

**POWER:  
Promoting Opportunities for Women's Empowerment and Rights  
Quarterly Narrative Report  
July to September 2019**

**Grant holder:** ActionAid UK (AAUK)

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

**Project locations:** Lalmonirhat, Gaibandha and Dinajpur District in Bangladesh; Talensi and Nabdam, Nanumba North and South, Tain and Asutifi South, Jirapa Municipal and Adaklu districts in Ghana; and Nyanza, Karongi, Gisagara, Musanze & Nyaruguru Districts in Rwanda

**Implementing partners:** SONGTABA, BONATADU, WOM, SODIA in Ghana; Duhozanye Organization, Faith Victory Association (FVA) and Tubibe Amahoro in Rwanda; SKS Foundation in Bangladesh

**Long term objective:** to contribute to the increased economic empowerment of rural women in Bangladesh, Ghana and Rwanda

**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.

**Overall progress for the quarter**

The quarter under review has shown steady progress of the project. The new groups formed in Rwanda have started very well and have been able to meet regularly. The groups have been able to raise the visibility of unpaid care and violence against women as well as start practising some of the agroecology practices. The project has also strengthened existing relationships between the women's groups and local authorities and the linkages developed are likely to continue after the project has ended. The commitment by local authorities to support child care through provision of land, toilets, solar panels in Bangladesh, and payment of care givers and proposed inclusion of care in budgets for Bangladesh, Ghana and Rwanda is testimony of the huge impact the project has been able to make.

The main challenge faced was the delay in fund clearance by the NGO bureau in Bangladesh which affected implementation of activities in new areas. The clearance has now come through and activities are now being implemented as planned. However there are some delays in project implementation as a result of this. In some areas in Bangladesh flooding affected the regular meetings of women's groups.

## **Outcome 1: By the end of 2020, 19,901 rural women are organised and are able to demand their rights as farmers and carers and have greater influence in their households and communities**

During this quarter, a total of 19,901 women were able to meet and discuss their issues as women and take collective action. In some areas in Bangladesh, flooding impacted on regular meetings. AAB and partners worked on an emergency response with the support of AAB mainstream funds and the project continues to work with severely affected communities to adapt their livelihoods to regular flooding. Women continued to discuss different issues affecting their rights, farming activities and other income generating activities, violence against women and unpaid care work issues as well money savings for their own access to finance. Women continued to engage with local authorities such as the union parishad in Bangladesh and district authorities in Rwanda, demanding a fair allocation of the budget to issues affecting women's lives such as unpaid care work, and access to child care and energy cooking stoves. In Ghana, women's engagements with duty bearers resulted in significant milestones for women. For example, in Sentu, UI-Kpong, Bemdiribu, Lugni women groups have successfully had boreholes drilled in their communities to reduce their unpaid care work burden collecting water from long distances. UI-Kpong community had 3 boreholes drilled to ensure there is reliable and functional water facilities in the community. Similarly, in Salinayili, a COMBAT group was able to stop illegal logging which was causing much destruction to the environment and affecting women's livelihoods.

### **Decision making at community levels**

A total of 78 group facilitators from new groups in Bangladesh were trained on effective participation in decision making at community level and have increased their managerial skills, communication and negotiation skills and ability to gain consensus in meetings. *"Having trained on effective participation with a practice of making a human web, we decided to combine our effort (three women groups growing vegetables in Gishubi) to have one strong voice to advocate for having irrigation materials to ensure increased produce with agroecology practices. We have requested for these irrigation materials for two months ago without any feedback. But we continued pushing until sector authority was convinced and has provided to us full irrigation materials include two water pumping engines, 4 rain guns and other accessories. This has reduced the burden and time for watering our vegetable gardens"* said Nyirantaganira Liberata member of Tuganzubunewe group in Gishubi sector, Gisagara District.

In Bangladesh, women leaders of three districts participated and gave their opinion on the process of local government gender sensitive and open budget preparation. The women leaders demanded an allocation of the budget for setting up a women's market space, breast feeding centre, and support for day care centres. Union Parishad (UP) Chairmen committed to allocate more budget for women friendly markets and awareness raising on unpaid care work. One of the UP Chairmen of Gaibandha Mr. Abdul Halim said, *"During the review of Union Parishad budget, we will allocate more*

*budget for awareness sessions on recognition, reduction and redistribution of unpaid care work.”*

## **Violence against women and girls**

Women groups were trained on how to receive and report cases of violence against women and girls, and they are disseminating the new learning to other group members. In Bangladesh, 22 cases of violence against women and girls were reported. Moreover, 15 members of Union Maitree and Women Federations of Gaibandha, Lalmonirhat and Ghoraghat participated in the nationwide campaign to prevent violence against women and children on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2019. In Rwanda and Ghana women have enhanced capacity in collection and referral of cases of violence against women and girls in the community and are equipped with necessary skills and knowledge to improve services in reporting cases of violence against women and girls emerging in the communities.

