

A vibrant photograph of two women in traditional African attire jumping joyfully in the air on a dirt path. They are surrounded by a group of other women in colorful dresses who are clapping and watching. The background features lush green hills, banana trees, and a clear blue sky with scattered clouds. The overall mood is one of celebration and community.

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ActionAid USA Country Strategy

2021 - 2023

More Action. Less Aid.

ActionAid is an international network building a just, equitable, and sustainable world in solidarity with communities on the frontlines of poverty and injustice. We know this can only be done by shifting power – towards communities and away from elites. And we know that aid as traditionally practiced does not accomplish this. That’s why we take action in partnership with people on the frontlines of poverty and injustice. Together, we tackle the symptoms of unequal power – poverty, hunger, gender-based violence, climate change, conflict, and disaster – and challenge the ideologies, legal systems, and social norms that lie underneath.

ActionAid embraces feminist leadership as necessary to moving our mission forward. We define feminist leadership as positive and inclusive use of power, focusing on care and well being. This guides our core values, theory of change, and objectives.

ActionAid USA is the U.S. branch of ActionAid International, which works in more than 50 countries to achieve social justice, gender equality, and poverty eradication. We influence U.S. policy and international institutions like the United Nations and elevate marginalized voices in the halls of power.

Our Vision

A just, equitable, and sustainable world in which every person enjoys the right to a life of dignity and freedom from poverty and all forms of oppression.

Our Mission

To realize social justice, gender equality, and poverty eradication by working with people living in poverty and exclusion, their communities, people’s organizations, activists, social movements, and supporters.

Our Core Values

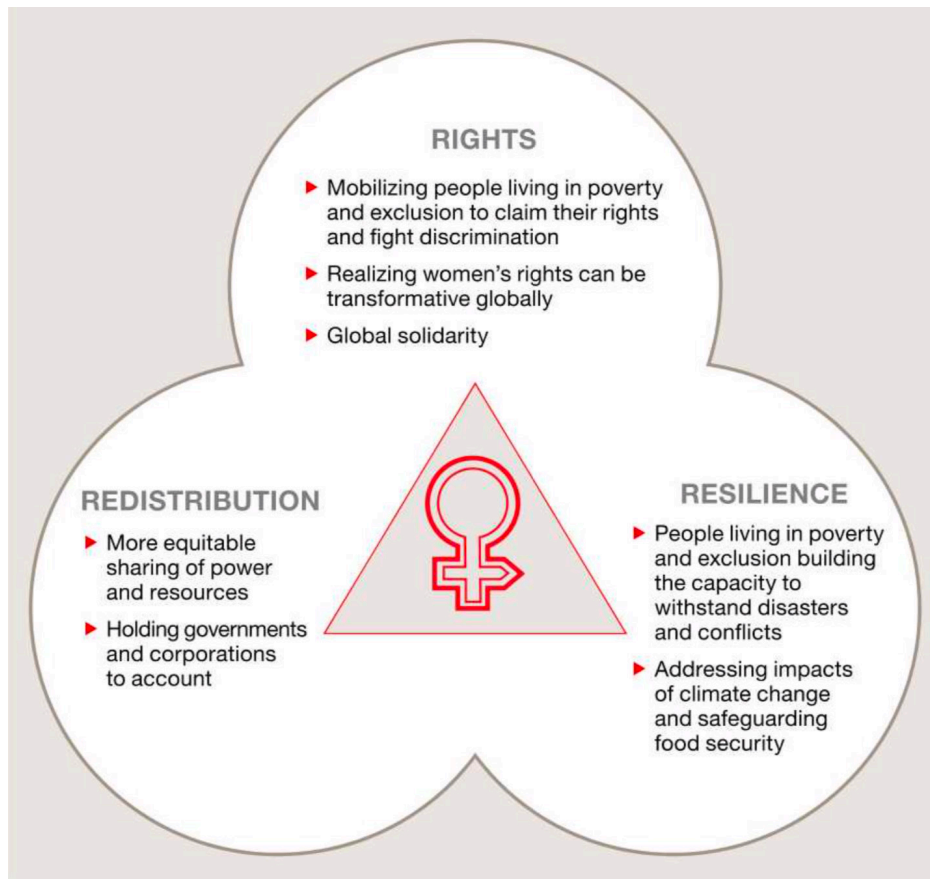
- ▶ **Mutual Respect:** We recognize the innate worth of all people and strive to embody intersectional feminist leadership principles.
- ▶ **Diversity, Equity and Inclusion:** We commit to being an anti-racist organization. We work to ensure the realization of our vision for everyone, irrespective of gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, caste, class, age, health status, ability, location, and religion – and to deepen our understanding of systemic racism and intersectionality.
- ▶ **Integrity:** We strive to be honest, transparent, and accountable with all internal and external stakeholders regarding the effectiveness of our actions and our use of resources, and to be open in our judgments and communications.
- ▶ **Solidarity:** We commit to being rooted within communities on the frontlines of poverty and injustice as we build a just, equitable, and sustainable world.
- ▶ **Courage of Conviction:** We seek to be creative, bold, and innovative in tackling the symptoms of unequal power – poverty, hunger, gender-based violence, climate change, conflict, and disaster – and in challenging the ideologies, systems, and norms that lie underneath.
- ▶ **Independence:** We are guided by facts, science, and the needs of communities, and we will develop and maintain procedures to avoid undue influence. We are also free of any religious or party-political affiliation.
- ▶ **Humility:** We recognize that we are part of a wider alliance against systemic poverty and injustice.

