

Promoting Opportunities for Women's Empowerment and Rights (POWER) project

2019 Annual Report

Period covered by report: January to December 2019

Grant holder: ActionAid UK (AAUK)

Implementing countries: ActionAid Ghana (AAG), ActionAid Rwanda (AAR), ActionAid Bangladesh (AAB)

Project locations: Ghana (Nanumba North and South districts, Talensi, Nabdam, Jirapa, Asutifi South, Train and Adaklu districts), Rwanda (Nyanza, Gisagara and Nyaruguru districts in the Southern Province, Musanze district in the Northern Province and Karongi district in Western Province), Bangladesh (Gaibandha, Dinajpur and Lalmonirhat districts)

Partners: Ghana (Songtaba, Bonatadu, Widows and Orphans Movement (WOM), Global Action for Women Empowerment (GLOWA) and Social Development and Improvement Agency (SODIA), Rwanda (Duhozanye, Faith Victory Association and Tubibe Amahoro), Bangladesh (SKS Foundation).

Long term objective: To contribute to the increased economic empowerment of women

Specific objective: 19,500 women in Ghana, Rwanda and Bangladesh have increased income and ability to control their income through practicing climate resilient sustainable agriculture, accessing markets and reducing, recognising and redistributing unpaid care work.

Target group: 19,500 rural women (smallholder farmers, producers and processors) (6,000 in Ghana, 7,350 in Rwanda, 6,150 in Bangladesh and 5,020 men (3,000 in Ghana, 1,000 in Rwanda, 1,020 in Bangladesh, local authorities, Government ministries, FAO, African Union and South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation

Overview

During its fourth year of implementation (2019) the POWER project continued to record good results among the women's groups. At the start of the year the project reallocated funds after the closure of ActionAid Pakistan, which created an opportunity to expand the number of women's groups, expanding efforts to work on Violence Against Women and Girls and reducing, redistributing unpaid care work with more time saving interventions in Rwanda and Bangladesh as well as scaling up research and advocacy efforts for the AAUK and Global Secretariat. However, In Bangladesh the Government approval process was slow for utilisation of the additional funds, resulting in some delays in implementation.

In terms of context: patriarchy, lack of mobility for women and climate change continued to impact on the rural women farmers.

Overall areas of significant impact and results for the year varied by country in line with local contexts, but all suggest increasing results aligned with our theory of change towards increased economic empowerment of women. In Ghana, significant impact was realised, particularly on the issues of addressing violence against women and unpaid care work. In Rwanda, registration of women's groups as cooperatives, group savings and community selling points were most impactful. In Bangladesh, significant results were realised in terms of market access where a national market place (Aauhri) was set up as well as reduction of unpaid care work which released women to be able to participate in various income generating activities.

Although there were frustrations with government systems, for example, lack of political will to implement reforms after strong advocacy by women's groups, women's confidence and ability to engage authorities improved in all three countries. In Ghana, women were able to participate actively in local government elections with some being elected into local posts. They were also able to demand improved access to water and increase their agricultural production. The theory of change was relevant as the reduction of unpaid care work led to the women having more time to engage in agricultural activities and community activities. Similarly, in Bangladesh, there was a significant improvement in women's ability to engage in community leadership and participation in community activities. Women in Bangladesh actively worked in solidarity with each other in an effort to stamp out violence against women. At regional and international level, women were able to raise their voices and advocate through African Union (AU), South Asia Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC), and Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and UNESCAP. The AU also launched the final gender strategy which included unpaid care work as one of the outcomes in the 2018-2028 strategy.

The changes noted by the project are very sustainable as the communities have internalised the redistribution of unpaid care work. The women's groups will continue to meet after the project has ended due to the voluntary savings which they now use to attend to their daily needs as well a commitment to activism through regular meetings by the reflect groups. The policy changes made in Rwanda on ECDs and on the rural women in agriculture in Bangladesh will continue long after the project has ended.

