

**Quarterly report:**

**Promoting Opportunities for Women's Empowerment and Rights**

**Project Quarter 2 2020**

***Period covered by report:*** April to June 2020

***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, Tain 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 and Lalmonirhat districts, Dinajpur district).

***Implementing partners:*** Ghana (Songtaba, Bonatadu, Widows and Orphans Movement (WOM), and Social Development and Improvement Agency (SODIA), GLOWA), 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 agroecology, accessing markets, and reducing, recognising, and redistributing unpaid care work.

**Introduction**

The period under review saw the COVID-19 taking full hold in many countries, with lockdown and movement restrictions being enforced in all countries. Staff, partners, and participants were also experiencing a lot of anxiety and uncertainty. Despite the challenging environment, the POWER project has continued to implement some activities including virtual meetings such as campaigns on unpaid care work and violence against women; meetings with SAARC, AU, CSM advocacy meetings; and TV and radio talk shows to raise awareness on unpaid care work, COVID-19 and violence against women and girls. The quarter has also been used for planning including the development of concept notes, publications, collating the end of project documentaries as well training of some women's groups on financial management and the sustainability of cooperatives. However, the level of expenditure remained low at EUR 438,555 of the total budget for quarter 2 and cumulatively EUR 746,131 for the year.

The onset of the pandemic has also negatively impacted and affected the project planning and implementation. As a result of lockdown and movement restrictions, the remaining activities including all face to face meetings, trainings, international travel, regional advocacy meetings, research and awareness raising activities have been halted. In terms of ways of working, it

took a bit of time for staff and partners to adjust, develop new ways of working, (e.g. organise working from home arrangements given internet challenges in some countries) and review workplans. To adapt to the changed context, in May the POWER project developed a revised workplan and budget for the remainder of project duration, which is still currently under review by the FLOW team. Many of the activities were revised however depending on donor approval, some activities which were time sensitive (such as seed distribution which is dependent on the seasonality) may need to be rephased in order to ensure activities are delivered as appropriate and as staff balance the remaining implementation with the close out of grant activities. With little time remaining in the project, ActionAid will update the donor on any challenges in this regard.

In preparation for project end, the POWER team has been working on closure activities including preparing asset disposal plans, sustainability plans and documentation checklists for final reporting, financial reconciliation, audit, and documentation of lessons and best practises.

**Outcome 1: 19,500 (6,000 in Ghana, 6,150 in Bangladesh, 7,350 in Rwanda) rural women are organized and can demand their rights as farmers and carers and have greater influence in their households and communities.**

### **Women's group meetings**

The women's groups in all the three countries have either paused or significantly reduced the frequency of their meeting during this quarter due to COVID-19, although sense of normality is coming back now as the situation improves.

In Rwanda, the women's group Reflect meetings, which were paused since last quarter during the total lockdown, have resumed under strict social distancing guidelines when the lockdown was relaxed. All 7,350 women met in the last quarter and 4,050 were provided with sanitisers and face masks. The POWER project also supported the groups with facemasks and hand sanitizers at the end of Quarter 2. Legally registered as cooperatives, the women's groups usually meet after they finish their collective farming work and discuss COVID-19 coping strategies and their on-going money saving and credit initiatives, which has helped women's group participants to access cash for starting small businesses and in case of family emergencies. The meetings have also helped women to discuss issues affecting their rights, including the COVID-19 impact on their livelihoods and collective activities.

In Ghana, a total of 180 groups comprising 5,760 women have been able hold their meetings to discuss issues that affect their lives and their communities, although the frequency of meetings was significantly reduced due to the restrictions of COVID-19. 160 women's groups have met in this quarter to discuss marketing of their products and produce, and other issues of COVID-19 in their respective communities. Twenty additional groups also discussed how they would use the savings schemes funds accumulated so far to support their farming activities for the period from June to October 2020.

Whilst in Bangladesh, the government restricted holding meetings or any form of gathering since the outbreak of the pandemic on 26<sup>th</sup> March 2020. Therefore, the women's group meetings were halted or significantly reduced to comply with government COVID-19 prevention measures.