Our Theory of Change

Poverty, racism, gender-based violence, and climate devastation all derive from extreme imbalances in wealth, control of natural resources, and power. The inequality that we see today is the direct result of governance systems that have benefited elites at the expense of society at large.

The COVID-19 pandemic, racial justice uprisings, and increasingly devastating climate disasters lay bare how these structures continue to deepen inequality across the world. Even humanitarian aid and development assistance, when traditionally practiced within such systems and structures, can perpetuate unequal distribution of power and resources.

ActionAid is committed to a feminist, green, and just transition from our current crises to new systems of governance that represent and benefit all people. We believe that lasting change will only come when the current unequal distribution of power is rebalanced toward communities and those facing poverty and injustice and that people facing poverty and injustice hold the key to solving the intersecting problems they face.



Therefore, we are rooted in communities and take an intersectional feminist approach to claiming power. We partner with communities to exercise their rights and build their capacity to challenge oppressive ideologies, legal systems, and social norms. Together, we advance the solutions that work best for them.

Our Niche

ActionAid USA is part of a democratic federation, supporting collective goals to advance our vision and mission. We:

- ▶ Bring a global justice perspective to domestic policy work in the United States.
- ▶ Provide thought leadership in domestic and international policy spaces that is grounded in justice and equity, leveraging federation-wide experience in locally rooted work.
- ▶ Elevate voices of marginalized communities in halls of power by facilitating their participation and highlighting their stories in key decision-making spaces.
- ▶ Raise funds for federation work in the Global South and share our locally rooted development model with our supporters and the U.S.-based funding community.
- ▶ Promote feminist leadership as an organizational culture that builds stronger organizations that are capable of driving positive change in the world.

Our Objectives

The entirety of our previous country strategy took place during the Trump administration, which was hostile to our vision, mission, and goals as an organization. This strategy will take place in a different context, with a political opportunity to not only roll back the harms done under the previous administration, but also to right some of the wrongs that predate Trump.

Many U.S. social movements have become strengthened in the past few years – on issues from climate justice to racial justice – and the new administration has been somewhat responsive to civil society pressure. While its focus is largely domestic, the Biden administration is also seeking a return to internationalism after four years of “America First” policy that alienated many U.S. allies and abdicated U.S. leadership (for better or worse) in most, if not all, multilateral spaces. In particular, the Biden administration has been vocal about its elevation of climate change as a priority issue, including in international policy.

