International NGOs.

Understanding INGOs: Operating context in the early twenty-first century

Chapter Four discussed how the role of INGOs had evolved over the past thirty years, suggesting that with the increased focus on, and funding flowing to, these organisations there had also been increased academic attention and critique. I suggested that ActionAid's own evolution responded in part to the academic commentary, and in part followed internal debate and vision as to what the organisation should be doing. The chapter concluded by suggesting that the organisational structure which emerged as a result of ActionAid's internationalisation process shared many elements with Korten's Fourth Generation Organisations, but also identified the tension between becoming a Fourth Generation Organisation, while existing in the mainstream INGO operating context.

My own analysis of ActionAid's challenge was mirrored in a process to explore whether and how Big INGOs (BINGOs) could contribute to, or catalyse 'progressive social change' (understood as involving shifts in power relations, and working towards greater realisation of human rights and political and social justice for poor and vulnerable people (Shutt, 2009: 8)). The process, coordinated by the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, involved a series of meetings in 2008-9, and brought together academics and senior staff from eight INGOs, who concluded that there needed to be:

[F]urther debate if BINGOs are to entirely free themselves from certain strictures originating in the humanitarian and development sector, and make more significant contributions to progressive social change (ibid: 11).

This comment suggests that in order to achieve the type of changes this group were hoping or expecting BINGOs to achieve, the organisations needed to be qualitatively different from the type of NGO that had emerged since the beginning of the international development project in the latter half of the last century. In pursuing its internationalisation agenda, ActionAid has attempted to do this. However, questions remain as to whether the organisation has managed to 'free' itself entirely from the

strictures of the sector. For example, while the organisation has invested in developing new stakeholders aligned with its new way of thinking, and in bringing more traditional stakeholders with them there is a dominant perception among many of the fundraising staff that the individual sponsors in the Global North expect to see their donations supporting traditional service delivery projects (cf. earlier discussion on child sponsorship pp. 116-121). This and similar stakeholder expectations (for example among larger donors, partner organisations and local communities) cause tensions for an organisation trying to shift its practice..

Role and position in development

Central to the tensions in INGO role and position are the multiple expectations different stakeholders (and academics) place on these organisations. In many ways these tensions mimic wider debates about the meaning and process of development.

If development is understood as a technical approach to ameliorating poverty, the INGO role in strengthening service delivery to the poor (whether this is through direct delivery or influencing government policy) is appropriate. However, if development is understood as transforming structural economic, political and social power, then the role of INGOs needs to be understood completely differently – as challenging rather than complementing a mainstream development agenda⁴⁴.

The current context of high-level consensus on development aims and objectives, such as the Millennium Development Goals, has led to increasingly strong relationships between INGOs and official donors. The concern of many (Tvedt 2006; Brinkerhoff et al, 2007; Mitlin et al, 2006; Bebbington et al, 2008) derives from this direct connection that INGOs have with the development mainstream. For example, receiving funding (from official donors) is seen as undermining NGOs' ability to distinguish themselves from the official agenda, threatening their moral legitimacy as well as their ability to 'make a difference' in terms of shaping development debate.

The lack of space to promote development alternatives is said to be further constrained due to the management practices adopted. For example, Wallace (2006) describes how the 'Aid Chain' has impacted on NGOs' understanding of project management, with log

⁴⁴ Although challenging does not necessarily imply confrontation – as Patel and Mitlin (2009) show through the work of Slum Dwellers International, building relationships and collaboration can be an effective way of transforming the relationship with government, and enabling poor and vulnerable women to secure their right to housing. Direct confrontation in this circumstance can risk backlash, retaliation and further exclusion.

frame approaches defining how development is understood, planned and reported on, squeezing the room for any non-linear, more complex appreciation of the development process.

The linear conception of development, and the role of INGOs in delivering tangible services is reinforced due to the relationship INGOs have built up with their Northern supporting public, which have emphasised a 'transaction frame' and a 'cheque-book relationship'. (Darnton with Kirk, 2011). Following research with the UK public the authors note that:

[P]eople in the UK understand and relate to global poverty no differently now than they did in the 1980s. This is the case despite massive campaigns such as the Jubilee 2000 debt initiative and Make Poverty History; the widespread adoption and mainstreaming of digital communication techniques and social networks... The dominant paradigm has been labelled the Live Aid Legacy, characterised by the relationship of 'Powerful Giver' and 'Grateful Receiver' [and] public perceptions have been stuck in this frame for 25 years (Darnton with Kirk, 2011: 5-6).

They suggest that a transformative frame needs to be found, based on strong and close ties with supporters, and emphasis on spaces for open dialogue and deliberation between supporters and practitioners, but note that given the extensive influence of the transaction frame a move in this direction is difficult.

Beyond the challenge of promoting alternative development relationships and conceptions of development, there are also various concerns regarding questions of power relations, representation and voice, and the complex North-South relationships which exist within INGOs. For example, Ossewaard warns that due to the pressure to function as a coherent organisation, INGOs suffer from a crisis of legitimacy as they:

[E]xperience a permanent struggle to reconcile their mission with the requirements for regulatory, cognitive and output legitimacy. The more [external] stakeholders press for increased organisation of INGO work, the more the pursuit of the core objectives of INGOs is obstructed (Ossewaard et al, 2008: 42).

In a similar vein, Power, et al (2003) discuss how the problem of dual accountability means that an NGO can continue to function as long as it keeps the donor happy, and that the primary 'customer', the community members, have limited voice. In fact, development success, understood as value driven, participatory, accountable, and sustainable can be detrimental to the donor-INGO relationship (ibid: 25).

Questions of accountability, legitimacy and representation are not just limited to North-South dynamics however. There are also questions within any particular country context as to whether INGO 'professionals' can legitimately represent the rural poor. There are concerns about whether INGOs 'give voice' to poor people, or merely become 'proxies for the voice of poor people' (Srivastava, 2005). For example, their engagement in policy influencing encourages a close relationship between government officials and NGO policy experts who use complex, technical language in an increasingly exclusive debate (Batliwala and Brown, 2006).

Batliwala suggests that the engagement of INGOs in global civil society has transformed it, impacting on its democracy and representativeness, and disguising differences in power, resources, visibility, access, structure and ideology – between movements of directly affected people and their advocates. The argument that International NGOs dominate the space internationally, and elite NGOs nationally (Batliwala, 2002: 396) is further compounded by the advent of new forms of communication – which increase ties between those who already know each other and 'raise walls of exclusion for those lacking access' (Della Porta and Tarrow, 2005: 4).

This distortion of civil society space is not only problematic in terms of local empowerment and sustainability; but can serve to close down the space for local negotiation and achievement for social justice (Batliwala, 2002). This can have a serious impact on the culture of an organisation – including who is recruited and the types of knowledge and language which are considered important within the organisation.

Thus, in conceiving their role, INGOs have a series of choices to make, including: the development activities they pursue (spanning traditional service delivery and high-level policy engagement and advocacy); how they frame and understand questions of legitimacy and representation; the extent to which partnership is understood as a mutual process or limited to a funding relationship (whether this concerns Southern project partners or Northern funders and donors); their organisational politics and their responsibility to speak out in different constituencies; and their systems of management and governance (Horton and Roche, 2010). Each organisation will respond differently to these questions, and ultimately to the question of how much emphasis they place on framing the development debate – the extent to which they believe their role is to challenge and transform a mainstream development consensus.

Organisational behaviour

Whereas International NGOs are often described (and managed) as if they were machines (Shutt, 2009) the dynamics of organisational functioning can be better understood if they are viewed as complex and interconnected - akin to ecosystems (Clarke and Ramalingam, 2008: 39).

In understanding organisations it is therefore important to consider the organisational structure, systems and culture; and the individuals which inhabit it. In addition, organisations do not live in a vacuum, they exist in a context (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978). They are influenced by their own history, the behaviour of other institutions in their sector, and the trends and priorities of the diverse stakeholders with whom they interact.

In 1998, Suzuki asserted that academic literature on NGOs tended to focus on the sector as a whole, rather than exploring the dynamics within organisations, or recognising the complexity of the relationship between the International and Field Offices (Suzuki, 1998). However, more recently there has been an increasing focus on understanding the complexity of International Development organisations and a recognition of different perspectives and priorities held by those sitting in different positions within any one aid agency or INGO (Groves and Hinton 2004; Eyben 2006; McGee, 2010). This view is reinforced by discussions with INGO staff (cf. my interviews), who frequently refer to the complex dynamics that exist when building programmes of work across different parts of any one organisation.

However, while individuals might voice this view privately, there are also many forces at play to obscure the diversity of perspectives which exists. For example, Mowles (2007: 402) suggests that the organisational language is often used to cover over power dynamics and hide differences in understanding; and Shutt (2009) notes that the temptation to explain organisations as machines, enables a focus on the technical aspects of programme management for example, rather than the complex internal dynamics at play.

At the BINGO process described above, each participant reflected on Morgan's 'Organisational Images' (1986) in relation to their own INGO. From the eight images described by Morgan, three appeared particularly relevant: the metaphor of an organisation as a 'political system' (behaviour as interest based, and shaped by power and conflict, with informal networks being important); as 'cultures' (with an emphasis on socially constructed realities and organisational language which creates shared

meanings) and as a 'machine' (with an emphasis on goals, rationality and a belief in hierarchy) (Shutt, 2008: 30). The fact that each organisation associates with a mix of metaphors suggests that a complex dynamic influences how these organisations function, **and** is at play when they try to change. Failure to recognise this can mean that organisational change is badly planned or supported.

Whereas some studying organisational behaviour (cf. Hofstede, 2002) focus on exploring specific dynamics in national cultures and suggest that understanding these cultural expectations enables appropriate management across national boundaries, others (Morgan, 2007) argue that individual and organisational behaviour is more complex than this. For Morgan an appreciation of different national cultures needs to be balanced with a recognition of the transnational space that exists within the organisation. He suggests that new social action and identity are constantly being developed internally as 'multiple groups of actors [are] involved in ongoing conflict and negotiation' (ibid: 472). This implies a need to view an organisation not as 'a thing' but as an entity with multiple local sites embedded in local social relations. These different sites interact with each other, and therefore constantly change in relation to each other (ibid).

'Managing' values and changing culture

The failure of humanitarian organisations to achieve the change they intend is discussed by Clarke and Ramalingam (2008). They suggest that change processes are often based on a technical input-output based approach; and that planners fail to recognise organisational complexities. These include whether the organisation actually has free flowing information or is likely to respond 'rationally'. For Clarke and Ramalingam, successful change processes require attention to organisational culture, 'thinking of the organisation as a community, with its own values and beliefs' (ibid: 35). So any changes in formal structure need to be accompanied by changes in the 'shadow world' of the organisation's culture – its behaviour and how things get done (ibid: 36). This also involves recognising that different individuals will respond differently to changing circumstances and therefore that organisational change needs to be seen as 'dynamic, unpredictable and beyond the control of any one individual or group' (ibid: 35):

In complex organisations, transformational change ultimately involves the creation of new organisational realities that can break the hold of dominant patterns in favour of new ones...These new patterns cannot be precisely defined in advance – it is possible only to nurture elements of the new reality, and create conditions under which the new reality can arise. (ibid: 40)

Clarke and Ramalingam conclude by noting it is hard to do new things in old ways (ibid: 76).

Grey (2005) suggests that an interest in organisational culture derives from an interest in self-management. If the organisational culture is strong and workers are aligned with the values, then there is no need for hierarchical management systems. Workers will be motivated and self-motivating; an approach which is expected within many NGOs. However, the presumption that the worker (rather than the work) can be controlled can lead to selecting staff who are amenable to organisational values or trying to inculcate specific beliefs through training and communication strategies. Grey argues that the very nature of this project is contradictory – as culture as a concept is rooted, natural and spontaneous, whereas cultural management suggests that senior managers can define and deliver cultural values. He illustrates his point via a study by Ogbonna and Wilkinson (1998) which looked at the results of cultural training on supermarket staff. This study found that the outputs of cultural training might get implemented without actually impacting on beliefs (Grey, 2005:72). This observation is reinforced by work done by Piálek (2008) on gender mainstreaming in Oxfam GB (discussed in Chapter Six). He notes:

Value change is therefore intensely personal and intensely political. It is rarely, if ever, technical and managerial...the more radical the nature of [institutional] change, the more focused the process must be on values. If norms become the focus at the expense of values, then the process of change will become subverted, as conflict, far from disappearing, becomes submerged within the institution (Piálek, 2008: 289).

Mowles reinforces this point, suggesting that values are

[C]ontested ideals ... they are emergent and profoundly social phenomena, which can only ever be the domain of struggle and contestation if they are not to become prescriptive and inhibiting of human freedom.... [T]aking up values as an instrument of management, arises as a direct result of the professionalisation and marketisation of the development domain, where INGOs face very similar pressures to those encountered by private sector companies (2007: 402).

and argues instead for 'critical management studies' and support for the reflective practitioner.

This brief review of literature on organisational behaviour suggests that focusing on organisational structure and processes in isolation is not sufficient to understanding how an organisation functions. To appreciate how an organisation implements its vision, it is important to understand the staff, their positionality and 'habitus' (Bourdieu,

1984), how the organisation expects them to interact, and what happens in practice. Taking the analogy of an organisation as a eco-system this implies reflection on who the individuals are, and how formal and informal mechanisms, processes, cultures and values interact.

UK INGOs: Shifting staff profiles

The increased attention on managerialism and results-based approaches (Wallace, 2006), and the, apparently contradictory, shift by INGOs to focus on the 'root causes' of poverty, (seen as embedded in unequal social, economic and political power), have both led staff with different skills being recruited into INGOs, and greater 'professionalism' across the sector.

The influence of management discourse

A focus on a technical approach to development has led many INGOs to recruit 'managers' - and to value staff for their technical management abilities rather than for their personal commitment to social justice. Returning to consider the three organisations discussed in Chapter Five (Oxfam, SCF-UK, and Christian Aid) the rising importance of management is clear. For example, in January 2010 Christian Aid recruited a new CEO and distributed the following press release:

Minghella, who has been the chief executive of the Financial Services Compensation Scheme (FSCS) for the past five years, will take up her new appointment in April 2010....While not coming from an international development background, she has extensive experience which will be invaluable in leading Christian Aid... During her time at the FSCS, it has moved from being a low-key organisation handling compensation claims on a small scale to one that has played a major role in mitigating the effects of the financial crisis...."My experience will, I believe, be useful to Christian Aid in developing the organisation internally and continuing to improve service delivery, while managing the opportunities and challenges of working with partner organisations," she said.
(<http://www.christiantoday.co.uk/article/christian.aid.announces.new.director/2489>, accessed 3.09.2010)

Reflecting on this Tina Wallace (academic and consultant working with INGOs) commented that:

Oxfam, VSO, Christian Aid now, and others have chosen people from the public sectors or financial staff to lead their organisations....many others have chosen leaders not steeped in their values and cultures....and few choose development practitioners to take them forward (E-mail, January 2010, Wallace).

The importance of management skills, and experiences from the private and public sector, was noted by Karen Twinning-Fooks, based on her experience in supporting INGO recruitment:

Oxfam, especially a few years ago, have been recruiting people from managerial and private sector – they want people who had MBAs, who know about competency frameworks and corporate management speak (Interview, Twinning-Fooks).

This observation is reinforced when considering the leadership at SCF-UK⁴⁵. When I accessed their website in 2010, the organisation had nine executive directors, six of whom appeared to have spent the majority of their working life in the private sector. The CEO had a finance background (managing director of Thomson Financial business); the Chief of Staff started his career as an investment banker; the director of campaigns had a long history in food marketing (in United Biscuits and Marks and Spencers); the previous experience of the Director of Human Resources was in the Global Banking division of Misys PLC; and the director of fundraising had ‘spent more than a decade in the technology sector...at BT, Siemens and Avaya’. In fact, there was only one staff member with a clear history in the voluntary sector (the Director of Programmes). The Policy Director was previously a member of the civil service in the Department for International Development. This picture was repeated among trustees with 8 out of 13 working in the private sector. (accessed http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/en/100_9635.htm and http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/en/100_8978.htm 11th June 2010).

There are various reasons for a focus on these type of management skills, for example the discourse on growth and the desire to take on public services delivery contracts (Thomas, 2008). However, there is also a concern that INGOs have become too managerial.

The problem of management

There is widespread disagreement as to the extent to which the traditional ‘nuts and bolts’ of management (Dichter, 1989: 391) apply to NGOs, and to whether NGOs should pay attention to management discourse and concerns.

For example, Landry et al (1992) discuss whether NGOs should be driven by mission and values, or concepts of efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

⁴⁵ Chosen because it had the information available on its website

Lewis suggests that the 'management problems' attributed to NGOs are due to the way these organisations emerged, and were defined as a category in themselves.

NGOs did not suddenly appear as new actors in development, but were instead discovered, nurtured and praised – and rapidly became elevated to a position of new importance within the tripartite institutional landscape of state, market and civil society. Alongside this re-imagining and as part of it, development NGOs were simultaneously constructed as objects of the managerialist discourse that were coming into vogue at the time (Lewis, 2008: 40).

At the heart of the management dilemma is the question as posed by Edwards and Fowler:

Can the organisation be an effective catalyst for social change unless it practises what it preaches in terms of participation, democracy, non-discrimination and empowerment? On the other hand, can the organisation be effective at all unless it imposes a set of management structures and decision-making processes that cut across these values? (Edwards and Fowler, 2002: 5-6).

But in considering this question deeper issues arise. In particular, this raises the question of whether NGOs are a specific type of entity that need to be managed, or whether they are a site for resistance.

The term 'management' brings with it various assumptions; most notably that techniques designed to manage efficiency and output in the private sector can be usefully applied in other sectors:

The overriding theme of new public managerialism is the normative assumption that management and organisational science as applied in the private business organisations will have generalised lessons for the government, public services and third sector (Haynes, 2003: 10).

However, managerial theory designed to improve output and profit, focuses on specific assumptions about human behaviour – including the ability to motivate individuals through pay, and strategies based on the concept of the rational economic man (Grey, 2005). There are questions as to whether such an approach is appropriate for a 'value-driven organisation' or whether it leads to a form of cultural imperialism, imposing Northern business approaches on the South. For example, Dar and Cooke (2008) compare mainstream management to mainstream development – suggesting that both have 'modernisation agendas'. They characterise contemporary society as dominated by the profit imperative, patriarchy, racial inequality and ecological irresponsibility, which leads to a context where organisations become 'instruments of domination and exploitation' (2008:2). They suggest, in contrast that there is a need for a 'new development management' based on international solidarity in opposition to:

[A]moral, virally pernicious, globalising managerialism that tries to obliterate borders and difference. In our view such solidarity requires a democratic, tolerant and self-critical approach to analysis and action (ibid: 3).

