

ActionAid UK Manifesto: Building a just world

Over the past 5 years, ActionAid has witnessed injustice deepening because of multiple global challenges, including the cost-of-living crisis, rollbacks on women and girls' rights, attacks on human rights, a climate emergency, and protracted and new conflicts. These crises have not happened by accident – economic and political decisions and practices have created and perpetuated them.

Women and girls experience multiple disadvantages as a result of patriarchal, colonial and racist social norms and behaviours, and in all the world's most pressing challenges, women and girls experience them disproportionately. Despite facing these threats, women and girls in all their diversity are leading the responses to the world's challenges. Using their unique understanding of their communities, they can provide the long-term solutions needed, without leaving anyone behind. Yet, women's and girls' rights organisations and voices remain undervalued, under-represented in decision-making spaces and chronically under-funded.

A transformational approach is needed to address the root causes of this injustice and build a fairer world. The next UK Government has an important role to play in this process. This will require political courage and leadership but with this in place, a just world is possible.

1

Becoming a genuine international development and humanitarian partner

The UK has positioned itself as a 'global leader' in international development and humanitarian response and successive governments have rightly championed the importance of women and girls' rights. Yet, as conflict, instability and poverty have increased, the UK

has cut Official Development Assistance (ODA), which has had a devastating impact on women and girls. If the UK is to regain trust it is vital that cuts to ODA are reversed and the UK returns to its legal commitment to spend 0.7% of GNI on ODA.

The next UK Government should:

- Ensure that all policies and funding - domestic and international – are coherent in prioritising the rights of women and girls, in all their diversity.
- Return to meeting the UK's legal commitment to spend 0.7% of GNI on ODA and stop using the UK's ODA budget for domestic spending.
- Ensure the UK's humanitarian action is immediate, consistent, sufficient and meets the needs of women and girls, through meaningful partnership with women's and girls' rights organisations.
- Retain and resource a Cabinet level International Development Minister to ensure that development decisions, including on budget and spend, are considered at the highest level of Government.

2

Championing women's leadership in peacebuilding, humanitarian and development

Women and girls are often on the frontline of the world's greatest challenges and are leading the responses to them. In times of crisis and conflict, the inequalities women face are exacerbated – with reduced access to services and an increase in all types of gender-based violence and exploitation.

Yet, women are in the best position to understand the root causes of the challenges they face and the needs and realities of women and girls, due to long-standing and trusted relationships in their communities. Without them it would be impossible to identify and deliver the life-saving services women, girls and other marginalised groups' need – especially in times of crisis – and advocate for their rights.

ActionAid knows that promoting women's leadership in the overlapping peacebuilding, humanitarian and development settings, is the fairest and most effective use of the ODA budget¹. Evidence shows that women's leadership can secure transformative change on gender

The next UK Government should:

- Ensure a focus on gender equality and increase the percentage of ODA for women's and girls' rights organisations. The next Government should also track and publish its progress on this.
- Ensure all ODA funding for women's and girls' rights organisations is long-term, core, flexible and for the self-determined priorities of those organisations. Crucially, funding streams cannot be siloed, instead spanning development, peacebuilding and humanitarian initiatives.
- Meet its international commitments on gender equality. This includes delivering the UK's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security and to ensure 25% of humanitarian funding goes to national and local actors, including women's and girls' rights organisations.
- Ensure all UK-funded programmes are meaningfully informed, by gendered analysis

equalityⁱⁱ and can lead to long-term changeⁱⁱⁱ. Yet, in 2019, funding towards women's rights organisations was just 0.2% of total UK ODA.^{iv} Shifting resources and power to women's and girls' rights organisations must be a priority for the next UK Government.

and the voices, leadership and demands of women and girls at all stages of the policy and programme cycle, through direct consultation, review and evaluation with women's and girls' rights organisations.

- Promote and resource the meaningful participation and influence of women and girls within national and global decision-making spaces and structures, including in humanitarian response and peacebuilding.

3 Building a fair and feminist economy

The current global economic system is failing. Prioritising economic growth, boosting corporate profits, and supporting the privatisation of public services have not eradicated poverty and inequality. Instead, these actions are destroying the planet and exacerbating inequalities rooted in colonialism and racism.

For women and girls, it is an approach which completely undervalues their paid and unpaid care work and the foundational role it plays in our society and economy. When public services are privatised or cut because of austerity, women are triply impacted – as workers in the public sector, as the primary users of public services and when their unpaid care work increases to plug the gap left by inaccessible, unavailable or unaffordable services.