Outcome 1: By the end of 2020 19,500 rural women are organised and are able to demand their rights as farmers and carers and have greater influence in their households and communities

The women's groups have been mobilised and organised bringing the total number of women to 19,781 (6,280 in Ghana, 6,151 in Bangladesh and 7,350 in Rwanda). In Ghana, some women's groups started their own groups without funding after seeing the success of the project. In all countries, women mobilised, lobbied and advocated for their rights to access water, agricultural inputs and safety nets. The most significant results were reported for women's participation in local leadership, addressing and fighting violence against women, increasing income and agricultural production and improved market access. There was also vibrant advocacy which led to policy reviews in early childhood development policy, agricultural policies and inclusion of unpaid care work in national dialogue and policies. Many of the women's groups independently organised activities that went beyond the project objectives, for example setting up independent child care centres in Bangladesh by women not part of the project, applying for independent funds for income generating activities with other groups as in Ghana, engaging in microfinancing as in Rwanda. This is a string indicator that the groups will be sustainable after the project has ended.

Women's participation in leadership and local structures

As a result of using reflection action methods and regular meetings, the women's group members have been able to build their self-confidence and participate in local elections and community structures. Thus, in all three countries, there has been an increase in the involvement of women in community structures. For example, in Bangladesh women participated in school management committees, market management committees, Violence Against Women Standing Committees and Parent Teacher Associations. This has resulted in project participants and other women in the community gaining access to different services such as the Vulnerable Group Development Card, old age allowance and work schemes from Upazila Parishads. In Ghana, there was strong engagement with local authorities to have access to water to reduce the burden of unpaid care work, as a result of which women's groups were successful in getting access to potable water and in some cases, boreholes were drilled. In Ghana, the women's groups were invited to input into the District Medium Term Plan and the districts established a business advisory centre with advisory services. In Rwanda¹, 66% project participants belong to one or more leadership positions in the community and 34% are heads of leadership committees of different decision-making structures. Therefore, the results in this area are emerging as intended in the theory of change with a lot of empowerment happening at individual level with a multiplier effect on collective action. Women have been able to challenge existing structural power and patriarchy. Women can articulate issues that affect them directly with local leaders. The women are also providing a role model for the young girls to take up leadership in the future. However, there were also challenges intaking up leadership positions as the nature of leadership positions in these community structures are long-term tenures (2-5years) and some positions require education or literacy. This also acts as a barrier as some of the women farmers have low literacy levels.

Gender sensitive accountability and transparency

The women's groups engagements also resulted in improved accountability by local authorities in all countries with new practices being put into place. For example, in Bangladesh 6 out of 12 Union Parishads printed out their annual budgets and displayed them on boards in public places. This was a key achievement for local level advocacy of women's groups who advocated for gender-sensitive budget preparation and it set an example of transparency and accountability as well. In Rwanda, the government became more accountable as they also shared their allocation of the budget which allowed women to be able to track and monitor the budget. In Ghana women were invited to attend the Mid-Term Plan review and advocated for the inclusion of needs related to unpaid care work.

Violence Against Women

In terms of addressing violence against women, it was reported that women in POWER's target groups are no longer afraid to report violence to the relevant institutions. For example, in Ghana, more women are aware and

¹ Based on a mini survey conducted at end of Q4 by AA Rwanda

use the reporting structures such as the COMBAT, Commission of Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHIRAJ), Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit. Women in Bangladesh have come together for joint action on violence against women and girls and have united across the federation to collectively demand justice during court hearings. The role of women has been so significant that the Government of Bangladesh has awarded six women leaders from the POWER project the 'Joyeeta Award'².



Picture 1&2: Beli Begum from Gaibandha (left) and Minara Begum from Lalmonirhat (right) receive the 'Joyeeta Award'.

In Rwanda, women have enhanced capacity in documenting, referral and support to VAWG cases in the community and were equipped with necessary skills and knowledge to improve services in reporting VAWG cases emerging in the communities. Women's ability to report cases of VAWG has been enhanced through the Violence Against Women and Girls digitized system which helps women to report cases of violence with full privacy while using their handsets and a web-based application. In the Northern Region of Ghana there was significant progress with regards to the reduction of domestic violence due to the active functioning of COMBAT, anti-violence platforms and their effective interaction with the women's groups. There has been a reduction of incidence of violence reported during the period between 2018 and 2019. For example, in 2018, a total of 42 cases were reported in the 12 communities where the POWER project is being implemented and resolved while others were referred to the police. In 2019, the number of reported cases saw a reduction from 42 to 12 cases in some Jirapa and Adaklu.