### **Supporting women's groups in the COVID-19 crisis**

In Rwanda, the project has trained 333 women's groups on the management and sustainability of their cooperatives. During the training in Gisagara district, women small business holders requested financial support from the district representative in order to cope with the COVID-

19 crisis. The district committed an immediate support of EUR 4,000 for 60 female food vendors who use the project-established selling point so that they can expand their businesses, increase income and better cope with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. *“We are very glad to receive this financial support that shows increased recognition of women’s work by district leadership. This support will help us to expand our business at the selling point”* said Mukeshimana Jacqueline, the representative of the women’s cooperative union. The project also provided training for women’s group facilitators on leadership and effective participation in the community decision-making structures to empower women with leadership skills for continuous advocacy engagements after the project ends.

In Bangladesh, the project has carried out awareness raising on COVID-19 and on accessing emergency responses for the women’s groups. To prevent the spread of the virus, social distancing rules were complied with and some communication was made through mobile phones. Advocacy initiatives led by a federation of women’s groups helped women to access different government emergency services. For example, 30 children in one of the day care centres received masks and hand soaps from Ghoraghat Union Parishad; while 33 children of another day care centre also received the Prime Minister Gift Package including food items (rice, pulses, oil, baby food etc.) and hygiene materials (soap, antiseptic disinfectants, sanitizers etc.) during the lockdown. Some participants in the women’s groups further received Vulnerable Group Feeding cards, Vulnerable Group Development allowance, emergency support, cash grants, training on tailoring and block-batik, and children clothes during the lockdown on behalf of their advocacy. Most of the women’s groups have been forced to stop running their regular income generating activities (IGA) temporarily, however three women’s groups (Ghoraghat 1 and Lalmonirhat 2) and five individual participants from Gaibandha produced 6,535 masks as an alternative IGA. These were sold to the community, generating BDT 98,025 (EUR 1,000) in income, which was then used for their family expenses during the pandemic. A total of three female participants from Ghoraghat also became members of the pre-primary school management committee this quarter. The School Management Committee (SMC) is one of the community structures which support schools’ functions and student development. These women will input into the school’s decision making to ensure that the school is child friendly.

In Ghana, the COVID-19 related restrictions affected the women’s groups not just in their communities but also in their ability to participate in networking and other advocacy events outside their districts. The number of women’s group meetings has reduced from four times to once a week. It has also affected their ability to market their goods, having a trickle-down effect on their level of income. As a result of social distancing and government prevention measures, it was not be possible to invite women leader farmers and other national and local level stakeholders for face-face meetings. The virus and has also affected the level of activity execution and led to the revision of most activities. Currently most advocacy meetings are held virtually, and most rural women cannot access laptops and standard Android phones to participate in virtual meetings.

### **Violence against women and girls and Unpaid care work**

In response to increased rates of violence against women and girls during the pandemic in Rwanda, the POWER project (in coordination with other related ActionAid Rwanda projects) conducted virtual campaigns on violence against women and girls and unpaid care work. Conducted through community radios, TV talk shows, online news media, and through the use of megaphones in the communities, the virtual campaigns helped the project to reach larger audiences than the physical campaigns, which targeted eleven communities in pre-lockdown plans. The campaigns increased the visibility of the project and its relevancy during the lockdown. Further, it was an opportunity to reach all categories of the population as all family

members were confined at home during the lockdown and the media was closely followed for any COVID-19 related information.

In Bangladesh, 42 family disputes and 13 domestic violence incidences (46 in Ghoraghat, 8 in Lalmonirhat and 1 in Gaibandha) have been recorded in this quarter. Two previously reported cases of VAW are being resolved in the court in Gaibandha, and the survivors received counselling by the group members. The monitoring data shows that 82% of women have the correct knowledge on how to report incidences of VAW and of the available support services. On the burden of unpaid care work, according to the project participants, more male family members stayed at home due to lockdown or job loss. The men contributed to reducing the burden of UCW and as a result, women were able to contribute more time in family IGAs such as harvesting, husking, and preserving rice.

**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**

### **Awareness and sensitisation on Unpaid Care Work (UCW) using virtual mechanisms**

As the COVID-19 crisis developed, the POWER project continued to raise awareness on UCW using virtual mechanisms, enabling the project to reach larger audiences both in urban and rural suburbs across the three countries.