This position is taken up by what Shutt (quoting Gulrajani, 2009) calls 'radical reformers', who:

[A]re able to theorise possibilities for "politicized, embedded and embodied" non-managerial development practice (Gulrajani 2009: 4). Such a view allows more space for contestation and plurality; a commonsensical and contingent approach to management that reduces dependency; and more participatory and civically oriented practice. (Shutt, 2011 unpublished: 5).

These ideas influence how an organisation identifies or frames its 'problems' and the processes developed to bring about a solution. It also suggests an alternative way of understanding organisational behaviour, and by extension organisational change.

While there have been concerns that INGOs have become overly influenced by Western neo-liberal management agendas, good management systems are clearly important in an international organisation which employs thousands of staff and works across multiple countries. John Gaventa, for example, recognised the benefit of such systems:

As I understand a somewhat simplistic history of Oxfam would be that in the mid-90s there were a lot of exciting and creative things going on, but organisationally it was a bit chaotic. Barbara Stocking was appointed by the trustees as the new director. She came in with a management background, from the NHS. I think now the feeling is that the systems are in place, and Oxfam is working well as an organisation. There have been technical hitches, but there has been huge investment into project, personnel, monitoring systems. Now we are working on how we can use these management systems to do much more really good mission driven work (Interview, Gaventa).

Given its strong ideological starting point for organisational design and functioning it is perhaps unsurprising that ActionAid has largely rejected this management path especially given the neo-liberal assumptions underlying much management discourse (Dar and Cooke, 2008). However, ActionAid's emphasis on ideology and activism has brought its own challenges.

Increasing policy focus

The scale of policy work differs across organisations. For example, the people I interviewed from CARE, Concern WorldWide and World Vision all emphasised that advocacy remained a very small part of their work, and that there were few policy staff employed internationally (or in the Northern Offices) and even fewer employed nationally. However, Oxfam and SCF-UK differed on this count. For example, Oxfam's

ex-Education Adviser outlined how Oxfam's international advocacy team had grown hugely in recent years, accompanied by bigger and more powerful regional teams. She continued to note that this had not been matched at national level – although very recently there had been a 'new generation' of national education coordinators with advocacy experience (Interview, Aikman).

For ActionAid, the increase in international, regional and national staff with a policy and/or activist background was a key shift during my research period.

While a focus on 'managers' can lead to different organisational dynamics, an increase in policy staff can also lead to shifts in organisational behaviour and understanding. For example, this anecdote from an Oxfam GB staff member implies an increasing distance between those working in the UK and those working in the Global South:

Oxfam in Oxford employs a lot of Oxbridge graduates. They may volunteer for Oxfam during a couple of summer holidays, and then often get a policy job when they graduate. But half of these people have never been to a developing country, they have no idea what these countries are like. Once there was someone on secondment from India and we were in a policy meeting, a member of staff asked him how he found working in the UK. He said it had been hard living in the UK, he'd had to open a fridge for the first time. Afterwards, one of the other policy staff, who was a hugely able northern lobbyist but who had never lived in the south, said 'oh, wow was he that poor?' In fact he was from a high caste in India and he had staff in his home who did all the cooking! (Interview, Max Lawson, MDG Campaigner, 2008)⁴⁶.

An individual's background tells us very little if anything per se about their values or commitment to tackling poverty or promoting social justice. However the shifting emphasis, whether this is for skills acquired in the public or corporate sector, or academic policy knowledge, from direct experience of working with people living in poverty, does have some implications for organisational dynamics more generally. Organisations are influenced by socially defined norms and expected behaviour, but created and recreated by human action (Giddens, 1986). And the potential for action is influenced by an individual's 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1984) - their previous experience and current positionality. This suggests that the entrance of a significant number of a different 'type' of person to an organisation is likely to have influence on the organisational culture and practice more generally.

⁴⁶ It is important not to read too much into such a story, especially when it is not accompanied by statistical information on Oxfam staff background. But it does give an impression of how an increase in policy staff can shift organisational dynamics.

It is not only the type of person being recruited that may be significant, but also their location. For example, over the past 10 years ActionAid has closed many of its local offices, and increased its presence in national capital cities. Wakwabubi (2011) notes that there is an increasing trend for INGOs based in Kenya to manage operations from a capital city and rely on partner organisations to implement programmes at the local level. Such shifting patterns lead to staff that being physically distant from the poor communities that they support, a dynamic exacerbated by withdrawal from direct service delivery to working through local partners. In recognition of this shift, and the associated concern that many development policy makers have never worked directly with poor people, some (Eyben, 2004; Birch et al; 2007) have argued for the importance of 'immersions'. These extended visits to rural communities are designed to encourage policy makers to leave their air-conditioned offices in capital cities and experience life in poor rural communities in the hope that stronger links and understanding will be built, as a result. Interestingly, ActionAid has pursued these programmes with its own staff, in addition to arranging immersions for official policy makers, suggesting that the organisation is recognising the impact of its changing staffing - a process that I now explore.

Staffing ActionAid International

Given that ActionAid has been operating within the broader context influencing UK INGOs, it would be surprising if the organisation had been operating in a completely different way from the trends described above. It recruited staff from the same 'pool' of individuals, using similar recruitment agencies, advertising portals and salary scales. However, two factors set ActionAid apart from other comparable organisations. Firstly, in ActionAid there was an emphasis on retaining staff and enabling them to move up through the hierarchy, as exemplified by Ramesh Singh, the Chief Executive during my research period.

Reflecting on his time with ActionAid (he had worked with the organisation for 19 years before being appointed CEO) Singh noted:

I myself have changed as ActionAid has changed, and I have also aimed to change AA. It is an iterative process, and of course the outside world has changed also. (Interview, Singh).

He joined the organisation as a technical adviser (in a local level agricultural unit), then became a local programme manager, before taking up a country director post. This was followed by a second country directorship, before joining the International Director's

team as regional director for Asia. His background was not atypical among senior staff, many of whom had been with ActionAid for 10 or more years; and had extensive experience of community development work. For example, as previously mentioned, the Head of Education had been with ActionAid for over 20 years, and had spent a significant period of time in Latin America engaging directly with popular education programmes.

The presence of long-serving staff within any organisation can have a range of effects. It suggests that an understanding of organisational history may remain inside the organisation. However, the impact of this depends on how the history is interpreted (and valued) by the organisation and by the individuals themselves. History can be romanticised, provide learning, or be rejected. Given the level of change ActionAid was attempting during my research period many elements of its organisational history were rejected or at least fought against. These included the North-South relationships, the role of service delivery and the influence of the perceived priorities of individual sponsors in determining local programming work.

Although specific aspects of the organisational history were criticised, it was also clear that retaining staff over long periods had a major influence. Understanding of the organisational culture and practice was retained. This meant that while the formal structure and power of the organisation shifted, informal practices continued, including the diffuse way that power operated across the organisation and the role of strong individual leaders. This dynamic is discussed further below.

Beyond the retention of organisational history there is another potential impact of having long serving senior staff. Change for ActionAid was largely led from the centre – with the shifts in organisational structure being determined by senior management. If many of the staff in these positions had been with the organisation a long time, and were aware of the organisational culture, it might be expected that they would use their understanding to facilitate change, to engage with the ‘shadow culture’ (Clarke and Ramingliham, 2008). While staff lower in the hierarchy may sometimes act as an obstacle for change (Roper and Pettit, 2003) this may be less likely at senior management level, given the level of influence senior management in a traditional organisational hierarchy has on organisation development and change. Taken together these observations imply that there might be strong commitment for the organisational shifts at the senior level, and strong facilitating factors to enable change. However, as will be explored further below, this would not necessarily mean that change would be

smooth, or that people at this level were necessarily aware of the implications of the organisational change.

The second difference for ActionAid was that where new staff were brought into the organisation, there was a deliberate emphasis on 'activism' rather than 'management'.

I was involved in recruiting Colin's [Africa Director] successor – and Salil [the CEO at the time] was keen that this would be someone African, with a policy/legal background, someone more political. Previously ActionAid staff in Africa had been generalists, or had specific technical development expertise: these were replaced by activists, policy people.... More recently it has been interesting to see that when ActionAid were recruiting for Ramesh's replacement last year they chose the Human Resources company that had recruited Salil to head up Amnesty International, they wanted a company that specialised in people with strong human rights background. (Interview, Twinning-Fooks)

Across the organisation new country directors were recruited with legal or activist backgrounds. This was also the case for some of the more senior staff (for example the Asia regional director had a long history in budget advocacy, supporting campaigning across India, and the theme head for Women's Rights was a well known Zimbabwean feminist activist). Beyond the emphasis on recruiting 'activists' for international positions, there was also significant attention placed on recruiting policy staff at national level, to play a leading role in ActionAid's 'thematic' work (which included Education, HIV/AIDS, Women's Rights etc.).

This focus on activism, and commitment to ActionAid's political interpretation of poverty and development, was repeated across national and international trustees. For example, the first chair of ActionAid International, Noerine Kaleeba, was a Ugandan woman who had worked with ActionAid since the 1990s. Her first contact with the organisation was as a member of TASO (The Aids Support Organisation), which had been set up to support people to 'live positively' with HIV and AIDS. The organisation has been widely acclaimed as a model example of a community response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Noerine not only brought long experience and understanding of ActionAid, but also a background in policy advocacy experience, based on the rights of people living with HIV and AIDS. The other international trustees were drawn from a range of backgrounds and countries, with a good spread across four continents (Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America) aimed at creating a truly international and representative dynamic.

The appointment of 'activists' appears coherent and appropriate for an organisation focused on rights and eradicating poverty and was accompanied by an emphasis on

presenting ActionAid as different from its peers. As noted in Chapter Four, ActionAid is frequently mentioned in academic publications highlighting ALPS, its commitment to a rights-based approach and its decentralisation process.

This meant that while some individuals joined the organisation due to a general wish to work for a development agency or driven by career aspirations, there were others who were attracted specifically to ActionAid given its emphasis on activism, and its radical agenda. For example, Karen Brown reflected:

When I was asked to be a trustee of ActionAid all I knew about the organisation was what my step-daughter had told me, which was that AA was definitely a little edgier and braver as far as she was aware than the other international development organisations in the UK....I've noticed this image in recruitment, for example a lot of people come to AA because of internationalisation (Interview, 2008, Brown, Chair of Trustees AAUK).

The Head of Impact Assessment noted:

I moved from Oxfam to ActionAid because of its commitment to downward accountability, and my perception that it was more rooted in the communities it was working with, and more progressive politics... I think AA is different from the other big NGOs, for example because of the governance structure, the power of the country programmes, the long-term nature of the funding and the politics are different (Interview, Adams).

The mixture of targeted recruitment and general reputation has meant that ActionAid has been able to staff its senior roles with individuals supportive of its stated development vision and radical agenda. This has contributed to a shift in organisational skills, knowledge and expectations, at least at the international level. But as the discussion below shows, while a strengthened policy contingent was enabling ActionAid to participate in international development discourse, with strong Southern involvement, this also gave rise to questions about the background of policy staff. How representative were they of poor and excluded voices? Was participation in activism and international policy making actually leading to a process of detachment between an international set of staff on the one hand, and the local development programmes on the other? Was this reinforcing the dynamics discussed in the previous chapter - where a legal rights-based process was evolving separately from the work involving more empowering rights-based approaches?

Developing organisational policy positions

The emphasis on policy work was not only about recruiting new staff, but also about developing a process that enabled strong Southern participation in defining policy

agendas and articulating policy positions – for action in the global South as well as in the global North. Policy development within ActionAid could therefore be characterised by international negotiation rather than being Northern led:

There was a change while I was there....the policy community grew, so there were more people to link with, there were genuine counterparts...There would be an interested Country Director or policy lead then we would work together more... [and increasingly you had to sell] the idea of working in the UK...there was a different dynamic.

I went to the World Vision International Policy Meeting [just after leaving ActionAid], it was a meeting of all the Support Offices, there were about 50 people at the meeting, nobody from the South ...what struck me at the meeting was it would be impossible to do anything like this in ActionAid. I also went to an Oxfam international meeting to present to them on aid issues and the same thing happened...The fact that in AA.. that kind of meeting wouldn't happen, that in itself says something; its not all bluster and rhetoric - there is something different (Interview, Watt)

This change went beyond the process of developing policy position to impacting advocacy:

[T]he political lead in AA and the broad priority setting was coming from the South...our reaction to the Gleneagles⁴⁷ communiqué was more negative than a lot of the other INGOs and one reason for that was it had to be negotiated between some colleagues in Africa who wanted to slam it, and colleagues in the UK who wanted a more nuanced/ carefully couched response.

Some of the time AA is criticised by the UK government for being negative, agitating on the sidelines, a lot this reflects internationalisation and the way it changed the political tone of our advocacy. There is an irony: the UK government and UK media dismiss NGOs saying they are just a bunch of white middle class trouble makers who represent nobody, but then actually when [an organisation] listens to some voices from the South they are much less comfortable for the UK government ...this is an interesting dynamic (ibid).

The policy process itself therefore enhanced ActionAid's image as a radical INGO and was well aligned with its emphasis on a rights-based process focused on transforming power.

However, while seemingly straightforward the policy dynamic was more complex in practice. On the one hand there was simply a human resource shortage, with many of the thematic teams struggling to find activist staff:

There is a real challenge that people who have had experience in emergency work, because we are at the cutting edge, haven't had experience in what we are

⁴⁷ The final statement from the 2005 meeting of the G8 Heads of State, at Gleneagles, Scotland.

trying to achieve. There are very few emergency people who have a policy thought in their mind (Interview, Yates).

On the other hand, there was also a problem in recruiting policy staff who had little community development experience:

People come from different backgrounds and they are not really being inducted into what we are about. Policy people are hired straight out of policy, they don't get community work, so making that link is impossible really... We are hiring lots of new people, giving them a very ambitious agenda and not really grounding them in 'cutting edge work'...we are trying to do stuff that hasn't been done before and there are no easy models – but we don't necessarily recognise how difficult it is and don't dedicate enough time and investment for it (Interview, Adams).

A deeper reflection on the shift in staffing indicates, then, that the emphasis on recruiting activists and policy experts fundamentally altered the nature of ActionAid.

New staff, new dynamics

Before looking further at the influence of the shift in staffing, it is useful to reflect further on some of the characteristics of the new staff, to understand the experiences and expertise that they brought into the organisation, and the priorities and focus of their roles. This can be seen clearly through reflecting on the staff recruited in the Education Theme.

Staffing the Education Theme

When I joined the International Education Unit (the precursor to the 'team') in 1998 all the staff had experience of working with grassroots communities, focused mainly on adult and popular education initiatives. This was also my own experience. By 2005, aside from the team head (who has been in post since 1990), the team had changed completely. Rather than community development experience, the core staff members included a Campaigns Co-ordinator (who had originally been a teacher and then become involved in teachers' unions); a Policy and Research Co-ordinator (who had extensive experience of international education policy); and an Education and HIV/AIDS advisor, who was re-recruited in 2008 based on the following advert:

ActionAid International is seeking to recruit a focused and committed Senior Advisor on **Education Rights and HIV/AIDS** to provide support to programmes developing rights-based education work and effective educational responses to HIV and AIDS....

Role profile:

- A minimum of five years' relevant work experience in the international development arena.
- Extensive professional knowledge, (master's degree) and experience in the education sector, especially in the educational response to HIV/AIDS.

- Demonstrable skills in inter-regional capacity building with civil society in Africa, Asia or Latin America.
- Demonstrable skills in management, advocacy and resource mobilisation; partnership development with government civil society and other stakeholders.
- Excellent strategic and analytical skills and writing/communication skills.
- A strong and proven commitment to human rights and socio-economic justice.
- Willingness to travel extensively (at least 13 weeks a year).

The absence of any mention of community development or participatory experience is notable (and even more telling given that part of the role was aimed to support the development of rights-based approaches).

This brief analysis of the IET suggests that while new skills were being brought into the organisation various kinds of skill and experience were also dropping by the wayside. This process was reinforced by the shifts in national staff.

The Education Review collected data on Education Leads, and presented a picture of a relatively young staff group in terms of age with 71% of staff being under 40, and only one third of staff had spent more than 3 years with the organisation (Sayed et al, 2009: paragraph 36). About half the Education Leads had some experience in the NGO sector, but more had worked within the education system itself, as teachers or as civil servants, or both. Out of the thirty respondents, six had considerable experience working for an international donor agency, and five had worked in academia. The survey did not ask staff whether they had programming or policy experience but given the information it did collect (the number of staff who had worked in government, for donor agencies or in academia, and the average age of staff) it seems probable that there were greater numbers had worked at national level on education issues rather than coming from a community development background. . Moreover, two thirds of the respondents claimed that they spent most of their time on national level work, whilst under a third had spent most of their time locally (ibid: paragraph 37).

The interviews that I conducted early on in my research reinforce a view of the Education Leads as rooted in education policy work:

Before I joined ActionAid I was the coordinator for professional development for the Pan African Teacher's centre; and before that I worked with the Ghana Education service, teaching, managing and researching. I have an M Phil in Curriculum development, and a degree in education (Interview, Konadu).

I've been at ActionAid for nearly 4 years (for the first two and half years I was the CEF⁴⁸ coordinator, for the last year I have been the Education lead). I did lots of things before joining AA, including being a teacher and programme manager, focusing on education, but I wouldn't call myself an educationalist, rather a lobbyist/advocate (Interview, Nsanjama).

As well as being the education coordinator I am the child rights coordinator. I spend more time in Nairobi than in the field. I'm a member of the Elimu Yetu [Education for All] coalition; and the CEF management team, I'm a member of various child rights coalitions, part of the senior management team in ActionAid, the contact person with the Ministry of Education, and I'm the person when anything comes up to do with child rights (Interview, Karugu).

