

**Quarterly report:**  
**Promoting Opportunities for Women's Empowerment and Rights**  
**Project Quarter 3 2020**

***Period covered by report:*** July to September 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**

During this period two positive factors affected the project implementation. Firstly, many of the COVID-19 lockdown measures which has hindered project delivery began to be lifted, facilitating movement and small group interactions and enabling more activity delivery for the project. Secondly, the quarter also saw the donor approval of the budget revisions which were proposed in June 2020, making it possible to implement new activities that were proposed. Most women's groups met during the period under review and were active in group meetings. However, in Bangladesh although the number of groups meeting remained the same, only 2,500 (instead of 6,151) women actually participated in the meetings. This was attributed to the dual emergencies within Bangladesh, the substantial flooding as well the COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions. In all three POWER countries, complete lockdown measures have been relaxed but strict rules and regulations have remained or been imposed by the government, which must be adhered to as part of activity implementation. In Bangladesh, mass gatherings are still prohibited so all types of campaigning are still restricted. COVID-19 and flooding were the main challenges faced by AAB during the quarter under review. The AAB team was also the worst affected by COVID-19 as nine partner staff were directly affected, resulting in one of the offices being closed and full suspension of activities as part of the safety measures to contain the situation. The POWER project partner offices were also closed, and COVID-19 tests ordered for all staff. The donor was informed of this in September, and we are pleased to report that the situation has since improved with all staff recovered and the office operational with constant monitoring. Flooding also affected the

activities in some communities in Bangladesh and this was mitigated by AAB and the partner organization through rehabilitation support for those who were affected by river erosion as well as through the provision of emergency support, including safe drinking water, dry foods, and purification materials for water supplies.

Most of the planned activities for quarter 3 were implemented as planned. In Rwanda, all the planned activities were successfully implemented, including the women's group meetings, agroecology practises and awareness raising. In Bangladesh, 16 out of 22 planned activities were completed while a few activities were re-phased and moved forward due to delays from COVID-19. In Ghana, 9 out of the 11 planned activities were carried out. These included engagements and collaboration among various women's groups, some departments under the District Assemblies, Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DoVVSU), Ghana Education Service, Community Development and ESOKO<sup>1</sup>, the Jirapa Farmers Network (JIFAN), chiefs and religious leaders, ActionAid's Activista network, and the POWER project community facilitators across all the 200 groups in Ghana. Women's groups continued to be supported and during this period water harvesting tanks were provided to women to support in their time saving initiatives. At the international level, the main activities carried out included the project's annual review meeting, held virtually for the first time and which covered progress to date, grant closure plans, financial reporting and audit, and the legacy of the POWER project. The teams also looked at project acceleration plans to make up for time lost due to COVID-19. This also highlighted the need to closely monitor activities to be able to reach the deadline for 2020. The multi-country evaluators were also appointed, and the evaluation kicked off during this quarter, due to be completed in December 2020.

**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**

In all countries, women met to discuss the group issues as the lockdown measures were eased. In Bangladesh, a total of 238 women groups participated in group meetings. Women advocated for goods and services such as Vulnerable Group Development (VGD), Vulnerable Group Feeding Card (VGF), allowances for widows, cattle feed, cattle vaccination, seeds, monetary support (from Cash for Work scheme), trainings on cow fattening, goat rearing, tailoring, and sewing machines from Upazila Parishad, Union Parishad, Upazila Livestock Office, and other government departments and NGOs. The period also saw flooding occurring in some of the communities. The unpaid care work was also affected as flood water contaminated the wells in the community thereby increasing the time spent on fetching safe water.

In Rwanda, women's groups have also started discussions on sustainability plans and have received support from the local authorities. For example, as part of the implementation of their sustainability plans, women's groups from Gishubi community in Gisagara District, Koaigida cooperative have started investing in agroecological beekeeping as a honey business. The authority of Gishubi community provided land to support the women implementing their beekeeping project. *"We are so thankful to community government officials for giving us land space for our beekeeping project," said Niyonagira Jacqueline, the President of Koaigida (Cooperative of Abishyizehamwe Gisagara Gishubi).*

In Ghana, women's groups continued their REFLECT meetings and money saving as the key activity that sustains group membership and regular attendance. The savings helped women's group members to adapt to the COVID-19 impact on their daily living, particularly during total

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<sup>1</sup> ESOKO is agricultural profiling and messaging service

lockdowns. Women's groups resumed active meetings in their respective communities and are reviewing their sustainability and advocacy plans for 2021. They plan to use the last quarter of the project to engage politicians and other stakeholders in these plans. The 200 women's groups were provided with logistics for their group meetings like flip charts, marker pens, card boards and Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs). The motivation package provided included zinc roofing sheets, food items, soap, clothes and cash support as a relief package in response to COVID-19 and to support their continued engagement within the women's groups.