In Rwanda, the POWER project conducted awareness raising on UCW through four community radio talk shows in five districts (Nyanza, Gisagara, Musanze, Nyaruguru and Karongi) to sensitize communities and families to redistribute UCW among family members. This modality was suitable as most of the family members were at home in this period. Panel discussants included rural women representatives, AAR representatives and district authorities in charge of gender and social affairs. The audience was able to make free telephone calls to ask questions and share their ideas with the panel. The telephone calls received from communities highlighted that UCW is a big challenge to women's economic empowerment and leadership and negatively affects the family and community development. District authorities who participated in the live radio talk shows recognized the burden of UCW and committed to support interventions that reduce and redistribute the burden of UCW to achieve women's economic empowerment. The officer in charge of Gender and Family Promotion from Nyanza district who participated the community radio talk shows appreciated the project efforts to reduce women's burden of UCW and to enable them to engage in economic opportunities. The women participants shared testimonies that the POWER project interventions have significantly improved their lives due to reduction of the time spent on UCW and increased income through CRSA practices and access to markets. *"Before, I used to spend more time [on] collection of firewood and water but now I have an energy saving cooking stove and a tap water at home. I have enough time to grow tomatoes and I regularly participate in the group reflection-action meetings* said Uwimanipaye Mediatrice, a member of Twisungane Musenyi women's group. The clean water from the water wells does not only benefit the project's direct target groups but also benefits the entire community members and are well appreciated by local residents. The availability of clean water also reduced the spread of infectious diseases in the communities. The use of community radio talk shows became an efficient delivery modality as the messages have reached larger audiences. During virtual sensitizations via community radios and TVs, role model families working with the POWER project were given opportunities to share testimonies on the benefits of fair redistribution of UCW where they mentioned that equal redistribution of UCW has led to increased income and reduced incidence of violence in their households. Also, as a result of the project's on-going

sensitizations, Gisagara district has started a subsidy programme to support families who want to access clean energy saving technologies such as Liquefied Petroleum Gases (cooking stoves which use gas), providing them at 50% of the total cost. Many women are now accessing this programme and 1,980 women have been able to access from the POWER project.

In Bangladesh, project data reports that the POWER project time saving interventions, including childcare centres and energy cooking stoves, has successfully reduced the burden of women's UCW, thus freeing up women for women to engage in IGAs and social activities. According to monitoring data, 89% of users of the time-saving interventions reported their satisfaction on the use of day care centre, energy saving cooking stove and bio-gas plant. In Bangladesh, the team has also used TV, community radio and social media to sensitize the communities on UCW and access to local markets. The project aired five short films covering the issues of UCW through national TV channel, cable TV networks and social media platforms. A large audience of 40,000 including policy makers, civil society organizations and the general public is estimated to have been reached through this open media system. Particularly, community radios remained an effective mechanism to relay the information to the remote communities who have limited access to internet connectivity. Women in Bangladesh are also reporting how the lockdown has resulted in a more equitable balance of UCW, with more men staying at homes and supporting their wives in doing household chores. Shunetra Rani, member of Jiboner Shopno women's group from Lalmonirhat, expressed her happiness with her husband. She said, *"My husband used to work in brickfield, now it is closed due to COVID-19. He stays at home and helps me in all household chores. He is cooking and taking care of the children and helping me on vegetable gardening."*

### **Time diaries**

In Ghana and Bangladesh, the time diary data collection has resumed using the new time diary application. In Ghana, 253 respondents (150 women, 103 men) have completed time diaries in Nanumba North and South. In Bangladesh, 720 participants (600 women, 120 men) have completed the time diaries across the three districts. Both countries reported some challenges in using the new time diaries application, and have been supported by On Our Radar, the firm that developed the application, by reducing some of the application features to support basic Android phones.

**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**

### **Agroecology and access to markets leading to increased income**

In Rwanda, access to markets through community established selling points supported women to increase sales volume of different agricultural produce, including fruits, vegetables, potatoes, grains, and beans. The women from Nyaruguru and Musanze districts realized an increased income of EUR 9,000 (equivalent to 9,430,500 RWF) during the COVID-19 lockdown. *"I used to think that being a businesswoman requires a certain formal high education level that made me to feel incompetent; but with skills I got in the POWER project trainings, I overcome the fear where today I am engaged in small business selling my farm produce specifically potatoes increase my money income"* said Uwimana Venantie from Tuzamurane – Kirwa women's group, Nyaruguru district.