Reflection on Theory of Change

The project annual review processes found unplanned outcomes for outcome 1 where women, having recognised their strengths as collectives, have formed their own independent groups and taken action on issues beyond the scope of the project. For example, on teenage pregnancy, girls' access to education, and reforestation. They have also gained access to social protection schemes. This demonstrates the effectiveness of the approach underlying the POWER Theory of Change and ActionAid's Human Rights Based Approach which relies on the wider and multiplying impact of collective action. During the annual review meeting it was noted that in some cases, some men can feel threatened by women's increased knowledge, skills, resources and power gained through the women's groups' activities, causing backlash and potential for violence against women and girls. For this reason, the project has undertaken reflection sessions separately with men and boys to support their understanding of women's rights, clarify the purpose and shared benefits of the women's groups' activities, and to prevent backlash against women participating in the project. In relation to *responding* to incidents of violence against women and girls, the original project design only specified one output: "women's groups are trained on how to report and respond to cases of violence." Throughout the life of the project this output has enabled many women to respond to violence with positive outcomes, but the project team recognised that the intention of this output needed to be expanded. Overall, there has been a more significant impact on VAWG across the project than originally envisioned and captured in the Theory of Change. We have therefore reviewed our Theory of Change document to reflect emerging outcomes in this area (See Annex 2), however we are not suggesting adding this as a new outcome area so late in the project, but will seek to measure and understand change through existing log frame indicators (Annex 3).

² Under the guidance of Ministry of Women and Children Affairs of Bangladesh, Department of Women Affairs offers 'Joyeeta Anneshan Award' every year during the celebration of 16 Days of Activism through a campaign.

Key Lessons

Women's leadership development has seen multiple results, for example, increased women's participation in different community structures, preventing violence against women, directly influencing policy and decision makers as well as reducing the burden of unpaid care work. This shows that any one intervention on women's rights can have multiple results as reflected in the intersectional framework of the POWER Theory of Change. We also learnt that communicating regularly with service providers is important for women to be able to access more services from the Government. Women's groups who have regular dialogue and contact with local authorities have been able to access more services, for example social protection in the form of vulnerability group cards in Bangladesh. Direct hands on practice and interactive entertainment using drama, theatre and debates on key issues have been seen to be more effective than traditional workshops in rural communities. Important lessons learned have also led the POWER Project team to clarify that in relation to responding to VAWG, we are seeing some emerging outcomes in the medium-term whereby women survivors of violence have access to high quality referral mechanisms. Future project designs should further consider the resources and partner expertise required to implement large-scale, survivor-centered case management in close collaboration with service providers, if the expected outcome is to be more ambitious.

Challenges faced

The main challenges faced under this outcome were the lack of political will to enable some of the local and national government leaders to concede to women's requests on unpaid care work and agroecology. We also noted that in some communities, women could not meet regularly due to harvest activities. The meeting times were adjusted, and meetings resumed after the harvesting period. Initially it was difficult to measure the women's participation in local structures as there are many, but this was resolved as all countries developed a detailed scheme of the local structures in their countries. We also noted challenges for women with lower education or literacy levels to access leadership positions due to the requirements of the role. This is a barrier that could be addressed through future programming in this area.

Sustainability

The results in this outcome area are sustainable as most groups have continued to meet beyond the POWER project agenda and issues, many women meet on average twice a month or more. Women's solidarity over the past four years has been strengthened. The trainings received by women enhanced women's knowledge on various issues including women's rights, leadership, Violence Against Women, land rights will continue after the project has ended. Most of the women's groups have also developed voluntary savings, opened bank accounts which will continue after the project has ended. The voluntary saving are self-managed and this makes strong and rooted in communities.

Outcome 2: By the end of 2020 Women's unpaid care work (UCW) is more highly valued within households, communities and government, more evenly distributed within households and hours spent by women on UCW is reduced, resulting in more free time for women to engage in social, economic and political activities.

The project has been able to raise awareness and change attitudes and behaviours on unpaid care work among men, women and young people in communities leading to improved recognition and redistribution of unpaid care work at household level and more free time for women. In terms of reduction of unpaid care work, the project has also continued to pilot and implement time saving interventions, including day-care centres, installation and use of energy-saving cooking stoves and bio-gas plants which are safer, secure and environment-friendly. At policy level we have also seen some significant progress, for example the Rwandan Government was able to review its policy to include early childcare in the policy at national level due to engagement with Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion.