Given this reality, ActionAid USA will focus our resources on pushing for changes in U.S. policy that will have direct impacts on ActionAid’s priority issues as identified in the new ActionAid International Strategic Implementation Framework (SIF2). Our perspective, theory of change, and the outcomes that we seek will all remain international or global, but our short-term advocacy and campaigning objectives and targets will be more domestic, in contrast to the heavy focus on international venues that we have previously favored.

For example, in seeking to increase the flows and quality of climate finance to communities in the Global South, in the past we have focused almost exclusively on the UNFCCC and the Green Climate Fund. We will continue some work in these arenas, while adding a focus on the Biden administration and the U.S. Congress, which – should we succeed – could provide billions of dollars in the coming years to climate-related projects in the Global South.

Our renewed emphasis on domestic targets is intended to complement the federation’s international work. Our focus is on those U.S. policies that have direct impacts on the rest of the world and on the Global South in particular.



Calling for climate justice and challenging false solutions

Climate justice has long been a focus of ActionAid USA, and this work will now feed directly into the SIF2 thematic priority area of “System Change for Climate Justice.”

Decades of inaction by rich industrialized countries are coming to a head as climate impacts have worsened globally and the opportunity to limit warming to 1.5°C is rapidly diminishing. Climate impacts, including droughts, floods, heat waves and more frequent and intense extreme weather events, are on the rise. While no community is immune, the world’s poorest and most marginalized are hit hardest. The climate crisis, and failure of governments to respond decisively, reflects a broken social contract; corporate interests and short-term profits have been prioritized over the well-being of people and communities.

As the world’s largest historical emitter of greenhouse gases and one of its wealthiest countries, the United States has a unique responsibility for ambitious climate action. But instead of taking significant steps to reduce emissions and coming forward with the money needed to support developing countries to adapt to the impacts of climate change, the U.S. has repeatedly limited progress at the international level, only to walk away from international agreements it played a major role in crafting. This consistent denial of responsibility – under both Republican and Democratic administrations – must end if the world is to successfully act on climate change. Only through countries taking on their fair share of climate action can the necessary ambition be unlocked for the world to effectively act on climate change.

Given the urgency with which the world must address the climate crisis, and the need for countries like the United States to do our fair share, focusing on real solutions is of the utmost importance. Corporate interests and climate delayers are promoting an array of false solutions that fail to solve the crisis. In particular, the promotion of

negative emissions technologies especially in the land sector, such as Bioenergy with Carbon Capture and Storage (BECCS), is deeply concerning. These technologies are not only false solutions to climate change, but also threaten both the right to food and land rights.

In the next three years, ActionAid USA will pursue global climate justice by pushing the United States to do its fair share of climate action – both in terms of reducing our emissions as rapidly as possible, and providing support (primarily through climate finance) to enable climate action in Global South countries. This will include adaptation for vulnerable communities and a response to climate-related loss and damage. We will also continue our longstanding work to stop false solutions and ensure that the coming transition is as just, green, and feminist as possible.

To achieve these outcomes, we will:

- ▶ Work with allies in the U.S. climate movement and at the international level to embed a fair shares approach to climate action into the collective understanding of the process and the needed response.
 - ▶ Building on this shared understanding, we will seek to increase ambition in U.S. climate policy, both in domestic action and international support, particularly through a new Nationally Determined Contribution, appropriations for contributions to multilateral climate funds like the Green Climate Fund, and major national policy packages such as the Green New Deal.
 - ▶ In collaboration with allies, we will use the fair share frames in international and multilateral climate forums, such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to help unlock the necessary ambition globally.
- ▶ Raise awareness with climate justice allies, NGOs, and policy makers about the dangers of false solutions, such as BECCS, in the land sector where they will not only threaten climate action, but also put food and land rights at risk.
- ▶ Collaborate with family farmer and progressive allies to develop a vision for an environmentally, socially, and economically just vision for agriculture in the United States, while holding policy makers accountable to communities and farmers, not agribusiness companies.
- ▶ Continue to be thought leaders within the progressive climate movement, especially in building solidarity between impacted and vulnerable communities in the U.S. and around the world, the intersections between climate impacts and migration, and calling for a just transition in climate action, particularly for those most vulnerable to the crisis.