In Ghana, 30 women farmers' groups were selected to receive seeds to support their farming, of which 10 women's groups have since been provided with seeds. The remaining distribution of seeds will be completed by end of July 2020. The seeds provided include maize, soya, beans, and okra. AAG has also signed a contract with ESOKO to provide weather updates, climate information, and market prices to 5,000 women farmers across the project areas. An inception meeting has been held with ESOKO and the delivery of their services will start on 14<sup>th</sup> of July 2020.

In Bangladesh, the first two months of the COVID-19 lockdown (March to April 2020) meant that women farmers could not go to market to sell their products, resulting in a significantly reduced income. From May 2020, they managed to sell their products from their home – a new market was set up that complied with the required social distancing rules. The situation is now improving as 317 women producers from Lalmonirhat, Gaibandha and Ghoraghat coordinated with local wholesalers and national buyers and sold their products directly. Project monitoring data shows that 55% of women participants were confident with their improved knowledge on access to market even during challenging times. The women farmers' sales reduced in the Covid-19 pandemic and they produced 1,718kg of seeds including paddy, pumpkin, ash gourd, long yard bean, maize, pulse, nuts, and leafy vegetables' seeds which were preserved in the seedbanks. One of the members of Gaibandha Upazila Federation, Beauty Begum said, *"In this COVID-19 situation, where there is a crisis of seed at market, it did not affect our cultivation. The communities got support from the seed bank."* A total of 3,698 farmers (1,985 project participants and 1,713 community farmers) received seeds from these seed banks. The seed banks will provide seeds to communities in case of prolonged crisis like COVID-19. Moreover, 703 women participants received seeds, livestock vaccines, cattle feed, and minnow from the Upazila Livestock Office and Agriculture Extension Office in three districts.

The Agroecology School supported by the POWER project has been emerging as an institution to support farmers to learn sustainable agriculture practices. The facilitators of the school raised awareness on the fall-army worm, Cyclone Amphan and floods amongst the communities and farmers. The school helps farmers to prepare in advance and mitigate against risks before the disasters occur. In this quarter, on the occasion of 'International Day of Biodiversity' and 'International Environment Day', a documentary (audio-visual) on the role of Agroecology School has been produced and shared using social media platform, which reached an audience of around 10,000 people.

**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.**

#### **Advocacy, linkages, and networking**

In Rwanda, the project team conducted virtual validation meetings for the research on the effects of UCW on women's economic empowerment. The purpose of this research was to assess the status of unpaid care and domestic work in Rwanda and its effects on women's economic empowerment within households, and how government policies and programmes can positively support the balance between paid work and unpaid care work. Also, the research aimed to base on available minimum wage in Rwanda to estimate the monetary value of Unpaid Care and Domestic Work (UCDW) to evidence advocacy towards the

consideration of UCDW in the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The research found that domestic work is unevenly shared, as women in rural areas spend 6 hours/day in UCDW, those in semi-urban spend 5 hours, and those in cities spend 2 hours per day. While men in rural areas spend 2 hours/day on UCDW, those in suburbs and towns only 1 hour/day. This is due to the fact that in cities most household chores are done by domestic workers. With reference to the available information on the minimum wage in Rwanda, the research revealed that a woman engaged in UCW every day contributes on average at least 1,800,000 RWF (EUR 18,000) to the economy annually but this is not recognized at all. *“By commissioning this research, we wanted to have credible data that may help us to contribute towards addressing the challenges of women empowerment in Rwanda,”* Josephine Irene Uwamariya, Country Director of ActionAid Rwanda said during the virtual meeting.

The research recommends the increased efforts to engage men in women’s economic empowerment programmes that targets the burden of unpaid care work. It also recommends the consideration of UCW in the national GDP and the increased support of gender responsive public services which reduce and redistribute women’s burden of unpaid care and domestic work to ensure inclusive development growth that leaves no one behind.

In Ghana, preparatory work has been done for policy briefs on UCW, market access and agro-ecology, as well as for the end of project documentary and training on data analysis. A validation meeting with the National Development Planning Commission is planned to take place on the 23rd of July 2020.