Overall, we are seeing clear indications that women are spending less time on UCW and that this is freeing up their time for income generation and other social or personal activities as per our theory of change. In Rwanda, in 2019, 2,085 women were supported with energy saving cooking stoves which helped women to reduce firewood use by 80%, thus also reducing time spent on firewood collection. Families were connected to clean tap water which reduced time spent on water collection by approximately four hours a day. Muhimundu Claudette, a widow of 43 years old from Ruheru noted *"I never had enough time for farming and other income generating activities due to innumerable UCW tasks, but with this support of tap water and cooking stove, I got sufficient time to spend on my vegetable gardens and take them to nearby selling point that POWER project established for us."* Claudette said. The interventions on water also had multiple benefits including reducing unpaid care for the girl child, increasing women's income, food security as they can use the water for their

gardens and to feed livestock and domestic tasks. In Ghana, in the Talensi and Jirapa District, the provision of energy saving cooking stoves saved women three (3) hours of time as well as reduced the cost spent on charcoal and firewood. For instance, Mary Takuk says *“this energy saving cooking stove has saved me a lot. I used to go to the far away every day for firewood even with a baby on my back. I could spend more than half the day there and will sometimes be beaten by the rain. I would get too tired and not be able to even make cloths and dresses of my customers.”*



Picture 3: A mother with her child in front of Jamuna Day Care Center at Gaibandha, Bangladesh.

In Ghana, Women in many communities now using childcare centres have an average of four (4) hours free time off childcare to engage in alternative activities. Young women also noted that childcare centres have benefited them by increasing their opportunities to improve their education and earning an income, particularly those affected by early child marriage. One young mother in Bangladesh says *‘It was my dream to start study again and it is being possible for the Jamuna day care centre. Every mother should get such facility. Government can follow the example.’* In all childcare centres in the three countries successes also depended on provision of high quality, safeguarding and care for children. Childcare management committees and local authority engagement assist in addressing any challenges in the management of the centre. In total, since the project inception 46 childcare centers have been set up (11 childcare centers in Rwanda, 18 childcare centers in Ghana and

17 childcare centers in Bangladesh). The project has also continued to lobby and advocate for the state to provide for the childcare centers so that there is sustainability after the FLOW grant ends. So far communities are making some contribution as well as local authorities to enable the childcare centers to function after the project has ended. The childcare centers have had a wide-reaching impact, for example in Bangladesh, centers some community members have established their self-managed and self-financed new day-care center with their own initiatives.

Local authorities’ response on unpaid care work

The project has also generated massive support from local authorities to address unpaid care work in all three countries. In Bangladesh, Union Parishads and government service providers have shown their positive response to the demands of women through creating a market space for women, breast feeding corner and support for day-care centres. The Union Parishads and Upazila Parishads of Gaibandha and Lalmonirhat have come up with support for utilities, house maintenance cost, primary health care and medical assistance for day care centres. This is all the outcome of effective advocacy and networking by the women leaders. In Rwanda, in 2019, as a result of sharing findings of the annual budget tracking results report, district authorities were able to increase the annual budget allocation from 4.5% to 6.1% to reduce the burden of fetching water but also increase access to clean water for rural communities. However, though the government committed to establishing a childcare centre in each village the implementation is still low and the budget tracking found that districts decreased their allocation to childcare centres from 1.2% to 0.6% and this calls for increased efforts to push government to implement the commitment. In Ghana, the participation of women in community structures such as water user committees in Salinayili influenced the siting of borehole that was the choice of women in the community. One woman explained *“this has reduced the distance we walk to fetch water and the time we use to spend fetching water. If we were not part of the meeting and actively involved in the process, the borehole would have been sited very far from us”*.

Awareness raising on unpaid care work for it to be valued and recognised

Through the use of time diaries and sensitisation meetings, the project has raised awareness of the need for unpaid care work to be recognised and valued at household, community, national, regional and international levels. Media advocacy to promote awareness on UCW has also played a significant role this year. A significant number of short films, columns, features, news clips, radio/TV talk shows, TV news and reports published and broadcasted the issue of unpaid care work to a wide audience. This work with the media has helped to make unpaid care work more visible and influence gender-sensitive public services that address the burden of unpaid care work to ensure women participate equally with men in economic and leadership opportunities. Linked to this, the project continued the sensitisation intervention for journalists through the Press Institute of Bangladesh (PIB). Women’s groups also participated in awareness raising through community sensitization, participation in annual advocacy moments such International Women’s Day and International rural women’s day.