## **Registration of cooperatives and enhanced group organisation**

Regarding the progress of women groups' registration as cooperatives and movements, the process has started and is still on-going in all districts. This is expected to enhance the sustainability of the women's groups beyond the life of the project, and several groups were registered during this period.

*“We thank ActionAid and partners for this activity of facilitating our registration as movement and cooperative. It is a good initiative not only for the government but all the women, now that we are going to work legally to benefit some opportunities we used to miss due to not having legal status but after getting the certificate we will be do more for our business, access bank services and also be protected by laws.”* said Jean Bosco NDUWIMANA, Official in charge of Cooperatives management at Muko sector, Rwanda.

**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**

## **Time saving interventions**

As a result of the advocacy work on unpaid care work and time saving interventions, women are realising more time to engage in productive activities. Among the time saving interventions in three districts, day care centres have become very popular within the community especially among the working mothers and as result one day care centre was established by the community in Lalmonirhat, Bangladesh, and is operating well. Moreover, 4 new day care centres have been established in

Ghoraghat. The local authorities have also been actively involved in the child care centres and have provided food support, solar energy, electricity bills and building maintenance costs from the Union Parishads. Similarly, time saving interventions like biogas plant and energy saving cooking stove are also becoming popular among the communities. One of the bio-gas plant users Latifa said that *“Now I am cooking by gas produced from the biogas plant. It reduces my cooking time and I can spend some time for my business”*. These interventions are reducing women’s workload especially for cooking and child care, which helps them to engage in income generating activities, day labour, agriculture, participating in group meetings, and building relationships and communicating with different Government departments and NGOs.

### **Redistribution of unpaid care work**

Through community sensitization meetings community leaders, especially religious leaders, duty bearers, service providers, civil society activists, and school managing committees are helping women to get family and community level support to move outside of the home to access markets, participate in income generating activities, and demand their rights with duty bearers. More and more male members of families are becoming more sensitive to the uneven distribution of paid and unpaid care work. They participate with women in performing daily household chores, and recognize their contribution in the family. Salimuddin, husband of Sajeda Begum, the member of Ashray Nari Dal of Lalmonirhat, Bangladesh, said, *“Previously, I did not respect the work performed by women in household. But now after attending the community meeting I have realized that woman is doing more work at household than a man doing at outside. We should respect their work and also help them in performing the household chores”*.

In Ghana the project concentrated on community sensitization meetings with traditional and religious leaders, men and boys and annual sensitization meetings on unpaid care work for young girls and boys at schools. These activities reached a total of 4606 people (2100 males and 2506 females) directly. Cooking competitions, role plays, time diaries and discussions were used to facilitate the engagements and trigger behaviour change on unpaid care work. Evidence suggests that increasingly more men and young boys are leading a cultural shift on gender roles with regards to unpaid care work. For example, in Mosheasu community 34 men out of 57 pledged to participate in cooking meals for their households. Visuals of men, traditional and religious leaders redistributing unpaid care work sparked conversations on social media. In Jirapa and Lumbussie, men and traditional leaders resolved to intensify advocacy with duty bearers for time saving interventions like child care centres and boreholes to relieve women of unpaid care work and enhance their income generating activities in the long term.

### **Digital time diary tool**

During this period the communications organisation On Our Radar continued to develop a digital tool for collecting time diaries, and the initial prototype has been developed. The time diary tool will enable easier and quicker time diaries collection and analysis.

**Outcome 3: By the end of 2020, 21,000 rural women have more secure and sustainable access to markets and productive resources leading to increased income.**

Women's capacity on agroecology has increased during the quarter under review. A total of 49 women groups of Lalmonirhat and Ghoraghat in Bangladesh enhanced their skills through refresher training on business model development, processing, packaging, and seed grading. Women have also made strong linkages with local market actors and the 'Aaurhi' market at national level. In Lalmonirhat, 10 participants of women groups and their children increased their skills on ICT and they are using it for searching online platforms to sell their products, develop new business ideas, and prepare bio-data for jobs.