### **Violence against women and girls**

In Rwanda and Bangladesh, work against violence against women and girls continued this quarter. In Rwanda, a total of 24 couples (including 6 role model couples) were trained on matrimonial regimes, inheritance, and succession law for VAWG prevention and reduction. The role model couples have improved knowledge on gender-based violence prevention and around access to justice. They are organized in a special group called IMBARAGA Z' URUKUNDO (Power of Love), while the remaining 18 couples have been identified for support through the project. *"I am feeling guilty to have been treating my wife badly and from today, I decided to stop it and change my mind for good,"* said one of the husbands.

In Bangladesh, 5,720 women were trained on how to monitor and track incidences of violence against women in their communities. In total 59 VAW incidences were recorded in this quarter. Of these, women's groups have addressed and resolved 56 incidences of domestic violence through local arbitration among the family members. There were two cases of attempted rape, which the perpetrators are being tried in the court of law in Lalmonirhat and Dinajpur districts. The women leaders are closely following the progress of these cases in the court. A further case on dowry and domestic violence is still pending resolution.

### **Women's leadership**

Through continued advocacy and lobbying, 27 new women took up leadership roles in various community structures, across three project areas in Bangladesh. These structures are the Union Parishad's Standing Committee on Education, Health and Family Planning, Rural Structure Development and Preservation, Social Welfare and Disaster Management Committee and other local community committees. Rashida Begum, member of Deep Shikha Women Group, joined the standing committee of Education, Health and Family Planning of Mogolhat Union Parishad as a member. She said: *"I have joined this committee for the welfare of our community, though it is very crucial time. I believe I will effectively play my role as the committee member and provide the services to the local women."*

### **Capacity building**

In Ghana, a total of 30 women leader farmers from the national women farmers movement were trained on feminist leadership, communication and social media. Topics discussed during the training were gender concepts, feminism, feminist principles and practical demonstration on how to draft messages and conversations on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and Twitter. In Rwanda, the project also trained 245 women on women's leadership and effective participation and who will, in turn, train their fellow group members. *"I feel very confident to be a leader in any position in my community and I am ready to stand for elections in early 2021 to compete for women's positions in the decision making structures to get an opportunity to influence decisions towards addressing [unpaid care work] and public financing for agroecology in the community,"* said Mukamasoni Claire from Sugira Group in Kibirizi community.

**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 activities delivered under this outcome continue to benefit the different women's groups, with many of the groups now focusing on sustaining the interventions as we near project closure. In Ghana, 18 meetings were held with district assembly-level stakeholders in order to ensure community management of project interventions after the closure, as well as district level support from government. The meetings aimed to renew commitments from community members, parents and traditional leaders, and to push for the inclusion of childcare stipends from government.

Important to note that during this reporting period, progress towards the amount of unpaid care work was impacted by COVID-19, as the time spent on work such as childcare and water harvesting increased. For example, childcare centres and schools were closed and all children spent most of their times at home, resulting in more domestic work especially for women. Water demands also increased due to the hand washing and overall hygiene focused response to COVID-19, while in some countries such as Bangladesh, contaminated tube wells worsened the situation.

### Time diaries

In Bangladesh, time diaries were successfully completed. A total of 714 project participants (597 women and 117 men) in three districts in Bangladesh have completed time diary data. At international level, a qualitative analysis of data from 2018 to 2019 was completed and the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) plans on submitting a draft report in October. The consolidated multi country data analysis will be used for further advocacy and will provide rich data and evidence building in this area.

