

## **Anti-racism and decolonisation at ActionAid UK**

### **Racism - A definition**

Racism is... race prejudice and social and institutional power

Racism is... a system of advantage based on race

Racism is... a system of oppression based on race

Racism is... a white supremacy system

Racism is different from racial prejudice, hatred, or discrimination. Racism involves one group having the power to carry out systematic discrimination through the institutional policies and practices of the society in question, and by shaping the cultural beliefs and values that support those racist policies and practices. Source: "What Is Racism?" – Dismantling Racism Works (dRworks)

*This definition of racism is grounded in Critical Race Theory.*

*It is being used by BOND in their report 'Racism, power and truth: Experiences of people of colour in development.'*

### **Anti-racism - A definition**

Anti-racism is strategies, theories, actions, and practices that challenge, and counter racism, inequalities, prejudices, and discrimination based on race<sup>i</sup>.

To be anti-racist takes consistent willpower. It requires daily intention. It means in addition to accepting that racism exists, you are educating yourself and working to eradicate racism from within.

To be anti-racist means you are actively engaging in opportunities to dismantle racist policies wherever they exist.

To be anti-racist is to fight for equity. It demands that you use your privilege to help those who are marginalized and to dismantle anti-Blackness. As an ally and co-conspirator, you take up the fight for what's right and what's equitable. You look at the institutions and systems you encounter with a critical thinking lens, questioning the status quo. If you see something, you say something.<sup>ii</sup>

### **ActionAid UK Context and approach**

Over 20 years ago, ActionAid recognised that there were large imbalances in power and huge inequality across the many countries in which ActionAid works, often as a result of systemic racism and colonialism, and we made a commitment to challenge unequal power and lack of voice in Global Majority countries.

This led to the decision to move our federation headquarters to South Africa, to embark on the process of ensuring country programmes are led at a local level and that all of our member countries have an equal vote, signalling our commitment to shifting power, decolonising aid and development.

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Since then we have been aiming to turn our focus away from Northern INGOs and listen to the women and girls we work with globally, as well as those living in poverty or experiencing marginalisation, standing in solidarity with them so they can claim their rights and shape their own futures.

Our core messages around fighting for social justice, advocating for equality and ending poverty are as instrumental now as they have ever been.

This shift is something that we are still proud of today, even though at some levels it is still a work in progress. We are a federation made up of members mostly run and governed by People of Colour. Our General Assembly, the International Board, our International Leadership Team and the team of country directors across the Federation are testament to that commitment and a result of that journey. Our diversity is our strength.

That said, we also recognise that Black, indigenous people and People of Colour experience profound harm due to centuries of structural racism – and are also currently bearing the disproportionate impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic where deep injustices and needs for systems change have been revealed. And ActionAid is not exempt from the impacts of structural and deeply embedded racism and discrimination that are prevalent in our world.

ActionAid UK has made a commitment to becoming decolonised and anti-racist – this is a key organisational priority that now cuts across everything we do.

Anti-racism and decolonisation are embedded in our 2023-2025 strategic plans and all teams are actively reviewing their areas of work and identifying improvements which can be made.

As part of this commitment, we are exploring how we can evolve our fundraising and marketing content and ensure we avoid presenting single stories as the only narrative, or stereotyping the rights holders we work with and perpetuating colonial tropes.

One example of this is our 'Women by Women' campaign, which aims to redress the power imbalance and white gaze of INGO photography by shining a spotlight on the incredible – but often overlooked – talent of women photographers in the countries where we work.

ActionAid UK has also held a series of discussions with Colleagues of Colour within the organisation to understand how racism has affected them, and how we can progress our journey towards becoming an anti-racist organisation. These discussions have recently been completed, and we are now working with Colleagues of Colour to put together well-resourced plans to take us forward.

We recognise that there is still much more to be done, and we are committed to self-reflection and continuous improvement to ensure we become an actively anti-racist organisation.

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### **Additional information**

Here are the anti-racist storytelling principles that we now work to in all our communications at ActionAid UK:

- ActionAid's images and footage depict people with dignity and humanity.
- ActionAid's images and stories represent people in an authentic way, with their full consent.
- Our intention is to never tell a single or stereotyped story about a person or a place.
- We commission local women photographers who understand the local context, to tell the stories of women and girls and young people living there.
- Our storytelling emphasizes humanity, individuality, agency, courage, and hope.
- Through the experiences shared in our storytelling, we aim to foster empathy, not pity, in our audiences.

Please let us know if you would like more information or to discuss this further with us, as it is one of the most important aspects of this project and we want to ensure these aims are at the heart of any new product(s) we develop.

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<sup>i</sup> Source, 23.08.21, <https://simmons.libguides.com/anti-oppression/anti-racism>

<sup>ii</sup> The three paragraphs starting, "To be anti-racist," are drawn from a piece written by an organisation called The AntiRacist Table. Here is the original version in full.  
<https://theantiracisttable.com/index.php/blog-news-resources/>