In addition to this core work, we will seek out funding to begin important work to:

- ▶ Address climate-induced migration and displacement, which is likely to be one of the biggest global trends in coming years. ActionAid is currently doing pioneering work on climate-induced migration in South Asia and there are active efforts to link this to policy and campaigning work in the US.



Photo: Rodrigo Carvalho/ActionAid

Transforming agricultural systems through agroecology and a strong U.S. food rights movement

Advocating for a just transition away from industrial agriculture systems that are bad for farmers, eaters, and the planet, towards more sustainable and inclusive agroecological approaches, has been another longstanding pillar of ActionAid USA work. This work will continue, in the context of the SIF2 Climate Justice thematic priority area.

Globally, we produce enough food to feed every person on the planet. Yet nearly 700 million people go to bed hungry every night. Countries around the world have committed to ending global hunger, achieving food security, improving nutrition, and promoting sustainable agriculture. The next three years will be pivotal in shaping the transformation we need towards a more economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable food system.

More investment in small-scale, locally owned agriculture is key to this transformation. Smallholder farmers grow 70% of the world's food; these farmers use agroecological farming practices centered on sustainability, and can therefore feed the world while preserving the environment. Women, who do most of the work on many of the world's farms, need specific financial and political support to make their farms a success.

But the expansion of industrialized agriculture has led to the dismantling of public support for local agriculture and increased corporate control of natural resources. It is also a major driver of climate change, with devastating impacts for farms all over the world. These factors make it more difficult for local food producers to make a decent living and feed the planet.

The U.S., where food insecurity and malnutrition are rapidly increasing, is a particularly powerful example of the false promises of an industrial model. The coronavirus pandemic has shown how broken the social contract is in our food and farm system, with farmers going bankrupt, food and farm workers exploited and endangered, and millions more pushed into hunger while agribusiness grows bigger and stronger.

Political representation of farmers' organizations and rural workers' movements in policy spaces is essential to challenging the status quo. Promoting policy changes to transition agriculture toward agroecology also requires meaningful involvement of the people directly affected by these policies and the solutions they have developed.

In the next three years, ActionAid USA will work to transform the food system into one that better serves farmers – particularly women smallholder and family farmers in both the Global South and the United States – and that serves environmental and climate justice rather than contributing to ecological collapse.

We believe that connecting farm and food justice movements in the United States and the Global South is a powerful tool for demonstrating that the model of industrial agriculture our country is forcing upon the rest of the world does not work for farmers or the environment – here at home, or abroad. *We will:*

- ▶ Advocate to improve policies and increase budget support for small-scale, agroecological agriculture in the Global South by engaging with donors in global spaces on food security and nutrition:
 - ▶ Increase the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program's (GAFSP) support for small scale food producers to finance their own projects and organizations.
 - ▶ Build better policy coherence between the projects financed by the GAFSP and the policy initiatives put forth at the United Nations' Committee on World Food Security (CFS), especially on agroecology.
- ▶ Promote rural women's rights, the right to food, agroecology and land rights as the core elements of a successful strategy to meet global commitments to end hunger and transform the current food system.
 - ▶ Advocate for the GAFSP, the CFS, and the FSS to include rural women's rights, the right to food, agroecology, and land rights in their policies, programs, and final outcomes.