In this quarter the POWER Project Manager and Project Monitoring and Documentation Officer also worked on articles<sup>1</sup> for publication with the Ghana News Agency. The articles were written on the following topics: (1) Adaptation to climate change adverse effects and empowering rural women; (2) Assessing early childhood development policy and challenges in implementation; (3) POWER project, a model for eliminating child marriage; and (4) the nexus between COVID-19 and unpaid care work. These were intended to share the experiences and lessons from the POWER project and to also sensitize the public on UCW and women’s economic empowerment.

In Bangladesh, the Steering Committee for recognition of UCW and Promotion of CRSA reviewed the action plan to boost up the advocacy initiatives on UCW and CRSA considering the COVID-19 crisis. As per the plan, members of the committee initiated developing a policy brief on family farming and to publish case stories on UCW captured by different network member organizations. The forum members are actively taking part on spreading the message of recognition of UCW using the social media platforms initiated by AAB. In addition, a rapid analysis of UCW during the COVID-19 pandemic in Bangladesh and four webinar meetings have been initiated in collaboration with multi-lateral group organizations under this networking platform.

Advocacy and campaigning through the use of media are being adopted as an alternate strategy, given the government ban on meetings/mass gathering. The POWER project organized and aired five short films on UCW through national television which also picked up the video messages of policy makers like M A Mannan (Minister - Ministry of Planning); Dr. Shamsul Alam (Member - General Economic Division, Ministry of Planning); and Mrs. Aroma Dutta (Member of Parliament) about their commitment to working on matters of UCW. Such

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<sup>1</sup> Adaptation to Climate Change adverse effects and empowering rural women, <https://www.gna.org.gh/1.18466275>; Assessing early childhood development policy, its progress and challenges in implementation, <https://www.gna.org.gh/1.18466530>; POWER Project, a model for eliminating child marriage; <https://www.gna.org.gh/1.18466585>; The nexus between COVID-19 and unpaid care work; <https://www.gna.org.gh/1.18466697>

initiatives received positive response from the media, civil society organizations and the public, which was reflected in engagement on social media platforms. Moreover, talk shows organized by a community radio platform in Gaibandha where the Gaibandha Upazila Women Federation leaders Bithi Begum and Lucky Begum attended as panellists covered issues such as the importance of redistributing UCW between husbands and wives, continuing IGAs in the pandemic and on preparedness for emergency response.

UNESCAP recommended to the countries of Asia and the Pacific to incorporate UCW and sustainable and holistic food system from production to consume in their national policies and programmes in the report of the 7<sup>th</sup> Asia and the Pacific High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development 2020 held in May 2020. AAI attended this virtual conference and raised the issues through the CSO consultation. UNESCAP invites all countries of the region to expediate the initiatives to achieve SDGs' target for gender parity by taking steps to recognize and redistribute UCW through introducing different services. The report also emphasized sustainable food and nutrition system for Asia and the Pacific by mentioning: *"The wider adoption of a holistic food system approach that enables food security and nutrition and promotes economic, social and environmental sustainability is even more urgent.... Governments can help to reduce hunger, improve nutrition and transform food systems through community programs, behaviour change communication and the mainstreaming of nutrition through multiple sectors, including through agricultural, trade and development policies, combined with an emphasis on food safety and universal health coverage. The COVID-19 outbreak has brought to the fore the importance of local food production and the need to prioritize the well-being of small food farmers, including women farmers, and ensuring social safety nets, insurance and social protection systems for all, including landless farmers."*

SAARC Agriculture Centre and AAB agreed to organize virtual meeting on promoting biodiversity in South Asia which is one of the pillars of climate resilient sustainable agriculture. The concept note for the meeting was finalised and it will be held in late July or August this year.

The period under review also saw an international webinar being held to discuss the minimum standards on unpaid care work<sup>2</sup>. There has been much interest in these, with Oxfam also proposing to draw on the guidelines to support their guidelines on unpaid care work to international financial institutions. The project also continued to make inputs on unpaid care work and women farmers' rights in Africa through virtual meetings organised by the Gender is my Agenda Campaign (GIMAC), United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the African Development Bank. For FAO related advocacy, the project is closely following the discussions which are being held ahead of the world conference on food security in October and the development of the voluntary guidelines on agroecology. The focus for the institutions has been to assess the gendered impact of COVID-19 on gender and women's rights.