The raised seedbanks that were created for seed and grain storage have also had multiple functions and benefited communities during floods. For example, during floods in Gaibandha, Bangladesh, in July 2019, about 21 flood affected families took shelter in 4 community seed banks with their cattle, poultry, furniture, seeds and food grain. During this quarter, about 245 community members including project participants received and deposited seeds in the seed banks in all working areas. Women groups' liaison and active networking with Upazila Agriculture Offices helped 313 women to access seed, fertilizer, compost and fruit and vegetable saplings. Furthermore, 236 women have set up vegetable plots applying agroecology techniques, and the techniques have become more popular among the community. Vegetable cultivation in sacks is not only helping to protect crops from floods but also helping people who do not have enough space in their homestead to cultivate vegetables to start earning income. Rashada Begum, member of Mayamoni women farmer group, said, *"I do not have extra land in my homestead to produce vegetables. I have discussed the issue at group meeting and my fellow group mates suggested me to produce vegetables in sack and now I can sell and eat the surplus products from my sack garden."*

In Ghana, during the climate strike week some smallholder farmers highlighted the effects of climate change and their adaptation strategies. POWER women groups played a significant role in the conversation that climate change is real and it affects the poor most in exhibitions in the Upper West (Jirapa) and Northern (Nanumba North and South) Regions.

In addition, a total of 736 women from 22 communities participated in alternative livelihood training on soap and pastry making, and 1,854 women smallholders and processors participated in training on business and agriculture in 55 communities. Project participants also participated in an exhibition with government departments, NGOs, financial institutions, agro-input dealers, agro-service providers, and aggregators. AAG and collaborators also had a one-day field exhibition forum to practice some of the learnings from the exhibition. Blendina Kuule a smallholder farmer was particularly happy about the exhibition. She said *"this session was for me and my group. We have about 20 bags of maize and 15 bags of beans that we are not*

*getting good prices to sell in our locality. I have already taken an agent contact. I will call [him] immediately after today's meeting to negotiate on our produce".*

### **Voluntary savings**

Project monitoring reveals that the saving schemes are one of the most sustainable activities introduced with the women's groups. It incentivizes women to meet regularly and it is catalysing their influence in control over resources and decisions. In all three countries, field visits conducted by the International Project Manager showed that many of the women's groups have found the savings to be one of the most sustainable motivators for group meetings. Women are able to save, and many have bank accounts and clear accountability mechanisms that are likely to facilitate continuity after the project has ended.

### **Market information access improved in Ghana and Bangladesh**

In Ghana, Esoko currently provides market and climate resilient agriculture services to farmers. For the period an average of 16,372 messages on weather, markets and agroecology have been sent to farmers from June to August. Esoko pushed 26,382 messages as the highest number to farmers in the peak season of farming. From the testimonies shared by participants; increasingly the partnership with Esoko is contributing to the project's outcome of increasing women's access to market and climate information. Esther Zury narrates, *"when there are rains on market day, we usually are not able to sell at good prices, sometimes the buyers do not come to the market at all and we end up incurring double cost of transportation. Now when the updates show there is rain we think critically before going to the market"*. In Bangladesh women were able to access improved information on markets through the local ICT centre in Gaibandha. 8,359 people in Bangladesh (4903 women and 3456 men) were directly reached.

**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.**

### **Engagement with duty bearers at national level**

In Rwanda, POWER project has improved visibility of the intersections of agroecology, women's unpaid care work and women's economic participation through the active participation of ActionAid in sector working groups (SWGs) with the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion (MIGEPROF) and Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources (MINAGRI) and Rwanda Women Parliamentarians Forum (FFRP). As a result of this increased visibility of POWER interventions, ActionAid is part of a technical steering committee of the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion for a continuous technical discussion and putting together evidence to push the Government of Rwanda to develop a standalone policy towards unpaid care work. ActionAid was also a member of the technical team to provide inputs in the National Gender Policy being revised in which unpaid care work issue is considered.

## **Media engagements**

In Rwanda, ActionAid also signed a partnership MoU with Rwanda Broadcasting Agency (RBA) that will facilitate space to reach wider audiences in advocating for recognition, redistribution and reduction of unpaid care work through live dialogues and airing POWER project communication products on project best practices on reduction of unpaid care work, agroecology practices and access to markets together with the related challenges that Government needs to address. ActionAid is also a co-chair of International Non-Governmental Organization Platform (NINGO) where POWER best practices are shared and discussed for greater visibility.