While an individual with a strong belief in equality and social justice can clearly advocate on behalf of those living in poverty, there are complex dynamics surrounding how 'representative' of a person living in poverty someone is when their background and experience is based in influencing national policy, with little experience of working directly with poor communities. Win (2004) argues convincingly that her experience as a Zimbabwean woman needs to be understood at many different levels. For example, rather than dismissing her as a member of the national middle-class educated elite, her relationships with her family and their expectations of her need to be recognised, as these influence her understanding and position. Likewise any individual member of ActionAid staff will bring with them specific experiences and influences which act in different ways to influence their approach to work. However, given ActionAid's emphasis on process and transformation of power, the shift from staff with a predominantly local remit and experience, to a national focus is particularly important. This potential concern was reinforced through a further reflection on the dynamics of national staff motivation and expectations.

National staff motivation and expectations

My interviews suggested that, while it had been relatively straightforward to recruit individuals at the international level with backgrounds in activism, this had been more difficult within country programmes. This was especially the case in those countries where civil society was generally perceived as less politically active. For example, a senior member of staff commented:

⁴⁸ CEF was the Commonwealth Education Fund, a six year programme (2002-2008) managed by ActionAid, Oxfam and Save the Children with £10million funding from DfID, which aimed to strengthen education coalitions (bringing together NGOs, teacher's unions, parents associations, faith groups etc.) working in 16 commonwealth countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia

In Africa the culture is much less confrontational – you see this in the country as a whole, in relation to government, but also within organisations. What the CD [Country Director] says goes, people don't challenge you, they agree with everything.....Everyone was subordinate to authority – as true within the organisation as within the country (Interview, anonymous, 2010).

ActionAid's conception of a rights-based approach was overtly political. To practise such an approach, centred on transforming power relations it was arguably appropriate to expect that staff should be motivated by their concern about poverty, and committed to confronting inequality and the domination of powerful rich elites. In reality, many of those who chose to work for ActionAid (either in the Global North or in the Global South) may have had very different values. For example, one person commented:

A lot of frontline staff that I have met don't actually agree with a rights-based approach, they say they are confused and they don't understand, but actually they don't agree. They think they should be delivering services, and part of this is a power issue. You accumulate social capital when you deliver services, you do not accumulate social capital when you just talk to the government. You get a lot more immediate kudos when you deliver a service: if you take people to a rally and they get arrested it is difficult. Part of it is also people's politics. I was speaking to programme directors from two of our African countries recently who didn't think that there is a problem with water privatisation, they don't believe in the right to free water. They come from a privileged middle class background, their ideology and paradigm is one of private property (Interview, Adams).

At a more general level, the individual ambitions of many working for INGOs were starkly demonstrated in a Panorama programme 'Addicted to Aid' where, while in Uganda the presenter (Sorious Samura) asked a room of students about their career ambitions. Joining an international development NGO was seen as the most desirable outcome of their studies – motivated in part by their commitment to development in their country; but also due to the relatively high status and salaries the role provided (Panorama, 21.11.2008). Opportunities for international travel and exposure are also likely play a role in attracting staff to INGOs.

Such views suggest that status and salaries have been important motivators for INGO staff. In addition, in many places across ActionAid a more traditional Victorian philanthropic approach to work could be seen. This approach sees development intervention as charity, bestowed by caring individuals who are comfortable and confident in their elite position in society.

For example, I took part in an immersion (see Birch et al, 2007) pilot in one ActionAid country programme. The aim was for us to stay in a rural village, spending time with people living in a poor community in order to learn from them and deepen our

understanding and appreciation of perspectives at the grassroots. On this particular visit the ActionAid staff from the capital city chose to stay in a local hotel rather than in the home of a village member – arguing that it was inappropriate and potentially dangerous for them to stay somewhere with no running water or electricity. There may have been several dynamics occurring of which I was unaware. However, it appeared to me that these staff held themselves apart from those with whom, and for whom, they were working. They were keen to discuss issues of poverty and committed to advocating on behalf of those living in poverty in the national capital, but unwilling to live in solidarity or share as equals, even for two nights. This distance has been potentially problematic given the emphasis ActionAid’s rights-based discourse places on process and the transformation of power.

In my interviews (and in my own experience of ActionAid) there were two dynamics evident which limited connection to the grassroots. Firstly, the organisation was so diverse. People had many different reasons for wanting to work for ActionAid. For some it was due to its stated values, but for others it was because of personal career ambitions. Others may have had a long history with the organisation and agreed with its earlier approach to development, rather than the post-1998 shifts. While any organisation is likely to have a wide diversity of staff, especially large organisations which operate across many boundaries (geographic, type of work etc.), the diversity of staff interacting with ActionAid’s organisational culture had a specific impact. The organisational space for individuals to pursue their own agendas (discussed in Chapter Four) meant that people with diverse beliefs were able to use organisational language to support their own perspective, as the following comment suggests:

Country programme staff do not necessarily share the International Education Team’s values and understanding. They may say that they are committed to girls’ education but this can mean many different things in practice. For example, that they think girls should stay at school until they are 14 and someone is ready to marry them, or that girls should learn to be good wives, or that girls should learn to be independent and think for themselves. There is obviously give and take in the relationship with country programmes but when the fundamental interpretation of statements are so different there are problems (Interview, 2009, Education Review, Dhianaraj Chetty).

Moreover, personal networking and reputation could mean much more than position or hierarchy within ActionAid as a policy coordinator reflected:

The organagram of AA doesn’t tell you much about who drives things forward, AA is individually driven....many people use AA for their own agenda, for example anti-globalisation activists who use the strength of the organisation to

pursue their own beliefs and their own platform, and there isn't the space to do this in most INGOs (Interview, Watt).

The impact of the organisational culture is revisited in the following chapter.

Alongside this culture of individuals existed a different dynamic, a second constraint in developing good awareness and understanding of grassroots perspectives. This can be described as a shifting 'class identity', or the habitus of the organisation alluded to in the previous discussion, driven by increasing numbers of national policy staff from relatively elite social backgrounds:

The policy voices that AA works with in the South tend to come elites, from public policy or political backgrounds, they are not necessarily any more programmatically rooted than anyone sitting in London. Brian [Africa Policy Coordinator] is no less a member of the globalised elite than David [head of the International Education theme], for example (Interview, Watt).

If national staff are from backgrounds that share little with the communities that they represent this raises questions about the nature of the transformation of power within ActionAid⁴⁹. There are two key issues here. Firstly, there are questions about how those representing poor and excluded voices were able to access information, knowledge and perspectives from grassroots groups. Responding to this should involve a series of practical processes - to ensure relevant information and knowledge flows. And secondly this is not just an issue of position, but also about values, behaviours, and ideology. If rights-based practice is focused on the transformation of power, representing local voices needs to go beyond conceiving of local knowledge as useful or relevant, to exploring knowledge construction within a framework of transferring power.

So, for example, equivalence is not necessarily needed for effective representation to take place - a man may be able to put forward a feminist agenda, for instance. But, it is hard to see how representation can lead to the transformation of power, if the individuals representing poor and excluded voices have little connection to or knowledge of the people that they are representing. If these individuals live their lives

⁴⁹ In some country programmes there has been a deliberate effort to recruit more representative staff into senior management and board positions – for example ActionAid India has a Dalit leading their work with Dalits. However, this is the exception rather than the rule. In general, the countries which are more aligned with a rights-based approach and have a more political civil society - with activism already connected to development - have more options in terms of staff recruitment. Equally, it has been easier to recruit staff to work with specific identity groups, rather than on themes of work – so a Dalit is recruited to work with Dalits, but the education coordinator is an NGO professional with experience in the NGO and academic spheres.

within a distant and distinct context, it is unlikely that excluded voices are being 'empowered'.

While organisational management and governance within ActionAid was designed to strengthen Southern voices, the voices that were actually being heard were not necessarily representative of people living in poverty. Therefore, although ActionAid might have been functioning with more equality between its Northern and Southern staff, there remain questions as to the extent that these structures were actually enabling the voices and perspectives of those living in poverty to enter into and influence development debates.

Rather the shifts in ActionAid staffs' class identity were leading to a general staff make-up of people with little, or no, community development experience (an area of expertise upon which ActionAid had previously built its reputation, see p.126). Beyond this the new staff and their associated focus were altering the incentive systems and organisational behaviour within the organisation:

It is the policy-advocacy work which is publicised within ActionAid, seen as 'sexy'. In the early 1990s the iconic people in ActionAid were DA [development area] managers – there were 10 or so with high status, they were it, known across the organisation. Now it is all policy people whose names are known, and these policy people may not have ever been a DA manager, they may not know much about what happens in the field...Cynically, because of the way the organisation works it is good for individual profile and recognition/ career progression to be seen to link internationally. Also the power relations in the organisation mean that people do link up the hierarchy, which at the moment means linking internationally (Interview, 2007, Archer).

The unintended consequence was that there was an organisational belief that power relations had been transformed, and that Southern perspectives were influencing organisational agendas. But, in reality grassroots voices and perspectives were becoming even more excluded from the organisation than they were previously, when greater value had been placed on DA managers, and local programmes.

Further reflection on the dynamics of engaging in global policy advocacy work sheds further light on how this outcome had arisen.

Doing justice to people's voices

Although ActionAid was clear that policy positions were to be negotiated across the different parts of the organisation such a democratic participatory process proved complex to implement in practice.

Because AAUK doesn't have autonomy to decide public policy positions this makes the process longer... the process is inefficient, there are either too many people involved in a sign off, or those involved are not taking their role seriously, which is an obstacle to moving forward (Interview, 2009, Belinda Calaguas, Head of Policy and Campaigns, ActionAid UK).

International fora run on internationally agreed timetables. There are set moments where INGOs can engage and influence, and slow internal decision-making processes can lead to a missed opportunity. There is also a real likelihood that international staff will have more experience and expertise (than national or local staff, or partners) in participating in these debates. They will probably have more familiarity with the language, more exposure to these specific types of high-level spaces and therefore may be more able to couch their interventions in terms that will be listened to and heard. These processes have been critiqued by many for creating an exclusive club of policy experts further marginalising those living in poverty (Batliwala and Brown, 2006).

This reality created obstacles for an organisation that wanted to influence and participate in debates which were being determined by an external time-table. There is no straightforward solution to balancing participation and quick decision taking, and any solution will involve trade-offs. The principles and processes behind such trade-offs depend on a series of organisational decisions. These include the value placed on involving poor constituencies vis-à-vis the value placed on engagement in external fora. For an organisation such as ActionAid, with its emphasis on process and transforming power it is reasonable to expect a high emphasis to be placed on poor people's participation. However, the reality has been more complex.

In responding to these different pressures and timetables, many of the staff working in ActionAid's international offices believed that they were able, and even obligated, to make decisions on how to use and present the voices of the poor. They were committed to combating poverty and had access to certain fora that were typically beyond the reach of those living in poverty. It was therefore their responsibility to ensure good media attention and discussion of ActionAid's positions and understanding in a range of policy fora. For example, one person commented:

Not all work needs to link to the local or national level, we also need to use our knowledge, expertise and connections to influence policy (Group Discussion, 2009, IET).

Another staff member explained the importance of 'doing justice to people's voices':

Work around the Angloplat campaign⁵⁰ has been quite interesting in the way that AA has developed an advocacy campaign at international level, targeting policies of an international company which impact workers rights on the ground in South Africa....There was a lot of work on the ground, focus group discussions with communities, and all the way through their perspective has been respected and they've been involved. The challenge has been ...the balance between participation and power and communication...making sure that community voices are heard at all levels, and a specific moment in time, an AGM or a report... The northern affiliates and the communications department are seen by some as being too extractive. Their view is that they become legitimate actors if they are **doing justice to people's voices**. Timing is an issue, external media opportunities can put pressure on participatory processes, and also a question of what to do about it if someone says something that you know won't appeal to the audience. Their argument is that to be legitimate and accountable we need to do the best we can by these people, which might mean putting a different spin on it. (Interview, Carroll, my emphasis)

The concept of 'doing justice' to people's voices is complex. Who decides which voices to do justice to? How are local voices interpreted and used? What is included or excluded? The example shared here builds on ActionAid's long experience and expertise in participatory work, but I have also suggested that there was a more general lack of thought or awareness about how to balance transformatory (as opposed to instrumental) participation with influencing external agendas. The emphasis on process and transforming power appears to have been abandoned in the process, in many instances. This has three major implications in relation to transformative participation.

Firstly, how you interpret and 'do justice to people's voices' is very dependent on who you are, and who you interact with. Wilson (2001) argues that knowledge is interpreted by what we already know, and our culture.

The way a staff member based in the UK interprets a piece of information is likely to differ from how a staff member based in a Southern country might view the same piece of information. Or the way a member of the global elite understands a particular point may differ from the importance placed on it by someone living in material poverty. Moreover, given the many people involved in linking local voices to those speaking at international fora the actions of 'infomediaries' (the people, mechanisms and processes that act as a channel between those who provide the information and those who want it, (Berdou, 2001)) and 'traductures' (the hidden dynamics and choices that individuals

⁵⁰ An international research and advocacy process which resulted in a publication arguing that remote rural communities in South Africa had lost their farm land and access to clean water as a result of mining carried out by the company Anglo Platinum (ActionAid, 2008b).

make when information is transferred from one context to another, (Wa Goro, 2005)) are of central importance.

Secondly there is a particular dynamic which occurs when INGOs engage in a policy discourse shaped by OECD countries:

It mirrors the discussion that has been going on recently about ethnic minority representation in our media. The issue isn't really whether there are enough black and brown faces on our screens...the issue is that black and Asian voices aren't participating in the original broadcasting decisions, or in senior positions in the broadcasting companies. And the issue is similar here, it is not purely whether AA is providing a platform for Africans to come to the G8, or whether it is collecting powerful stories of people living in poverty. The issue is who is setting those priorities and how are they are being collected and identified (Interview, Watt).

This suggests that there is a need to look beyond how poor people's voices are communicated in Northern policy agenda. There is a need to think through how those agendas are set in the first place, and when and how grassroots voices are heard in this process.

Thirdly, there is the question about how 'doing justice to people's voices' interacts with the aim of transforming global power relations. The UK head of policy and campaigns considered this in her reflections on the exact role of ActionAid UK in relation to policy advocacy:

ActionAid expects decisions on Education to be taken at the national level, and expects donors to respect decisions taken in country; the role of donors is to enable the country decision to work. So why should Policy & Campaigns write policy positions for donors? There is a core contradiction in this. For example if we do research and inform donors what they should be doing on Education it undermines our position that donors should listen to national citizens. Really the role of AA is to create space for other actors or the countries themselves to be informing the donor (Interview, Calaguas).

Responding to these issues would imply a 'rights-based policy process' that looks very different from traditional policy advocacy work. Given its shift in organisational structure and emphasis on Southern voices it is fair to assume that ActionAid would have wanted to develop such a process.. However, organisational investment in the dynamics of such a process was not evident. I revisit what this might involve in my Conclusion.

Moreover, despite ActionAid's desire to stand apart from comparable INGOs and privilege recruitment based on individual experience in activism rather than management there was also evidence that the wider context was influencing how

ActionAid's organisational functioning evolved. For example, an advert for an "International Communications Planning Manager" described the necessary attributes for a potential candidate:

You might be an experienced communication manager in the not-for-profit sector looking to use your talents to create a wider impact, or perhaps you work as an account manager for a well-regarded communications agency, and are looking for an opportunity to make a bigger difference. Whatever your background, you will be an accomplished project manager with a strong understanding of brand and content development, digital strategy, systems management and corporate communications. With exceptional interpersonal, influencing and networking skills you will be committed to helping tackle the effects of poverty and changing what keeps people poor (<http://jobs.thirdsector.co.uk/job/328743/communications-planning-manager/> accessed 16th Sept 2010).

It is important not to read too much into a job advert; however, it is noteworthy that throughout the advert (which was over 400 words) there is no mention of values or human rights or accountability to the poor. The knowledge and skills of the external communication environment usurped a political value led approach to poverty eradication.

Reflection on the relationship with donors also shows a complex dynamic. For example, ActionAid staff were keen to emphasise that the organisation was not unduly influenced by official donor agendas:

I don't think we are donor dependent, I really don't. We still have only around 20% of our income from institutional donors...As an international function we wouldn't encourage any country to go for money that doesn't fit with their strategy, plan, current thinking. The majority of countries set limits on how much institutional funding they will take so as not to be donor dependent. I can't think of one case where we silenced ourselves in terms of policy and advocacy work because we have funding from a donor (Interview, Ruparel).

However, there were indications that donor concerns had influenced ActionAid's previous decisions. For example, there were various organisational pressures to develop shared indicators that would enable ActionAid to demonstrate the impact of its work to donors. In addition, in 2010 an ActionAid International Accountability Advisor (March 2010) was recruited to:

Innovate new ways of working to realise ActionAid's commitment to accountability to poor and excluded rights holders based in the global south, while also managing accountabilities to donors and supporters based in the global north (Role Profile).

In many ways influence over programme design and management processes are much more extreme than influencing a specific policy statement or position. Various academics (see Wallace, 2006 or Thomas, 2008, for example) have argued that use of management tools, such as the log-frame, effectively close the space for local discussion on what development might mean, and limit the amount of time spent on the slow processes of relationship building and community development. Moreover, Shutt (2011) questions the assumption that INGOs can accept any donor funding and remain independent. She argues that most donors are currently operating within a neo-liberal paradigm, that centres on the view that the market knows best, and that this is fundamentally contrary to rights-based thinking. The mere existence of an INGO-donor relationship therefore creates tensions for that INGO's practice.

Thus, although ActionAid was charting a different organisational course, based on its rights-based vision, there was also evidence that the external factors which characterise the sector as a whole remained influential within the dynamics of the organisation.

But a lack of investment in enabling poor people to negotiate with ActionAid as to how their voices, perspectives and knowledge are used in Northern advocacy contexts cannot only be due to the individuals involved, or the organisation's wider operating context. Organisations make a series of decisions as to what to value and incentivise in their organisational design and day-to-day practice. There were various organisational choices made by ActionAid which acted together to limit (or even exclude) grassroots voices at international level. These are the subject of the following chapter.

Chapter 8: Developing a Rights-Based Organisation: Part Two

Introduction

The previous chapter described how, as a result of their entrance into the development mainstream, INGOs have experienced various pressures and critiques of their form and practice. It raised concerns regarding how a management discourse developed within a neo-liberal context was increasingly influential in terms of NGO functioning. It suggested that, while many large INGOs had responded to this by recruiting ‘managers’ with little if any experience in development, ActionAid had followed a different path – focusing its attention on the recruitment of activists. However, it noted that this shift in staff was not without consequences. It suggested that while ActionAid’s intention had been to strengthen Southern participation in development debates at the international level, as part of its wider vision of transforming power relations, there were questions concerning who these staff were, their politics and whom they were able to represent. Moreover, I argued that increasing numbers of policy and activist staff were shifting ActionAid’s class identity and culture more broadly.