There is a lack of coherence between the UK's development and economic goals. There is an assumption that economic growth and job creation will automatically lead to gender equality and the elimination of poverty. At the same time, the UK's approach ignores the gendered impact of macroeconomic decisions on tax and debt. UK tax havens, for example, result in significant lost revenue for the 'Global South' that could be invested in the provision of high-quality public services in those countries.

ActionAid has long championed feminist economic alternatives and this movement is gaining ground. This approach recognises the central role of women's paid and unpaid care work and places wellbeing, human rights and the environment at the centre of all economic decision-making.

The next UK Government should:

- Recognise the foundational role of women and girls' paid and unpaid care work and champion economic policies that prioritise care, wellbeing, human rights and the planet including greater investment in quality, universal, gender-responsive public services.
- Introduce new UK legislation on business, human rights and the environment, which would place a mandatory requirement on all UK companies, including platform tech companies and financial institutions, to undertake gendered human rights and environmental due diligence of their activities and supply chains, and to ensure access to remedy.
- Support a UN Binding Treaty on Business and Human Rights and a UN Tax Convention.
- Use its position on the Boards of the IMF and World Bank to urge against policy advice which undermines the ability of states to meet their gender equality obligations and encourage investment in quality, universal gender-responsive public services.
- Urgently and proactively engage in global discussions to restructure and cancel the debt of countries facing debt distress and promote progressive forms of taxation.

ⁱⁱSee for example: Mala Hutn and S. Laurel Weldon, [The Civic Origins of Progressive Policy Change: Combating Violence against Women in Global Perspective, 1975–2005 on JSTOR](#), and ODI – see: [Mobilising for change: how women's social movements are transforming gender norms | ODI: Think change](#).

ⁱⁱⁱOxfam Canada, [A Feminist Approach to Localization: How Canada Can Support the Leadership of Women's Rights Actors in Humanitarian Action](#)

^{iv}Care International, [Policy briefing - UK leadership on gender equality globally.pdf \(careinternational.org.uk\)](#)

4

Delivering a just feminist climate transition

While the climate emergency impacts everyone, it does not affect everyone equally. It's unjust that those who are least responsible for causing the crisis are bearing the heaviest burdens, facing lost livelihoods and displacement. ActionAid knows that climate change worsens gender inequality. For instance, women are disproportionately affected by undernutrition after droughts, and girls are more likely to drop out of school following extreme weather events. Additionally, climate change exacerbates food and water insecurity, conflict, gender-based violence, and displacement.

Despite these threats, women and girls are leading responses to the climate emergency^v. Women have the knowledge and expertise that can be used in climate change mitigation and disaster risk reduction^{vi} and evidence shows that women's participation in decision-making results in more effective climate change solutions^{vii}.

The next UK Government must acknowledge the UK's historical role in and ongoing contribution to climate change. It must commit to addressing loss and damage by allocating new and additional funds. Additionally, promoting the leadership of women and girls is crucial to building resilience and addressing the disproportionate impacts they face from climate-related loss and damage.

Simultaneously, as the epicentre of the global financial sector, the UK hosts major banks that invest billions in harmful industries like fossil fuels, extractives, and industrial agriculture. These industries directly impact the land and resources vital to the well-being of women, girls, and their communities. To counter this, new legislation is essential to compel financial institutions to reduce their support for such harmful industries.

The next UK Government should:

- Provide new and additional International Climate Finance, proportionate to the UK's historical responsibility in the climate crisis and to the resources needed by those impacted and facing losses and damages and those urgently needing adaptation support. This funding should be in the form of grants and not loans, so as not to exacerbate the debt distress of other governments.
- Ensure alignment between domestic and international policy agendas on climate through domestic legislation and policy and by ensuring collaboration between government departments. This includes scaling up domestic climate commitments to meet its net-zero target in 2050.
- Build strong and equitable partnerships with, and shift power and resources to women's rights organisations who are leading initiatives on adaptation and resilience to climate change.
- End public subsidies to fossil fuel companies and ensure that international banks are held accountable for human rights harms, environmental harms caused by their supply chains (see recommendation on new legislation in section 3).

^vActionAid UK, [Escalating Climate Emergencies | ActionAid UK](#)

^{vi}UN, https://www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/climate_change/downloads/Women_and_Climate_Change_Factsheet.pdf

^{vii}See for example: Astghik Mavisakalyan and Yashar Tarverdi, [EconStor: Gender and climate change: Do female parliamentarians make difference?](#)