Redistribution of unpaid care work at household level

According to monitoring data, in 2019 men's participation in UCW has also increased across activities like childcare, laundry, dishwashing, cooking and preparing the bed. Project participants also increased their mobility and engagement into different community structures and participation in various social development initiatives. Project participants reported that they are getting more time to engage in income generation, small business, continue education and other productive works.

Reflection on Theory of Change

Time diaries have had a huge impact on sensitisation on unpaid care work, resulting in increased recognition, redistribution and even reduction inline with the POWER Theory of Change. The interventions of childcare, water and energy saving technologies have also led to indirect outcomes where more girl children are attending school and have more time to study as a result of the redistribution of unpaid care work.

Key Lessons

It has still been challenging to find a large group of women who report allocating more time for leisure as most of the women tend to use the time for income generating activities. This is worrying because of the risk of instrumentalising women but also due to limited access to time-and labour- saving technologies in implementing countries. As a follow up to the mid-term review, women reported that it was difficult to allocate time to leisure when they had not addressed their income needs, while others noted that due to culture there were also under pressure to be using their time in 'productive ways'. This is an area that will need further research as interventions on leisure and entertainment for women were not included in this project.

Challenges

Although women were able to raise their voices and participate in national and local forums it was not possible for the local authorities to increase budget significantly to fully support women with interventions that help reduce the burden of unpaid care work. The objectives of advocating for inclusion for these resources such as energy saving technologies, childcare centres and water harvesting were only marginally included in some budgets. There was recognition that these were much needed but the budgets were not reflective of this. Local authorities also rely on central budget allocations hence the need to strengthen advocacy from local, regional and national levels in countries. The effort will continue in 2020 as part of the sustainability and advocacy plans.

Sustainability

The women's group interventions that have been introduced in the communities to reduce unpaid care work will continue to be used as models by other groups and members of the women's groups. Redistribution of unpaid care work has challenged the gender norms in communities in such a way that all community members are aware of the negative effects of the burden of unpaid care work for women and the benefits of redistribution within households and the state. This change to attitudes and behaviours will continue to create more positive norms beyond the project timeline. The fact that relationships have been more harmonious also makes it possible to be sustainable in the long run.

Interventions on childcare centres in particular appear quite sustainable and are even multiplying as in some communities women who are not part of the POWER project have established childcare centres their communities. In most communities, local authorities and other community members are contributing to the running of childcare centres in the form of land, lighting, children's toys and other necessities for children. The possibility of adoption by the state to pay care givers salaries is also likely in Rwanda and in some local authorities of Ghana and Bangladesh.

Outcome 3: By the end of 2020, 19,500 rural women have more secure and sustainable access to markets and productive resources leading to increased income

Access to productive resources

One of the key achievements under Outcome 3 includes supporting target women smallholder farmer groups with access to productive resources such as land, agricultural inputs and markets access which has enhanced women's economic empowerment. For example, in Rwanda women have been able to advocate for access to agricultural resources such as irrigation facilities, 2 water pumping engines, 4 rain guns and other accessories. In Ghana, women have secured access to land through engagements with traditional landowners. For example, a total of 138 acres of fertile lands have been realised within 2019 and most of them have MOUs showing how long they can utilise the land.

Capacity building (agroecology)

A women's group member from Ghana had this to say *"The training on Farmer Business School has been one of the best for me since I joined the group. It has helped me to put more efforts in my dry Okro farming both in the raining and dry season..... We use some of the money to buy foodstuffs that we did not farm. We will soon be completing our new 3 block rooms from the sales of the Okro. I can now have a resilient shelter and rest from recurring burden of yearly construction of weak mud rooms"*. The trainings on agroecology have also helped women become more resilient to flooding, with women in Bangladesh being able to preserve their vegetables during flooding by using buckets or pots which are placed on high ground during flooding and in the ground after flooding. This supports women to get food all year round and improves food and nutrition security.