This chapter takes the discussion deeper. I start by exploring how the organisational structure, processes and function impacted on the organisation’s ability to achieve its development vision – one which linked a rights-based approach to processes of transformative participation. However, in contrast to the previous chapter (see p. 237), which explored how ActionAid participated in international policy making and advocacy, the focus of this chapter is on how the organisational conception of the ‘local programme’ enabled (or rather constrained) the organisation in achieving its goal of transformative participation within its rights-based practice. I focus on the strategies developed for local programme work to connect upwards and influence national and international practice, and explore the challenges involved in linking a context-specific, deeply rooted local programme to broader programmes of work at the national and international levels.

Implementing internationalisation: transforming organisational power?

Internationalisation, the organisational decentralisation process described in Chapter Four, fundamentally transformed ActionAid's operating structure. On the one hand Country Programmes became autonomous units, accountable to their national board of trustees and members of the ActionAid International Federation. On the other, Country Directors lost some of their power, as International Theme Heads (the custodians of the six human rights about which the strategy was centred) were situated above them in the organisational hierarchy:

Since being a theme head I have felt like I have more power – I am more confident in communicating with the Country Programmes than before, this is partly because I have clarity in my role....another big change is having named people at the national level to link to. Although not all countries link in the same way it is easier than before (Interview, 2007, Archer).

The change in structure was not without tension and concern: while the theme heads had been placed high in the organisational hierarchy they had no management role of country programme staff working in their theme:

National staff feel very pressured by international staff, and international staff feel very disempowered because they are given responsibility without budget or power. Both sides feel the other is the one with the power, and the whole thing is very difficult (Interview, Adams).

The international theme heads were dependent on national staff to develop and implement the thematic work, and yet had very limited power to actually hold them to account. As Archer reflected (two years after the quote above):

The IET has no line management responsibility for [national] Education Leads, and this is right, it wouldn't work. However, it would be good to have involvement in the recruitment and induction processes. For about three years there was a lot of continuity of staff, but recently there has been a lot of staff turnover and restructuring. This is challenging: we depend on the staff to build common understanding, we need to know who they are, what their politics are etc. [National] Education Leads generally come from other NGOs, and they come with baggage. But there is no-one more important in making the education work work than the [national] Education Lead - these are the people who are key to make education work coherent across the organisation, so the role needs to be valued (Interview, 2009, Education Review, Archer).

In 2008 a 'Handbook' had been produced to detail the roles, responsibilities and relationships of the different parts of the organisation. This was intended to show how

formal power operated in the organisation, locating the country programme as ‘the primary strategy unit’ while:

The International Secretariat exists to support and help deliver desired and sustainable changes via the national organisations...The International secretariat should never be purely self serving...[however] the country accepts a responsibility to contribute to the international agenda (ActionAid, 2008c: 11).

On a more practical level the ‘Handbook’ stated that country units should devote 70% of their time to in-country work, and 30% to:

Contributing to and participating in international work projects and agendas led by the International Secretariat.... At the international level, functions and themes should devote 50% of their effort to delivering supra-national or multi-country objectives and 50% to servicing and supporting country/national units (ibid: 11).

It was also noted that all the work of the secretariat:

has to be rooted in ActionAid’s programme work and experience with the people and communities in the countries where it works. It can never be detached from the country/ national impact (ibid: 11).

The implication was that work should be built from local to national to international levels, reflecting the decentralisation agenda and the rights-based emphasis on transforming power. But, this statement of principle was not integrated across the detailed description of the different functions. For example, while there was discussion on the role of the Theme Head there was no mention of how s/he should understand or respond to community level work.

The Theme Head⁵¹ role was seen as leading thinking within the theme and developing capacity across the organisation to implement programmes to meet the thematic priorities. There was no attention paid to how the Theme Head should listen and learn from what was happening within the Country Programmes. All the emphasis was on ensuring alignment of national work to the international strategy and leading ‘above-country’ activity (ibid: 31).

Internationalisation intended to locate country level decision-making at the country level, but a structural bias had been introduced through the description of how national and international work was expected to relate. The International Themes had no explicit downward accountability, and no concept of mutual accountability was

⁵¹ Theme heads sit as part of the international secretariat

developed. The Theme Head was intended to lead the theme based on their external knowledge, links and influences. Such a position appears in tension with a conception of bottom-up participatory development.

Power and personalities

The formal organisational relationships did not facilitate a bottom-up approach to development, and the informal practices made this vision even less obtainable:

One of the great things about working for ActionAid was that it was big enough to have some sort of influence but small enough that you didn't feel like you were one small cog in the bureaucracy, implementing someone else's plan, ...[however] there were no systems and processes that allowed for quick and effective decisions that people felt beholden to. Decisions in AA were more like aspirations, recommendations that people might be persuaded to pick up but probably wouldn't (Interview, Watt).

The way that you get power in the organisation is through being seen to be involved in lots of things; even if your role is to advise... you get power by agreeing to be on lots of task forces, agreeing to do a project and writing reports and facilitating the process yourself. Rather than what you should be doing which is being the background role for other people to do it (Interview, Adams).

The emphasis on power residing in the individual, who was well known within the organisation, personally influential and respected, led to a further skew in the organisational culture:

AA relies on people and power, on personal relationships. The relationship with DfID for example, is based on individuals and their interests. But for institutional funding really you need processes and systems and these go against the organisational culture (Interview Education Review, 2009, Ruparel).

Individuals are really important for the organisation, individuals are what get things done. Personal relationships are what makes the organisation work as we don't have the system, which is great in many ways, but also a risk for the organisation as what happens if someone leaves, and everything is dependent on individuals and how good they are (Interview, 2008, Ingram).

The importance of personal reputation was also mentioned extensively in the interviews I conducted for the Education Review; illustrating how that individual personality had influenced the way that education work had evolved across the organisation.

David Archer [Theme Head] is the face of education. I don't really interact with the education theme as a whole, I interact with David. When running the GCE work, I got a steer from David. I communicate with David on issues and ensure that what we are talking about in the UK fits in with what they are saying internationally. When I need to go down to country level, I use David as the first port of call (Interview, Education Review, 2009, Janet Convery, Head of Schools and Youth, ActionAid UK)

The international theme is strongly led by David, who is excellent and has the profile, understanding and confidence to manage education well inside and outside the organisation. His presence is key to what the structure, organisation, profile and focus of the theme is like and you cannot detach from this. David has been a sustained presence in AA, he is well connected to countries. If you considered the IET without David it would be different (Interview, Education Review, 2009, Singh)

The reality of individual reputation, power and agenda setting exists in stark contrast to an organisation which emphasises decentralised power and participatory decision-making. The existence of such strong individual power suggests that although the organisational structure had been transformed, the shadow culture (Clarke and Ramalingam, 2008) retained many of the same characteristics that had emerged throughout ActionAid's history (Chapter Four). This meant that, although the organisation itself had decentralised, the processes of work remained strongly influenced by the previous relationships and work practices that had evolved prior to the organisational change. And the extent to which grassroots voices were being included depended significantly on the individuals involved - their values, preferences and motivation, their 'habitus'.

For example, in relation to Archer, it is worth noting that part of the reason he was able to develop and sustain such power was because of his commitment to the wider organisational vision and goals, and his historical connection to grassroots practice (he was key in the development of *Reflect* and therefore has some understanding of programming issues). Moreover, how any individual 'uses' their power needs to be appreciated. For example, Archer was generally perceived to take an open and collaborative approach to work, to value and respect diverse perspectives. His operation of power was not top-down or authoritarian, but aligned with many of ActionAid's own stated values. However, even given this, it is noteworthy that the IET did not invest in many of the processes or functions that would have enabled it to be more responsive to grassroots perspectives and experiences. Fundamentally, the education thematic work was developed through a centralised approach. This claim can be illustrated by exploring how the education theme staff conceived their roles.

Role and function of education staff

This section starts by reflecting on the role of the IET, and then considers the role of the national Education Lead staff. The discussion is extended in the next section through an analysis of the local education programme.

The IET

In 2006 when asked about the role of the IET, the staff commented that they were there to

Step back, to see the big picture and bring in new ideas. But is there a tension here, how does this link to the bottom-up country programme led ideas? How do we blend the two and make sure we are not too top down? We have not answered this question yet (Focus group discussion, 2006, IET).

It was notable that in the Education Review which took place two and a half years later, staff were still not able to answer this question. Moreover, the tension was not highlighted by the Theme Head:

The role of the IET is to develop strategies and sustain response to a changing context, ensuring that AA's education work remains critical, challenging and cutting edge. We give strategic leadership and build the capacity of Country Programmes – this involves understanding what they are doing and sharing interesting practice across countries; and encouraging them to work in a strategic way – to combat the pressure for service delivery, to think constantly about how they can work more strategically.... We have a role in influencing the Education NGO sector – to look at the role we **all** play in education. We also build relationships at international and regional level – with different types of institutions, networks, academics etc. which help in building similar relationships at country level – as the trust is already there, we see our role as opening doors for this. And we also emphasise building AA's profile with the donor community, for example with our work with the IMF and World Bank (Interview, Education Review, 2009, Archer).

A further complication in responding to national priorities was due to how the team operated:

Different colleagues interact with country programmes in different ways. I work by email, Balaraba used to spend a lot of time on the phone to different country programmes. Victorine spends her time travelling round the world, engaging with staff at national level directly in short visits, Chetty gives extended support to selected countries, while Akanksha provides frameworks within which people can work (ibid).

In practice the linkages are very individually based, and do not really happen as a team; I might talk to Ghana about one project, Victorine about another and there is no real coordination. The team tends to operate as 4 consultants rather than a strong team. We are a stronger team than we were, with greater role clarity and respect for each other...but the roles still develop as a function of their experience and backgrounds, rather than anything formalised. Things work because people take initiative and make it work (Interview, Education Review, 2009, Marphatia).

The flexibility to work in different ways clearly enabled staff to build relationships in a way that best suited their personal work style and capacity. This was clearly positive in

terms of 'doing' education work. It is also an example of how different staff were able to use their personal power, position and approach to proceed with their work. However it also presents a clear drawback. If national staff wanted to engage with and influence the IET, they had to understand these internal dynamics and employ a range of different strategies depending on whom they were wanting to engage with. Moreover, the assertion that the team operated as a set of individuals suggests that while it might have been possible to negotiate and work with one specific team member, it was harder to influence the wider team agenda, or the broader team's (and therefore ActionAid's) understanding of education rights.

When asked about who influenced their work it was notable that not a single team member mentioned 'poor and excluded' groups. For example, one team member commented:

The international directors, especially Anne [Policy Director and line manager of the theme head] influence what the IET does. The IET is influenced by external policies, trends, and actors. For example, the FTI [Fast Track Initiative], GCE [Global Campaign for Education] and task forces such as World Bank or IMF ones. Country leads do not have as much influence as they should – they should be demanding, asking for what they want, but they don't really do this (Interview, Education Review, Marphatia).

Moreover, another member noted that

The DA level is beyond the IET's reach – too remote, and Education Leads have a similar relationship to DA work as the IET has to the Education Leads (Interview, Education Review, Chetty).

Taken together these comments suggest that there was limited opportunity for the grassroots to influence agendas or the understanding of the IET, although there was an awareness that this should have been happening more systematically. Enabling this information, knowledge and opinion to flow was dependent on a series of factors and central to this was creating an appropriate incentive system and space. However, this did not appear to be a priority in the IET, a picture replicated at national level.

National education role

The role of the Education Leads was complex: they were expected to link internationally, work with their peers nationally and support the local programme. They were also the key contact point for international staff if they wanted to find out anything about education work taking place in the country. However, as noted in the previous chapter they did not always have programming skills and therefore many

struggled to understand, let alone support the local programme. For example, a UK fundraiser noted:

When we are doing big proposals the person who gets tasked with it is the Education Lead, and they can't do programming. They just don't know how to sit down and say these are the activities that will lead to this happening, they will just write you a strategy paper instead. It's painful (Interview, Ingram).

In July 2007 the IET and Education Leads met and discussed (among other things) the role of the Education Lead; identifying key features and challenges of the role. The group noted that the Education Lead should coordinate the education work across the country programme, and provide leadership on: education policy work, research and advocacy, and the education programme. This included planning and facilitating work with partners. The Education Lead was also to play a linking role. This involved: 'reconciling the country strategy paper with the education strategy paper'; linking local experiences to international work; launching international publications nationally; translating international campaigns to the local context and participating in campaigns; both nationally and internationally (ActionAid 2007c: 18).

The challenges in juggling these roles were well recognised by the Education Leads. For example:

It is hard to work on securing a balanced investment in education...I am meant to link to the international level – to GCE, to create up and down linkages. But there are so many different roles to play. Sometimes I'm a child rights activist, sometimes a manager, or doing updates for the board etc. etc. there are so many roles to play it sucks your blood (Interview, 2007, Karagu).

However, the earlier interviews, and the meeting discussion suggest that there was also a preference for national and international work, with less interest in creating space to strengthen connections with the local programmes. For example, in response to a question as to what would strengthen his ability to perform his multiple roles, Karagu commented:

It is great when I have the chance to go to forums and international meetings as these give you a chance to reflect and think about what you're doing, it would be good have more forums to go to, more time for this (Interview, 2007, Karagu).

A similar struggle to balance the multiple roles was discussed by the Education Leads in Ghana and Malawi, with both recognising the difficulties of connecting locally but then continuing to emphasise the importance of the international programme and a desire to participate in this more extensively (Interview Transcripts, 2007).

In the meeting of education staff a range of strategies were discussed to address the work overload and other challenges identified (which included difficulties of forging a common agenda with partners, mixed accountability (to the Theme Head and Country Director) and problems in monitoring and supporting local level work). All the solutions focused on gaining better national support for the Education Lead – through increased support from country directors or greater human resources for the education work. There was no mention of how the IET might respond to, or build from, country level work; to listen to and learn from the country programme. In addition, all reference to the challenges in linking to and supporting local level work was framed from the national and international perspective. There was no mention of ‘two-way blending’. The focus was on how to ensure that international programmes of work could be understood and engaged in nationally (ActionAid 2007c: 19). The bias towards the centre continued.

This tension perhaps reflects the organisational context present at the time. As noted in Chapters Four and Seven, the processes of organisational change and decentralisation are complex. For ActionAid this was further complicated by a desire to decentralise while simultaneously changing the development understanding and approach. The IET had a responsibility to support this shift in development practice, to build national capacity to work on education rights. In addition, education had been chosen as one of the central binding themes, to hold the organisation together as it decentralised. However, the focus on cohesive work and building capacity on rights-based practice appeared to operate in tension with a desire to support a decentralisation process, and to enable poor people’s participation. This situation was confused further by the dynamics of the local programme.

The role and function of local programmes

As noted earlier (Chapter Two) any information I collected on the local programme was mediated through staff sitting at the international or national level, or based on my own visits to local partners and grassroots communities. The information contained in this section is based on interviews with national and international staff, data collected through the Education Review, and reflections from my experiences in visiting local programmes between 2000-2007. Specific perspectives and bias (my own and that of the staff with whom I interacted) influence how local work was viewed, valued, understood and communicated. However, given my interest in how transformative participation was occurring in relation to ActionAid, and how the organisation was (or

was not) enabling grassroots voices to influence development more broadly, it is important to consider how the local programme was known and viewed nationally and internationally.

This section starts by noting the broad characteristics of the staff, and the relationships between local and national staff. I then consider two key issues which impacted on how national and international staff were able to make connections to local level work: local programme diversity and quality.

Relationships between national and local staff

It is not possible to present a generic picture of the local level staff as they differed extensively from country to country. For example, ActionAid Nigeria had been set up with the specific intention of doing all local work through partner organisations, which were managed directly by staff sitting at the national level. ActionAid India had programme offices at state level and employed programme officers based in state capitals. These programme officers were the people responsible for managing relationships with partner organisations, and it was the partners who actually delivered programmes. While ActionAid Kenya was involved directly in service provision and local community work, while also working with local partners organisations - who may have been supported by national or local staff (Sayed et al, 2009; Interviews, 2007). Given the diversity of models for managing the 'local programme' work it is likely that the individuals responsible for the local programme may have had diverse remits, and have come from a range of different backgrounds.

Data collected through the Education Review showed that a high proportion of child sponsorship funding was spent at the grassroots level, on a range of education activities. These activities included service delivery (classroom construction, teacher training, provision of learning materials) and community organising (establishment of girls clubs, parents committees, budget tracking initiatives etc.). Such activities depend on developing strong links with specific grassroots groups (which may be clustered geographically, or identity based) and working with them over extended time periods. This type of work requires good project management skills and relationship building. It relies on building trust, and having strong local links and knowledge. It is therefore unsurprising that when Education Leads were asked about criteria for selecting local partners 'community linkages' was ranked highest (Sayed et al, 2009: table 8.2).

Given the types of activity and focus of work at the grassroots, the staff focused at this level required very different skills and experience from those working nationally and

internationally. My most recent trips with ActionAid which involved visits to partner organisations were to Nigeria, Bangladesh and India. My impression of these organisations was that despite the diversity noted above, they shared common characteristics. All were relatively small organisations. Their offices were sparse, they had few staff and limited access to communication technologies or transport. Typically the individuals I met had little exposure to international issues or knowledge of ActionAid beyond the person or people they formally connected to. They often had basic English language skills, but excellent local reputations and connections.

The ActionAid local offices were also fairly small and sparse but, by contrast to the partner organisations, they were often reasonably well connected to national capitals, having better information and communication technology, and larger travel budgets. However, the staff working in these offices were still relatively isolated, largely detached from the national offices and programmes. They spent considerable amounts of time travelling to the communities where ActionAid was working, visiting partner offices and ensuring compliance with project plans. They were unlikely to be involved in the technical language of education advocacy and policymaking.

While staff sitting in London or a national capital were relatively distant from the realities of rural poverty, staff working at the local level were likely to be confronted by it daily. This meant that it was very hard for them to ignore the resource shortages faced by many people living in material poverty. But it also suggested a deep exposure to the knowledge, perspectives and priorities of those living in such circumstances. Staff based at the grassroots therefore had a radically different experience, cultural context and outlook from people working nationally (or internationally).