### Time saving interventions

Most of the interventions on unpaid care work continued to reduce the burden of UCW for women during this quarter. Women in all three countries are generally satisfied with the interventions on UCW such as water harvesting, water kiosks, energy cooking stoves, etc. The availability of childcare centres was reduced, for example in Bangladesh the day care centres have been closed since April 2020 due to the pandemic. A total of six advocacy meetings with Union Parishads and Upazila Parishad officials were carried out, with the end result that they agreed to support efforts to reduce the burden of unpaid care work in three districts. Specifically, in Gaibandha district, two chairmen of Kanchipara and Fazlupur Union Parishad decided to provide VGD (Vulnerable Group Development) Card for each daycare centre facilitators (30-kilogram rice for each in every month). Moreover, both chairmen also gave commitments to provide electricity and solar systems to the daycare centres. The Chairman of Rajpur Union Parishad at Lalmonirhat will continue providing VGF (Vulnerable Group Feeding) cards (20-kilogram rice for each in every month) to the daycare children. Lastly in Ghoraghat, the Union Parishad Members committed to increasing the number of day care centers.

In Rwanda, the POWER project supported 692 women with improved energy saving cooking stoves. These stoves were distributed together with a container that keeps food warm for at least seven hours. This stove will also contribute to the protection of the environment because it reduces fuelwood at 80% and emits less smoke. *"I am so happy with this stove. It reduces my workload of unpaid care work and I will gain more time for farming and other work,"* said Beatrice Nyirampakaniye, member of Abahujimbaraga Group in Muganza sector. In Ghana, ten groups from eight communities from Jirapa Municipal indicated they needed water harvesting containers to help them store water for easy collection for processing of their shea butter. In view of this, 10 poly tanks have been purchased for distribution to these groups. This

will support both the women's income generating activities as well as reducing the unpaid care work burden.

### **Media and awareness raising on unpaid care work**

In quarter 2 the project readjusted its plans from face to face community engagements to online platforms in light of COVID-19 restrictions, which proved to have a greater reach for advocacy messages. In Bangladesh, 30 senior journalists (chief editors) participated in a webinar on UCW that was organized in collaboration with Press Institute Bangladesh (PIB), AAB and SKS Foundation. In addition, five journalists also participated in the media fellowship programme and published 16 reports on UCW, engaging policy makers and civil society members for its recognition, reduction, redistribution in electronic, print and news media. In these reports the policy makers reiterated the need to address UCW in national policies and initiate an accounting system that captures its inherent value. Similarly, in Rwanda virtual sensitizations on UCW were held through TV and radio talk shows on the impact of UCW on women's empowerment. These involved the participation of government officials who further committed to interventions that reduce the burden of UCW. For instance, in Gisagara district, they started a programme of subsidizing time saving cooking stoves. Recently the Rwanda National Women's Council office contacted AAR to share experiences on how they can also provide time saving cooking stoves. In the long term, the Government of Rwanda committed to halve the rate of use of fuelwood from 83% to 42% by 2024 as the National Strategy for transformation 2018-2024 (NST 1), and UCW is now reflected in the family policy. Through the media engagements an estimated 45,400 people viewed a short film and documentary on market access, UCW, VAW and agroecology through local dish channels. Interim monitoring data shows that these awareness raising activities have created a positive outlook within the community on UCW.

### **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 practices and support**

During the period under review, the project encouraged diversification of income sources and use of agroecologically produced manure. 893 poultry (447 in Nyanza, 267 in Musanze, and 179 in Nyaruguru districts) were distributed, which will support women to recover from COVID-19 financial shocks through selling the eggs as well as using the manure to increase soil fertility and farm productivity. Eggs will also help women to improve nutrition in their family,



*Figure 1: Niragire Elevation – Member of Terimbere Mugore Group, Ruheru Nyaruguru, Rwanda. "I was so happy when I was selected as the best model woman farmer in the Ruheru community in agroecologically producing healthy tree tomatoes as I can harvest more than 35 kg of tree tomato fruits per week and I sell at 1,000 RWF (\$1) per kg."*

particularly those who have children under 5 years old. In Rwanda, as part of the implementation of agroecology practices, women's groups already in cooperatives are practicing agroecology on 79 hectares of land (33 ha in Nyanza, 16 ha in Musanze, 12 ha in Ruheru, 2 ha in Kibilizi community and 16 in Gitesi and Murindi LRPs). Additionally, women's groups from Kibirizi community organized in the Koabikigi cooperative are engaged in sustainable vegetable production. They are operating in Duwane marshland given by the district of