Gender-sensitive access to markets

Women's access to markets has also been improved through training on gender sensitive access to markets, creation of selling points and markets. For example, in Rwanda, in 2019, community women-controlled selling points have been beneficial for women, enabling them to have a safe space to sell their products and avoid middlemen. A women's group member from Ruheru community in Nyaruguru District said: *"It is a great pleasure to have this selling point in our community. I am safe here because it is near home and it helps me to spend more time selling my products"*. The project established seven (7) community selling points that are safe and strategic for target women farmers to increase bargaining power and income with their products. Among the seven, one was equipped with eco-friendly storage technologies such hermetic storage materials and a solar-powered cooling chamber which help women to keep safe their harvest and reduce postharvest losses. District authorities also provided land parcels for the set-up of selling points in strategic sites and these were part of district performance contracts that ensure the sustainable management of the established selling points. All of this has resulted in improved access to markets for women.

In Bangladesh, two thirds (69%) of women participants have more than one income generating activity (IGA) at household level. A market space known as Aaurhi has been set up supported to strengthen multiple income generation activities by women. 'Aaurhi', as the remarkable achievement of POWER, is ensuring safe, secured and sustainable market access for women and also encouraging them to be a part of supply chain for both local and national level. The "Aaurhi 'focuses on organic food and items from the women farmers. This enables women to realise higher profits and reduce the time in the market as the 'Aaurhi' provides a ready market for their products and a fair price.

Women's groups in Bangladesh were also effectively engaging buyers and Market Management Committee, Union Parishads and other duty bearers to create an enabling environment in the local market. Additionally, linkages with District and Upazilla Livestock Office and Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) were enhanced so that women could access different services from their offices including cattle fattening, vaccination support (deworming tablet, vaccines), Integrated Pest Management (IPM) training, seed preservation materials, which has enhanced their farming outputs and increased their productivity. This has helped women to improve their access to services. One-woman Konika Rani received award from the women Affairs office for setting example on women's access to market.



Picture 4: Konika Rani at her tea stall at Kalirbazar Market

One woman in Bangladesh also noted that previously, as a Hindu woman she could not imagine spending the whole day in the market and when she entered, she noted that the market was not friendly to women and lacked even basic facilities such as a women's toilet. Women have broken religious barriers to participate in the market. She now earns 500 to 600 taka per day through selling tea in the market.

In Ghana, women have also been able to enjoy improved access to information to access the market where 94% of the profiled women received SMS messages on weather forecasts once or twice a month. The information services were very useful and helped them to make decisions on how to cultivate, how to plant, when to fertilize their crops, how to fertilize, when to harvest, how to store, how much to sell the produce, bargain well with buyers, and which market to sell their produce. The weather forecast also provides women with information that helps them to do an early warning response for their farming activities in terms of rainfall patterns and other climatic changes which impact on farming.

Resilience to climate change

In terms of agroecology practices, many agroecological methods including seed preservation, composting, mulching, natural pesticide, sack/pot cultivation, using green manure are being practised, leading to increased productivity. This has resulted in resilience to climate change being built with many farmers now able to preserve vegetables during flooding. During the devastating flooding in mid-2019 in Bangladesh, women cultivated vegetables in sack/pots which not only helped to protect crops from flooding, but also expedited cultivating vegetables in small household spaces to start generating an income. In Rwanda, the project has also distributed agroforestry seedlings, especially Calliandra and Leucaena for soil management and animal fodder in all of the project locations which will help improve soil fertility and access to fodder. The Women also have support of community agronomists who distribute agroforestry seedlings from public tree-nurseries enhancing sustainability of this effort. Women now have increased livelihood diversification from rearing of animal which can be used to cover household costs and sustain families during floods or drought.

Voluntary savings and financing

In all countries women have been involved in voluntary saving which has improved their social safety net and access to finance. In Rwanda, women's groups have built strong relationships with local financial institutions (Savings and Credits Cooperatives SACCO that operate at every community level) everywhere in the country through their collective money savings scheme. Data collection on the women's savings initiative showed that women's savings amounted to 323,205,274 RWF equivalent to 352,844 USD. This access to finance helps women group members to access family needs including medical insurance and school fees for their children as well as purchasing collective cropland. It also contributes to the overall sustainability of the project and women's groups as it provides a strong motivation to continue to meet as a group beyond the project timeline.