For ActionAid staff based near to the local programme work, contact with grassroots communities was often mediated by partner organisations. The relationship with partners is complex and beyond the remit of this research. However, in considering how ActionAid local staff were able to communicate local knowledge and perspectives upwards to staff based in the capital cities or focused internationally, it is important to mention how these relationships were characterised.

For example, the work I did in Nigeria with partner organisations suggested that although they viewed ActionAid Nigeria very positively (mentioning that the organisation was accessible and showed respect and flexibility) they also noted that accountability in the relationship was one-sided (with no accountability from ActionAid to the partner organisation) (Newman, 2004: 29). Moreover, the Education Review

(Sayed et al, 2009: section 8.2) suggested that for the most part, partners viewed ActionAid as a donor, rather than an equal partner:

The relationship between AA and partners has been a real eye opener for me. There is enormous trust and a common sense of purpose with partners at every level. But AA basically acts as a donor to CSOs [Civil Society Organisations]. CSOs raise money from AA in the same way as they would from any other funder (Interview, Education Review, Chetty).

These observations and comments suggest that although the relationship was collaborative, and often very strong, it was not equal. ActionAid was perceived as a donor, able to demand certain actions without needing to reciprocate, and yet reciprocity is key to strong local development practice (Thomas, 2008). In addition, these inequalities in the power relationship with partners were exacerbated by the current organisational priorities and focus.

As noted above, there had been an organisational shift from valuing local level work, to valuing media coverage and policy advocacy work. This led to an incentive system where staff found themselves looking 'up' the organisation, rather than 'down' to the grassroots. Rather than focus on developing strong connections with, and understanding of, the local programme, the organisational culture encouraged national staff to focus on national and international work. This organisational shift interacted with the individual interest of Education Lead staff, discussed above and in Chapter Seven.

In addition to the organisational incentive system there were various practical reasons why the links between the local programme and national staff were limited. Not least was the physical distance between staff. This could be overcome relatively easily internationally through the use of Information and Communication Technologies, but was more difficult in relation to the local to national linkages given the lack of infrastructure at the time.

This reality meant that the links between local and national staff were quite limited. Local staff (and partners) would fulfil the expectations of staff 'higher up the chain' but there was little pressure for reciprocity (a dynamic repeated from national to international level – see p.258). While ALPS created space and processes for transparency, there was little emphasis on accountability:

I don't believe we deliver on downward accountability, it is a misnomer. What we mean is we'll come down to you and you'll tell us what you are doing, or what you want to do. So there is a downward design to some extent, but we don't

account for what we are doing to you, so in that respect it is not really downward accountability and we need to get that right (Interview, Brown).

Given this dynamic it is unlikely that local staff or those working in partner organisations would communicate local realities 'up the system' unless directly asked for input.

In addition, the organisational shift to framing work by a rights-based discourse reinforced the unequal relationship between ActionAid and its partners. For example, the Education Review found that many local organisations had first learned of a 'rights-based approach' through their partnership with ActionAid (Sayed et al, 2009: table 5.4). Thus it was not just funding that characterised the unequal relationship with partners, but also the view that ActionAid was building partner capacity to take on a new (and 'better') approach. Given these dynamics it is perhaps unsurprising that there were differing views within the organisation as to how the local programme should be conceived and supported.

The local level programme

Chapter Four described how 'Development Areas' emerged (and remained important throughout my research) as ActionAid's key programming unit in the mid-1980s. The work developed at this level was managed by locally based staff and partners based on extensive community participation.

The focus of local programmes was to strengthen local awareness of, and capacity to secure, a range of human rights. However, as part of this process there was also an emphasis on building transparent and accountable relationships – between communities and partner organisation, and with ActionAid itself. For example, the annual 'Participatory Review and Reflection Process', a core requirement of ALPS was designed to create space for local people to feed back to ActionAid. Through this process, groups who had been working with ActionAid or partner organisations were asked to suggest areas for improvement and further work. The 'open information' policy, which included budget sharing, and a 'whistle-blowing' policy, were designed to ensure transparency and financial accountability.

During the strategy period there was a deliberate attempt to protect the local space and ensure that work at this level continued to be well rooted and developed in context. While there was emphasis on moving away from pure service delivery towards community organisation and action there was also a willingness to enable a thousand flowers to bloom:

In terms of programming there shouldn't be systems. I make the comparison with animal grazing. There are many different ways to manage how animals graze. One way is to tie them all to the same peg but then let them go where they wish. They can find their own way as long as they don't cross the boundaries to another field. I think much of the most innovative work happens at these boundaries. So you don't need systems to control programming, what you do need is a united vision (Interview, Singh).

Given this approach to the local programme, and the strong community participation in developing local level work, it was not surprising that the work at the local level varied significantly. For example, the education review found over 400 different priorities and foci for local level education work (Sayed et al, 2009: Annex 1). Some work was framed by a specific 'target group', such as girls, orphans or ethnic minorities. Other work was built around a particular activity or strategy for engagement, for example, tracking the education budget, building the capacity of school management groups and working on disaster risk reduction in schools.

The aim of protecting the local level space and enabling the programme to respond to its context was clearly in line with the organisational vision of decentralisation. Significant power to design, plan and manage the local programme resided locally, empowering those closest to the work to take immediate and strategic decisions and guide practice. ActionAid had developed a good reputation for this practice, and received positive feedback from a range of stakeholders on their commitment to this empowering approach.

However, a wish to respect this space had an unintended consequence. There was little attention focused on the local level programme, or effort to manage or coordinate local level work. Thus while the local programme may well have been strongly rooted, and responsive to the local context, it was limited in its ability to engage with or influence wider organisational practice. There were practical and ideological difficulties in attempting to build a coherent national and international programme linked to such diverse local practice, which I now discuss.

Working with diverse local programmes

The diversity of programming received a mixed response:

An idea may originate in the IET, and then you can look at how it is translated into practice in different CPs [Country Programmes]. You end up with 10 different initiatives – they may all be innovative, context specific etc. but as a project this does not work well. It would be good to be more structured at times, to have more 'recipes' for work (Interview, Education Review, 2009, Chetty,).

This perspective was picked up Review Report, which noted:

[I]t is evident that the focus and content of AAI varies from country to country reflecting the decentralised nature of the organisation and the specificity of context. At the same time, the variation does challenge AAI's education work in regard to the creation of a shared and consistent education agenda and approach. This makes strong local-national-international links more difficult to achieve (Sayed et al, 2009: Paragraph 44).

The diversity of programming was motivated by a political commitment to participatory development and decentralisation. However, the extent of diversity at the grassroots rendered it logistically complicated and potentially impossible for a national education programme to build from the local perspective. This was not only a logistical issue, of how to collate information and experiences arising from such diverse sources, but also an ideological one.

For example, the extent of localism and rootedness implied that it would be unwise to consider any individual community representative of the wider experience of people living in poverty across a country or region. This meant that a specific community had limited legitimacy to act alone to influence ActionAid's wider goals and vision of development. It would have been inappropriate for any one programme to influence wider organisational perspectives and understanding, when the experiences of other equally poor communities in the same country or region might differ to a considerable extent⁵². Local priority setting and well-rooted programming was therefore leading to further isolation and disconnect between people at the grassroots, and ActionAid as an organisation fighting to eradicate poverty.

However, it was not just the diversity of the local programme that created a disconnect, between local and national/international work. Also important were the opinions of national and international staff on the local programme focus and quality.

Programme quality

For many staff working internationally the quality of local work was a fundamental issue. There was a perception that local staff capacity was weak and the development area work still rooted in a service delivery model. The Policy Director commented:

⁵² I do not mean to suggest that no grassroots experience can be more broadly representative, but that the choices made in responding to a specific experience will be influenced by specific power relations (for example, the interest of a staff member in a particular area, or concerning a particular issue; or the ability of an individual in a specific project to get his/her voice heard).

DA work is not designed to influence policy work. DAs were conceived around delivering sponsorship. They were designed to deliver services, and then a veneer of community empowerment was added, and a veneer of rights-based working, but the whole basis of the programme is service delivery. It is only in the newer CPs, Nigeria or Brazil, who have conceptualised DAs as a vehicle for policy change, where the staff responsibilities are very different (Interview 2009, Anne Jellema, Policy Director).

In 2010 a very critical internal audit report focused on the 'low quality of local programming' was distributed internally. The review raised doubts on the extent to which action at the local level was strategic and also shared concerns on evaluation and learning processes. It also discussed operational challenges at this level, noting for example:

Inadequate engagement with government structures means DAs do not get the government input essential to address the challenges that the community faces in a sustainable and coherent way. A common example is with education: if the ActionAid DA provides classrooms this must be supported by a commitment from the government to shoulder the associated operating costs such as teachers' salaries. However, some DAs find themselves bearing these costs on an ongoing basis (ActionAid, 2010d: 5).

And it ended by noting:

[T]here has been very little global recognition of the problems and trends in our work in DAs. Hence concerted efforts towards re-energising our work at DA level have been lacking to date (ibid: 10).

Opinions similar to this were frequently communicated to me in interviews with Northern based staff. For example fundraising staff cited the difficulty of managing the relationship with donors when local work was weak; while communication staff emphasised the difficulty in developing communication material for Northern publics to illustrate rights-based practice, when local practice was still rooted in service delivery. Policy and advocacy staff gave the weak nature of local practice as the primary reason for not building from this work, or including grassroots voices in their own practice.

However, such opinions need to be treated with caution. It is relatively straightforward to sit at international level and blame local programming issues for a lack of ability to listen and respond to poor people's voices at national and international levels (Newman and Beardon, 2011: 12). In addition, the perceived poor quality of the local programme was likely to be exacerbated through the distance between international and local interpretations of what a rights-based process involves (cf. discussion in Chapter Six). There is a distinction between weak programmes and programmes designed based on a different understanding of rights, or a different appreciation of context. It is inevitably

very difficult for people located externally to a grassroots programme to be able to make useful judgements on another person's work. For example, a weak programme in the eyes of someone involved in Northern Advocacy could mean that the local programme was not generating information or processes that were useful or linked to their own work focus. The difference in framing (and therefore solving) the issue of programme quality at local level leads to different solutions, as can be seen through exploring the IET initiative 'Promoting Rights in Schools'⁵³.

'Promoting Rights in Schools'

'Promoting Rights in Schools' (ActionAid, 2011) responded to the perceived twin challenges of poor quality local programmes and diversity of practice. The programme aimed to simultaneously strengthen local rights-based practice, to generate useful information for national and international policy understanding, positioning and campaigning, and to promote greater coherence across the education work.

It centred on a school charter based on 10 key rights (spanning the right to adequate infrastructure, quality teaching, relevant education and the right to participate). Taken together these rights provided for school-based quality education.

Each right was accompanied by three sets of information – the legal basis for the right; a range of participatory activities which could be used locally to raise awareness and enable local groups to discuss, analyse, monitor and take action to secure these rights; and a series of indicators expressed in a survey format which could be used to collect local data relating to the right.

Given the two objectives of 'Promoting Rights in Schools' (local empowerment and action, and data collection) the programme emphasises the importance of engaging children, parents, teachers and human rights activists:

The key is that people at local, district and national level each ANALYSE and USE the data collected – rather than collecting it for someone else. The school should be encouraged to display these materials as well as using them for further analysis and developing a new School Improvement Plan (ActionAid, 2011: 6).

⁵³ This initiative was developed in 2010-2011 and so I have not studied it in detail; however it is included here as its framing gives useful insights into the dynamics of linking local-national and international work.

It also encourages those working with the pack to produce reports (to be shared nationally and locally) based on the data collected. This process is described as an action approach for evidenced based advocacy and campaigning.

The material in the pack and ideas for action at the different levels are impressive, and show how community level action can be catalysed while also providing the evidence for national level campaigning and policy influencing. However, there is also a clear gap in this approach. There are no clear systems of mutual accountability, or emphasis on on-going local participation to shape how this programme plays out beyond the local level.

The question therefore remains as to whether this process was contributing to transforming power beyond the local level. Was it enabling poor and excluded voices to influence ActionAid's understanding and priority setting, or was it just a way to collect information to support pre-determined organisational analysis? In his response to reading this Chapter, Archer wrote:

I think that the emphasis is very much on transformative (and not instrumental) participation....It is fascinating to see how they have used the charter and PRS [Promoting Rights in Schools] framework in Nepal – using a whole range of participatory tools with a focus on building and transforming power through the process. In many ways this becomes the means by which grassroots people can influence our agenda. We encourage people to interrogate the rights, to use them as a springboard, to add their own insights, interpretations and perspectives etc.Having a one page expression of the essence of existing rights provides a solid foundation and creates space for local diversity. Neighbouring communities may end up with a very different focus, a different interpretation of priorities etc. (E-mail September 2011, Archer).

However, I would argue that unless there is a corresponding articulation of the response and role of ActionAid in relation to the local work it is questionable how such a programme might move beyond instrumental participation to transformative participation. Was the programme focused on using local evidence and voices (in 'doing justice to them'), or on strengthening local voice in relation to ActionAid's policy and practice? (and by extension to influence wider development debates, including for example how such a process responds to the continuums discussed in the previous chapter of universal/locally defined rights?). Was there an opportunity for grassroots people to engage with and influence ActionAid's agenda, or were they cast in a role of locally based activity to secure rights as defined and prioritised elsewhere?

A key issue is the question of who is defining the problem, and therefore what problem is being 'solved'? If the problem is defined as the lack of quality, connection or

coherence across the local programmes, and concerns about how this constrains national and international policy work, a particular perspective is being pursued. The issue is framed, and therefore solved, by the centre.

But, as detailed above, there were various biases existing within ActionAid. The background and motivation of national staff, the organisational power relationships and incentive systems, and the organisational understanding of rights-based practice all interacted in identifying the problem and proposing a solution. The approach to problem definition and solution was framed by attention to fulfilling an organisational rights-based vision, rather than reflecting an emphasis on the decentralisation process, linked to strategies for participation and empowerment from the bottom up. Taking a different starting position may have led to a very different conception of the issue, and solution.

If an organisation is to respond properly to grassroots analysis and voices, it needs to be clear about the role of the local level work in relation to national and international work. In this context this requires much more thought as to what a participatory rights-based policy-advocacy process might look like in practice. I return to this point in my conclusion.

Communication and information flows

Organisational information systems not only enable information and knowledge to flow through an organisation, they can also signal how an organisation values different information sources, and how it considers accountability. They act to incentivise what are seen as 'desirable' attitudes and behaviour. But these systems not only depend on how different knowledge is valued, and the incentives created, but also the organisational culture. In addition, as noted by Johnson and Wilson, for learning to be institutionalised there is a need to recognise and respond to the social power differentials which exist among those involved, and the differences in what these individuals already know (Johnson and Wilson, 1999; Johnson and Wilson, 2000).

This suggests that, if ActionAid were to develop information systems to enable flows of knowledge and perspectives from the grassroots, the organisation not only needed to value this knowledge but also to consider how the organisational social power relations currently operated.

There was a consensus among all the staff interviewed that knowledge capture systems had not been sufficiently understood or invested in. This is perhaps unsurprising given the organisational rejection of 'management' discourse and practice as discussed in the previous chapter. For example, many staff attributed the lack of organisational systems to a confusion resulting from the ideological commitment to decentralisation:

Internally we talk too much about centralisation and decentralisation, without really understanding the implications. What we essentially have is quite a corporate, hierarchical culture, there are chief execs and boards etc. but we want to support the ALPS' principles and decentralisation agenda. You can have global systems that are neither centralised or decentralised, but globally owned. But there is a real resistance to putting in a system that has controls across the organisation, so each country develops their own finance system for example. The rhetoric has got stuck on decentralisation and centralisation rather than a global system that everyone could have access to (Interview, Ruparel).

The lack of well-designed systems was also attributed to the types of leadership across the organisation, a direct impact of recruiting activists rather than managers (cf. Chapter Seven):

Generally ActionAid is rubbish about thinking organisationally and systematically. The sort of leadership and shapers of the organisation are policy wonks not OD [Organisational Development] wonks, so OD and HR [Human Resources] have negligible influence and I think that very few of the rest of us have the skills necessary. When I was looking for guidance on making local-national-international connections there was none, there is no learning at all, there is no effort to learn. I do think that the HR/OD/shared learning parts of the organisation need to be much more concerned with how do you deliver structures and processes which meet the strategic aims of the organisation, for there is a big disconnect. I think AA is particularly bad at this (Interview, Yates).

These two dimensions had led to a situation where:

Everything becomes everyone's job and no one's, and things don't get taken forward and there is not strong leadership on some of the important issues... There is a bit of political reluctance to take strong leadership on things...from what I've seen this goes across the board (Interview, Ingram).

Organisational systems can take many forms. As discussed in Chapter Seven, ActionAid had very legitimate reasons for rejecting a managerial discourse based within a neo-liberal framework, underpinned by concepts of individualism and assumptions about human behaviour based on rational choice theory (Harvey, 2005). However, the impact of this rejection meant that there was no investment in designing more appropriate processes based on alternative understandings of human behaviour, power relations and motivation.

The lack of interest in organisational systems meant that the IET was able to function throughout my research period without investing in this area. However, this lack of investment led to a perverse outcome:

The reason that there isn't a system is to avoid being top-down and heavy. Because if there is a system you need to feed it. But what happens now is, if a theme head wants to know what is happening within their theme they write to all the theme staff at national level and they report upwards, I don't understand why they do but they do, they are not supposed to, and we're not supposed to ask for top-down information.... And the same thing happens within national programmes down to the DA. It is very interesting how people complain that the level above them imposes on them and then they turn around and do twice as bad to the level below them! (Interview, Adams)

The lack of organisational systems or attempt to institutionalise learning from the grassroots meant that what information did flow through the organisation depended on the specific interest of those who held organisational power. Although information (and voices and perspectives) from the local level were shared internationally, the driver for this information was individuals, rather than due to an organisational commitment. Information that came up through the system was therefore framed by the specific interest and bias of those who requested it. As often as not, these individuals were rooted in policy discourse, influenced by external policy-makers, academics and peers. Information may have been flowing from the grassroots, but influence was not.

Powell argues:

[Development] is a process which cannot happen, and can [sic] certainly cannot lead to the intended outcomes, unless it is based *both* on a good understanding of the particular socio-economic reality that 'the development' is intended to change *and*, just as importantly, on an appreciation of the perceptions of local populations as to their options in that reality (Powell, 2006: 2).