Gisagara in response to their request of land. In partnership with ActionAid and the POWER project implementing partner in Gisagara District (Duhozanye), the district authority is also supporting women vegetable producers in the Duwane marshland with a solar-powered irrigation scheme, as part of promoting agroecology technologies. Similarly, women's groups from other communities are also engaged in agroecological production of different food crops, mainly vegetables and fruits especially tree tomatoes and passion fruits. In Bangladesh, the Agroecology School has so far trained 5,226 farmers in this quarter on issues like flood crises response, diverse methods of vegetable cultivation, importance of organic fertiliser and soil health. The school has taken initiatives to conduct research on fall armyworm prevention biologically and also as disseminated knowledge and experiences to various farmers. Meanwhile, the school has started to develop a [website](#), which will be launched soon.

The seed banks are becoming popular among the communities. 1,715 farmers, 1,300 project participants and 415 community farmers had accessed seed banks which improved their resilience during the flooding.



Figure 2: Resilience cultivation during flooding in Bangladesh by women farmers

#### **Access to markets**

In Ghana, the quarter saw a strong engagement with access to market information through engagement of the ESOKO market platform. The overall objective of ESOKO was to send voice SMS on technologies for climate resilience agriculture and market information to 5,000 smallholder farmers involved in production of maize, pepper, millet, cassava, and groundnut. Within the period, 4,705 price alert messages were delivered, 45,025 messages on weather alerts, and 11,673 tips on agroecology. A call centre was established as a platform where women farmers can call and seek market information and weather updates. This was dominated by requests on agroecology (93%), with 5% covering weather alerts and 2% on market information.

Although COVID-19 had an overall negative effect on the economy, in Ghana at UI-Kpong, Mwofo and Nindor-wala communities, the groups reported increased sales in their soap making business because of increased demand for soap for hand washing. There was also a surge on demand for vegetables from community gardens.

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

Under this outcome area, some activities were delivered although others had to be re-planned and revised due to challenges in meeting face-to-face. The end of project evaluation also started and will be completed in December 2020. The appointed consultants are [Social Development Direct](#), who are particularly strong in research in the key project thematic areas of unpaid care work and VAWG and come with substantial experience in intersectional feminist evaluations and research. During this period, they submitted the inception report, which was reviewed by ActionAid and approved. The consultants are currently finalizing the data collection tools and kicking off the data collection work.

IDS has also submitted a draft report for the unpaid care work: a feminist analysis of time diaries from Ghana, Bangladesh and Rwanda. The overall objective of the study is to

undertake quantitative and qualitative analysis of the time diary data sets collected by POWER implementing countries. An important aim of this study is to produce evidence to inform ActionAid's policy and advocacy work on unpaid care and women's economic empowerment at local, national, regional and international level. A Policy brief will be published in Quarter 4. A multi country online study on violence against women and girls was also initiated in Bangladesh and will be completed in Rwanda and Ghana in October 2020.

Lastly a number of webinars were held including one by the Project Management Team on '*Women as Agents of Change: Power, rights & navigating crises*'.<sup>2</sup> The topic covered various crises including COVID-19, health and flooding, and was attended by more than 60 participants.

### **Advocacy by women federation members**

In Bangladesh, five women federation leaders from Gaibandha and Dinajpur have attended a community radio platform. The women federation leaders discussed issues of food crises in emergencies, flood response, access to markets, the importance of redistributing UCW between husband and wife, importance of addressing VAW and the continuation of income generating activities in the pandemic.

### **Upcoming research and policy briefs**

As per the action plan of the Steering Committee on Recognition of UCW and Promoting CRSA, an external consultant is developing a policy brief on family farming and agroecology. A voluntary guideline on '*Responsible investment in sustainable Agriculture development in SAARC Region*' has been published jointly with the SAARC Agriculture Centre to promote agroecology in South Asia. AAUK is currently working with implementing countries on a multi country online study on unpaid care work and violence against women with the first set of interviews having been completed in Bangladesh.