Reflection on theory of change

Changes and interventions have progressed according to the POWER Theory of Change as we increasingly see women have been able to increase their income. However, in some cases knowledge on agroecology and market access has been hampered by structural issues such as poor infrastructure (roads, market stalls) and lack of gender sensitive markets which can prohibit some women from making maximum gains at the market. Women's access to markets and agroecology have also supported women's increased mobility, which in turn has supported women's increased participation in decision-making in households and public life. Indeed, all of the project's strategies and outcomes have contributed to each other, providing a holistic approach to women's economic empowerment.

Key Lessons

Empowering women collectives on access to productive resources and access to markets yields better results than empowering individuals.

Key Challenges:

Community infrastructure such as roads were poor and many women farmers cannot easily transport goods to market and customers cannot easily reach the farmers. Although in some communities there were efforts to resuscitate these roads. Further the gendered nature of the market where men transport goods to market in early morning and return later a night is a challenge for women due to safety, social norms as well as the burden of unpaid care work which many women have to do in addition to market. This was noted as a particular challenge in Bangladesh.

Sustainability

Women farmers have learnt skills on agroecology, access to market which they will retain and continue to use after the project has ended. The women farmers are now well versed with the use of agroforestry including trees such as calliandra to improve fertility, use of green manure, compost, natural pest control, use of sacks, pot gardens to adapt to flooding, water harvesting, agro-processing and market analysis. Women have also established a strong presence in the market and have the inner confidence to persevere in the market with some changes already being made for gender sensitive market spaces for women in Bangladesh, as well as to some extent in Rwanda and Ghana. Women have also learnt skills on agro processing for rice, maize, pepper, income generating, animal rearing which has strengthened their livelihoods options in the context of climate change. Women's group regular meetings also act as a support system for collective discussion, advocacy for issues that affect women farmers in the market.

Outcome 4: Greater visibility of intersections of CRSA, women's UCW and women's economic participation leads to changes in policy and practice by sub-national, national, regional and international stakeholders by 2020.

Changing policy at regional and international levels

The POWER Project advocated for the African Union Member States to increase public financing to address unpaid care work, climate change and climate-induced forced displacements that mostly affect rural women smallholder farmers. Women in their speeches strongly recommended the need for time saving interventions and climate change adaptation measures including a public fund that can compensate loss and damage due to climate-related hazards³. The POWER project supported the direct articulation of issues by rural women farmers in regional spaces including AU⁴ and SAARC. The AU strategy launched in 2019 also now includes elements of unpaid care work and violence against women. The project team raised awareness for the need to include the intersectionality of these issues to technical experts of FAO, WFP and IFAD, leading to greater commitment for the revision or creation of policy and programme interventions. In both South Asia and Africa, women farmers contributed inputs to the Pre-CSW session on the Beijing Platform for Action. A communique on women farmers forum on unpaid care work in Africa was also agreed in 2019 with women highlighting some of their key demands on unpaid care work including the development of a regional protocol on unpaid care work. In the South Asia Region, POWER Project engagement resulted in SAC developing a Voluntary Guideline on Responsible Investment for Sustainable Agricultural Development for SAARC regions with key issues on women farmers being included as well as partnership between governments, business initiators and farmers to promote climate resilient sustainable agriculture. Furthermore, engagements with UNESCAP created the opportunity to incorporate the issue of recognition of UCW and women's contribution in agriculture, develop programme on women's entrepreneurship development and women's access to markets in the CSO Statement of the South Asian Forum on Sustainable Development of 2019.

National level advocacy

All countries were engaged in advocacy with impressive results and commitments, but actions from governments still need to be monitored to ensure implementation and sustainability. National-level advocacy and campaign interventions elevated the discussion on Unpaid Care Work (UCW) among the policymakers, researchers, economists, media personals, students, young celebrities and activists from sport and showbiz. This has resulted in a number of commitments, for example there was commitment to incorporate unpaid care work into the coming 8th Five Year Plan of Bangladesh. The government accepted the economic aspects of valuing unpaid care work in GDP and contribution to SDG 5.4 on gender equality and raised the need for a model to turn this Non-SNA activity into SNA (System of National Accounting). The Bangladesh Government also revised the National Agriculture Policy 2013 in 2018 (drafted) and incorporated a separate chapter recognising women contribution in agriculture and this was finally approved in 2019. Women farmers directly advocated in these consultations and shared learning on agroecology leading to recognition of women farmer's expertise and knowledge.