While ActionAid had recognised the need for good understanding and information, the organisation had failed to appreciate the importance of differing perceptions. This distinction is at the heart of the challenge in realising a coherent implementation of its rights-based approach. In avoiding discussion of global information systems to support its vision of rights-based development and transformation of power, ActionAid had inadvertently excluded the voices of those to whom it strove to be most accountable.

The gap existed in part because of the emphasis at the recruitment stage where policy and advocacy skills were being stressed, over and above experience in programme development and community participation. However, this context was exacerbated by

ActionAid's specific organisational culture – which led to a failure to appreciate the contradictions between its different goals and an unwillingness to invest in the appropriate kinds of management systems and processes that could have helped to reduce these problems. In addition a final dimension of ActionAid's operation needs to be considered before closing this discussion on organisational dynamics – the influence of social movements.

Social movements

Social movements have quite a lot of influence. Ramesh has a thing saying that we will never do anything that social movements say will harm them, we might not sign on to everything, but we will avoid doing anything that harms them (Interview, Adams)

As part of its vision to become a global movement for equality and social justice, ActionAid invested significantly in its relationship with social movements⁵⁴. Moreover, as suggested in Chapter Four, ActionAid's decentralisation process was centred on the desire to operate as a citizens' organisation, a new sort of organisation which shared elements of a traditional INGO and elements of a social movement. Thus these organisations were important in two ways – in relation to how ActionAid aligned its practice, and in relation to the internal organisational functioning.

There is a huge literature on these movements and the dynamics and tensions they experience, which I do not have the space to do justice to here. However, some of the most relevant criticism emphasises the short-comings in such organisations, for example:

[G]lobal civil society is often championed as a force for democracy: it can give voice, stimulate debate, confer legitimacy, etc. Yet civic groups – even those that actively campaign for a democratisation of official institutions and market

⁵⁴ It is not clear exactly how ActionAid understands the term social movement as it is not defined in any of the organisational documentation I read. However, the organisation is clearly focused on those movements linked to poverty eradication, human rights and social equality and justice. Mayo writes: 'The definition of what constitutes a social movement has been contested...In summary, these tend to include collective mobilisations with socio-economic, political and/or cultural dimensions, mobilizing around issues of identity as well as around more specific rights' (Mayo, 2005: 54). She continues to note that this definition includes the women's movement, environmental movements and peace, civil liberties and human rights movements together with trade union and labour movements. A key defining characteristic is that movements need to be made up of more than one 'single formal organisation'; so a particular trade union, political party or religious organisation would not be defined as a social movement, although they might participate in a social movement (ibid: 55). New social movements tend to emphasise issues of identity, ideology and culture, rather than the issues of distribution and production – and focus on a new form of politics, beyond the class analysis which dominated in 'old' social movements (ibid: 73).

operations – can fail to meet democratic criteria in their own internal workings. For example, some civic associations offer their members no opportunity for participation beyond the payment of subscriptions.... biased access to civil society can reproduce or even enlarge structural inequalities and arbitrary privileges connected with class, gender, nationality, race, religion, and so on (Scholte, 1999: 30).

In aligning itself with these organisations, and in reflecting some of the characteristics of social movements within its own organisational form, it was perhaps unsurprising that ActionAid had also struggled with operationalising transformative participation within its structure.

However, its relationship with social movements brought with it another problem. How could ActionAid balance building strong relationships with these organised bodies, typically well rooted in rights-discourse, without further marginalising the ‘unorganised poor and excluded’ individuals and groups who were ActionAid’s primary constituency? This tension was illustrated through ActionAid’s links with teachers’ unions⁵⁵.

Developing links with teachers’ unions: illustrating tensions with social movements

Work with Teachers’ Unions has intensified over the strategy period ...and this has influenced the education coalitions at national level; when TUs join the education coalitions they have to look at issues differently and they become more political, and have a stronger platform and collective voice (Interview, Education Review, Archer).

At international level, as part of the Global Campaign for Education, ActionAid had worked with teachers’ unions for over 10 years, but national level links were developed more recently. Historically, there had been tensions between development NGOs and teachers’ unions, due to a radically different approach to strengthening national education systems. For example, while teachers’ unions were fighting for more respect and better pay and conditions, NGOs were often recruiting and training volunteer

⁵⁵ It is important to note that teachers’ union differ from many of the social movements ActionAid connects to. Teachers are a professional body, whereas other movements ActionAid was connecting to, for example the landless people’s movement or Via Campesina (the international peasant’s movement), were more directly connected to the poor and excluded groups ActionAid was engaging with at the grassroots. Given this it is likely that the tensions arising from engagement with the teachers’ unions might be more extreme than the dynamics arising from the relationship with other social movements, because the teachers’ union voice was more distant from the ‘community’ voice. I have not explored this issue. It is also important to note that different countries, with different types of civil society will have different experiences. For example, in Brazil it was easier to develop strong coherent relationships with social movements than it was in many African countries, which historically have had a less politicised and active civil society (ActionAid, 2010b).

teachers and effectively undermining the teaching profession (cf. p. 185). Overcoming this historic distrust and developing strong partnerships with teachers' unions was a major achievement for ActionAid. However, this relationship was not straightforward.

Working with teachers' unions meant that it was no longer tenable for ActionAid to support volunteer teacher programmes. Instead of developing its own cadre of teachers it needed to invest in supporting and strengthening the teaching profession and professional teachers. But this position did not necessarily reflect the opinion of grassroots communities.

AA is much more influenced by its links with social movements than DA level work in terms of its policy position.[An] example of this is our position on para-teachers. This is developed more due to our links with Education International than a systematic process from the field. And this is an issue where there is a tension (Interview, Jellema).

Whereas it might have been coherent nationally to develop policy positions alongside teachers' unions this was not necessarily the case locally. For communities where there was no primary school, or no professional teacher willing to be posted to their (remote) area, priorities were often different. For example, there were frequent reports via the national Education Leads of local community groups' expectations of ActionAid to provide, train and fund teaching staff.

This dynamic mirrored the tensions discussed in the Chapter Six of how national and international staff understood the role of service delivery within a rights-based approach. The teachers' union discourse fitted more easily within a rights-based conception, than local voices advocating for service delivery. It is therefore unsurprising that the union voice had more influence over national (and international) agendas in terms of articulating positions on the role of ActionAid in education rights.

Moreover, it was not just that the understandings of education rights were shared between the unions and the international education staff. It was also likely that those working in teachers' unions (or speaking on behalf of people organised in social movements more generally) are used to articulating their positions, to persuading others to listen and support their cause. In contrast, people living at the grassroots, who have no community organisation and little connection to the outside world, are likely to be less articulate or confident in sharing their positions. The 'unorganised' poor were therefore doubly disadvantaged. Not only did their priorities and messages differ from the organisational positions taken, but they were less able to communicate their views to ActionAid staff and partners.

Responding to these different constituencies was clearly complex. Both groups represented poor and excluded people, and yet had very different perspectives and outlook. However, the key question is how these different views were balanced and negotiated, and whether ActionAid had the process to enable this. Given the discussions in the previous section which detailed ActionAid's lack of investment in bottom-up information flows, and its policy bias and the fact that no-one I interviewed mentioned such systems, it would seem reasonable to assume that such mechanisms did not exist.

The distinction between social movements and unorganised grassroots poor also gives rise to questions of how ActionAid understood 'citizens'. In considering its desire to become a citizens' organisation, did its vision centre on becoming an organisation that linked to other civil society organisations? Or was it one that built from local communities who may not have previously participated in what is generally understood as 'civil society' (because of their level of exclusion)? Clarity on this issue was clearly necessary for ActionAid to be able to unpack who it should be responding to, and be influenced by.

Concluding comments

The analysis in this section (Chapters Seven and Eight) shows that although ActionAid had invested in various aspects of organisational change, including transforming its organisational structure, bringing new skills into the organisation and developing new relationships with more politically organised bodies it was facing many challenges in implementing its rights-based approach. Moreover, the strategies it put in place to strengthen its rights-based approach often appear in conflict with its vision of a decentralised organisation, an international network of national citizens' organisations. Creating space for local diversity and well-rooted programmes may have enabled good participatory work, but this did not necessarily comply with the organisation's rights-based vision.

The process of integrating rights and participation is complicated. For ActionAid, this process was more challenging due to two factors. Firstly, the organisation was attempting to transform its development understanding and practice, while simultaneously undergoing a decentralisation process. This action gave rise to two competing movements. Secondly, by associating management with the dominant neo-liberal management paradigm (Dar and Cooke, 2008), and therefore rejecting 'management' the organisation was left without the structure, culture, or individuals to

emphasise the importance of appropriate relations and systems to facilitate its development practice.

ActionAid clearly had many committed and capable staff, and yet, as an organisation its commitment to participation and transforming power was limited. It had failed to create a habitus where local knowledge and perspectives were routinely considered and actively sought within its international and national action.

Mowles (2007) argues that organisations are complex, and Clarke and Ramalingam (2008) note the need to engage with the shadow culture of organisations in promoting change. ActionAid had transformed its organisational structure, and yet many of the same cultural practices remained. The organisation had decentralised, but expectations of the centre remained. New governance structures and management hierarchies had been developed, and yet operating power continued to reside in the individual. The power of the centre may have been particularly strong during the phase of decentralisation which coincided with my research:

While AA is moving towards being a federal organisation it is not there yet – it is more like a unitary organisation with some federal bits (and federal aspirations). There are only 6 affiliates so far, so although the power relations are designed for a federal structure, the national power has not emerged yet to balance the central power. In many ways the central power is necessary at the moment to hold the organisation together as it changes (Interview, Archer, 2007)⁵⁶.

However, at the time of my research there were no signs that investment was being made to encourage new relationships and work practices to occur inside the organisation. The focus was on the wider organisational dynamics as opposed to the day-to-day working practice.

The problems ActionAid was facing in enabling local voices and perspectives to influence its practice, while shifting to a rights-based approach, were not all due to a lack of focus on organisational behaviour, management or structure. There was a much deeper issue, suggestive of a gap in ActionAid's development theory. Although significant investment had been made in developing a rights-based framework to analyse and understand the context of poverty and devise appropriate development

⁵⁶ In his feedback in 2011 David Archer made the point that organisational power has shifted extensively since my research: 'I would say that one of my major learnings in the past year is just how dramatically power has shifted and how the new national Boards and Assemblies, which often involve social movements, are driving the future direction of the organisation' (E-mail September 2011, Archer)

responses at the local level, there was no evidence to suggest that the organisation had considered what a rights-based policy process, i.e. a policy process combined with a locally rooted, transformative approach to development, might look like:

There is a lot of talk about how local people don't know how to do rights-based work, but there isn't the same kind of edge when talking about how policy people don't know how to do local work – instead its framed along what's your model to make your advocacy link to local work (Interview, Adams).

This failure to properly consider the idea of a rights-based policy process led to a gap in organisational design. The lack of a concept of a rights-based policy process meant that the organisation had not considered how accountability might function, or what specific skills, capacities, relationships and incentives might be appropriate to enable those living in poverty to influence policy work. This meant that there was little attention paid to the organisational implications of bottom-up development. Nor was attention paid to where investment needed to be made to facilitate the voices of poor and excluded people in defining and deciding policy positioning or the organisational interpretation of rights.

Instead of investing in transformative participation, a context was emerging where the local programme evolved in parallel to the national and international programme. Where the programmes did interact the space was framed by the needs and perception of international and national staff. In responding to this context it is necessary to give further thought to what a rights-based policy process might mean. This includes considering further the shape and function of a rights-based organisation, and the roles played by different stakeholders linked to it, and the internal relationships that characterise how it functions, in order to encourage and develop transformative participation. Such participation would need to go beyond supporting grassroots groups to engage with their local context, to include exploring how they would be able to influence ActionAid's understanding of development – and by extension, how ActionAid engaged with the external environment. This is the subject of the following chapter - my conclusion.

Conclusion

Introduction

I started this thesis by challenging the view that rights and participation fit neatly together, and have argued throughout my findings chapters that the way these concepts interact depends on how each is conceived and practised. In doing so I have raised various issues, and suggested that rather than participation facilitating a rights-based approach, or rights enabling the radical politics of participation, the two exist in tension, at a theoretical level and within organisational practice.

For example, in Chapter Five, 'Articulating a Rights-Based Approach', I identified three continuums which shape how different organisations integrate and use rights in their work. I suggested that many choices are made: to focus on legislative or empowering approaches; to favour outcome based or process based strategies; and whether to take a universal or locally defined conception of rights. I drew on ActionAid's work between 2006-2009 to expose the tensions which arise when an organisation commits to working at both ends of these continuums. The challenges were discussed further, in Chapter Six, through my analysis of ActionAid's work on the Right to Education. Here I illustrated the variety of perspectives on rights which existed within one 'theme of work' in one organisation, and showed how the different priorities interacted in practice. In Chapters Seven and Eight, I looked more deeply at the interplay between participation and rights by focusing on organisational dynamics within ActionAid. This involved reflecting on work undertaken by the organisation at two opposite ends of the spectrum – engagement in international policy debates, and implementation of grassroots community development as conceived and related to nationally and internationally. This also led me to explore how the organisational decentralisation process interacted with a move to a rights-based agenda.

My theoretical analysis, together with reflections on ActionAid's experiences, suggest that working on rights and participation within one organisation, when both are located within a discourse centred on transforming power, may be irreconcilable in principle. However, while the two approaches do exist in tension, there are a range of practical steps that can be taken to enable the two to interact more positively in practice. This concluding chapter takes a step back from the ActionAid case study, and considers these

tensions (and how to work with them) from the perspective of broader questions about the role of INGOs, and of their contribution to rights-based development.

I start this chapter by reflecting briefly on two key aspects of my research journey. I do this to contextualise and legitimise the discussion contained later in the chapter – which shares my reflections and conclusions based on my research. This is followed by a brief consideration of the contested nature of participation and rights, which serves to emphasise how my findings are located with relation to a specific interpretation of both approaches. I then briefly summarise the key contributions my research has made to ‘knowledge’ before discussing the implications of my findings in relation to the role and function of INGOs. In doing so I draw on a range of insights offered by people I interviewed on what a ‘rights-based organisation’ would look like. I develop these into principles that could enable a more positive integration of rights and participation.

My research journey

Six years ago, when I decided to return to study, I had little idea as to how my research would evolve. As I noted in the introduction I was motivated by three factors. From an academic perspective I felt that there was a gap in the academic knowledge concerning how rights and participation interact – in theory and in practice. As a practitioner, motivated by my outrage at global inequalities and aspiring to participate in the struggle for social justice, I was interested in and committed to the transformation that ActionAid was under-taking. I wanted to work alongside the organisation to strengthen attention to grassroots voices and perspectives. This particular commitment was extended by a third interest, which responded to my academic interests and practitioner concerns. I wanted to understand further the roles that could be played by individuals in the Global North, working in INGOs and committed to a transformational approach to development.

My research journey has been a long one, with shifts and turns, breaks and times of intensity, difficulties and times of immense learning and understanding. As noted in Chapter Three, my research strategy evolved as possibilities changed. I have had to balance flexibility and the ability to respond to new opportunities, while ensuring that I kept my focus. I have worked to embrace new possibilities without losing sight of my initial interest, or the gaps in academic knowledge that I was working to fill.

In many ways my research journey has mirrored what I advocate in relation to working with rights and participation. I started with an interest in pursuing participatory

research, but took decisions based on the real contexts I experienced. I aimed to deepen understanding - even when I could not be as participatory as I had hoped. This was done with an honest acknowledgement of my limitations – both in my own abilities to pursue participatory action research and my context. But also by, I hope, preserving the values and the intention behind participatory practice.

There are two issues which have been particularly important in my research: researching a changing context and the shifting nature of my relationship with ActionAid.

Researching and understanding a moving scenario

I had originally designed my research based on an 18-month data collection process, but due to my own changing circumstances (the birth of 2 children) I ended up collecting data over a four-year period. This had two major implications.

Firstly, the level of change that has occurred during my research period has been vast. The external world has shifted extensively. Opportunities for INGOs were radically different in the post 'Make Poverty History' era of 2005 and the post-global financial crisis reality of 2009. In addition, when I started my research there was little written on the internal functioning of INGOs, or the challenges of operating as a radical actor within the current development context. As time has passed, more and more material has been produced (Bebbington et al, 2008; Shutt, 2009; Hickey and Mitlin, 2009; McGee, 2010). These materials have been useful in extending and framing my own analysis and have also challenged me to consider how my research can add most effectively to the continually expanding body of knowledge.

Beyond this, ActionAid itself has been constantly evolving and changing. There have been a range of organisational reviews, new analysis and publications, specific initiatives and clarifications of positions, especially in relation to human rights-based practice. The past year has been a particularly important one for the organisation – and has included an organisation wide review (ActionAid, 2010b) and its most participatory strategy development process (Newman with Archer, 2011).

My continued engagement with the organisation indubitably enriched my research and strengthened my understanding and analysis. However, it also meant that I had to make choices about where to focus my attention and impose boundaries on my research, to ensure that I did not drown in the information available. I have been concerned as to how to pay justice to the range of voices and processes on which I collected information.

I have also struggled to balance the depth of focus with the range of issues which impact on understanding organisational rights-based practice. This process was also influenced by my changing relationship with the organisation.

From insider to outsider?

When I started my research I was very much an insider to ActionAid.

In 2006, when I started my research, I visited the organisation every week and spent many days working in the office. During 2011, as I wrote this thesis, I have not visited the organisation. I have limited awareness of the latest discussions and have become much more of an outsider.

This has enabled me to consider my findings more objectively, but it has also meant that I have felt less legitimate in drawing on my own organisational understanding and experiences developed originally prior to my research period. In questioning the validity of my previous knowledge and assumptions, and balancing previous connections with ever increasing distance, I have engaged in critical reflexivity. This has involved continually reflecting on and analysing my interpretations, assumptions and my positionality, as I read and re-read the information I collected.

I do not doubt that another researcher would have presented this information differently, painted a different picture. But I am also confident that however subjective my picture is, it does give insight into key contradictions and tensions faced by INGOs adopting the language of universal human rights and marrying this with a participatory bottom-up approach to development. Moreover, I am confident that my case study works well to illustrate the key questions of 'Realistic Evaluation': the need to understand 'What works for whom in what circumstances and in what respects, and how?' (Pawson and Tilley, 2004: 2).