## **Visibility of issues of Violence Against Women**

Regarding visibility of violence against women and girls, ActionAid continues working with the Gender Monitoring Office and Rwanda National Police/ Gender-based violence department to ensure reduction and prevention of violence against women and girls as per the partnership MoUs signed between ActionAid Rwanda and Rwanda National Police and Gender Monitoring Office. In Bangladesh, 9 members of Upazila Federation met in a lobby meeting with the Honorable Deputy Speaker of Bangladesh and discussed cases of violence against women and fairs for men and boys participating in cooking. In the meeting the Deputy Speaker committed to support Women Federations and the local police to arrest perpetrators and bring them under trial.

To express solidarity with the national movement against violence against women and girls, the federation members of Gaibandha organized meetings with Bangladesh Mohila Parisad, Kormojibi Nari, Nari Moitry and Durbar Network to participate in a human chain and one district level advocacy meeting with a lawyer to get legal support for violence against women and girls cases filed in the court to ensure justice.

## **Visibility of intersections of unpaid care work and Agroecology**

In Bangladesh a national level advocacy planning meeting was held with the "*Steering Committee for recognition of Unpaid Care Work and Promotion of Climate Resilient Sustainable Agriculture*", which brought forward some recommendations by giving focus on raising awareness on SDG 5.4 (recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies, and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate) through countrywide campaigns and engaging young people to extend the platform. Women leaders from the women federations of Lalmonirhat, Dinajpur and Gaibandha participated in this planning workshop in Dhaka.

To raise the visibility of unpaid care work and violence against women and girls ActionAid Bangladesh invited interested participants to the Photography Competition titled 'Different Images of Men' to influence policy makers and the public to recognise, redistribute and reduce unpaid care work. AAB started an online campaign for it which

has reached 83,636 people so far. Inspirational messages from Dr. Shamsul Alam, Member (Senior Secretary), Planning Commission, Government of Bangladesh elevated the discussion on unpaid care work with policy makers, and messages from sport celebrities, photographers and academics gave the campaign a new dimension and disseminated the messages further. More than 100 photo stories were submitted.

During this period ActionAid also collected relevant information for a video documentary and case studies to highlight the project progress and visibility of intersections of unpaid care work and agroecology.

### **Linkages with alliance, coalitions**

In Bangladesh, at the local level 238 women groups linked with Union Parishad, Upazila Parishad, various Government Departments, networks and coalitions. In this quarter they have taken 22 advocacy initiatives with community members, duty bearers and service providers to demand their rights regarding access to markets; recognising, reducing and redistributing unpaid care work; and ending violence against women.

In Ghana, a national dialogue was successfully held in August. It was themed; *“Reduce and Redistribute Unpaid Care Work, Women’s Labor Counts”*. The dialogue was a sensitization to the general public as well as a technical consultation with Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies, academia and civil society organisations in Ghana. Largely the dialogue brought to bear the contributions of women to development through unpaid care work, which is not recognised by government and families. There were demands mostly by women on unpaid care work which affects their economic empowerment and calling on government to invest in time saving interventions such as child care centres. Media houses in Ghana including MultiMedia, EIB, Media General and the Print shared stories on unpaid care work. Follow these links for some of the interviews: <https://youtu.be/wPyTIBPeGX4> and <https://youtu.be/QGwMH7tOzWo>.

### **Mid-term Review**

The mid-term review report and findings were disseminated with stakeholders at all levels in workshops. The dissemination offered a platform for stakeholders to share experiences, observations and lessons to improve the project. The Project Management Team continue to implement follow up actions from the Mid-Term Review.

### **Challenges**

#### **Delayed fund clearance by the NGO bureau**

In Bangladesh, some planned activities remained incomplete mostly due to delayed fund clearance and approval Non-Government Organization Affairs Bureau in Bangladesh in the new areas receiving re-allocated funds from the Pakistan office closure. Activities are still expected to be on track.

### **Flooding in Gaibandha**

The devastating flood in July to the Gaibandha and Lalmonirhat areas also hampered project implementation.

### **Research delays**

There were delays to contracting for two research activities at the international level: research by the Institute of Development Studies on the time diaries data and analysis of how women and men's time use has changed over the project period; and the development of minimum standards and guidelines on addressing unpaid care work in public policy. These two activities are now expected to be delivered on time.