### **Impact of the COVID-19 and proposed arrangements**

COVID-19 has impacted negatively on the project planning and implementation. Instead of the face to face meetings most of the activities have been revised to virtual meetings, with some face to face meetings maintained as many of the women do not have smart phones or laptops to participate in virtual activities. It is proposed that in addition to radio and TV talk shows, solar radios will be used for training and awareness raising at a community level. To further support women under the new conditions, the budget for women's groups will be

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<sup>2</sup> Webinar on minimum standards and unpaid care work, <https://web.microsoftstream.com/video/ddd2beb4-5d5f-4416-83c2-505880b65558>

increased to cater for hand sanitisers and face masks in all communities. In order to support some women's groups who have been negatively impacted by COVID-19, the project has proposed to reactivate its seed distribution as well as livelihood diversification efforts through the distribution of livestock, strengthening of market access and mobile use for reporting of issues of violence against women and girls in Rwanda. Online marketing is also being piloted in Rwanda. The project will also support any groups that have significantly lost their group savings and livelihoods due to COVID-19. The project will also hold virtual meetings for field visits, training on participatory videos on unpaid care work, data collection for key activities including time diaries study, the end of project evaluation, and the study on unpaid care work and violence against women and girls policy briefs.

Once the proposed revisions are accepted and donor approval received, the team will hold planning meetings to readjust workplans so that all activities will be finalised before the end of the year.

### **POWER project endline evaluation**

The project advertised an endline evaluation and received large volume of applications. A selection strategy was developed to recruit qualified consultants for the evaluation which was recently completed and further discussions around budgeting and planning is held with the selected supplier. Once those discussions are finalized the project will contract and the endline evaluation is expected to take place between August and November 2020.

### **Lessons learnt**

During this quarter we learnt that innovation and adaptation is required to adequately adapt to the changing environment context in the face of COVID-19. In all three countries digital platforms were used to conduct awareness raising as a way of ensuring that the project objectives continued to be achieved as face to face meetings became impossible. The specific lessons for each country are detailed below:

#### ***Rwanda***

- Virtual campaigns can have far reaching impacts on communities and have the potential to reach more people than face to face meetings. The project's virtual campaigns on VAWG prevention and UCW redistribution through the community radio talk shows has reached more audiences than planned as all family members, including children, were confined to the home.
- Established selling points for women's farmer groups and their money saving initiatives helped farmers to cope with COVID-19 crisis as farming and selling food was not restricted. It is observed that if women's farmer collectives get enough support to increase food production and access to markets, they are able to improve and sustain their livelihoods not only for their own families but also to increase the supply of fresh food at local markets.

#### ***Bangladesh***

- Local cable TV networks and radio channels can be a vital tool to sensitize communities on different issues. Telecasting the audio-visual productions in cable TV

networks and talk shows in radio during the pandemic was very effective in the POWER project implementation areas.

- Local initiatives such as seed banks can play a critical role during times of crisis, as preserving seeds in the seed banks helped women farmers to get access easily when there is scarcity of seeds at market and the prices are higher due to the COVID-19 lockdown.
- Advocacy and campaigning through television and social media were very efficient in reaching relevant policy makers. As the project team was not able to organize some advocacy initiatives which involved mass gatherings, we have organized talk shows and telecasted short films on the TV channels. In those events, the following policy makers were present: Minister - Ministry of Planning; Sr. Secretary of Planning Commission; State Minister - Ministry of Labour and Employment; Sr. Secretary, Ministry of Women and Children Affairs; and other prominent economists of the country.

### **Challenges and risks**

- Across all the three countries the COVID-19 pandemic is not only delaying project implementation but also putting the lives of the people at risk. Local authorities in three countries have responded with lockdowns to save lives and many livelihood sources were lost by the communities.
- In Bangladesh, the COVID-19 pandemic and heavy flooding in the northern parts of the country also further put people's lives at high risk. This also significantly impacted the project implementation in those areas. Many of the women were able to take shelter and preserve their seeds in the raised seed banks during the flooding. This demonstrated that infrastructure such as seed banks can have multiple benefits for communities. In the past, the seed banks also serve as a space for childcare and meetings for women.
- The COVID-19 pandemic meant that the activities had to be revised to accommodate the new reality and this has resulted in significant delays in project implementation. As the project draws to a close it is likely that the last six months of the project will be quite intensive and potentially challenging for the project team.