Revisiting participation and rights

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states that human rights are inalienable, guaranteed to every human by virtue of being human. But securing and enjoying these rights requires infrastructure, resources and capacity to deliver, and individuals with the capability to access their rights. Both aspects of this equation are subject to complex power relations and political choices influenced by structural inequalities and economic realities. Moreover, as discussed in Chapter Three, there are specific challenges to the UDHR – including its focus on individual rights developed

within a Western liberal framework, building from the US and French Bills on 'the Rights of Man'.

Given this, the relevance of participation to securing human rights is evident. Eyben (2003) argues that:

[T]he right to participation can be seen as the entry point to realising all other rights... Understanding participation as a right...means switching from a technical to a political understanding of development (Eyben, 2003: 2).

While rights on their own run the danger of being abstract targets, politically neutral, and discussed without reference to the politics of development, by integrating participation these concepts develop meaning and content, based on real contexts and experiences. Rights become discussed and prioritised dependent on diverse realities. They respond to individual and group experiences of discrimination and exclusion. Rights discourse moves beyond content to ideas of process, embracing a series of principles including equality, non-discrimination and accountability.

But, although the links between rights and participation are convincing, the process of integrating the two approaches into organisational practice is complex. As Ling (2010) recognised, participatory practice suggests a focus on 'bottom-up' development, on flexible and responsive systems that build from the perspectives, voices and priorities of poor and excluded people; systems which place process and empowerment at their heart. Power et al (2003) comment that bottom-up development requires an organisation:

[T]o work for the liberation of those at the bottom by drawing its own sense of direction and priorities from this group[and] ... to adapt their internal structure, systems, and culture to the complex and evolving struggles of those in poverty, including even the choice not to be 'developed'. ... [T]o let go of the controls in community development. (Power et al, 2003: 26-7)

And yet rights-based practice implies a focus on global standards; for example, using the discourse of universal human rights to ensure that governments and policy makers respect and fulfil their obligations. This skews attention upwards, to the power-holders at national and international level.

Both practices are hugely relevant and important for transformative development. But, as the ActionAid case study illustrated, far from supporting and extending each other the two approaches existed in tension, pulling the organisation in fundamentally different directions. In embracing a universal, legislative approach to rights ActionAid tended to instrumentalise participation in its international and national policy work, or

even excluded poor people's voices completely. This occurred despite its focus on transforming power relations, its investment in a decentralisation process (aimed at strengthening Southern voices in development) and its commitment to protecting the space for locally responsive and participatory programmes.

However, the 'extreme case' also provided many positive examples of how an organisation can work outside, or beyond, a mainstream technical approach to development. Its on-going internationalisation process is clearly shifting organisational power relations, locating the strategic decision-making in the hands of a general assembly which involves strong Southern representation, including key actors from nationally based social movements. Although its focus on recruitment of 'activists' raised various challenges, for example in terms of representation, and engagement with the local programme, their presence did enable the organisation to take on a more political analysis based on understandings of equality and justice and to avoid the trappings of neo-liberal management discourse. In addition, the work that the organisation is doing to try and build from the local programme, for example through Promoting Rights in Schools, indicates that there is strong interest and commitment to strengthen current practice, and a belief in the need to involve multiple knowledges and perspectives. The fact that staff were open to my critique and engaged with my findings is testament to this.

The ActionAid experience suggests that any organisation that is seriously concerned to work on both participation and rights will find itself forced to make trade-offs and compromises. How these are made will depend on wider organisational understandings of its role in development, and its specific interpretation of participation and rights. So, what does this mean for participatory rights-based practice?

Contribution to knowledge

In exposing the tensions that exist between participation and rights, my research has suggested a particular set of dilemmas in seeking to balance a commitment to bottom-up development with a focus on universal human rights. This is in part because people understand rights in different ways, dependent on their positionality and context, and therefore prioritise different elements of rights-based practice. I have suggested a pragmatic compromise to work with the tensions involved – to focus on the concept of a rights-based policy process, one that integrates the dynamics of transformative participation with the goal of securing a range of relevant rights. This concept appears to be missing from current academic discourse and development practice.

A rights-based policy process redefines who is involved in a policy process, and in what ways. The ActionAid experience suggests that it is not enough to want to work on legislative and empowering rights-based approaches (cf. Gready and Ensor, 2005), but that specific efforts need to be made to integrate work at the local, national and international levels to enable poor people's perspectives to influence how work evolves at the other levels. Such an approach needs to recognise the challenges of valuing both process and outcome. It requires clarity about the trade-offs between the goal of influencing specific policies and the aim of strengthening the participation of poor and excluded groups in debates that impact upon their development more broadly. My research suggests that unless rights-based working recognises these balancing acts it is unlikely that such an approach can contribute to transformative development.

Beyond the complexities of integrating rights and participation I have also unpacked the difficulties of organisational change, specifically change aimed at bringing about transformative development. ActionAid changed its organisational structure and recruited new staff of a different kind in order to transform its development practice. But by focusing on its vision of an appropriate organisational form - the ends - and largely rejecting any management theory, it ignored the means. Dar and Cooke suggest in their volume on 'The New Development Management' that it is sufficient to problematise management given the extensive a-critical writing which exists currently (Cooke and Dar, 2008: 17). However, I would argue that my case highlights the problems in rejecting one discourse without giving sufficient attention to the space it leaves behind. In failing to consider the process of organisational change, ActionAid could not respond to the unintended consequences of that change. ActionAid wanted to transform its organisational structure and practice. But transformation requires engagement with the 'shadow culture' (Clarke and Ramalingam, 2008). It involves participation, reflection, negotiation, and at times this means slowing down, or altering course. It requires acknowledgement that any organisation is part of a wider 'ecosystem' (Clarke and Ramalingham, 2008) with a diversity of pressures and influences. It also involves confronting the inevitable conflict between stated organisational values and those values held by different staff, and recognising that organisational change is not a linear process. This requires much stronger planning and management than was apparent in ActionAid.

Finally, my project has also contributed to knowledge through modelling an alternative way of doing research on, and with, INGOs (cf. Lewis, 2005). As noted in the introduction and methodology chapter, the research involved playing multiple roles: the

insider-outsider, academic-practitioner and researcher-facilitator. Each dimension was important in deepening understanding of ActionAid's experience. As an insider-outsider I was able to use my knowledge of ActionAid while also achieving the distance and independence to analyse the findings outside the organisation itself. As academic-practitioner I was able to behave as the 'reflective-practitioner' (Schön, 1983) while drawing on the relevant academic literature to extend my understanding and analysis. Finally, as researcher-facilitator I was able to share my learning with the organisation, while also bringing in the views and perspectives of ActionAid staff to challenge and extend the analysis. It is clearly difficult to repeat such a position, let alone find people with the time and resources to engage in this way with an organisation over a four – five year period. Yet such research is crucial in deepening understanding of how organisations function, especially NGOs which have become such prominent players in international development. I hope that academic institutions and INGOs will collaborate to arrange more opportunities, and develop partnerships between practitioners and academics for deepening research on the understanding and practice of INGOs. This involves the organisations themselves valuing and prioritising such research, and academics strengthening some of the skills that are more commonplace among NGOs - of facilitator and collaborator, rather than that of the outside expert examining and looking in.

Moving forwards

There are two areas which need to be considered in reconciling participation and rights. Firstly, there needs to be clarity on role and potential of INGOs, including their relationships and accountability. Secondly, it is important to understand further organisational dynamics and functioning. This section discusses these two areas.

INGO position, potential and power relations

During my interviews I asked people to describe how they understood a 'rights-based organisation'; the responses included a wide range of views on the subject. This included fundamental disagreement as to whether an INGO could ever become a rights-based organisation. For example, one person suggested:

[To build a rights based organisation] you would set up a team of people who work alongside local movements, to strengthen those movements. That takes a whole different skill set, you wouldn't even locate yourselves in the development sector; you'd locate yourself in the international solidarity sector, which barely exists (Interview 2008, Adams).

While another, also from ActionAid, argued:

We are a development NGO, and we need to be able to manage money well and deliver. We do take sides, and by having our own boards we will be more rooted. We are part of the international apparatus, we need to be technically competent, and we should work in partnerships and alliances, be rooted and accountable, but we are not, and should not be, a social movement (Interview 2008, Richard Miller, Director, ActionAid UK).

One reaction to the issues raised in this thesis could be to suggest that the dilemmas and challenges experienced by ActionAid are due to the type of organisation it is, and to suggest that INGOs cannot be the site for bringing together participation and rights.

Reflecting on the literature by those who emphasise the need for NGOs to take a more radical alternative approach to development, it is clear that many thinkers do believe that a more transformative approach to social change is unlikely for NGOs given their current form and context (Korten, 1990; Fowler and Biekart, 2008; Bebbington et al, 2008; Shutt, 2009).

In addition, it appears likely that the operating context (in the UK at least, but potentially internationally given the realities of continued global economic crisis) is becoming more constraining, and so even more problematic. For example:

Conservatives plan to champion a 'cash-on-delivery' approach to aid, which focuses on payments for results rather than inputs, as well as holding ineffectual aid to account and redirecting underperforming funds... Whereas Labour 'echoes the apologetic literature on the "new" imperialism', the Conservatives celebrate Britain's gift to the world of capitalism. OWC [One World Conservatism] displays none of Labour's anxieties about the possibility of globalisation making the poor poorer, it just sees it as offering a way out of poverty (Sharp et al, 2010: 1127).

In addition, Shutt argues that a dependency on aid makes it difficult, if not actually impossible to 'act outside or independently of managerialist discourse' (2011: 10). Such an analysis implies an ever-decreasing space to consider concepts of powerlessness and inequality.

However, there is also clearly a view, shared by many of those working in and with INGOs, that they are able to make a difference and take on a more transformative agenda. I am of this view, and believe that their operating parameters, opportunities and constraints, need to be properly understood as a starting point for strengthening transformative action.

A starting point is to recognise all the positive factors which currently shape INGO action. INGOs do, after all, have the ability to raise vast sums of money from the public

and donors alike (Yaziji and Doh, 2009). Their structure also means that have potentially good access to policy makers and the media, as well as to isolated poor grassroots communities. They can engage with rich and poor, Northern and Southern publics, linking across borders with diverse groups within specific local communities. Individually such organisations are small players vis-à-vis Western governments and multi-lateral organisations, but collectively they have potential power:

[T]o mobilise the broader networks and institutions within which they are embedded... These networks can provide other resources and relationships of power (Mitlin et al, 2006: 13).

Beyond this there are specific opportunities identified by those supportive of INGOs taking on a more transformative approach to development. For example, although Shutt (2011) is concerned about the ability for INGOs to act outside of the mainstream agenda she also argues that the ambiguities in the current 'Value for Money' agenda of the UK Coalition Government may create space to shift the discourse and expectations of INGO action, and enable these organisations to push for global social transformation. Mitlin et al (2006) provide an agenda for such action, calling on INGOs to invest in partnerships with social movements and other similar actors so as to embrace more radical development alternatives situated within a new political economy. Darnton and Kirk (2011) urge INGOs to invest in creating alternative relations between UK public and developing countries. In addition, the participants in the 'How wide are the Ripples?'⁵⁷ process (which resulted in the publication of 'Participatory Learning and Action' 63, 2011) agreed that although it was important to recognise the structural challenges of transforming INGO practice there was also the need to act as 'empowered individuals':

[T]o be a conscious and active part of change.. [and] hope to inspire other empowered activists working with INGOs to bring about more accountable, equitable and participatory development (Newman and Beardon, 2011:12).

INGOs also have access to extensive learning from other sectors. For example, Gaventa and Mayo (2009) highlight that local links can give legitimacy to those speaking at the international level, whilst their multi-national presence can lead to the development of solidarity links, increasing 'outsider' support. This can put pressure on local and national governments, thus strengthening the possibilities for change. Through their

⁵⁷ The two-year process included a literature review; reflections on relevant work with five INGOs which led to a working paper (available at <http://tinyurl.com/rippleswp>); a follow-up workshop with 30 people who have been trying to promote bottom-up information flows (report available at <http://tinyurl.com/ripples-workshop>); and, from that, PLA 63.

exploration of 'National Policy Change', Gaventa and McGee (2010) similarly identify the importance of balance, appealing to internationally recognised norms and standards, whilst ensuring these are locally contextualised and adapted. They emphasise the importance of national players in these broad based coalitions. For example urban middle class activists may have the links and technical expertise to obtain the ear of governments, whilst working alongside a diverse cross section of civil society actors, including local actors and marginalised groups. But above all they argue that:

Successful policy change occurs not through professional advocacy alone but involves complex and highly developed mobilizing structures which link national reformers to local and faith-based groups, the media and repositories of expertise. Such structures are built over time, deeply grounded in the societies where they are found, and linked to the biographies of those who lead them (ibid: 23).

In their experience INGOs are rarely at the forefront of national policy change (ibid: 18). Such analysis is extended through Gaventa and Barrett's (2010) analysis of citizen engagement, which identifies the importance of 'local associations' in securing rights and through the process strengthening participants' sense of citizenship. These insights imply a much stronger role for INGO in 'accompaniment'⁵⁸ rather than direct policy advocacy work.

These ideas give various opportunities for INGOs to take on a more transformative agenda, negotiating the complex reality of working with transformative participation and human rights. However, there are a series of organisational issues that also need to be considered to enable rights and participation to interact.

Integrating rights and participation: an agenda for action

At a fundamental level any INGO committed to transformative development needs to consider the relationships that they intend to create both inside the organisation and with the range of other development actors (from poor grassroots communities, to general publics in the Global North and South, to donors, national governments and other international actors).

Central to the issue of transformative participation is the question of who is defining the development vision(s). To whose agenda are INGOs working, and how can they use their knowledge, connections and expertise to support and extend transformative

⁵⁸ A term used by many working in popular education in Latin America to suggest working alongside – of solidarity action, mutual capacity building and support.

participatory practice? My analysis of ActionAid's work suggested that a central tension in integrating rights and participation arose through its desire to engage in policy-advocacy work. For various reasons greater emphasis was paid to success as understood in relation to external influence and profile, rather than in relation to coherence with values and the longer-term, more complex vision of transformation of power. My agenda for action therefore responds to this.

At a basic level it involves considering individual staff behaviour and practice:

How far can you institutionalise a rights-based approach, what does embedding it mean? Being a rights-based organisation is about values, and this is so dependent on who you have. (Interview 2008, Jo Rowlands, Right to be heard Coordinator, Oxfam GB)

The question of having the 'right' staff is clearly important, especially given the analysis discussed in Chapter Seven, concerning the difficulties in shifting staff values (Mowles, 2007); balanced with the skills and experiences required for activism and policy-advocacy.

This suggests it is necessary to understand more deeply what individual attributes are needed to enable good linkages between local participatory practice and national and international policy work. These attributes may include specific values, such as a belief in multiple knowledges (see http://wiki.ikmemergent.net/index.php/Main_Page) and a commitment to a transformative approach to development. But they will also involve specific skills and experiences, which are likely to be quite diverse and will not necessarily be found in any one individual (i.e. the range of staff skills will need to span experiences in community development, and understandings of global policy processes).

Emphasising the importance of participation and responding to the agendas of poor people at the grassroots does not negate the need for organisations to have the skills and capacities to engage in technical policy debates. It is important to recognise these dilemmas, and be open to making trade-offs. This recognition also reaffirms the need to understand organisational history, culture, behaviour and the complexity of organisational change and, as my discussion in Chapter Seven illustrated, to be aware of the potential impact of bringing different 'types' of people into the organisation.

There are, in addition, a range of other trade-offs which need to be considered. For example:

[A rights-based organisation] would put a lot more emphasis on downward learning and accountability... for value-driven organisations the bottom line is

their values. It is not the growth, output, how much money we got that year, it's not even about how many poor people did we help that year. It's about 'What values did we bring and are we consistent to those values?' (Interview, Gaventa)

Gaventa's comment implies that a rights-based organisation might need to sacrifice growth and influence, in order to achieve coherence. This could involve rejecting an offer for funding from a specific donor whose agenda was not consistent with the organisation's own, or deciding not to engage in a new area of work if staff capacity might compromise process and relationships. Equally it could involve not participating in a particular policy discussion if the terms of debate meant that there was not the space to negotiate a transformative approach to development (whether this was understood as referring to process or outcome). The nature of compromise, however, implies that decisions might equally be taken in the other direction – to prioritise growth in a particular area because it would enable stronger development work focused on transforming power.

The decision needs to be justified in terms of wider organisational discourses and principles to:

[Turn] the 'subjects' of development into equal actors, and [allow] autonomous visions of 'development' to move beyond local spheres and into wider debates and processes....[this] changes the relationship between INGOs and poor and marginalised communities from one of consultation and implementation, to dialogue and negotiation of plans and activities, and ultimately of the kind of world we want to live in (Newman and Beardon, 2011: 18).

Beyond values and behaviour, attention needs to be paid to organisational structure and process. For many of those that I interviewed, a rights-based organisation involved alignment between local and national (and international) work.

You would have a more country wide approach rather than community specific approach. That wouldn't mean that you wouldn't work at community level, but that you would have a more strategic approach, thinking about the systemic change you would want to see at country level; rather than, at the moment when you look at a country strategy paper there is all this top line stuff and then lots of activities like school visits and giving out pencils to people and there seems to not be much connection between the two things (Interview, Ingram).

If we were to be organised as a rights-based organisation, the international secretariat would be organised around campaigns rather than themes. It would take three issues and work on them over a 5-10 year period, ensuring good programme work that links up to policy, so that local programme work can be aligned to a bigger programme (Interview, Jellema).

INGOs need organisational systems that facilitate coherence, as some of those I interviewed highlighted:

I don't know what AA would look like if it were designed to implement an RBA, but I do think you'd have a much clearer alignment between our planning and financial systems and our development model (Interview, Yates).

The whole planning agenda should be participatory. And we need better information sharing systems. For example, you would have one IT interface that leads off into various knowledge areas, and enables local knowledge to flow up (Interview, Ruparel).

The balance between bottom-up development and organisational coherence and function is complex, and there will always be trade-offs made between organisational imperatives and development imperatives (Dudding, 2011: 127). I would argue that the ideas of 'programme alignment' put too much emphasis on the organisational imperative, ahead of a commitment to transformative development. However, the comments concerning coherence in organisational planning shed light on how management techniques might have relevance to strengthening integration between participatory and rights-based practice. This involves recognising that management does not need to imply a 'New Public Sector Management' approach, imbued with ideas of effectiveness and efficiency, but can draw on the ideas of the 'radical reformers' (Shutt, 2011).