- ▶ Support the involvement of the U.S. food rights movements and grassroots organizations in national and global food spaces, especially the UN Committee on World Food Security and the UN Food Systems Summit to have more voice and visibility, both internationally and nationally, in deciding the policies that impact their lives:
 - ▶ Provide support and assistance to grassroots and civil society networks of U.S. food justice and anti-hunger organizations to enable them to play an active role in the global food security debate, by engaging in the civil society organizing spaces for the GAFSP, the CFS, and the FSS, and pressing for the U.S. to acknowledge and promote the right to food through the adoption of a Congressional resolution on the right to food in the U.S., as part of the broader strategy for food justice and food sovereignty.
 - ▶ Strengthen and align civil society organizations in the U.S. to push US food and farm policy to prioritize the needs of farmers and workers instead of the corporate agenda, particularly at the intersection of climate and agricultural policy, increasing democratic decision-making by farmers, workers, communities, and other rights holders, in accordance with recognition of the right to food.
 - ▶ Support frontline organizations to engage in national and global food and agriculture policymaking and the shaping of political priorities for major legislation and international human rights frameworks.



Fighting for the right to land for communities

Access to and control over land is vital for rural communities around the world, especially for women and marginalized groups, because it is the main way they produce food and secure their livelihoods. International human rights frameworks, particularly the rights to food and housing, give rural and urban communities a fundamental right to access land. ActionAid USA will continue our pioneering work on these issues, which fit into ActionAid International's SIF2 Climate Justice thematic priority area, in particular as a "Redistribution" issue.

Communities' right to land is threatened by lack of legal recognition, by ongoing attempts to privatize land tenure arrangements that already exist, and by new attempts by the financial and agribusiness sectors to turn farmland into a financial asset, making access to land for food production dependent on who has the most money. These threats to the right to land come at a time when indigenous and local communities of food producers, especially women, are facing more and more challenges to their survival on the land, as the power of agribusiness companies continues to increase, and as global trade and policy support the interests of multinationals.

Moreover, the threats to community land rights and the expansion of agribusiness present one of the greatest threats to the Earth. Deforestation for large-scale cropping destroys biodiversity and is a major driver of the climate crisis, as well as

pandemic disease. Recognition of the rights to land are therefore integral to stopping climate change and protecting global health.

Financial actors engaged in land grabbing include pension and retirement funds, who manage money on behalf of workers, and who have little knowledge of how their money is being used. Instead of funding a sustainable future, workers' savings are funding a failed model of agriculture and undermining community land rights.

Wealthy governments and intergovernmental institutions such as the World Bank are the major funders of land governance efforts, yet these efforts often make land more accessible to agribusiness and financial interests, rather than protect the rights of communities, women, and marginalized groups.

In the next three years, ActionAid USA will work to stop communities' loss of land to agribusiness and other corporations, through interventions targeting international financial institutions, institutional investors, and other major actors whose actions have a direct impact on the land rights of marginalized communities. *We will:*

- ▶ Work with social movements and civil society organizations in international policy spaces such as the UN Committee on World Food Security, World Bank meetings, and the meetings of major land governance donors to shift their program priorities and funding towards protecting the long-term land rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, emphasizing the land rights of women.
- ▶ Work with farmers, workers, and international civil society to challenge the financialization of farmland, educating the pension fund managers that are engaging in farmland speculation and raising public awareness. We will work to stop retirement funds from being invested in land, seek the adoption of public policies that stop the loss of land to financial actors, and protect its accessibility for local communities, marginalized groups, women, and young people.
- ▶ Support grassroots efforts to access land for communities in the US and promote policy ideas that can support farmers and workers to scale up production of sustainable, ecological, and socially produced food.



Mobilizing resources in the U.S. to support the work of ActionAid in the Global South

Shifting resources toward marginalized communities in the Global South is critical to building their power over time. Given the concentration of wealth in the U.S., a major component of ActionAid USA's value add is raising funds to support humanitarian response, women's rights, climate justice, sustainable agriculture, land rights, education, and economic justice work being carried out within ActionAid USA and across the ActionAid federation. Through our fundraising work, we also aim to support ActionAid country offices and partners in the Global South to build resources and influence, with the ultimate goal of facilitating financial sustainability and sovereignty.