In Ghana, women's capacity to understand land rights was enhanced through joint training with local organisations such as NET right and Abantu. AA Ghana in collaboration with Abantu for development also disseminated and developed a road map for the review of the national determined contributions towards a gender responsive climate action plans in Ghana in 2020⁵. In Ghana, time dairy data collected in 2018 was used by the Ghana Statistical Service in order to estimate the value of unpaid care work contribution to Gross Domestic Product in the project districts and to influence the Ghana Statistical Service to include unpaid care work in its data collection indicators. The National Women Farmers⁶ presented their demands and called on government to invest in time saving interventions such as childcare centres and boreholes. Due to the advocacy actions, the District Assemblies understood better unpaid care work and some provided boreholes and registered some women's groups to benefit from the 'Planting for Food and Jobs' and 'Rearing for Food and Jobs' schemes. AA Ghana have also developed draft guidelines that will support local authorities to recognize and plan effectively for unpaid care work. As well, ensuring time saving interventions are provided my state departments and District Assemblies to minimise the time use in doing care work and to support women access to quality, leisure and enhancing their productive capacities.

³ <http://www.genderismyagenda.com/old/links/34/34GIMAC-Recommendations-ENG.pdf>

⁴ CSW 63

⁵ (<https://www.myjoyonline.com/opinion/2019/march-8th/the-woman-factor-in-the-economy-especially-in-agriculture.php><https://allafrica.com/stories/201403102591.html>)

⁶ <https://youtu.be/wPyTIBPeGX4> and <https://youtu.be/QGwMH7tOzWo>.

Research and publications

In Rwanda, POWER has also commissioned a national-level research on unpaid care work to generate credible evidence on UCW status in rural, suburbs and urban areas and its effects on women's economic participation that will support advocacy efforts. In Ghana, research was published on the operationalization of Climate Change Adaptation Policy. The research was used to engage the government and contributed to the national climate action plans particularly the inclusion of agroecology and climate resilience and role of women. Additionally, AA Ghana, Department of Children and United Nations Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and other NGOs in Ghana initiated the process for the review of the Early Childhood Care and Development Policy to ensure inclusion of unpaid care work.

A digital time diary tool has been developed and will enable a more efficient way of data collection and analysis. The tool has been tested in Ghana and Rwanda and all staff in three countries are now well versed with the tool which will be used for data collection in 2020.

Challenges

In all countries, unpaid care work through increased recognition by states has not been a priority in their annual planning and budgeting and advocacy for inclusion will continue in the last year. The challenges faced included lack of political will to implement existing policies on childcare. Similarly, the project will continue to advocate for the inclusion of agroecology. In terms of advocacy at the regional level, the space for articulation of women's rights remained limited in both SAARC and the AU. In the future, conversations online with policy makers and stakeholders can help make the process of engagement faster and more effective. Another challenge was that the collection of time diary data took longer than anticipated due to the huge amount of data collected over the past 3 years, the capacity of staff and partners, the differences between countries, and the need for additional resources. These challenges have now been addressed and the process is now on course but might need to be adjusted to respond to the COVID 19 challenges in 2020.

Sustainability

The visibility of these issues through media, national, regional and international bodies will facilitate long term discussion on these issues. The POWER project efforts on policy changes, for example, on the early childcare policy in Rwanda or rural women farmers inclusion in policy in Bangladesh, inclusion of unpaid care work in annual plans in Rwanda and district budget plans on unpaid care in Ghana. These changes will continue to have an impact long after the project has ended, and will impact a much wider group than just the project target groups. The women's participation in advocacy, leadership and confidence to participate is also a long-term achievement which will continue after the project has ended.

Conclusion

In 2019, the POWER Project has made significant progress towards all expected outcomes, and it has also contributed to several unexpected outcomes. Therefore, we have seen the benefits of the intersectional approach taken by the POWER project and Theory of Change, as activities and results under one outcome are strongly impacting on the others and the combined impact of this strengthens the outcomes for women farmers. The year 2020 will focus on consolidating and maximising project results and documenting and sharing some of the key learning and findings from this project.

Annexes

- Annex 1: Global Indicators
- Annex 2: Revised Theory of Change
- Annex 3: Revised Logframe
- Annex 4: Policy Brief
- Annex 5: Cultivating Women's Rights Through Agroecology