For example, bringing ideas of transformative participation into organisational practice would lead to specific principles to inform on-going organisational decision-making, such as the importance of negotiation with a wide group of stakeholders. It could include investing in building collaborative working practices and mutual accountability, based on valuing different perspectives, position, remit, skills and knowledge. But beyond this, a transformative approach also involves considering how perspectives and voices from the grassroots communities that the organisation serves can be influential on organisational practice, in terms of organisational learning and understanding, but also ultimately in terms of how poor people's perspectives and voices can influence wider development debates.

In developing such systems it is also important to acknowledge that not every decision can be made through a participatory process. For example, in their discussion of 'sense-making' from diverse participatory experiences, Beardon et al (2011: 82) suggest a need to mix a 'participatory aggregation process' with 'negotiating representation as mediators when necessary', to enable 'collective sense-making for mutual benefit'. This involves having a clear agreement as to which decision and action processes will involve direct participation, and which will involve delegated representation. Such processes are never straightforward, and need to be pursued with an awareness of existing power

relations, motivations and expectations. But above all, they need to be pursued from the basis of an organisational commitment to openness, to being ready to listen, to respond and to change, and 'to let[ting] go of the controls of development' (Powell et al, 2003: 27).

My analysis of INGOs' roles and potential suggests a fundamentally different way of understanding policy-advocacy work; based on creating space for poor and excluded people at the grassroots to participate regularly with, and within, the organisations that exist to 'eradicate their poverty'. These new forms of relating (between INGOs and their partners and poor and excluded people living at the grassroots) need to be created with an awareness of current power relations, along with taking action to minimise these - to give an expanded role to those living in poverty to enable them to inform, shape and influence the local, national and international development agendas, rather than just feeding into the agenda of others.

Such transformative practice would need to recognise the limits of organisational power and the multitude of factors which impact on any wider vision of change. But it would also be shaped by principles derived from organisational attempts to be value-driven, rather than falling into the trap of pursuing a Western corporate or new public sector management discourse.

Where next

As I come to the end of my thesis there are two areas that I feel warrant further research and collaborative practice.

Firstly, while my research focus was very much on the interaction between rights and participation, within an organisational context, I have also been interested in the links and relationship between INGOs and mainstream development practitioners.

In locating rights and participation within a wider vision of transformative development, which enables voices of poor and excluded groups to influence and shape development discourse, it has been important to consider how these large organisations, which are increasingly powerful players in development, respond to and influence development practice more broadly.

This has led me to consider whether there are examples where INGOs have challenged or acted against the development mainstream, and under what specific conditions – internally and externally? There may be significant learning from previous practice on

this; on how INGOs have created spaces and opportunities to be the radical actors that so many critics of INGO practice expect them to be.

Secondly, as I noted above, one of my three areas of interest in undertaking this research was to understand more about the potential role of staff based in the Northern offices of INGOs, particularly those individuals concerned with a transformative vision of development. I wanted to understand how their skills and position could be put to best use in a way that recognises their context, the skills, expertise and access they have, and yet contributes to transforming rather than reinforcing global power relations.

While I believe that my suggestions for a rights-based policy process could contribute to facilitating better connections between the Northern and Southern development workers, I still feel that there is a long way to go in terms of transforming global power relationships. Further research is needed to understand the role INGOs can play in transforming these global power relationships. This includes exploring how their work can take general publics beyond the 'transaction frame' (Darnton and Kirk, 2011) building public understanding and a sense of responsibility for development. Learning from the South is the exception rather than the rule (Taylor, 2011).

Such a transformation of power relationships is not possible by one organisation on its own, and I therefore hope that INGOs will collectively work together to re-situate their role and position in international development, to enable a rights-based process which links to and reinforces bottom-up development and empowering participatory practice.

Appendix One: List of Interviewees

ActionAid Staff

Name	Role	Interview Date
1. Laurie Adams	Head - Impact Assessment/Shared Learning	2008
2. Balaraba Aliyu	Communication, Information and Shared Learning Coordinator, IET	IET Group Discussion
3. David Archer	Theme Head - Education 1990 - ongoing ⁵⁹	2007, 2009 (education review), 2010 x 2 (incl. AA History interview)
4. Geoffrey Atieli,	Programme Development Manager, ActionAid Kenya, 1981-2003	E-mail correspondence 2010
5. Andrew Bunbury	Various roles including Head of Programme Funding 1980 - 1997	2010
6. Ken Burnett	UK Director 1977-1983, AA trustee (in various different roles) 1995-2009	2009
7. Karen Brown	Chair of Trustees - AAUK	2008
8. Belinda Calaguas	Head of Policy and Campaigns, ActionAid UK	2009 + 2009 (education review)
9. Kate Carroll	Policy Officer, Knowledge Initiative	2008
10. Robert Chambers	AA Board Member 1992-2006	2010
11. Janet Convery	Head of Schools and Youth ActionAid UK	2009 (education review)

⁵⁹ Length of employment only included for those staff interviewed regarding ActionAid's history

12. Dhianaraj Chetty	Education Rights and HIV/AIDS Adviser	2009 (education review)
13. Victorine Djitrinou	Campaigns Coordinator, IET	IET Group Discussions
14. Patrik Erickson	Campaigner AA Sweden	2008
15. Liam Flynn	Director, ActionAid Ireland 1984 - 2006	E-mail correspondence 2010
16. Tony German	Various roles in fundraising and policy staff member 1978-1993	2010
17. Anna Gibson	Head of fundraising, AA USA	2009 (education review)
18. Martin Griffiths	CEO, 1991-1995	2010
19. Samantha Hargreaves	Shared Learning Coordinator	2010
20. Louise Hilditch	Director, AA Brussels	2009 (education review)
21. Roland Hodson	CEO, staff member 1974-1991	2010
22. Rebecca Ingram	UK fundraising (in 2009 she also worked as part-time project coordinator in the IET)	2008, 2009 (education review)
23. Anne Jellema	International Policy Director	2008
24. Jackson Karagu	Education Lead, Kenya	2006, 2007 x 2
25. Dorothy Konadu	Education Lead, Ghana	2006, 2007 x 2
26. Jean Kamau	Country Director - Kenya	2009 (education review)
27. Rosario Leon	Impact Assessment Coordinator	2009 (education review)
28. Antonella Mancini	Various roles including Head of the Impact Assessment Unit, staff member 1993-2005	2010
29. Babu Matthews	Country Director - India	2009 (education review)
30. Akanksha Marphatia	Policy and Research Coordinator, IET	2009 (education review) (and part of IET group)

		discussions)
31. Helen McEachern	Director, International Fundraising	2009 (education review)
32. Richard Miller	Director, ActionAid UK	2008
33. Lisa Mills	Head of Trust and Foundations, AAUK	2009 (education review)
34. Julita Nsanjama	Education Lead, ActionAid Malawi	2006, 2007 x 2
35. Kate Nustedt	Head of International Communications	2009 (education review)
36. Emma Pearce	Reflect and Literacy Co-ordinator	2009 (education review)
37. Susan Pennington	International Fundraising Co-ordinator	2008
38. Sonya Ruparel,	UK/Operations Manager, International Partnership Development	2008, 2009 (education review)
39. John Samuels	Regional Director, Asia	2009 (education review)
40. Salil Shetty	Various roles including CEO 1985-2003	2010
41. Ramesh Singh,	Various roles including CEO, Staff member 1984-2010	2009 (education review), 2010
42. Katriona Street	Education Attachment - Finance	2009 (education review)
43. Egigayehu Summers	Administrator, IET	2009 (education review)
44. Karen Twining Fooks,	Africa Regional Coordinator, staff member 1997-2002	2010
45. Nigel Twose	Country Director, ActionAid Nepal/International Policy Director 1990-1997	2008
46. Patrick Watt	UK Policy and Campaigns Coordinator 2001-2008	2008
47. Colin Williams	Africa Regional Director, staff member 1981-2003	2010

48. Tennyson Williams	Country Director - Sierra Leone	2009 (education review)
49. Everjoice Win	Theme Head - Women's Rights	2009 (education review)
50. Roger Yates	Theme Head - Human Security in Conflicts and Emergencies	2008

Non-ActionAid

Name	Role/Organisation	Interview Date
1. Sheila Aikman	Global Education Adviser, Oxfam	2008
2. Anonymous	Save the Children	2009
3. Allison Burden	Senior Technical Advisor, Rights-based Approach and Governance, CARE USA	2008
4. Rosalind Eyben	Fellow, Institute of Development Studies	2008
5. Lucia Fry	UK Policy Coordinator, Global Campaign for Education	2008
6. John Gaventa	Chair of Oxfam GB	2008
7. Max Lawson	Millennium Development Goals Campaigner, Oxfam GB	2008
8. Philippa Lei	Lei, Senior Child Rights Policy Advisor, World Vision	2008
9. Jo Rowlands	Right to be heard Coordinator, Oxfam GB	2008
10. Eric Slade	Education Adviser, Concern Worldwide	2008
11. Yusuf Sayed	Reader in International Education, Sussex	2009

	University	
12. Sinead Walsh	Global Advocacy Adviser, Concern Worldwide	2008

Appendix Two: Glossary

Affiliates: Organisations that join and own ActionAid International and agree to take part fully in the governance as well as in the fulfilment of ActionAid International's values, vision, mission, strategies, standards and systems.

Associates: Other organisations that join ActionAid International and country programmes both with the intention of, and in the process of becoming, full affiliates.

ALPS: Accountability, Learning and Planning System (ActionAid)

CBOs: Community Based Organisation

DA: Development Area (ActionAid's local programme)

Education Lead: ActionAid staff member working at Country Programme Level to coordinate in-country education work

FPT: Fighting Poverty Together, Organisational Strategy 1999-2005 (ActionAid)

GCE: Global Campaign for Education

GMF: Global Monitoring Framework (ActionAid)

HRBA: Human rights-based approach

MDGs: Millennium Development Goals

IES: International Education Strategy (ActionAid)

IET: International Education Team (ActionAid)

Internationalisation: ActionAid's decentralisation process (began in 2003)

INGO: International Non-governmental Organisation

MoU: Memorandum of Understanding

NFE: non-formal education

PRA: Participatory Rural Appraisal

PRRP: participatory review and reflection process (ActionAid)

RBA: rights-based approach

Reflect: A participatory approach to adult learning and social change: www.reflect-action.org

R2EP: Rights to End Poverty, Organisational Strategy 2005-2010 (ActionAid)

SCF: Save the Children Fund

SD: Service Delivery

SMC: School Management Committee

Appendix Three: Education Rights: a resource pack for practitioners and activists

The resource pack drew together learning and experience from work in education by ActionAid, its partners, and education coalitions of which it was a member. It presented a range of ideas and methodologies to put a human rights-based approach to education into practice and shared a set of principles to underline a human rights-based approach:

- **Identifying and targeting specific ‘rights-holders’**, the most poor and oppressed people who may suffer multiple discriminations which impact on their ability to access and enjoy their rights;
- **Working with rights-holders**, valuing their knowledge and skills, and complementing these by developing new skills and confidence, and making available relevant information;
- **Creating spaces and organising people** into a reflection-action process and working with them to analyse power, challenge unequal power relations and secure human rights;
- **Building from the grassroots** to the national and international, understanding that each level has distinct but complementary role to play;
- **Linking with others**, including education coalitions, social movements, teachers’ unions, the media and government as appropriate, based on the understanding that we should be working together, complementing each others’ work, not competing with each other; or wasting resources through duplication of work;
- **Taking a holistic approach**, focusing on education as an entry point but recognising that there are many issues which impact on people’s ability to access education and that these are complex;
- **Exploring the roles of different stakeholders**, from local cultural custodians to the international financial institutions, all of whom need to be included in the struggle for education rights;
- Recognising the **centrality of gender** and power relations and their impact on people’s ability to access education or be involved in transforming education, and therefore prioritising work in this area;
- **Using participatory methods** to actively engage rights-holders in influencing, designing and monitoring education policy and delivery, ensuring that complex information is translated and repackaged to make it more accessible at the grassroots;
- Learning from and **documenting experiences**, and sharing these with other practitioners so that practice can continually improve and evolve;
- Being **honest about achievements**, not over claiming success and recognising that there are many different forces at play, and other initiatives which influence people’s reality. It is also important to be open about challenges and failures, which can be great for learning and strengthening practice. (Newman, 2007: 10)

It gave ideas as to the roles of people working at the local and national level on rights, and structured around ActionAid's six strategic goals in Education it gave a range of ideas for working at the local and national level on education rights, emphasising the importance of connecting across both levels.

Summary Contents

- **Introduction**
 - *Some background to the pack* (from service delivery to rights and human rights approaches)
 - *The pack itself* (what is it and who is it for)
- **Section 1: Understanding and Securing the Right to Education**
 - *Grounding the right to education locally* (introducing the right to education, making it meaningful, documenting rights abuses, local campaigning, analysing non-public schools)
 - *Working at the national level* (understanding the right to education, mobilising for constitutional amendments or new legislation, pursuing the legal option)
- **Section 2: Working with Excluded Groups**
 - *Strategies for action* (working with the excluded group and other key education stakeholders)
 - *Working with specific excluded groups* (Girls, disabled children, Pastoralists, minority groups, street children, child labourers, children affected by HIV, AIDS and conflict, children without citizenship)
- **Section 3: Financing Education**
 - *Understanding Budgets* (the budget cycle)
 - *Working at the local level: the school budget* (budget analysis, tracking and influencing)
 - *Work at the national level* (budget analysis, tracking and influencing, and working with statistics)
 - *Work at the international level* (understanding the influence of the IMF)
- **Section 4: Citizen Participation in Education**
 - *Working at the local level* (school management committees, working with children, working with other local groups)
 - *Working at the district level*
 - *Working at the national level* (education coalitions, lobbying, awareness raising and influencing, working with teachers' unions and social movements)
 - *Linking regionally and internationally*
- **Section 5: Rights in Education**
 - *Statistics and indicators of quality education* (what is quality education, how to collect, analyse, compile and use data)
 - *Putting rights in education into practice* (HIV and Education, violence against girls in school, engaging with the curriculum, Human Rights education and teachers' rights)

- **Section 6: Advancing a full 'Education for All' Agenda**
 - Early childhood care and education (*mapping, providing and documenting ECCE, campaigning for ECCE*)
 - Secondary education (*analysing and campaigning for secondary education*)
 - Adult Literacy (*Using the adult literacy benchmarks, Reflect, literacy and education rights*)

- **Annex: Useful resources and websites**

Appendix Four: Organisational Diagram

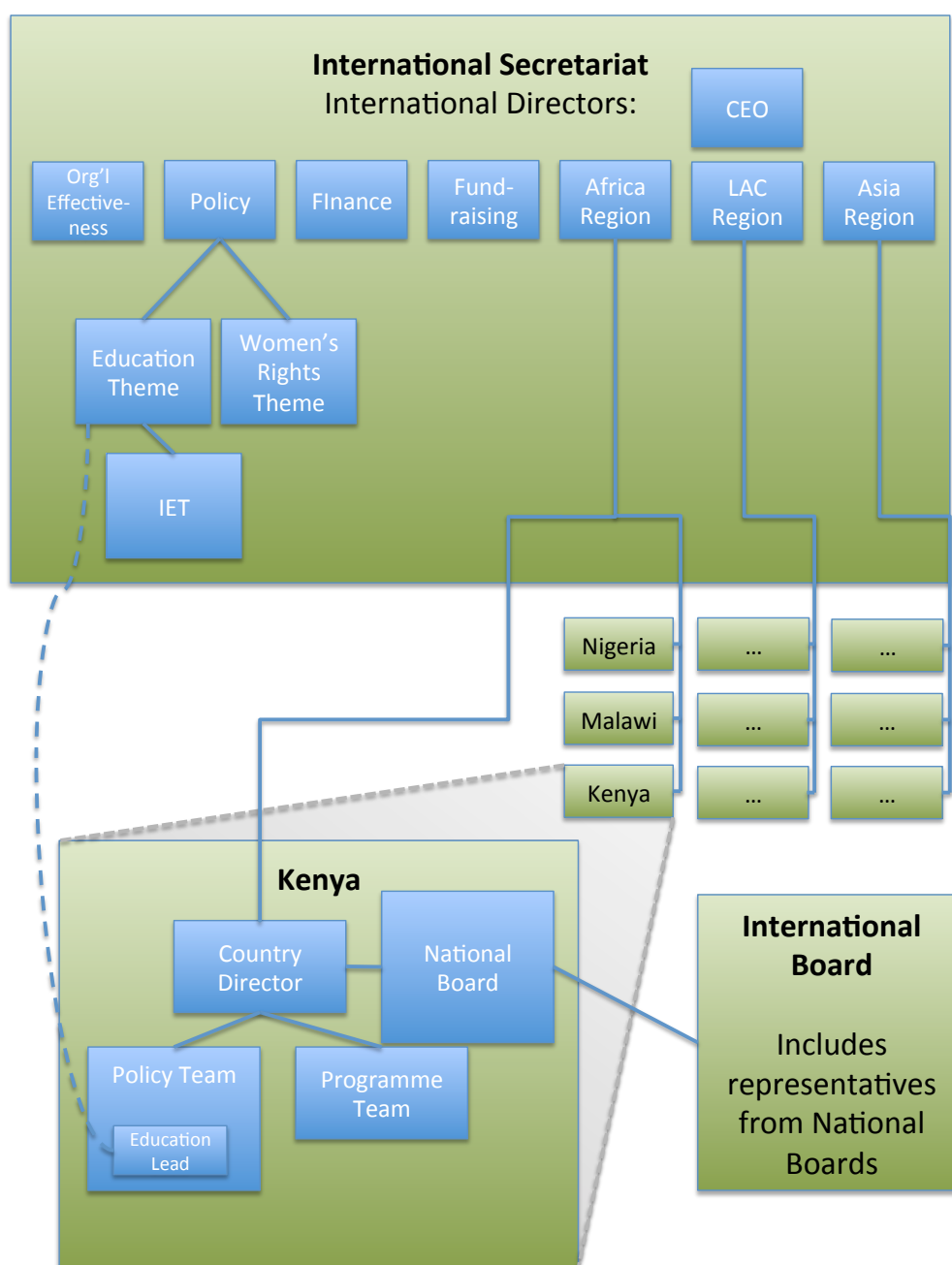


Illustration of the relationship between the International Secretariat and a representative Country Programme. The solid line shows management/governance responsibility and the dotted line indicates a relationship which does not include formal management.

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