ActionAid USA is uniquely positioned within the ActionAid federation and our own country context to achieve these outcomes. The US continues to be one of the most charitable countries in the world. In the most recent year for which data was available, Americans had donated nearly \$450 billion dollars to charity, with approximately 6% going towards international and environmental causes. Yet, a global pandemic, a national movement toward racial justice, and rising recognition of the gravity of the climate crisis, find the philanthropic sector – and nearly every other sector – at a time of great uncertainty. Bearing this in mind and considering ActionAid USA's ongoing ambition to become a sustainable, resource secure organization, we find ourselves at a time of exploration, growth, and learning.

ActionAid USA has traditionally relied on grant funding from U.S.-based foundations to cover operational costs and support the work of the international ActionAid

federation. Yet, as giving by individuals, foundations, and corporations increases each year, competition for funding has increased as well, with the number of charitable organizations in the US growing to 1.33 million in 2019. We have therefore determined that diversifying our fundraising channels is key to building a strong, financially sound organization.

Over the next three years, with robust foundations funding, a maturing major gifts program, an unrealized individual giving program, and an initial exploration of corporate philanthropy, we will:

- ▶ Strengthen foundations partnerships and explore new avenues of foundations funding by building on our existing relationships and knowledge to raise funds and leverage influence towards advocacy objectives. This will include developing new ways of engaging foundation prospects and deepening our relationship with existing foundation partners through securing grants across multiple programs and cultivating visibility at all levels.
- ▶ Use our strength in relationship building and multiple thematic areas of focus to secure increased and more diverse unrestricted revenue from current and prospective major donors, and when opportunities arise, secure restricted revenue tailored to individuals' specific interests and the needs of the federation.
- ▶ Utilize digital channels to offer clear, compelling stories and evidence of change, encouraging our supporters to make financial contributions to enable ActionAid to fulfill our mission.
- ▶ Conduct a scoping of the corporate philanthropic market in the US in order to determine whether ActionAid USA has a competitive edge for corporate funding. If the scoping indicates strong potential, we will build out internal systems for vetting, securing, and implementing corporate funding, cultivating relationships with suitable, aligned corporate donors.
- ▶ Provide thought leadership, particularly as it relates to the importance of true cost recovery for NGOs and their partners. Seeing resources as power, help to facilitate access to resources and platforms for progressive, women-centered NGOs and their partners.



Advancing Feminist Leadership

Feminist leadership seeks to transform patriarchal dynamics of dominance and subordination within organizations. It tells us that we can become powerful by making those around us feel empowered, able, and respected. It seeks power *with* others instead of power *over* others. At ActionAid, we define feminist leadership as positive and inclusive use of power both to build effective organizations and to drive transformational change in the world. We embrace feminist leadership not only because it is consistent with feminist values and principles – a way of “walking the talk” – but also because it is necessary to succeed in our mission.

We have already started incorporating principles of feminist leadership into our organizational culture. Doing so has shown the benefits of inclusivity and sharing power, particularly when navigating big organizational challenges. We have overcome several such challenges, including working through a pandemic, with unity and mutual respect. A feminist leadership approach also guides our engagement with other country offices, making way for more productive working relationships.

Over the next three years, we will:

- ▶ Share our experiences applying feminist leadership to organizational challenges and build stronger partnerships with peer organizations and within the federation.
- ▶ Conduct primers or trainings for peer organizations on feminist leadership.
- ▶ Apply a feminist leadership lens to policy, advocacy, and communications, in particular our engagement with coalitions and building common positions.
- ▶ Apply a feminist leadership lens to fundraising, in particular holding foundations and other key funders accountable to such practices.
- ▶ Annually evaluate and improve our internal implementation of feminist leadership.