### **Networking and alliance building**

Under this outcome, two activities were planned for training on networking and alliance building at both community and regional levels in Adaklu district and other regional programs in Ghana. The training is held at the regional and community level in Volta, Oti regions with Adaklu as the centre for the project area. Other activities that will take place in the next period are the launch of the tool kit on UCW, national level training on gender-based violence and finalization of two policy briefs.

### **Media engagement**

Three TV talk shows and five short films on unpaid care work have been broadcast at national TV channels. AAB has initiated the process for a campaign and photography competition on UCW titled '*Different Images of Men*' to influence policy makers for the recognition, redistribution and reduction of UCW. Based on the competition, a social media campaign also launched in September 2020 and reached 723,354 people.

In Rwanda, due to cancellation of advocacy events at national, regional, and global levels as mitigation against the spread of COVID-19, no activity under this outcome has been completed so far. Instead, as per the approved revised plans, almost all 2020 planned activities required cross-border movements and physical gatherings were revised into two main activities which will take place in quarter 4. So far, procurement process to implement one activity of producing TV and radio sketch series on UCW has been completed and production and dissemination are planned for the next period.

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<sup>2</sup> '*Women as Agents of Change: Power, rights & navigating crises*'.<sup>2</sup>  
<https://web.microsoftstream.com/video/524f7bf4-b2a8-4cc3-b7c1-fcc276d94ff2>

## **Documenting the legacy of the POWER project**

All implementers are working on documentaries as the project comes to a close, so that the interventions by the project can be preserved. A documentary on the POWER project in Ghana has also been completed with LEMA concepts. One international documentary is also now being finalised for eventual virtual screening, and a course is being developed to highlight the lessons from the POWER project.

## **Challenges faced**

### **Bangladesh**

- Between July and September 2020, nine staff of SKS Foundation (AAB partner) in Lalmonirhat contracted COVID-19. As a result, the project office was closed to stop further transmission among other staff and community, and all activities were postponed for over two weeks. At its most critical stage, one of our colleagues was hospitalized in ICU with severe symptoms. We are pleased to report that all have recovered well, and all other COVID tests administered across all staff returned negative. However, this created a backlog in the project implementation, which is being addressed by POWER PMT, AAB senior management and partner staff through the provision of additional human resources and regular monitoring.
- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the project activities were revised and the process including the donor approval took a substantial amount of time.
- Bangladesh has seen one of the worst floods in its history which affected the agriculture production and livelihoods of the communities in Gaibandha and Lalmonirhat districts. Although farmers can sell their products in the market, the women from the area who were affected by flood are still suffering as the low land areas, especially the paddy fields, remain under water.

### **Rwanda**

- The biggest challenge remains COVID-19, which is affecting the project activity implementation, which will in turn affect the timely completion of activities and project closure plans.
- Working from home due to restrictions has reduced the physical movement of staff and affected regular monitoring plans and quality delivery.

### **Ghana**

- Erratic rainfall has delayed the planting of cereals, especially during the second minor raining season for Volta, Bono, and Ahofo regions.

## **Lessons learned:**

**Bangladesh:** The implementation strategies of the advocacy and the awareness raising activities at community and national level has been changed due to COVID-19. The project delivered these events using online platforms, including media and social media. The use of online platforms has been successful as it reached more people in the target areas.

**Rwanda:** During lockdowns, virtual sensitizations on UCW and VAWG reached more audiences and UCW redistribution among family members has increased as families were confined at home. Staff also have increased skills on the use of virtual means to implement project activities, and virtual technologies were very effective for sensitization-related activities during lockdowns.

**Ghana:** The women continue to use the group farm concept as demonstration farms for learning and sharing of agroecology tips. Some women's groups have increasingly used

interest accumulated from savings schemes as loanable funds to members to support them with small businesses at the community level.

## **Sustainability**

In terms of sustainability, all countries have been working on sustainability plans. The main sustainability elements are embedded in women's groups who are having a number of self-organised income generating initiatives. The start up funds are drawn from their savings which are likely to continue after the project has ended. For example, in Rwanda women's groups from Gishubi, Koabikigi cooperative have started a beekeeping project with 120 hives using their own funds from saving initiatives. They were given land space by Gishubi leadership to run the honey production project. Similarly, women's groups from other communities are also engaged in agroecological production of different food crops mainly vegetables and fruits especially tree tomatoes and passion fruits.